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COOPERATIVE NEWSPAPER INDEXING: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH FOR NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIPTION IN DEPRESSED ECONOMY

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Introduction

Newspapers constitute an important source of information in any literate society. Their importance largely lies in the current information they carry. This information keeps readers informed of current events. They carry information of various kinds covering subjects in humanities such as philosophy, psychology, music, language, literature, religion and art; social science subjects such as political science, economics, law, history, commerce, sociology and education; science subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology and medicine and technology subjects such as

architecture and engineering. The variety of information they cover on a daily basis makes them an encyclopaedia of information. Nigerian newspapers are particularly rich in terms of the information they carry in the social sciences and humanities.

Like in other sources of information, indexing of newspapers falls within the general definition of index. Harrod (1971)[1] quoted the British Standards Institute's definition of index as "a systematic guide to the text of any reading matter or to the contents of other collected documentary materials, comprising of series of entries with headings arranged in alphabetical or other chosen order and with reference to show where such item indexed is located. He also quoted the American Standard Association's (ASA) definition of index with regard to the fields of library practice and documentation as "a guide to the contents of any reading matter or other documentary materials which provides a systematic sustained subject analysis of the contents of such materials, arranged according to other chosen order. Each entry is followed by a page number, paragraph number or other chosen indicator showing the exact location of the reference." One can go on and on citing definitions of index, but the key word in all definitions is that an index is a "guide."

Indexing Problems.

Indexing of newspapers is accompanied by corresponding problems. These problems are common to all organisations involved in indexing, no matter their size and the scale of their indexing activities. Among others, these problems include the difficulty of choosing a suitable classification scheme or code, list of subject headings or thesaurus and producing alternatives to the above tools where existing ones are inadequate. Others are the recruitment and training of capable indexers; lack of funds to acquire desired publications regularly and innovate some operations in order to improve the services and keep abreast with the times.

Despite these problems, librarians should take the bull by the horns by embarking on indexing of newspapers as this is one of the ways of getting current information at this time of depressed economy.

Reasons for Cooperative Inedexing of Newspapers

Much has been written and continues to be written about the stringent times in which libraries are operating. Three pervasive causes are indentified consistently: rising cost of materials and services, shrinking budgets and the impact of new technologies for performing tasks and handling information. The financial situation may not improve substantially although the naira appears

to be appreciating now according to the government. The appreciation may not bring down immediately the prices of materials. It is common knowledge that the costs of both monographs and serials continue to increase due to inflation.

Although all segments of the economy are in difficulty, the challenges confronting libraries are in trouble and are forced to cut down acquisitions. Coupled with this fact, librarians themselves are fond of considering financial difficulties the administration faces, so they try to under-estimate the amount of money needed in the library budget which is not good enough. It is suicidal.

This explains why cooperative newspaper indexing is imperative. For example, when the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria embarked on the indexing of articles and news items on education in the Nigerian Newspapers in 1976[3], it indexed all the Nigerian Newspapers. This work continued satisfactorily up to 1983, the year the last edition of the index was published. But since 1984 the work seems to be dying a gradual death. Many things are responsible for this, among which is lack of funds to get all the newspapers that this index covered. If there had been some form of cooperation between the Institute

Library and the neighbouring libraries. I believe that a lot could have been done.

There had been an attempt to produce periodical index titled "Nigerian Periodical Index" (NPI)[4] by the committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities. The latest issue of this index was published in December, 1986. Despite the assurance given by the producers that "... the NPI will not die, especially given your continued support and patronage"[5] Eight years after this assurance, nothing seems to have been done about it. I am sure many problems are responsible for that. It is my desire and I strongly suggest that, the index be resuscitated.

Factors Contributing to Successful Cooperation

Library cooperation is nothing new in librarianship. This paper does not intend to talk about general library cooperation, but cooperation in indexing of newspapers. However, no matter the type of cooperation, there are factors responsible for the decision to cooperate.

First, is the ability of librarians to see beyond the limitations of their circumstances, that is, the ability to know that one does not have the resources to purchase all materials (in this case, newspapers), but can share the vision of possessing what he needs through planning and cooperation. The opportunity of

supplementing the resources of each library by those of the others should be of great advantage.

A second factor that should encourage cooperation is the availability of outside funds. This means any money that comes in apart from the library vote, be it gifts or loans. Such funds could go a long way to ease the problem of newspaper subscription. Librarians should solicit for such kind of funds from philanthropic agencies.

A third factor that may lead to cooperative newspaper subscription is shared bibliographic information about each others' collections. This will certainly enhance access to the materials. Bibliographic information is essential to the success of cooperative programmes. Indeed, until librarians know what both libraries hold, cooperation cannot work. Hence, cooperative newspaper indexing is necessary for newspaper subscription at this time of depressed economy.

The rationale for the agitation for cooperative indexing of newspapers is that this strategy would extend the number of unique titles available to users. Materials that librarians of a given institution cannot afford may be available with other members of the consortium. This approach according to Dominguez and Swindler (1993)[4] "also minimizes the unnecessary duplication of materials.

They said, "By coordinating their collections, librarians do not need to duplicate specialised research materials and can use their funds to buy titles that are more central to academic programmes and collection strengths."

When the economic, social, political, cultural or academic environment limits an institution's ability to provide resources, a joint effort becomes the best way to meet local needs. The situation in Nigeria now calls for cooperation in buying newspapers. When we think of the cost of newspapers, the politics of Nigeria and many other factors, the best way out is to embark on cooperative indexing as no one library can boast of having all the newspapers up to date. Over the decades, each major new cooperative initiative has begun for similar reasons — a need for library resources without adequate funds to acquire them locally.

Before cooperation can be successful, key individuals must share both a vision of what cooperation can accomplish and a commitment to pursue cooperative options. They must have a common goal and share the same interests. They must have the challenges otherwise the cooperation will not last long.

Inter-institutional structures are also important if cooperation will succeed because they foster an environment in which cooperation can take place. There should be a forum for

participants to hold regular meetings. These meetings would encourage honest and open communication between participants and thereby socialize staff for cooperation. The involvement of staff at the operational level is essential, that is, staff who will be involved at the initial meeting of the project. They need to be intimately involved in all aspects of the cooperative process. The indexers need support and time to do the work deligently.

Given the depressed economy in which we have been trapped, one may think that it is unwise to explore sophisticated ways of subscribing to newspapers in libraries such as microfilming of newspapers. But I feel strongly with Ibekwe (1986)[7] that it may be a wiser idea to think along that line because in the long run this method will reduce cost and enable cooperating libraries to save money by filming all the available newspapers. Agreed, if the machinery has already been purchased, filming alone will not consume funds. However, where the machines are yet to be set in place. I still strongly feel that an attempt should be made to purchase them, the initial cost notwithstanding. We stand to gain in the long run.

Conclusion

As many libraries as possible can embark on newspaper indexing especially now that the newspapers are so expensive that one

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