Open Index Initiative: A cooperative effort to develop an online database for Indian Social Science Literature

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Abstract:

The paper, a case study, discusses the cooperative effort to develop an online database consisting of index and abstract to articles, book reviews and conference papers published in Indian social science journals. This cooperative effort, named as Open Index Initiative (OII) has derived inspiration from two online databases, RePEc (Research Papers in Economics) and DoIS (Documents in Information Science). The OII model developed on participatory approach of the World Bank, depends on library and information professionals (LIS professionals) and libraries to contribute data themselves, Offer suggestions to improve the system, Monitor and evaluate the results themselves and allows Mirroring the compilation at their sites for non-commercial activities.

Introduction:

Open Index Initiative (OII) is relatively a new concept conceived at IGIDR (Indira Gandhi Institute of development Research, Mumbai) library with a basic objective of developing an exhaustive online index to articles, book reviews and conference papers, published in Indian social science journals. Most of the Indian social journals are not indexed in the international Databases or indexing journals. Therefore, OII, a cooperative effort, attempts to fill this gap.

It is also important to mention here a similar effort by an Indian institution. The Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID) has developed an On-line Index to Indian Social Science journals covering about 105 journals. This service is yet to cover abstract and book reviews.

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The scope of OII, is not limited only to one subject area but can also be extended to other subject areas in other libraries or library networks. The inspiration for this initiative came from **RePEc** (Research Papers in Economics), a distributed catalog of articles in the area of economics for which the data is contributed by LIS professionals and others from 44 countries. OII differs from RePEc in its method of collecting and compiling data and also the format in which data needs to be provided by the contributors.

The OII model:

RePEc model, mentioned earlier, gathers data every day from the HTTP/FTP server on which the contributor provides the data in a specific format. The data, which is in Resource Description Framework (RDF) format, is collected every day from various HTTP/FTP servers, is compiled and uploaded at a central server and gets mirrored at some more places.

The RePEc administrators periodically send access statistics and also error messages, if any, to the data contributor over email. It also provides hyperlink to the full-text of the documents if available on Internet. The data contributors, in addition to bibliographic details, will also provide URL (Uniform Resource Locator) to such documents.

DoIS (Documents in Information Science) is another service available on Internet, for finding and downloading the latest research results in Information Science, developed on same lines with RePEc. This is a volunteer effort to create a free bibliographic resource of scientific texts specialized in Information Science and is monitored by a team of volunteers.

On the contrary the OII at IGIDR, which is inspired by the above mentioned two voluntary services, intends to collect data in more than one format, which happens to be the contributor's choice. Some of the formats chosen for exchange includes ISO2709, MS-EXCELL, M-ACCESS and also ASCII file with fields delimited by specific characters. However, ISO2709 is the most preferred format. The tags in case of ISO2709 format, which happens to CCF, would be provided by the coordinating agency, which at present is IGIDR

An individual or an institution can become the contributor and specific journal(s) will be allocated to such contributor(s) by the coordinator. The data thus provided and compiled becomes common property and any academic and research organization of the country, contributing data for OII, can mirror the entire database for non-commercial purpose. Therefore, it is very implicit that access is unlimited but no one owns it.

Due credit will be given to the contributors, whether institution or an individual, by including their names in each record, which ultimately gets displayed at the time of retrieval.

It is presumed that, the idea of giving credit to each contributor might, will most probably, become a major motivating factor for more people join hands with the initiative.

The OII, which is still at the rudimentary stage of development, strongly believes in voluntary contribution from LIS professionals and libraries for its success. Therefore, the spirit of resource sharing and cooperative cataloging become the driving force for its success.

The OII model has developed on the basis of Participatory approach allows the institutions/individuals to:

1. Contribute data themselves.

2. Offer suggestions to improve the system.

3. Monitor and evaluate the results themselves.

4. Mirror the compilation at their sites for non-commercial activities.

The idea of participatory approach has been borrowed from other fields, mainly development economics.

According to World Bank, *"Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them".*

The participation, according the World Bank, is important because it makes projects efficient, effective, and sustainable in a variety of ways. It also has some important implications:
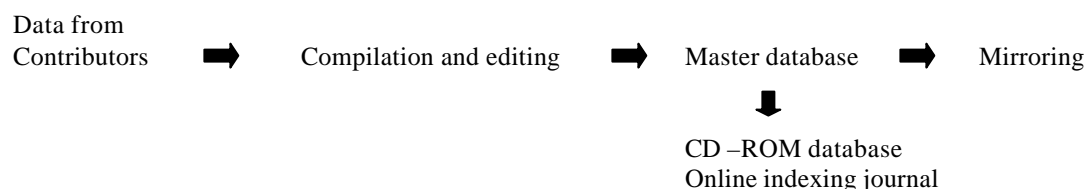
1. The participation clarifies project goals,
2. Reduces Project cost
3. Prevents/reduces management conflicts
4. Promote technology transfer
5. Encourages a culture of self help

This idea of Participatory Approach adopted by OII, also has same objectives as defined by the World Bank, but with some difference in its methodology. The coordinating organization, in the initial stage, will decide on modus operandi, data format, ownership. However, there is scope and possibility for incorporating suggestions received by the contributors.

In the OII model the users or other contributors can give feedback to each other over email. There is also a great scope to handover, the entire process of collection, compilation and hosting, to a network or an institution at a later stage.

The flow of work in OII:

Broad view:

Data from
Contributors ➡ Compilation and editing ➡ Master database ➡ Mirroring

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CD –ROM database
Online indexing journal

Steps in workflow:

I Database management

Receiving data in prescribed format
Checking data for consistency
Updating the Master Database
Converting the data in a suitable format for uploading on MySQL server
Updating the master database on the web server

II. Users' feedback

Users' Feedback from the ➡ Updation of records ➡ Updation of Master database
Contributors

III. Byproducts:

A quarterly/half-yearly online indexing journal
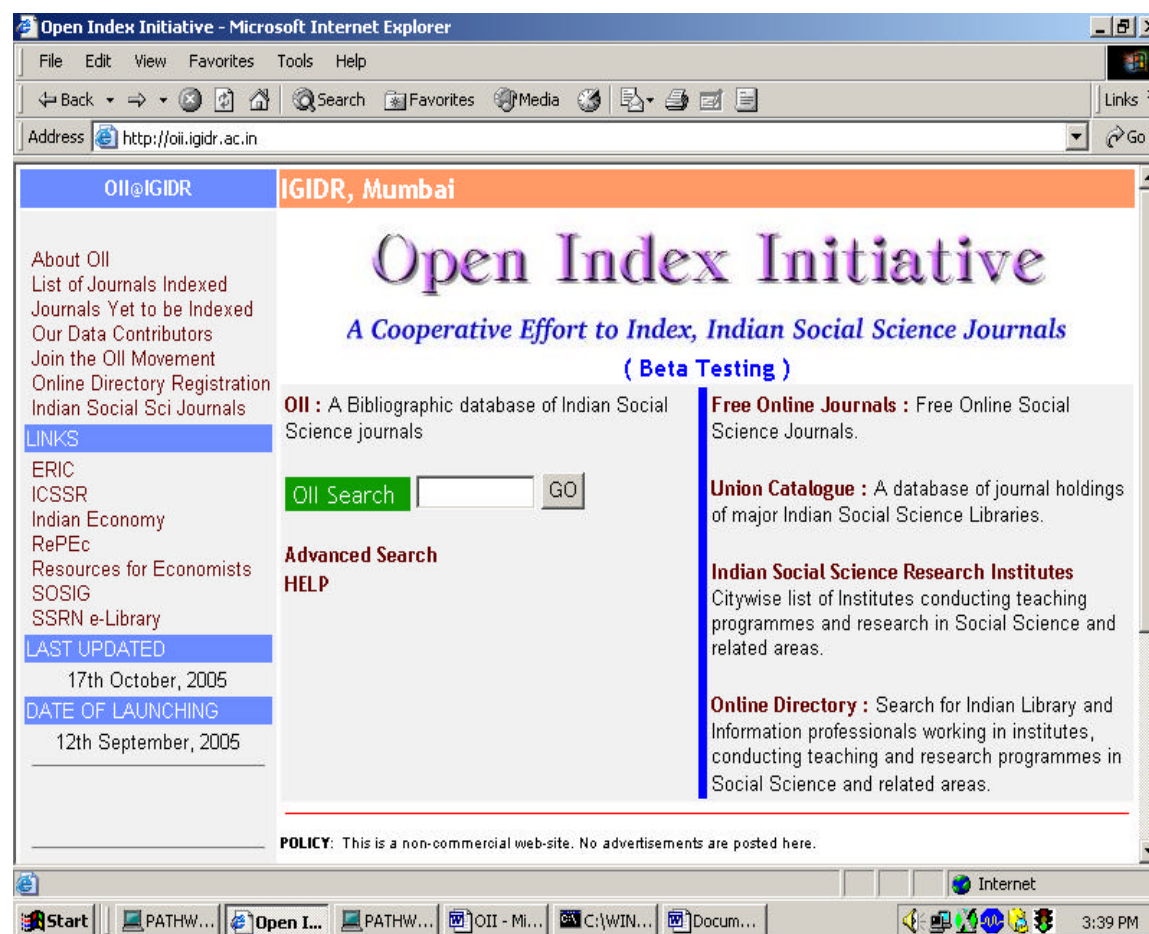A quarterly or yearly cumulation on CD

The Salient features of OII model:

1. Covers Journal articles, book reviews and conference papers published in
   Indian Social Science Journals
2. Data comes from the individuals and institutions on regular basis.
3. Abstract will be provided where ever possible
4. Can be mirrored by the contributors at their web sites
5. Each contributor will get due credit and the users can directly
   interact with them.
6. Allows the contributors to offer suggestions to improve the system, Monitor and evaluate the
   results themselves

Infra-structure requirements: The data received from various contributors will be compiled and hosted on a web server at IGIDR Library (http://oii.igidr.ac.in) . The model suggests use of Free or Open source software or such software which come along with the operating systems.

The OII database has been developed on MySQL server with PHP interface on Linux platform, which are in public domain.   Therefore, has very little financial implications and the institutions who wish to mirror the database need to make very little investment.

Training and human network: The OII model is based on the participatory approach therefore believes in developing a very good human network and frequent interaction with the contributors for further development. The coordinating agency needs to conduct workshops and to develop a very good team consisting of contributors and technical advisors.   Therefore, the model expects some amount of funding for its further development and growth and also expects a national level documentation center to be part of all the OII related activities. Training intends to cover topics such as data formats and conversion- XML and ISO 2709, RDBMS, development of Thesaurus/subject headings.

Figure 1 - A screen shot of OII main page

Scope for further developments: The OII model strongly believes in resource sharing and expects some of the data contributing institutions to mirror the site. Therefore, certain technical and non-technical issues need to be considered for its further growth and development

Technical

1. Development of a suitable thesaurus or subject headings list, representing all Indian social and economic concepts.

2. Downloading of data in ISO2709 and XML

3. Further development of Software

Copy right issues: Abstract provided in the journal article is copyrighted. Therefore, partnership with various publishers and their participation in the OII movement.

Managerial issues: To develop mechanism to get data on continuous basis from individuals and Institutions.

Financial issues: Funds for conducting training program

Conclusion:

Indian social science literature is not widely covered in international indexing and abstracting journals. OII, developed on the participatory approach model may fill this gap. For its success it expects data contributions and active participation from LIS professionals and also needs institutional backing for its for growth and development. This movement would probably also enhance resource-sharing activities among Indian social science libraries.

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