One Nation One Subscription: The Future of Open Access for Indian Academia

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ABSTRACT

India is practicing the largest Democracy in the World. All the Citizens have equal rights in India. India's ambitious policy proposal, One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), envisions a national-level framework to provide universal access to scholarly literature by negotiating a centralized subscription model for academic journals and databases. Launched under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Department of Science and Technology, ONOS is designed to reduce access disparities and enhance research productivity, particularly among underfunded institutions (Prasad, 2021; Government of India, 2020). This article critically evaluates the potential of ONOS to reshape the landscape of open access in Indian academia. While the policy offers substantial opportunities such as bridging the knowledge gap, improving equity in research access, and supporting the dissemination of scientific information. It also presents significant dilemmas and at the same time it includes challenges in publisher negotiations, sustainability of funding, and the tension between centralized access and decentralized institutional autonomy (Suber, 2012; Singh & Sharma, 2022). Furthermore, this paper situates ONOS within global open-access movements, drawing comparisons with initiatives such as Plan S and transformative agreements in Europe (Coalition S, 2019). Through policy analysis and stakeholder perspectives, the study explores whether ONOS can be a catalyst for inclusive academic growth or a complex trade-off in the broader quest for open knowledge in the Global South.

KEYWORDS

One Nation One Subscription (ONOS),Open Access,Scholarly Publishing,Knowledge Equity,Academic Research Access,Research Policy in India,Centralized Subscription Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to scholarly knowledge has increasingly become a cornerstone for academic excellence, innovation, and national development in India. In a knowledge-driven global economy, the availability of research literature is not only essential for academic institutions but also for policymakers, professionals, and independent researchers. However, the high subscription costs of scientific journals and databases have long posed a significant barrier, especially for developing nations like India. This issue is particularly pressing in the Indian academic landscape, where many public institutions and state universities are unable to afford comprehensive subscriptions to reputed journals (Ghosh, 2019). In response to this structural inequality in knowledge access, the Government of India has proposed an ambitious policy initiative titled One Nation One Subscription (ONOS). The ONOS policy, spearheaded by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology, aims to negotiate a single, nationwide

subscription to major scientific publishers, thereby ensuring free access to academic journals and databases for all Indian citizens (Government of India, 2020). This marks a paradigm shift from the current decentralized subscription model where individual institutions procure access based on their financial capacity as the result it's fragmented and exclusionary research ecosystem. This paper aims to critically examine the ONOS policy through a multidimensional lens, exploring its potential benefits, institutional implications, comparative global experiences, and the ethical dilemmas it presents. The analysis is situated within the broader discourse on open access, digital inclusion, and research democratization in India. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to assess whether ONOS represents a sustainable pathway toward inclusive knowledge access or a short-term policy experiment with uncertain consequences. Furthermore this paper will try to explain how the ONOS will be helpful for Indian Academia in Nationwide. It examines both sides of this policy, Positive and Negatives. How the ONOS will impact in the Future of Indian Academia.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital Divide and Equity in Knowledge Access Several scholars emphasize the structural inequalities in academic access in India. According to the Indian National Science Academy (2019), a majority of Indian colleges and universities lack access to high-impact journals due to prohibitive costs. Ghosh (2021) argues that such disparities hinder research quality and innovation, particularly in Tier-2 and rural institutions. ONOS, by eliminating institutional and geographical barriers, aims to address this critical issue. Cost Efficiency through Centralized Subscription Models The financial implications of academic journal subscriptions have been a central concern globally. Suber (2012) notes that institutional-level subscriptions result in duplication and inefficiencies. In India, ONOS seeks to emulate centralized models like Germany's Project DEAL, which has successfully negotiated nationwide access to journals while promoting open access publishing (Max Planck Digital Library, 2020). Global Policy Models and Open Access Trends The international trend toward open access is reflected in initiatives like Plan S and UNESCO's Open Science Recommendations (UNESCO, 2021). These policies emphasize making publicly funded research freely available to all. ONOS aligns with these principles, though it currently focuses more on access than on open publishing. Nonetheless, integrating ONOS with national open access repositories could further democratize knowledge. Technological Infrastructure and Implementation Effective implementation of ONOS will depend on robust digital infrastructure. The National Digital Library of India (NDLI) and National Academic Depository (NAD) have been identified as potential enablers. According to Mehta and Sharma (2022), technological preparedness, including digital authentication and user-friendly platforms, is key to realizing the full benefits of national subscription models.

3. BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

Access to academic research in India has long been limited by high subscription costs and unequal distribution of institutional resources. Most public universities, especially in rural or underfunded regions, face challenges in subscribing to international journals, creating significant gaps in research access and output (Ghosh, 2019). The Government of India proposed the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) policy under the Draft Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) 2020. The aim is to centralize negotiations with global publishers and provide nationwide access to academic journals, free of cost, to all public institutions and potentially the general public (Government of India, 2020). ONOS draws

inspiration from global initiatives like Germany's Projekt DEAL and Plan S in Europe, which advocate for equitable access to publicly funded research (Coalition S, 2019; Hinchliffe, 2020). However, ONOS is broader in scope, it's focusing not only just on open access of publishing but also on creating a centralized digital access infrastructure. While promising in its attempt to democratize knowledge, the policy also raises concerns over financial sustainability, institutional autonomy, and complex negotiations with large publishers (Jain & Basu, 2021). It represents a strategic step toward treating knowledge as a public good but requires careful implementation and broad stakeholder engagement. Thus, ONOS sits at the intersection of science policy, digital access, and educational equity. It reflects a growing recognition of knowledge as a public good, but its success will depend on inclusive policy making, stakeholder engagement, and a carefully designed implementation framework. As the policy evolves, it presents an important opportunity to examine not only the mechanics of subscription models but also broader questions about the future of academic publishing and the role of the state in facilitating open knowledge.

4. OBJECTIVES OF ONE NATION ONE SUBSCRIPTION (ONOS)

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative is a landmark policy move by the Government of India aimed at transforming the academic and research landscape through equitable and universal access to scholarly literature. The policy seeks to address long-standing disparities in access to scientific knowledge, particularly among underfunded and rural institutions. Here are the key objectives of ONOS are discussed below. ONOS aims to provide free and seamless access to academic journals, databases, and e-resources for all Indian citizens, especially students, researchers, and faculty in public institutions (Government of India, 2020). This would help bridge the knowledge gap between elite and resource-constrained institutions. Negotiating a single national-level subscription with major publishers, the policy intends to reduce duplication of expenditure across institutions and ensure cost-effectiveness through collective bargaining (Prasad, 2021). This would replace fragmented institutional subscriptions with a unified model. ONOS is expected to boost academic research and innovation by expanding access to cutting-edge knowledge and recent scientific developments. This aligns with India's broader vision to strengthen its position in global research rankings (Jain & Basu, 2021). The initiative seeks to democratize access to knowledge across geographical and institutional boundaries, thereby supporting researchers in rural, state-run, or newly established institutions who previously lacked such access (Ghosh, 2019). By enabling access to a wide array of academic literature, ONOS supports evidence-based policymaking and enhances the quality of teaching and curriculum development in higher education (Suber, 2012).

5. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ONOS

One of the most pressing challenges facing India's academic and research ecosystem is the unequal access to scholarly literature. Premier institutions like IITs and IISc have access to high-cost journals and databases, while state universities, regional colleges, and standalone research institutes struggle due to limited budgets (Ghosh, 2019). This disparity hampers the quality and competitiveness of research across the country. ONOS aims to eliminate this inequality by creating a uniform access structure that ensures every researcher, irrespective of location or institutional affiliation, has access to the same body of knowledge. India has witnessed a steady increase in research output in recent years. However, access barriers have often limited the quality and global impact of Indian research (Jain & Basu, 2021). ONOS is seen as a transformative step that could boost research productivity by providing scholars with the latest literature, fostering collaboration, and supporting innovation. Increased access could also improve citation

metrics and help Indian research align with global standards. Currently, multiple institutions subscribe separately to the same resources, leading to redundancy and financial inefficiency. ONOS proposes a centralized model where the government negotiates with publishers on behalf of the nation, resulting in better pricing, broader access, and optimal use of public funds (Government of India, 2020). This collective bargaining approach is not only more sustainable but also aligns with global best practices. So the need for ONOS is very much in India. Also it has a high level of Significance in the Academic point of view.

6. POSITIVE SIDE OF ONE NATION ONE SUBSCRIPTION

The One Nation One Subscription policy presents a transformative opportunity for India's academic, scientific, and innovation sectors. It deals with bridge gaps in knowledge access, enhances national research capabilities, and promotes equity across institutions. Here are some of the important benefits or Positive side of ONOS explained below. ONOS ensures uniform access to academic journals and research databases across all Indian institutions, regardless of size, location, or funding level. This eliminates knowledge hierarchies between elite institutions and underfunded colleges, allowing every researcher and student to access the same high-quality global literature (Ghosh, 2019). Scholars can stay up-to-date with recent findings, engage in informed research design, and publish in high-impact journals. This may lead to greater research output, innovation, and international collaborations (Jain & Basu, 2021). ONOS reduces duplication of subscription costs by replacing fragmented institutional procurement with a national-level agreement. This model offers significant cost savings to the government and ensures better pricing from publishers via collective bargaining (Government of India, 2020). In the long term, ONOS contributes to building a knowledge-driven economy by enabling widespread access to cutting-edge science, technology, and social research. This supports evidence-based policymaking, entrepreneurship, and innovation ecosystems, helping India transition into a knowledge superpower (Suber, 2012). Faculty and students can design more informed syllabi, engage in data-driven discussions, and foster critical thinking aligning with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020). Though not a purely open access initiative, ONOS complements the global open science movement by making previously inaccessible content available to all. It may also pave the way for India to promote indigenous open access platforms, journals, and repositories (Coalition S, 2019). After discussing the Positive side of ONOS we can say that this policy will be very beneficial for the Nationwide Indian Academia.

7. CHALLENGING FACTORS OF ONOS

One Nation One Subscription is a visionary policy aimed at democratizing access to scholarly resources, it faces several implementation challenges, structural concerns, and critical viewpoints from various academic and publishing stakeholders. A nuanced understanding of these issues is essential for its success.Here are the Challenging areas mentioned below.

Negotiating a national-level subscription deal with major international publishers like Elsevier, Springer Nature, or Wiley is a complex and time-consuming process. These publishers may resist national-level licensing due to concerns over revenue loss and market control (Jain & Basu, 2021). Additionally, reaching consensus on pricing, access terms, and user rights is a formidable challenge. While ONOS is intended to reduce overall costs through centralization, the initial cost of a national subscription could be substantial. Critics argue that if not adequately budgeted, the policy might strain public funds or divert resources from

other critical sectors in education (Chakrabarti, 2021). Centralized procurement may undermine institutional autonomy, especially for elite institutions that already have customized subscriptions. Uniform access could lead to over standardization, preventing universities from tailoring content according to their specific academic needs (Das, 2020). Currently, ONOS is focused on public institutions. Private universities and colleges which educate a significant portion of India's student population may remain excluded, leading to a new form of digital divide. This exclusion undermines the goal of universal academic access (Ghosh, 2019). ONOS relies heavily on international publishers, which might unintentionally marginalize Indian open-access journals and repositories. Instead of strengthening indigenous platforms like Shodhganga or Indian Citation Index, the policy could increase dependence on Western publishing monopolies (Kumar, 2022). However the ONOS has a lot of benefits but it's not free from Challenges. As we discussed above there are some of the areas where the ONOS can face challenges.

8. COMPARATIVE STUDY: ONOS AND INTERNATIONAL MODELS OF OPEN ACCESS

India's One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) policy aligns with global efforts to ensure universal access to academic knowledge. While India's approach is distinct in scale and centralization, other countries have adopted various transformative models of open access through national agreements, funding mandates, and publisher negotiations. A comparative analysis with global examples provides valuable insights into the potential, limitations, and strategic direction of ONOS.

GERMANY: Projekt DEAL

Germany's Projekt DEAL is among the most influential models globally. Launched in 2014, it established "publish and read" agreements with major publishers such as Wiley (2019) and Springer Nature (2020). These agreements allow German authors to publish open access in hybrid journals and provide nationwide access to subscription content for all participating institutions (Max Planck Digital Library, 2020). Unlike ONOS, which focuses primarily on centralized read access, Projekt DEAL integrates transformative publishing by reallocating subscription costs toward article processing charges (APCs). This not only ensures broader access but also transforms the publishing model toward openness. Germany's federal academic structure posed initial challenges, but consensus was achieved through a collaborative approach involving university consortia, libraries, and state ministries.

UNITED KINGDOM: Jisc and Plan S Alignment

The United Kingdom follows a hybrid, decentralized approach spearheaded by Jisc, a publicly funded education and research body. Jisc negotiates transformative agreements on behalf of UK institutions, aligned with the mandates of Plan S, an initiative by Coalition S that requires all publicly funded research to be open access (Coalition S, 2019). UK agreements often include provisions for both access and publication, giving institutions flexibility in implementation. Moreover, the UK model emphasizes funder-driven compliance, where research councils and funding bodies mandate open access publication and provide APC funding (Hinchliffe, 2020).

THE NETHERLANDS: Government-Led Mandates and Full Open Access Goals

The Netherlands is widely regarded as a pioneer in implementing a nation-wide open access policy. Since 2014, the Dutch government has enforced mandates to ensure that publicly funded research is available via open access. The Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) successfully negotiated open access deals with almost all major publishers. By 2020, more than 70% of scholarly publications by Dutch researchers were published OA (VSNU, 2020). The success of the Dutch model lies in strong governmental support, performance monitoring, and transparency in negotiations. Unlike ONOS, which

currently focuses more on access than on publication, the Dutch system emphasizes publishing as a public good.

SOUTH AFRICA: Consortium-Based Equity Model

South Africa operates through a consortium model led by the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC). Though not as transformative as European models, SANLiC emphasizes equitable access and affordability by pooling institutional resources and negotiating access for a broad set of institutions, including historically disadvantaged ones. While ONOS is state-led and centralized, South Africa's bottom-up approach relies on collaboration among universities and libraries. It also invests in building open repositories and digital platforms to increase the visibility of African scholarship (SANLiC, 2021). ONOS could benefit from incorporating community-driven mechanisms and building strong digital infrastructure for local content dissemination.

9. SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After a Comprehensive Comparative Study of ONOS, we can say that to ensure the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, it is essential to address current limitations and refine its operational strategies. Here are some of the Important policies Suggested below. The government should ensure a transparent negotiation mechanism involving all key stakeholders universities, libraries, researchers, and IT experts. Forming a National ONOS Task Force with representatives from public and private institutions could help accommodate diverse academic needs (Jain & Basu, 2021). To realize the goal of universal access, private universities, colleges, and regional research bodies must be integrated into the ONOS framework, possibly through tiered participation models or co-contribution schemes (Ghosh, 2019). ONOS should allocate a portion of its resources to support and upgrade Indian open access repositories like Shodhganga, ShodhSindhu, and the Indian Citation Index. Strengthening local journals will reduce dependency on foreign publishers (Kumar, 2022). To track usage, efficiency, and access equity, the ONOS initiative must establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Periodic user feedback from institutions can help in customizing subscriptions and identifying underutilized resources (Das, 2020). Training and awareness campaigns should be conducted to help students, faculty, and researchers understand and utilize ONOS resources effectively. Digital literacy initiatives will ensure the full realization of ONOS's benefits (Chakrabarti, 2021). ONOS must develop clear protocols on user data privacy, digital rights management (DRM), and fair usage to prevent exploitation or surveillance of researchers' data (Suber, 2012).

10. CONCLUSION

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative represents a bold and visionary step in India's journey toward academic equity, digital inclusion, and knowledge democratization. In a country marked by institutional, geographical, and financial disparities, ONOS has the potential to become a transformational force bridging the gap between elite and under-resourced institutions and empowering millions of students, researchers, and educators. However, as with any large-scale reform, its success hinges not merely on ambition, but on careful implementation, sustained dialogue, and inclusive policy making. While ONOS promises significant benefits such as equitable access, cost-efficiency, and enhanced research output, it must also navigate complex challenges ranging from publisher negotiations and financial viability to institutional autonomy and data ethics. ONOS must align with India's broader vision of becoming a knowledge economy and innovation hub. To that end, empowering regional universities,

encouraging interdisciplinary research, and ensuring ethical standards in digital access are not just add-ons, they are imperatives. ONOS is not just about subscriptions, it is about reshaping the academic fabric of India. It offers a rare opportunity to level the playing field and build a truly inclusive and research-oriented society.

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