

How Will India's One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) Policy Shape the Future of Small Indian Journal Publishers? A Perspective on Challenges

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Abstract

Purpose : The proposed “One Nation One Subscription” (ONOS) policy (<https://www.onos.gov.in/>) in India could be a game-changer in the way our country accesses online academic journals. Currently, with 30 publishers on board, the initiative is expected to provide a vast collection of scholarly content through government-negotiated agreements, aiming to close the knowledge gap and make high-quality research more accessible to 18 million researchers and academicians. At the same time, the policy raises significant concerns about its impact on Indian publishers, particularly with regard to sustainability, revenue models, and competition within the publishing ecosystem.

Methodology : This paper adopted a qualitative approach to examine the ONOS policy, focusing on insights from a top publisher of management journals to explore its potential implications.

Findings : The ONOS initiative is going to provide over 18 million students, teachers, and researchers with access to scholarly e-journals, thereby filling critical knowledge gaps across the nation. However, small Indian journal publishers face significant challenges, including financial pressures and threats to content diversity. For ONOS to succeed, it must balance broad accessibility with the long-term sustainability of India's journal publishing industry.

Practical Implications : ONOS will be of immense help to improve access to academic resources for further development of education and research in the country. Nonetheless, its true impact—particularly on the survival of smaller Indian journal publishers—will become evident as the journal publishing landscape continues to evolve in the coming years.

Keywords : one nation one subscription, ONOS, Indian journals, Indian publishers, policy development

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To realize the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, Viksitbharat@2047, and making India self-reliant, The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has identified research as the corequisite for outstanding education and development in our country (ONOS, 2025). The Government of India approved the One

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Nation One Subscription (ONOS) scheme on November 25, 2024, which promises to make e-journals in all disciplines accessible to one and all. From STEM and medicine to management and social sciences, this initiative will benefit almost 6,400 institutions, including universities, colleges, and R&D centers, through access to over 13,000 journals from 30 leading publishers, including Elsevier, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Springer, and Wiley. The initiative will provide access to a wealth of knowledge in the form of high-quality research content in scholarly journals for nearly 1.8 crore students, faculty, researchers, and scientists across disciplines, including those in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, thus initiating core and interdisciplinary research in the country. As knowledge cannot be limited in silos, students from diverse regions and different economic backgrounds will be able to access the same knowledge resources, which could, in the long run, help decrease the gap in education and offer everyone equal opportunities for growth (ONOS, 2025).

Though ONOS holds great promise by promising to provide equitable access to academic resources, it also raises significant concerns for small, independent publishers and regional journals publishing non-English research who have not been onboarded onto ONOS. By onboarding a small number of publishers, ONOS could unwittingly set off a domino effect. Researchers will likely gravitate toward reading, citing, and publishing in the journals included in ONOS (as INFLIBNET will provide unified access through campus-wide-network and off-campus access through INFED), thereby amplifying these journals' influence. This shift could put small, independent, or institutional journals, particularly those focusing on Indian socioeconomic issues and regional research, at risk. These niche journals may be pressured to merge with larger publishers, become financially nonviable, or be entirely obliterated. *If these smaller journals shut down, the ramifications will be profound. India would lose valuable platforms that publish diverse research narratives focusing on Indian authors and Indian research, and academic publishing in India could come under the monopolistic control of a few big publishers. These entities would then essentially determine where and how Indian research gets published.*

This dramatic shift in the academic publishing universe could create significant problems for smaller journals, which could become ever more marginalized. These journals might struggle to keep up with the academic landscape, where attracting contributors, readers, and citations is key. This disengagement may even worsen their monetary crises and ultimately undermine their very existence in the long run. Most operate on limited budgets, relying on subscriptions to publish regular issues of their content. As ONOS is exclusively inclined towards big publishers and is a centralized subscription system, smaller journals might see a drop in subscription numbers under its regime as institutions might lose the motivation to subscribe to small, independent journals that are not a part of the ONOS system. This revenue drop could force them into tough decisions — getting sucked into mergers with larger publishers or, in some cases, shutting their doors entirely. The loss of these journals would further constrain and shrink the voices of Indian researchers and limit the heterogeneity of academic thought and discourse.

The second and much bigger concern is the effect on region-specific and India-specific research. Many smaller or national and regional journals specialize in interdisciplinary research driven by the local economic, cultural, and policy environment. These journals are the foundation of the regional knowledge economy: not just localizing but localizing global topics of conversation. If these journals fail, researchers will be at risk of losing opportunities to publish work that responds to local needs. This will water down the range of Indian academic contributions on the global stage and cripple local capability to address urgent research challenges.

Journals that publish in non-English languages, regional ones such as Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, etc., will be at even greater risk. These journals are crucial for covering local topics and serving communities that don't speak English as a first language. But as attention shifts to English-language publications, regional journals will struggle to remain relevant. Such a trend could also result in local research getting marginalized and academic work becoming homogenized, making it increasingly difficult for research exercised outside the English-speaking domain to receive adequate recognition both within India and outside.

A decline in small journal publishers could lead to widespread job losses across the Indian journal publishing sector. Sales teams, production staff, and content editors would probably be among the layoff groups, and the infrastructure that underlies journal publishing — subscription services, printing presses, and distribution networks could be dealt a severe blow. This disruption would hamper the wider ecosystem and diminish the vitality of India's academic publishing sector. The problems are magnified for print journals as many academic communities still value physical copies; however, the move to digital platforms like ONOS threatens their value. ONOS could make print journals redundant, even threatening the survival of publishing houses producing print journals and printing presses supporting these publishers. Institutions dependent on print subscriptions may find it difficult to adjust, thus restricting even more individuals from getting research who have not already started transitioning to digital formats.

Conclusion

ONOS can transform the Indian academic ecosystem by democratizing access to global knowledge. Whether it succeeds or not, however, will greatly depend on whether Indian journals, especially those published by small, independent, and local publishers; national educational institutions; and regional language publishers, are accommodated. The Government of India must implement suitable policy-based guidelines and frameworks to safeguard the interests of Indian research and Indian journals to ensure that foreign journals and large publishers do not cannibalize these.

Policy Implications

To ensure that the ONOS initiative benefits the academic community and to reduce its impact on institutional journals and small publishers :

✧ It is indispensable to include other journals in the ONOS framework by creating a mechanism to onboard and promote high-quality print journals. This would ensure that these journals are visible and accessible to a wider academic audience, helping them to remain relevant in the evolving landscape. Additionally, the Government could provide funding and support to help journals improve their indexing, adopt digital platforms, and meet international publishing standards. This would help them to compete with larger, global journals and maintain their operations.

✧ Universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) should be motivated to independently subscribe to high-quality Indian journals, both print and online, that consistently publish quality content (until these journals become a part of the ONOS framework).

✧ Think tanks like the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) could collaborate with professional organizations to evolve evaluation metrics appropriate for Indian journals. Such metrics could be analog to Scopus's SJR, Scopus's CiteScore, or the WoS Impact Factor (IF) but tailored to the Indian research ecosystem. Journals maintaining a regular publication schedule and those obtaining good and consistent metrics could be shortlisted for ONOS onboarding.

✧ Finally, capacity-building efforts to strengthen journal editors, publishers, etc., are required. Training programs designed to improve the quality of these journals would ensure that they remain adaptive in the rapidly changing academic publishing landscape while continuing to provide valuable platforms for research. These measures, in aggregate, could pave the way for a more sustainable academic publishing framework, one that would enable both global and local research and ensure that more diverse voices and perspectives have a seat at the table.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Teena Bagga and Priyanka Gilani conceptualized and wrote this perspective paper. Mr. Deepak Sawhney gave insights from the publisher's perspective for this paper.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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