ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AS INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH HUBS:
A Review of Research Support Services for Social Science Research

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Abstract :

The transition from collection centered librarianship to research centered academic library services has become increasingly important in the digital and multidisciplinary higher education environment. This paper examines the role of academic libraries as interdisciplinary research hubs, with particular attention to support for social science research. The study uses secondary evidence from published research on research support services (RSS), research data management (RDM), and academic library research infrastructure in India and internationally. A major evidence base is the website analysis of 212 Indian academic libraries reported by Singh, Raj and Madalli, which identified eight categories of research support services. The reported availability was highest for research tool recommendations (58.96%) and scholarly publishing support (46.70%), while RDM (4.25%) and research impact measurement (17.92%) were much less visible on library websites. A 2025 systematic review of 89 empirical RDM studies further shows that academic libraries increasingly use partnerships, infrastructure, and new workflows to support the research data life cycle, although social sciences and humanities represented only 3.4% of the reviewed studies as a specifically identified disciplinary group. The paper argues, on the basis of this evidence, that the research hub model should integrate discovery, research consultation, open access, scholarly communication, data support, impact measurement, digital research tools, and preservation, while developing stronger liaison relationships with social science researchers. The study concludes with a proposed service framework for academic libraries seeking to move from transactional assistance towards sustained research partnership.

Keywords : Academic libraries; interdisciplinary research; social sciences; research support services; research data management; scholarly communication; digital scholarship; research partnership; India

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Introduction :

Higher education is increasingly organized around multidisciplinary knowledge production, digital scholarship, open science, and collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly calls for multidisciplinary higher education and stronger research ecosystems. It also identifies interdisciplinary research involving the humanities and social sciences as important for addressing societal challenges. The policy therefore creates an environment in which academic libraries can extend their contribution beyond access to information resources towards active research support. (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020).

The contemporary research environment also changes the expectations placed on academic librarians. Researchers may require assistance with literature discovery, systematic searching, reference management, open-access publishing, copyright, bibliometrics, research visibility, data management, digital tools, metadata, repositories, and preservation. IFLA's Academic and Research Libraries Section identifies open access, open data management, open science, e-research support, information literacy, and advanced staff skills among important areas for academic and research libraries. (IFLA, 2026).

For social science research, the need for integrated support is particularly significant because social science projects frequently combine qualitative and quantitative evidence, surveys, interviews, administrative data, statistical datasets, digital sources, and increasingly text and data analysis. IFLA's Social Science Libraries Section recognises disciplines including economics, sociology, psychology, political science, demography, geography, history, communication and social work, while also highlighting research methods such as text and data mining and statistical analysis. (IFLA, 2026).

The central issue addressed in this paper is therefore not whether libraries provide research support, but whether their existing services are sufficiently integrated and visible to function as interdisciplinary research hubs. The available Indian evidence suggests that several services exist, but their adoption is uneven and often weakly institutionalised. This paper brings together that evidence and proposes a practical framework for strengthening the library's role as a research partner.

Statement of the Problem :

Academic libraries in India have expanded their digital collections substantially, yet research support services are not uniformly developed across institutions. A large scale study of 212 Indian academic libraries found that only 29 libraries (13.68%) had a dedicated research support services page on their websites. The same study found substantial differences among individual research support categories, with research tool recommendations more visible than research data management and research impact services. (Singh, Raj, & Madalli, 2025).

This creates a service development problem. A library may possess databases, repositories, electronic journals and digital infrastructure without presenting these resources

as a coordinated research support ecosystem. For interdisciplinary social science research, fragmented services can make it difficult for researchers to identify whom to approach, which tools are available, how data can be managed, and how research outputs can be preserved and measured.

Objectives of the Study :

1. To examine the concept of academic libraries as interdisciplinary research hubs.
2. To analyse published evidence on the availability of research support services in Indian academic libraries.
3. To identify the major research support areas relevant to social science researchers.
4. To examine the role of research data management, scholarly communication, open access, research tools and impact services in the research life cycle.
5. To identify major gaps that may limit academic libraries from functioning as integrated research partners.
6. To propose a practical interdisciplinary research support framework for academic libraries.

Methodology :

This paper adopts a secondary data based analytical review design. It does not claim any primary survey or interview data collected by the author. The evidence is drawn from published empirical studies, a published research dataset, and authoritative policy and professional sources. The principal Indian evidence is the study of 212 academic libraries by Singh, Raj and Madalli, which examined eight categories of research support services through information available on institutional library websites. Additional evidence is drawn from the triangulation study of research data management (RDM) services in 186 Indian academic institutions by Singh, Bharti and Madalli, and from the systematic review of 89 empirical RDM studies by Ho and Wong. These sources are used as contextual evidence and are explicitly attributed throughout the paper.

The analysis uses descriptive synthesis rather than statistical inference. Percentages reported in the original studies are retained as published and are not presented as data collected by the author. The purpose is to synthesise existing evidence and translate it into a practical Library and Information Science framework for interdisciplinary social science research.

Limitations of the Study :

The paper is based on secondary evidence and does not present a new questionnaire survey of researchers or librarians. The major Indian dataset is based on information visible on institutional library websites; therefore, services not documented online may be undercounted. The international systematic review and Indian studies also use different populations, methods and time periods, so their percentages should be interpreted as contextual evidence rather than as directly comparable survey measures.

Research Support Services in Indian Academic Libraries: Evidence from 212 Libraries :

The large scale Indian website study evaluated 212 academic libraries, comprising Central Universities and Institutes of National Importance. Eight categories of research support services were examined: research guides, research consultancy, research impact measurement, open access, research tool recommendation, research data management, scholarly publishing, and archiving/preservation of research outputs. (Singh, Raj, & Madalli, 2025).

Research support service	**Libraries (N=212)**	**Percentage**	**Not reporting service**
Research tools recommendation	125	58.96%	87
Scholarly publishing	99	46.70%	113
Open Access	75	35.38%	137
Research consultancy	69	32.55%	143
Archiving & preservation	64	30.19%	148
Research guides	44	20.75%	168
Research impact measurement	38	17.92%	174
Research Data Management (RDM)	9	4.25%	203

Source: Singh, R. K., Raj, R., & Madalli, D. P. (2024/2025). Investigation of research support services (RSS) in academic libraries of India.

The data show a clear concentration around relatively familiar and immediately usable services. Research tool recommendations were reported by 125 libraries (58.96%), followed by scholarly publishing support in 99 libraries (46.70%). Open-access support was reported by 75 libraries (35.38%), while research consultancy and archiving/preservation were reported by 69 (32.55%) and 64 (30.19%) libraries respectively. More specialised services were less visible: research guides were reported by 44 libraries (20.75%), research-impact measurement by 38 (17.92%), and RDM by only 9 (4.25%). The original study also found that only 29 of the 212 libraries had a dedicated research support services page, indicating that service visibility and institutionalization remain important issues.

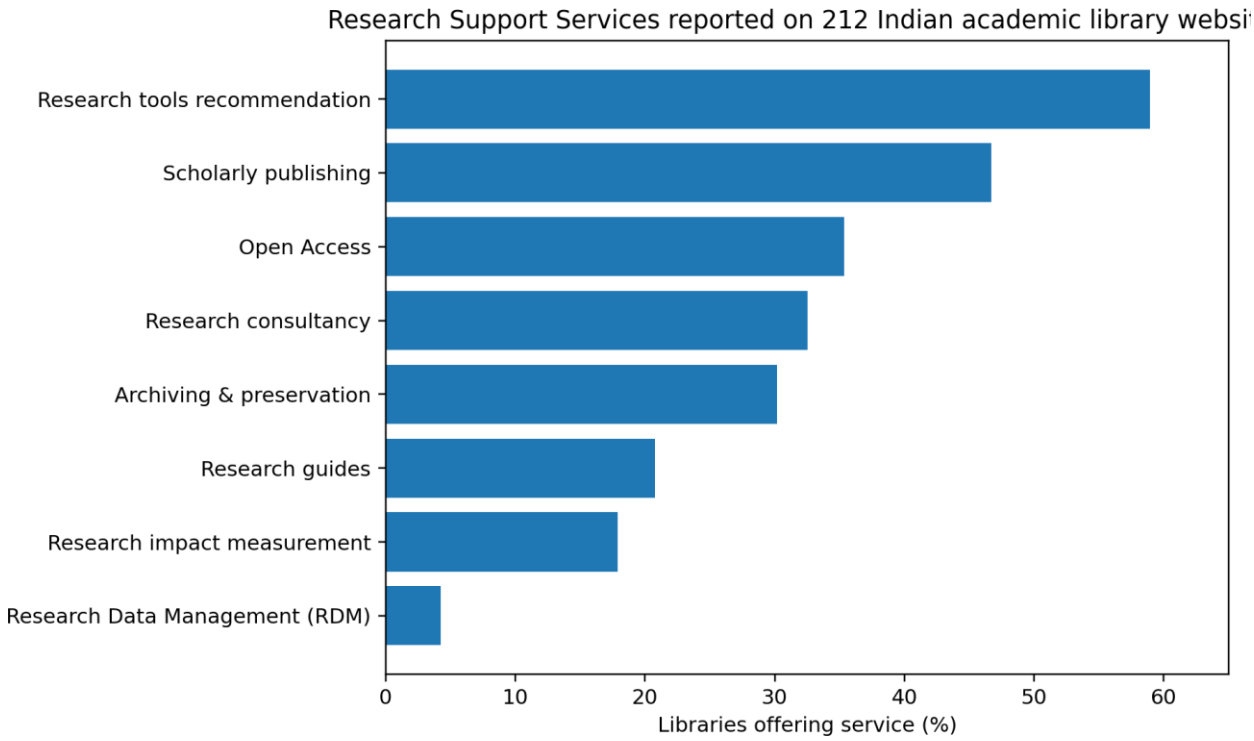


Figure 1. Reported availability of research support services on 212 Indian academic library websites. (source: Singh, Raj, & Madalli, 2025).

Research Data Management as a Critical Gap :

Research Data Management is an important component of modern research support because research increasingly produces datasets that need to be organised, documented, stored, preserved, shared and, where appropriate, reused. Singh, Bharti and Madalli (2022) evaluated RDM services in 186 Indian academic institutions using literature review, library website evaluation, online survey and telephone interviews. Their findings described RDM implementation in Indian academic libraries as being at an early stage, with policy, expertise, skills and technological infrastructure among the major challenges.

The website component of that study found that 17.10% of the institutions did not have a library web page identified on their institutional websites, and the authors reported that none of the evaluated library websites mentioned an RDM policy or RDM training resources. The study also reported that only 2.97% of survey respondents acknowledged that their institutions had an RDM policy, while many institutions were still considering policy development. (Singh, Bharti, & Madalli, 2022).

The international evidence points in the same direction while showing broader development. Ho and Wong (2025) systematically reviewed 89 empirical studies of RDM services in academic libraries worldwide. Their review found that 55.1% of the studies used qualitative methods, 30.3% quantitative methods and 14.6% mixed methods. Multidisciplinary settings appeared in 23.6% of studies, while Social Sciences & Humanities

were explicitly identified as the disciplinary focus in 3.4% of studies. The review emphasised partnerships, infrastructure, workflows and adaptation to researcher needs as important elements of RDM implementation.

Relevance to Interdisciplinary Social Science Research :

Social science research increasingly crosses disciplinary boundaries. A project on migration, for example, may require demographic data, geographic information, economic indicators, policy documents, historical records, survey data and qualitative interviews. A study of digital society may combine communication studies, sociology, psychology, information science and computational analysis. In such projects, the library can contribute a combination of subject knowledge, information discovery, metadata, research data practices, scholarly communication and digital research skills.

The role of the librarian therefore shifts from a transaction based model answering a reference question or providing access to a database to a partnership model in which the librarian is involved at several stages of the research life cycle. An IFLA case study on research libraries similarly describes a move away from disciplinary silos towards cross-disciplinary support, data curation, visualization, digitisation, metadata and partnership with research teams (Hickerson & Brosz, 2019).

Proposed Interdisciplinary Research Hub Framework :

Based on the evidence reviewed, an academic library can develop an interdisciplinary research hub model around seven interconnected service layers:

1. Discovery & Information Intelligence : Subject guides, advanced database searching, systematic literature searching, discovery tools, current-awareness services and interdisciplinary resource mapping.
2. Research Consultation : One to one or group research consultations, topic refinement, literature-search strategy, source evaluation and referral to specialist services.
3. Digital Research & Data Support : Research data management, data documentation, data organization, repositories, digitization, text and data mining, basic analytical-tool guidance and data preservation.
4. Scholarly Communication : Open-access publishing, journal selection, copyright guidance, author identifiers, repository deposit, research visibility and scholarly publishing support.
5. Research Impact & Visibility : Bibliometrics, citation analysis, altmetrics, researcher profiles, institutional visibility, research-output tracking and responsible use of metrics.
6. Interdisciplinary Collaboration : Liaison with social science departments, research cells, research-development cells, IT units, statisticians, data scientists and research administrators.
7. Research Skills & Capacity Building : Workshops on information literacy, research

tools, reference management, data literacy, scholarly communication, research ethics, reproducibility and digital scholarship.

Proposed Research Life Cycle Support Model :

The seven service layers can be mapped to the research life cycle. At the planning stage, librarians can support topic discovery, literature reviews, research questions, information sources and data management planning. During data collection and analysis, support can include data organization, metadata, preservation, ethical information practices and appropriate digital research tools. During publication, the library can assist with journal selection, open access, copyright, repository deposit and author identifiers. After publication, the library can support preservation, research visibility, citation analysis and responsible impact measurement.

Research stage	Library contribution	Social science examples
Planning	Literature searching, research consultation, subject mapping, source evaluation	Literature review; policy research; interdisciplinary topic mapping
Data collection	Data-source identification, data literacy, metadata and documentation	Surveys; census data; interviews; administrative datasets
Analysis	Research-tool guidance, text/data mining orientation, data organisation	Qualitative coding; statistical datasets; bibliometric/text analysis
Publication	Scholarly communication, OA, copyright, journal and repository support	Article submission; repository deposit; author identifiers
Post-publication	Preservation, impact measurement, visibility and research profiles	Citation analysis; altmetrics; repository statistics

Discussion :

The evidence suggests that Indian academic libraries already possess several building blocks of a research hub model, but these components are unevenly developed and are not always presented as an integrated service. The strongest visibility in the 212 library study was for research-tool recommendations and scholarly publishing, while RDM and research impact measurement were much less visible. This pattern may reflect differences in staff expertise, institutional priorities, infrastructure, policy maturity and researcher demand. It should not be interpreted as proof that a library provides no service merely because the service is not visible on its website; the authors of the 212 library study specifically noted that some libraries may provide services without organising or publicizing them under a dedicated RSS page.

The evidence also indicates that research support should not be treated as a single service. Research support is an ecosystem spanning discovery, consultation, data, publishing,

preservation, visibility and training. This is consistent with the broader direction of academic and research librarianship identified by IFLA and ACRL, where open science, data management, scholarly communication, information literacy and advanced professional skills are increasingly integrated into the research mission of libraries.

For social science research, the interdisciplinary research-hub model is especially relevant because social science problems frequently intersect with health, environment, technology, economics, public policy, culture and community development. A librarian who understands research workflows and can coordinate specialist support can contribute to the research team without replacing the disciplinary expertise of the researcher.

Conclusion :

Academic libraries have the potential to function as interdisciplinary research hubs by integrating information resources with research consultation, digital scholarship, data support, scholarly communication, preservation and research-impact services. Evidence from 212 Indian academic library websites demonstrates that research-tool recommendation and scholarly publishing support are relatively visible, while RDM and research-impact services remain much less visible. The evidence from 186 Indian institutions and the international systematic review of 89 RDM studies further indicates that policy, infrastructure, skills and partnership models are central to the development of advanced research support.

For social science research, the future-oriented role of the academic librarian is therefore best understood as a research partner who connects people, information, data, technology and scholarly communication. The proposed seven-layer framework provides a practical basis for moving from fragmented services towards a coordinated interdisciplinary research-support ecosystem. Such a transformation is consistent with the multidisciplinary and research-oriented direction of NEP 2020 and with the evolving international mission of academic and research libraries.

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