



Serial Publications

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WITHIN LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY, serial publications have been considered traditionally as a separately distinguishable library resource because there are differences in their contents, format, bibliographical relationships, and the methods of acquisition and service.

Definitions of the term "serial" vary from authority to authority and from library to library, as A. Osborn makes clear in his study.¹ For this article the term is used to include all those publications which are issued with varying frequency, with a title common to successive issues, but without a foreseeable ending. Within this definition fall periodicals, governmental serials, newspapers, series, annuals, proceedings, transactions, and other less easily delineated categories. This lack of clarity in definition is partly responsible for the absence of an authoritative quantitative analysis of the extent of serial publishing. UNESCO recently attempted a quantitative survey on a world-wide basis,² but admitted the difficulties in obtaining reliable data and in arriving at definitions which are generally acceptable. The UNESCO study reports nearly 100,000 newspaper and periodical titles in the world in the 1950's, but this figure is far from complete for the broad sweep of serials considered here. Osborn estimates that there are between half a million and a million serial titles published each year.³ Figures for the number of separate issues published during a year and for the number of copies produced are too great for a reasonable estimate, but from what we know of serials, their number is staggering.

The future of serial publications can be considered under two aspects: (1) the future of the serial publications themselves, and (2) whether and how libraries will use them. Serial publications, which have been part of our library resources for hundreds of years,⁴ will remain library resources for many years to come. It seems safe to

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predict that there will be no abrupt change in the pattern of publishing and reading which is favorable to the serial publication, dealing as it does with information too current, too transitory, or too fragmentary for conventional book treatment.

D. E. Carroll is making an intensive study of the world production of newspapers and periodicals⁵ which appears to indicate that the rate of increase in the production of these materials since about 1800 has been doubling at intervals of approximately twenty-five years. While there will eventually be a decrease in the rate of growth, the developments in the newer and presently underdeveloped countries should tend to maintain the present rate for the immediate future.

The growth in population in the United States for the past fifteen years has been accompanied by a fairly consistent increase in the circulation figures for newspapers and periodicals. During the next twenty years, demographic factors will undoubtedly have an effect upon the production and circulation of serial publications throughout the world. These factors in themselves may have relatively small effect upon the number of serial titles, their character, or the development of bibliographic controls. Changes in population characteristics such as educational attainment will increase the demands upon educational institutions and will affect library service, including the use of serials. However, the character and degree of these changes cannot be judged accurately.

There is some evidence that economic factors have an impact upon the production of serial publications. The figures reported by the U.S. Bureau of the Census⁶ for the period from the late 1920's into the 1950's show a downward trend in book publishing and serial circulation (newspapers and periodicals) during the first half of the 1930's, with a progressive upward trend since the end of World War II. The Census figures do not show a corresponding increase in the number of periodical titles since World War II, a fact which may imply that other trends in the economy, such as increased costs of materials and labor, have adversely affected certain segments of the serial publishing industry. A continued high rate of economic growth, such as we have experienced during the past fifteen years, seems favorable to publishing, while a prolonged period of economic distress may have an adverse influence.

Although technological changes during the past twenty years have been unprecedented, the effects of such changes are not easily measured. Most noticeable has been the impact of the increased interest

in scientific fields of study, resulting in the production of more literature, predominantly serial in nature.^{7, 8} Developments in printing—such as high speed presses, improved offset, and low-cost duplication methods—have had a decided influence upon serial publications.⁹

Social and political factors can affect serial production. In recent years the United States has seen the reappearance of a specialized literary publication, the "little" magazine.¹⁰ We have also seen the emergence of such serial types as the comic book and the men's magazine (of a character that would not have appeared openly ten years ago). The creation of new nations is bringing forth their new literature, which will include serials.

Research and special libraries have long recognized the importance of this type of material and have collected it extensively.¹¹ Some categories of serials which are quite valuable for research—newspapers and foreign government publications—are collected adequately by only a relatively small number of libraries. There are indications, however, that all types of libraries now recognize more fully the importance of this type of publication and will collect them more actively during the next twenty years.

A perennial problem with serials has been to develop means of obtaining access to their contents.¹² In the past, a small number of limited bibliographic tools have provided a degree of access to the contents of the major serials, but no comprehensive attack has been made. Recent technological advances in the field of information retrieval offer the hope of improvement in the future. Well known examples of the application of new techniques to the control of serial contents are the American Chemical Society's *Chemical Titles*,¹³ a list in which machine methods are used to produce current author and key-word indexes from 600 chemical journals, and the Listomatic system being used in the preparation of the National Library of Medicine's *Index Medicus*.¹⁴ It is not likely that machines will solve completely the control of serial contents within twenty years, but undoubtedly significant improvements will be made.

If it is possible to develop bibliographies which are broader in scope than the present tools and at the same time not prohibitive in cost, such tools would become part of the reference apparatus of a great many libraries. The availability of such bibliographies would impose greater pressures to make more serials available. As a result, the fact that libraries would probably share these resources more extensively could lead to increased use of the regional library ap-

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proach, increased interlibrary loans, and further developments in the technology of quick and inexpensive copying methods. Allied with this cooperation is the need for better knowledge of the location of serials, which is already on the way toward improvement with the forthcoming third edition of the *Union List of Serials*.¹⁵ Projects for the preparation of regional union lists and lists of specialized types of serials surely will continue.

Costs of periodicals are demonstrably on the increase, according to studies made for the American Library Association and reported in a recent publication of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.⁸ Unless library budgets increase sufficiently, the higher costs of serials could result in greater selectivity in their acquisition. If economic pressures on the publishers become too great, restrictions upon reproducing copyrighted materials could become more severe.

One predictable change of a technological nature affecting the use of serials in libraries will be further developments in microforms,¹⁶ which are accepted now to provide inexpensive means of acquiring complete collections of important serial materials, and of preserving bulky collections in a small space and in a durable form.

Among serial publications, periodicals are of most significance to libraries. While general interest periodicals which are most commonly found in various types of libraries are expected to grow, an even greater rate of growth can be predicted for specialized periodicals. Studies such as those of Brodman and Taine¹⁷ for medical periodicals and those for medical, educational, and social science periodicals reported by UNESCO² are valuable, but they admit the lack of information upon which to base adequate world estimates. C. H. Brown predicted in his 1956 study on scientific serials a sizable increase within twenty years.⁷ It appears from recent literature¹⁸ that the lack of reliable statistical data on periodicals is now receiving attention.

Serial and nonserial publications of the agencies of national, state, and local governments will continue among the library resources of the future. All signs point to an increased place in our lives of governmental activities at all levels. With the extension of governmental activities will come more publishing, much of it of vital importance for library collections. Researchers, government personnel, and the general public are becoming increasingly aware of the effects of government and are seeking access to the published results of governmental activities.

It is not likely that domestic and foreign governments will provide a complete solution for the acquisition and control of government publications. Present efforts to improve the depository library system for the United States Government publications might decrease the problem. If efforts at the national level appear dim, they are even dimmer at the state and local levels. For foreign government publications, the problem is particularly acute. A recent survey for the Farmington Plan Committee of the Association of Research Libraries¹⁹ indicated deficiencies in the resources of foreign government publications.

A resource of increasing significance particularly to libraries serving industrial laboratories, academic institutions, and government agencies is the technical research report, which is not a completely new type of serial, but its growth during the past twenty years has added a new dimension to scientific and technical literature. A National Science Foundation report²⁰ shows that during the past twenty-one years the amount being spent annually by the U.S. Federal Government for basic research and development in governmental, industrial, and university facilities has grown steadily from \$0.74 billion to \$8.1 billion. In addition, industrial organizations and universities are spending further billions on research and development.²¹ Unless there is a radical change in the methods of recording and reporting the results of this research—and proposed²² technological developments could bring such a change—specialized libraries can look forward to an increase in the number of these reports in the future.

The already mentioned UNESCO survey² shows a world total of newspapers of general interest of 30,000 in the mid-1950's. In the United States, several sources during the past forty years have indicated a gradual decline of newspaper titles.^{6, 23} For world totals, however, such a decline may be offset by the emergence of a strong press in the newly developing areas.

Many libraries have not included newspapers among their collections to any great extent because of custodial problems. Since the use of microfilm in the late 1930's, newspaper holdings are more common in a larger number of libraries. This trend is likely to continue and to increase, with libraries collecting a greater number of local and national newspapers. The most significant development in recent years has been the Foreign Newspaper Microfilm Project sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries,²⁴ which has made accessible

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to libraries through loan or purchase the most important newspapers of foreign countries.

The demographic implications for future library service will bring an increase in the number of serials publications and increased demands upon libraries for this type of resource.

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