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Comparative study of Indian patent databases

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ABSTRACT

There are now several databases which can be used to search for Indian patent information, including IPAIRS (Indian Patent Information Retrieval System), which is the official and free searching tool. This paper explores both the completeness of the patent coverage and also the accuracy of the information available in three subscription-based databases and IPAIRS. The results of our studies were encouraging, with accurate bibliographic information being retrieved and the data coverage of the databases showing increasing consistency over time.

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1. Introduction

Can Indian patent information be easily retrieved? Is it reliable? Patent information searchers and users worldwide have been asking these questions for a number of years and as recently as 2009 it was said that obtaining information about patents in India could be challenging [1].

Over the years, the information has been documented in many different forms. The full text has been available in paper format since 1912 [2] with formats including

- Fascicules (abridgments of specifications),
- Patent Office Journals,
- Patent indexes,
- Gazette of India Part 3 Section 2,
- Journal of the Patent Office Technical Society and
- Patented inventions of the CSIR (Council of Scientific Industrial Research) [3].

Some examples of early electronic databases are Ekaswa A, B and C which were set up by the Indian Department of Science and Technology as separate databases, each covering a different time

period. Other examples are BigPatents, a free database of post-TRIPS¹ Indian patent applications and issued patents (no longer available), and the National Informatics Centre of India which provides a search system for the bibliographic data of Indian and non-Indian patent documents [4].

India is one of the major developing and emerging markets, and over recent years many foreign companies have set up innovation centres and manufacturing units in the country. Probably, as a result of this, the number of patent filings in India has increased over the last 5 years [5]. This trend has amplified the need for databases to provide complete coverage of Indian patent information.

Accessing Indian patent information has become easier following the launch of IPAIRS Version 2.0 in April 2012 [6], and also with other databases such as CIPIS (Clairvortex Intellectual Property Information Services), INFULL (Indian (IN) Patents Full Text) and MCPaIRS (Molecular Connections Patent Information Retrieval System). In addition, databases such as PatBase, TotalPatent, Chemical Abstracts, and Thomson Reuters Derwent World Patent Index have also been increasingly focused on providing comprehensive Indian patent information. The coverage details of these databases are summarized in 2.1.

¹ TRIPS – Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an international agreement administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO) that sets down minimum standards for many forms of intellectual property (IP) regulation as applied to nationals of other WTO Members. It was negotiated at the end of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1994.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TRIPS_Agreement]

Abbreviations: CIPIS, Clairvortex Intellectual Property Information Services; IPAIRS, Indian Patent Information Retrieval System; MCPaIRS, Molecular Connections Patent Information Retrieval System; INFULL, Indian (IN) Patents Full Text.

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Therefore, accessing and retrieving Indian patent information is more straightforward. However, database providers typically only specify a range of years over which patent information is covered in a database and it is not always clear how complete the coverage of Indian patent information is, for any given year.

Using methodology as explained further in the report, we have investigated the completeness and the accuracy of Indian patent information coverage over the last 20 years in the databases listed in Table 1.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Databases and their coverage

The databases listed in Table 1 were used in the study-

Table 1
Databases providing Indian patent information.

Database	Document type	Coverage from
CIPIS [#]	Applications and Patents	1971
IPAIRS	Applications and Patents	1912
INFULL [#]	Applications and Patents	1912
MCPaIRS [#]	Applications and Patents	1981

[#]Subscription based.

Although not considered here, the other patent databases mentioned below also cover Indian patent information in addition to data from many other patent issuing authorities worldwide.

- PatBase (coverage from 1912)
- Chemical Abstracts (coverage from 1948)
- Thomson Reuters Derwent World Patent Index (coverage from 2004)
- Thomson Innovation (coverage from 2000)
- TotalPatent (coverage from 1912)
- WIPS Global (coverage from 1900)

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Study 1

We searched for the number of Unilever (or Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) or Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL); hereinafter collectively referred to as Unilever), filings published each year from 1992 to 2012 in each of the subscription based databases mentioned in Table 1. We hoped this would give us an idea of how complete the information available on the databases is.

2.2.2. Study 2

This part of the study was divided into two sections:

- Pre-2005
- Post-2005 (including 2005)

This time split is because Patent Office Journals are only available online from, and including 2005, so could only be used for part b) of the study.

2.2.2.1. Pre-2005. In the absence of the online availability of Patent Office Journals prior to 2005, we selected four published Unilever documents per year. We then checked the retrievability of these 52 documents (four documents for 13 years; 1992–2004) using the databases listed in Table 1. Further, the accuracy of bibliographic

data of documents thus retrieved was checked by comparing it with that of the Unilever documents.

2.2.2.2. Post-2005 (including 2005). Four patent documents, one each from Kolkata (the head office of the Patent Office), Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai (branch offices), and published in Patent Office Journals each month, were randomly selected. In total, 416 documents were selected (four documents per month for a total of 104 months from January 2005–August 2013). Subsequently, the retrievability of these 416 documents was checked using all the databases listed in Table 1. These documents were not restricted to any particular applicant. Further, the accuracy of the bibliographic data of the documents retrieved was checked by comparing it with the corresponding data found in Patent Office Journals.

While checking for accuracy in either of the study periods, minor changes in titles of retrieved documents were deemed as 'the same'. However, if a retrieved document showed a completely different applicant's name, different filing dates, or any other mistake, it was taken to be 'incorrect'.

3. Results

3.1. Study 1

Table 2 shows the number of Unilever patent publications retrieved from the databases used in the study between 1992 and 2012.

It can be seen from the table above that the databases showed a varying number of published applications for almost every year. However, for most years, at least two of the databases retrieved very similar numbers. The variation could be due to gaps in information coverage, or to a difference in the way the databases treat the information. It may be that in some instances published applications and granted patents are combined, and in some they are present as separate records.

In only one full year (2006), all the three databases retrieved exactly the same number of records. Even though in 2012, the databases retrieved the same number of documents, the full year's data was not available at the time of testing and therefore it is to be expected that the numbers will change.

Table 2
Numbers of retrieved Unilever patent publications.

Filing year	CIPIS	INFULL	MCPaIRS	Difference [#]
1992	76	54	73	22
1993	96	68	96	28
1994	74	66	75	9
1995	65	65	62	3
1996	83	76	62	21
1997	151	159	148	11
1998	154	156	154	2
1999	158	156	156	2
2000	64	59	65	6
2001	183	150	174	33
2002	206	129	207	78
2003	137	151	147	14
2004	215	212	229	17
2005	165	171	163	8
2006	146	146	146	0
2007	188	183	188	5
2008	143	141	143	2
2009	120	114	118	6
2010	157	153	156	4
2011	115	90	98	25
2012	35	35	35	0

Note: All the numbers appearing above are as found in August 2013.

[#]The difference between the highest number retrieved and the lowest number retrieved.

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