When to Publish? Perspectives of North African researchers in the medical field

Quand publier? Perspectives des chercheurs nord-africains dans le domaine médical

Rihem Dahmane[1,2], Rym Fakhfakh[3], Meriem Gaddas[2,4], Imen Ben Saida[2,5], Helmi Ben Saad[2,4]

1. Department of Nephrology, Dialysis and Transplantation, University of Sousse, Faculty of Medicine of Sousse, Sahloul Hospital, Sousse, Tunisia.
2. University of Sousse, Faculty of Medicine 'Ibn el Jazzar' of Sousse, Farhat HACHED University Hospital, Research Laboratory LR12SP09 'Heart Failure' Sousse, Tunisia
3. Rheumatology Department, Farhat Hached Hospital, Sousse, Tunisia
4. Department of Physiology and Functional Explorations, Farhat HACHED University Hospital, Sousse, Tunisia.
5. Medical Intensive Care Unit, Farhat Hached Hospital, Sousse, Tunisia

Abstract

Introduction: Scientific publication plays a vital role in sharing research outcomes, enhancing knowledge, and fostering academic careers. However, researchers in low-income countries like Tunisia often face significant barriers, including limited access to funding, training, mentorship, and high-impact journals. These challenges can hinder their ability to publish effectively and at the right time. This study explored strategies for successful medical publication and examined the optimal timing for manuscript submission, drawing on the experiences of Tunisian researchers.

Methods: This perspective-based study combines a comprehensive literature review with expert-facilitated group discussions. A research session held at the Faculty of Medicine of Sousse (Tunisia) brought together 44 participants from diverse medical specialties. The session included expert presentations, group discussions, and a review of relevant literature.

Results: Timing was highlighted as a key strategic factor: submitting a manuscript upon completion of data analysis, in response to a call for papers, ahead of a major scientific event, or when the topic is particularly relevant can significantly increase the visibility and impact of the publication. Scientific publication also plays a crucial role in academic recognition and career progression. Careful planning, strategic journal selection, and adherence to editorial and ethical standards were identified as essential elements for improving publication success.

Conclusion: Knowing when to publish can make all the difference. Submitting a manuscript at the right time — whether it is shortly after completing data analysis, when the topic is gaining attention, or in response to a specific call for papers — can significantly increase a study's visibility and impact. However, timing alone is not enough. With the right training, thoughtful journal selection, and strong institutional support, researchers — especially those in low- and middle-income countries — can overcome many of the barriers they face and share their work more effectively with the global scientific community.

Keywords: Academic Career, Low- and Middle-Income Countries, Publication Strategy, Publication Timing, Scientific Publication

Résumé

Introduction: La publication scientifique est une étape clé dans la valorisation des résultats de recherche, l'enrichissement des connaissances, l'évolution des carrières et la visibilité académique. Pourtant, dans les pays à faible revenu comme la Tunisie, les chercheurs se heurtent à de nombreux obstacles : ressources financières limitées, accès restreint aux revues à fort impact, manque de formation en rédaction scientifique et absence de mentorat structuré. Cette étude vise à identifier les stratégies les plus efficaces pour réussir une publication médicale, tout en explorant les moments les plus propices pour soumettre un manuscrit. Elle s'appuie sur les retours d'expérience de chercheurs tunisiens et s'inscrit dans une série d'articles consacrés aux grandes questions de la publication scientifique : pourquoi publier, comment publier, et quand publier.

Méthodes: Cette étude fondée sur une perspective combine une revue de littérature approfondie avec des discussions de groupe animées par des experts. Une séance de recherche tenue à la Faculté de médecine de Sousse (Tunisie) a réuni 44 participants issus de diverses spécialités médicales. Cette session comprenait des présentations d'experts, des discussions en groupes et une analyse de la littérature pertinente.

Résultats : Le choix du moment de publication a été reconnu comme un facteur stratégique essentiel: publier à la fin de l'analyse des données, en réponse à un appel à contribution, à l'approche d'un événement scientifique majeur ou lorsque le sujet est particulièrement d'actualité permet de maximiser l'impact et la visibilité de l'article. Par ailleurs, la publication scientifique contribue fortement à la reconnaissance académique et à l'évolution de carrière. Une planification rigoureuse, le choix ciblé de la revue, ainsi que la maîtrise des exigences éditoriales et éthiques sont des leviers clés pour renforcer les chances de publication.

Conclusion: Une approche stratégique de la publication, combinée à des formations spécialisées et à un accompagnement institutionnel, s'avère indispensable pour améliorer les capacités de publication des chercheurs, en particulier dans les pays à revenu faible ou intermédiaire.

Mots-clés: Carrière académique, Moment de publication, Pays à Revenu Faible ou Intermédiaire, Publication scientifique, Stratégie de publication

Correspondance
Rihem Dahmane
Department of Nephrology, Dialysis and Transplantation, University of Sousse, Faculty of Medicine of Sousse, Sahloul Hospital, Sousse, Tunisia.
Email: dahmane.rihem@yahoo.fr

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Successfully publishing a scientific paper depends not only on the quality of the research, but also on the strategic timing of submission to maximize its impact…

Introduction

Far exceeding the status of a mere academic obligation, the process of scientific publication constitutes a fundamental component of research dissemination (1). The scientific publication process not only enables the transfer of novel insights and energizes scholarly discourse, but it also amplifies the prominence of scientific endeavors and fosters academic progression (2). Furthermore, the timeliness of publication significantly elevates the likelihood of a research article being cited, engaged with, and translated into clinical or practical applications (3, 4). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the consistent escalation in global scientific output (4), durations vary substantially between scientific fields and even within the same broader discipline (5). This lag may obstruct the rapid dissemination of innovative findings, thereby potentially delaying their integration into clinical practice (6). For authors, particularly those aspiring for impact and visibility, the interval from submission to publication emerges as a critical criterion in selecting a journal (7). A plethora of studies has demonstrated that this duration is affected by various determinants, including the journal's field of specialization (8-12), impact factor (9-11, 13), frequency of publication (11), open access policies (9, 14), accessibility of online publishing (6, 11, 13, 15), and even temporal trends (10, 12, 16, 17). The timeline from submission to publication is conventionally categorized into two distinct phases: the duration from submission to acceptance—which is contingent upon the velocity of peer review and cycles of revision—and the interval from acceptance to publication, which encompasses editing, proofreading, and the final layout processing (6). In the realm of primary health care, where the expeditious dissemination of practical and evidence-based knowledge is paramount (18, 19), comprehending these timeframes holds particular significance. Although a limited number of studies have tackled this subject (5, 6, 20), they frequently either incorporate journals beyond the stringent scope of primary health care or center predominantly on high-impact publications (20, 21).
This perspective-based study aimed to investigate the pivotal moments during which the publication of a scientific paper may prove especially advantageous.

Methods

The current study is one of three components of a project that addresses the following three queries: why, when and how to publish? The purpose of the first section (ie; why to publish) was to review the theoretical justifications and incentives that push medical researchers to participate in the publication process and identify those of researchers from low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) (22). The second part (ie; How to publish) aimed to identify strategies for successful medical publication, drawing on the experiences of Tunisian researchers (23). The third part (ie; when to publish) is the aim of this study. This is a perspective-based study combining structured, expert-facilitated collaborative group discussions with a comprehensive literature review.
The Faculty of Medicine at Sousse, Tunisia's Research Committee organized a three-hour research brainstorm session from 14:00 to 17:00 on February 18, 2025, with the theme "Kickoff — Why, When, and How to Publish?". Through its official Facebook page and email, the committee invited all faculty members and all PhD students associated with the doctoral school. Forty-four participants, of whom 48% were women, attended the session. Medical (48%), basic sciences (18%), surgery (14%), and dentistry (9%) were among the specialties represented by the participants. Furthermore, 11% of the attendance were PhD students. According to Scopus data, the median (interquartile range) number of publications and h-index of participants were 2.0 (0.0; 6.5) and 0.5 (0.0; 2.0), respectively. Participants were divided into seven tables at random for the session, with roughly six people at each table. A spokesperson was given to each table. An expert in medical writing (HBS on the authors' list) led the session. The expert started the interactive style by handing out thought-provoking questions on scraps of paper, including "When to publish?" After reflecting and writing their answers for five to seven minutes, participants had five minutes to debate the topic as a group. After then, the cumulative insights from each spokesperson's table were compiled and examined. The specialist then went on to discuss the main facets of academic publication in a PowerPoint presentation. An open discussion that followed the lecture allowed for more clarification and idea sharing. A survey of pertinent literature, expert presentations, and participant input were used to construct this report.

Results and discussion

Thirty-one participants gave feedback on the question "When to publish?" Participants' responses, summarized in Table 1, highlighted several key considerations when it comes to selecting the optimal time to publish.
These moments encompass but are not restricted to the i) Culmination of data analysis, ii) Initiation of a special issue or a call for papers, and iii) Lead-up to significant conferences or scientific gatherings, or intervals when the research topic garners heightened relevance in the scientific or public dialogue. Grasping and capitalizing on these windows of opportunity can substantially augment a publication's visibility and enduring impact.
Many researchers emphasized the importance of publishing once their article was ready, with some noting that this moment should align with career goals or the completion of the study. A notable portion of participants mentioned the relevance of publishing before major scientific conferences or taking advantage of special issues as strategic moments to enhance visibility. Others pointed out the timing linked to academic calendars, specifically pre-aggregation stages, while several

acknowledged the necessity of timely publication to meet contest deadlines or align with current hot topics. Despite the diversity of responses, common themes emerged, including the preference for publishing once results were solid and complete, as well as the strategic use of open access options.

Table 1. Responses of the 31 participants (university hospital doctors and doctoral students) to the question: when publish?

Thematic Category	Expressions Used	Percent
When the work is ready / complete	Article is ready Work is ready Complete results Solid results Enough data Research finished Team validated work	**39%**
Strategic career timing	Early in the career Throughout career Career goals Academic calendar: Pre-aggregation, Need for quick publication for contests	**26%**
Conferences & visibility opportunities	Before big scientific conferences At the approach of major conferences Beginning of the year	**16%**
Special issues / thematic opportunities	Special issue Specific theme Open access / specific theme	**13%**
Trending / timely topics	Relevant subject Current topic Promising results	**13%**
Early / partial data publication	Pre-results From the protocol After obtaining results	**13%**
Open access consideration	Open access	**13%**
Ethical considerations	Ethical agreement	**3%**

There is a wide variation in the time to acceptance and publication in medical journals. Choosing the right time to submit a scientific article is essential for improving its chances of timely publication and, consequently, its visibility and impact within the academic community (24). During the workshop, participants exchanged insights and shared their experiences on the subject. Their input helped highlight the key moments considered most suitable for publication. Combined with expert presentations and an in-depth review of the literature, this feedback allowed the authors to identify effective strategies and essential steps for determining the optimal timing for manuscript submission. Addressing the critical question of "When to publish?" requires both strategic vision and the ability to navigate various challenges throughout the publication process.

Disseminating research findings is essential to the advancement of science, as it promotes the exchange of knowledge, encourages academic dialogue, and supports the progression of researchers' careers. The pace at which research is published plays a critical role in scholarly communication, directly influencing opportunities for tenure and job stability, while also revealing disparities experienced by various groups within the publication system (24). The timing of manuscript submission plays a pivotal role in shaping the visibility, scientific impact, and reception of a study (24). The following points will help researchers understanding the right time to submit their paper.

Upon obtaining preliminary results

The swift publication of work by renowned researchers in prestigious journals plays a crucial role in attracting the attention of the scientific community, fostering discussion, and establishing these findings as key references (24). Sharing preliminary results can encourage collaboration and accelerate knowledge development and innovation (25). A relevant example is provided by Dergaa et al. (26, 27), who explored the opportunities and risks of generative artificial intelligence—specifically Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (ChatGPT)—in academic writing. Their early publication on this emerging and sensitive topic sparked timely debate, influencing ethical and methodological considerations in future research (26-36).

After full study validation

Ideally, scientific work should be published only after full completion and rigorous validation, ensuring reproducibility, statistical robustness, and sound interpretation (37). A three-year publication period is often considered optimal for assessing research performance, especially in rapidly evolving fields like medicine. This timeframe strikes a crucial balance between the reliability of results and the need for relevant assessments (38).

High-impact journals typically require finalized, peer-reviewed manuscripts, contributing to the credibility and integrity of scientific output (39, 40). Upholding rigorous standards in the documentation of methods, materials, and experimental design significantly improves the clarity, reliability, and reproducibility of scientific research (37). Nonetheless, this model represents the gold standard in scientific communication (37).

In response to calls for papers

Responding to a call for papers for a special issue presents a strategic opportunity to reach a targeted audience and increase acceptance chances (41). This is particularly effective when the manuscript closely aligns with the thematic scope such as submitting a study on pitfalls to avoid by diabetics during Ramadan fasting (42) to a special issue on Ramadan and health (43). Special issues attract readers focused on specific topics and promote thematic cohesion (41). To optimize chances of acceptance, submissions should include a detailed proposal—title, abstract, and project status—while clearly articulating their contribution to the issue's objectives (44). However, some scholars caution that exclusive focus on special issues may limit the scope of

research, potentially sidelining innovative work that falls outside predefined themes.

Prior to major scientific conferences

Coordinated publication—releasing research simultaneously with major scientific conferences—can significantly enhance visibility and citation impact (45). Such publications are often featured in prominent sessions, fostering immediate engagement (46). Studies show that coordinated publications receive more citations (median of 188) compared to non-coordinated ones (median of 98) (45, 46). These publications are frequently supported by industry, particularly in fields like cardiovascular research, which further boosts their exposure (45). However, this model raises concerns: the rush to publish may compromise peer-review quality (47-49), and the environmental impact of travel to in-person conferences poses ethical challenges (47-49). A balanced approach is therefore essential to ensure academic rigor and sustainability.

When the topic is timely and relevant

Publishing on current or emerging topics increases visibility, readership, citations, and media attention, as timely dissemination is key to maximizing scientific and societal impact (50). Researchers can significantly enhance the impact of their work by taking proactive steps at key stages of the research process—planning during manuscript development, actively promoting the published work, and tracking citations—to broaden its reach and attract wider audience engagement (51). Media coverage plays a crucial role in increasing the visibility of scientific research (51). Additionally, awards and recognitions create spikes in public and academic interest, further amplifying a researcher's influence and citation rates (52).
The importance of timely publication is particularly evident during global events. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic sparked an unprecedented increase in scientific publications in early 2020. The rapid dissemination of new knowledge was crucial for finding scientifically sound solutions to combat the spread of the virus. This highlights how publication timelines need to be adaptable to ensure research remains relevant to current trends and urgent societal needs (53).

As part of career development strategy

Regular publishing is essential for academic success, playing a key role in career advancement, funding acquisition, and institutional reputation. Publications are often prioritized over teaching in promotion decisions (2) and are critical for attracting research funding, as they signal scholarly productivity (48). Consistent publishing also boosts institutional prestige, influencing rankings and eligibility for competitive grants (49). Strategically timed publications—such as during tenure evaluations or grant application periods—can strengthen an academic's profile by showcasing active research (54).

To further enhance research productivity and efficiency, it is vital to encourage early career researchers, such as doctoral candidates, to publish from the outset of their careers. Promoting early publication, rather than solely focusing on publications for career advancement milestones, can significantly boost research output and foster a proactive research culture (55).
However, the "publish or perish" culture can foster negative consequences, including the spread of low-quality or unethical research, as academics may prioritize volume over rigor (48). This trend highlights the need for balance between quantity and the quality of scholarly output.

As soon as the manuscript is ready

Delaying manuscript submission can slow down the publication process, reducing the relevance and impact of research—especially in fast-moving fields. Timely submission helps ensure findings are published while still current and competitive (56).
To help reduce such delays, adopting publication models that integrate open access and preprint platforms can facilitate faster dissemination of research findings, shield researchers from competitive pressures, and promote more rapid progress in conservation science (56). However, while speed is important, ensuring compliance with journal requirements remains crucial to avoid rejections and further setbacks. Balancing timely submission with.

Choosing the right journal strategically

Selecting the right journal plays a key role in maximizing a researcher's visibility, engagement, and academic recognition (57). Open access journals broaden dissemination and can boost citation rates by eliminating access restrictions (57). Meanwhile, publishing in prestigious journals enhances scientific credibility and supports academic advancement through rigorous peer review and editorial standards (57). The choice should align with the researcher's goals—whether prioritizing broad dissemination or academic prestige (7).

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study offers important new information about when North African medical researchers decide to publish their work. It reveals important elements impacting when researchers decide to publish by combining participant experiences, professional opinions, and an analysis of pertinent literature. Exploring practical and context-specific difficulties, especially in LMICs, with an emphasis on the academic environment in North Africa was made possible by the workshop-based approach. The study's conclusions may not be as broadly applicable, though, due to its very small sample size. Its design as a component of a larger set of investigations employing the same research cohort is partially to blame for this (22, 23). Furthermore, the results' applicability to other

contexts inside or outside of Tunisia may be impacted by the focus on a particular institutional and regional context.

Conclusion

Successful publication timing requires strategic foresight: thoroughly validating research results, taking advantage of calls for papers and academic conferences, and ensuring alignment with both career goals and societal relevance (Figure 1). Tackling ethical and practical challenges—such as the quality of peer review, the environmental impact of publishing, and biases toward popular or trending topics—can significantly enhance the effectiveness of scientific communication.

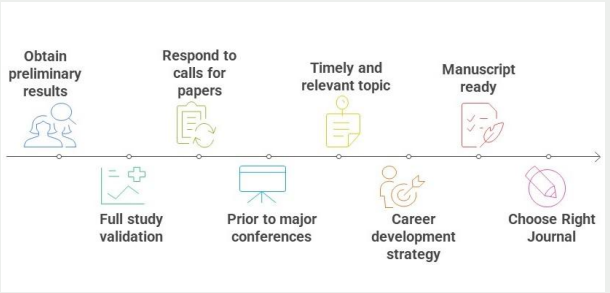

Figure 1. Strategic moments in research publication.

DECLARATION. The authors wish to disclose that two artificial intelligence tools (ie; Quillbot and ChatGPT ephemeral) were utilized to enhance the clarity and coherence of the manuscript' writing. The tool was utilized for language refinement purposes only, ensuring the text was clear and coherent without altering the scientific content (34).

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