



Message or messenger, that's the right question

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Abstract

Current publication system is based in a continuous pressure for publish in "high-rated" journals, in the consideration that this is a synonymous of research-quality, forgotten both the sense of research: the generation of knowledge, nor the publication in specific journals; and that after the emergence of internet, the current editorial system should have been fully rethought.

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Introduction

It has been said that in the world of science publish or perish is the question. We must publish our results because our departments, research centers, universities, governments and fundraisers consider this an obligation to maintain the quality status of the centers and its position in international rankings which, supposedly, attracts external funding and high quality students or researchers, or to justify the levels of investment in scientific research, and the "scientific position" of the countries (1,2). In summa, to be recognized, to maintain status and prestige, ... or perish, and become ancient history.

On the other hand, nobody seems to take into account two key questions:

1. The right reason to publish an article is none of the aforementioned. The right reason is to communicate our results to anyone, anywhere, in order to disseminate obtained results and contribute to the advance of knowledge.
2. Close related to previous point: some research may need a bit more time to be fully finished, and may be out of current "evaluation times".

Good scientific work is a work of passion that should be done with love, and, it is true, that should be result in a manuscript, patent, or any other manner to contribution to science advancement. But in the current scientific environment it seems that researchers are not persons but

rather are publishing machines which produce final results as if working on an assembly line, and sometimes this results in bad scientific practices.

We often need to publish in specific journals and not because of their scope or appropriateness (1). Indeed, publishing in a relevant top-ranking journal is better than publishing in a journal addressed to a specific target audience. Publishing in a top-ranking journal allows us to be recognized and makes our research more attractive to possible fundraisers, or to scientific policymakers (1). Publishing in a target correct journal may be equivalent to being invisible from a fundraising point of view, since this may represent for a lot of people to be "in the second division of science", irrespectively of the audience of interest.

We now seems to act as youtubers considering the journal impact factor and the quartiles as an internet "likes" number. In fact, we seem like junkies looking for a dose of impact factor over and over again. Thus, it seems that our mission is to publish, to publish anything, but not in any journal.

The same article published in a journal ranking among the top-ten is considered better than that if published in a non-rating journal. The same article published in a highly known journal is better than if published in a little known journal. But the article is the same, and the message is the same, and the non-rating or little known journal may be more adequate for our text than the highest ranking journal (3).

Maybe we have lost the true sense of our mission. We are scientists. We are not writers looking for a bestseller, we are not youtubers, we are not “likes” collectors.

It is true that in the past, when knowledge was supported in print, the diffusion of a scientific journal was relevant and better ranked journals was a guarantee of good diffusion. The lack of a printed journal was the same as the lack of knowledge carried over. But we live in the present.

At present, in the internet era, all knowledge may be transmitted on-line. In this era the relevance of scientific journal distribution is almost negligible if existent. You can access to thousands, thousands of thousands of scientific articles from your home, in the morning, while having a coffee and a croissant.

In this context, why is publishing in a top-ranked journal of merit? Why is the route of transmission important and not what is transmitted? What is the relevance of the scientific results measured in terms of journals and not in terms of the specific reports? What are we valuating?

While it's true that we need a quality control to avoid or diminish the publication of “disinformative” (to say the least) studies, we don't need journals as they are conceived at present; we don't need a “quality” rating of journals. Maybe we don't need the current journals or, more correctly, we don't need the current editorial system. Why do we need to publish in any commercial journal? Why do we need to pay to publish? Why do we need to pay to read? Why don't universities, research centers, hospitals (or government administrations) have their own on-line journal(s) in which their affiliated (or national resident) authors can publish in Open Access and without author fees? In this scenario, manuscripts should only be evaluated for their methodology soundness or correctness, and not because of their potential attraction to external citations. This model will be cheaper for all scientific statements, will guarantee full diffusion of knowledge, and would avoid the continuous race to publish, thereby facilitating the development of more meticulous, time consuming studies (4).

We do aspire for see our names in a top journal, or we do aspire to see how our results are transmitted to others, and subsequently used in their research, their activities, their policies or their day-to-day life? To be conscient of our priorities everyone can answer a simple question:

What is more relevant: What is published ... or where is published?

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Ethics statement

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