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Evaluation of Turkish Medical Researchers' Affecting Factors for Journal Selection Decisions

Türk Tıp Araştırmacılarının Dergi Seçim Kararlarını Etkileyen Faktörlerin Değerlendirilmesi

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the factors affecting Turkish medical researchers' choice of journals for publication.

Materials and Methods: This study is an online cross-sectional survey study. The participants with at least one Pubmed/MEDLINE indexed published paper were recruited non-random from the Turkish Medical Network Telegram group. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions and three sections; the first part included open-ended questions, the second part included questions about the factors affecting journal selection, and the third part included participants who were asked if they had paid for publication for any reason.

Results: The study included 353 Turkish medical researchers, with a median age of 38 and 50.9% female. Bibliometric scores, publication fees, and overall prestige/reputation were the most influential factors affecting journal selection. The availability of a suitable manuscript, turnaround times, international contributions, previous experiences with the journal, and ease of submission were also significant factors.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates that the participants consider the publication objectives, relevance, and important selection criteria before they make a clear decision.

Keywords: Citation index, impact factor, journal selection, Turkish medical researchers

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma, Türk tıp araştırmacılarının makalelerini yayımlamak için dergi seçimini etkileyen faktörleri araştırmayı amaçlamıştır.

Materyal ve Metot: Bu çalışma, çevrimiçi kesitsel bir anket çalışmasıdır. En az bir PubMed/MEDLINE dizinli yayımlanmış makalesi bulunan katılımcılar, Türk Medikal Ağı Telegram grubundan rastgele olmayan yöntemle seçilmiştir. Anket, üç bölümden ve 18 sorudan oluşmuştur; birinci bölüm açık uçlu soruları, ikinci bölüm dergi seçiminde etkili olan faktörlere ilişkin soruları, üçüncü bölüm ise katılımcıların herhangi bir nedenle yayımlama ücreti ödeyip ödemediklerini içermektedir.

Bulgular: Çalışmaya medyan yaşı 38 olan ve %50.9'u kadın olan 353 Türk tıp araştırmacısı katılmıştır. Dergi seçiminde bibliyometrik skorlar, yayımlama ücretleri ve genel prestij/itibar en etkili faktörler arasında yer almıştır. Ayrıca, uygun bir makale bulunabilirliği, geri dönüş süreleri, uluslararası katkılar, dergiyle önceki deneyimler ve başvuru kolaylığı da önemli faktörler arasında yer almıştır.

Sonuç: Bu çalışma, katılımcıların dergi seçimi yapmadan önce yayımlama hedeflerini, konuya uygunluğunu ve önemli seçim kriterlerini dikkate aldıklarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Atıf indeksi, dergi seçimi, etki faktörü, Türk tıp araştırmacıları

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INTRODUCTION

The production and transfer of academic information are for the benefit of both society and researchers. Moreover, academic publication serves many purposes, including increasing peer recognition and providing career opportunities.[1,2]

Preparing an article and getting it published in a journal is a complex process. Authors must complete all required phases of the publication process, including execution, writing, editing, drafting, formatting, and identifying the peer-reviewed journals they are targeting to publish an article that results in a successful publication goal.[3] Choosing the best journal for a written work can be challenging, even for experienced authors. Selecting a journal involves considering a variety of factors (such as the peer review process, the target audience of the journal, the type of articles accepted, the publishing model used, etc.). Therefore, choosing the right journal can save time for both authors and publishers.[4,5]

The following criteria must be met to write and publish a journal article successfully: choosing an appropriate topic, understanding the publication's audience, framing the article in the appropriate style, cooperating with the journal editor to produce an acceptable manuscript, including positively responding to the editor's criticisms and suggestions; and adhering to all submission guidelines and deadlines. Journal writing can be an exacting, demanding, frustrating, and incredibly satisfying professional activity for someone who sees it through to its successful conclusion.[6] Preparing, submitting, and properly revising a manuscript can be challenging. Any deficiencies in these procedures may result in the rejection of a manuscript or dissatisfaction of the author.[3] Considering all these factors, choosing the ideal journal is difficult. Although there are various articles on this subject, the criteria have not yet been clarified.[7-9]

In this study, we aimed to evaluate the journal selection decisions of Turkish researchers in the medical field and the factors affecting these decisions. By identifying these elements, the research aims to aid both novice and experienced authors in making informed choices. Additionally, the findings can guide journal editors and publishers in improving their services to meet researchers' needs better, enhancing the publication process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethics Committee Approval: Our study was approved by the Sakarya University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee (Date: 16.04.2021, decision no: E-71522473-050.01.04-25241-247). This study was conducted with ethical principles for medical research described in the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed of the purpose of the survey online, and consent was obtained online as well. All personal identifiers regarding participant data were removed during analysis to preclude personal identification.

Study design: This study is an online cross-sectional survey study.

Participant recruitment and sampling: Participants with at least one Pubmed/MEDLINE-indexed published paper were recruited non-random from the Turkish Medical Network Telegram app group, which includes more than 3.000 confirmed academic members. The members who showed interest received a written description of the project and were subsequently contacted with a link for the survey. Surveys were conducted via an online questionnaire between March 1st and April 30th, 2022, due to COVID-19 precautions. The questionnaire was piloted for face validity within a small representative sample of 14 medical professionals, and the final version was further tested online among several non-participating medical professionals.

Study tool: After reviewing relevant surveys, editorials, and review papers on the factors that influence the selection of a journal for publication, the authors prepared a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions and three sections, with an estimated time to complete of less than 5 minutes.

The first section included questions for age, sex, academic title, major field of study, years of practice, years as a lecturer, years since the first publication, and number of publications (papers indexed in Pubmed/MEDLINE, all published articles, books, or book chapters), which were gathered by open-ended questions.

The second section included questions regarding factors that affect journal choice. For factors associated with journal choice, participants were asked to choose from a pre-determined list including overall prestige/reputation of the journal, journal editors and editorial board, citation indexes, international contribution, scientometric data, publishing fees, previous experience with the journal, having a study which has a good fit with the journal, the turnaround time, and ease of submission. Participants were further asked to choose their citation index(es) that influenced their journal choice, including Science Citation Index (SCI)-Expanded (SCIE), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), ESCI (Emerging Sources Citation Index), EBSCO, Scopus, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals) and TRIndex (Turkish Citation Index), developed by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK)/ Turkish Academic Network and Information Center (ULAKBİM), is a bibliographic / full-text database

containing articles and journals in the main subjects of Dentistry, Pharmacy, Engineering, Basic Sciences, Health Sciences, Veterinary, Social and Human Sciences. Participants chose the scientometric data that influenced their journal choice from a list that included Journal Impact Factor (JIF), Hirsch (H)-Index, Scientific Journal Ranking (SJR), Eigenfactor, Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), and Altmetrics. All pre-defined lists for answers also included an "other" choice, in which participants could also write their answers.

In the third section, participants were asked if they had paid for publication for any reason. Responses were categorized as “Yes, for open access,” “Yes, for other reasons (such as publication and page charges),” “The fee was waived,” and “I specifically avoid paid journals”.

Statistics: Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS (Statistic Program for Social Sciences) Statistics for Windows version 23 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Data were presented as median and range or in number and percentage values. Mann Whitney-U tests were used for the comparison of continuous data. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

A total of 353 Turkish medical researchers with at least one Pubmed/MEDLINE-indexed paper were included in the study. The median age was 38 years, and women and men approximately equally participated in the survey. The majority of participants (n=220, 62.3%) held the title of specialist, while one -third held the title of professor. Only 13 (3.7%) of the participants were residents. More than half of the participants (n=237, 67.2%) were from clinical sciences. Participants practiced medicine for a median of 11 years and were teaching medicine for a median of 5 years. The median year from the first publication was five years, with a median of four publications indexed in Pubmed/MEDLINE and eight publications overall (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of participants.

Characteristics		Data
Gender, n (%)	Female	180 (50.9)
	Male	173 (49.1)
Academic title, n (%)	Resident	13 (3.7)
	Specialist	220 (62.3)
	Assistant Professor	93 (26.4)
	Associate Professor and Professor	27 (7.6)
Field of practice, n (%)	Basic sciences	28 (7.9)
	Clinical sciences	237 (67.2)
	Surgical sciences	88 (24.9)
Years of practice: Median (min-max) years		11 (1-33)
Years as a lecturer: Median (min-max) years		5 (0-25)
Years since first publication: median (min-max) years		5 (1-20)
Number of publications: Median (min-max) values	Papers indexed in Pubmed/MEDLINE	4 (1-95)
	All papers	8 (1-207)
	Books or book chapters	2 (0-42)

Data were presented as frequency (percentage) for categorical variables and median (minimum-maximum) for continuous variables.

Three hundred thirty-five participants (94.9%) considered citation indexing as a factor in their journal selection. Other highest-ranking factors were scientometric scores, publishing fees, the overall prestige/ reputation of the journal and having a study that fits the journal well. Less than twenty percent of the participants reported that turnaround time, international contribution, previous experiences with the journal, ease of submission, and the editors and editorial board affected their journal choice (Table 2).

When participants were asked which citation indexes affect their journal choice, all participants unanimously chose SCIE as the primary index. Only 126 (35.7%) participants used the TR Index as a citation index to choose journals, with other indexes used to a lesser extent. When choosing a journal, three hundred and twenty-three (91.5%) participants relied on JIF as the primary scientometric data. The second most influential scientometric data was the H-index, with 166 (47%) of the participants reporting it as a factor that influenced their decision and others to a lesser extent (Table 3).

Table 2. Factors influencing the journal selection of participants.

Factors	n (%)
Citation indexing	335 (94.9)
Scientometric data	156 (44.2)
Publishing fees	153 (43.3)
Overall prestige/reputation	136 (38.5)
Study with a good fit to the journal	99 (28)
Turnaround time	59 (16.7)
International contribution	54 (15.3)
Previous experience with the journal	36 (10.2)
Ease of submission	21 (5.9)
Editors and editorial board	9 (2.5)

Data were presented as frequency (percentage) for categorical variables.

Table 3. Citation indexes and scientometric data influencing the journal selection of participants.

Index Status		n (%)
Citation index	SCIE	353 (100)
	TR Index	126 (35.7)
	ESCI	88 (24.9)
	SSCI & AHCI	64 (18.1)
	Scopus	48 (13.6)
	Others*	16 (4.5)
Scientometric data	JIF	323 (91.5)
	H-index	166 (47)
	SJR	27 (7.6)
	Others**	11 (3.1)

Data were presented as frequency (percentage) for categorical variables. SCIE; Science Citation Index-Expanded, TRIndex; Turkish Citation Index, ESCI; Emerging Sources Citation Index, SSCI; Social Sciences Citation Index, AHCI; Arts and Humanities Citation Index. Others* include the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and EBSCO. JIF; Journal Impact Factor, H-index; Hirsch index, SJR; Scientific Journal Ranking. Others** include the Eigenfactor, Altmetrics, and 5-year impact factor.

Participants who preferred using scientometric data were practicing medicine for 2.5 years longer than those who did not (12 years vs. 9.5 years, Mann-Whitney U test, p=0.006). Moreover, they had four more publications (10 publications vs. 6 publications, Mann-Whitney U test, p=0.004). Similar differences were also observed in participants who used "having a study that fit the journal well" as a factor for journal choice; these participants were practicing medicine for three years longer (13 years vs. 10 years, Mann-Whitney U test, p=0.003), and had three more publications (11 publications vs. 8 publications, Mann-Whitney U test, p=0.044) (Table 4). Nearly half of the participants (n=164, 46.5%) reported having previous experiences with paid journals for various reasons: 114 (32.3%) had paid page, figure, or submission charges, and 50 (14.2%) paid Open Access (OA) article publishing charges. None of the participants reported a fee waiver; the remaining 189 (53.5%) expressed that they avoid journals requiring authors to pay any fees for article publishing (Table 5).

Table 4. Association between participants' characteristics and journal selection factors.

Factor	Group	Median years of practice	p-value	Median number of publications	p-value
Preferred using scientometric data	Practicing participants	12	p=0.006	10	p=0.004
	Non-practicing participants	9.5		6	
Journal choice: fit to journal	Considered important	13	p=0.003	11	p=0.044
	Not considered important	10		8	

Mann-Whitney U test

Table 5. Payment practices and preferences of participants regarding journal publication fees.

Category	n (%)
Previously paid journals for publication	164 (46.5)
- Paid page, figure, or submission charges	114 (32.3)
- Paid only OA article publishing charges	50 (14.2)
Fee waivers reported	0 (0)
Avoid journals requiring fees	189 (53.5)

Data were presented as frequency (percentage) for categorical variables; OA: Open Access.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Choosing the right journal for an article is a crucial decision that affects the pre-publishing process and the article's success post-publication. It impacts the article's visibility, the effectiveness of the research findings in the literature, and the likelihood of receiving citations. This study aims to evaluate the factors that Turkish researchers in the medical field consider when choosing a journal to submit their papers. Herein, we demonstrated that among the factors affecting journal selection, participants were mainly influenced by the citation index. High-quality and respected journals are usually well-indexed; this broader extent in their bibliographic database makes the journal more available.[10] In this context, the researchers participating in our study prefer to have their articles published in a high-quality and respected journal. SCIE, an index that hosts the most respected and high-impact factor journals in today's academic world, was uniformly defined as the index that affected the participants' journal selection.[11] While our results demonstrate that citation indexes seem to play a pivotal role in journal selection for researchers seeking high-quality publication opportunities, it is essential to recognize that not all well-indexed journals maintain the same level of academic rigor, highlighting the need for careful evaluation beyond indexing alone, noting that Turkish researchers may need to be informed on the topic.[10]

Journal ranking via scientometric indexes is a quantitative approach mainly based on paper and citation counts that aims to inform researchers and help guide academic institutions. Herein, we demonstrated that Turkish researchers value scientometric data after the citation index for journal selection. Scientometric data, used as a measure to evaluate and rank the prestige of a journal, was also noted as an important criterion for journal selection in other countries as well.[12] In our study, the participants stated that JIF affected the journal selection the most among the scientometric data. JIF reflects the average annual number of citations of articles published in the journal over the past two years and is reported annually by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR).[13] While journals with high JIF are often perceived as more prestigious, there is considerable misusage associated with this metric.[14] In light of these concerns, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) has advocated reducing reliance on JIF as an incentive factor.[15] Rather than using JIF alone, using multiple scientometric data during the journal selection process can provide a more robust evaluation of journal quality.[16] While we demonstrate that JIF remains a significant influence in journal selection among Turkish researchers, educating researchers to incorporate various data to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of journal quality is crucial.

Some journals may request a fee during article submission or publication. The journals that employ a pay-to-publish mandatory open-access model and the costs of open-access publishing are increasing yearly.[17] While previous studies have shown that publishing open access increases the number of citations, the findings remain inconclusive and depend on the research area.[18,19] In our study, participants had negative opinions about journals that charge authors for open-access publishing. High fees, paying in different currencies, exchange differences, and other expenses (laboratory kit, transportation, etc.) made until the publication stage are inevitable causes of this result.

Once an article is submitted to a journal, it enters into a phase where it cannot be submitted to another journal's evaluation until a reply is received. Therefore, the turnaround time of a journal becomes a crucial factor in journal selection.[20] The literature suggests that authors should control the average number of days for editorial review, the average time for peer review, and the average time from acceptance of the article to publication, which is included in the journal information prior to submitting a paper.[20] In line with these suggestions, our study participants noted that the turnaround time is among the important criteria for journal selection.

As journals are usually published by international academic societies with different missions and visions for shaping the literature, editorial policies regarding journal purpose and aims play a crucial role in defining 'the goodness of fit' of an article for journal selection.[20] Therefore, when submitting a paper to a journal, the paper should be relevant to the subject and should be compatible with the journal's purpose and aims, as having a bad fit is one of the most common reasons for rapid rejection in the medical field.[21] Only a quarter of our participants reported that they consider "good fit to the journal" as a criterion in selecting journals. Despite the significance, it is concerning that only a minority of participants recognizes it as a criterion, which highlights the need for greater awareness and education among researchers regarding the importance of understanding editorial policies and journal alignment.

In our study, participants who stated that they preferred scientometric data of journals as a criterion had been practicing medicine for a longer period than those who did not, and these participants had a higher number of publications. The professional experience of participants who were considered a 'good fit for the journal' as one of the criteria for journal selection was also significantly higher, and they had a greater number of publications. Similarly, the literature suggests that the level of experience

plays a significant role in the journal selection process and the factors influencing it.[22]

In conclusion, our study offers a unique perspective on the journal selection process of Turkish researchers in the medical field. Understanding the reasons and methods behind their choice of publication platform is crucial in the ever-expanding information landscape. Choosing a journal for publication is a complex decision influenced by various factors. Our study underscores the significant roles of citation indexes and scientometric data, particularly JIF, in shaping journal preferences. Other factors, such as publication fees and turnaround times, also play a crucial role. Lastly, ensuring that the article aligns well with the journal's scope is revealed as an important factor, as any misalignment can result in swift rejection. It is worth noting that apart from showing the current landscape of journal selection criteria used by Turkish researchers, our study also underlines those educating researchers on the correct use of citation indexes and scientometric data remains a significant challenge, which ultimately will enhance the effectiveness of their publication strategies. There are several limitations in this study. The non-random selection of participants, who were instead recruited voluntarily from the Turkish Medical Network Telegram group, represents a limitation of this study. However, the insights gained from this sampling approach, which inherently includes only researchers active on this specific digital platform, are significant. While the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population of Turkish medical researchers, they provide a valuable perspective. There is a need for studies that include a more significant number of participants and where academic and non-academic authors can be examined in detail.

Ethics Committee Approval: Our study was approved by the Sakarya University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee (Date: 16.04.2021, decision no: E-71522473-050.01.04-25241-247).

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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