

Prior to existence

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INTRODUCTION

Sharing research outcomes as quickly as possible is paramount for the researchers and the research. In the pursuit of early showcasing the research, researchers are well supported by the instrumentalities of journal publication systems. The betimes for publishing research findings is to be decided for the best possible use. Considering the importance of time windows in health and medicine, early publication is acceptable in health sciences journals. Additionally, competitions with peers also play a significant role in the efforts of early publications.

The impressive contributions of short communications in health science and management are irrefutable. In this context, the enormous contribution of a single-page article (spanned over parts of two printed pages¹ that include generous acknowledgment and references) published by Watson and Crick (1953)² that later finds a place in Nature Collection 'Physics: Looking back...' published in 2006, in life science and health science is worth mentioning. Though it was not an early publication, Watson and Crick recognized the importance of sharing information 'in advance of publication' and cited that as a reference in their article.² In addition, they have also documented the importance of sharing information and ideas, even unpublished, in the article.² It is interesting to note that two consecutive articles were published in the same issue of the journal 'Nature' with a common broad heading 'Molecular structures of nucleic acids' – one by Watson and Crick² and the other one by Wilkins *et al.*,³ while the first one received nearly 9000 citations, the second one received only less than 700 citations since 1953. Leaving the citations alone, the comparative accession metrics [204k(2) vs. 16k(3)] suggest that early accessibility cannot guarantee greater access by the scientific community. Whopping >32k citations were received by a COVID-19 article published in the journal *The Lancet*⁴ within four years of publication with a reader count of 38k; on the contrary, the metrics presented on the website⁵ for an article⁶ published in 2020 suggest that a letter of two pages with only six references published in *JAMA* is accessed more than 910k times and cited just >4k only. Therefore, early publication is not essential to reach the audience.

However, deciding the criteria for selecting the time or the suitability of the content to be published as short communication is often the discretion of the editor. With the availability of more than 30000 journals in health sciences, the pressure on the editor can be perceived differently. If the urgency of publication, scientific or personal or commercial, could not convince one editor, there are many in the field to be convinced. Conversely, even if the editor is not convinced

and early publication is denied, the science does not suffer as someone else may get the opportunity to serve the science. However, the editor's decision might have taken away an opportunity for the journal to improve its citation. Thus, even though it is a call to be made by the editor to avoid the blame, the reviewers are asked to comment on the priority suggestions for evaluating the manuscript.

Journals allow researchers to publish their thoughts, ideas, or comments in many ways and forms. Apart from regular articles, alphabetically arranged publication opportunities of short descriptions of concepts or research findings are in the form of 'Analyses,' 'Brief Notes,' 'Brief Reports,' 'Brief Research Reports,' 'Letters to the Editor,' 'Letter,' 'Micro articles,' 'Minireview,' 'Opinions,' 'Personal Narrative,' 'Preprint,' 'Perspectives,' 'Reports,' 'Rapid Communications,' 'Short Communications,' 'Viewpoints,' *etc.* Some of these are peer-reviewed, while others are not. Whatever the case, these are shorter publications and usually do not have regular sections like empirical research articles. There are often journal-laid restrictions on the amount of data to be presented and references to be used in these publications. However, the citations of these shorter publications are not indicative that these are not full-length articles.

Though there is no mention of these communications types in the ICMJE Recommendations,⁷ the editor's freedom in deciding about the time of publication for any article has been mentioned. While some journals agree that the 'short communications' must be published quickly,⁸ others agree that it should be reviewed quickly.⁹ It has occasionally been proposed that the requirements for these kinds of publications in academic journals be the quick distribution of highly significant material that would interest a broad research community.¹⁰ and should get priority handling.⁹ On the contrary, there are instances where nonpriority is categorically mentioned for these shorter versions of communications.¹¹ Content-wise, it is generally accepted that these should be smaller in volume, with word counts ranging between 2500 and 3500, and limited numbers of tables, figures, and references; nevertheless, relatively larger sizes are also acceptable.^{12,13} For some journals, these communications should have the freedom of expressing themselves without the formalities of predefined article structures, while others insist on sticking to the prescribed structure or article outline.^{8,13,14}

While it is commonly agreed upon that these communications are a glimpse of a new and significant research outcome that is yet incomplete, these articles may include continuation information of already published articles¹² or high-quality

small-scale research activities without complex results¹⁵ or negative results.¹² They may also include inconsistent results with previously published reports.¹³ or questioning standing concepts.¹⁶ with or without supplementary materials.^{8,13} While these should not be the preliminary reports of novel research,¹⁶ it is expected that the detailed publications should be followed by an article published at later dates.¹⁷

With the change of publication scenario from print to online and counts being reckoned under several banners, there are changes in the strategies of the publications. Invitations are everywhere for everyone, including commentaries, letters, (guest) editorials, opinions, *etc.*, so that the ticks on the counter can be improved and higher counts can attract more counts in the count-only metrics system.

'Fast-track full papers,' 'Post-publication review,' 'Pre-print,' 'Ahead of prints,' 'Articles in press,' and 'Articles in process' are some of the systems or options to serve the purpose. However, it is different that articles may remain in this stage for 2 years or more, as the purpose is served by online dissemination of the information. (The references for these facts are not included as that may serve as a tiny support to the process).

In 1996, 'Protein Engineering,' a journal from Oxford Academic Journals, encouraged the authors to publish preliminary results as 'Short communications' and supported fast-track publications of these communications.¹⁸ With the surge of online open-access publishing systems, the publication system could be made very fast, and the dissemination of information could be speedy. In that case, there is no need for such publications if only quick dissemination of information is the target. Notably, being a shorter version of the publication, the 'publication fee' is relatively less;¹³ discounts are also sometimes offered¹⁹ on 'short communications.' While research minds started questioning the suitability of these shorter formats of publications in journals, recently, 'Short Communications' has been introduced in the 'Statistical Science' journal.²⁰ Interesting to note that the journal did not commit to any quicker publication of this new format and mentioned a list of qualities to qualify and disqualify the requests from authors willing to publish 'Short Communication,' as they have rightly mentioned that '*a short paper does not automatically qualify as a short communication*'.²⁰

Conceptually, these small pieces of communication share significant, often initial, information obtained that authors and the editorial board are convinced to be important for the scientific community. It is not necessarily the quality information that cannot be delivered in a short format. However, the role of the editorial process is paramount in this context. Although these communication formats have been introduced in some journals recently, the need for those is not beyond question. Particularly when there is hardly any journal that practically remains a 'print only' publication, and there is no space crunch in the online media with plenty of repository options, neither the researchers nor the journal

would like to shrink the publication size. Considering the mercantile potential of research outcomes/news and high peer pressure, sharing significant initial research information may sound disporting. Finally, the word 'early' synonymizes with 'premature,' and when the premature manuscript utilizes the opportunities of early publications, the sufferer is the science.

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