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Tiago M Correia, Maria Rodrigues

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# The Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning Marketing Model applied to Scientific Health Research

Correia, Tiago M. (<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5480-6384>)<sup>1\*</sup>, Maria Rodrigues (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0968-7358>)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ISCAP – Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto

\*Corresponding author: [tiagojmonteirocorreia@gmail.com](mailto:tiagojmonteirocorreia@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Currently, in the scientific health research (SHR) field, there is a narrow focus in the pursuit of highly ranked journals with higher impact factors, based on citation models and journal ratings. This limitation often leads to undervalue the relevance of scientific studies by prioritizing citation impact. This limitation is a direct result of the funding needs inherent in the fields of natural sciences and engineering, where investments in equipment and infrastructures are considerably higher compared to other research areas. In the present article, the authors aimed to contribute to SHR by combining Marketing concepts, particularly the Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning model (STP Marketing model), to the development of scientific research projects in the healthcare sector. By applying these concepts in research projects design and researchers career progression, a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved of how individuals or institutes are perceived. Furthermore, the implementation of effective STP Marketing strategies will enable researchers and institutes to gain a competitive advantage in the market by treating articles as products that require strategic positioning in a highly competitive environment. Ultimately, researchers should keep in mind that their ultimate audience is the journals audience they are targeting, as their objective is to publish in a journal that aligns with their specific goals.

**Keywords:** Scientific health research, STP Marketing model, Research article, Product

## Introduction

Scientific health research (SHR) has a large impact on public health and progress<sup>1</sup>. Due to this, it should be in the public interest to continue to fund this field. Natural sciences and engineering are more data-driven and require more funding for equipment and infrastructure<sup>2</sup> which makes this research field highly dependent of a systematic evaluation.

Besides the scientific impact and relevance of the work, the evaluation of scientific projects to grant funding is strongly dependent of several indicators:

the number of citations of the proposal's authors, number of scientific publications in high impact factor journals and the scientific merit of the authors. This metrics results in a competition among researchers and research institutes. This might lead to researchers to prioritize their research output in terms of publication in highly ranked journals and securing research funds, often at the expense of more meaningful and impactful research<sup>3</sup>. This raises an important question: How can STP Marketing strategy help to overcome this competition?

Journals rankings are used to assess the quality and impact of

publications. These rankings are based on various metrics such as citation counts, impact factor, h-index, and others. Based on this, journals are divided into four quartiles: (Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4)<sup>4</sup>. There are several ranked lists of academic journals, the most commonly used ones are the Web of Science Journal Citation Reports, Scopus, and the Google Scholar Metrics<sup>5</sup>. Journal rankings can help researchers in choosing the right journal to submit their work, as well as assist readers in identifying high-quality research in a particular field. Moreover, these rankings can influence funding decisions and job promotions in academia. However, these rankings can also lead to a narrow focus on a small number of journals, which can stifle innovation and creativity in research<sup>6</sup>.

Citations are the most widely used metric to measure the impact of one specific article<sup>7,8</sup>. Not only the number, but the quality of citations is important to assess articles relevance<sup>7</sup>. A citation in an Q3 journal is less relevant than a citation in a Q1 journal.

SHR is a highly competitive market, as researchers fight for journals acceptance and fundings. To differentiate themselves from the competition, they need to not only to demonstrate their scientific merit but to be able to communicate their findings effectively<sup>9</sup>. Marketing can arise as a powerful tool to help researchers achieve their ultimate goals and define strategies to boost their scientific research.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is crucial to (re)think how we see a research article. It cannot be considered as a simple research work, but a way to positively impact future research and consequently its relevance. The research article will directly affect future fundings by the journals ranking that it is published in, as well as the number and quality of citations. Therefore, the present article aims to do, first, a systematic

review on how SHR publishing process works and, secondly, take a completely new approach in how we see the research article by applying the STP Marketing model. Finally, it will be also discussed how this Marketing strategy model can boost SHR by approaching the article as a product that can be placed and promoted in a highly competitive market.

## Methodology

Given the main goal of the present article, the authors started to first search and analyze peer-reviewed journal articles within the scope of SHR publishing process. The articles were browsed using Google scholar, Scopus and PubMed. With this, the authors aimed to gather information regarding the steps that are usually followed from the research project design until its publication. The questions to answer were: how researchers see a research article? When publishing and where to publish? Why choose one journal over other? What are the criteria used to do that choice? How are journals ranked? How the number of citations and journals ranking can influence all these questions? And ultimately, how to get more funding to SHR?

After a systematic review on the publishing process in SHR, the authors noticed that there is a huge gap regarding the application of Marketing strategies in SHR. Taking this into account, the next step was to do a review regarding the STP Marketing model.

The authors searched and read each selected article regarding STP Marketing models applied to several specific topics. With this, the authors aimed to construct a general but complete description of all the three components included in STP Marketing model.

In the final part of the article, having a complete review from SHR publishing process and the STP Marketing model, the authors applied the

STP Marketing model to SHR, by approaching the article as a product. In the end, the authors constructed an example model to follow, using all the suggested strategies in how to apply STP Marketing model in SHR (Figure 2).

## **An overview and discussion of the STP Marketing Model applied in SHR**

The STP Marketing model is a strategic Marketing framework used to identify and evaluate potential target markets for a product or service<sup>10</sup>. The STP Marketing model unfolds into three components: Market Segmentation, describing the market; Market Targeting, selecting the audience and Market Positioning, as the image in consumers' minds<sup>11</sup>. Also, effective Targeting, Segmentation and Positioning require a deep understanding of customer needs and preferences, as well as an understanding of the competitive landscape<sup>12</sup>.

Market Segmentation involves dividing the overall market into distinct segments based on various factors such as demographics, psychographics, behavior, or needs. By identifying and understanding different segments, businesses can tailor their Marketing efforts to specific groups that share similar characteristics or requirements<sup>10</sup>. One of the requirements for an effective Segmentation is its Measurability, as the capability to present the Segmentation in quantitative terms. Other requirement is accessibility, which means that the Segmentation should be effectively reached and served. The Segmentation should be also substantial, meaning that it should represent a fruitful return accordingly to the pre-defined goals. Another important requirement is differentiability, in the way that the defined segment should contain specific differentiated characteristics. Finally, Segmentation needs to be actionable.

This means that the strategy must secure enough resources to reach the desired segment<sup>11</sup>. Segmenting the market allows to understand the unique characteristics and preferences of different customer groups<sup>13</sup>.

Market targeting is the process of selecting one or more identified segments, to focus on based on their potential return and fit with the capabilities and predefined goals<sup>14</sup>. Targeting involves evaluating the attractiveness of different segments based on factors such as size, growth potential, competition and resources<sup>13</sup>.

Market Positioning refers to the process of creating a distinct and desirable image or perception of the product or brand in the minds of the target market. It involves developing a unique value proposition and effectively communicating it to the target audience, highlighting the product's benefits and differentiation from competitors<sup>10</sup>. Taking this into consideration, all Segmentation and Targeting strategy design needs to take into account the intended positioning. The Segmentation and Targeting are influenced by the defined Positioning, and it also contributes to build the Positioning itself. Positioning is supported by all Marketing actions. In the STP process, the position must be first defined and then effectively executed. It takes considerable time to establish a strong position, but it can be easily lost if not maintained. Consistent performance and effective communication are essential for sustaining the desired position in the market<sup>11</sup>.

As referred before, it is crucial for researchers not only to demonstrate the scientific merit of the research, but also to communicate their findings effectively. Researchers must learn how to sell themselves and becoming more skilled in Marketing and communication to secure funding<sup>9</sup>.

For this, researchers can resort to Marketing STP strategy as it can boost researchers, groups and institutions to accomplish better papers, aim to more suitable journals, maximize the number of citations and consequently obtain better fundings (Figure 1).

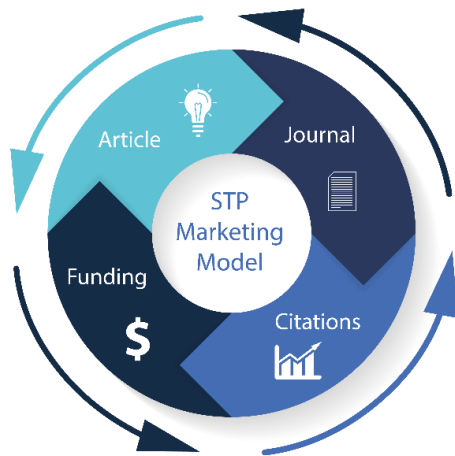


Figure 1 – Representative diagram of how SHR can work, applying the STP Marketing model.

By segmenting their market, researchers can define their focus-market. The Segmentation must be defined in the research project design stage, since it will allow them to evaluate their competition, such as other researchers and research projects in the same field and assess their competitive advantages. By defining their segment, researchers can also evaluate resources and start to direct their research article towards the segment needs. This will allow them to be in line with the segment communication and requirements as well as better prepare them to what high rating journals look for, the topics in higher demand and possible gaps or niche markets that journals might be keen to accept.

The first step for researchers and institutes is to define their objectives. There is a need to be smart about writing SMART objectives as they should be: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART)<sup>15</sup>.

Researchers can define segments such as scientific or clinical researchers, active physicians, industry, and others. This will allow them to steer their research to the intended segment needs. In Segmentation, researchers should ensure that the segment is accessible, reachable and its differentiation from other segments is notable. The segment chosen must be also in line with the pre-defined objectives and provide the intended outcome. The Segmentation criteria should be measurable, and the researchers must have the needed resources to reach the desired segment<sup>11</sup>.

Targeting, being the process of selecting one or more segments to focus on based on their potential return and fit with the competitive advantages, will allow researchers to define their target audience. For researchers is important to distinguish between the target, who is the “consumer” of their “product” (article), and the journal, the distribution channel for the article. Understanding this distinction provides researchers a competitive advantage by enabling them to comprehend market needs and consequently discern the topics that journals are more inclined to accept. Also, researchers should define the intended journal in the project design stage as it is essential for maximizing the impact and visibility of a research article<sup>16</sup>. This will also allow them to develop the project in line with the selected journal’s characteristics. When writing an article for the general public, particularly for a journal with a wide readership, it is important to adopt a more accessible and engaging writing style compared to articles aimed at fellow researchers. However, researchers should keep in mind that their ultimate audience is the journals audience they are targeting, as their objective is to publish in a journal that aligns with their specific goals.

In journal selection process, researchers must assess the accessibility and dissemination of the journal, such as

its indexing in databases and online visibility. This will ensure that their research article reaches the intended audience and has a high potential for citation and impact. Authors should also consider the reputation and journal's impact factor, to ensure that their research article is published in a high-quality and reputable journal<sup>16</sup>.

Positioning allows researchers and institutes to create a distinct image and deliver their value proposition. This is fundamental for researchers, from their early careers, to define *how they want to be seen themselves as researchers*. Researchers should actively pursue institutes that align with their intended Positioning, as this will contribute to building their desired image, development of research projects, and ultimately facilitating the publication of articles.

Regarding Positioning, when choosing a journal, researchers should pursue a journal that aligns with the intended scope, ensuring a good match with the journal's positioning<sup>16</sup>. As for institutes, it is also important that they are able to attract researchers in line with their Positioning, as well as to ensure that the research projects are also within the intended Positioning. Institutes Positioning should be a beacon to all the

strategy definition, from research selection to project strategy design and article development.

The current absence of an STP Marketing strategy in research project design and career progression for researchers can lead to an unclear image of how they are perceived as individuals or as an institute. However, by implementing effective Targeting, Segmentation and Positioning, researchers can gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace<sup>12</sup>. To achieve this, institutes and researchers can benefit from applying Marketing strategies, treating their articles as products that require strategic placement in a highly competitive marketplace.

## Conclusions and future perspectives

In the present article, the authors aimed to investigate the publishing process of SHR through the lens of the STP Marketing model. The goal was to explore how the concepts of Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning can benefit researchers and institutes in defining effective strategies to secure funding and advance their research endeavors. To accomplish this, the authors conducted a systematic review,

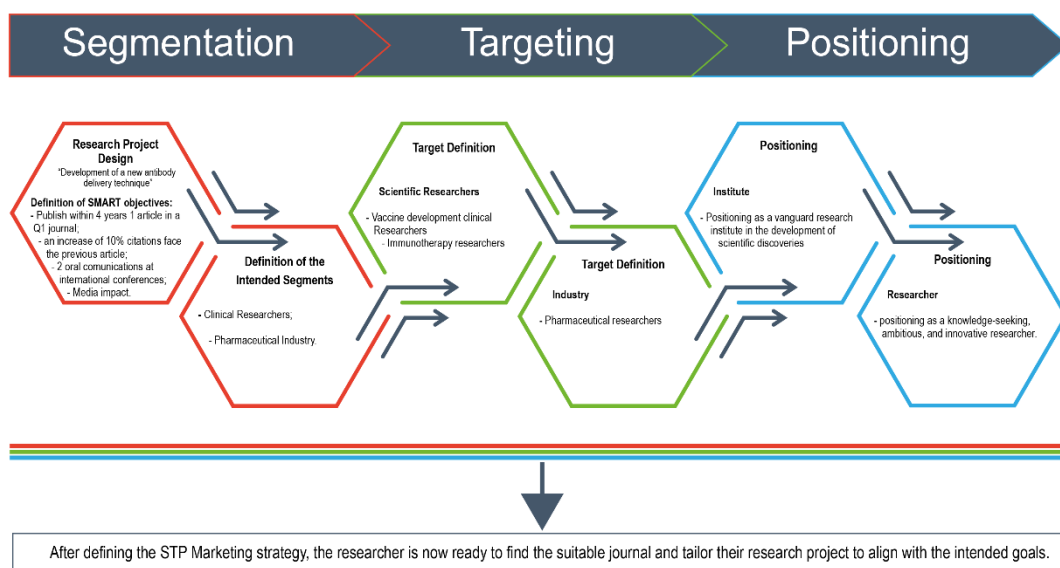


Figure 2. Representative diagram of a STP Marketing model strategy applied to a SHR project example.

searching and analyzing a range of peer-reviewed articles that covered both the SHR publishing process and the fundamental components of the STP Marketing model.

The article has shown that the application of Marketing concepts in the research project design, as well as in researchers career progression, can help develop a clear image of how they are perceived as individuals or as an institute. Implementing effective STP Marketing strategies can allow researchers and institutes to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace, treating articles as products that require strategic Positioning in a highly competitive market. Moreover, institutions might benefit from the implementation of a Marketing department to assist both researchers as the institute itself.

As future perspectives, it would be interesting to explore the appliance of other Marketing strategies in SHR.

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## Author Contributions

Correia, Tiago M. carried out the review, analysis and wrote the manuscript. Maria Rodrigues (mar@iscap.ipp.pt) revised the manuscript.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

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