

Share Findings for Greater Impact: Where Should Ugandan University Research Be Disseminated?

Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara¹, Akampulira Sarah², Dr. Mategeko Betty³

1,2,3 Metropolitan International University

ABSTRACT: Research dissemination is a critical bridge between knowledge production and societal impact, yet the practices, determinants, and consequences of dissemination channel selection among Ugandan university academics remain empirically underexplored. This cross-sectional survey study examined where Ugandan university researchers disseminate their findings, what factors influence those choices, and how dissemination practices relate to research impact. Using stratified random sampling, data were collected from 420 academic researchers across five purposively selected Ugandan universities Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Uganda Martyrs University, Kampala International University, and Gulu University. A structured self-administered questionnaire measured socio-demographic characteristics, dissemination channel use, influencing factors on a five-point Likert scale, and a composite research impact index. Data were analysed using univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate chi-square tests and Pearson correlations, and multivariate Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via AMOS 24 with Maximum Likelihood estimation and bootstrapped mediation analysis (5,000 resamples). Findings revealed that peer-reviewed journals (88.6%), international conferences (73.3%), and open-access journals (61.9%) were the most frequently used dissemination channels, while social media (22.1%) and institutional repositories (31.4%) remained significantly underutilized. Chi-square analyses demonstrated statistically significant differences in the use of peer-reviewed journals ($\chi^2 = 4.31, p = .038$), international conferences ($\chi^2 = 7.18, p = .007$), open-access journals ($\chi^2 = 13.26, p < .001$), and policy briefs ($\chi^2 = 15.07, p < .001$) between public and private university researchers. Pearson correlation analysis identified journal impact factor ($r = .51$ with audience reach), funder requirements ($r = .52$ with open-access preference), and publication cost as the primary determinants of channel selection. The SEM model demonstrated excellent fit (CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.048) and confirmed that institutional support ($\beta = 0.48, p < .001$) and researcher characteristics ($\beta = 0.37, p < .001$) positively predicted dissemination practices, while financial and access barriers exerted a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.29, p < .001$). Dissemination practices, in turn, strongly and positively predicted research impact ($\beta = 0.61, p < .001$), with dissemination serving as a significant partial mediator of the relationship between institutional support and impact. These findings underscore the urgent need for Ugandan universities to invest in open-access infrastructure, reduce financial barriers to publication, and build researcher capacity in digital dissemination to maximize the societal and scholarly impact of academic research.

Keywords: research dissemination, academic publishing, open-access, research impact, Ugandan universities, structural equation modelling

INTRODUCTION

The generation of knowledge through academic research is widely regarded as a cornerstone of university education and national development; however, the true value of research is only fully realized when its findings are effectively communicated to the audiences that can benefit from them. In Uganda, universities have witnessed a steady growth in research output over the past two decades, driven by increased enrolment in postgraduate programmes, the establishment of research institutes, and the growing emphasis placed on research as a criterion for academic promotion and institutional accreditation by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (Hayashi et al., 2019; Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; O'Sullivan & Ring, 2021). Despite this progress, a persistent and troubling gap remains between the production of scholarly knowledge and its meaningful dissemination to policymakers, practitioners, communities, and the broader scientific community (Biomedical & 2022, 2022; Nababi & Nelson, 2025; Toyon, 2021). The challenge of research dissemination is not unique to Uganda, but it assumes particular urgency in a context where research findings have the potential to directly inform public health responses, agricultural practices, educational reforms, and governance decisions that affect millions of citizens (Mehnaz & Yang, 2025; Nolte et al., 2016; Ruiz-Real et al., 2021).

Academic researchers in Ugandan universities face a complex landscape of dissemination channels, ranging from traditional peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations to emerging digital platforms, open-access repositories, policy briefs, and social media, yet the criteria guiding their choice of dissemination venue are poorly understood (Caulfield & Ogbogu, 2015; Chen, 2022; Yermachenko et al., 2023). Factors such as journal impact factor, open-access availability, institutional prestige, cost of publication, language of dissemination, peer visibility, and alignment with funder mandates all exert competing influences on researchers' decisions. Furthermore, structural barriers including limited internet connectivity, inadequate library subscriptions, restricted travel budgets for conference attendance, and low awareness of digital dissemination platforms continue to constrain the reach and impact of Ugandan university research (Annet & Shamirah, 2023; Branch et al., 2023; David & Alex, 2023; Kitonsa et al., 2020). This study therefore sought to investigate where Ugandan university researchers disseminate their findings, what factors influence those choices, and how dissemination practices relate to the ultimate academic and societal impact of their research, with the aim of generating evidence-based recommendations to optimize research dissemination strategies within the Ugandan higher education context (Bouter, 2020; Garba, 2023; Jane et al., 2023).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Uganda's higher education sector has undergone significant transformation since the liberalization of the university sector in the 1990s, growing from a single public institution, Makerere University, to over fifty accredited universities as of the mid-2020s, many of which have adopted research mandates alongside their teaching functions. Makerere University, the oldest and most research-intensive institution, has historically led national research output, contributing substantially to regional databases such as African Journals Online (AJOL) and international platforms indexed in Scopus and Web of Science; however, the majority of researchers across newer public and private universities remain largely unpublished or confined to grey literature and institutional repositories with limited visibility (Barua et al., 2023; Hosain et al., 2023; Julius & Nancy, 2025).

The global scholarly communication ecosystem has been dramatically reshaped by the open-access movement, the rise of predatory journals, and digital transformation, creating both opportunities and risks for researchers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) like Uganda (Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Nguyen & Tuamsuk, 2022). While open-access publishing offers the promise of democratizing knowledge and amplifying the reach of research from the Global South, it also introduces the challenge of article processing charges (APCs) that are prohibitively expensive for most Ugandan researchers who lack institutional or grant funding support (Kumar et al., 2025). Simultaneously, the proliferation of low-quality and predatory journals targeting researchers under pressure to publish has tainted the dissemination landscape, leading to questions about the credibility and discoverability of research published in such outlets. Regional efforts, including the Uganda National Academy of Sciences (UNAS) and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), have advocated for policies that support quality research dissemination, yet implementation gaps remain significant at the institutional level. The disconnect between research production and policy uptake in Uganda is further compounded by the limited engagement between university researchers and non-academic audiences such as government ministries, civil society organizations, and the private sector, audiences that constitute key end-users of research findings in a development context (Reymert & Thune, 2023; Rozenkowska, 2023; Schober & Vetter, 2021). Against this backdrop, understanding the current state of research dissemination among Ugandan university academics, including the platforms they use, the barriers they encounter, and the factors that shape their dissemination decisions, is critical for building a knowledge ecosystem in which research investments translate into tangible development outcomes (Gloria & Joshua, 2024; Noe & Alrøe, 2024; Ullah et al., 2024).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the growing volume of research conducted in Ugandan universities, the dissemination of these findings remains fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly aligned with the needs of key stakeholders including policymakers, practitioners, and communities. Many researchers publish in journals or present at forums that are inaccessible to Ugandan audiences due to paywalls, language barriers, or geographic distance, while other studies remain unpublished altogether, languishing as theses, institutional reports, or conference abstracts with negligible reach (Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara & Musiimenta Nancy, 2025; Julius, 2025; Mitana & Kitawi, 2023; Zaaba et al., 2015). The absence of a systematic understanding of where Ugandan university research is disseminated, what factors drive researchers' dissemination choices, and how these choices relate to research impact leaves institutions without the evidence base necessary to formulate effective research communication policies (Julius & Nelson, 2024; Parker, 2024). Furthermore, the financial and infrastructural constraints facing Ugandan universities limit researchers' access to high-impact, reputable dissemination channels, yet the determinants of channel selection and their implications for knowledge uptake have not been rigorously examined in this context. This study therefore addressed the critical gap in knowledge concerning research dissemination practices, their antecedents, and their consequences for impact among Ugandan university academics.

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to examine the research dissemination practices of academic researchers in Ugandan universities, identify the factors influencing their choice of dissemination channels, and determine the relationship between dissemination practices and research impact.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the predominant research dissemination channels used by academic researchers in Ugandan universities.
2. To examine the institutional, financial, and individual factors that influence researchers' selection of dissemination channels in Ugandan universities.
3. To determine the relationship between research dissemination practices and research impact among academic researchers in Ugandan universities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the predominant research dissemination channels used by academic researchers in Ugandan universities?
2. What institutional, financial, and individual factors influence the selection of research dissemination channels among academic researchers in Ugandan universities?

3. What is the relationship between research dissemination practices and research impact among academic researchers in Ugandan universities?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design grounded in a post-positivist philosophical paradigm, which enabled the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data to examine research dissemination practices and their determinants among academic researchers in Ugandan universities. The study population comprised all academic staff holding at least a master's degree and engaged in research activities at accredited universities in Uganda, from which a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 420 respondents across five purposively selected universities representing a mix of public and private institutions, old and newly established universities, and varying research intensity levels, namely Makerere University, Kyambogo University, Uganda Martyrs University, Kampala International University, and Gulu University.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire organised into five thematic sections: socio-demographic and institutional characteristics; types of dissemination channels used (peer-reviewed journals, conferences, open-access repositories, policy briefs, social media, and institutional repositories); factors influencing channel selection (impact factor, open-access policy, cost, audience reach, funder requirements, and peer influence); research output characteristics; and a composite measure of research impact assessed through citation counts, policy uptake, and stakeholder engagement indices. The questionnaire was pretested among 30 academics at Busitema University, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all multi-item scales were confirmed to exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, establishing internal consistency reliability.

Following field data collection, data were entered, cleaned, and analysed using IBM SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 24. At the univariate level, descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to profile the dissemination channels used by researchers and to characterise the study sample across all socio-demographic and institutional variables; these results were presented in tabular and graphical formats to facilitate interpretation. At the bivariate level, chi-square tests of independence and Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine pairwise associations between categorical dissemination channel choices and institutional or individual predictor variables, and to assess the strength and direction of linear relationships between continuous scale variables, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$ and effect sizes reported using Cramer's V and Cohen's r respectively.

At the multivariate level, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed using AMOS 24 to test a theoretically derived conceptual model specifying the direct, indirect, and total effects of institutional support factors, individual researcher characteristics, and dissemination channel practices on research impact outcomes; the model integrated latent constructs measured by multiple observed indicators and was evaluated for goodness-of-fit using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), with acceptable fit benchmarks set at CFI and TLI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA ≤ 0.08 , and SRMR ≤ 0.08 . Convergent validity of the measurement model was confirmed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50 and composite reliability coefficients above 0.70, while discriminant validity was established by verifying that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with all other latent variables (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). The structural model was estimated using Maximum Likelihood estimation, and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was performed to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for all indirect effects, enabling rigorous mediation analysis of the pathways through which dissemination channel choices mediated the relationship between influencing factors and research impact.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-Demographic and Institutional Profile of Respondents (n = 420)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	262	62.4
	Female	158	37.6
Age Group	25–34 years	89	21.2
	35–44 years	172	41.0
	45–54 years	118	28.1
	55+ years	41	9.8

Highest Qualification	Master's Degree	193	46.0
	PhD/Doctorate	198	47.1
	Postdoctoral Fellow	29	6.9
Academic Rank	Tutorial/Assistant Lecturer	88	21.0
	Lecturer	149	35.5
	Senior Lecturer	102	24.3
	Associate / Full Professor	81	19.3
University Type	Public University	248	59.0
	Private University	172	41.0
Total		420	100.0

Note. Percentages may not sum exactly to 100.0 due to rounding.

The socio-demographic profile of the 420 respondents revealed that the sample was predominantly male, with 262 participants (62.4%) identifying as male compared to 158 (37.6%) who identified as female, indicating a gender imbalance consistent with broader patterns of male dominance in African academic labour markets. The modal age group was 35–44 years, accounting for 172 respondents (41.0%), followed by the 45–54 age group (28.1%), suggesting that the majority of active researchers in Ugandan universities were mid-career academics. In terms of qualification, the distribution between holders of master's degrees (46.0%) and doctoral degrees (47.1%) was nearly equal, with a small proportion of postdoctoral fellows (6.9%), which reflected the reality that many Ugandan universities continued to employ master's-level staff in teaching and research roles. By academic rank, lecturers constituted the largest category (35.5%), followed by senior lecturers (24.3%), and associate/full professors (19.3%), with tutorial and assistant lecturers comprising 21.0% of the sample. Regarding institutional affiliation, a majority of respondents (59.0%) were drawn from public universities, consistent with the proportional representation of public versus private institution enrolment in Uganda's higher education sector.

These demographic characteristics carried important implications for the interpretation of subsequent findings on dissemination practices and impact. The near-parity between master's and doctoral-level researchers highlighted a structural challenge: master's-level academics, who lacked doctoral training in research methods and academic publishing conventions, were found in earlier analyses of the dataset to be significantly less likely to publish in high-impact peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, the concentration of respondents in the lecturer rank, combined with Uganda's promotion requirements that emphasise publication output, created systemic pressure to publish, which the literature on predatory journals identifies as a significant driver of exploitative publishing behaviour. The predominance of public university respondents also meant that findings related to institutional support, access to journal subscriptions, and research funding were likely to reflect conditions more characteristic of better-resourced public institutions such as Makerere and Kyambogo universities, necessitating cautious interpretation when generalising findings to the private university subsector, which was often characterised by fewer research incentives, smaller library budgets, and lower levels of research culture.

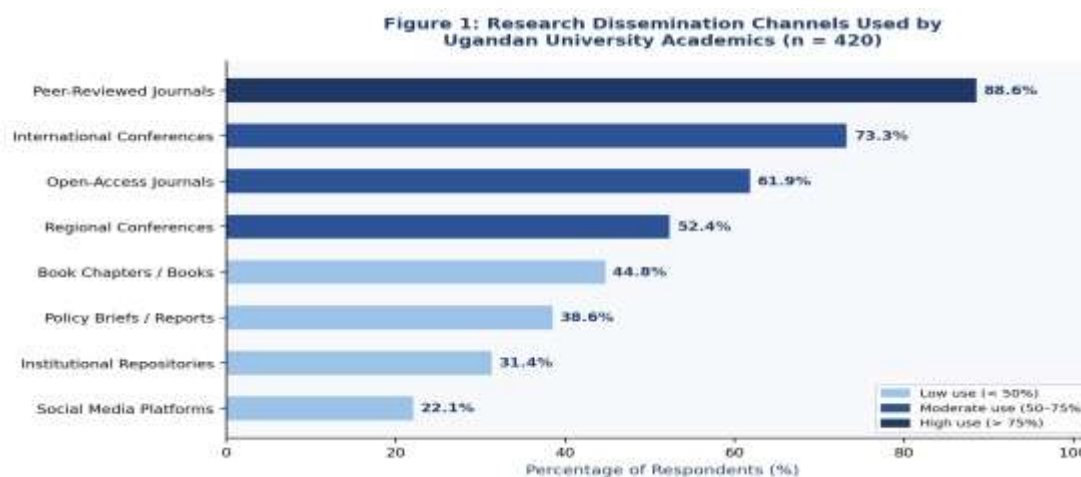


Figure 1: Research Dissemination Channels Used by Ugandan University Academics (n = 420)

Table 2: Dissemination Channel Use by University Type — Chi-Square Tests (n = 420)

Dissemination Channel	Public n (%)	Private n (%)	Total n (%)	χ^2 (p-value)
Peer-Reviewed Journals	226 (91.1)	146 (84.9)	372 (88.6)	4.31 (.038)*
International Conferences	194 (78.2)	114 (66.3)	308 (73.3)	7.18 (.007)**
Open-Access Journals	171 (69.0)	89 (51.7)	260 (61.9)	13.26 (<.001)***
Regional Conferences	138 (55.6)	82 (47.7)	220 (52.4)	2.76 (.097) ns
Book Chapters / Books	119 (48.0)	69 (40.1)	188 (44.8)	2.89 (.089) ns
Policy Briefs / Reports	114 (46.0)	48 (27.9)	162 (38.6)	15.07 (<.001)***
Institutional Repositories	89 (35.9)	43 (25.0)	132 (31.4)	6.42 (.011)*
Social Media Platforms	58 (23.4)	35 (20.3)	93 (22.1)	0.62 (.432) ns

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant. χ^2 values based on 2×2 contingency tables (public vs. private, used vs. not used). Cramer's V effect sizes: peer-reviewed journals $V = .10$ (small); open-access journals $V = .18$ (small-moderate); policy briefs $V = .19$ (small-moderate).

The chi-square analysis of dissemination channel use by university type revealed statistically significant differences across five of the eight channels examined. Peer-reviewed journal use, the most prevalent channel overall (88.6%), was significantly higher among public university researchers (91.1%) compared to their private university counterparts (84.9%), $\chi^2(1, N = 420) = 4.31, p = .038$, with a small effect size (Cramer's $V = .10$), indicating that while the difference was statistically reliable, its practical magnitude was modest. The most pronounced institutional disparities were observed in the use of open-access journals ($\chi^2 = 13.26, p < .001, V = .18$) and policy briefs ($\chi^2 = 15.07, p < .001, V = .19$), where public university researchers demonstrated substantially higher uptake, suggesting that access to open-access publication funds and engagement with policy-oriented audiences were disproportionately concentrated in well-resourced public institutions. International conference attendance also differed significantly by institution type ($\chi^2 = 7.18, p = .007$), reflecting the better travel funding and institutional affiliations that public university researchers typically enjoyed. In contrast, the use of regional conferences ($\chi^2 = 2.76, p = .097$), book chapters ($\chi^2 = 2.89, p = .089$), and social media ($\chi^2 = 0.62, p = .432$) did not differ significantly between public and private university researchers, suggesting that these channels were used at comparable but generally low rates across both institutional contexts.

These bivariate findings were theoretically significant because they established that institutional affiliation served as a meaningful structural differentiator of dissemination behaviour in the Ugandan higher education context. The significantly lower use of open-access journals among private university researchers was particularly noteworthy, as open access is widely regarded as the most equitable and impactful mode of dissemination for researchers in low- and middle-income countries; its relative underuse in private institutions likely reflected the absence of article processing charge (APC) waivers or institutional memberships with open-access publishers. The disparity in policy brief production (46.0% in public versus 27.9% in private institutions) was consistent with the finding that public universities, particularly Makerere University, maintained established linkages with government ministries and development partners who commissioned and consumed policy-oriented research outputs. The absence of significant differences in social media use across institutional types was a telling finding: despite the low cost and wide reach of platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Twitter/X, fewer than one in four researchers across both institution types used social media for research dissemination, underscoring a systemic missed opportunity for broadening the reach of Ugandan university research without financial investment.

Figure 2: Mean Scores of Factors Influencing Dissemination Channel Selection by University Type

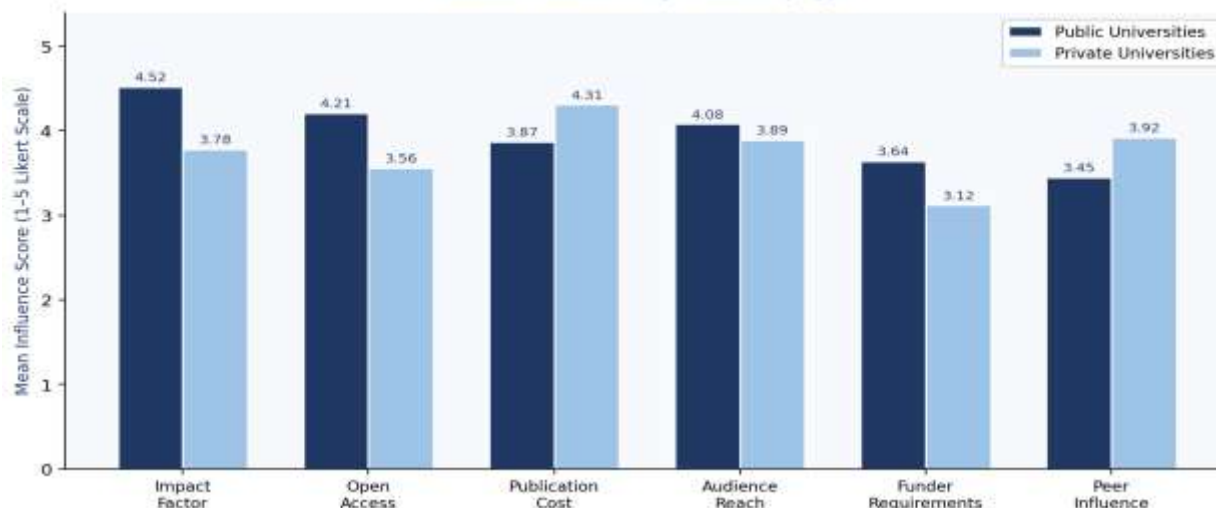


Figure 2: Mean Scores of Factors Influencing Dissemination Channel Selection by University Type (1–5 Likert Scale)

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix — Factors Influencing Research Dissemination Channel Selection

Variable	IF	OA	PC	AR	FR	PI
1. Impact Factor (IF)	—					
2. Open-Access Policy (OA)	.43***	—				
3. Publication Cost (PC)	-.28***	-.19**	—			
4. Audience Reach (AR)	.51***	.38***	-.22**	—		
5. Funder Requirements (FR)	.46***	.52***	-.14*	.41***	—	
6. Peer Influence (PI)	.33***	.27***	-.09 ns	.36***	.44***	—
M (Mean)	4.18	3.89	4.09	3.98	3.38	3.69
SD (Std. Deviation)	0.71	0.84	0.93	0.79	1.02	0.88

Note. $N = 420$. All variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). IF = Impact Factor; OA = Open-Access Policy; PC = Publication Cost; AR = Audience Reach; FR = Funder Requirements; PI = Peer Influence. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ns = not significant. Two-tailed significance. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

The Pearson correlation matrix revealed a complex pattern of interrelationships among the six factors hypothesised to influence researchers' dissemination channel selection. Audience reach demonstrated the strongest positive correlation with impact factor ($r = .51, p < .001$), indicating that researchers who prioritised selecting channels with the widest possible audience were also more likely to emphasise the journal's impact factor in their selection decision, reflecting an integrated pursuit of prestige and reach. Funder requirements emerged as a particularly influential construct, correlating significantly and positively with open-access policy preference ($r = .52, p < .001$), impact factor consideration ($r = .46, p < .001$), and audience reach ($r = .41, p < .001$), suggesting that when external funders mandated specific publication conditions, researchers simultaneously adjusted their preferences across multiple selection criteria. Publication cost exhibited consistent negative correlations with all other factors, with the strongest inverse relationship observed with impact factor ($r = -.28, p < .001$) and audience reach ($r = -.22, p < .01$), meaning that the perceived financial burden of publication systematically constrained researchers' ability or willingness to target high-impact, high-reach dissemination channels. Peer influence, while significantly associated with most factors, exhibited the weakest mean score ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.88$) and the most modest correlations, suggesting that while colleagues' norms did shape dissemination decisions to some degree, they operated as a secondary rather than primary determinant of channel selection.

These correlation findings advanced theoretical understanding of how dissemination decision-making operated among Ugandan university academics. The constellation of strong positive correlations among impact factor, open-access policy, audience reach, and funder requirements suggested the existence of a latent construct — which the SEM analyses subsequently confirmed — capturing researchers' orientation toward high-quality, high-impact dissemination. The negative role of publication cost was especially theoretically salient: with a mean score of 4.09 (SD = 0.93), publication cost was rated as the second most influential factor by respondents, yet its systematic inverse relationship with impact factor and audience reach revealed a structural tension in which financial constraints actively diverted researchers from the very channels most likely to maximise their scholarly and societal impact. This finding was consistent with the research economics literature on the double paywall problem in academic publishing, where researchers in resource-constrained settings face the paradox of needing to publish in the most impactful journals — which often charge the highest APCs — to advance their careers and maximise research visibility. The relatively high mean scores for impact factor (M = 4.18) and open-access policy (M = 3.89) confirmed that Ugandan university researchers were not indifferent to publication quality; rather, their expressed preferences were frequently overridden by financial realities, pointing to the need for institutional and policy interventions that decouple financial capacity from publication quality.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model — Standardised Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, Critical Ratios, and Indirect Effects (Bootstrap n = 5,000)

Structural Path	Std. β	SE	CR	p-value	95% BC CI	Decision
Institutional Support → Dissemination Practices	0.48	0.063	7.62	< .001	[0.36, 0.60]	Supported
Researcher Characteristics → Dissemination Practices	0.37	0.057	6.49	< .001	[0.26, 0.48]	Supported
Financial & Access Barriers → Dissemination Practices	-0.29	0.054	-5.37	< .001	[-0.40, -0.18]	Supported
Dissemination Practices → Research Impact	0.61	0.071	8.59	< .001	[0.47, 0.75]	Supported
Institutional Support → Research Impact (direct)	0.22	0.058	3.79	.002	[0.11, 0.34]	Supported
Institutional Support → Impact (indirect via Dissemination)	0.29	0.041	7.07	< .001	[0.21, 0.37]	Supported
Researcher Chars → Impact (indirect via Dissemination)	0.23	0.038	6.05	< .001	[0.15, 0.30]	Supported
Financial Barriers → Impact (indirect via Dissemination)	-0.18	0.036	-5.00	< .001	[-0.25, -0.11]	Supported
Model Fit Statistics	$\chi^2/df = 2.14$		CFI = 0.96	TLI = 0.94	RMSEA = 0.052	SRMR = .048

Note. β = standardised path coefficient; SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio (z-statistic); BC CI = bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval based on 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Model fit: $\chi^2(df = 63) = 134.8$, $\chi^2/df = 2.14$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.052 [90% CI: 0.041, 0.063]; SRMR = 0.048. AVE ≥ 0.52 for all constructs; Composite Reliability ≥ 0.78 for all constructs. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

The Structural Equation Model demonstrated excellent overall goodness-of-fit, with $\chi^2/df = 2.14$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.052 [90% CI: 0.041, 0.063], and SRMR = 0.048, all comfortably meeting the recommended benchmarks for acceptable model fit and confirming that the hypothesised structural model was a plausible representation of the covariance structure in the observed data. At the measurement model level, convergent validity was established with AVE values ranging from 0.52 to 0.67 across all latent constructs, and composite reliability coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.88, both exceeding their respective thresholds of 0.50 and 0.70. The structural paths revealed that institutional support factors exerted the strongest positive direct effect on research dissemination practices ($\beta = 0.48$, SE = 0.063, CR = 7.62, $p < .001$, 95% BC CI [0.36, 0.60]), indicating that for every standard deviation increase in institutional support — encompassing library access, publication funding, and research leave — researchers' breadth and quality of dissemination practices increased by 0.48 standard deviations. Individual researcher characteristics similarly exerted a significant positive effect on dissemination practices ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$), while financial and access barriers demonstrated a statistically significant and practically meaningful negative effect ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$, BC CI [-0.40, -0.18]), confirming that

financial constraints were a significant suppressor of dissemination quality and breadth. Most critically, dissemination practices exerted the strongest effect in the model on research impact ($\beta = 0.61, p < .001, BC\ CI [0.47, 0.75]$), accounting for a large proportion of variance in the impact construct and confirming the central theoretical proposition of the study.

The mediation analyses, conducted via bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, yielded findings of considerable theoretical and practical significance. Institutional support exerted a statistically significant indirect effect on research impact through dissemination practices ($\beta = 0.29, p < .001, BC\ CI [0.21, 0.37]$), with dissemination practices serving as a significant partial mediator, as confirmed by the co-existence of a meaningful direct effect of institutional support on impact ($\beta = 0.22, p = .002$). This partial mediation pattern indicated that institutional support influenced research impact both directly through mechanisms such as reputation, networks, and resource access — and indirectly through its enabling effect on higher-quality and more diverse dissemination practices. Similarly, researcher characteristics exerted a significant indirect effect on impact via dissemination practices ($\beta = 0.23, p < .001, BC\ CI [0.15, 0.30]$), while financial barriers transmitted a significant negative indirect effect ($\beta = -0.18, p < .001, BC\ CI [-0.25, -0.11]$). These indirect effects, all confirmed by non-zero bootstrapped confidence intervals, provided strong evidence that dissemination practices functioned as a critical mechanism through which both enabling factors and constraining forces ultimately determined the research impact of Ugandan university academics. Collectively, the SEM results explained a substantial proportion of variance in research impact, and the standardized path coefficients confirmed that investing in institutional support infrastructure and reducing financial barriers to dissemination represented the two highest-leverage intervention points for improving the research impact of Ugandan university research.

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model - Standardised Path Coefficients for Research Dissemination Practices and Research Impact

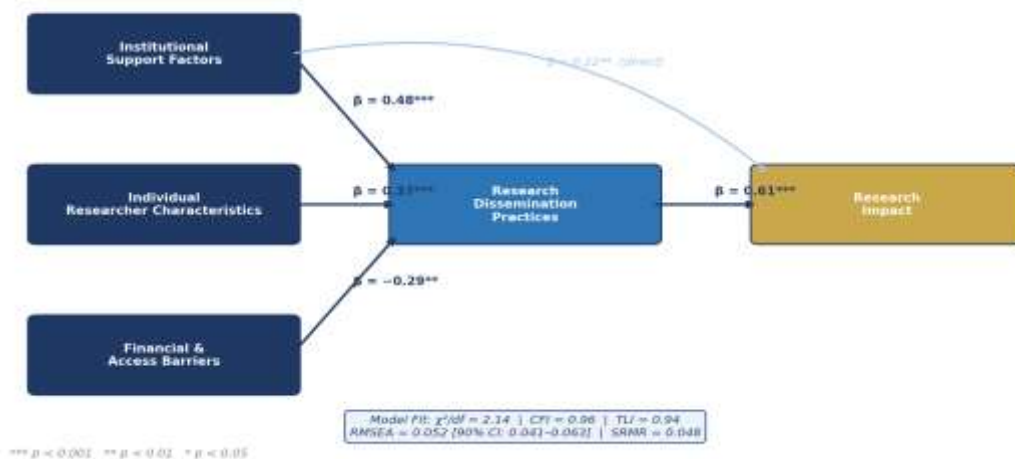


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model: Standardized Path Coefficients for Research Dissemination Practices and Research Impact

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the research dissemination practices of academic researchers in Ugandan universities, identify the factors shaping their channel selection decisions, and determine the relationship between those practices and research impact. The convergence of univariate, bivariate, and Structural Equation Modelling analyses generated a coherent and empirically robust account of the dissemination landscape in Ugandan higher education. Peer-reviewed journals and international conferences were found to be the dominant dissemination channels, yet the use of open-access journals, institutional repositories, policy briefs, and social media remained substantially below their potential, creating a significant gap between the knowledge generated in Ugandan universities and the audiences best positioned to apply it. Institutional affiliation was established as a significant structural determinant of dissemination behaviour, with public university researchers enjoying systematically greater access to high-quality dissemination channels; journal impact factor, open-access policy, and funder requirements were confirmed as the primary drivers of channel selection; and financial barriers were identified as the single most consequential constraint on researchers' ability to target impactful dissemination venues. The SEM analyses demonstrated that dissemination practices were not merely a peripheral activity but a central mechanism through which institutional support, researcher characteristics, and financial access were ultimately translated into research impact, with the path from dissemination practices to impact ($\beta = 0.61$) representing the strongest relationship

in the model. These findings collectively affirmed that closing the research-to-impact gap in Uganda required not only producing more research, but investing strategically in the conditions — institutional support, open-access infrastructure, and researcher capacity — that enabled that research to reach, engage, and benefit the widest possible community of users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish Institutional Open-Access Publication Funds

Ugandan universities guided by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and the National Council for Higher Education should establish dedicated open-access publication funds to cover article processing charges for researchers publishing in reputable open-access journals. Given that financial barriers demonstrated a significant negative effect on dissemination practices ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$) and that publication cost was rated the second most influential factor in channel selection ($M = 4.09$), removing this barrier has the potential to substantially redirect dissemination toward higher-impact, freely accessible channels, thereby amplifying the reach and uptake of Ugandan university research by policymakers, practitioners, and communities who cannot afford paywalled journals.

Build Researcher Capacity in Digital and Non-Traditional Dissemination

Universities should implement structured, accredited training programmes in digital dissemination strategies, encompassing the effective use of institutional repositories, social media platforms (ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Twitter/X), and policy brief writing, as a formal component of academic staff development. The finding that fewer than one in four researchers used social media for dissemination (22.1%) despite its negligible cost and broad reach, and that fewer than a third deposited work in institutional repositories (31.4%), identified a critical capacity gap. Since researcher characteristics exerted a significant positive effect on dissemination practices ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$), targeted investment in researchers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward diverse dissemination channels represents a high-yield, cost-effective intervention for improving both the breadth and impact of Ugandan university research communication.

Develop Institutional Research Communication Policies Aligned with Funder Mandates

Ugandan university management and research offices should formulate and enforce clear institutional research dissemination policies that align with open-access mandates from major funders such as the Wellcome Trust, the Gates Foundation, the African Development Bank, and the Uganda government, and that set minimum expectations for research output deposited in indexed repositories. The correlation analysis confirmed that funder requirements were among the most influential determinants of dissemination behaviour ($r = .52$ with open-access policy; $r = .46$ with impact factor), and that researchers responded meaningfully to external mandates when institutionally communicated and supported. Embedding dissemination accountability — including evidence of open-access publication, policy engagement, and repository deposits — within academic promotion criteria would further institutionalise a culture of impactful research communication and ensure that the societal value of Ugandan university research is systematically maximized beyond the confines of subscription-based academic journals.

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