

RESEARCH PERFORMANCE

...or *ILLUSION*



The danger of "too many papers too fast"

A conversation with my advisor in 2002:

- *Me: When can I send the paper off? Should we look for easier journals?*
- *Professor: Don't rush! We publish to share with people, not to hide it.*

In 2020, many candidates of associate and full professors in Vietnam had a problem of "too many papers too fast"

The danger of "Too many papers too fast": It raises doubt about research **quality** and **integrity**

The danger of "too many papers too fast"

"Too many papers too fast" creates an

ILLUSION

of research performance

How can we avoid our own illusion?

Outline

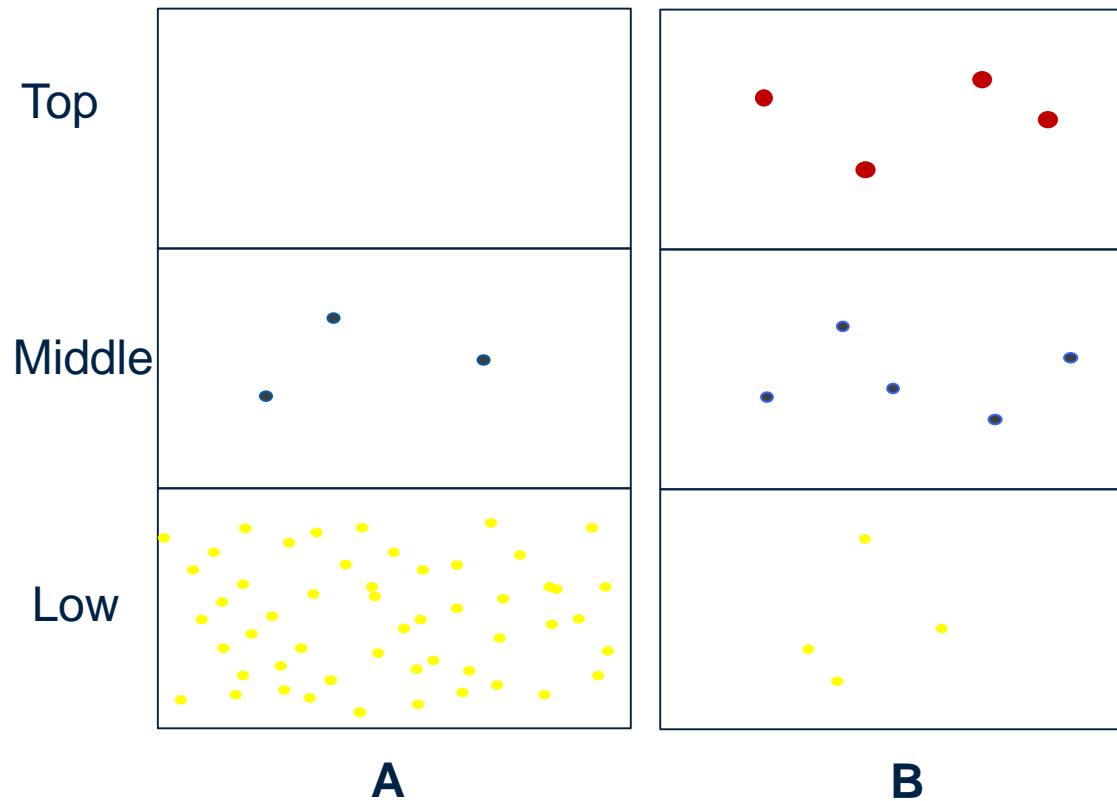
- How should we assess research performance?
- How could we recognize quality journals?
- How could we recognize "dubious" journals?
- What should we do as researchers? as organizations?

Some Caveats

This presentation ...

- ... is my personal observations and opinions
- ... is about choices rather than being "right or wrong"
- ... aims at building a shared understanding of "research performance" and "quality journals"
- ... does not intend to attack any person or organization in any way

1. Research performance (individual)



- **Ideas vs. KPI:** The most meaningful contributions in research are ideas, not KPIs
 - *...KPI is a way to encourage generation of ideas*
- **Quantity vs. Quality:** In Science, quantity can never be used to trade or make-up for quality
 - *...But quality needs time and persistence*
- **Role:** Principal authors - those who initiate ideas and frame the papers - should get different level of credit
 - *... Collaboration is common*

1. Research performance (individual) - Strategies

Examples of quantity-focus

- Number of publications
- Number of citations
- h-index

Prioritize number of publications that meet thresholds, with diversified topics

Examples of quality-focus

- Ideas that provoke debates
- Journal quality
- Reputation in the field

Prioritize few publications that aim at top quality, with a continuity of focused topic(s)

1. Research performance (individual) - Tactics

Quantity-focus

- Data driven and exploitation
- Theories follow data and results (*HARKing*)
- Unrelated topics
- Strong results, uncertain ideas
- Aims at journals that meet thresholds

Quality-focus

- Ideas driven
- Theories drive data and results
- Focus topic(s)
- Strong ideas, uncertain results
- Aims at reputable journals

1. Research performance (individual) - Typical process

Quantity-focus

- Have a dataset
- Run as many possible models as you can based on a vaguely defined relationships
- Select results that have significance and look for theories that fit
- Write up papers

Quality-focus

- Have questions
- Select theories that help generate new hypotheses or insights
- Look for data that help test the hypotheses
- Write up papers

1. Research performance (individual)

Why should we be more quality-focus and theory-driven?

- The ultimate aim of research is to create new knowledge
 - Theory development should go first, theory testing follows
- Theory-driven research helps the researchers be known for ideas rather than just a technician
- Theory-driven research enriches the researchers' knowledge that improves teaching and managerial performance

1. Research performance (organizations)

"I visited an University in China. They proudly presented to me how many ISI papers they have published. I don't know what it was for. I wanted to hear what their research was about." (Eddy Malesky)

- **Beginning:** Input-based (e.g. No. of projects)
 - *Inputs do not reflect productivity and values*
- **Change:** Output-based (e.g., No. of publications)
 - *Outputs do not reflect values and level*
- **Improvement:** Output and ranks of journals
 - *KPIs are only numbers*
- **Idea focus:** ... Ideas and impacts of research
 - *Requires evaluations of experts in the fields*

1. Research performance - Examples



How Healthcare Workers Can Stay the Course During a Pandemic

March 20, 2020

During the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the functionality of institutions many take for granted—such as hospitals, schools, and libraries—is at the forefront of people's minds. A University of Oregon professor is contributing to that understanding through an analysis he and his coauthors conducted of a potential Ebola outbreak in 2014 at a large hospital facility in Australia.

Lundquist College of Business Professor Emeritus [Alan Meyer](#) and his coauthors delve into the issue of how those administering care weigh the value of social inclusion, finite resources, and safety in a new research paper titled "Maintaining Places of Social Inclusion: Ebola and the Emergency Department," which was recently accepted to the top journal *Administrative Science Quarterly* and was published online

"The prospect of an Ebola virus outbreak triggered doctors' and nurses' fears for their own safety, and their families' safety. This disrupted the Emergency Department to the point of near-calamity," Meyer said, "but the Australian healthcare workers found a way forward by managing their fears and emotions. They delivered ethical care while taking measures for self-protection from the highly communicable disease."

Ebola, like COVID-19, is not only potentially deadly but initially was not as well understood as other viruses. For some, this lack of understanding sparked panic due to the fear of unknown risks. The research may provide an outline for maintaining effective care in current and future pandemics.

The study, coauthored by [April Wright](#) of the University of Queensland, [Trish Reay](#) of Alberta School of Business, and [Jonathan Staggs](#) of Christian Heritage College, illustrates how two factors—robust information and training, and the moral call doctors and nurses feel to serve those in need—ultimately helped the healthcare workers to override their natural fear response and to provide ethical care.

The researchers, already onsite at the Australian hospital for an ethnography (a detailed account of social practices in delivery of healthcare), worked closely with doctors and nurses to understand how lessons learned about emergency care management during the Ebola outbreak may be applied to the current COVID-19 corona virus pandemic.

During data collection, the World Health Organisation declared an international public health emergency following an outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. With a mortality rate of 70 percent, doctors and nurses on the frontlines were understandably fearful. Yet during this time, essential care for heart attacks, strokes, and other emergencies needed to continue at their usual pace.

"They felt urgency because the public expected and needed them to serve," Meyer explained. "The emergency workers were able to quell initial fear and respond normally and appropriately to mitigate harm because they felt they had received adequate training and information."

The authors put forth a process model that caregivers, and others who interact with the public through institutions, may follow during these uncertain times.

"The most important lesson we draw from our study of Ebola leads us to implore citizens, public officials, and healthcare leaders to recognize, facilitate, and celebrate the role of 'institutional custodians' during a pandemic," Meyer said. "These doctors and nurses tend the embers, occupy the moral high ground, and model behavior for others. We should expect healthcare teams to experience fear and have doubts. But rest assured that when the dust settles, many doctors and nurses who have deeply identified with their custodianship role will rise to the challenge of preserving that 'place of social inclusion.' The rest of us just need to celebrate them and support them. That's every bit as important as 'flattening the curve' with social distancing and travel restrictions."

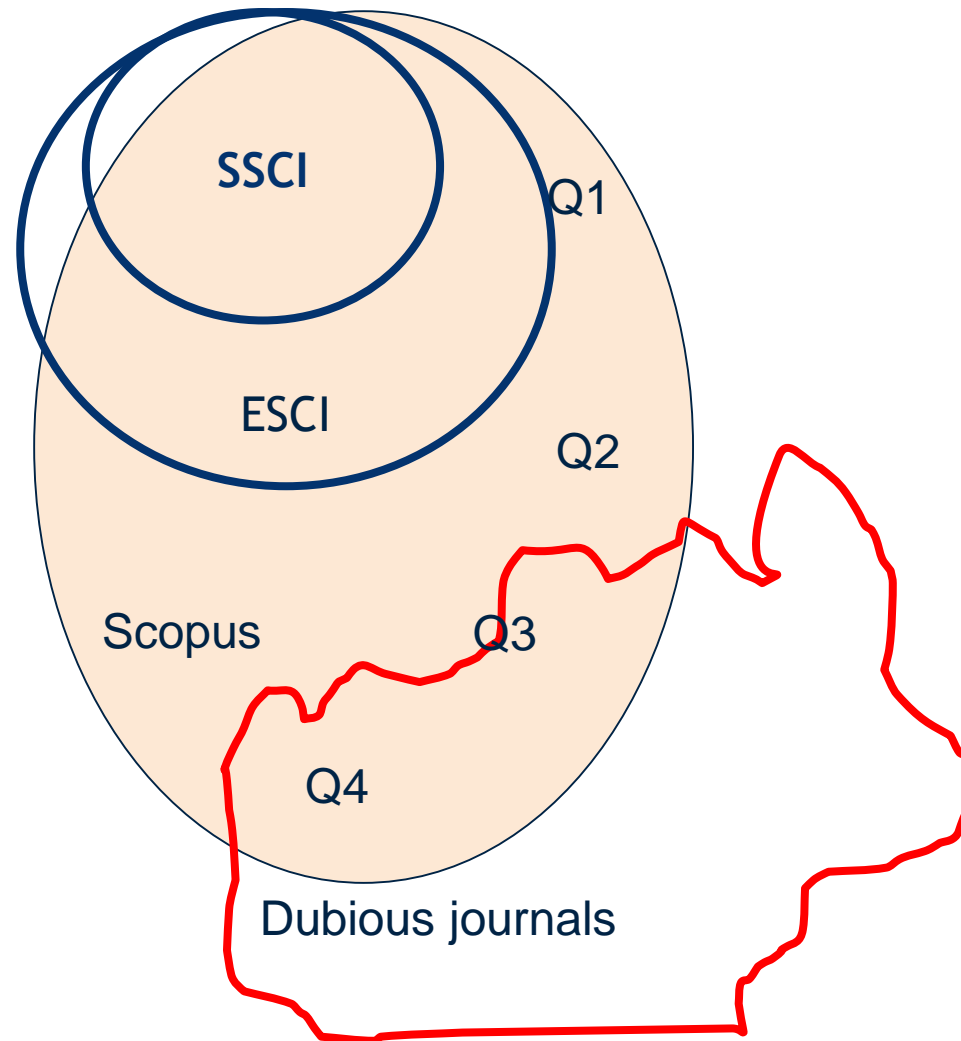
The doctors who sponsored the research have written a translational piece that has been published by the journal *Emergency Medicine Australasia*.

—[AnneMarie Knepper-Sjoblom '05](#), *Lundquist College Communications*

Areas of interest: All Faculty, Management, Research Matters, Management Faculty, Alan Meyer, March 2020.

- ❖ Faculty research is summarized and posted on the website
- ❖ Some universities copy the first page and post them in the faculty's bulletin boards

1. Research performance - Popular lists of journals



2. Recognition of quality journals

- Quality journals are those that apply **rigorous review process** to 1) filter and eliminate low-quality manuscripts; and 2) to help authors improve their papers
 - Critical and constructive comments
 - Rigorous evaluations of the manuscripts (acceptance rate)
- Major universities have lists of accepted journals (could be published or implicit) for different fields
 - The higher the rank of the universities, the shorter the lists
- Vietnamese universities could reference accepted lists
 - Clarivate (ISI), Australia Business Dean List (ABDC), Harzing's ABS list
 - **Scopus has become too unreliable as it includes many dubious journals**

2. Recognition of quality journals - Authors

- Editors and Editor Boards - Their affiliations, publications, reputations
- Review process: Blind review? Number of reviewers? Time? Submission experiences
- Indexes (ISI: SCI/**SSCI**/A&HSCI + ESCI; ABDC list; Harzing's list)
 - Note: New journals may not be in established lists but if the Editor and Editor Board include famous researchers, the journal will be good
- Acceptance rate
- Skim some recent papers to have a feeling of paper quality
- Be careful with IF:
 - Some journals fake the indicator, e.g., IC (Index Copernicus)
 - The IFs vary greatly across fields

2. Recognition of quality journal- Example

Status:

- Established: 2015
- ESCI

My prediction:

This journal will enter SSCI and becomes A journal soon:

- The Editor
- The Editor Board
- Authors and quality of recent papers

informs

<http://pubsonline.informs.org/journal/stsc>

STRATEGY SCIENCE

Vol. 5, No. 1, March 2020

ISSN 2333-2050 (print), ISSN 2333-2077 (online)

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3. Recognition of "dubious" journals

- Dubious journals are those that **do not follow a rigorous review process** to 1) select quality papers; and 2) help improve the quality of submissions
 - Time and fee are symptoms - the key is the quality and rigor of reviews

Symptoms:

- Regularly invite researchers to submit manuscripts with short-time turn around
 - *Good journals have "Call for papers" (Special issues) but the lead time is long*
- Quick review
- Quality of review: No or very minor revision
- Published papers with all levels of quality, even with language mistakes
- There are Beall's List (Beallslist.net) and predatory lists - but these lists are not updated

3. "Dubious" journals - an example

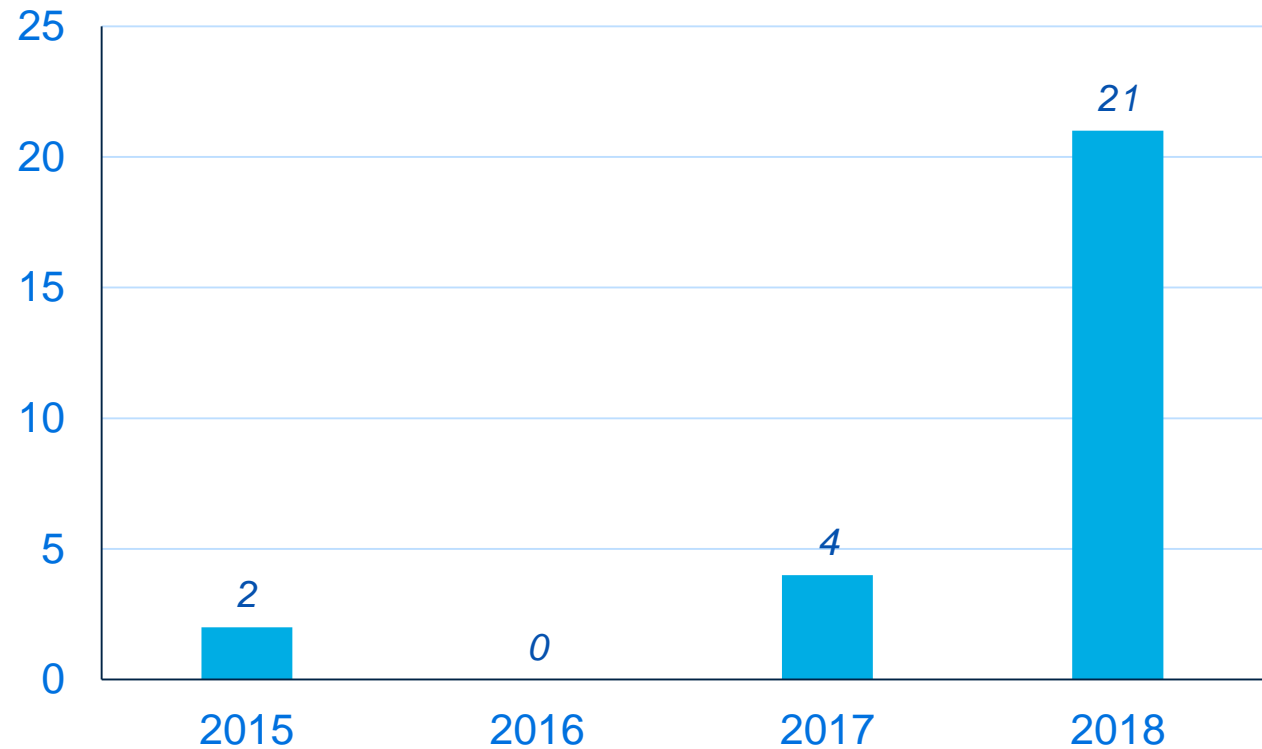
- My colleague submitted a paper to an Asian journal in business and finance - indexed in ESCI
- Three days later he got an acceptance email, asking for open access publication fee of \$1400
- If he agreed to pay, the paper would be published within three weeks time
- He declined

I checked 1 issue: The journal published 30+ papers and one author could appear multiple times

3. "Dubious" journals - Contributions from VN authors

Sample of five dubious journals

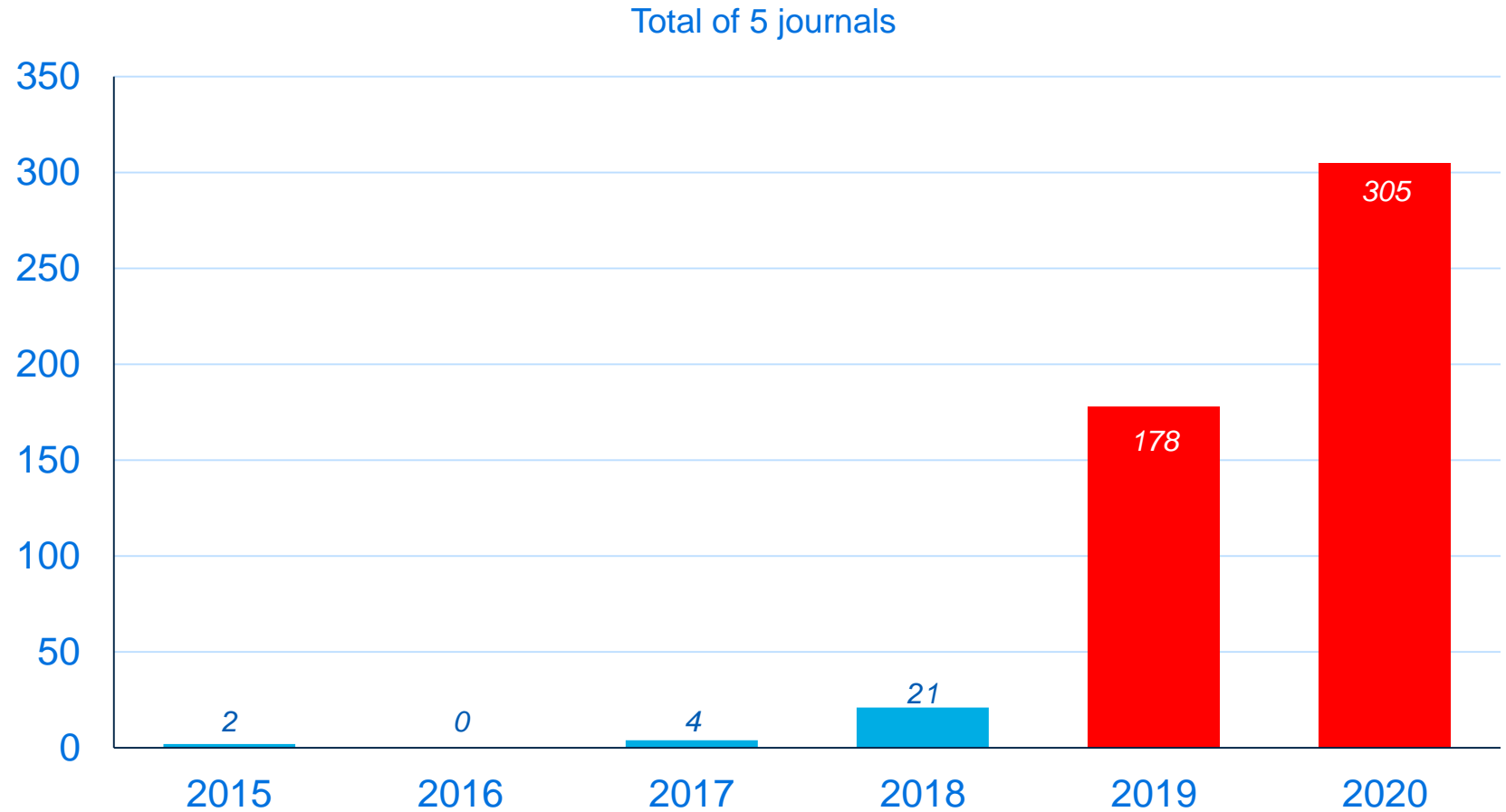
- 1) Academy of Accounting & Financial Studies
- 2) Accounting
- 3) Management Science Letter
- 4) Uncertain Supply Chain Management
- 5) Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business



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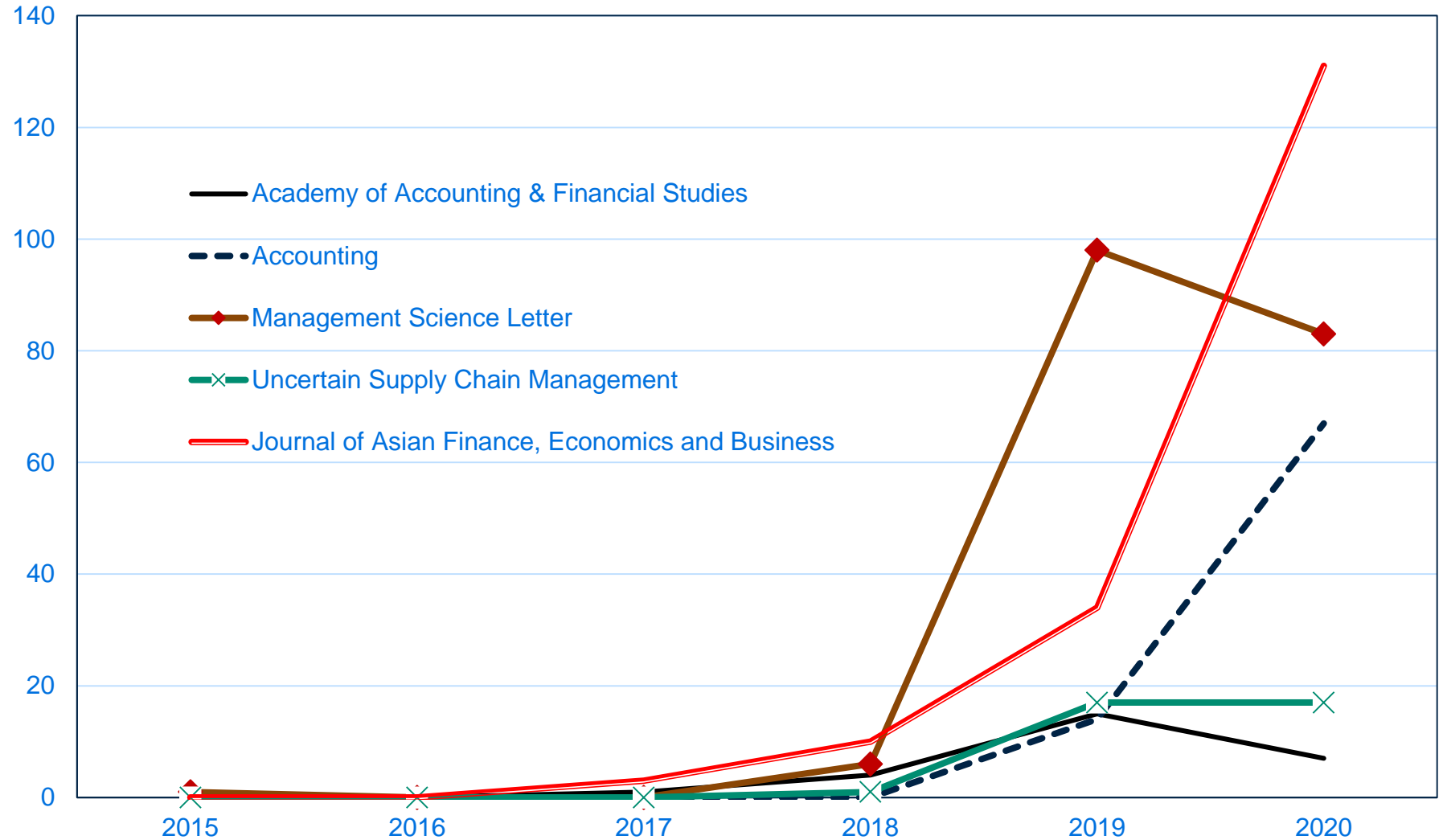
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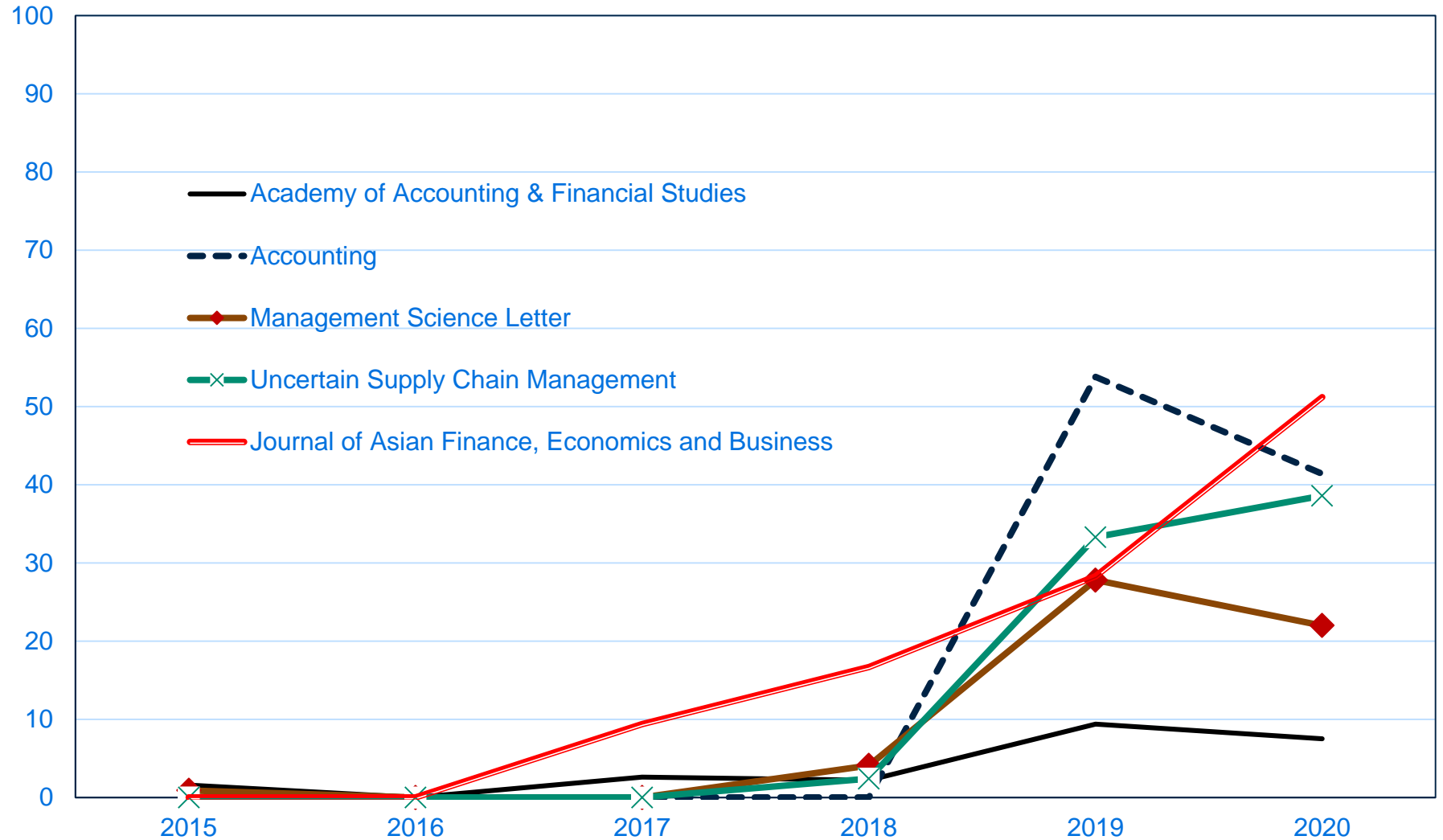
Total articles that have VN authors



3. "Dubious" journals - Contributions from VN authors

Sample of five dubious journals

Total articles that have VN authors



3. "Dubious" journals - Contributions from VN authors

THERE ARE **54** DUBIOUS JOURNALS

recognized by

The Professorship Evaluation Committee in Economic Field in 2020

3. Why are dubious journals dangerous?

- They misdirect the research goals
- They distort the evaluation of research performance
- They misallocate resources for research
- They kill motivation for quality research

They create an **illusion** of achievement

4. Recommendations for researchers

- Conduct quality research:
 - Follow few related topics within your fields - do not jump too much
 - Take serious courses/programs on research
 - Join strong research teams
 - Consult senior, reputable researchers of the fields
- Aim at quality journals - do not "catch trend" in counting quantity
- Shy away from dubious journals - including those that are not on black lists but recently published dubious articles
- Constantly and patiently trying

4. Recommendations for leaders and evaluators

- Drop **Scopus** and consider alternative lists to guide researchers
 - WoS, ABDC, Harzing's lists
- Review and update the list every year
- No list can replace evaluators' judgment of research quality