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Publication Date

2025-03-04

Peer reviewed

When Does It Become Overkill and Exploitation?

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When Does It Become Overkill and Exploitation?

This essay is intended to foster reflection and action on the impact of the escalating changes in journal publication practices on our PhD students and junior colleagues. Based on our experiences and observations we argue that journals, at least in management (first author) and marketing (second author) that accept empirical research, are demanding ever-increasing amounts of data, duplicative studies, and methodological elaborations for publication, and that these are having a detrimental impact on our PhD students, our junior colleagues and, ultimately, the future of our fields. We argue that expecting ever more work of our students and junior colleagues and not adequately weighing costs versus benefits is not fair nor professional.

We first describe the increasing, and in our judgment, excessive, publication requirements, then outline why this places particularly damaging burdens on our doctoral students and junior colleagues. Next, we speculate about why this has happened, and provide our observations about who seems to benefit, and environmental changes we believe have contributed to it. Finally, we conclude with some ideas about what could be done to minimize these negative consequences for our students and junior colleagues, and for our fields. This essay is based on our personal observations. We are senior colleagues with many decades working in management and marketing and both have long served as authors, reviewers, associate editors and editors for journals in our fields. We sought to supplement our perceptions by mustering data in support where it was available.

Excessive Publication Requirements

Because our focus is on pre-tenure colleagues and so many schools now demand these faculty publish in journals from popular lists (e.g., *Financial Times Top 50 Journals*) to improve the school's rankings, we collected some modest data on a sample of these top journals. To do a rough check on our experiences, we determined the average and maximum numbers of studies and authors per article from 1992 through 2022, and the annual article counts, in five-year increments. We studied the management journals *Academy of Management Journal* and *Organization Science*, and the marketing journals *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research*.

While there is some noise in the data, we see clear trends. In all four journals across both fields, we see increases in the average and maximum numbers of studies per article (see Table 1). For example, in the *Academy of Management Journal*, the number of studies per article in 1992 never exceeded 3 but now it is 6. We did not even count web appendix studies which is a new burdensome requirement in and of itself. Not surprisingly, with rising demands for more studies per article, there has also been an increase in the number of authors per article. For example, from 1992 to 2022, in all four journals across both fields, the average number of authors increased from roughly two to three (see Table 2). In *Organization Science,* the number of authors in 1992 never exceeded three but now it is eight. While some of these are maximum values, the increases are striking.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 About Here

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Are current articles better than past ones due to the extra studies and authors? We do not believe so. Then, how is this happening? Here are some of our personal observations. For

laboratory experiments, journals now frequently request numerous replications and additional experiments over several revision cycles before accepting a paper for publication. Reviewers and editors ask authors for studies to be redone with a new sample, a different manipulation or measure, or an additional moderator or mediator, even when there will be no substantive change in the implications. In other words, burdensome revisions are imposed without considering whether the results will be more informative. In past decades, alternative samples, methods, or explanations would be tested in future papers. The current escalation in publication requirements can result in as many as ten to twelve experiments in the main paper, with more studies in the web appendix. In addition, most journals in our fields now require at least one experiment in a field setting or a secondary data study to supplement the many required laboratory experiments.

This is a heavy burden, and it is often beyond the financial and technical capabilities of our junior colleagues, except perhaps those in elite universities. For instance, in one of the marketing journals studied here, a recent article with four authors included ten online experiments in the main twenty-one page publication, plus a thirty-two page online web appendix with four more studies (an 11th experiment, a survey of managers, in-depth interviews with managers, and secondary field data) and four supplemental data analyses. Is all this really necessary to convey the authors' main point, which was that people prefer to hear positive self-news from a human versus artificial-intelligence decision maker?

Qualitative researchers in our fields are not spared the increasingly burdensome publication requirements. A cursory review of qualitative publications over the past decades indicates researchers are compelled to provide ever more elaborate reporting of coding schemes and discussions of and citations to the latest qualitative methodologies. Moreover, they must provide ever more detailed descriptions of their inference processes, which in our experience

rarely adds to the confidence in their inferences, or the applicability of their work to business which is so critical in our applied fields.

Of course, data without theory is meaningless, and manuscripts in top journals must make a theoretical contribution. But too often what exactly is inadequate about the proposed theoretical contribution is never explained, leaving authors to struggle to interpret what was meant. Manuscript submissions are increasingly deemed not good enough based on ambiguous criteria like "weak theoretical contribution" rather than specific shortcomings and actionable solutions. Why exactly is the theoretical contribution so weak and what could be done to strengthen it? Particularly for junior colleagues who feel they need the manuscript published to maintain their careers such non-actionable feedback can be overwhelming.

Too often an editor or reviewer prefers a different theory from the one the authors addressed. Thus, to get the paper accepted authors must engage in time-consuming and costly library search and redrafting to try to satisfy this requirement even when the theoretical differences are substantively inconsequential. The first author and her co-authors were required to use a different theory to explain the findings in an article submitted to a journal. The review team found the results compelling but preferred a different theoretical explanation. This required weeks of research and re-writing, even though it made no substantive change in the contribution, but it was necessary to have the paper accepted. Nearly twenty years ago, the second author faced a similar situation, but the Managing Editor overruled the criticism, and the paper was accepted in the first round with only minor revisions, and it has since garnered 514 citations.

There is also more attention to journals' numeric metrics, which frequently drags down acceptance rates. With acute attention to the journal's Impact Factor, meaning its multi-year citation count averaged across articles, editorial boards often feel pressure to take fewer risks,

demand more, and accept less. The fewer articles published, the less risk of a problematic Impact Factor dip because a non-stellar article made it in. Ironically, Impact Factor relates less to onerous publication requirements and more to timeliness, relevance, and readability, so some A-journal Impact Factors are dropping below those of B-level journals (e.g., a 5.1 Impact Factor for the top-ranked *Journal of Marketing Research* versus a 10.5 Impact Factor for *Journal of Business Research*).

Some top journals are struggling to fill their pages, especially in marketing. The American Marketing Association's prestigious *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* published just three research articles in 2022 Issue 1 (of 4), filling the remaining pages with invited commentaries. Is it believable that worldwide there were just three meritorious articles on public policy and marketing in the first quarter of 2022? Submissions are there, and there have been dramatic increases in business schools requiring top publications especially outside the U.S., and corresponding increases in journal submissions. Yet the number of articles published in 2022 versus thirty years ago in 1992 increased just 55% in *Academy of Management Journal* (which added additional issues in that time) and roughly 100% in our focal marketing journals, although over 300% in *Organization Science*.

Negative Consequences for PhD Students and Junior Colleagues

The large number of studies and theoretical elaborations required for publication in these "must have" journals put extraordinary burdens on our doctoral students and junior faculty. PhD students must complete ever more complex dissertations. Dissertations now commonly have multiple studies and, for qualitative studies, more elaborate descriptions of methods to keep up with the latest methodological language. For example, in each of the past three dissertations on which the first author served on the dissertation committee, there were three separate studies all

using different samples, with at least one being a major field study. Several years ago, this was unheard of in management and marketing. The only doctoral students doing three studies were those using economics methods, and one chapter was "the theoretical chapter" and the others used the same database. The effect of this escalation in expectations keeps doctoral students in their under-paid doctoral programs for longer periods of time. The American Marketing Association (2024) has been monitoring these trends (Academy of Management has not, unfortunately) and it finds that 42% of marketing PhD students take over six years to complete their degree, up from 10% twenty years ago.

Our observation that published empirical papers have more authors than previously is a direct result of these journal demands. These practices encourage authors to invite other scholars to join to do the requested additional studies or alternative theoretical development, increasing the number of authors and diluting the original author's visibility. This is particularly damaging to PhD students and junior faculty who are less likely to be remembered as the lead author since familiar names are more easily remembered (Schulman 1976). It also harms their chances for tenure as some colleagues divide the original author's contributions by the number of authors.

Despite these greater demands, junior faculty still are expected to publish in the top journals at the same rate as in previous decades (and, at some aspiring schools, to publish more). And yet the "clock" for tenure reviews has not gotten longer despite these added demands. Further, junior faculty are expected to show professional involvement through journal reviewing before coming up for tenure, and the lengthy re-reviews of increasingly complex manuscripts takes significant time from their teaching, research, and family lives.

This situation imposes several costs on our colleagues and the field. For example, given the additional time required to work as a low-paid teaching or research assistant, some brilliant

individuals who might otherwise apply to PhD programs in business opt not to do so, reducing the number of domestic applicants, especially those with extensive business experience and those from underrepresented groups who may have family obligations that make years of low student pay untenable. At our public university, despite offering four-year twelve-month tuition and living expense coverage, we struggle to find domestic PhD applicants. Up the road at an elite private school which demands GMAT scores of over 90%, virtually all business PhD students are non-U.S. Despite increasingly rigorous PhD admission standards and programs, many junior colleagues are not granted tenure at their first job, if ever. This is due to the continued insistence that, despite rising publication requirements, they produce multiple publications in top or near top journals in their field. This can demoralize junior colleagues undermining their mental health.

Many of our PhD students must accept teaching post-docs, and junior colleagues must accept teaching or clinical professor positions, either initially upon graduation or after failing to attain tenure. These positions require them to take on heavy teaching responsibilities while still expected to publish, further lengthening their time in "apprentice roles" making many leery of committing to a scholarly career. And it is not just potential PhD applicants with options that may be discouraged. As business school PhD graduates can find more predictable careers outside academia, some of our most innovative junior researchers give up their university positions to become practitioners. Of course, many excellent PhD students want to become practitioners; but our focus is on those who aspired to be academics but find the obstacles overwhelming. At least one business PhD student in marketing, unable to find a suitable position on the job market, took his own life.

All of this contributes to a rising gap between junior colleague "haves vs. have nots". Those at elite universities with generous internal funding to cover rising publication costs and

research assistantships and fellowships are well positioned to conduct research that will allow them to succeed in academia. All others are at a distinct disadvantage, something that stifles innovative new research on diverse and substantively meaningful topics.

Why This Is Happening

Who Benefits

In trying to understand why this is happening, we first thought who might be benefiting, since it is rare for such a widespread trend to occur without someone gaining an advantage from it. Based on our experiences and observations we speculate that senior faculty, especially those at well-funded private universities, can benefit from the ever more onerous publication requirements. This keeps well-trained senior doctoral students and post-docs around longer as useful research assistants. Our PhD students are increasingly advised to delay their job market search until they have at least one publication or revision-request in hand, ideally at a top journal, typically with the advisor as co-author. Senior faculty who can navigate the publication process better not only attract more PhD students but also keep them around longer, now more than ever.

Further, senior faculty can benefit by being a co-author on publications of their students' research, even post-dissertation, since the senior faculty have "cracked the code" of publication and can expect a more favorable audience from collegial associate editors and editors. Thus, senior faculty members' publication records improve, while our junior colleagues' contributions are potentially watered down and underappreciated. A glowing letter at tenure review from a former dissertation advisor is often discounted compared to the "hard data" of a publication record showing extensive co-authoring with the advisor.

Moreover, if ever-more demanding editors find they have too few accepted manuscripts, they ask their senior-colleague friends to author commentaries or head special issues to fill pages

to meet the publishers' demands for journal length, further aiding senior faculty. For example, the second author was invited to write a commentary with three other senior authors for the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 2022 Issue 1 mentioned above, which only had three submitted research articles in it.

Research Fraud Overreaction

The increasing publication demands appear to be due at least in part to the widely publicized cases of researcher fraud and research not replicated for other reasons. This has led to a belief that large numbers of replication experiments, replication field studies, replications of the same study with a new sample or measure or manipulation, or other additional data collection or analysis should ensure the results are real, accurate, reproducible, and rigorous. Further, all empirical papers now need to post either their data or elaborate descriptions of their methods and inference processes.

Burdens are imposed on both qualitative and quantitative researchers. For example, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (2024), a prominent publisher of qualitative research in management, now has numerous pages of requirements of authors to assure "transparency". There is no indication that these elaborate justifications of data collection, analyses, and interpretations result in more valid insights. Classics such as Roy's (1959) *Banana Time* or Roethlisberger and Dickson's (1939) *Management and the Worker* were produced without them. Our argument is not with ensuring rigor, but with onerous and tedious requirements that fail to increase rigor.

Ironically, the numerous additional studies required of quantitative researchers contribute to the increasing number of authors on a paper and so chances for fraud. With many studies conducted by different people in one manuscript, authors do not always know whether others

have checked their analyses, or even fabricated the data for an individual study. Further, the burden on reviewers and editors (remember a lot of those reviewers are junior faculty) of reading ever more revisions, with long responses to reviewers and voluminous web appendices, each rivaling the original paper in length, means that reviewers do not have the time to carefully check all the research in the papers they review. Thus, there are now more opportunities for fabrication slipping through, leading to an ever-increasing spiral. In other words, onerous publication requirements could be contributing to fraud rather than protecting us from it.

Contributing Environmental Changes

There seem to be three environmental changes that have made the problem worse, not only for our junior colleagues, but also for the field. First, the movement of journals online means that many editors do not face the page constraints that used to limit the number of pages in a published paper including appendices. Further, many journals now ask that supplementary material be posted online, further reducing any constraints on asking for additional information. This means editors and reviewers are freer to ask for additional studies and methodological descriptions that can be placed in online appendices with no limit on length. Remember our earlier example of an article with a thirty-two page web appendix reporting four more studies and four more analyses. This is becoming the norm rather than the exception, as authors use published papers as a model for what is expected and try to do even more to stand out.

Another contributing environmental factor is that there are many more applicants for assistant professor of business than previously. The second author's PhD student just went on the job market and one school shared they had received 171 applicants for the job. In the first author's area, the most recent search for an assistant professor produced 110 applicants. Thirty years ago, there were many fewer business schools producing PhDs but now there are quality

programs worldwide, so schools that used to have a review a dozen viable applicants for an assistant professorship now have over a hundred, forcing beleaguered search committees to rely on simplistic metrics to winnow the pool down to a reasonable number of applications to read in full.

The availability of generative artificial intelligence and its misuse in research and educational environments will only make things worse. The second author already has experience with a PhD student who fabricated a literature review and citations using ChatGPT. The student sought to submit a paper to an academic conference that permitted ChatGPT for proofing, tried to push the envelope and use ChatGPT to write much of the paper, and was caught by a co-author only because fabricated citations were attributed to that co-author. Plagiarism software would not have caught this problem.

What Can Be Done?

We conclude this essay with several actions that can be taken now to alleviate the rising publication burdens on our doctoral students and junior faculty. While we do not see any way to directly address the environmental changes that may be driving these challenges, that does not mean we cannot do more. We have six actionable suggestions.

First, reviewers and editors should help researchers convey their ideas and evidence clearly and transparently and correct any fatal flaws, but otherwise accept the work, rather than mandating alternative yet equivalent studies that require different samples, methods, analyses, mediators, moderators, or theories. Too often these demands are justified as development of the paper with insufficient thought to the costs to the authors, review team, practitioners who need our timely insights, and our fields at large.

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Second, journal editors should set a reasonable cap on the number of studies per paper and the number of revisions, as is routinely done in fields like public health and medicine. Excessive replications and method elaborations are unlikely to further enhance quality and may be promoting error and fraud for the reasons noted above. Based on our own experiences as editors and reviewers, we have observed that reviewers and editors are far more likely to dive into methodological details to verify accuracy and completeness if a paper contains a small number of studies or fewer theoretical or methodological materials. When faced with reviewing a very large number of studies or other materials in the initial submission, with more or different ones piled on in revisions, reviews become increasingly cursory and less likely to detect errors, oversights, ambiguity, lack of candor, or worse.

In addition, too many editors and associate editors have abandoned their responsibilities to sift through the reviewers' comments and interpret and provide clarity to the authors about what should be done in any future drafts. It is their responsibility to highlight which reviewers' comments need attention and clarify conflicting or vague advice. This was common practice when we were beginning our careers, but now many editors just pass on the (sometimes conflicting) reviews without comment and expect the authors to make sense of them.

Third, rather than asking for additional studies or detailed elaborations of methods, editors can address concerns about errors and fraud by requiring authors to provide their existing datasets, coding methods and analysis syntax in a repository available only to the assigned reviewers and editors. Asking authors to uploading their existing basic research materials should not be onerous. To protect the labor of the authors, the information should be viewable to the review team only until the review process is completed, as some journals, but not all, are doing. Data collection is extremely labor intensive and allowing others to use the work for their own

publications is unfair. There can be strict agreements that the data can only be used to search for fraud or errors. *Administrative Science Quarterly* and *Journal of Marketin*g have recently set up such repository systems to facilitate manuscript reviews, but these will only work if reviewers have the time to review the datasets and analyses, something addressed next.

Fourth, to check for possible problems with datasets or analyses, a statistical editor can be hired and assigned to each paper, as is routinely done in many public health and medical journals. Data and analysis checks can be done through sampling, as is common in financial audits. Journals, even those published by scholarly associations, tend to be very profitable, as the authors can attest. If they were not, so many for-profit publishers would not have moved into journal publishing in recent decades. Publishers can find and pay or otherwise reward experts to do the data and analysis audits, freeing up our over-burdened editors and reviewers so they can judge the paper's contributions and articulate clear-cut next revision steps to the authors.

Fifth, business schools should limit their professors of teaching and teaching post-docs to support rather than exploit new PhDs and junior researchers. We understand that this trend is driven by financial concerns and that deans need to balance their budgets. However, expanding the number of heavy-teaching, research-lite faculty positions undermines the training of future colleagues, limits new knowledge, and makes academic careers less attractive. Especially now that we need to address radical changes driven by generative artificial intelligence, among other challenges, we need junior colleagues' fresh ideas.

Finally, senior faculty who lead promotion and tenure committees, as well as deans, should stop insisting on rigid minimal counts of publications in "top-tier journals" or in journal lists such as in the *Financial Times*. Instead, decision makers should actually read the research, look at letter-writer evaluations of the work, citation counts, media attention, and other indicators

of impact. We are paid to make professional judgments about research quality. Also, an obsessive reliance on numbers does not make the process more objective because it can be gamed (e.g., by padding papers with co-authors to get everyone's publication counts up). Further, dissertation committee chairs or members adding their names to doctoral students' papers or post-dissertation work without making major substantive contributions should be recognized as of dubious morality. Senior faculty should commit to reading and providing feedback to their former students' papers for one or two years without putting their names on as co-authors.

Limitations and Conclusions

This essay has some limitations. Our focus has been on PhD students who seek tenure-track positions and we acknowledge that those pursuing careers in practice may not have these concerns. Further, our essay is based on our own experiences and observations, and some limited data we could muster. We cannot know the extent to which our concerns extend to the many other journals that are not the leading ones in our scholarly fields. We do not have direct personal experience with the tenure process in teaching-oriented schools, but many of our former PhD students in such schools lament that the extreme publication pressures they face are similar to those we have described here, affecting mental health.

In conclusion, expecting ever more duplicative studies and elaborate descriptions in our students' and junior colleagues' journal submissions, and not weighing costs versus benefits to our fields and to society, is not fair or professional. Our creeping publication demands are harming our PhD students and junior colleagues and harming our fields by chasing away colleagues who could bring the new insights and address new problems that would strengthen our fields in future. We have expressed our concerns quite strongly in the hopes of spurring more

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reflection on our own actions as senior faculty, reviewers, and editors in imposing ever-increasing publication demands on our junior colleagues.

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Table 1. Average Number of Studies and Maximum Number of Studies per Article 1992 to 2022

Academy of Management Journal

Organizational Science
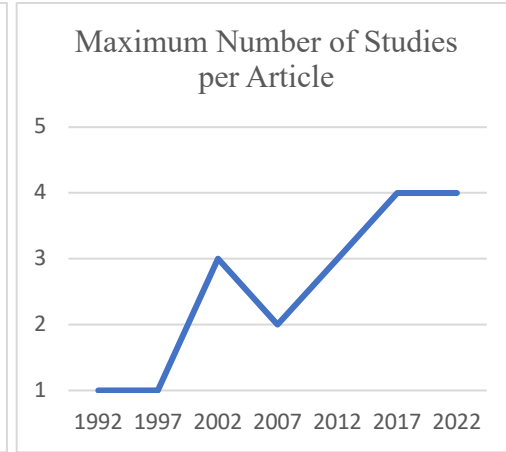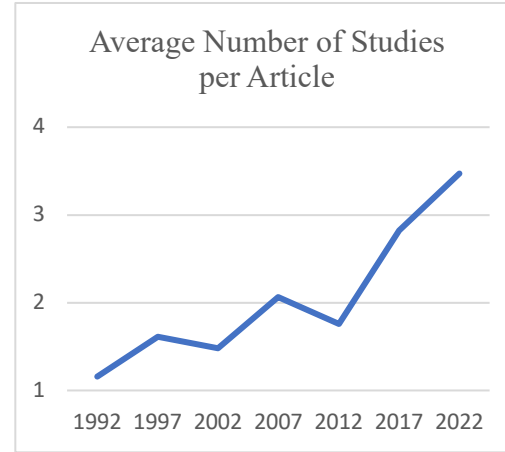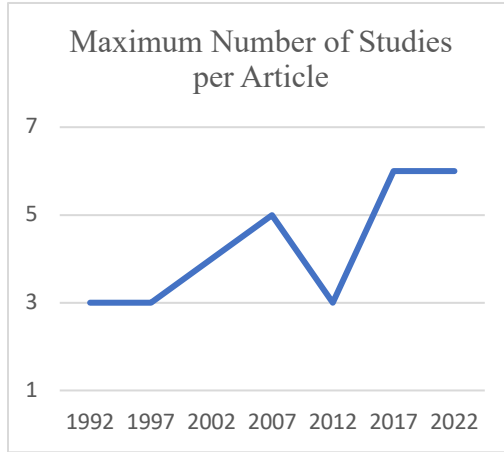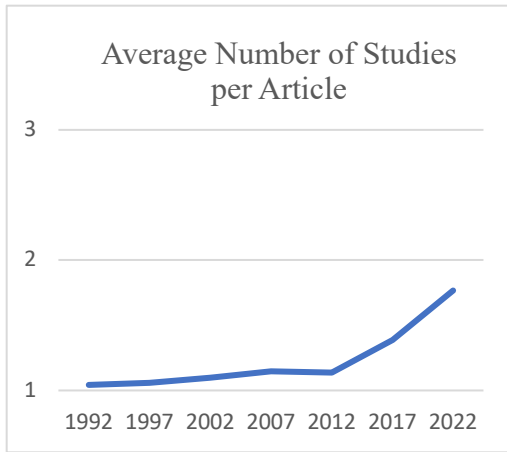
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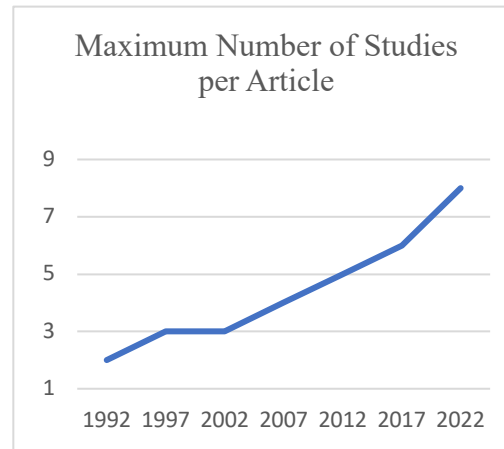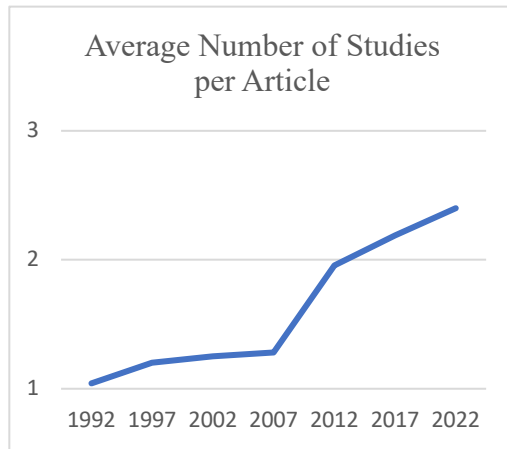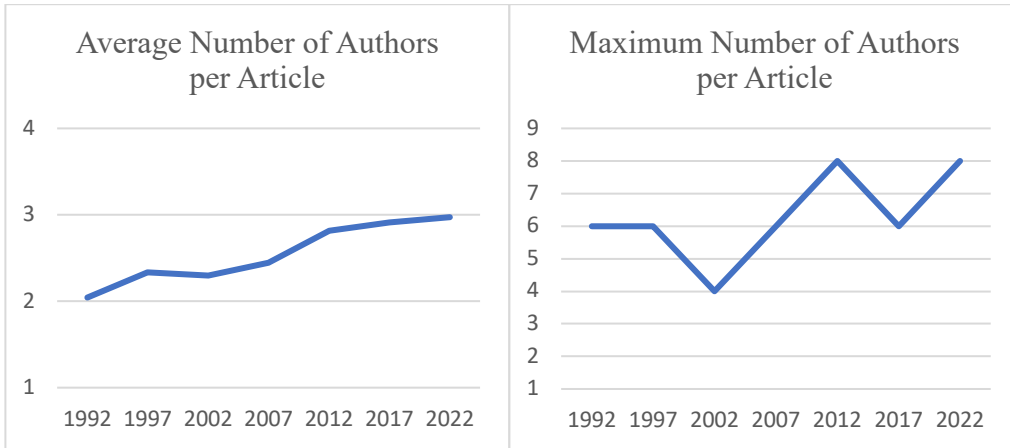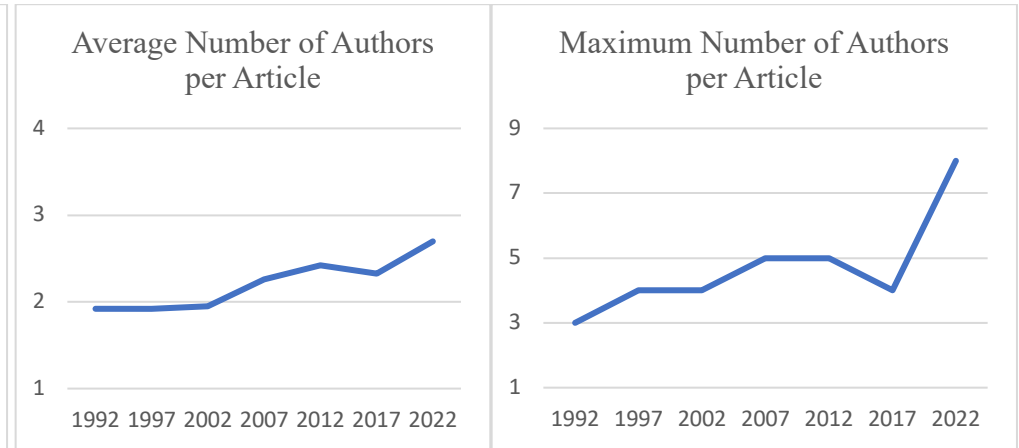

Journal of Marketing Research
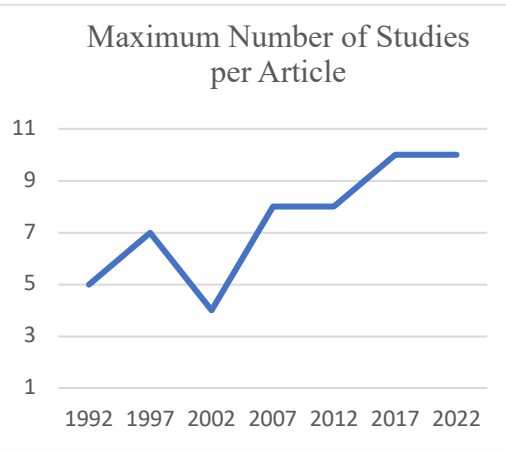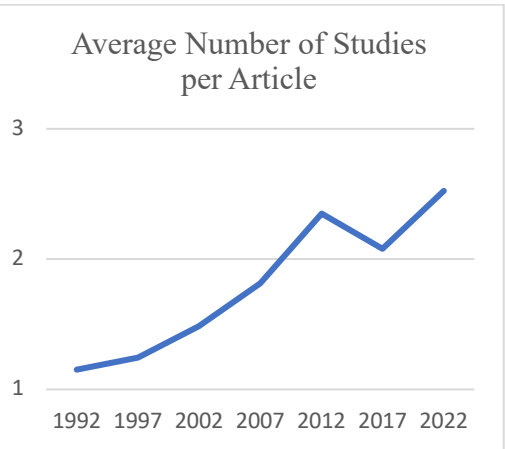
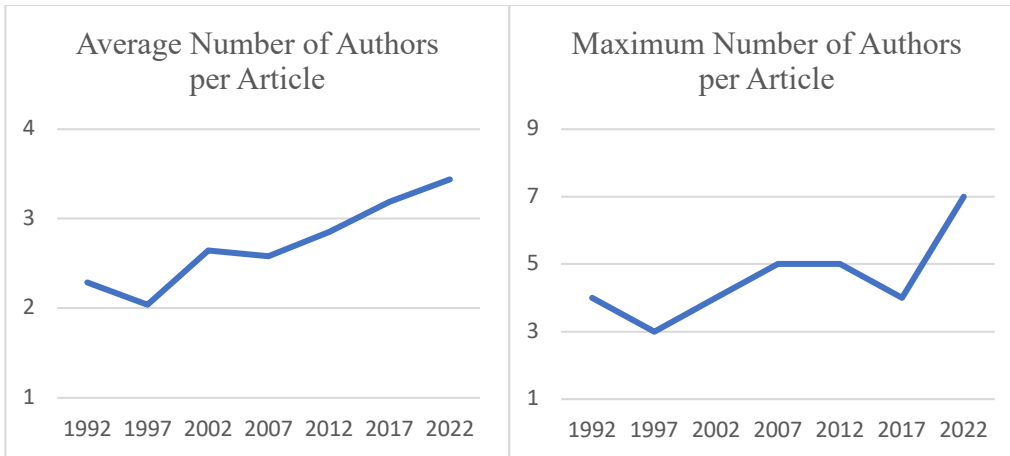Table 2. Average Number of Authors and Maximum Number of Authors per Article 1992 to 2022
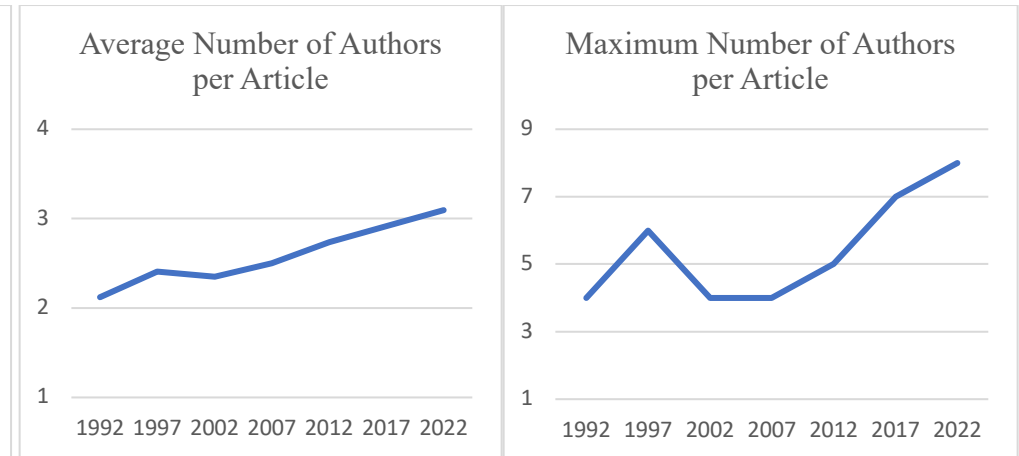
Academy of Management Journal*

Organizational Science

Journal of Marketing

Journal of Marketing Research

Note: *Author count of 20 in a 2020 article was removed as an outlier.