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)

Top

Middle

Low

A   B
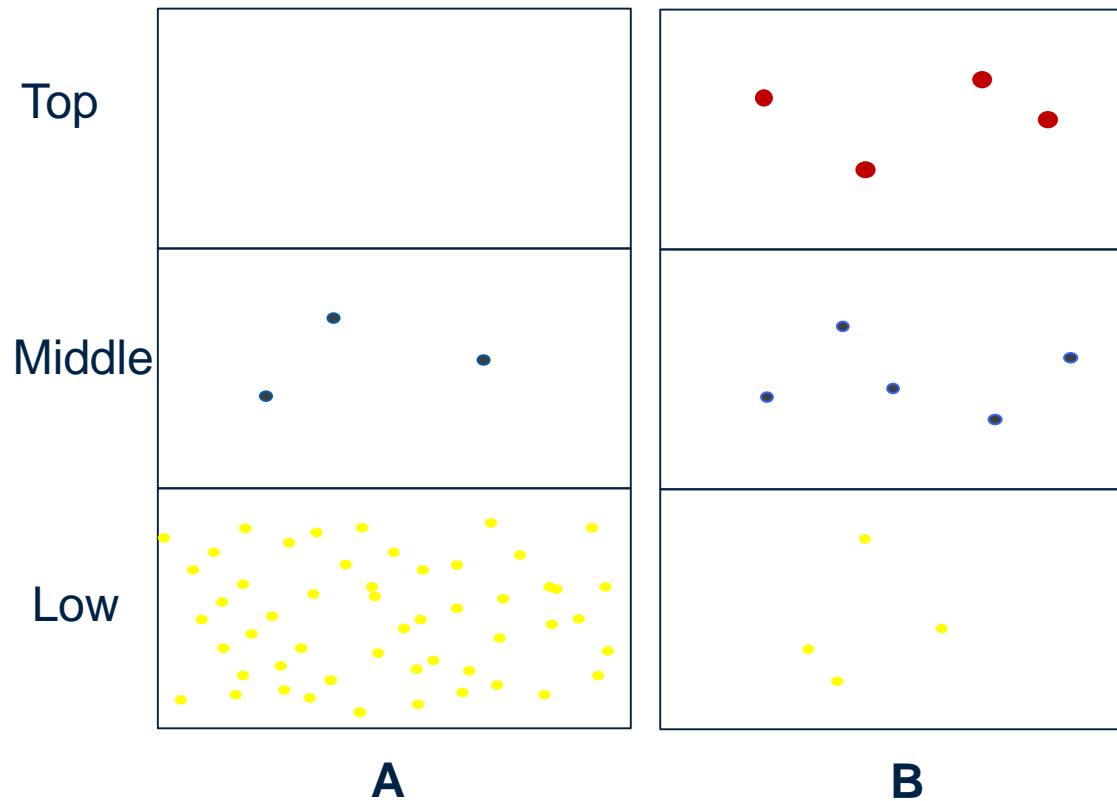
- **Ideas vs. KPI**: The most meaningful contributions in research are ideas, not KPIs

  - *...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

❖ 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
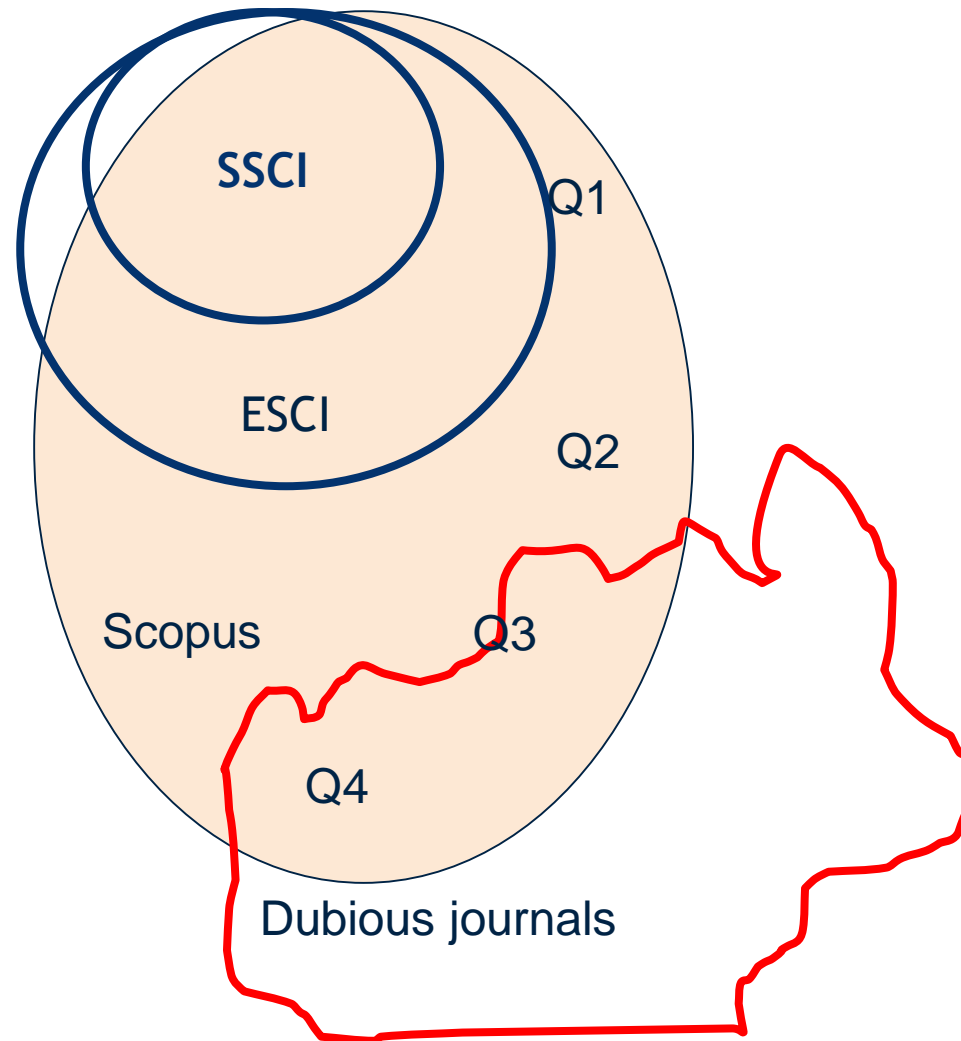
2. Recognition of quality journals

- 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

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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Total of 5 journals

3. "Dubious" journals - Contributions from VN authors

Sample of five dubious journals

Total articles that have VN authors

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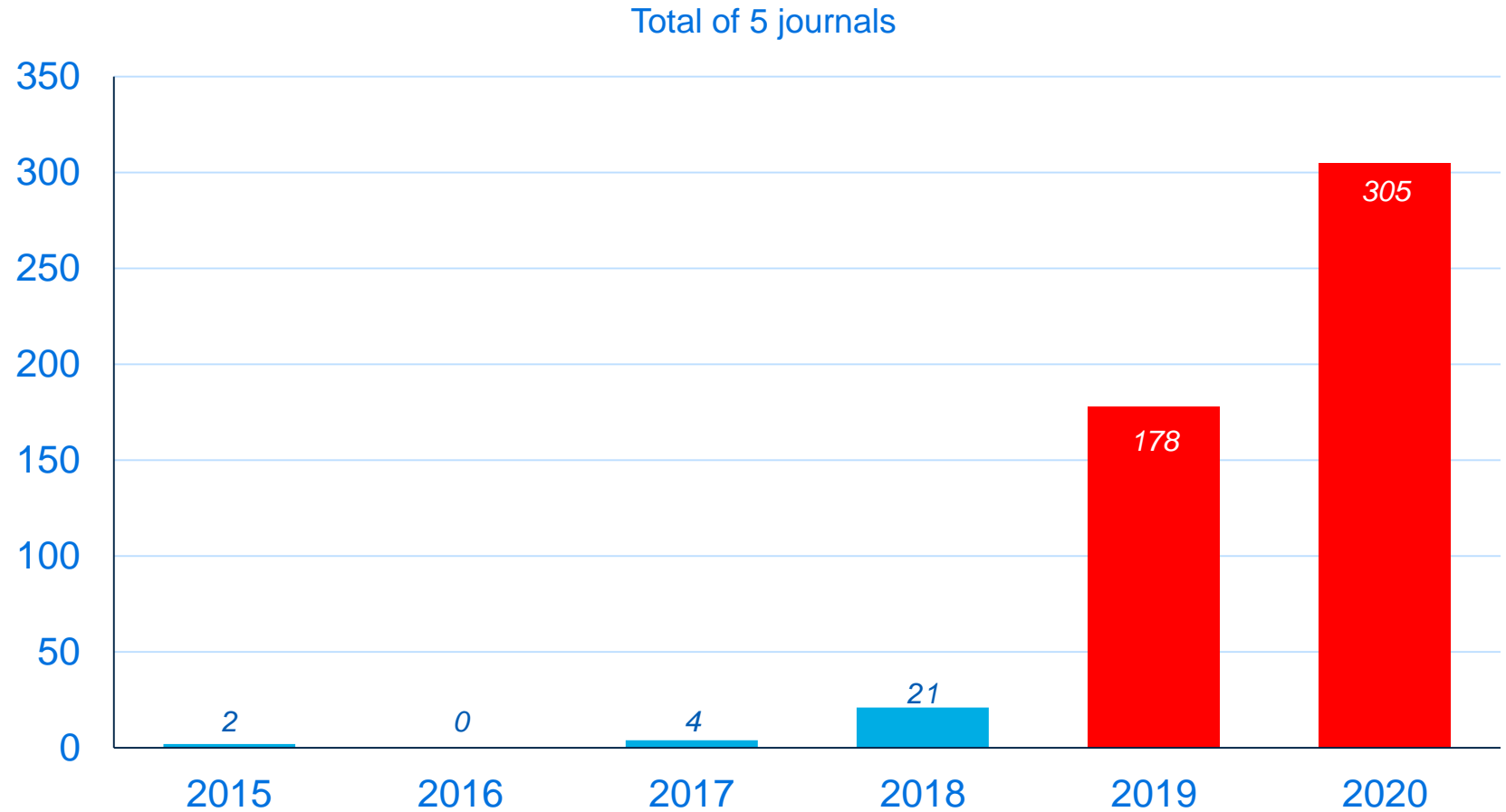- Academy of Accounting & Financial Studies
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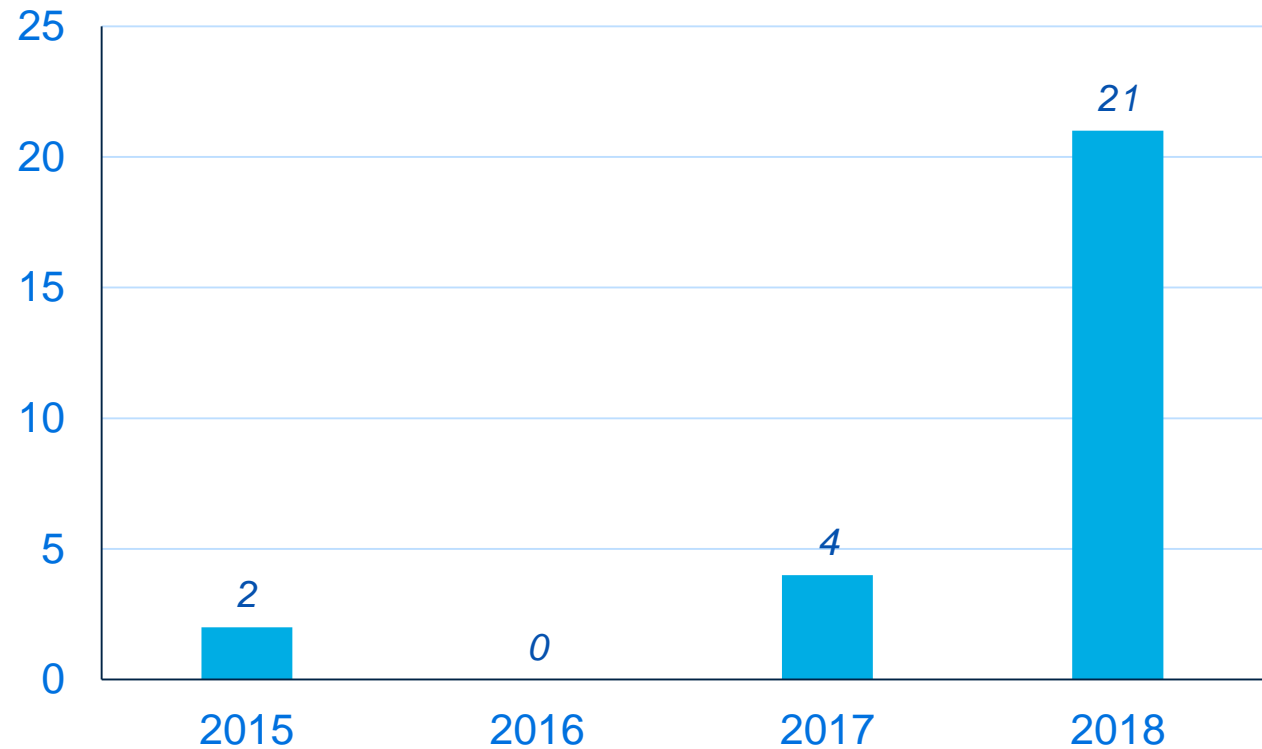
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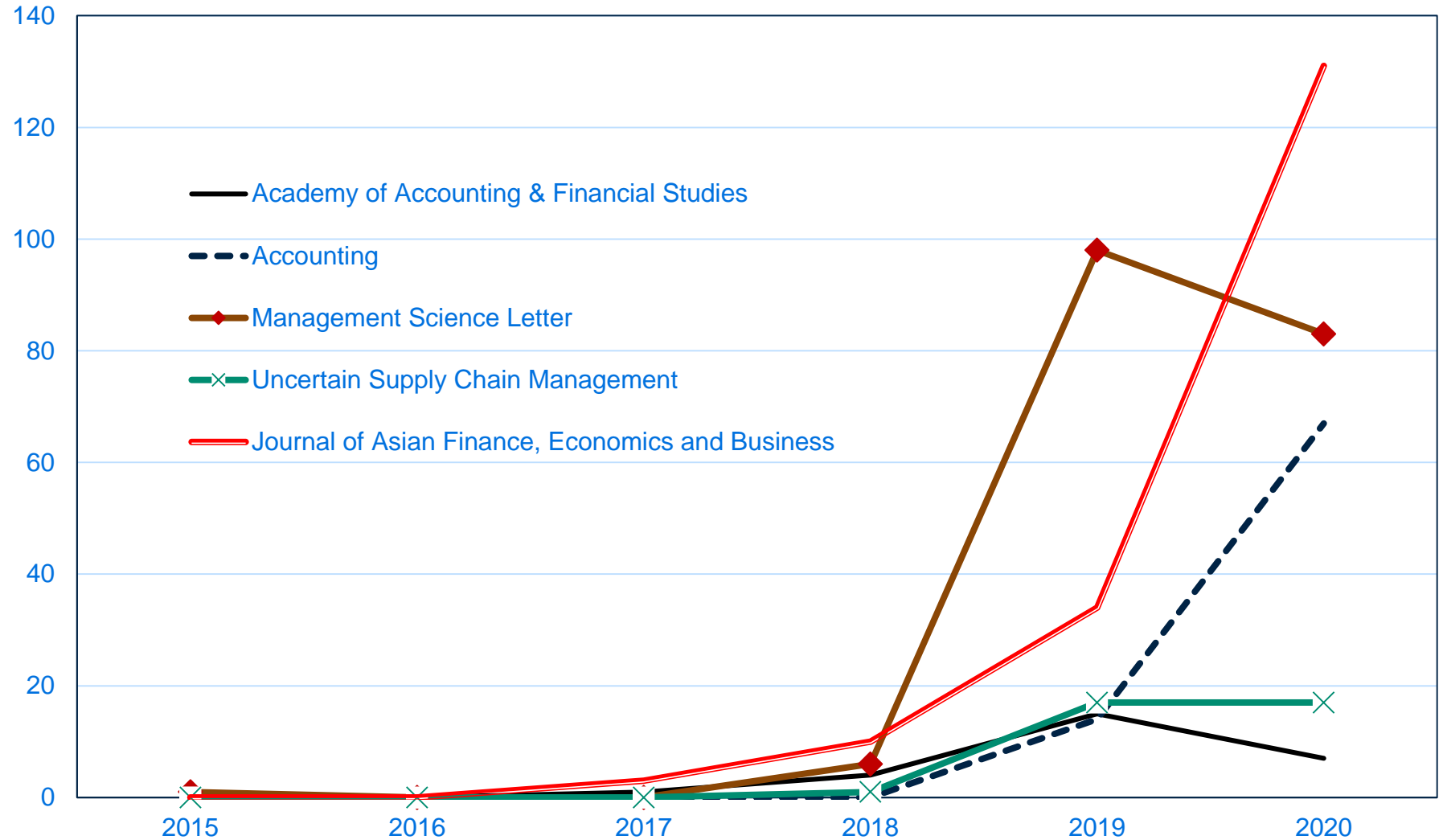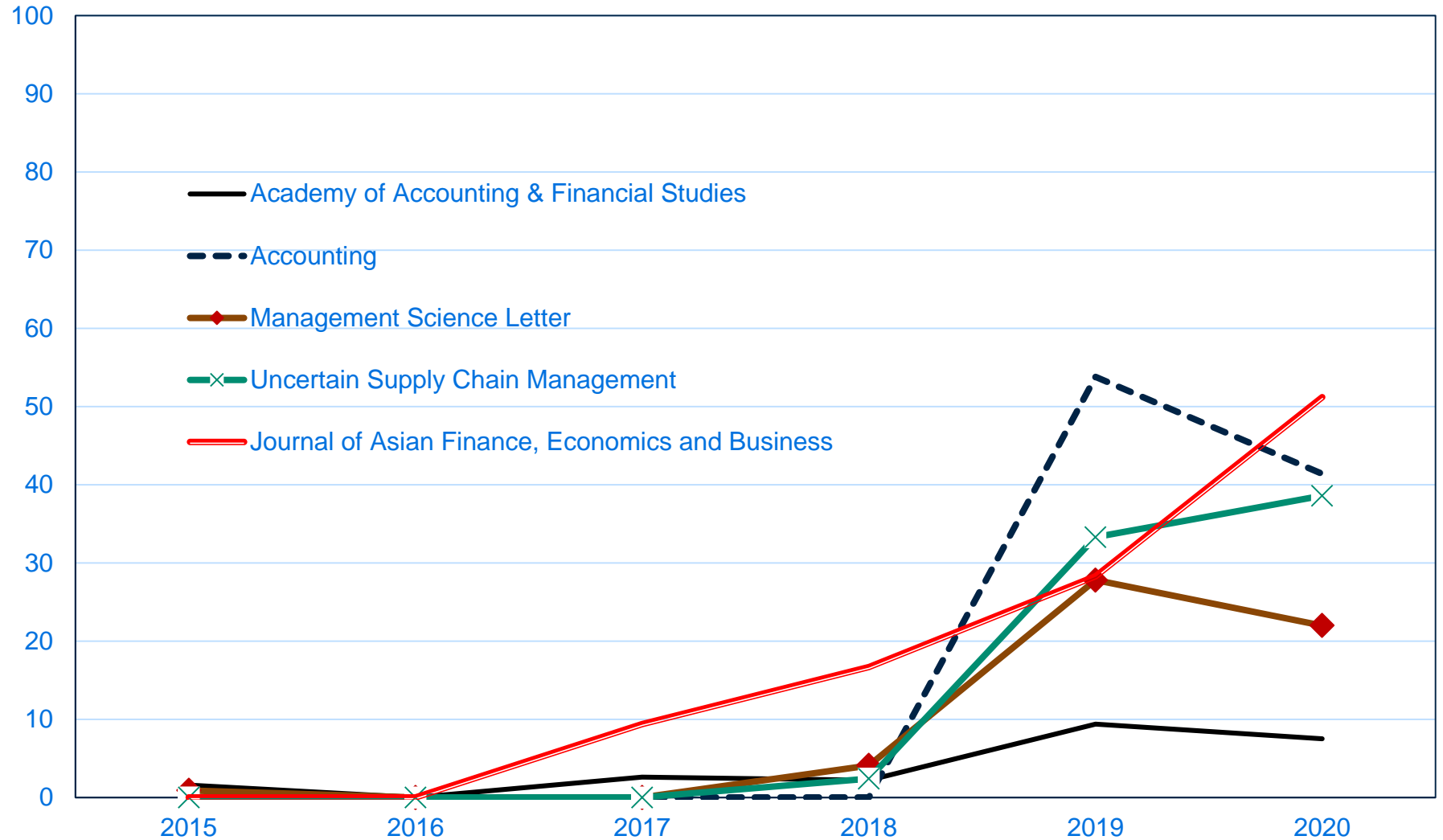
Sample of five dubious journals

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