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Abstract

Critics have argued that publishing in psychology must become quicker and leaner. In response, some journals have adopted short article formats alongside regular articles. The citation impact of these formats was compared in a study of 1,735 articles published in *Psychological Science*, *Cognition*, and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* over a 6-year period. Short articles received fewer citations on average but more citations on a per-page basis. They were only slightly less likely to have high impact. Short articles appear to garner scientific influence more efficiently than standard articles, supporting calls for their widespread adoption.

Keywords

Publication practices in psychology have recently come under attack. Critics such as Park (2009) and Taylor (2009) argue that our articles are often too long and inaccessible and that our journals take too long to evaluate and publish them. Part of the solution may lie in article formats with short word limits. Such short article formats have become increasingly popular in the field. However, although they are more reader- and author-friendly than longer articles, they may be less powerful vehicles for transmitting scientific knowledge. Longer articles allow ideas and arguments to be more fully developed and findings to be replicated and clarified. As a result, they may have greater scientific influence, usually measured by citation impact. Longer articles would be expected to attract more citations and to achieve highly cited status more often.

I examined citations accrued by short and regular articles in one generalist journal (*Psychological Science*) that pioneered the publication of short articles and two prominent specialist journals (*Cognition* and *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* or *JESP*) that have well-established short formats. For *Psychological Science*, I compared “research articles” (less than 4,000 words) with “research reports” and “short reports” combined (less than 2,500 and 1,500 words, respectively); for *Cognition*, I compared “full articles” (no word limit) with “brief articles” (less than 3,000 words); and for *JESP*, I compared “articles” (no word limit) with “reports” (less than 5,000 words). Citations were counted (using Web of Science, accessed March 2009) for all articles in these formats published from 2002 to 2007. The article types were compared on citations per article, citations per journal page, and probability of highly cited status (i.e., above the 75th percentile for the relevant journal and publication year).

Table 1 shows that in 15 of the 18 comparisons (3 journals $\times$ 6 publication years), short articles received fewer mean citations than did longer articles (binomial $p = .008$). Averaging across the 6 years, the mean citations accrued by regular articles exceeded those of short articles by 34.6% for *Psychological Science*, 59.2% for *Cognition*, and 6.6% for *JESP*. However, these articles were, on average, 44.8% (*Psychological Science*), 147.5% (*Cognition*), and 65.2% (*JESP*) longer. Thus, short articles garnered more citations per journal page in 16 of the 18 comparisons (binomial $p = .001$). In all three journals, longer articles had a slightly higher probability of being highly cited—not statistically reliable for *JESP*—but short articles were frequently among the most-cited articles.

These findings support the value of short article formats in psychology. Although short articles tend to have less citation impact than their heavyweight cousins, they punch above their weight class—they are more efficient in converting journal pages into citation impact. Although they are less likely to be found in the select ranks of highly cited articles, short articles yield a similar or higher rate of such articles on a per-page basis. A comparison of 100 pages of short articles and 100 pages of long articles would be expected to yield the following numbers of high-impact publications: 3.60 versus 4.10 (*Psychological Science*), 1.78 versus 1.06 (*Cognition*), and 2.61 versus 1.95 (*JESP*).

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Table 1. Summary of Citation Analysis

Variable	Psychological Science		Cognition		JESP	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
Total articles	317	533	161	278	258	188
Total pages	1,495	3,638	1,716	7,334	2,079	2,503
Citations/article						
2002	23.00	30.90	26.52	25.63	17.38	21.81
2003	23.79	37.01	21.67	22.85	14.83	16.48
2004	23.21	24.57	11.32	28.68	12.24	10.23
2005	13.13	17.22	10.50	13.16	7.77	8.70
2006	8.68	12.39	4.20	9.28	5.55	5.40
2007	3.80	5.23	2.78	4.27	2.84	3.12
Citations/page						
2002	4.76	4.82	2.63	0.94	2.11	1.65
2003	5.23	5.77	2.05	0.88	1.83	1.05
2004	4.79	3.75	1.06	1.04	1.50	0.75
2005	2.66	2.41	0.97	0.56	0.93	0.62
2006	1.88	1.73	0.40	0.33	0.70	0.43
2007	0.83	0.75	0.25	0.16	0.36	0.26
<i>p</i> (highly cited)	.17	.28	.19	.28	.21	.26

Short articles appear to be somewhat more efficient in generating scientific influence than standard articles. Indeed, some of the most influential articles in scientific history have been extremely short, most famously Watson and Crick's (1953) report on the structure of DNA, which consumed barely one page of *Nature* and has been cited more than 3,300 times. This conclusion supports critics who advocate a different model of scientific publication for psychology (Park, 2009). A journal composed entirely of short articles would be expected to have greater overall scientific influence than one with the same page count that contained only long articles. Journals that exclusively publish long articles—such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, whose articles have grown increasingly long and many-studied—might be well advised to add a short-article format for this reason. Ironically, adopting a short-article format might reduce the journal's impact factor, which is based on citations per article, while increasing its aggregate impact. Short article formats may have

limitations, but they appear to be well suited to the promotion of impactful science.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared that he had no conflicts of interest with respect to his authorship or the publication of this article.

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