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## Repository data transfers: Incentives, free-riding and goodwill among economists

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# Repository Data Transfers: Incentives, Free-Riding and Goodwill among Economists\*

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## Abstract

We analyse the availability of source data of experimental data in a sample of highly respected economic journals. We test whether publication strategies of journals have an effect for the publication of data. The results for the sample of journals we investigated indicate a large variety of publication patterns. Even mandatory publication of experimental data leads in many cases to sources which are only available upon request. Thus, transparency and replicability of experimental results currently depend to a large extent on the good will of the journals and the stringency by which editors follow the research data availability policies.

JEL classification: C91

Keywords: experimental results, data availability, repositories

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# 1 Introduction

Transparency and replicability are two major assets to every experimental discipline. Hence, any breach of those two preconditions for solid scientific work, be it by poorly documented sources or even non-accessible data imposes an enormous threat to the experimental methodology. Lately, there has been an ongoing discussion in experimental psychology and experimental economics of a significant crisis of reproducibility (Baker, 2016) and replication (Page, Noussair and Slonim, 2021). The database of a substantial number of seminal experimental results collected in laboratory settings is not fully documented, and in some cases is even unavailable (Camerer et al., 2018). At the same time, there is an insufficient number of replication studies. The number of those studies comparing their data with the data of established publications is low and often restricted to specific projects with special funding such as the Reproducibility Project Psychology (RPP) or the Experimental Economics Replication Project (EERP).<sup>1</sup>

One critical component of the poor availability of data is an incentive problem: individual researchers are left alone with their responsibility for the delivery of experimental data to data repositories. The process of preparation and transfer typically requires tedious effort causing high costs for the individual researcher without any recognizable personal benefit. Thus, the provision of experimental data is a typical public good problem. In turn, some journals “solve” the public goods problem by making the upload at a repository mandatory for acceptance of the article. Other journals “strongly” recommend the publication of data, while others say nothing about this. The purpose of the current article is to review (*i*) how we economists handle our contributions to the public good (i.e., our data upload) facing the different institutional settings by the journals, and (*ii*) whether the institutional setting along our contributions affect the success of the articles (measured in the citation rate of the individual articles). As such, our paper follows earlier studies relating the research data availability policies of journals and the journals’ success in citation indices (Vlaeminck, 2013; Vlaeminck and Herrmann, 2015; Höffler, 2017).

We investigate the different data availability policies of the majority of journals publishing experimental results in the last years and the specific repository rules that are implied. We distinguish between journals that require, expect, or encourage publication of data. Results show that journals with a high impact factor have mandatory data availability policies. A substantial variance in the types of repositories are suggested: journal specific repositories (e.g., QJE dataverse), general commercial repositories (e.g., Mendeley Data) and open repositories (e.g., OSF). We conducted a systematic analysis of data storage throughout the journal issues in 2022 and/or 2023: our results document the dramatic consequences of

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<sup>1</sup>See Open Science Collaboration (2015); another critical problem emerges through the publication bias: data of “null results” (i.e., data that cannot establish significant differences between treatment condition is rarely published (Andrews and Kasy, 2019). Yet, the publication bias lies beyond the scope of our study.

different data availability requirements. However, even for the same policies we find substantial variations in the data availability, although all journals have an excellent reputation among economists.

## 2 The Analysis

Altogether, we analyze volumes 2022 and 2023 of twelve highly respected journals in economics and related topics that publish experimental studies. Table 1 lists the journals and provides an overview of the journals’ publication strategies.

Journals differ with respect to the enforcement by which they implement the availability of data: 7 out of the 12 require the upload of data prior to the publication, while authors have to document this to the editor during the submission process (by providing an explanation regarding the availability of data). Similarly, *Experimental Economics* “expects” authors to make the data available, but does not require any proof or statement regarding the destination of the data. Finally, 4 journals highly encourage the availability of experimental data in their publishing procedures but do not deal with this point in the submission procedure.

Notice that required provision of experimental data does not lead uniformly to the availability of data through repositories. In three journals, all data is published via the non-commercial data repository (e.g., openICPSR, osf). In contrast, required publication of data in *Management Science* leads to 10 unpublished data sets out of 70 experimental articles, while 57 data sets are published via the journal’s homepage, 2 via private home pages of authors and only 1 via a public data repository. Similarly, the data for the 7 experimental articles in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 2022 are all on the journal’s home page. From 24 (24) experimental articles in *Games and Economic Behaviour* (*Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization*) in late 2023, the data of 4 (3) is available via a public data repository, the data of the others is available upon request.

We find an equally diverse picture for journals without required publication of data, although the rate of data available upon request increases even further. The data for 14 articles published in *Experimental Economics* in 2022 is not available at all. However, the data for 26 experimental articles are available via non-commercial data repositories, while the authors of 6 articles use the journal’s home page and 1 author the own home page for making the data available. Notice that the situation becomes even worse if journals only encourage the publication of data. The proportion of experimental articles with unavailable data differs between 0% (*Journal of Finance*, although the data is exclusively available via the journal’s home page) and 100% (*Review of Financial Studies*, *Journal of Accounting Research*) or almost 100% (*Marketing Science*). In the latter case, 1 article published the data via a non-commercial data repository. Figure 1 summarizes our findings for the journals.

Journal	Year	Policy	Articles	Experiments	n/available	private	commercially	public
Quarterly Journal of Economics	2022	required	36	7	0	0	0	7
Quarterly Journal of Economics	2023	required	12	5	0	0	0	5
American Economic Review	2022	required	114	22	1	0	0	21
Review of Economic Studies	2022	required	90	8	0	0	0	8
Journal of Political Economy	2022	required	71	7	0	0	7	0
Management Science	2022	required	437	71	10	2	57	1
Management Science	2023	required	103	11	1	0	10	0
Games and Economic Behaviour	2023	required	76	24	20	0	0	4
Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization	2023	required	86	22	19	0	0	3
Experimental Economics	2022	expected	51	47	14	1	6	26
Experimental Economics	2023	expected	33	31	5	0	0	26
Journal of Finance	2022	encouraged	68	7	0	0	7	0
Journal of Finance	2023	encouraged	70	1	0	0	1	0
Review of Financial Studies	2022	encouraged	127	9	9	0	0	0
Journal of Marketing	2022	encouraged	51	22	21	0	0	1
Journal of Accounting Research	2022	encouraged	45	5	5	0	0	0

Table 1: Analyzed journals

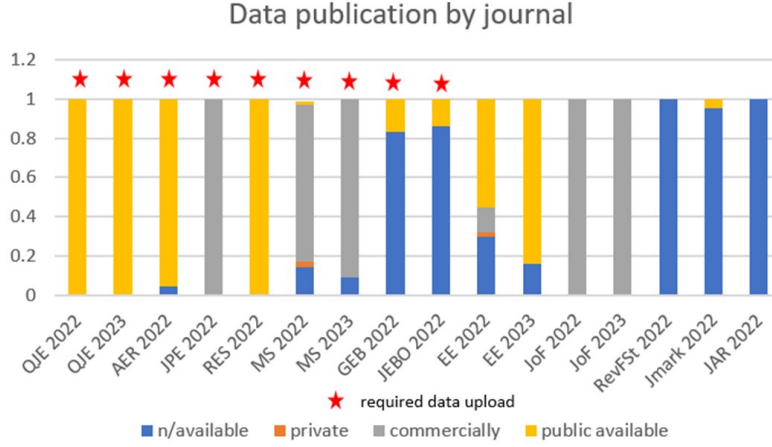


Figure 1: Publication strategies for the journals

### 3 Conclusion

The overall availability of experimental data is far from being secured. The results for the sample of journals we investigated already indicate that economics do not overcome the public goods problem. Although data availability provides an important asset and has crucial implications for the credibility of results, there is too little goodwill among economists to publish their data on a voluntary basis. What is shocking, however, is that even mandatory publication of experimental data leads in many cases to sources which are only available upon request. Thus, transparency and replicability of experimental results currently depend to a large extent on the good will of the journals and the stringency by which editors follow the research data availability policies.

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