Viewpoint

Publishing replications in marketing

Mark Uncles
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Introduction
Marketing researchers have a love–hate relationship with replication. It is widely accepted that replication is central to normal scientific investigation. Through replication we establish the robustness of our results, we describe norms and – where there are major departures from norms – we may be able to identify systematic deviations. On the other hand, it is common to hear extremely negative remarks when replication is being discussed. Why yet another study? Isn’t replication boring? Doesn’t it show a lack of originality? Surely it isn’t worth the journal space? An oft-expressed criticism is that replicated results are not managerially useful because marketing managers are trying to break the mould rather than abide by norms.

The importance of replication
Replication is a pillar of normal scientific investigation for three principal reasons: (1) it establishes that a result found once at least holds once more; (2) it establishes that a result generally holds again (i.e. the result has boundary conditions that can be described and documented); and (3) it establishes where a result does not generally hold again (i.e. the result has boundary conditions that can be described and documented). Results with known scope and boundary conditions are said to be robust. Such results provide a basis for theory building, in that the researcher now has something about which to theorise. Because we tend to be adept at developing hypotheses and creating theories, it is important to do this with respect to robust results (where there is something meaningful to explain), rather than over-interpret one-off or ephemeral results.

Importantly, results with known scope and boundary conditions can be applied and used. This surprises many managers. But, put bluntly, how can managers contemplate breaking the mould if they are unaware that there is a mould? Or, put another way, why should a manager put much (any) reliance on a result that hasn’t been replicated and that may never occur again?

The incidence of replication
Opinions differ about the extent of replication in marketing. Some observers argue that the necessity of replication is frequently stated, but rarely undertaken (Ehrenberg & Bound 1993; Hubbard & Armstrong 1994; Hubbard & Lindsay 2002; Uncles & Wright 2004). The point was reiterated in a recent International Journal of Market Research editorial (Mouncey 2011). Researchers, it would seem, give lip-service to replication. For evidence, note that prior to 1990 under 5% of
empirical papers published in leading marketing journals were replications with extensions (Zinkhan et al. 1990), and the percentage of replications in these journals actually declined over the period 1990–2004 compared to 1974–1980 (Evanschitzky et al. 2007).

Other observers contend that the necessity of replication is frequently stated, and claim that path-breaking studies are in fact replicated. By way of example, recall the dozens of replications of the work on market orientation (originally published by Kohli and Jaworski and Naver and Slater in the early 1990s). We are now faced with replications of market orientation for almost every country around the globe and for almost every conceivable type of organisation (e.g. private and public sector, large and small businesses, technologically turbulent industries and established stable industries). Another prominent example would be the numerous replications and extensions of Hofstede’s work on cultural dimensions for international business; the original study, published in the early 1980s, was conducted across multiple countries and was robust from the start, but in the intervening years the dimensions have been tested and re-tested many times in widely varying contexts.

As these examples show, some path-breaking studies are replicated, but the majority of studies in marketing research are not. There is no culture of replication. It is not routinely and instinctively undertaken. Rather, it is seen as time-consuming, laborious, uncreative, lacking in vision and boring. At best, it is something for junior or less able researchers to do.

**Publication processes**

Some of the responsibility for the low status of replications must lie with journal editors and referees. Editors have been known to remark: ‘we only publish important papers’, ‘replications aren’t worth the journal space’, or ‘I’m concerned about the contribution-to-length ratio’. Referees comment: ‘where’s the innovation?’, ‘I don’t see a new technique here’ or ‘that’s worthy, but not newsworthy’. By way of example, consider the following remarks by two editors of a leading academic marketing journal: ‘the journal will not be very receptive to work that merely replicates well-established findings across countries and cultures ... we will favour truly new ideas and methods, even if inconclusive, over the mere application of older, more highly conclusive, ideas and methods’ (Stremersch & Lehmann 2007, p. 1).

The irony of these remarks should not be overlooked. How can a paper that hasn’t been replicated be described as important? It might prove to be important after further investigation, but before any replication has been undertaken we simply don’t know its importance. Or, why give precious journal space to something that might be merely unique or idiosyncratic? And why would editors of a reputable scientific journal prefer to publish inconclusive, and possibly speculative, work over highly conclusive robust results? Surely, from a scientific viewpoint, a well-established result is much more newsworthy than a potentially misleading speculation? Even the comment about innovation is questionable because the type of replication we mostly envisage in marketing is
‘differentiated’ – a result isn’t tested in exactly the same conditions as before, but is examined under slightly different conditions, and this requires the researcher to be innovative and imaginative (Uncles & Kwok 2011).

**What can editors do?**

The news isn’t all bad. Publication processes can be turned to advantage. Editors help by sponsoring replication special issues (such as those published by *Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Journal of Advertising Research* and the *Australasian Marketing Journal*) or by making an ongoing commitment to a re-enquiries section or Research Notes where replications can be published succinctly (which deals with any concerns about the contribution-to-length ratio). Referees can assist too, by expecting more than one experiment from experimental studies, by looking for results from multiple datasets and by concerning themselves with the robustness of results. To formalise this it may be necessary to modify review criteria (e.g. with the inclusion of ‘replicated’ and ‘replicable’ criteria) and change reviewer behaviour (e.g. by de-listing reviewers who disparage replications).

**What should authors do?**

Authors can assist by building replication into their own work. In the initial study, they can document procedures for exact/close replication, use multiple datasets for close/differentiated replication, explain and justify the slightly different conditions under which their results are examined, summarise the robust results but also describe the scope and boundary conditions. By providing appendices and websites for extra details, replications need not take up too much journal space. In follow-up studies, authors can be brief (‘the result holds again’) and interesting (‘but the result doesn’t hold under conditions XYZ’). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that in 60% of replications findings conflict with those from the original study (Armstrong 2010) – that strikes me as interesting and newsworthy!

Authors are also in a good position to encourage and facilitate replication by others. They can teach the importance of replication to research students and have them undertake replications as part of their hands-on training. Specifically, it is helpful to make datasets available, provide copies of survey instruments, and respond to enquiries when other researchers wish to replicate and extend an earlier study.

**Final word**

I can think of no better way to describe the importance of replications than to quote Collins (1985): ‘replication is the Supreme Court of the scientific system’ – it is about weighing up the body of evidence to reach an informed and considered judgement.

**References**


**Mark Uncles**
Deputy Dean (Faculty) & Professor of Marketing, *Australian School of Business, University of New South Wales*