CHAPTER 11

Field Experiments in Marketing

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Abstract

In the last 20 years the marketing literature has seen a sharp increase in the number of papers reporting findings from field experiments. This can be partly explained by the ease of conducting field experiments in Internet settings. However, we have also seen an increase in field experiments in physical stores and other non-Internet settings. While many of these papers focus on pricing and advertising topics, there are also a broad range of other topics represented, including several papers that use field experiments to provide model-free validation of optimization models. We review the requirements to publish a field experiment paper in the marketing literature. We also identify topics that remain relatively understudied. In particular, there is a notable absence of papers studying channel relationships or business-to-business markets. Perhaps more surprisingly, there is also a lack of papers investigating the feasibility of using field experiments to optimize marketing decisions.

Keywords
Advertising; Field experiments; Marketing; Model validation; Pricing; Randomization; Sales force; Word of mouth

JEL Codes
D12; D4; M3

Marketing is a diverse field that draws from a rich array of disciplines and a broad assortment of empirical and theoretical methods. One of those disciplines is economics and one of the methods used to investigate economic questions is field experiments. The history of field experiments in the marketing literature is surprisingly long. Early examples include Curhan (1974) and Eskin and Baron (1977), who vary prices, newspaper advertising, and display variables in grocery stores. This chapter reviews the recent history of field experiments in marketing by identifying papers published in the last 20 years (between 1995 and 2014). We report how the number of papers published has increased during this period and evaluate different explanations for this increase. We then group the papers into five topics and review the papers by topic. This chapter concludes by reflecting on the design of field experiments used in marketing and proposing topics for future research.

1. PAPERS THAT REPORT FIELD EXPERIMENTS

We focus on the five leading marketing journals that publish papers with an economics focus. They include the Journal of Marketing (JM), the Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), Marketing Science (MktSci), Quantitative Marketing and Economics (QME), and the marketing department of Management Science (MngSci). To identify relevant papers, we first had a research assistant read every issue of the journals published between 1995 and 2014. We then supplemented this initial list with a Web of Science topic search.

1 The two major marketing journals not included in this list are Journal of Consumer Research (JCR) and the Journal of Consumer Psychology (JCP). Papers published in these two journals have a strongly psychological perspective.
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