

Reed, W. Robert; Röseler, Lukas; Saam, Marianne; Wallrich, Lukas

Working Paper — Published Version

No Room at the Inn? The Case for Specialized Replication Journals

WiSo-HH Working Paper Series, No. 88

Suggested Citation: Reed, W. Robert; Röseler, Lukas; Saam, Marianne; Wallrich, Lukas (2025) : No Room at the Inn? The Case for Specialized Replication Journals, WiSo-HH Working Paper Series, No. 88, Universität Hamburg, WiSo-Forschungslabor, Hamburg, <https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/forschung/forschungslabor/working-papers/pdfs-wp/wp88.pdf>

This Version is available at:
<http://hdl.handle.net/11108/665>

Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics
Düsternbrooker Weg 120
24105 Kiel (Germany)
E-Mail: info@zbw.eu
<https://www.zbw.eu/de/ueber-uns/profil-der-zbw/veroeffentlichungen-zbw>

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**W. Robert Reed
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W. Robert Reed, University of Canterbury, Christchurch
Lukas Röseler, Münster Center for Open Science, University of Münster
Marianne Saam, ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics and University of Hamburg
Lukas Wallrich, Birkbeck Business School, Birkbeck, University of London

ISSN 2196-8128

Font used: „TheSans UHH“ / LucasFonts

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No Room at the Inn?

The Case for Specialized Replication Journals

W. Robert Reed

University of Canterbury, Christchurch
ORCID 0000-0002-6459-8174

Lukas Röseler

Münster Center for Open Science, University of Münster
ORCID 0000-0002-6446-1901

Marianne Saam

ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics and University of Hamburg
ORCID 0000-0001-7055-0567 (corresponding author, e-mail: m.saam@zbw.eu)

Lukas Wallrich

Birkbeck Business School, Birkbeck, University of London
ORCID 0000-0003-2121-5177

Version: April 29, 2025

Abstract: *Replications are widely recognized as essential to the self-correcting nature of science. Interest in replication studies has grown markedly in both economics and psychology over the past decade. Nevertheless, they still represent a very small share of total publications. We discuss why most journals in economics and psychology do not regularly publish replications and which role replication journals can play in creating a home for replications that is sustainable, credible, and visible.*

Key words: replications; reproductions; economics; psychology; publishing

I. Introduction

Replications are widely recognized as essential to the self-correcting nature of science, in that they support the detection of statistical and procedural errors. In disciplines like economics and psychology, where empirical studies often produce conflicting findings, the importance of replication is particularly acute. Yet despite widespread agreement about its value, replication studies continue to face a serious problem: there are few clear pathways for publishing them. Traditional journals rarely welcome replication submissions published in their pages. This article documents the relative scarcity of published replication research and the limited receptiveness of most journals to replication submissions. While special issues like this make an important contribution to the visibility of replications, we see a complementary role for dedicated replication journals, in which submissions do not compete for space with standard papers.

II. The Pottery Barn Rule

In a widely cited 2012 blog post, psychologist Sanjay Srivastava proposed what he called the "Pottery Barn Rule" for scientific publishing: "Once a journal has published a study, it becomes responsible for publishing direct replications of that study" (Srivastava, 2012). According to Srivastava, such replications should be reviewed for technical merit only, and published in brief form as online supplements to the original article. This principle has been praised in meta-science circles for its clarity and fairness. It affirms the idea that journals should bear some responsibility for the accuracy of the findings they disseminate.

However, while the Pottery Barn Rule is frequently cited, it has been implemented by only a handful of journals. *Royal Society Open Science* is one of the few that explicitly applies this policy to its psychology section (with detailed guidelines for authors, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/rsos/replication-studies>, accessed April 29, 2025). Most journals have avoided adopting it. The reluctance to adopt such policies is rooted in both practical and structural concerns: replication studies are widely perceived to generate fewer citations than original research (Ankel-Peters et al., 2023), demand additional editorial resources, and potentially disrupt established narratives surrounding high-profile findings. Despite recent evidence that the assumption about lower citation impact may be unfounded (Coupé et al., 2025), the Pottery Barn Rule

remains an aspirational ideal rather than a guiding principle in editorial policy. Many existing replications likely remain informal as parts of published papers that are inspired by previous research or as unpublished preliminary work or graduate course work (Hamermesh, 2017). If the journals that publish the original research are not willing to publish their replications, where then can replications go?

III. Replications Are Booming, Right?

It would seem that finding a place for replications is no longer the problem it once was. Interest in replication studies has grown markedly in both economics and psychology over the past decade, reflecting a broader movement toward transparency and robustness in empirical research. In psychology, this shift was catalyzed by high-profile replication failures and formalized through initiatives like the Open Science Collaboration (2015) and the Many Labs projects (starting with Klein et al., 2014). These efforts demonstrated that many published findings could not be reproduced, prompting major journals to adopt policies supporting replications, preregistration, and open data. Journals such as *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, and *Social Psychology* now regularly publish Registered Reports and replication studies. Psychology has thus started to institutionalize replication as a core scientific practice.

Economics, while slower to reform, has also seen a notable interest in replication activity. There has been increased emphasis on data transparency, with many journals now requiring authors to make their data and code publicly available (Vlaeminck, 2021). An early initiative promoting reproducibility checks and meta-studies in economics was the Berkeley Initiative for Transparency in Social Sciences established in 2012. A pivotal development came in 2018 when the American Economic Association (AEA) appointed its first Data Editor, a position tasked with enforcing data availability and reproducibility standards across all AEA journals. For the first time, compliance with transparency policies was systematically monitored at scale. The Data Editor's office conducts reproducibility checks on accepted papers, ensuring that posted code and data can reproduce the reported results prior to publication (Vilhuber, 2020). This initiative has not only improved the reliability of published research but also lowered barriers for replication by making clean, well-documented replication files accessible to other researchers.

In 2021, Abel Brodeur of the University of Ottawa founded the Institute for Replication (I4R). The organization introduced a “replication games” model—collaborative events in which teams work to reanalyze published studies within a limited timeframe. In addition, I4R launched a working paper series to disseminate replication findings; as of 2025, this series includes 192 papers (website: https://i4replication.org/discussion_paper.html, accessed April 19, 2024). The initiative has contributed to increased replication activity in behavioral science, economics and finance as well as political science. With greater emphasis on the importance of replication, one would expect to see replications appearing more frequently in peer-reviewed journals.

IV. Replication Studies in Journals: Still Hard to Find

Historically, the rate of replication publication has been strikingly low. In economics, Mueller-Langer et al. (2019) found that replication studies made up only about 0.1% of publications in the top 50 journals in economics from 1974 to 2014. Makel et al. (2012) estimated that only 1.07% of articles in psychology were replications.

Since 2015, the blog site *The Replication Network (TRN)* has been tracking replication studies in economics using a consistent definition (*The Replication Network*, n.d.). It classifies a study as a replication if it: (1) has as its primary purpose the assessment of whether a finding from a previously published study is reliable; (2) aims to “do the same thing” as the original study; (3) is published as a standalone article with its own title and ISBN (or equivalent unique identifier); (4) it addresses one, or at most two, original studies; and (5) both the replication the corresponding original study were also published in a peer-reviewed publication.

The number of published replications in economics has increased substantially in recent years, from below 10 per year before 2000 to more than 20 per year after 2010, in some years even more than 50. Nonetheless they still represent a very small share of the total volume of empirical research. Even using a conservative estimate of 10,000 empirical articles published annually in economics journals, the proportion of replications remains exceptionally low (The search portal EconBiz lists more than 70,000 articles published in economics and management journals for 2023, source: www.econbiz.de).

In psychology, replication studies also remain rare. From 2010 to 2021, only 0.20% of articles published in 88 top journals were replications, here defined as tests of previously reported claims, using the original methods with new data (Clarke et al., 2024). While growing, this shows that the vast majority of claims still go unreplicated.

V. Where Do Replications Get Published in Economics and Psychology?

As noted above, there are few clear pathways for publishing replication studies. In economics, most journals either discourage replications (by requiring “original work” in their guidelines, which does not unequivocally include reproductions) or make no mention of them. According to the Center for Open Science (2025), only ten journals in economics have a minimal policy encouraging replication submissions; none operate with result-blind review or accept registered reports. Relatedly, the publication of replications is concentrated in relatively few journals. According to *The Replication Network*, four journals account for about a third of all economics replications since 1960: the *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, the *American Economic Review*, *Econ Journal Watch*, and the *Journal of Comments and Replications in Economics*. Ten journals account for approximately half of all replications in economics.

In psychology, the publishing environment for replication studies is somewhat more supportive, but opportunities remain limited and highly concentrated. A small number of journals—*Social Psychology* (Nosek & Lakens, 2014), *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (Simons, 2014), *Royal Society Open Science*, *Collabra: Psychology*, *Psychological Science* (Vazire, 2024), *Meta-Psychology* and *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science (AMPPS)*—have established reputations for actively supporting replication work, often through Registered Reports or special issues. Beyond these outlets, avenues for publishing replications are relatively scarce. Clarke et al. (2024) found that 54 out of 88 top-ranking psychology journals published no direct replications between 2010 and 2021, with six journals publishing nearly 60% of all replications.

VI. Aren't Working Papers and Preprints Good Enough?

While journal space for replication studies remains limited, many replication efforts are disseminated as working papers or preprints. In addition to the discussion paper series

of I4R, studies also appear on preprint servers, even when they do not ultimately find a home in peer-reviewed economics journals.

So, is it necessary for replications to be published in journals? There are at least three reasons to answer in the affirmative. Firstly, publication increases visibility and impact. Many researchers remain unaware of replications that are not prominently published. Journal publication provides indexing and promotion opportunities lacking for preprints. The evidence shows that publishing a study in a peer-reviewed journal dramatically increases its citation impact relative to leaving it as a working paper. In economics, a study of 28,000 papers showed that getting the “stamp of approval” of journal publication roughly doubles the yearly citations of a paper, compared to similar work that never passes beyond the working paper stage (Wohlrabe & Bürgi, 2021). When replications remain in working paper form, they are thus far less likely to be discovered, cited or integrated into the scientific discourse. Related to this, researchers need to publish in academic journals and receive citations in order to progress their careers (Bakker et al., 2012). If those opportunities are limited, the incentives to conduct replication research are diminished, strongly signaling that replication work is less valued than original research. Finally, journal publication comes with peer review and quality assurance mostly absent from working papers. Publication can make replications both more trustworthy and more trusted, ensuring that they can more meaningfully advance science.

VII. The Need for Specialized Replication Journals

Given the structural barriers facing replication in traditional journals, specialized replication journals offer a promising solution. Journals like the *Journal of Comments and Replications in Economics* (JCRE that is co-edited by two authors of this paper, RR and MS) and *Replication Research* (R2 that will also be co-edited by two authors of this paper, LR and LW) are designed specifically to publish replication work. They offer dedicated space, appropriate peer review standards, and often embrace open science practices like reproducibility checks and data sharing. These journals can help normalize replication as a routine part of scholarly publishing. They provide a venue where replication is not second-class work, but a central contribution (see also Kasy, 2021). They can also provide high-quality specialized peer review, focused on nuances particular to replications, such as nuanced assessments of replication successes and

failures and the similarity or closeness between a replication and an original study. They also allow researchers to cite and build upon replications in a formal and traceable way, increasing their integration into the literature. Finally, they create opportunities for diamond open access models—free to read, free to publish—that align with the values of transparency and equity in research.

In short, specialized replication journals can do what traditional journals have not: provide a sustainable, credible, and visible home for replication studies. As the volume of replication work grows, these journals are essential for ensuring that replications are not just conducted, but also reviewed, disseminated and recognized.

Author Contributions:

- RR, LR, MS, LW: Conceptualization, investigation, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing
- MS: Project administration

Acknowledgements:

We thank Tom Coupé, Paul von Hippel and Steven Verheyen for helpful discussions.

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