Journal of Marketing Analytics (2025) 13:1033–1034
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-025-00447-x

EDITORIAL

The significance of nothing: a call to discussion

Maria Petrescu[1] · **Anjala S. Krishen**[2]

Received: 22 October 2025 / Accepted: 22 October 2025 / Published online: 5 November 2025
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Limited 2025

The marginalization of null results in (business) research is not new; more than four decades ago, Rosenthal (1979) warned that journals are "filled with the 5% of studies that show Type I errors, while the file drawers back at the lab are filled with the 95% that show nonsignificant results." This "file drawer problem" has distorted the scientific record by creating inflated perceptions of effect sizes and overstating the generalizability of findings. In marketing, Hubbard and Armstrong (1992) documented this phenomenon empirically: among 692 articles published in Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, and Journal of Consumer Research (1974–1989), only 7.8% failed to reject the null hypothesis. Their findings exposed a systemic editorial and cultural bias that could not be explained by inadequate statistical power.

Such bias has consequences beyond academia. In analytics-driven industries, where predictive models and A/B tests increasingly inform resource allocation, selective reporting of "positive" outcomes can mislead decision-makers, fostering misplaced confidence in spurious relationships and over-optimistic ROI estimates. The result is not just publication bias, it is decision bias.

Recent experimental evidence confirms that the stigma persists. Chopra et al. (2023) demonstrate that even when design quality and statistical precision are held constant, studies with null results are rated as less publishable, of lower quality, and of lower importance by both PhD students and editors. The "null result penalty" they identify reveals a deep-seated heuristic equating statistical significance with scientific precision, a misunderstanding that perpetuates the publication of false positives while silencing rigorous, well-designed studies with null findings. Their study also highlights that the penalty is amplified when results are reported as p-values rather than standard errors, suggesting that even communication norms contribute to the undervaluing of null results.

Null results are not synonymous with "no effect"; they are evidence about the magnitude, boundary conditions, or even non-existence of effects. As Landis et al. (2014) argued, null results clarify theory, reduce research waste, and enhance practical decision-making when they reveal that simpler or cheaper options perform as well as more complex alternatives. In marketing analytics, where the emphasis often lies in marginal gains, null results can be especially informative: finding no difference in response to alternative creative formats or pricing algorithms is itself a strategic insight, pointing toward parsimony and cost efficiency.

Null findings also play a critical role in meta-analysis, replication, and model calibration. Without their inclusion, cumulative analyses overstate true effects and misinform theory. In fields like uplift modeling, causal inference, and segmentation, designing for "no meaningful effect" through equivalence or minimal-effect testing ensures that nulls speak to managerial irrelevance rather than statistical uncertainty (Knight 2003; Springer Nature 2025).

Collectively, the evidence on bias (Hubbard & Armstrong 1992; Rosenthal 1979), experimental estimates of null penalties (Chopra et al. 2023), empirically-driven norms (Golder et al. 2023), and editorial examples (Landis et al. 2014) make a compelling case for the necessity of more visible and methodologically rigorous null results in business analytics. Our call for a special issue on this topic aligns with a broader transformation in marketing scholarship toward what Golder et al. (2023) term the "empirics-first" paradigm. This approach prioritizes data-driven discovery grounded in real-world phenomena, allowing insight to precede and inform theory rather than merely confirm it.

In a field gradually dominated by big data, machine learning, and experimentation, empirics-first thinking recognizes that null results are not statistical failures but necessary

✉ Maria Petrescu
petrescm@erau.edu

Anjala S. Krishen
anjala.krishen@unlv.edu

[1] Worldwide College of Business, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, FL, USA

[2] Office of the Dean, Lee Business School, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, USA

waypoints in understanding complex systems. This special issue of the Journal of Marketing Analytics, The Significance of Nothing: Null Results in Business Research, challenges misconceptions and calls for a shift in the epistemic culture of marketing research, urging scholars to treat null findings not as failures of analysis but as essential building blocks in cumulative scientific progress.

The special issue could provide contributions in a few important areas:

1. Design for inference about no meaningful effect, through equivalence testing and power analysis targeting minimal detectable effects (Landis et al. 2014; Kane, 2024).
2. Pre-specification and transparency, by preregistering hypotheses, analysis plans, and decision rules to prevent post-hoc rationalization (Kane, 2024; Kozlov 2024).
3. Comprehensive reporting, by retaining nonsignificant coefficients, intervals, and diagnostics, ensuring that meta-analyses capture the full empirical surface (Landis et al. 2014).
4. Editorial innovation, through pre-results review models and rubrics that explicitly assess the informativeness of nulls (Landis et al. 2014).

References

Chopra, F., I. Haaland, C. Roth, and A. Stegmann. 2023. The null result penalty. *The Economic Journal* 134:193–219.

Golder, P. N., M. G. Dekimpe, J. T. An, et al. 2023. Learning from data: An empirics-first approach to relevant knowledge generation. *Journal of Marketing* 87:319–336. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221129200.

Hubbard, R., and J. S. Armstrong. 1992. Are null results becoming an endangered species in marketing? *Marketing Letters* 3:127–136. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00993992.

Kane, J. V. 2024. More than meets the ITT: A guide for anticipating and investigating nonsignificant results in survey experiments. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*. https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2024.1.

Knight, J. 2003. Null and void. *Nature* 422:554–555. https://doi.org/10.1038/422554a.

Kozlov, B. M. 2024. How to give null results the airtime they deserve. *Nature* 631:738–730.

Landis, R. S., L. R. James, C. E. Lance, et al. 2014. When is nothing something? Editorial for the null results special issue of Journal of Business and Psychology. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 29:163–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9347-8.

Rosenthal, R. 1979. The file drawer problem and tolerance for null results. *Psychological Bulletin* 86:638–641. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.86.3.638.

Springer Nature (2025) *The state of null results: Insights from 11,000 researchers on negative or inconclusive results* (white paper), Springer Nature, 2025. https://stories.springernature.com/the-state-of-null-results-white-paper/index.html

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Maria Petrescu is an Associate Professor of Marketing in the Worldwide College of Business, ERAU. She obtained her Ph.D. in Business Administration and Marketing from Florida Atlantic University and an MBA from Nova Southeastern University. She also has graduate studies in public management and European affairs from Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris, France. Her research interests and experience include business analytics, artificial intelligence in business, and digital communication deception. She has published articles in journals such as the Journal of Business Research, Industrial Marketing Management, Psychology & Marketing, Journal of Marketing Management, and the Journal of Product and Brand Management. She is also deputy editor of the Journal of Marketing Communications and co-editor of the Journal of Marketing Analytics.

Anjala S. Krishen (Ph.D., Virginia Tech, USA) is the Mel Larson Endowed Chair of Marketing, and Professor and Interim Dean for Lee Business School at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). She has a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Rice University, and a M.S. Marketing, MBA, and Ph.D. from Virginia Tech. She held management positions for 13 years before pursuing a doctorate. To date, she has published interdisciplinary research in journals including Industrial Marketing Management, Psychology & MarketingJournal of Services MarketingEuropean Journal of Marketing, and Journal of Marketing Education.