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Introduction to field experiments in economics with applications to the economics of charity

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Abstract This special issue highlights an empirical approach that has increasingly grown in prominence in the last decade—field experiments. While field experiments can be used quite generally in economics—to test theories’ predictions, to measure key parameters, and to provide insights into the generalizability of empirical results—this special issue focuses on using field experiments to explore questions within the economics of charity. The issue contains six distinct field experimental studies that investigate various aspects associated with the economics of charitable giving. The issue also includes a fitting tribute to one of the earliest experimenters to depart from traditional lab methods, Peter Bohm, who curiously has not received deep credit or broad acclaim. Hopefully this issue will begin to rectify this oversight.

Keywords Field experiment · Economics of charity

JEL Classification C93 · H1

1 Introduction

The power of the experimental approach in scientific inquiry can be traced to the 16th century (Yates 1975). Since the Renaissance, fundamental advances making use of the experimental method in the physical and biological sciences have been fast and furious (see List and Riley 2007, for some examples). Within economics, the usage of lab experiments has steadily increased since the pioneers began to explore important economic phenomena in the lab more than a half century ago.

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