

Review protocol: Link Functions and Generalized Linear Models in Interaction Testing within Psychological Research

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1. Objectives and rationale

The planned review will analyze a sample of recently published psychological research articles targeting a selection of reputable journals across diverse subfields. The primary objective is to describe and quantify how frequently interaction effects are tested in empirical research articles, how often these articles explicitly set non-identity link functions (e.g., by appropriately specifying generalized linear models), and how frequently the use of an identity link function may be problematic, given the type of variables analyzed. Additionally, we aim to determine how often statistically significant interaction effects are detected, particularly when identity link functions are employed. Finally, we aim to document the most commonly analyzed response variables in studies testing interactions (e.g., accuracies, sum scores).

The rationale for this review is that, in our experience, psychology researchers frequently test interaction effects to identify moderators of known main effects, but also because it is often just a standard routine to test interactions after testing main effects. Typically, classical linear models or equivalent methods (e.g., ANOVA) are employed. By default, these methods use identity link functions, despite many psychological response variables being inherently non-normally distributed due to natural bounds (e.g., accuracies, response times, sum or average scores, error counts, proportions). Moreover, psychometric variables have been systematically shown to deviate from normal distributions (Micceri 1989). Failing to employ appropriate link functions can lead to the detection of pseudo-interactions, as incorrect link functions distort interval scales, transforming equal intervals into unequal ones and *vice versa*. Consequently, using inappropriate link functions places researchers at risk of identifying statistically significant interactions that do not reflect the true data-generating processes.

We believe it is important to quantify how often this methodological oversight occurs within psychological research to raise awareness and caution in the field. The current review does not

aim for an exhaustive systematic review covering the entire psychological literature. Rather, the goal is to provide a general overview and preliminary estimates regarding the prevalence and magnitude of this potentially widespread issue. As a subsequent step after the review, we plan to conduct simulation studies to illustrate how neglecting appropriate link functions when testing interactions can frequently lead to spurious findings in realistic research scenarios.

2. Methods

2.1 Sample

A sample of 200 recently published articles will be analyzed, drawn from five reputable journals representing diverse research areas within psychology. Specifically, we will select one journal from each of the following categories: general psychology, experimental psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, and developmental psychology. From each journal, 40 articles will be randomly sampled, resulting in a total sample of 200 articles.

The chosen sample size ($N = 200$) and the level of detail in data coding reflect considerations of feasibility and available resources. Given that our primary objective is to obtain a general estimate of how frequently link functions are incorrectly used in testing interactions, we intentionally selected articles only from high-impact journals, ensuring a sufficient representation to approximate the magnitude of the issue. Following a strategy similar to that adopted by Hardwicke et al. (2024), our sample size determination was guided by considerations of precision. For binomial responses (e.g., whether an article reports at least one statistically significant interaction), the estimated proportion is most variable at 50%. With a sample size of $N = 200$, the corresponding 95% uncertainty bound is approximately $\pm 6.9\%$ (computed using standard methods such as the Wilson score interval, probit and logit transformations, or likelihood-ratio test-based intervals.)

2.1.1 Sources and Search strategy

Articles will be sampled from five journals, each corresponding to the categories previously listed. Journals are selected based on a discretionary combination of criteria: high Impact Factor (IF, based on the latest available Clarivate Journal Citation Reports from 2023; all selected journals rank within the first quartile in 2023), not primarily publishing review articles, not excessively specialized in a narrow empirical subfield, and a strong general reputation in their respective fields, as jointly evaluated by the coauthors of this review.

The selected journals are:

- *Psychological Science* (for general psychology);

- *Journal of Experimental Psychology-General* (for experimental psychology);
- *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (for social psychology);
- *Developmental Science* (for developmental psychology);
- *Psychological Medicine* (for clinical psychology).

Article records will be retrieved from Elsevier’s Scopus database, including all articles published in each of these journals in 2024. For each journal, a separate list of articles will be created. Within each list, exactly 40 eligible articles will be randomly selected for inclusion in the meta-analysis. To ensure randomization, R will be used: the `sample()` function will be applied separately to each journal’s full list, preceded by `set.seed(0)` for reproducibility. Articles will then be screened in order until 40 eligible articles per journal are included. If a journal has fewer than 40 eligible articles in 2024, the selection will be extended to 2023 using the same criteria.

2.1.2 Eligibility Criteria

The review will include only empirical articles presenting original psychological research. Articles will be excluded if they:

- Are reviews or meta-analyses;
- Are editorials, commentaries, opinion papers, or theoretical articles without empirical data;
- Exclusively employ qualitative research methods;
- Consist solely of replication studies;
- Focus primarily on the validation of psychometric instruments.

Replication studies and validation studies are excluded because the former are typically constrained to replicate existing methods from the original studies, while the latter are often focused on psychometric properties rather than hypothesis testing.

2.2 Coding procedure

Table 1 reports the variables that will be coded for each included study. Each study will be independently coded by two researchers. Any discrepancies will be resolved through discussion or, if necessary, consultation with the other two researcher.

Table 1: Data Dictionary

Variable Name	Description	Value Type
<i>Authors</i>	Full list of authors’ names.	Text
<i>Title</i>	Title of the article.	Text

Variable Name	Description	Value Type
<i>Year</i>	Year of publication.	Integer
<i>Journal</i>	Name of the journal in which the article was published.	Text
<i>Tests_interactions</i>	Whether the article tests at least one interaction term in a model or using an ANOVA.	Boolean
<i>Uses_non_identity_link_function</i>	Whether at least one of the tested interaction is presumably analyzed with a non-identity link function (e.g., because a generalized linear model was used).	Boolean
<i>Explicit_link_function</i>	Whether the link function is explicitly defined for at least one statistical model in the article (that is, in this case just indicating which generalized linear model or family was used is not enough; we code whether at least one link function is explicitly declared).	Boolean
<i>Incorrect_identity_link_function</i>	Whether at least one tested interaction is analyzed using an identity link function when another, non-identity link function would be more appropriate.	Boolean
<i>Finds_significant_interactions</i>	Whether at least one interaction (where the link function was incorrectly specified as identity) yields a statistically significant result, or is considered and discussed in an analogous way if non-frequentist (e.g., Bayesian) analyses were carried out.	Boolean

Variable Name	Description	Value Type
<i>Response_variable_types</i>	A list of of the types of response variables on which interactions are tested. Possible values include: Sum score, Accuracy, Error count, Response times, Ordinal/Likert, This list may be expanded.	Category

2.3 Data analysis

The analysis will primarily focus on descriptive statistics. No hypothesis testing will be conducted, but 95% confidence intervals (CIs) will be computed for the estimated proportions of the Boolean variables. For each coded variable listed in Table 1, excluding *Authors*, *Title*, *Year*, and *Journal* (as they are not relevant to the analysis—summary statistics) the following will be computed:

- Boolean variables: Proportions will be calculated along with 95% CIs, using the Wilson score interval to estimate uncertainty Proportions will also be reported separately for each journal, but without CIs.
- *Response_variable_types*: The proportion of studies testing interactions on each type of response variable will be computed.

All analyses will be conducted in R, and results will be presented in summary tables. Graphical representations may also be included to facilitate interpretation.

References

- Hardwicke, Tom E, Robert T Thibault, Beth Clarke, Nicholas Moodie, Sophia Crüwell, Sarah R Schiavone, Sarah A Handcock, et al. 2024. “Prevalence of Transparent Research Practices in Psychology: A Cross-Sectional Study of Empirical Articles Published in 2022.” *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* 7 (4): 25152459241283477.
- Micceri, Theodore. 1989. “The Unicorn, the Normal Curve, and Other Improbable Creatures.” *Psychological Bulletin* 105 (1): 156.