

False (and Missed) Discoveries in Financial Economics

CAMPBELL R. HARVEY , YAN LIU

First published: 19 May 2020

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jofi.12951>

Citations: 69

ABSTRACT

Multiple testing plagues many important questions in finance such as fund and factor selection. We propose a new way to calibrate both Type I and Type II errors. Next, using a double-bootstrap method, we establish a t -statistic hurdle that is associated with a specific false discovery rate (e.g., 5%). We also establish a hurdle that is associated with a certain acceptable ratio of misses to false discoveries (Type II error scaled by Type I error), which effectively allows for differential costs of the two types of mistakes. Evaluating current methods, we find that they lack power to detect outperforming managers.

Supporting Information

Filename	Description
jofi12951-sup-0001-InternetAppendix.pdf 325.6 KB	Appendix S1: Internet Appendix.
jofi12951-sup-0002-ReplicationCode.zip 16.1 KB	Replication code.

Please note: The publisher is not responsible for the content or functionality of any supporting information supplied by the authors. Any queries (other than missing content) should be directed to the corresponding author for the article.

REFERENCES

Andrikogiannopoulou, Angie, and Filippou Papakonstantinou, 2016, Estimating mutual fund skill: A new approach, Working paper, Swiss Finance Institute.

 | [Google Scholar](#) |

Andrikogiannopoulou, Angie, and Filippou Papakonstantinou, 2019, Reassessing false discoveries in mutual fund performance: Skill, luck, or lack of power? *Journal of Finance* 74, 2667–2688.

 | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Avramov, Doron, Robert Kosowski, Narayan Y. Naik, and Melvyn Teo, 2011, Hedge funds, managerial skill, and macroeconomic variables, *Journal of Financial Economics* **99**, 672–692.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Ayadi, Mohamed A., and Lawrence Kryzanowski, 2011, Fixed-income fund performance: Role of luck and ability in tail membership, *Journal of Empirical Finance* **18**, 379–392.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Bajgrowicz, Pierre, and Olivier Scaillet, 2012, Technical trading revisited: False discoveries, persistence tests, and transaction costs, *Journal of Financial Economics* **106**, 473–491.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Barras, Laurent, 2019, A large-scale approach for evaluating asset pricing models, *Journal of Financial Economics* **134**, 549–569.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Barras, Laurent, Olivier Scaillet, and Russ Wermers, 2010, False discoveries in mutual fund performance: Measuring luck in estimated alphas, *Journal of Finance* **65**, 179–216.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Barras, Laurent, Olivier Scaillet, and Russ Wermers, 2018, Reassessing false discoveries in mutual fund performance: Skill, luck, or lack of power? A reply. Working paper, McGill University.

[Google Scholar](#)

Beneish, Messod D., 1997, Detecting GAAP violation: Implications for assessing earnings management among firms with extreme financial performance, *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy, Fall 1997*, 271–309.

[Google Scholar](#)

Beneish, Messod D., 1999, The detection of earnings manipulation, *Financial Analysts' Journal* **55**, 24–36.

[Google Scholar](#)

Benjamini, Yoav, and Yosef Hochberg, 1995, Controlling for the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B* **57**, 289–300.

[Google Scholar](#)

Benjamini, Yoav, and Daniel Yekutieli, 2001, The control of the false discovery rate in multiple testing under dependency, *Annals of Statistics* **29**, 1165–1188.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Berk, Jonathan B., and Richard C. Green, 2004, Mutual fund flows and performance in rational markets, *Journal of Political Economy* 112, 1269–1295.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Blake, David, Alberto Rossi, Allan Timmermann, Ian Tonks, and Russ Wermers, 2013, Decentralized investment management: Evidence from the pension fund industry, *Journal of Finance* 68, 1133–1178.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Brown, S. J., W. Goetzmann, R. G. Ibbotson, and S. A. Ross, 1992, Survivorship bias in performance studies, *Review of Financial Studies* 5, 553–580.

[CAS](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Busse, Jeffrey A., Amit Goyal, and Sunil Wahal, 2014, Investing in a global world, *Review of Finance* 18, 561–590.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Carhart, Mark M., 1997, On persistence in mutual fund performance, *Journal of Finance* 52, 57–82.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Carhart, M.M., J.N. Carpenter, A.W. Lynch, and D.K. Musto, 2002, Mutual fund survivorship, *Review of Financial Studies* 15, 1439–1463.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Cao, Charles, Yong Chen, Bing Liang, and Andrew W. Lo, 2013, Can hedge funds time market liquidity? *Journal of Financial Economics* 109, 493–516.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Chen, Joseph, Harrison Hong, Ming Huang, and Jeffrey D. Kubik, 2004, Does fund size erode mutual fund performance? The role of liquidity and organization, *American Economic Review* 94, 1276–1302.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Chen, Yong, and Bing Liang, 2007, Do market timing hedge funds time the market? *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis* 42, 827–856.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Chordia, Tarun, Amit Goyal, and Alessio Saretto, 2020, Anomalies and false rejections, *Review of Financial Studies* 33, 2134–2179.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

D'Agostino, Antonello, Kieran McQuinn, and Karl Whelan, 2012, Are some forecasters really better than others? *Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking* **44**, 715–732.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

De Long, J. Bradford, and Kevin Lang, 1992, Are all economic hypotheses false? *Journal of Political Economy* **100**, 1257–1272.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

DeGroot, Morris, 1975, *Probability and Statistics* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA).

[Google Scholar](#)

DeGroot, Morris, and Mark J. Schervish, 2011, *Probability and Statistics*, 4th edition (Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, UK)

[Google Scholar](#)

Diane Del Guercio,, and Paula A. Tkac, 2008, Star power: The effect of Morningstar ratings on mutual fund flow, *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis* **43**, 907–936.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Elton, Edwin J., Martin J. Gruber, and Christopher R. Blake, 1996, Survivor bias and mutual fund performance, *Review of Financial Studies* **9**, 1097–1120.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Elton, Edwin J., Martin J. Gruber, and Christopher R. Blake, 2001, A first look at the accuracy of the CRSP mutual fund database and a comparison of the CRSP and Morningstar mutual fund database, *Journal of Finance* **56**, 2415–2430.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Fama, Eugene F., and Kenneth R. French, 1993, Common risk factors in the returns on stocks and bonds, *Journal of Financial Economics* **33**, 3–56.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Fama, Eugene F., and Kenneth R. French, 2010, Luck versus skill in the cross-section of mutual fund returns, *Journal of Finance* **65**, 1915–1947.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Fawcett, T., 2006, An introduction to ROC analysis, *Pattern Recognition Letters* 27, 861–874.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Person, Wayne, and Yong Chen, 2017, Working paper, University of Southern California.

[Google Scholar](#) |

Genovese, Christopher, and Larry Wasserman, 2002, Operating characteristics and extensions of the false discovery rate procedure, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B* 64, 499–517.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Giglio, Stefano, Yuan Liao, and Dacheng Xiu, 2018, Thousands of alpha tests, Working paper, University of Chicago.

[Google Scholar](#) |

Hastie, T., Robert Tibshirani, and Jerome Friedman, 2009, *The Elements of Statistical Learning: Data Mining, Inference, and Prediction* (Springer Science & Business Media) New York, New York.

[Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., 2017, Presidential address: The scientific outlook in financial economics, *Journal of Finance* 72, 1399–1440.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., and Yan Liu, 2013, Multiple testing in economics, Working paper, Duke University.

[Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., Yan Liu, and Heqing Zhu, 2016, ... and the cross-section of expected returns, *Review of Financial Studies* 29, 5–72.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., and Yan Liu, 2017, Luck vs. skill and factor selection, in John Cochrane and Tobias J. Moskowitz, eds.: *The Fama Portfolio* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL).

[Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., and Yan Liu, 2018, Detecting repeatable performance, *Review of Financial Studies* 31, 2499–2552.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) |

Harvey, Campbell R., and Yan Liu, 2019, Lucky factors, Working paper, Duke University.

[Google Scholar](#)

Harvey, Campbell R., and Yan Liu, 2020, Revisiting luck vs. skill in mutual fund evaluation, Working paper, Duke University.

[Google Scholar](#)

Harvey, Campbell R., Yan Liu, Nicholas G. Polson, and Jianeng Xu, 2019, Re-evaluating semi-strong market efficiency, Working paper, Duke University.

[Google Scholar](#)

Hau, Harald, and Sandy Lai, 2013, Real effects of stock underpricing, *Journal of Financial Economics* **108**, 392–408.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Horowitz, Joel L., 2001, *The Bootstrap, Handbook of Econometrics* 5 (Elsevier, Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

[Google Scholar](#)

Hou, Kewei, Chen Xue, and Lu Zhang, 2020, Replicating anomalies, *Review of Financial Studies* **33**, 2019–2133.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Ioannidis, John P. A., 2005, Why most published research findings are false? *PLoS Medicine* **2**, e124.

[PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Ioannidis, John P. A., and Chris H. Doucouliagos, 2013, What's to know about the credibility of empirical economics, *Journal of Economic Surveys* **27**, 997–1004.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Ioannidis, John P. A., Tom D. Stanley, and Hristos Doucouliagos, 2017, The power of bias in economics research, *Economic Journal* **127**, 236–265.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Jiang, George J., Tong Yao, and Tong Yu, 2007, Do mutual funds time the market? Evidence from portfolio holdings, *Journal of Financial Economics* **86**, 724–758.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Jones, Christopher S. and Jay Shanken, 2005, Mutual fund performance with learning across funds, *Journal of Financial Economics* **78**, 507–552.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Kandel, Shmuel, and Robert F. Stambaugh, 1996, On the predictability of stock returns: An asset-allocation perspective, *Journal of Finance* **51**, 385–424.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Kosowski, Robert, Allan Timmermann, Russ Wermers, and Hal White, 2006, Can mutual fund “stars” really pick stocks? New evidence from a bootstrap analysis, *Journal of Finance* **61**, 2551–2595.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Leamer, Edward E., 1983, Let's take the con out of econometrics, *American Economic Review* **73**, 31–43.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Linnainmaa, Juhani T., 2013, Reverse survivorship bias, *Journal of Finance* **68**, 789–813.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Nanda, Vikram, Z. Jay Wang, and Lu Zheng, 2004, Family values and the star phenomenon: Strategies of mutual fund families, *Review of Financial Studies* **17**, 667–698.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Romano, Joseph P., Azeem M. Shaikh, and Michael Wolf, 2008, Control of the false discovery rate under dependence using the bootstrap and subsampling, *TEST* **17**, 417–442.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Romano, Joseph P., and Michael Wolf, 2005, Stepwise multiple testing as formalized data snooping, *Econometrica* **73**, 1237–1282.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Sarkar, Sanat K., 2006, False discovery and false nondiscovery rates in single-step multiple testing procedures, *Annals of Statistics* **34**, 394–415.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Sastry, Ravi, 2013, The cross-section of investing skill, Working paper, University of Melbourne.

[Google Scholar](#)

Scott, James G., and James O. Berger, 2006, An exploration of aspects of Bayesian multiple testing, *Journal of Statistical Planning and Inference* **136**, 2144–2162.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Storey, John D., 2002, A direct approach to false discovery rates, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B* **64**, 479–498.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Storey, John D., 2003, The positive false discovery rate: A Bayesian interpretation and the q-value, *Annals of Statistics* **31**, 2013–2035.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Yan, Xuemin, and Lingling Zheng, 2017, Fundamental analysis and the cross-section of stocks returns: A data-mining approach, *Review of Financial Studies* **30**, 1382–1423.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

Ziliak, Stephen T., and Deirdre N. McCloskey, 2004, Size matters: The standard error of regressions in the *American Economic Review* **33**, 527–546.

[Google Scholar](#)

Citing Literature



[Download PDF](#)

ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About Cookies](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Wiley Research DE&I Statement and Publishing Policies](#)

[Developing World Access](#)

HELP & SUPPORT

[Contact Us](#)

[Training and Support](#)

DMCA & Reporting Piracy

OPPORTUNITIES

Subscription Agents
Advertisers & Corporate Partners

CONNECT WITH WILEY

The Wiley Network
Wiley Press Room

Copyright © 1999-2025 John Wiley & Sons, Inc or related companies. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial intelligence technologies or similar technologies.

WILEY