

Abstract

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In the first chapter, we study experimentally whether public beliefs about ethnic discrimination, an emotionally loaded issue, are shifted more by information from experts or from ordinary people. We also examine whether people are inclined to choose the most influential sources. For this purpose, we combine, in a novel design, the random provision of information from different sources with endogenous information acquisition from the same sources. We find that individuals update their beliefs most in response to information from experts, namely researchers studying ethnic minorities and human resource managers. Exogenous adjustments in beliefs do not induce changes in attitudes to ethnic minorities. Consistent with the strength of belief updating, more individuals choose information from experts over information from ordinary people. This result suggests that, in the aggregate, people behave rationally as they favor a source that is perceived to be relatively accurate. The findings have implications for information-dissemination policies.

In the second chapter, we shift the focus from the general public to racial minorities and study the effects of information provision on minorities' beliefs and behavior. There is a long-standing concern that expected discrimination discourages minorities from making efforts to succeed. Effort withdrawal could contribute to confirming negative stereotypes about minorities' productivity and enduring disparities. This chapter extends the findings of correlational research by exogenously manipulating individuals' beliefs about discrimination against their group and exploring a causal link between perceived discrimination and individuals' labor market behavior. For this purpose, we conduct an online experiment in the US with a diverse sample of 2,000 African Americans. We randomly assign individuals to two groups and inform one group about the frequency of discrimination against African Americans in a previous survey. To study the information effects on effort, we subsequently measure participants' results on a math task. We document that most individuals initially overestimate discrimination against African Americans. The overestimation decreases strongly and significantly as a result of information provision. At the same time, treated individuals, males in particular, attempt and correctly solve fewer math problems than untreated individuals. Hence, our findings do not support the common concern that minorities' inflated expectations about discrimination induce them to underperform.

In the third chapter (joint work with Sona Badalyan and Rastislav Reháč), we focus on communication among hiring team members and document the existence of discrimination in the disclosure of information about candidates. In particular, we conduct an online experiment with a nationally representative sample of Czech individuals who act as human resource assistants and hiring managers in our online labor market. The main novel feature of our experiment is the monitoring of information flow between human resource assistants and hiring managers. We exogenously manipulate candidates' names to explore the causal effects of their gender on information that assistants select for managers. Our findings reveal that assistants disclose more information about family and less information about work for female candidates than for male candidates. An in-depth analysis of information disclosed suggests that gender stereotypes play an important role in this disclosure discrimination.