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Evaluation of

"Essays on Information and Discrimination"

Dissertation by Darya Korlyakova

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Overall Assessment

In her dissertation, Darya Korlyakova explores the subjects of information and discrimination in three stand-alone papers. Leveraging innovative online experiments conducted with representative populations from the Czech Republic (Chapters 1 and 3) and the U.S. (Chapter 2), each paper addresses a critical gap in current research using modern experimental methodologies. The quality of each paper stands out, each bearing potential for publication in very good international journals. Thus, in my evaluation, the dissertation fulfills the criteria for the conferral of a PhD degree. It meets both the formal and content requirements for a doctoral thesis, and I endorse it for defense. The following are some recommendations and discussion points that could enhance the dissertation further.

General Comments

Critical discussion of representativeness:

The candidate deserves recognition for executing the experiments on representative samples, a design choice that offers novel insights into phenomena related to information and discrimination within the general population. However, it would be beneficial to provide additional information about the recruitment process for these samples in each chapter. Presumably, these are quota-representative samples from online access panels, which introduces the methodological question of their representativeness. Survey methodology purists might be skeptical about such samples as not truly representative due to their self-selected nature. While I don't subscribe to this extreme view, I encourage the candidate to present evidence concerning the degree to which quota-representative samples approximate the "gold standard" of probability-based samples.

Transferability of results to other countries:

Another salient point pertains to the transferability of results from the Czech Republic (Chapters 1 and 3) and the U.S. to other countries. An international comparison involving more countries on key factors that might influence the study outcomes (e.g., prevalence of discrimination or representation of different minority groups) would be illuminating to assess to what extent the chapters' results are or aren't applicable to other countries.

Chapter-specific Comments

Chapter 1

Incentives:

Participants were offered a 22-cent bonus for correct beliefs. An alternative approach (often used in papers using online surveys) is to offer a larger amount via probabilistic payment with the same budget. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both methods according to existing literature, and does the candidate expect that the choice of payment scheme significantly influence outcomes?

Domain-specificity of results:

The paper compellingly demonstrates that people's beliefs are significantly influenced by expert opinions. The evidence is rooted in the context of racial discrimination, but it would be illuminating to discuss to what extent is this reliance on expert opinion domain-specific. Would expert opinions carry similar weight in contexts such as climate change or COVID-19 vaccinations?

Chapter 2:

Connection between real effort task and payment:

The relationship between the real effort task and the payment is somewhat unclear. Specifically, it's not apparent whether solving more math problems directly benefits the participant in terms of increased compensation. It might be beneficial to clarify whether or not subjects should expect to receive a higher amount if she solves more math problems, given that the ultimate allocation decision is taken by a third-party dictator (who does not benefit from the solved problems).

Chapter 3

Relevance of representative sample:

In this experiment, information-disclosing assistants are sourced from a representative sample. My principal concern lies in the fact that a representative sample may not necessarily mirror the demographic that usually carries out such tasks, which could limit the generalizability of the results. Is it a concern that participants may lack real-life familiarity with the task, thereby complicating the extrapolation of their decisions to the actual labor market?