KARTHIK SRINIVASAN

CONTACT INFORMATION

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EDUCATION

University of Chicago, Booth School of Business *Expected 06/2024*
Ph.D., Economics

Northwestern University *06/2016*
B.A., Economics, Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Primary: Behavioral Economics, Labor Economics
Secondary: Political Economy, Applied Theory
Methods: Experimental Economics, Machine Learning for Causal Inference

REFERENCES

Devin Pope *(Co-Chair)*
Rothmeier Professor of Behavioral Science and Economics
University of Chicago
Booth School of Business
Devin.Pope@chicagobooth.edu

Alexander Frankel *(Co-Chair)*
Professor of Economics
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Eric Budish
McDermott Professor of Economics
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Eric Zwick
Associate Professor of Finance
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WORKING PAPERS

Paying Attention (Job Market Paper)

· Humans are social animals. Is the desire for attention from other people a quantitatively important non-monetary incentive? I consider this question in the context of social media, where platforms like TikTok and Reddit successfully attract a large volume of user-generated content without offering financial incentives to most users. Using data on two billion Reddit posts, I estimate the elasticity of content production with respect to attention, as measured by the number of comments and upvotes that a post receives. I isolate plausibly exogenous variation in attention by studying posts that go viral. After going viral, producers create 183% more posts for a month. I replicate this result on a sample of TikTok producers: virality causes a 190% increase in production. I complement these reduced form estimates with a large-scale, preregistered field experiment on Reddit. I randomly allocate attention by adding three or six comments to posts. I use generative AI to produce responsive comments in real time, and distribute these comments via a network of bots. Adding three comments causes a

15% increase in production, but I find a null effect for six comments. This difference is explained by attention quality: comments in the six comment treatment arm are more likely to be downvoted, and downvoted comments decrease production. Taken together, the empirical findings suggest that the attention labor supply curve is concave. Producers value initial units of attention highly, but the marginal value of attention rapidly diminishes. Motivated by this fact, I propose a model of a social media platform which manages a two-sided market composed of content producers and consumers. The key trade-off is that consumers dislike low-quality content, but including low-quality content provides attention to producers, which boosts the supply of high-quality content in equilibrium. If the attention labor supply curve is sufficiently concave, then the platform includes some low-quality content, though a social planner would include strictly more. This wedge provides a new rationale for the regulation of social media platforms.

Presentations: Booth Student Research in Economics Seminar (2023), Behavioral Economics Working Group (2023)

Judicial Scarring [pdf]

· Can making decisions in extreme cases bias subsequent decisions? I study this question in a high-stakes field setting: felony sentencing. I estimate the effect of sentencing a first-degree murder on the length of sentences issued to subsequent defendants. I use data on the universe of felony sentencing decisions in Cook County to estimate a difference-in-differences design comparing judges in the same courthouse who have and have not recently sentenced a first-degree murder. Judges issue sentences that are 13% longer in the 10 days after they sentence a first-degree murder. Effects are twice as large for defendants who share the same race as the murderer and defendants who face high-class felony charges. A back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that this bias affects 6% of defendants on an ongoing basis because judges regularly sentence first-degree murders.

Presentations: Harris American Politics Conference (2022), Booth Student Research in Economics Seminar (2022), Behavioral Economics Working Group (2022)

Do Journalists Drive Media Slant? [pdf]

· When firms and workers have misaligned preferences, how do firms exert control? I explore this question in the context of online news production, where journalists and firm managers may want to produce content with different degrees of partisan slant. I construct a new dataset that links 2,700 journalists to firms, news articles, and Twitter profiles. I measure article slant with a machine learning algorithm that I train to identify partisan phrases. Using a within-journalist design, I find that writing for more right or left leaning firms does not change the slant of a journalist's writing. Journalist ideology, as measured by following decisions of Twitter users, is strongly correlated with article slant. I interpret these findings as evidence that firms exert little direct control over the slant of journalists' writing.

Presentations: Booth Student Research in Economics Seminar (2021)

WORK IN PROGRESS

Free Speech, Echo Chambers, and Content Moderation

with Scott Behmer and Rafael Jiménez-Durán

· Does moderation change whether people are willing join social media platforms? Does it change which political opinions they are willing to express? How do these effects vary with the political composition of the platform? We study these questions on Facebook.

Status: Pilot completed.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Ph.D. Math Camp Fall 2020, Fall 2021, Fall 2022
Instructor

- Developed curriculum, lecture notes and problem sets (co-taught with Walter Zhang)
- Course consisted of 36 hours of lecture

PRE-DOCTORAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant to Eric Zwick, Owen Zidar 2016-2018

- Contributed to *Tax Cuts for Whom?*, *Capitalists in the Twenty-First Century*, *Who Profits from Patents?*

MISCELLANEOUS

Citizenship: United States of America
Programming Languages: Python, R

Last Updated: November 1, 2023