

The Left-Digit Effect and Stock Selling Behavior

Investors are more likely to sell stocks after a change in the left-digit. This occurs for both price increases and decreases. The likelihood of a stock being sold jumps when the price crosses the left-digit from below, e.g. a stock increasing from £9 to £10, and also increases when the price crosses the left-digit from above, e.g. a stock decreasing from £10 to £9. We interpret this as showing that investor attention is drawn to stocks that change their leftmost digit. Left-digit changes are attention grabbing, causing sale activity. This is similar to the rank effect finding of Hartzmark (2015), whereby either top-ranked or bottom-ranked stocks by return since purchase are those most likely to be sold.

To show our result, we draw a sample of stock \times quarters that have increased in value and have gone through a left-digit in a calendar quarter (e.g. Jan - Mar), which we call the Price Increasing Sample. We then draw a sample of stocks that have decreased in value through a left-digit in a calendar quarter, which we call the Price Decreasing Sample.¹ Note, this sample restriction is at the stock \times quarter level.

We then draw all investor \times stock \times days within the Price Increasing Sample and the Price Decreasing Sample, i.e. all observations for investors \times days on which the investor held the stock at the beginning of the day. We look at the probability of sale when the stock is just below a left-digit change, e.g. £9, compared with above the left-digit change, e.g. £10. This exercise might compare investor \times stock \times days drawn from different investors. Therefore, we also conduct estimates that include individual fixed effects, thereby exploiting within-investor variation in the probability of sale either side of the left-digit change.

Figure 1 illustrates the main result. Each panel shows the probability of a stock sale by the leftmost two digits of the stock price. Note, this pools over leftmost digits that are in pence, pounds, hundreds of pounds, and so on. The only information used in the analysis is the leftmost two digits, in integer values. The left-side plots pool all observations by the leftmost two digits and the probability of sale together with a 95% confidence interval. The right-side plots show the probability of sale by leftmost two digits. Panel A shows an increase in the probability of sale when the price crosses the left-digit from below, Panel B shows an increase

¹ We have implemented this sample restriction approximately in this version. In a future version we will implement the sample restriction precisely. We do not expect the results to change when we do this.

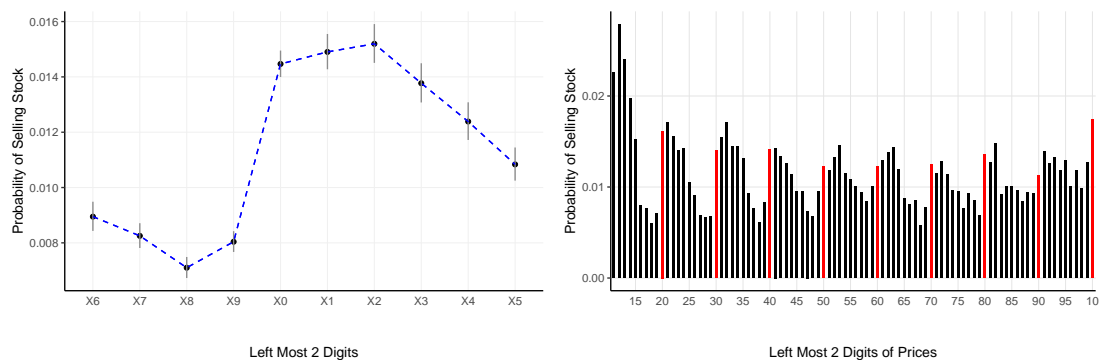
in the probability of sale when the price crosses the left-digit from above. Figure 2 and Figure 3 reproduce these plots for subsamples by the price range of the stock, in Panel A up to £1, in Panel B between £1 and £10, and in Panel C between £10 and £100.

Possible queries:

- 1 Limit orders. We have previously discussed the possibility that the patterns we see might be created by limit orders set at left-digit thresholds, i.e., round numbers. We think this is not the general mechanism at work, because limit orders would create a spike in the probability of sale at the left-digit alone. It would not explain the increased probability of sale at X_1 , X_2 , etc.. We think we see higher probability at X_1 , X_2 , etc.. because there is a delay between the stock crossing the left-digit and investors logging-in to their accounts. We could examine the role of limit orders more precisely by looking into very fine price data at the penny level.
- 2 Sample selection. We have previously discussed the possibility that the results might in some way be an artefact of sample selection, given that we are selecting on stock \times quarters that pass through a left digit change. We can clarify any concerns around sample selection in two ways.
 - A It is true that our sample selection criteria mean that our sample does not uniformly comprise observations across X_0 - X_9 . For example, in the price increasing sample the requirement is that the stock has increased in value up to at least X_0 , but there is no further requirement. This will give us an excess of observations at X_0 compared with X_1 , X_2 , and so on. We see this is indeed the case in Figure A3 in the histogram. However, this does not bias our results as the y-variable in our analysis is the *probability* of sale. Hence, the X_0 bin has a larger denominator in the y-variable compared with the other variables. Moreover, our results is that the probability of sales increases between X_9 and X_0 , for which there is only a small increase in density in the histogram.
 - B To double-check, we conducted a simulation analysis in which we input the same data but choose stocks to be sold at random. The result in Figure A3 in the right-side plot confirms that this delivers a uniform probability of sale.

Figure 1: Leftmost Stock Price Digit and Probability of Sale

(A) Price Increasing



(B) Price Decreasing

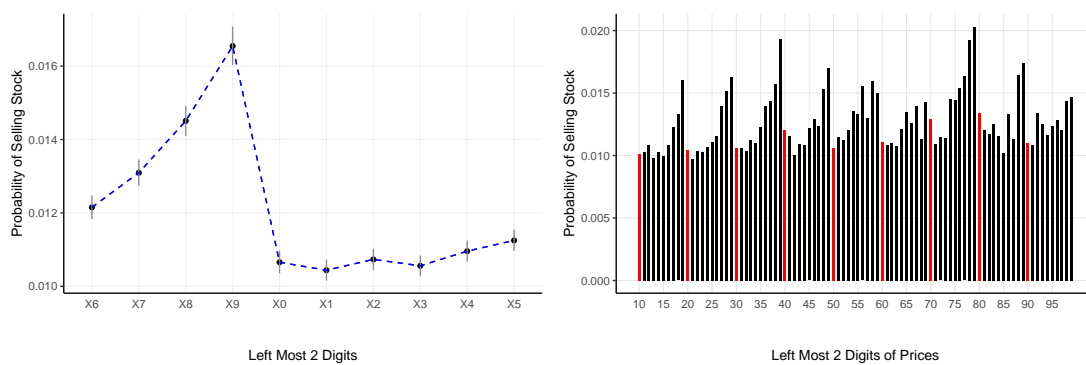
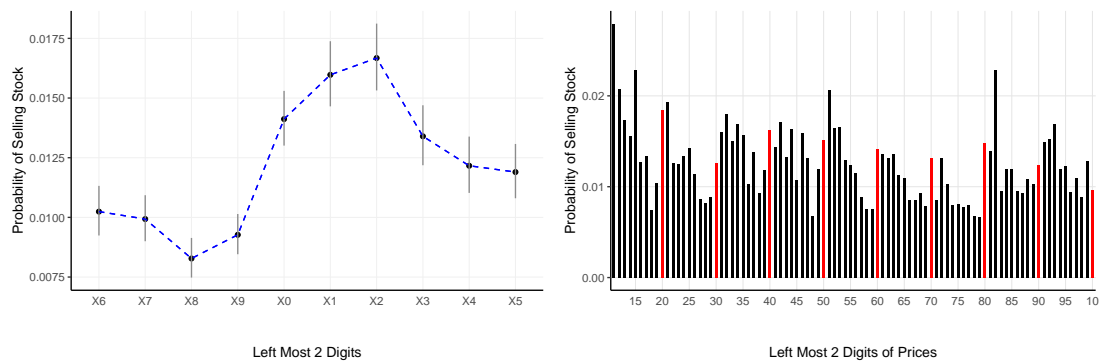
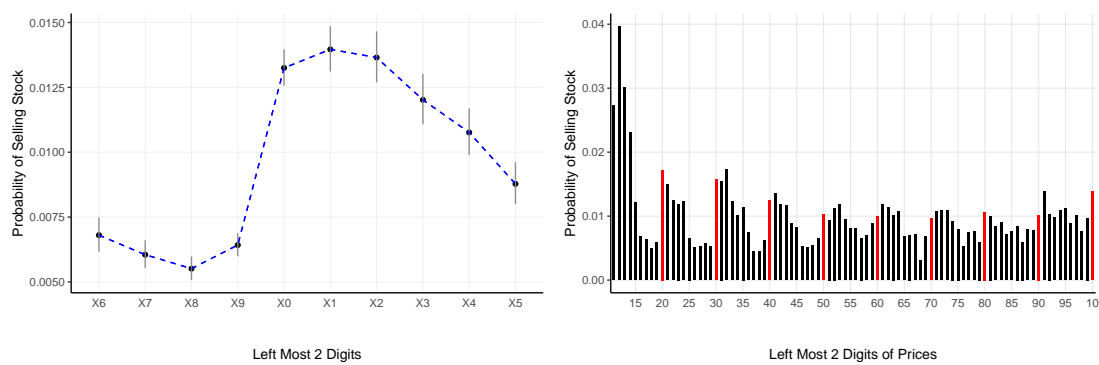


Figure 2: Leftmost Stock Price Digit and Probability of Sale
Prices Increasing Sample by Price Range

(A) Price = £0.11 to £1.01



(B) Price = £1.01 to £10.1



(C) Price = £11 to £101

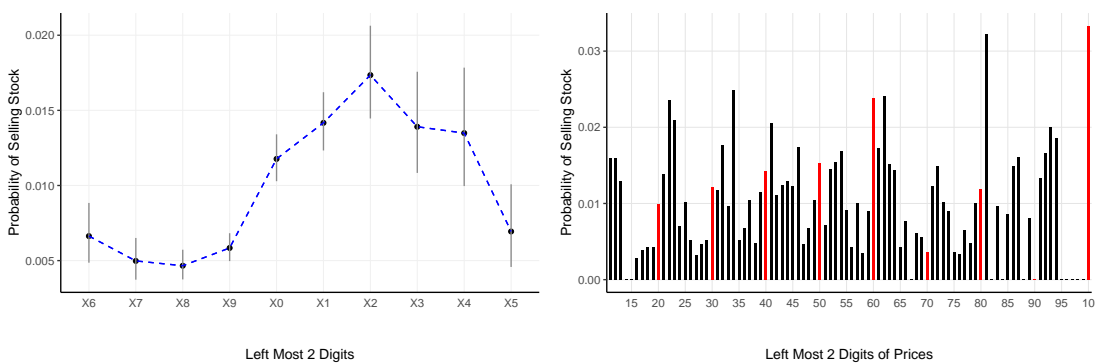
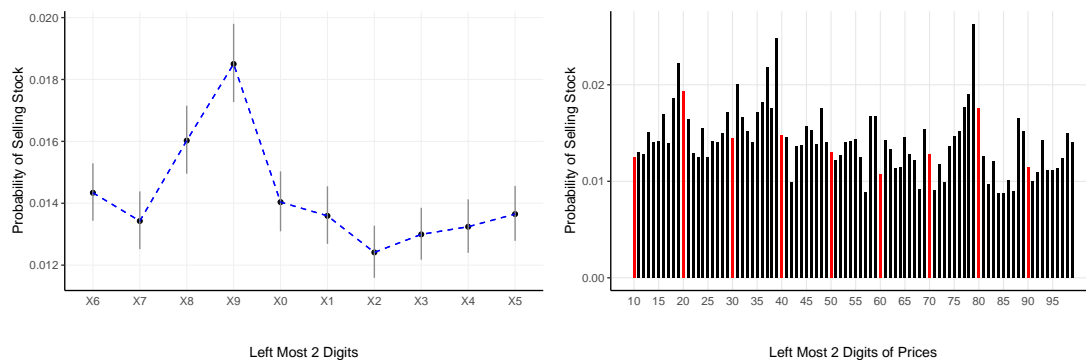
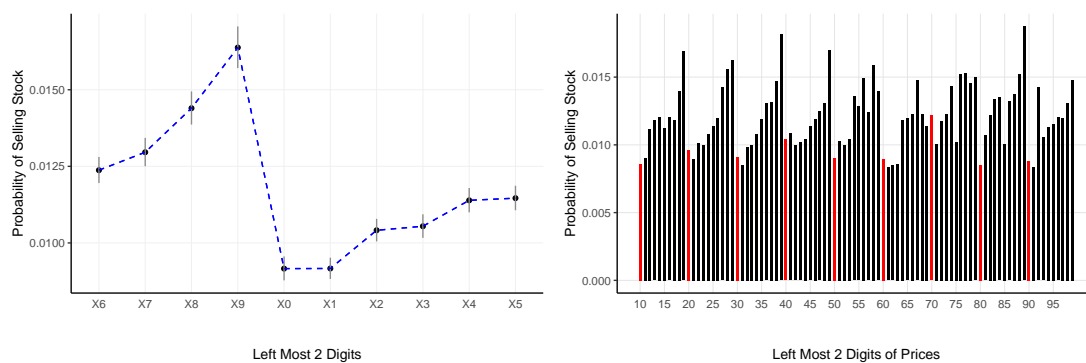


Figure 3: Leftmost Stock Price Digit and Probability of Sale
Prices Decreasing Sample by Price Range

(A) Price = £0.11 to £1.01



(B) Price = £1.01 to £10.1



(C) Price = £11 to £101

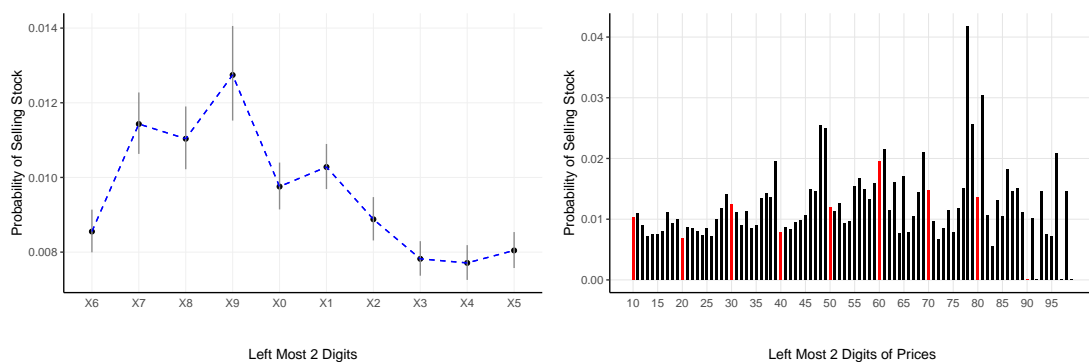


Table 1: Probability of Sale and Left Digit, Price Increasing Sample

	<i>Probability of Sale_{ijt} = 1</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Above X0 = 1	0.0058*** (0.0002)	0.0076*** (0.0003)	0.0070*** (0.0003)	0.0067*** (0.0003)	0.0070*** (0.0003)
Stock Digits (X0 to X5)		-0.0007*** (0.0001)	-0.0008*** (0.0001)	-0.0008*** (0.0001)	-0.0010*** (0.0001)
Stock Digits (X6 to X9)		-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)
Constant	0.0080*** (0.0003)	0.0076*** (0.0003)	0.0098*** (0.0025)		
Day FE	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Industry FE	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Account FE	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Stock FE	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Observations	1,517,823	1,517,823	1,517,823	1,517,823	1,517,823
R ²	0.0008	0.0008	0.0022	0.0511	0.0549

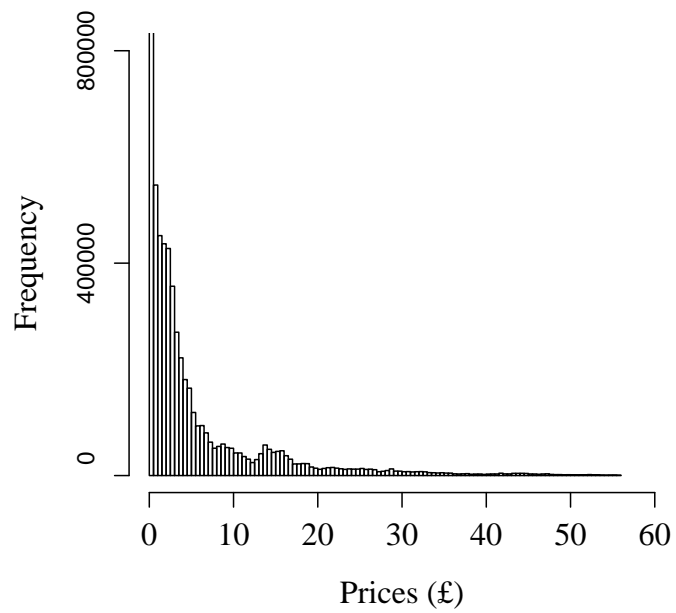
Note: The unit of observation is an investor \times stock \times day. The samples is restricted to login days. We include only quarters in which the stocks increased in price (regarding the first observation of the quarter) and change the left most digit at least once during the quarter. Only those stocks that have changed the left most digit are included. Regressions fit an intercept for the change in the left most digit at X0 and two slopes for the left (X6 to X9) and right (X0 to X5) values, as described by the raw patterns in ??. The constant shows the probability to sell the stock at when the second digit is 9 (X9). The second digit over threshold dummy shows the jump in probability when the first digit changes and so the second digit becomes 0 (X0). SE are clustered by account.

Table 2: Probability of Sale and Left Digit, Price Decreasing Sample

	<i>Probability of Sale_{ijt} = 1</i>				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Above X0 = 1 (in Range X0 to X5)	-0.0029*** (0.0001)	-0.0057*** (0.0003)	-0.0056*** (0.0003)	-0.0054*** (0.0003)	-0.0057*** (0.0003)
Stock Digits (X0 to X5)		0.0001*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0000)	0.0004*** (0.0000)	0.0004*** (0.0000)
Stock Digits (X6 to X9)		0.0014*** (0.0001)	0.0013*** (0.0001)	0.0011*** (0.0001)	0.0011*** (0.0001)
Constant	0.0137*** (0.0003)	0.0162*** (0.0004)	0.0193*** (0.0019)		
Day FE	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Industry FE	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Account FE	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Stock FE	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Observations	4,376,352	4,376,352	4,376,352	4,376,352	4,376,352
R ²	0.0002	0.0002	0.0009	0.0492	0.0526

Note: The unit of observation is an investor \times stock \times day. The samples is restricted to login days. We include only quarters in which the stocks have not increased in price (regarding the first observation of the quarter) and have not changed the left most digit at least once during the quarter. Regressions fit an intercept for the change in the left most digit at X0 and two slopes for the left (X6 to X9) and right (X0 to X5) values, as described by the raw patterns in ???. The constant shows the probability to sell the stock at when the second digit is 9 (X9). The second digit over threshold dummy shows the jump in probability when the first digit changes and so the second digit becomes 0 (X0). SE are clustered by account.

Figure A1: Histogram of Stock Prices



Note: Figure shows the histogram of prices on login days. Outliers in the 99 percentile are excluded.

Figure A2: Sample Selection and Simulation Exercise

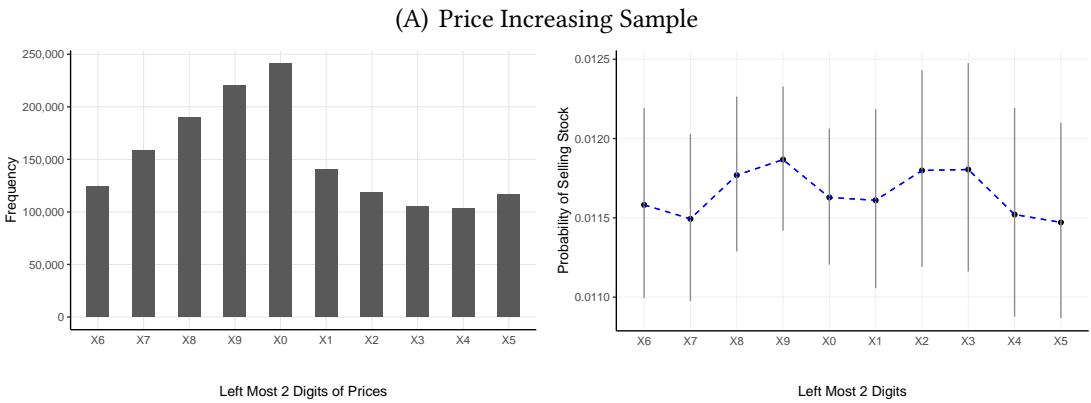
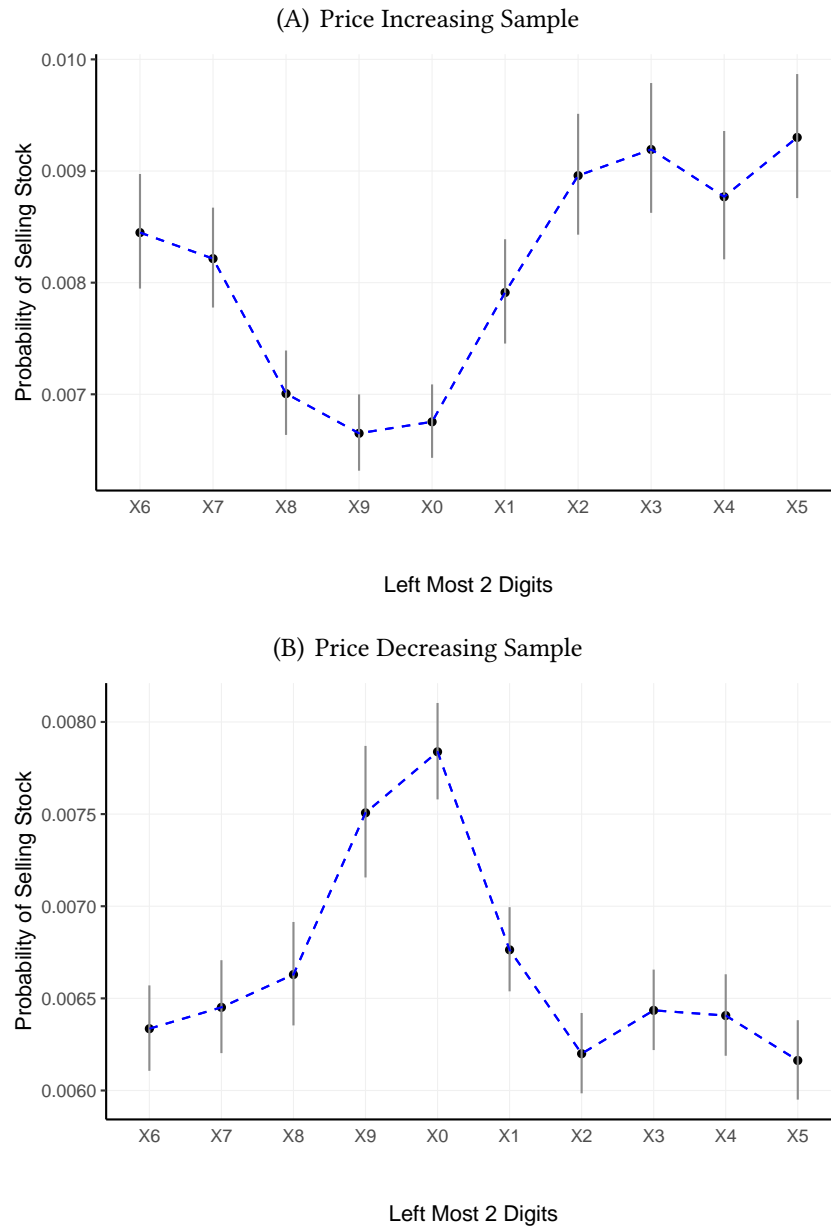
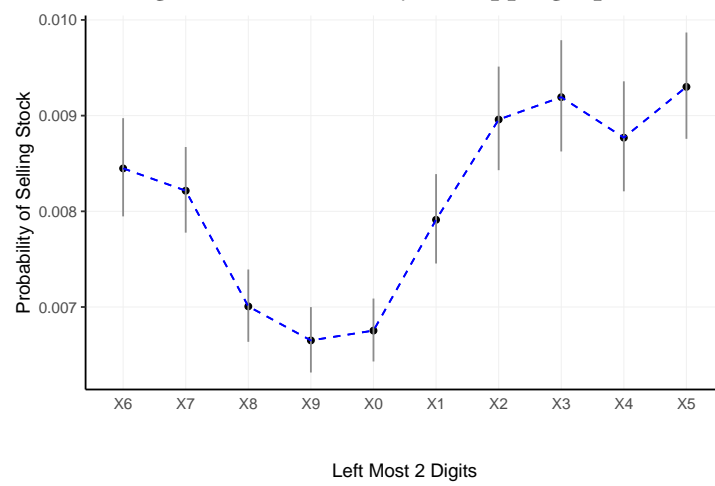


Figure A3: Probability of Topping-up



Note: Figure shows the probability of topping up (increasing position in a stock) under the same sample selection.

Figure A4: Probability of Topping-up



Note: Figure shows the probability of topping up (increasing position in an stock) under the same sample selection.

Table A1: Summary Stats

Panel (A): Baseline Sample

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Median	Pctl(75)	Max
Price on Login Days £	5,894,175	7.090	27.717	0.000	0.938	2.625	6.990	4,495.251
Price on Sell Days £	349,983	6.247	29.101	0.000	0.645	2.211	5.615	4,443.405
Price of Stocks Sold £	68,103	6.451	40.256	0.000	0.624	2.200	5.400	4,443.405

Panel (B): Price Increasing Sample

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Median	Pctl(75)	Max
All Stocks	1,517,823	5.887	31.146	0.000	0.568	2.250	5.992	2,062.035
Stocks with Prices Between £0.11 to £1.01	387,060	0.607	0.246	0.110	0.398	0.655	0.799	1.010
Stocks with Prices Between £1.1 to £10.1	754,649	4.884	2.420	1.100	2.882	4.477	6.745	10.100
Stocks with Prices Between £11 to £101	117,405	33.897	17.368	11.000	20.010	29.580	40.500	100.997

Panel (C): Price Decreasing Sample

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Median	Pctl(75)	Max
All Stocks	4,376,352	7.507	26.412	0.000	1.183	2.650	8.270	4,495.251
Stocks with Prices Between £0.10 to £1.0	611,813	0.491	0.277	0.100	0.226	0.472	0.740	1.000
Stocks with Prices Between £1 to £10	2,461,228	3.230	1.998	1.000	1.750	2.602	4.176	10.000
Stocks with Prices Between £10 to £100	978,415	20.993	11.905	10.000	13.725	16.350	24.450	99.990