Mingzi Niu (she/her/hers)

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RESEARCH FIELDS Mechanism Design, Information Theory, Behavioral Economics

EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor, Department of Decisions, Operations and Technology, Business School
The Chinese University of Hong Kong *(Expected)* Fall 2025
Postdoc, The Federmann Center for the Study of Rationality & Bussiness School
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2024 – 2025

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Economics, Rice University May 2024
Dissertation Title: Essays on Information Economics and Behavioral Economics
Committee: Mallesh Pai (Chair), Hülya Eraslan, Nina Bobkova, Rakesh Vohra, Kerry Back
M.A. Economics, Duke University May 2018
B.A. Finance and Banking, Peking University July 2016
B.S. Mathematics and Statistics, Peking University July 2016

HONORS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The Azrieli Fellowship 2024 – 2025
Fellowship, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2024 – 2025
The Jennifer and Purvez Captain Award, Rice University [*Best Economics Dissertation*] 2024
The George R Zodrow Award, Rice University [*Best Performance in a Workshop*] 2021 – 2023
The Timothy and Katharine Gunning Award, Rice University 2022
The Rica and Tony Ligeralde Fellowship Award, Rice University 2020
The Maria Esther and Carlos Linares Award, Rice University 2019
Fellowship, Rice University 2018 – 2024
The M.A. Merit Scholar Award, Duke University 2017
The May 4th Scholarship for Academic Excellence, Peking University 2013

PUBLICATIONS

Best vs. All: Equity and Accuracy of Standardized Test Score Reporting (with Aaron Roth, Rakesh Vohra, and Sampath Kannan), *FAccT'22: 2022 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 574–586

ABSTRACT: We study a game theoretic model of standardized testing for college admissions and emphasize a source of unfairness that arises from the fact that only some applicants have the resources to take tests multiple times. We find that, compared to super-scoring, requiring that all scores be reported results in superior equilibrium outcomes in admission accuracy and equity across populations. This is the case even though the more highly resourced students can—at their option—either report a more accurate signal of their type, or pool with the lower resourced population under this policy. This represents an unusual situation where the goals of accuracy and equity are in alignment.

WORKING PAPERS Procrastination and Commitment

ABSTRACT: I propose a tractable model of procrastination. A present-biased agent completes a long-term task with a fixed deadline and can commit to a series of short-term goals. I show that the commitment to these goals alleviates procrastination but weakly impairs welfare. The central mechanism is, under partial commitment, the unchanged motive of procrastination rebounds during unregulated times, neutralizing the disciplinary benefit from commitment. This provides a cautionary counterpoint to the time inconsistency literature that emphasizes the value of commitment.

Motivated Misspecification

ABSTRACT: I propose a model of expectation management to study how the directionality of misperception is determined to favor one party in a long-term relationship. A principal delegates a project to an agent and can set the agent's expectation of its potential. A high expectation stimulates the agent's effort in the short run but distorts the agent's learning about her own ability, potentially lowering effort in the long run. I identify conditions where the principal induces the agent's optimism or pessimism about the project. The central mechanism is, to sustain excessive effort, the principal downplays factors that affect project output independent of the agent's effort, thus inflating the agent's perceived return to her effort. This paper thus provides a novel approach to induce effort (perception manipulation), complementary to the usual monetary or informational incentives studied in the principal-agent theory, which can be applied to a wide range of interactions such as mentorship, abusive relationships, and political propaganda.

Signaling Design (with Matteo Camboni, Mallesh Pai, and Rakesh Vohra)

ABSTRACT: We revisit the classic job-market signaling model of Spence (1973), introducing profit-seeking schools as intermediaries that design the mapping from candidates' efforts to job-market signals. Each school commits to an attendance fee and a monitoring policy. We show that, in equilibrium, a monopolist school captures the entire social surplus by committing to low information signals and charging fees that extract students' surplus from being hired. In contrast, competition shifts surplus to students, with schools vying to attract high-ability students, enabling them to distinguish themselves from their lower-ability peers. However, this increased signal informativeness leads to more wasteful effort in equilibrium, contrasting with the usual argument that competition enhances social efficiency. This result may be reversed if schools face binding fee caps.

Multilateral War of Attrition with Majority Rule (with Hülya Eraslan, and Kirill S. Evdokimov)

ABSTRACT: We analyze a multilateral war of attrition game with majority rule in continuous time. A chair and two competing players decide how to split one unit of surplus. Players have exogenously given demands that are incompatible. At each instance, the players simultaneously choose whether to concede or continue. The chair can concede to either of the two competing players, but the competing players can concede only to the chair. An agreement is reached when at least one player concedes. We characterize the equilibria of this game and establish the necessary and sufficient conditions under which equilibria with delay exist. In contrast to the bilateral case, delay equilibria are less likely and must involve an asymmetry: they exist only when the demands of the competing players are identical and sufficiently large, and only the chair can concede with a strictly positive probability at the start of the game. This has the surprising implication that the chair may be worse off when bargaining with two players under majority rule than with one who has veto power.

Anonymity or Geotagging? Evidence From Social Media in China (with Yiqian Wang, Ziang Xiao)

ABSTRACT: Anonymity protects the freedom of speech whereas burgeoning misinformation from anonymous sources compels platforms to promote identity transparency. Leveraging recent Chinese social media regulations and text analysis advancements, we find that reduced anonymity substantially decreases politically marginalized groups' representation. We motivate our empirical results using a theoretical framework and investigate how the intergroup gap in media biases affects participation in social media. Our findings highlight that, under media biases, identity transparency intensifies political polarization.

WORKING
IN PROGRESS
Mortgage Refinancing under Time Inconsistency (with Yunbo Liu)
Screening with Delegated Learning
Gaming in Zero-Knowledge Proof System
The Value of Matching Platforms

TEACHING EXPERIENCE	Teaching Assistant: Microeconomics I & II [*G*], Rice University	2019 - 2024
	Teaching Assistant: Microeconomics [*G*], Duke University	2017
	Academic Tutor: Intermediate Microeconomics [*UG*], Duke Athletics	2017

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE	Research Assistant for Prof. M. Pai and Prof. R. Vohra	2020 − 2023
	Foundations of Fair Data Analysis [NSF Grant CCF-1763349]	
	Research Assistant for Prof. W. Darity	Fall 2017
	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme [Samuel Dubois Cook Center on Social Equity]	
	Undergraduate Dissertation	Spring 2016
	An Investigation into Peasants' Life in Modern China	
	Research Assistant for Prof. X. Zhang	Fall 2014
	E-commerce Practices of the Luggage Industry in Baigou [National School of Development]	

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	Intern: Economic Research Group in Blockchain, CasperLabs LLC, San Diego	2021 − 2022
	Intern: National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, Beijing	Fall 2015
	Intern: Publicity Department, Bank of China International, Beijing	Winter 2015

PRESENTATIONS AND SEMINARS

2024 North America Summer Meeting [Vanderbilt], Midwest Theory Conference [Rochester], Southern Economic Annual Meeting [Washington, DC], European Winter Meeting [Palma de Majorca, Spain]

Tsinghua University; CUHK–Shenzhen; Kyoto University–The Institute of Economic Research; Southern Methodist University; University of Bristol; University of Warwick; University of Bonn; CUHK; Technion

2023 North America Summer Meeting [UCLA]; Stony Brook International Conference on Game Theory; Asia Meeting of the Econometric Society [Tsinghua University]; Texas Economic Theory Camp [Texas A&M]; Midwest International Economics Conference [Georgia Tech]; European Winter Meeting [Manchester]

2022 Midwest International Economics Conference [Purdue]; North America Summer Meeting [Miami]; ACM FAccT Conference [Seoul]; Stony Brook International Conference on Game Theory; Asian School in Economic Theory by the Econometric Society [Singapore]; Asia Meeting of the Econometric Society [Tokyo]; Economics Graduate Student Conference [WUSTL]; Texas Economic Theory Camp [Rice]

2021 Doctoral Student Workshop on Economics of Artificial Intelligence [NBER]; Annual Young Researchers Workshop [Cornell]; Southern Economic Annual Meeting [Houston]

REFEREE SERVICES

Economics Letters, Games and Economic Behavior, International Economic Review, International Journal of Game Theory, Journal of Industrial Economics, Journal of Mathematical Economics, Review of Economic Design, Social Choice and Welfare