



Research Paper

Allowing for reflection time does not change behavior in dictator and cheating games



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ABSTRACT

Reaction time, usually measured in seconds, has been shown to be correlated with decisions in experimental games. In this paper, we study how allowing for a full day of “reflection time” alters behavior. We compare behavior in dictator and cheating games when participants make immediate choices with behavior when participants have an extra day to decide, and find that allowing for more time does not affect behavior.

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1. Introduction

The revealed-preference approach in economics is focused on choice data. Yet, as [Gul and Pesendorfer \(2008\)](#) write: “In standard economics, an individual’s decisions may improve when a constraint is relaxed. For example, an agent may make better decisions if he is given better information, more resources, or more time to make his decision.” Experimental studies show that sometimes such non-choice data are important in understanding preferences. One example is the correlation found between reaction time of individuals when making their decisions and their choices.

Consider, for example, allocation choices in dictator or public-goods games. If participants have clear preferences over allocations, neither the amount of time they are given to decide nor their reaction time are predicted to correlate with their choices. However, according to the dual-system models of cognitive processes ([Fudenberg and Levine, 2006](#); [Loewenstein, 2005](#); [Kahneman, 2003, 2011](#)), time to decide might affect the cognitive process leading to the decision. This literature discusses the difference between System I, which is rapid and intuitive, and System II, which is slower and deliberative. As the dual-system models predict, recent papers testing the difference between “intuitive” and “deliberate” decisions find

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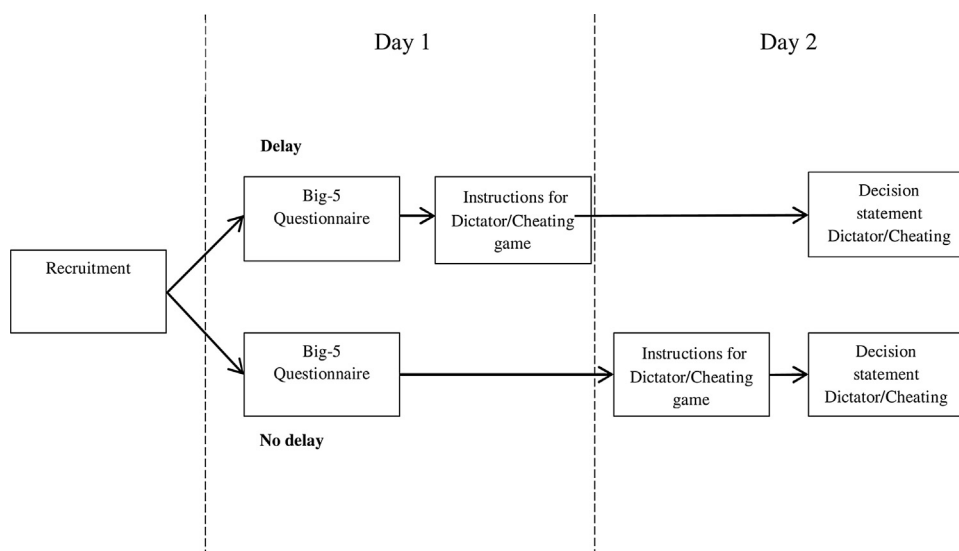


Fig. 1. The timeline of the experiment.

correlation between reaction time and decisions (e.g., Piovesan and Wengström, 2009; Grimm and MEngel, 2011; Jiang, 2013; Neo et al., 2013; Kocher et al., 2016; Rand et al., 2012, 2014; Nielsen et al., 2014; Lohse et al., 2016).

In the literature on reaction time, participants make decisions within an experimental session, and the reaction time is typically measured in seconds. In our everyday lives, however, we mostly have more than minutes to make decisions. In this study, we ask what happens when participants have a longer time period to reflect on social and ethical decisions. We do so by comparing decisions participants make in dictator and cheating games immediately during an experimental session with decisions they make after they have had a day to think about their choices. By giving participants time to “sleep on the decision,” we allow them to reflect on the possible payoffs and moral costs, ask others for advice, and consider their decision while being home in familiar surroundings. We assume that in both conditions participants enter System II – participants are not pressured to decide fast and have some time to think about their decisions – therefore our interest is not giving more insights on dual-models, but understanding how a relatively long time to think affects decisions.

Consider a simple example of a cheating game: A participant is asked to roll a die in private and report the outcome to the experimenter. If the participant reports “5,” s/he is paid 50 Euros; otherwise s/he is paid nothing. Cheating is inferred statistically by comparing the expected fraction of people who report a 5 with the actual fraction. In such a game, Kajackaite and Gneezy (2017) found the majority of participants do not lie. In a similar cheating game, we test whether giving participants a day to think about the decision and potentially discuss it with other people increases cheating. Other examples of experimental evidence on cheating include: Abeler et al. (2014), Abeler et al. (2017), Cohn et al. (2014), Dreber and Johannesson (2008), Erat and Gneezy (2012), Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi (2013), Gneezy (2005), Gneezy et al. (2017), Lundquist et al. (2009), Mazar et al. (2008), Shalvi et al. (2011) and Sutter (2009), amongst others. Similarly, we test whether time to think affects giving behavior in a dictator game.

We find no significant differences between decisions made immediately in the lab and decisions for which participants had a day to reflect – in neither dictator nor cheating games. From a methodological perspective, the results show the concern regarding participants not having enough time to consider their decision in the lab does not seem to be important for this kind of social and ethical decisions.

2. Experimental procedures, design, and sample

We employ a between-subjects design consisting of eight ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) treatments; we vary (i) the task (dictator game vs. cheating game), (ii) the given time to decide (no-delay vs. delay), and (iii) the size of the stake in the decision (low vs. high).

In all the treatments, participants were asked to come to the lab on two consecutive days. The timeline of the treatments is presented in Fig. 1. On the first day, participants read some initial instructions and completed a Big-5 questionnaire.¹ Depending on the treatment of reflection time, participants either (i) only completed the questionnaire and left the lab on day 1, or (ii) completed the questionnaire and received instructions for day 2 of the experiment. By giving participants

¹ All instructions are presented in Appendix B in the Supplementary data, along with the full questionnaire. Note that the use of the Big-5 questionnaire was completely instrumental. We collected the Big-5 data only because we needed to provide the participants in the no-delay treatments with some reason for coming to the experiment – otherwise they would have arrived just to pick up the show up fee, which is not conventional in experiments and might confuse the participants. To keep treatments consistent, we had all participants fill in the Big-5 questionnaire.

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