

Benjamin Casner

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Citizenship and Visa Status

US Citizen

Education

Ph.D. in Economics, The Ohio State University, Expected Spring 2020
Dissertation: “Essays on Digital Economics and Platforms”
Committee: James Peck, Huanxing Yang, Paul J. Healy
MA in Economics, The Ohio State University, 2015
MSc in Behavioural Economics, University of Nottingham. 2012
BA in Economics and Math, Saint John’s University (Minnesota) 2011

Teaching and Research Fields

Industrial Organization, Applied Game Theory, Experimental and Behavioral Economics

Research Papers

“Seller Curation in Platforms” (**Job Market Paper**) under review at *The International Journal of Industrial Organization*

Market platforms must decide how much effort to put into screening out low-quality sellers. Increasing quality of the sellers on a market increases consumer confidence and participation, but other factors may reduce the incentive to screen. This article explores why market platforms do not screen out low-quality sellers when screening costs are minimal. Consumers must search for a seller whose product is a good match. The presence of low-quality sellers reduces search intensity, softening competition between sellers, increasing equilibrium price and hence the platform's revenue per sale. If sellers compete with sufficient intensity then the platform admits some low-quality sellers. This might initially seem contradictory to the practice of platform recommendations, but recommending a high-quality seller and search obfuscation are complementary strategies. The low-quality sellers enable the recommended seller to attract many consumers at a high price and the effect of the recommendation is strengthened as low-quality sellers become more adept at imitating high-quality sellers.

“Learning While Shopping: An Experimental Investigation into the Effects of Learning on Recall in Consumer Search” under review at *Experimental Economics*

In many consumer search environments, searchers do not know the precise distribution of prices in the market before they begin searching. I conduct an experiment which explores a broad class of search problems with learning about the distribution of payoffs. My results support the theoretical prediction that learning results in monotonically declining reservation values, providing evidence that learning may be an explanation for declining reservation utility and recall seen in field data. However, while the theory predicts a “one step” reservation value strategy, many subjects instead choose to set a high reservation value in order to learn about the distribution before adjusting based on their observations. Additionally, I provide evidence that the consistent under-searching in search experiments may stem from a reinforcement heuristic similar to those proposed elsewhere in the literature.

“Media Provision With Outsourced Content Production”

I use a model with a platform facilitating interaction between consumers, advertisers, and content creators to explore the effects of introducing a subscription which allows consumers to avoid ads. The subscription increases provision of niche content, but increased advertising and a high subscription price may reduce the welfare of consumers who enjoy mass market content. The effect on total welfare depends on how much the platform increases payments to content creators as a result of the subscription.

“How Much Does Schooling Disutility Matter?” Joint with Guanyi Yang

Researchers studying education decisions are often inconsistent in choosing whether and how to include disutility of education terms. We show that adding a disutility term in an education choice model is equivalent to assuming a relationship between wealth, risk, and education decisions. Our theory predicts that agents may choose to work even if schooling would increase their lifetime wealth. Disutility of schooling creates a gap between the increase in utility return from education and the financial return. Moreover, utility gains from education are decreasing in wealth and increasing in riskiness of future consumption. If the degree of risk increases heterogeneously across human capital investment options, then risk aversion and the precautionary savings motive can compound or negate each other depending which option has a greater increase in risk. Our results also explain recent empirical findings, including a relationship between wealth and education, working between periods of schooling, and college major choices.

Research in Progress

“Going the Last Mile: Access Pricing and Vertical Integration”

“Information Structures in online market platforms”

Conference and Seminar Presentations

- 46th Annual Conference of the European Association for Research in Industrial Economics (EARIE), August 2019
- Young Economists Symposium, Columbia University, August 2019
- The 30th International Conference on Game Theory, Stony Brook University July 2019
- Midwest Economic Theory Conference, Indiana University Bloomington, May 2019
- Midwest Economics Association Annual Conference, March 2019
- Invited Seminar, University of Toledo Economics Department, February 2019
- Applied Economics Workshop, The Ohio State University, February 2019
- Invited Seminar, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University Economics Department, November 2018
- Invited Seminar, University of Minnesota Applied Economics Department, November 2018
- Applied Economics Workshop, The Ohio State University, October 2018
- Midwest Economic Theory Conference, Vanderbilt University October 2018
- The 29th International Conference on Game Theory, Stony Brook University July 2018
- Midwest Economics Association Annual Conference, March 2018
- Applied Economics Workshop, The Ohio State University, March 2018
- European Winter Meeting of the Econometric Society, Barcelona GSE December 2017
- The 28th International Conference on Game Theory, Stony Brook University July 2017
- Midwest Economic Theory Conference, Gatton School of Business, May 2017
- Applied Economics Workshop, The Ohio State University, February 2017

Research Experience and Other Employment

August 2014 to Present PhD Researcher: The Ohio State University

June 2013 to July 2014 Research Analyst: Enrollment Research Associates

Professional Activities

Referee for *Eastern Economic Journal*

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships

2019	Burton-Abrams Dissertation Fellowship, L. Edwin Smart Departmental Citation for Excellence in Teaching, Distinguished University Fellowship
2018	Decision Sciences Collaborative Research Grant, Journal of Money Credit and Banking Research Grant
2014	Distinguished University Fellowship

Teaching Experience

Summer 2016, Spring 2017, Spring 2018, Summer 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019	Instructor, Economic Issues in the US, The Ohio State University <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-designed course covering current topics in economics. Approximately 35 students per semester
Fall 2016, Fall 2017	Teaching Assistant for Dr. James Peck, Econ 8712, The Ohio State University <ul style="list-style-type: none">• First year PhD micro theory track. Approximately 40 students per semester.
Fall 2015, Spring 2016	Teaching Assistant, Econ 2002 for Dr. Darcy Hartman <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Principles of Macroeconomics. Approximately 700 students per semester. My responsibilities included leading 3 recitations with approximately 40 students each.

References

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