Propensity to Engage Type II Processes in Relation to Donation Preferences and the Individual Victim Effect

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1. Motivation

The Individual Victim Effect (IVE) reflects the pervasive desire or need to save a single identified victim of a cause, whilst regarding a large group suffering similarly with less consideration. The IVE is a ubiquitous effect in lab and in the field: people consistently donate more when the cause is presented as an identifiable victim. We begin by asking: **Will the IVE replicate in an online survey environment?**

Slovic (2007) argues that the IVE reflects primarily a Type I response. Consistent with this idea, Friedrich & McGuire (2010) demonstrated that high rational scorers on the Rational Experiential Inventory (REI) did not show a preference for donating to an individual victim as opposed to an unnamed group, but low rational scorers did.

We extended this research by asking whether Friedrich & McGuire’s result would replicate if we used the Cognitive Reflection Test— a behavioural measure of one’s willingness to reflect— rather than the REI, a subjective report measure. We hypothesize that those who readily engage Type II processes will be less susceptible to the IVE.

2. Method

401 Mturk participants completed a Qualtrics survey. Participants were first asked some basic demographic questions. Then participants were randomly assigned to complete the Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) and bias battery before or after responding to a vignette. Participants were also randomly assigned to one of two vignettes: the IV (Individual Victim) Condition, and the Non-IV Condition.

The usual environment for such studies is in lab or in the field, using physical donations to measure the IVE. **We may conclude that the IVE has now been replicated in an online survey environment.**

No relation was found between the CRT + Bias test score and the Individual Victim Effect. The effect found in Friedrich & McGuire (2010) did not generalize to a case in which a behavioural measure of rational thinking was used. Possible reasons for this include:

- The IVE is not a Type I process
- Friedrich & McGuire’s result was a type 1 error
- Individual differences in rational/analytic thinking captured by the REI, but not the CRT, are related to the IVE

A follow up study could incorporate the following changes:

- Asking participants how much they would be willing to donate, to increase the frequency of “Yes” responses
- Obtaining similar data from an Mturk survey that includes the REI scores

3. Results

Participants in the Individual Victim condition were significantly more likely to donate to the cause (37.0%) than were participants in the Non-Individual Victim condition (21.4%). There was no significant difference in donation amount ($) across conditions.

CRT + Bias battery scores were partitioned using an interquartile split into low-scoring and high-scoring CRT groups. The two groups exhibited similar preference for donating to an individual victim. Therefore, CRT score did not have an effect on the IVE.

The IVE in terms of amount donated also did not differ as a function of CRT + Bias group.

4. Summary

The CRT + Bias Task consisted of four questions from the CRT-2 (Thompson & Oppenheimer, 2016), four questions from the CRT-4 (Toplak, West, & Stanovich, 2014), and one denominator neglect bias test, in randomized order. Participants were given free entry for each of the nine questions.

On assignment to a vignette, participants were asked if they would donate. Those answering “No,” were taken to the next portion of the survey; those answering “Yes,” were given a slider to select their donation amount (to the nearest cent).

5. References


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Accessibility

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