

# Research Statement

Aleksandr Levkun

I am an economic theorist interested in games with imperfect information. My research agenda focuses on the topic of strategic mediation of information. A recurring theme is a presence of the information intermediary influencing the interaction between informed and uninformed parties. I study the outcomes of the games with the information intermediary and how they are affected by the intermediary's preferences.

In my job market paper "Communication with Strategic Fact-checking", I examine communication between an informed sender and an uninformed receiver with a presence of a strategic fact-checker. The sender makes a claim about an issue to persuade the receiver to approve the sender's proposition. The fact-checker has its own interests and chooses a stochastic fact-checking policy that initiates checks of sender's claims. The fact-checking technology is subject to a potential failure to produce a fact-check and the usage of this technology is costly. Full fact-checking is optimal when the cost is below the threshold. Otherwise, no fact-checking is optimal. I characterize the cost threshold as a function of fact-checker's preferences. The receiver need not prefer a fact-checker with preferences aligned with the receiver to one with opposed preferences. The addition of a fact-checker does not necessarily improve communication even when both fact-checkers are willing to fully check by themselves. For the intermediate cost we find an equilibrium in which there is an underprovision of fact-checking due to free-riding.

My working paper "Strategic Mediation of Information in Autocracies" presents the optimal editorial policy for state-owned media manipulating information flow from a strategic informed elite to an uninformed receiver. The receiver attempts to match the state of the ruler's competence with a binary action. If the elite's and audience's preferences are too distant from each other, then the editorial policy is uninformative. Other-

wise, the media signal whether the state is higher or lower than a threshold which depends on the elite's preferences. The media benefit from a more lenient elite, as long as the elite is not too lenient. The media are worse off when the receiver is more critical of the ruler, whereas the elite generally is better off when the receiver is more critical. When the receiver has private information about how critical he is, I characterize the lower bound on the media's payoff obtained within the class of restricted editorial policies. I identify a sufficient condition that implies the bound is achieved.

My third paper on the topic of strategic mediation "The Value of Data Records" (with Simone Galperti and Jacopo Perego) provides a new perspective on the classic problem of valuing information. Many online platforms intermediate trade between sellers and buyers relying on individual data records of their personal characteristics. A key question this paper tackles is how much value a platform derives from each record. Is this value higher for one buyer than for another? What are its properties? We answer these questions by combining a modern information-design perspective with classic duality methods. We show that the value of a buyer's record cannot be correctly assessed by focusing only on the payoff that a platform directly earns from the trade between that buyer and a seller. This is because of a novel externality between records, which arises when a platform pools records to withhold information from the sellers. We characterize how much a platform is willing to pay for more records—e.g., for getting new buyers to join it—and for better records—e.g., for more information about existing buyers. Our analysis establishes basic properties of the demand side of data markets and our methods apply generally to a large class of principal-agent problems.

I also have a project on "Subjective Uncertainty and Contract Dissolution" (with Renee Bowen and Malte Lammert). We study how subjective uncertainty about rent distribution affects parties' incentives to revoke a formal agreement. Parties initiate a relationship based on an optimistic assessment, but over time may learn that the underlying state is undesirable and the contract is generating a value less than their outside option. We provide a rationale for contract dissolution and lawsuits arising around contractual agreements and provide a model that makes predictions about the time it takes for contracts to dissolve as a function of the parties' prior beliefs. We show that a relationship can only be

formed under symmetric beliefs if the contract is desirable from a social planner's point of view. Conversely, if a contract is undesirable to a social planner, then forming a contractual relationship requires heterogeneous beliefs. Moreover, the beliefs must be optimistic: players must interpret the uncertainty in their favor.