Aluma Dembo
Email: a.dembo@berkeley.edu
Phone: (650) 804 – 6257

Course of Study

I am a 5th year PhD Candidate at the University of California, Berkeley. My major field is Econometrics and my minor field is Behavioral Economics. In the course of my studies I have taken PhD level courses in Microeconomics Theory, Econometrics, and Psychology and Economics. Before coming to Berkeley I earned a M.Sc. in Statistics from Stanford University with a focus on Machine Learning (taking the STATS 315A-B). In between, I interned at Facebook, Inc. working with the growth team on data pipeline monitoring using HQL and Java.

Research Projects

My general research interests are experimental economics using smartphone data and the development of statistical tests for economic theories of decision making. I'm currently working with my advisor, Shachar Kariv, and colleagues from Engineering to develop a platform for conducting economic experiments on the smartphone. Using a flexible native app for Android phones we are able to collect high frequency responses from participants for experiments that must usually take place over the course of one sitting in the lab. In addition, we leverage the device's unique hardware capabilities to collect a rich set of contextual data on activity (location and accelerometer), and social network (call and text logs), as well as other phone usage statistics (other apps accessed, battery level, etc.). Our current project looks at consistency of behavior over a week in this type of smartphone experiment as compared with identical experiments conducted over an hour in the lab.

Dissertation

My own dissertation uses this platform to test the relationship between decisions over risk and incidental emotions. In addition to the aforementioned background phone data, I am able to collect a time series of experimentally measured decisions over lotteries alongside self-reported emotions. Using this data I can test if inconsistencies in decisions are related to incidental emotions as has been previously found in the Psychology literature. I have conducted this experiment twice now, once in the spring of 2015 and once in the fall of 2015. Over the next few months I will begin to analyze the data and write up my results. My dissertation will be complete in the Spring of 2017.

Overall Research Interests

Widespread adoption of mobile devices in the last five years offers researchers a new opportunity to study human behavior live and in the wild, effectively catapulting the laboratory into the field. The ability to install customized applications that access a variety of built-in sensors gives researchers unprecedented access to contextual information before and at the time of experimentally induced behavior.

As more and more web activity becomes geared towards use on mobile devices, understanding digitization becomes increasingly important. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to attend the NBER Digitization tutorial in March. I believe my understanding of mobile technologies would be an interesting and unique contribution to the discussion, and I would personally learn a lot by attending. Please note that I do not require hotel accommodation.