

Lying and Cheating in Economic Decision Situations (Bachelor + Master Seminar)

I. Topic Description

This seminar deals with different reasons why people do (or do not) engage in morally doubtful activities like lying, cheating and deception and we try to assess their impact in different decision situations.

From a neoclassical economic perspective, agents are assumed to strategically use forms of lying, cheating and deception as long as the expected benefits for themselves are higher than the expected costs (e.g. the expected punishment for being caught lying/cheating). In this framework, lying itself does not induce intrinsic costs for the agent. Behavior is rather judged by its consequences than by moral and psychological aspects. This means, a lie may be even considered as appropriate if it leads to a mutually beneficial outcome for all parties.

However, taking insights from other disciplines into account provides evidence, that many more factors play a role for the question why people do or do not lie or cheat. Important here are also psychological aspects and moral/normative considerations. These may lead to both “intrinsic costs” of lying (bad conscience, negative self-image etc.) or “extrinsic costs”, such as negative reputation effects, which can explain why in several cases agents refrain from lying even if this would increase their own payoffs.

We will address these questions mostly by the use of experiments. Those enable the researcher to set up a specific decision environment allowing to isolate and test certain motives in terms of lying and cheating. Participants are expected to familiarize themselves with the relevant literature (of which an excerpt is provided in the list of references).

In the seminar no specific topics will be handed out. Instead, students will use their own creative abilities to think of an interesting novel research question in the broad thematic field of lying and cheating. Based on this, you are supposed to develop an experimental design for a lab/online or a field study, which is suited to test your hypothesis/answer your research question. (*Note:* Carrying out the experiment itself is not part of the seminar.)

Students are encouraged to form small groups of 2-3 persons for their research project. (Working as a single person is possible too, but not recommended.)

Prior attendance of the courses “Economics and Behavior”, “Game Theory” and/or other seminars at the chair is recommended, but not required.

II. Organizational and Procedural Details

The seminar starts with an **introductory (in-person) meeting on Tue, 28th April 2026 at 2:00 pm** (KD2 Lab “seminar room A+B”, 1st floor building 01.85). The meeting is supposed to last for approx. 1-1,5h. In the weeks after students work individually within their research group and receive feedback/support by the seminar instructors. Ideas for experiments or field studies will be presented in **blocked events on Tue, 30th June 2026**. Each presentation should last for approx. 20 minutes. Full attendance in all meetings is required for successful participation in the seminar. Seminar papers of 12 -15 pages are to be handed in by the **2nd August 2026**. The language used throughout the seminar is English, this includes the presentations and the final thesis.

For further questions, please contact Dr. Hannes Rau (hannes.rau@kit.edu)

III. Sources of Inspiration

- Balafoutas, L., Beck, A., Kerschbamer, R., & Sutter, M. (2013). What drives taxi drivers? A field experiment on fraud in a market for credence goods. *Review of Economic Studies*, 80(3), 876-891.
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- Falk, A., & Szech, N. (2013). Morals and markets. *Science*, 340(6133), 707-711.
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- Kerschbamer, R., Neururer, D., & Sutter, M. (2016). Insurance coverage of customers induces dishonesty of sellers in markets for credence goods. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(27), 7454-7458.
- Leib, M., Köbis, N., Soraperra, I., Weisel, O., & Shalvi, S. (2021). Collaborative dishonesty: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 147(12), 1241
- Rosenbaum, S. M., Billinger, S., & Stieglitz, N. (2014). Let's be honest: A review of experimental evidence of honesty and truth-telling. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 45, 181-196.