Perceived reliance on advice for others: People perceive others would rely more on novice (but not expert) advice than themselves

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Perceived reliance on advice for others: People perceive others would rely more on novice (but not expert) advice than themselves.

Prior research on advice-taking has focused on the extent to which people rely on different kinds of advice. We extend this research by focusing on the perception of whether people believe that others are comparatively more likely to rely on advice from novice advisor and less on advice from expert advisor than themselves. Nine preregistered studies show that consumers believe that others would rely more on low-quality advice but similarly on high-quality advice. This effect is mediated by perceptions of naivete, conformity (both higher for others), and intelligence (lower for others). Theoretically, this work contributes to the literature about reliance on advice, the literature about self-other bias, and the literature about advice-giver expertise. We supply recommendations for consumer decision-making, advice-giving, and recommendation systems.

Keywords: advice taking; self-other differences; judgement and decision making

Track: Consumer Behaviour

1. Introduction

People routinely seek advice from others because this enhances their accuracy in judgement (Yaniv, 2004). Advice-seeking can be as basic as asking friends for recommendations on what to eat at a restaurant or what others thought of a new movie or as complex as deciding on a course of action in a legal or medical matter or asking one's parents and peers for input before accepting a job offer. Previous literature (Harvey & Fischer, 1997; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000) investigated the contextual and dispositional factors that could affect the decision to seek advice. However, this literature is thin regarding people's different beliefs about others' comparative reliance on advice. When thinking about others, people might hold overly cynical views of others, perceiving them to rely more on low-quality advice than themselves. This is because people are biased towards others: they think they are better than others (Alicke, 1985). In the present research, we investigated whether people perceive others to rely more on advice from non-expert advisor and less on advice from expert advisor than themselves. Our findings show that people perceive others to rely more on non-expert advice and equally on expert advice than themselves. In the general discussion section, we further elaborate on our research's theoretical and practical contributions[1].

1.1 Self-other differences in reliance on advice

A pivotal aspect of social life is making inferences about others' preferences, yet people's perceptions of others may be biased. For example, people perceive others to be more sexist, ageist, and racist in comparison to themselves (Wang & Jeon, 2020). Consumers also believe that the same product will be more effective for others, as they perceive themselves to be more unique than others (Polman et al., 2021). This biased speculation regarding others' preferences can lead people to perceive that others possess lower levels of sophistication than themselves (Pronin et al., 2001). One dominant reason for that is people are driven to see themselves favourably since it helps in maintaining a positive self-concept (Kunda, 1990). The asymmetry between self and other is particularly pronounced in circumstances with greater personal significance, such as performing better in jobs, since it is self-enhancing (VanBergen et al., 2022). Such biased perceptions of self and of others can potentially influence the extent to which people perceive themselves and others to rely on advice from expert and non-expert advisor. Perceiving oneself to possess greater cognitive abilities than others in comprehending an expert advisor's counsel and confidently integrating such counsel

[1] Pre-registrations, data analysis, and materials are posted at the Open Science Framework repository.

into decision-making is consistent with the enhancement of ego. It aids individuals in maintaining a favourable self-concept (Brown, 2012). Thus, people might perceive themselves to rely more on advice from an expert advisor than others.

Information about the self that includes a risk to self-identity initiates a defensive mechanism aimed at preserving the desirable self-image (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). Accordingly, it is rational to rely less on advice from non-expert advisor as it does not contribute to building a positive self-image. However, information about others is judged more dispassionately than the self (Klein & Epley, 2016). People might perceive others to lack the cognitive ability to identify errors in their judgements in differentiating between a good and an average counsel (Pronin et al., 2007). Thus, people might perceive others to rely more on advice from non-expert advisor than themselves, indicating others' lack of competence and objectivity. Taken together, we hypothesized that people would perceive others to rely more on advice from non-expert advisor and less on advice from expert advisor than themselves. This investigation of self-other differences on comparative reliance of advice is of theoretical importance as it facilitates comprehension of how individuals make sense of others' reactions to the causal outcomes of their decision-making endeavours.

1.2 Advice taken from expert and non-expert advisor.

Expert advisors possess extensive knowledge and expertise in a particular task or domain, unlike non-expert advisors, who may have some knowledge or expertise in the same domain. In comparison to a non-expert advisor, advice from an expert advisor reduces social uncertainty for unfavourable outcomes by limiting the range of possible errors (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001). People solicit advice from advisor who possess greater knowledge and proficiency than them in the relevant decision-making domain (Harvey & Fischer, 1997). Prior research has found that people seldom take advice from novice advisor compared to expert advisor (Swol & Sniezek, 2005). This is because people believe they are more likely to have a favourable outcome when the advice giver's expertise exceeds their own (Schrah et al., 2006). In contrast, relying on advice from a non-expert advisor makes people vulnerable as the consequences of decisions after incorporating the advice might be subjected to error. In such a case, relying more on an experienced and knowledgeable advisor than a novice advisor would be prudent. Thus, the advisor's expertise plays an important role in determining how much reliance the decision-maker should place on the advisor. We hypothesized that self-other differences in comparative reliance would be less pronounced when choosing to rely on advice from an expert compared to a non-expert advisor.

2. Study Overview

Table 1: Summary of findings

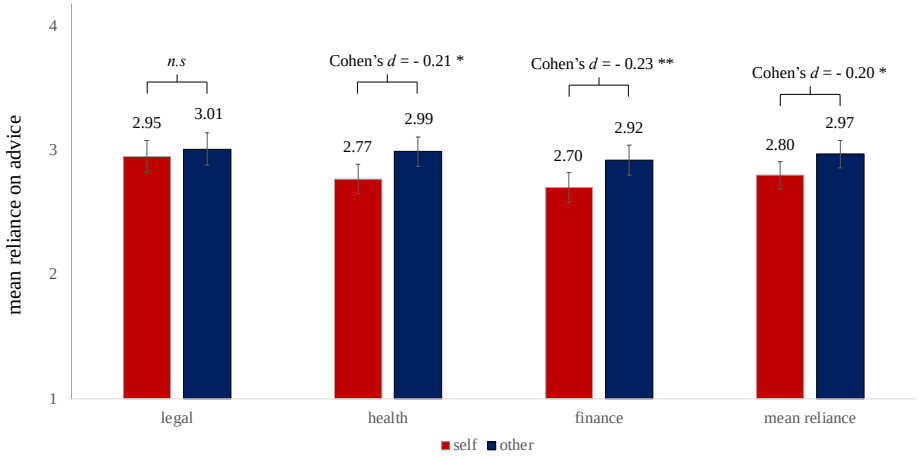
Study	*N*	Design	Main Findings
Testing the main effects of self-other asymmetry and moderation by advice giver's expertise			
1	152 (Prolific)	2 target (self vs. average British person) X 3 scenarios (health, legal, personal finance problem) fully within-subjects design	People think others are more likely to rely on advice from non-expert advisor than they are
2	601 (MTurk)	2 conditions between-subjects (advice giver expertise: novice vs expert)X 3 conditions within-subjects (situation: health problem, legal problem, translation task)	People think others would rely more on advice from novice advisor and equally rely on advice from expert advisor than themselves
3	577 (MTurk)	2 target (self vs. average American person) X 2 expertise of advice giver (expert vs. non-expert) between-subjects design	People think others would rely more on advice from novices than they would, and we found no such difference in advice from experts
4	131 (Grenoble Ecole de Management)	2 conditions within subjects: advice giver (novice vs expert advice givers)	Replication of our main effects with French participants increases the generalizability of our effect
Debiasing Intervention Study: Task Difficulty			
5	374 (MTurk)	2 target (self vs average American's reliance on advice) within-subjects X 2 task difficulty (easy vs hard task) between-subjects	People did not perceive themselves and others to rely differently on advice from non-expert advisor for both hard and easy tasks
Testing for mediation			
6	369 (MTurk)	2 (self vs other) between-subjects; measured mediators: perceived naivete, intelligence, and conformity	Perceived naïveté, intelligence, and conformity mediated relationship between self-other and perceived reliance on low-quality advice
Causal Chain Studies to isolate effects of three mediators			
7a	267 (MTurk)	Perceived naiveté 2 (novice vs expert advisor) within-subjects design	Participants perceived a not naïve person was less likely to rely on advice from a novice and more likely to rely on advice from an expert than a very naïve person
7b	263 (MTurk)	Perceived intelligence 2 (novice vs expert advisor) within-subjects design	Participants perceived an intelligent person was less likely to rely on advice from a novice and more likely to rely on advice from an expert than an unintelligent person
7c	304 (MTurk)	Perceived conformity 2 (novice vs expert advisor) within-subjects design	Participants perceived the highly conformist person to be less likely to rely on advice from a novice and more likely to rely on advice from an expert than the non-conformist person

Note: $N = 3038$; Sample size indicated after applying preregistered exclusion criteria

2. Study 1: Reliance on advice from non-expert advisor (Indirect elicitation)

This preregistered study showed that, on average, participants perceived the average British person (M = 2.97, SD = 1.29) was more likely to rely on advice from a random Prolific worker (non-expert advice) than they were (M = 2.80, SD = 1.37), p = .015, d = 0.20. This study supports the initial notion that people think others are more likely to rely on non-expert advice than they are.

Figure 1: Results of Study 1



Note: *: p < .05, **: p < .01, ***: p < .001

3. Study 2: Reliance on advice from expert and non-expert advisor (Direct elicitation)

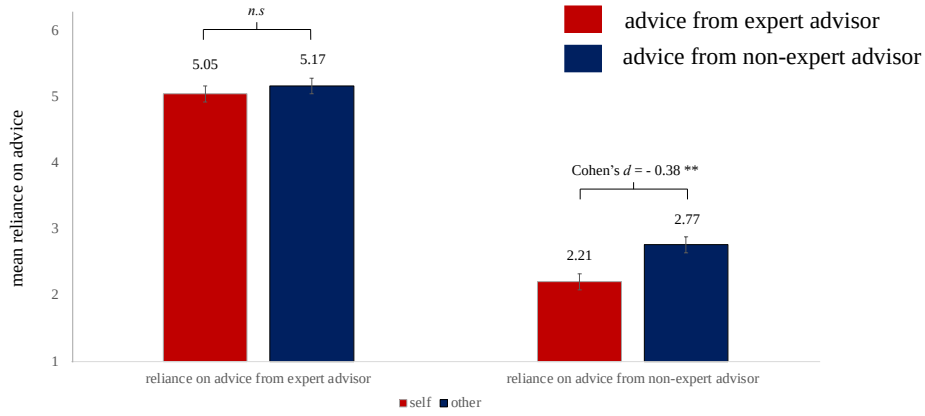
This preregistered study showed that participants perceived that the average American would rely on advice from non-expert advisor more than they would (M = 4.49, SD = 1.23), p < .001, d = 0.40. However, participants perceived that the average American would rely on advice from expert advisor equally as they would (M = 3.96, SD = 1.22), p = .591, d = - 0.03. This study shows that while people think others would rely more on advice from non-expert advisor than themselves, they and others would rely equally on advice from expert advisor.

4. Study 3: Replicating the main effect of self-other differences

This preregistered study replicated our previous finding on self-other asymmetry in perceived reliance on advice from expert and non-expert advisor. Participants perceived the average American (M = 2.77, SD = 1.76) to rely more on the advice from non-expert advisor than themselves (M = 2.21, SD = 1.55), p_{Tukey} = .008, d = 0.38. However, we did not find a significant difference between participants' self-reported reliance (M = 5.05, SD = 1.33) and

the estimated reliance of the average American (M = 5.17, SD = 1.17) when the advice comes from an expert advisor, p_{Tukey} = .906, d = .08.

Figure 2: Results of Study 3



5. Study 4: Replicating the main effect of self-other differences (Different population)

This preregistered study with 131 francophone undergraduate participants replicated our main findings. Participants rated the average student as more likely than they would to rely on advice from novice advisor (M = 4.59, SD = 1.34), p < .001, d = 0.44. However, participants rated the average student as less likely than they would to rely on an expert advisor's advice (M = 3.51, SD = 1.52), p < .001, d = 0.32.

6. Study 5: Debiasing Intervention – Task Difficulty

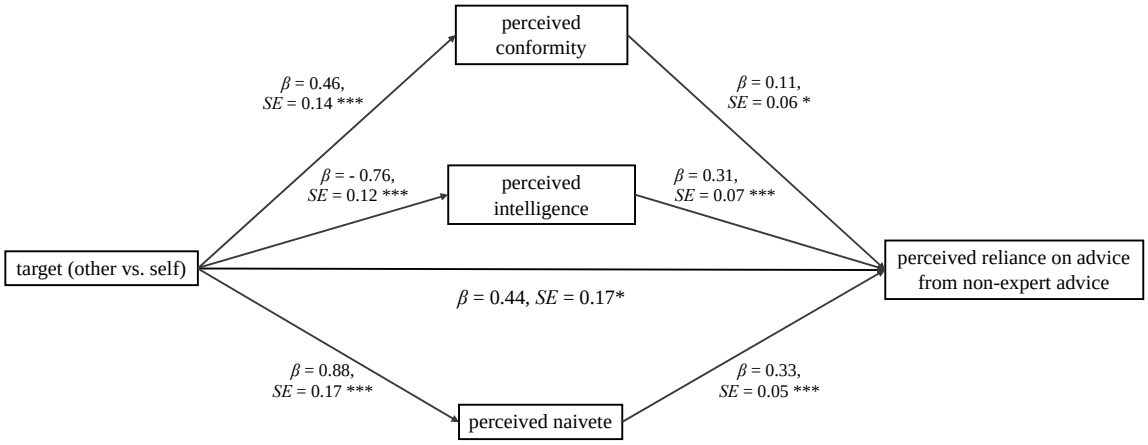
This preregistered study showed that although participants believed good advice was more important for the harder task than the easier task, M = 5.44, SD = 1.48, p < .001, d = 0.98, we did not find a difference in people's perception of the extent to which an average American would rely on advice from non-expert advisor in easy (M = 4.30, SD = 1.44) and the hard task (M = 4.34, SD = 1.46), p = .76, d = 0.03. Overall, participants thought that the average American was more likely than they were to rely on a random MTurker advice (novice advisor), M = 4.32, SD = 1.45, p < .001, d = 0.22. Altogether, we found no evidence of task difficulty moderating the self-other differences in reliance on non-expert advice.

7. Study 6: Mediation with perceived naiveté, conformism, and intelligence

In this preregistered study, a parallel mediation analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4 with 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2013) showed a significant indirect effect of the perception of naiveté, ab(SE) = 0.44 (0.09), 95% CI = [0.27, 0.63]; a significant indirect

effect of the perception of intelligence, *ab*(SE) = - 0.37 (0.08), 95% CI = [- 0.54, - 0.23]; a significant indirect effect of the perception of conformity mediating the effect of self-other condition on perceived reliance on advice from on-expert advisor, *ab*(SE) = 0.08 (0.05), 95% CI = [0.00, 0.12]. This study showed that others perceived as more naïve, more conformist, and less intelligent than self increases the perception that others would rely more on advice from non-expert advisor.

Figure 3: Mediating effects of perceived naïveté, intelligence and conformity.



Note: *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$, ***: $p < .001$. Coefficients are standardized.

8. Causal chain studies: 7a (naivete), 7b (intelligence), and 7c (conformity)

The objective of these causal chain studies was to isolate the effects of the potential mediators of our phenomena and to explore their influence on supposed reliance on novice and expert advice.

The preregistered study 7a showed that participants rated the not naïve person as less likely to rely on advice from a novice advisor than the very naïve person, $M = 2.76$, SD = 2.00, $t(266) = - 10.12$, $p < .001$, $d = - 0.62$. Alongside, participants rated the not naïve person as more likely to rely on advice from an expert advisor than the very naïve person, $M = 4.71$, SD = 1.75, $t(266) = 6.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$.

The preregistered study 7b showed that participants rated that the unintelligent person was more likely to rely on advice from a novice than an intelligent person, $M = 5.37$, SD = 1.76, $t(262) = 12.65$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$. Alongside, participants rated the very intelligent person as more likely to rely on advice from an expert than the unintelligent person, $M = 3.36$, SD = 2.04, $t(262) = - 5.10$, $p < .001$, $d = - 0.31$.

The preregistered study 7c showed that participants rated the not conformist person to be more likely to rely on advice from a novice than the very conformist person, $M = 4.41$, SD =

1.91, $t(303) = 3.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.22$. Alongside, participants rated the very conformist person as more likely to rely on advice from an expert as compared to a conformist person ($M = 3.29$, SD = 1.94), $t(303) = -6.39$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.37$.

Overall, these studies lend credence to the notion that people believe that conformism reduces reliance on advice from novice advisor while naiveté increases it. Alongside, conformism and naiveté also have asymmetrical effects on perceived reliance on advice from expert advisor: perceived conformism of others increases perceived reliance of others on advice from expert advisor, and perceived naiveté reduces perceived reliance of others on advice from expert advisor.

9. General Discussion

The current research contributes to two streams of literature: advice-taking (Feng & MacGeorge, 2006; Yaniv, 2004) and comparison between the self and others (Alicke, 1985; Epley & Dunning, 2000). First, our findings nuance the literature about differences in reliance on advisor and add social nuance to it by showing that people perceive others to rely more on advice from non-expert advisor and similarly on advice from expert advisor compared to themselves. As decision-makers, people often rely on others' opinions to reduce their own decision errors (Yaniv et al., 2011), especially when the decision lacks a conclusive solution. Moving a step further and building on our findings, if most others are perceived to rely on expert advisor similarly to the self, it is plausible that this might enhance the perceived credibility of the advisor. This, in turn, can mitigate any possible scepticism towards the advice giver. The competent information obtained by observing how the majority of others behave can act as a cue for people to rely completely on the advisor, leading to lesser discounting. Further, we supplement the rich literature on expert advice-taking (Savadori et al., 2001; Swol & Sniezek, 2005) by demonstrating that the advisor's expertise moderates the self-other differences in comparative reliance on advice. People can make inferences about others' competence by taking cues from whom others rely on to make their decisions. Thus, a mediocre perception of others' ability to be rational in decision choices by relying more on non-expert advice than themselves can further contribute to the negative reputation of others and the advice giver at the same time.

Our research has practical implications for comprehending how individuals perceive others to react to the same source of advice. According to Word Economic Forum data, remote dispensing of educational content via platforms like Coursera, Skillshare, LinkedIn Learning, etc., has proliferated in recent times, where learners access several online courses to

upgrade their skills and match with the changing demands of the labour market. However, these platforms host several different courses of varied levels of difficulty, which might potentially confuse a learner if they are unsure of their skill level. Personalised recommendations and coaches guide learners to choose the course optimised to their needs and skills. People might increasingly select diverse learning topics to increase their breadth of skills while perceiving highly conformist others to choose popular courses based on expert recommendation. This absence of relevant work experience with a long list of divergent skills might become a potential disadvantage for the candidate during an interview, especially compared to others who leveraged the expert recommendations. People might develop a more paternalistic attitude towards others if they have suffered adverse consequences due to reliance on bad counsel. One might feel obligated to help their friend or peers if they suffered financial loss after relying on advice from non-experts. This can be particularly relevant in an organisational context. Our results indicated others are perceived to be more naïve and hence exhibit greater reliance on bad counsel than self. This belief can lead people to choose negotiation partners whom they can successfully exploit (Barasch et al., 2016). For example, while selling a second-hand car, the owner may perceive the buyer as inexperienced, naïve and dependent on a non-expert broker to make the bargaining. In that case, the owner may choose to negotiate directly with the buyer to make the most profit out of the negotiation. Furthermore, individuals perceived as naïve and relying on non-expert lawyers might be susceptible to being wrongly accused by interrogators using deceptive strategies (Perillo & Kassin, 2011). People also perceived less intelligent others to rely more on non-expert advice. Building on our findings, a defendant who lost a legal case might be perceived by the accused to be unintelligent enough to rely on novice counsel. This pessimistic perception about the defendant might also spill over on the lawyer, resulting in detrimental consequences on their professional reputation.

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