Trade-off between search costs and accuracy in a visual and manual search task

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Ilja Wagner[1], Jan Tünnermann[2], Anna Schubö[2], & Alexander Schütz[2]
[1]Justus Liebig University Giessen, [2]University of Marburg
Contact: Ilja.Wagner@psychol.uni-giessen.de

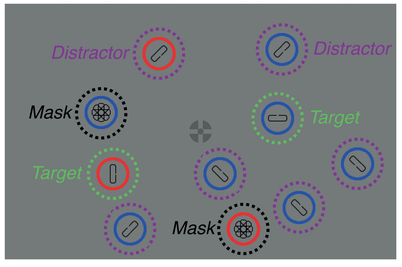
Introduction

- Humans must balance the influence of different factors when choosing between multiple courses of action
- Previous work showed that humans can trade off their accuracy to discriminate object features against the prospective temporal costs of eye movements to optimize performance in a visual search task [1]
- **Is this trade-off is specific for eye movements, or does it generalize to other effectors?**

Methods

Task: find one of the two targets and discriminate the gap location; choose freely between targets, and complete as many trials as you can in 6:30 min.

Ten stimuli in each trial



Feedback after each trial

Time

+/– 0.02€ Reward/punishment for right/wrong resp.

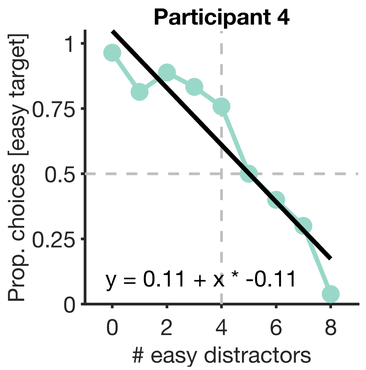
Two conditions: use finger taps (manual search) or eye movements (visual search)

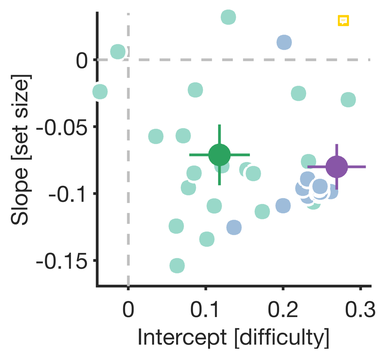
Stimuli are masked, unless fixated or ~~taped~~

Manipulation 1: discrimination difficulty (easy- and difficult-to-discriminate target)

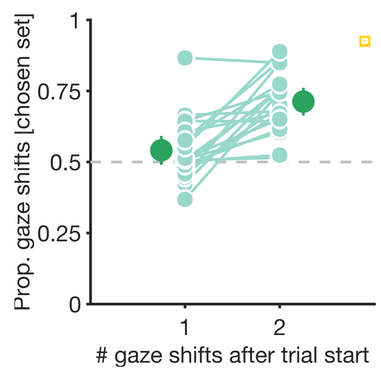
Manipulation 2: temporal costs of searching for a target (i.e., relative number of easy and difficult distractors in trial)

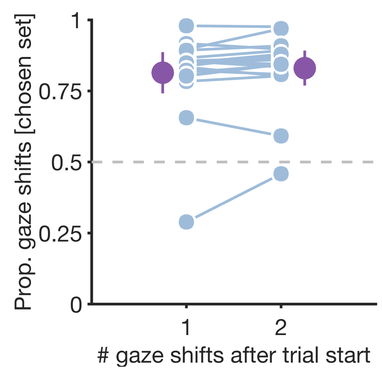
Results



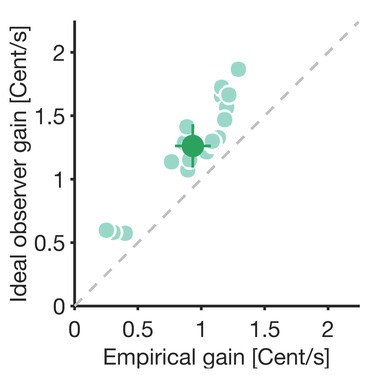


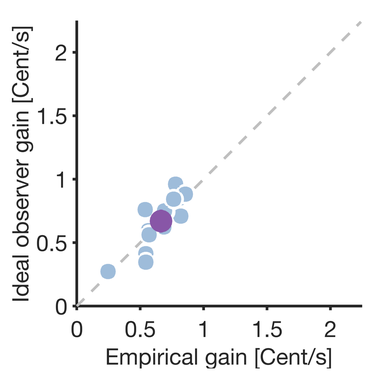
Both effectors: participants considered search costs and discrimination difficulty when choosing targets



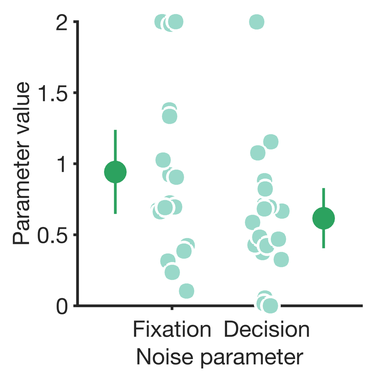


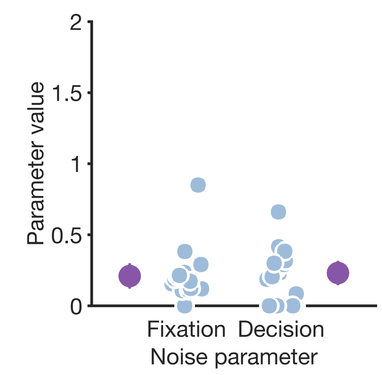
Participants had a stronger preference to fixate elements from both sets during visual search





Failure to maximize monetary gain per unit of time (i.e., performance) during visual search





Model fitting reveals that performance is more strongly constrained by noise during visual search

Conclusion

- The previously reported near-optimal trade-off between search costs and discrimination accuracy constitutes a general strategy for humans to optimize decision-making behavior
- However, the slower time course of manual actions makes choice behavior less susceptible to noise, compared to fast-paced eye movements

References

[1] Wagner, I., Henare, D., Tünnermann, J., Schubö, A., & Schütz, A. C. (2023). Humans trade off search costs and accuracy in a combined visual search and perceptual task. *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics*, *85*(1), 23-40.

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