

# Bayesian multi-level modelling for predicting single and double feature visual search

Anna E. Hughes<sup>a</sup>, Anna Nowakowska<sup>b</sup>, Alasdair D. F. Clarke<sup>1</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department of Psychology, University of Essex, Colchester, CO4 3SQ, UK*

<sup>b</sup>*School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, AB24 3FX, UK*

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## Abstract

Performance in visual search tasks is frequently summarised by “search slopes” - the additional cost in reaction time for each additional distractor. While search tasks with a shallow search slopes are termed efficient (pop-out, parallel, feature), there is no clear dichotomy between efficient and inefficient (serial, conjunction) search. Indeed, a range of search slopes are observed in empirical data. The Target Contrast Signal (TCS) Theory is a rare example of quantitative model that attempts to predict search slopes for efficient visual search. One study using the TCS framework has shown that the search slope in a double-feature search (where the target differs in both colour and shape from the distractors) can be estimated from the slopes of the associated single-feature searches. This estimation is done using a contrast combination model, and a collinear contrast integration model was shown to outperform other options. In our work, we extend TCS to a Bayesian multi-level framework. We investigate modelling using normal and shifted-lognormal distributions, and show that the latter allows for a better fit to previously published data. We propose running a new fully within-subjects experiment to attempt to replicate the key original findings, with some changes to help distinguish between theories.

**Keywords:** Visual search, Efficient search, Parallel processing

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## 1. Introduction

Visual search, where participants are asked to find a target within a cluttered scene, has been extensively studied within psychology. Several models have been developed that can generate testable predictions about how different types of distractors and targets affect search efficiency. One of the key distinctions in the field

6 has been between efficient (also referred to as parallel or pop-out) and inefficient  
7 (serial) search. These are often studied in the context of the regression slope be-  
8 tween the number of distractors and mean reaction time, which has been termed  
9 the *search slope*. When the search slope is shallow (usually positive, but occasion-  
10 ally negative e.g. (Rangelov et al., 2017)), the search is called efficient or parallel,  
11 and the addition of more non-target distractors has little impact on an observers  
12 difficulty in finding a target. When the slope is steeper, each additional distrac-  
13 tor has a noticeable impact on increasing difficulty, and the search is described  
14 as inefficient or serial. However, the distinction between these types of search is  
15 often less clear in real experimental data, with a range of different search slopes  
16 being seen for different types of targets and distractors (Duncan and Humphreys,  
17 1989; Cave and Wolfe, 1990; Wolfe, 1998; Liesefeld et al., 2016). Recent work  
18 has also attempted to model the variation in search slopes at the boundary between  
19 inefficient and efficient search (Liesefeld et al., 2016).

20 In the current study, we are interested in what has traditionally been termed  
21 efficient or parallel search, and the factors that affect search slope in these condi-  
22 tions. Recent work has suggested that for efficient search, there is a logarithmic  
23 relationship between distractor set size and reaction time, and that this relation-  
24 ship can be modified by target-distractor similarity (Buetti et al., 2016), providing  
25 evidence that search behaviour in parallel search is more complex than has pre-  
26 viously been assumed. This observation has formed the basis of the ‘Target Con-  
27 trast Signal (TCS) Theory’ (Lleras et al., 2020), which aims to provide a means  
28 of predicting observer search slopes for new search arrays by quantifying target-  
29 distractor differences. For example, by measuring search slopes for conditions in  
30 which the distractors differ from the target along a *single feature* (e.g. colour *or*  
31 shape), it has been shown that you can predict search times for arrays in which  
32 the target differs from the distractors along two features (e.g., colour *and* shape)  
33 which we refer to here as *double feature* search. (Buetti et al., 2019). Here, we  
34 aim to replicate and extend this work both theoretically and empirically, to test the  
35 generalisability of the TCS model, and to suggest ways in which the TCS model  
36 could be modified to generate better predictions.

### 37 1.1. Previous Work

38 Many different forms of visual search models have been proposed. One well  
39 developed class of models are the saliency models, which aim to predict eye move-  
40 ments during scene viewing, including visual search. They rest on the assump-  
41 tion that fixations are directed to objects or locations that are most dissimilar to  
42 the background or other objects in the visual display (Itti and Koch, 2000; Itti

et al., 1998; Koch and Ullman, 1987). While the original saliency model was able to predict fixation allocation in a visual search task above chance (Parkhurst et al., 2002), further research demonstrated that a comparable level of performance could be achieved using a simple central fixation bias heuristic (Tatler, 2007). The saliency models have since been extended and improved (see for example Zhang et al. (2008)): however, the main issue with this family of models remains their limited usability in complex real-life search arrays (Tatler et al., 2011; Koehler et al., 2014). In addition, in most instances of visual search, the target is clearly defined (i.e. the goal is to find a specific object) and inspecting the most salient areas of the display may in these cases be inefficient. Finally, by focusing on eye movements, these models do not necessarily provide a theoretical framework for the cognitive processes underlying visual search.

Perhaps the most established class of models of visual search are based around Feature Integration Theory (Treisman and Gelade, 1980), which has been modified and extended by Wolfe and colleagues in the Guided Search Model (Wolfe et al., 1989; Wolfe, 2014). These theories have been developed using data from visual search tasks with discrete sets of abstract items. These models combine top-down influences (how closely an item resembles the observer’s goal) with bottom-up image properties. For example, if one’s goal (top-down processing) is to find a red horizontal bar, all the red and horizontal items in a visual search display will be given greater weight than distractors (e.g. vertical and blue items) in the model. The salience of a given object in the display (how distinctive it is from the surrounding objects) also activates bottom-up processing. For instance, a blue item among red items is ranked higher than red among orange items. In such cases, a salient item can capture attention even without resembling the target. Combining bottom-up and top-down sources of activation generates an activation map which generates a prediction of the order in which stimuli are processed in visual search. Thus, these models aim to produce a representation of the visual properties of the distractors at each location in the visual field. However, these are predominantly qualitative models, and thus it is difficult to use them to make specific quantitative predictions.

TCS falls under a class of models that take a different approach, in that they focus solely on representing the difference between targets and distractors. For example, in work on eye movement patterns, it has been proposed that performance in inefficient (serial) visual search is mostly determined by the size of the ‘functional viewing field’, whose size varies as a function of target-distractor similarity (Hulleman and Olivers, 2017). Similarly, work on attention has proposed the notion of ‘relative features’, where attention is tuned to feature relationships

i.e. the appearance of the target relative to distractors in the environment (Becker et al., 2014; Becker, 2010). TCS also has features in common with other models that propose parallel identification of all items in a scene, with diffusion based mechanisms for identifying targets from distractors (Moran et al., 2013, 2016). However, TCS (Lleras et al., 2020) aims to provide a unifying framework that can make quantitative behavioural predictions for visual search based on this general assumption. As such, it is an attractive candidate model for a formal registered replication.

A key assumption of the TCS model is that behaviour is determined by comparing the target template (held in memory) with every element present in the scene in parallel. This allows the visual system to reject peripheral non-targets quickly; the speed at which items are evaluated is determined by how different the item is from the template through an evidence accumulation process (formally, the slope of the logarithmic function is assumed to be inversely proportional to the overall magnitude of the contrast signal between the target and distractor). The model thus focuses on an initial, efficient processing stage of search; if sufficient evidence is not accumulated during this process, the model posits that a second stage is entered, requiring a sequence of eye movements to search for the target in a serial manner. TCS has been successful in predicting a number of empirical results, including search performance in heterogeneous scenes based on parameters estimated in homogeneous scenes, both with artificial stimuli (Buetti et al., 2016; Lleras et al., 2019) and with real-world objects visualised on a computer display (Wang et al., 2017). Table 1 provides an overview of studies investigating the TCS framework to date.

The original version of the TCS model is essentially a (natural) log-linear model in the number of distractors. The full model contains a variable  $L$ , which represents the number of different types of distractors present in the display. However, in our paper, we will follow Buetti et al. (2019) and only consider the specific case of  $L = 1$ , of a target among a homogeneous set of distractors. In this case, the TCS model can be represented in the following way:

$$\hat{RT} = a + D \log(N_T + 1) \quad (1)$$

The intercept,  $a$ , corresponds to search arrays in which only the target is present and there are no distractors.  $N_T$  is the total number of distractors.

## 1.2. Rationale for proposed work

While many aspects of the TCS framework have been tested, with extremely promising results, there remains a great deal of scope for verification of some of

Reference	Overview
Buetti et al. (2016)	For efficient search with a specific target, there is a logarithmic relationship between distractor set size and reaction time. The steepness of this relationship is modulated by distractor-target similarity, with steeper slopes for more similar distractors.
Wang et al. (2017)	Data from homogeneous search arrays can be used to predict search reaction times in heterogeneous displays containing images of real-world objects, using an equation assuming parallel, unlimited capacity, exhaustive processing, and independence of inter-item processing.
Madison et al. (2018)	Logarithmic efficiency in efficient search cannot be explained by crowding in peripheral vision.
Ng et al. (2018)	Logarithmic efficiency in efficient search cannot be explained by eye movements.
Lleras et al. (2019)	Validation of previous results showing data from homogeneous search arrays can be used to predict reaction times in heterogeneous displays. Distractor-distractor interactions can also facilitate processing when nearby items are similar to each other.
<b>Buetti et al. (2019)</b>	Data from search arrays where the distractors are distinguished from the target by one feature can be used to predict search reaction times in displays with compound stimuli, defined by two features. Reaction times can be predicted using a collinear contrast integration model, which assumes that the overall target-distractor contrast is the sum of the contrasts from the two feature vectors separately.
Lleras et al. (2020)	Full proposal of the Target Contrast Signal Theory, proposing that the initial stage of processing computes a difference signal between each item in the scene and the target template, using this to determine which items in the scene are unlikely to be the target.
Ng et al. (2020)	Attention works in a two stage process, first discarding target-dissimilar distractors in a distributed, parallel way. Focused spatial attention then visits target-similar items at random.
Xu et al. (2021)	Extension of Buetti et al. (2019) to new features (shape and texture), which combine according to a Euclidean metric (orthogonal contrast integration model).

Table 1: An overview of work on the Target Contrast Signal Theory. The key paper for our replication is highlighted.

116 the key findings to date, and extensions of aspects of the model. In all implementa-  
117 tions of TCS so far, predictions of search efficiency (e.g. in heterogeneous scenes)  
118 have been made on the average of a group of participants, using data from a dif-  
119 ferent group performing a different task (e.g. searching in homogeneous scenes).  
120 Thus, we know that TCS can replicate group-level averages between subjects in  
121 search well, but we do not know to what extent it is also able to make predictions  
122 at the individual level. This is particularly important given that conclusions based  
123 on aggregate data can be different from those that take individual differences into  
124 account; in one study where participants searched for a target in an array of ran-  
125 domly oriented line segments, aggregating the data suggested that participants  
126 were using a stochastic search model (Nowakowska et al., 2017). However, when  
127 considering each participant individually, it became clear that there was a high  
128 level of heterogeneity in responses, with some participants performing close to  
129 optimally, and others actually performing worse than chance (Nowakowska et al.,  
130 2017). Similarly striking variability has also been reported in other search studies  
131 (Irons and Leber, 2016, 2018; Clarke et al., 2020).

132 Taking search time distributions into account is also important for constrain-  
133 ing theories of visual search (Wolfe et al., 2010; Liesefeld and Müller, 2020): for  
134 example, they have been used to help distinguish between models that make sim-  
135 ilar predictions at the level of average reaction times (Moran et al., 2016, 2017).  
136 Including subject and trial level data into our implementation of the TCS will  
137 therefore further aid model development and assumption testing.

138 We also extend the TCS model into a Bayesian framework, where we begin  
139 with existing 'prior' beliefs that are updated with data to give 'posterior' beliefs  
140 that can be used for inference (McElreath, 2020). We think this has a number  
141 of advantages over frequentist approaches. Perhaps most importantly, Bayesian  
142 models are highly flexible. We demonstrate how we are able to specify a model  
143 that is able to more accurately represent the distribution of responses (for exam-  
144 ple, by specifying a response distribution that avoids predicting negative reaction  
145 times) with a relatively complex model structure, that can be fit to a relatively  
146 small amount of pilot data: something that would be challenging within a fre-  
147 quentist framework. We also believe that Bayesian models offer very intuitive  
148 methods for model testing and comparison and straightforward interpretation of  
149 results, and we hope that this manuscript can act as a demonstration of these ben-  
150 efits, showing how they can be applied to real scientific questions beyond the  
151 simplified examples often found in textbooks or tutorials.

152 In the current manuscript, we focus on replicating and extending findings from  
153 Buetti et al. (2019). In their study, participants searched for a target in a scene of

homogeneous distractors (see Figure 1). First, parallel search efficiency (measured by the logarithmic search slope) was estimated for cases where the distractors varied from the target in one dimension: either colour (e.g. a cyan target being searched for in either yellow, blue or orange distractors) or shape (e.g. a semicircle target in either circle, diamond or triangle distractors). New participants then searched for the same targets in displays where the distractors were compounds, differing from the target in both colour and shape (e.g. searching for a cyan semicircle in either blue circles, orange diamonds or yellow triangles). The logarithmic search slopes in the initial experiments were then used to predict the logarithmic slopes and reaction times using a number of models. The authors found that the best model was a ‘collinear contrast integration model’ where the distinctiveness scores were summed along each attribute in the unidimensional experiments, creating an overall contrast score that was used for compound stimuli predictions. In our registered replication, we will attempt to verify the conclusions of Buetti et al. (2019), that the collinear contrast integration model does indeed offer the best characterisation of contrast signal combinations in visual search within the TCS framework.

We begin by verifying the analysis of Buetti et al. (2019). We then describe our proposed replication study, showing with pilot data how we are able to extend their model of how multi-dimensional contrasts are calculated, both by incorporating a multi-level design to predict within-subjects effects and by utilising a Bayesian generalised linear model framework to better represent the distribution of responses (e.g. avoiding predicting negative reaction times, accounting for uncertainty in model predictions).

## 2. The Target Contrast Model

We first describe the original Target Contrast Model, as presented in Buetti et al. (2019) and verify that we can successfully replicate the original analysis (both using frequentist modelling and Bayesian modelling; see *Supplementary Materials*).

### 2.1. TCS modelling overview

In Experiment 1a of Buetti et al. (2019), participants searched for a cyan semicircle target among blue, yellow or orange semicircular distractors i.e. they searched for a target that differed from the distractors by a *single feature* (colour). The experiment was then repeated (1b) using a different single feature (shape,

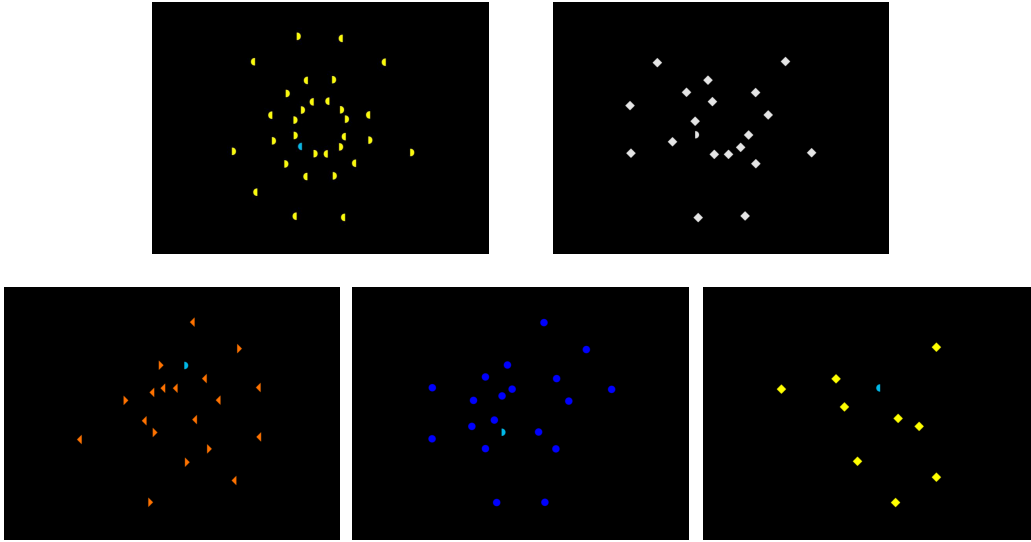


Figure 1: Example stimuli from Buetti et al. (2019) Top left: Expt 1A. Here, the target is a blue semicircle within a set of homogeneous (yellow semicircle) distractors. Top right: Expt 1B. The target is a grey semicircle in circular grey distractors. Bottom left: Expt 2A. The target is a blue semicircle in orange diamond distractors. Bottom middle: Expt 2B. The target is a blue semicircle in dark blue triangle distractors. Bottom right: Expt 2C. The target is a blue semicircle in yellow circular distractors.

188 with participants searching for the semicircular target within triangle, circle or di-  
 189 amond distractors). In Experiments 2a, 2b and 2c, participants again searched for  
 190 a cyan semicircle, but this time, the distractors differed in both shape and colour.  
 191 We will refer to these conditions as *double features*. Note, unlike in standard con-  
 192 junction searches, in this paradigm, the distractors are all identical with respect to  
 193 these features (i.e, orange triangles). Examples of all these stimuli are shown in  
 194 Figure 1. Buetti et al. (2019) also carried out a replication of their basic results  
 195 using slightly different target and distractor stimuli (Experiments 3 and 4).

196 The *Target Signal Contrast* theory is built around a linear model for predicting  
 197 mean reaction times from the logarithm of the number of distractors (see Equation  
 198 1). In particular, the TCS theory allows us to predict the value of the logarithmic  
 199 slope,  $D_{c,s}$ , in this condition based on the corresponding  $D_i$  in the single feature  
 200 search experiments.



201 *2.1.1. Calculating the intercept,  $a$ , and the logarithmic slope parameter,  $D_i$*

202 Experiments 1a and 1b and 3a and 3b were used to calculate the logarithmic  
 203 slope parameter  $D_i$ . In all experiments, the number of distractors varied, allowing  
 204 the data to be used to fit a log-linear model for reaction times, where reaction  
 205 times increase logarithmically with  $N_T$ , the number of distractors (see Equation  
 206 1). In the original model the error distribution was assumed to be normal. Thus  
 207 the results of Experiments 1 and 3 were used to calculate  $D_i$ , for each type of  
 208 distractor. When colour varied, we will refer to  $D_c$ , for  $c = 1, 2, 3$ . Similarly for  
 209 shape we will denote this ( $D_s$ ), and the compound features are denoted as ( $D_{c,s}$ ).

210 Fitting the model specified in Equation 1 to the data, we obtain the values for  
 211  $D_c$  and  $D_s$  given in Table 2. As can be seen, the more similar the distractors are to  
 212 the target, the steeper the slope parameter is.

feature	$D_c$	feature	$D_s$
blue	76.8	triangle	141.1
yellow	16.0	diamond	77.2
orange	9.8	circle	62.1

Table 2: A table of  $D_i$  values for Experiment 1a and 1b. See *Supplementary Materials* for full values for all experiments.

213 *2.1.2. Estimating  $D_{c,s}$ , the logarithmic slope parameter for compound features*

214 In the context of the current experiments, the core idea of TCS theory is that  
 215 we can estimate the (natural) logarithmic slope parameter for a double feature  
 216 visual search from the slopes parameters in the two independent single feature  
 217 searches i.e.,  $D_{c,s} = f(D_c, D_s)$ . Buetti et al. (2019) tested three different models  
 218 for predicting  $D$  for compound colour-shape stimuli. The best feature guidance  
 219 model (Equation 2) suggests that when the target and lures differ in two dimen-  
 220 sions, participants will choose to attend to whichever feature dimension is the  
 221 most discriminable (i.e. has the smallest  $D$  value):

$$D_{c,s} = \min(D_c, D_s) \quad (2)$$

222 The orthogonal contrast combination model instead suggests that independent  
 223 feature dimensions comprise a multidimensional space, where an object can be  
 224 described by the overall vector in this space, and thus  $D_{c,s}$  can be represented as:

$$D_{c,s} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{(\frac{1}{D_c})^2 + (\frac{1}{D_s})^2}} \quad (3)$$

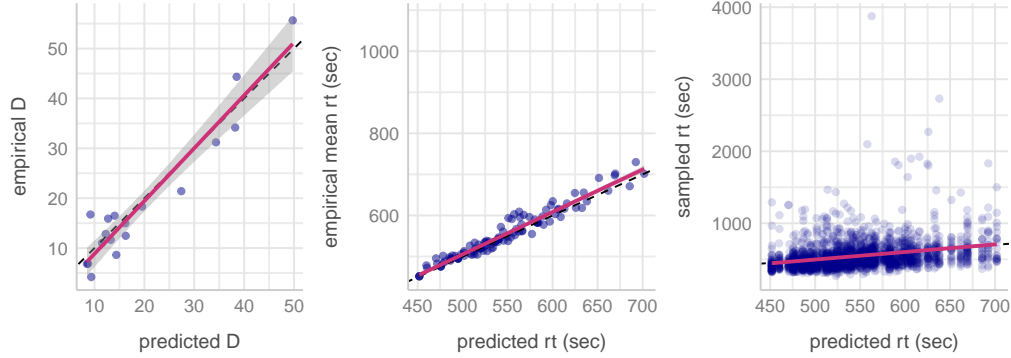


Figure 2: (left) The collinear method for calculating  $D$  offers a good prediction. (centre) Using the TCS to predict reaction times. (right) Each dot now represents a randomly sampled reaction time from an observer. Note that there is greater spread in the data points here, due to the fact that there will be trial-to-trial variability due to target position, inter-item distances, observer differences and so on.

Finally, the collinear contrast integration model also assumes independence of feature dimensions, but assumes that while the visual features create a multidimensional space, the contrast between them is unidimensional. As  $D$  is assumed to be inversely proportional to contrast, the equation can be written as follows:

$$\frac{1}{D_{c,s}} = \frac{1}{D_c} + \frac{1}{D_s} \quad (4)$$

Buetti et al. (2019) found that with their dataset, the collinear contrast integration model was best able to predict  $D_{c,s}$  from  $D_c$  and  $D_s$ , with  $R^2 = 0.915$ . We verified we were able to replicate this result using the dataset available on OSF (<https://osf.io/f3m24/>)<sup>1</sup> and using the exclusion criteria originally applied; see Figure 2 (left panel) and *Supplementary Materials* for details. We show that we are able to do this using both the frequentist modelling approaches used in the original paper, and using Bayesian modelling.

### 2.1.3. Estimating $a$ , the intercept parameter for compound features

As  $a$  is the intercept of the model, it represents how long observers take to find a target when  $N_T = 0$ , i.e., there are no distractors. As such, it should be independent of both shape and colour, and can be thought of as the role of non-search

<sup>1</sup>downloaded on 28th August 2020

processes (such as motivation, motor preparation etc.) that influence reaction time. In Buetti et al. (2019),  $a$  was calculated for each sub-experiment. Here, we follow that method in order to replicate their results exactly.

#### 2.1.4. Estimating mean reaction times

Finally, we can use Equation 1 to predict mean reaction times. As can be seen in Figure 2 (centre panel), these predictions are essentially identical to the empirical RT results:  $R^2 = 0.93\%$ .

#### 2.1.5. Discussion

While TCS theory offers a good prediction of search slopes and corresponding mean reaction times for double feature search, there are two related limitations. Firstly, it is unable to account for individual differences between observers, only the changes to the sample average. Secondly, it cannot account for the distribution of reaction times over multiple trials. Figure 2 (right panel) shows clearly that these factors generate high levels of variability within the individual trial-level data. To address these issues, we propose adapting TCS to make use of multi-level modelling techniques. Multi-level models allow us to take into account the hierarchical structure of the data (i.e. that each participant completes multiple trials) in a way that does not require averaging, meaning that we are able to model participant variability as well as group-level effects (Gelman and Hill, 2006).

### 2.2. A multi-level TCS

Switching from a linear regression model to a multi-level model will allow us to compute  $D$  for each participant, while simultaneously estimating the trial-to-trial variance. We also switch from a frequentist to Bayesian framework, as this allows us to naturally account for the uncertainty in the model's predictions. However, switching from linear regression to a multi-level model raises the problem of which distribution to use for modelling reaction times. Using a normal distribution is unlikely to be satisfactory, as it is unable to account for the skew frequently seen in reaction time distributions, and also allows the possibility of negative reaction times. We can account for both of these problems by using a log-normal distribution. We will also test whether a slightly more complex extension of this model, the shifted lognormal model (which allows the distribution to be offset to the right i.e. mimicking the patterns seen in reaction time data, where valid responses begin at around 100ms) offers any improvement in model fit. Note that a Wald, or inverse Gaussian distribution, would also be a reasonable distribution choice for this data given that TCS is based on a diffusion process

275 e.g. (Moran et al., 2013): we chose not to use this distribution as it often leads to  
276 computational issues, which would make it harder for others to reproduce or build  
277 on our approach later.

### 278 3. Hypotheses

279 We plan an experiment to test the extent to which the original results in Buetti  
280 et al. (2019) replicate and generalise, using our new modelling approach.

#### 281 3.1. Proposed Modifications to Experimental Design

282 In order to better test the above, and increases sensitivity, we propose to make  
283 the following changes to the experiment described in Buetti et al. (2019):

- 284 1. **Within-subjects design.** This modification should give us greater power to  
285 detect differences between different models, as well as allowing us to in-  
286 vestigate how individual differences in the single-feature task might explain  
287 differences in the double-feature task.  
288
- 289 2. **Increase target-distractor similarity.** If the distractors are a very differ-  
290 ent colour from the target, they may not distinguish well between different  
291 contrast models. We will therefore run a version of the experiment where  
292 the target is a red semicircle, with distractors being either orange, purple or  
293 pink.  
294

#### 295 3.2. Registered Hypothesis

- 296 1. **Shifted lognormal model.** We hypothesise that a shifted lognormal model  
297 will give the best fit to our single-feature data, when compared to a lognor-  
298 mal and a normal model.  
299
- 300 2. **Log-linear effect of  $N_T$ .** We will test the TCS model assumption that  $N_T$   
301 has a log-linear effect by testing models with and without the log of this  
302 term. We expect that this will confirm the results previously seen in papers  
303 testing TCS i.e. that the log-linear approach will be best.  
304
- 305 3. **Contrast model comparisons.** We will test the hypothesis proposed by  
306 (Buetti et al., 2019): specifically, that the *collinear contrast ingratiation*

307 *model* outperforms the *best feature guidance*, and *orthogonal contrast com-*  
308 *bination models* for the calculation of  $D$ , by calculating and comparing the  
309 mean absolute prediction error for each model.

310

311 **4. Reaction time predictions.** We will further test the hypothesis proposed by  
312 (Buetti et al., 2019) by testing which model gives the best prediction at the  
313 trial-by-trial RT level.

314 We will test each of these hypotheses by calculating the marginal likelihood of  
315 the relevant models, and then calculating the poster probabilities. This will give  
316 us a probability for each model that represents the likelihood that the model gives  
317 the best prediction. We will consider there to be evidence for one model over  
318 the others if a given model has a probability above 90%. We will consider there  
319 to be strong evidence for one model over the others if that model has a posterior  
320 probability above 99%. This approach is most appropriate for our model: other  
321 measures of model fit, such as AIC, require an assumption of flat priors (which is  
322 not valid for multi-level models) and are based on point estimates (which is not  
323 valid for Bayesian models) (McElreath, 2020).

### 324 3.3. *Planned Explorations*

325 We plan to investigate the effect of individual differences in this paradigm:  
326 to what extent performance in the single-feature task can predict performance in  
327 the double-feature task for a given individual (Buetti et al. (2019) were not able  
328 to investigate this due to the between-subjects design of their study). We plan to  
329 do this by specifying a more complex random effects structure for the model, that  
330 allows for individual differences across different slopes for different features. This  
331 allows us to then study the random effect correlation structure. However, given  
332 these models can be challenging to fit, we will do this in an exploratory manner  
333 after carrying out our formally registered analysis.

334 One of the benefits of using a multi-level modelling approach is that it is rel-  
335 atively easy to extend to incorporate other factors that may contribute to reaction  
336 times, such as eccentricity and inter-item distance, which may help to explain  
337 behaviour further. To demonstrate this, we will also run exploratory analyses in-  
338 cluding a factor for which ring the target is in to assess whether this improves  
339 model fit or affects any of the conclusions that can be drawn from the model.

### 340 3.4. *Pilot Experiment*

341 Full details of a pilot experiment with  $n = 4$  participants (960 trials each) using  
342 our proposed analyses can be found in *Supplementary Materials*. This suggests

343 that even with a small sample, we can convincingly demonstrate H1 and H2, how-  
344 ever more data will be required to discriminate between the models in H3.

## 345 4. General Methods

### 346 4.1. Sample Size: Participants and Trials

347 We plan to test 40 participants during the experiment. Our pilot experiment  
348 shows that H1 and H2 are easily demonstrated with 10 times less data, and Buetti  
349 et al. (2019) used 20 participants per experiment. Our sample size will therefore be  
350 in line with previous work testing H3 and H4. Ethical approval for the study was  
351 granted by the University of Aberdeen (application number PEC/4677/2021/2).

### 352 4.2. Stimuli

353 The targets and distractors are randomly assigned to the display based on an  
354 invisible grid. Within each quadrant of the screen, there are three 'spokes' each  
355 with four possible target positions (starting from the centre of the screen and mov-  
356 ing outwards), creating 36 different target positions in total, in three concentric  
357 circles. A small amount of jitter is added to each possible position to make the  
358 target locations less predictable.

359 **Distractor and target types:** we will replicate the distractor types used in  
360 Buetti et al. (2019), apart from that we will change one distractor colour (from  
361 blue to pink) to allow us to discriminate better between different models of the  
362 data (see above). There are six single-feature conditions (purple, orange and pink  
363 distractors and triangle, circle and diamond distractors) and nine double-feature  
364 conditions (all possible pairings of the single-feature conditions). The target is al-  
365 ways a red semicircle, except in the trials where the distractors are single-feature  
366 shapes (triangles, circles and diamonds) in which case the target is a white semi-  
367 circle.

368 **Set sizes:** we will run all the distractor set sizes used in Buetti et al. (2019) (1,  
369 4, 9, 19 and 31). We will also run target-only 'zero distractor' trials (60 in total,  
370 with 12 being the white semicircle target and the remainder the red semicircle  
371 target).

372 The experiments were programmed in PsychoPy and Pavlovica (Peirce et al.,  
373 2019). Stimuli were pre-made to generate search array images with  $1920 \times 1080$   
374 resolution.

### 375 4.3. Procedure

376 Participants will complete the experiment in the laboratory, sitting at a viewing  
377 distance of 45cm from the screen. They will view a fixation cross before viewing  
378 a search array: they will press the space bar to continue to the trial. Participants  
379 will be told to search for the target among distractors (i.e. will be told to per-  
380 form a singleton search) and report if the semicircle target points to the left or  
381 right, by pressing either the ‘f’ or ‘j’ key respectively on their keyboard. They  
382 will first complete 16 practice trials where they will receive feedback immedi-  
383 ately after completing each trial. In the real experimental trials, participants will  
384 receive feedback on their average accuracy and reaction time after each block of  
385 120 trials. Participants will complete 8 blocks of trials (960 trials overall i.e. 192  
386 trials in each of 5 experiments, consisting of 5 set sizes x 3 distractor conditions  
387 x 12 repeats + 12 zero distractor trials) with the order of the displays being fully  
388 randomised i.e. all different conditions will be completely intermixed (in the ter-  
389 minology of Buetti et al. (2019), participants will complete all of Experiments 1  
390 and 2 in the same testing session, rather than having different participants com-  
391 plete each separate sub-experiment).

392 In both the practice and experimental trials, the search display will always  
393 remain on screen until a response is made, or until 5 seconds had passed.

### 394 4.4. Data Pre-processing

395 Only participants who complete the full experiment will be considered candi-  
396 dates for inclusion in the data analysis. We will apply the same inclusion criteria  
397 as the original paper: participants will only be included if their search accuracy  
398 over 90% and their average response time is not smaller or larger than two stan-  
399 dard deviations from the group average response time.

400 For participants included in the analysis, we will apply the data cleaning used  
401 in the pilot data analysis i.e. removing the top and bottom 1% of their data.

### 402 4.5. Analysis Plan

403 All analysis will be carried out using R (vx.xx)<sup>2</sup>, brms (v.xx.xx) and rStan  
404 (vx.xxxx) As discussed above, we will use a mixed-effect models with either nor-  
405 mal, lognormal or shifted lognormal distributions.

406 Please see the analysis of our pilot data for a full implementation of our anal-  
407 ysis pipeline, including all code (available on Github at [https://github.com/scienceanna/TCS\\_Bayesian](https://github.com/scienceanna/TCS_Bayesian)).  
408

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<sup>2</sup>Version numbers will be recorded upon completion of final analysis.

## 409 **5. Results**

410 *– blank –*

## 411 **6. General Discussion**

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### 413 **Conflict of interest**

414 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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