Department of Psychology
The University of Hong Kong
香港大學心理學系

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Departmental Seminar

Tracking salient distractors and learning to suppress them



Prof. Benchi Wang
Professor, The Great Bay Area Centre for Brain Research
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Southern Medical University

3:00p.m. – 4:00p.m.
Room 715, 7/F
The Jockey Club Tower
Centennial Campus
The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Rapidly orienting to salient objects in crowded environments has been a crucial adaptation in human evolution, enabling quick identification of potential prey, mates or predators. However, this inherent human trait also makes us vulnerable to distractions, as our attention is easily captured by salient objects around us. For instance, we are often distracted by our phone's buzzer when focusing on a task at hand. Similarly, when performing visual search tasks in a laboratory setting, certain types of stimuli that stand out from the environment (e.g., a red circle surrounding by green stimuli), known as salient distractors, automatically capture our attention, regardless of their relevance to our immediate goals. This phenomenon, termed attentional capture, underscores the challenge of maintaining focus amidst distracting stimuli.

Effectively suppressing these salient distractors is crucial for successfully completing ongoing tasks. Yet, the timing and mechanisms of interaction between salient distractors and our goals remain unclear. Moreover, our knowledge on the neural mechanisms responsible for attentional capture is limited to a few brain regions recorded from non-human primates. In this presentation, I will discuss findings from human intracranial EEG recordings, revealing the neural mechanisms that enable tracking salient distractors, and suppressing them via statistical learning.

About the Speaker

Benchi Wang, PhD, obtained his doctorate from VU Amsterdam and specializes in human cognition, focusing on attention, memory, and learning. He has authored 30 papers in top-tier journals, including the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* series (JEP: LMC and JEP: HPP), *Nature Human Behaviour, PNAS, Nature Communications*, and *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. Two of these publications are recognized as ESI Highly Cited Papers. His research has received over 2,100 citations. In addition to his research, Dr. Wang serves as a co-supervisor for PhD students at VU Amsterdam, is an editorial board member for *Visual Cognition* and *Scientific Reports*., and acts as an external reviewer for RGC grants in Hong Kong.

Zoom Meeting (For participants who couldn't attend the Seminar in person)

https://hku.zoom.us/j/97611967657?pwd=q04ebfagqhJrAr5O10NTm9cVrDwJsY.1
Meeting ID: 976 1196 7657 Password: 714710

~ All are Welcome ~

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