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Authors

Zhang, Peiyuan

Ma, Wei Ji

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A Naturalistic Paradigm for Measuring the Intention–Behavior Gap

Pei Yuan Zhang

New York University, New York, USA

Wei Ji Ma

New York University, New York, USA

Abstract

Studies using self-reported questionnaires show that procrastination stems not from lacking intention but from failing to follow through on plans, termed the intention–behavior gap. However, behavioral evidence is lacking, especially for quantifying actual behavior and intention over time. To address this, I created the Boring Online Reading Experiment (BORE), a naturalistic behavioral paradigm. Participants have seven days to complete a lengthy, self-paced online reading task with multiple units. Before starting, participants report planned daily progress. Throughout the week, we track actual progress over time. The intention–behavior gap is quantified as the difference between planned and actual progress. Pilot data ($N = 64$) demonstrated BORE's external validity, with trait procrastination correlating strongly with the observed intention–behavior gap ($r = .45$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the pilot study provided behavioral evidence of the intention–behavior gap: participants completed the task significantly later than planned (median actual = 4.73 days; median planned = 3.50 days; $p < .001$).