An empirical assessment of how readers value text: an adaptation of the willingness-to-wait paradigm

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Background

• Reading more is associated with improved decoding skills and better comprehension (but cf. recent debates on causality van Bergen et al. 2021, Malachini et al., 2017)
• Reading enjoyment is usually measured using self-report questionnaires that are prone to bias (e.g. social desirability) and don’t capture moment-to-moment changes in enjoyment, or how this links to value
• Experimental designs which impose monetary or temporal costs have been used to assess the intrinsic value of a stimulus (Becker et al., 1964; Frederick et al., 2002)
• Using a willingness-to-wait design, we aim to assess value assigned to a synopsis

Hypotheses

1. Enjoyment ratings will positively predict the decision to wait for information about a book
2. Enjoyment ratings will positively predict comprehension of text

Methods

• 40 native English speakers (Mage = 31.1 years, SD = 10.18).
• Participants read various synopses (N = 40) and subsequently rated their enjoyment on 1-9 Likert scale. They also answered two comprehension questions about each synopsis; one literal and one non-literal (see Figure 1)
• Participants could choose to wait an additional 3-6 seconds per trial to see the associated book cover. They were not compensated for any extra time taken during the task.
• Participants also completed the Adult Reading Motivation Questionnaire (ARMQ; Schutte and Malouff, 2017) and Sentence Verification Task which measured reading proficiency (Garvin and Krishnan, 2020).

Results

• Participants were more likely to wait and learn more information about a book when they enjoyed it (β= 0.94, SE = 0.11, z = 8.73, p < 0.05)
• Comprehension scores for a text were higher when participants enjoyed reading it, even when reading proficiency was controlled for (X(1) = 10.11, p = 0.001)
• ARMQ scores and the decision to wait were not correlated (r = -0.089, p = 0.6)

Discussion

• Our willingness-to-wait task measured changes in enjoyment during reading. We were able to capture states of enjoyment associated with reading a specific text, and show these were intrinsically linked to people’s decisions to act on reading, as well as their understanding.
• Results indicate that enjoyment might influence real-life decisions involved with reading

When adults enjoyed reading a synopsis
• They waited to learn more about a book
• They comprehended it better (even controlling for reading proficiency)