World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences
Vol:8, No:06, 2014

The Role of Emotion in Attention Allocation

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Abstract : In this exploratory study to examine the effects of emotional significance on change detection using the flicker paradigm, three different categories of scenes were randomly presented (neutral, positive and negative) in three different blocks. We hypothesized that because of the different effects on attention, performance in change detection tasks differs for scenes with different effective values. We found the greatest accuracy of change detection was for changes occurring in positive and negative scenes (compared with neutral scenes). Secondly and most importantly, changes in negative scenes (and also positive scenes, though not with statistical significance) were detected faster than changes in neutral scenes. Interestingly, women were less accurate than men in detecting changes in emotionally significant scenes (both negative and positive), i.e., women detected fewer changes in emotional scenes in the time limit of 40s. But on the other hand, women were quicker to detect changes in positive and negative images than men. The study makes important contributions to the area of the role of emotions on information processing. The role of emotion in attention will be discussed.

Keywords : attention, emotion, flicker task, IAPS
Conference Title : ICCPBS 2014 : International Conference on Cognitive, Psychological and Behavioral Sciences
Conference Location : Paris, France
Conference Dates : June 26-27, 2014