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What’s that in your background?
The Effects of Visual Clutter on Videoconferencing
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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of videoconferencing has increased in innumerable domains, with consequences to employee and student well-being. Despite these detriments, many companies have reported that they will continue to use and promote remote meetings in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is critical to examine the factors that benefit and detract from positive telecommunication use. “Zoom Fatigue” is a phenomenon in which users report feeling exhausted after virtual meetings. It has been postulated that one cause could be viewers having different attentional focus than in a typical in-person meeting. One factor that can affect attentional focus is visual clutter, or the degree to which a visual scene contains high-density, complex objects. Previous research has established approximate measures of visual clutter by combining measures of the variation of color, contrast, and orientation. However, there is little research available that addresses the effects of visual clutter in a videoconferencing context. While it has been suggested that Zoom fatigue could be mitigated by reducing on-screen stimuli through minimal or peaceful backgrounds, additional research is warranted. Here we investigated whether the visual clutter present in Zoom backgrounds would be associated with user-ratings of suitability for professional applications, viewer comfort, distracting nature, and relaxing nature of the background. Based on our results, future analyses can be conducted to examine the effects of visual clutter on one’s ability to recall and understand presented information. Further research in this area will contribute to the fundamental understanding of the impact of virtual meeting backgrounds on viewers.