Zitian Wang

University of Virginia
Department of Economics
248 McCormick Rd,
Charlottesville, VA 22904

Update: July 2026
Email: zw3qt@virginia.edu
Phone: +1 434-466-0957
Homepage: https://zitianwang96.github.io/

Education

Ph.D. Candidate in Economics, University of Virginia 2021 – 2027 (expected)

Dissertation: "Auction for Prominence and Price-Directed Consumer Search: Theory and Experiment"

Committee: Charles Holt, Po-Hsuan Lin, Peter Troyan, Noan Myung

M.A. in Economics, Columbia University 2019 – 2020

B.A. in Economics and B.S. in Financial Mathematics, University of California, Los Angeles 2015 – 2019

Research Fields

Experimental Economics, Behavioral Economics, Game Theory, Industrial Organization

Job Market Paper

1. **Wang, Z.** (2026) "Auction for Prominence and Price-Directed Consumer Search: Theory and Experiment"

Working Papers

2. **Wang, Z.**, Ahmed, I., Unjitwattana, P., Xie, E.Y., Fong, M.-J. & Lin, P.-H. (2026) "Revisiting the Intra-Team Communication Method to Elicit Level-k Reasoning in Beauty Contests and 11–20 Games" **(First author)**. Revising at **European Economic Review**.
3. **Wang, Z.** (2025) "Coordination under Uncertainty and Noisy Communication: A Generalized Email Game" [Slides]

Conference, Seminar and Workshop Presentations

2026 Economic Science Association World Meeting*, Economic Science Association North American Meeting*, Southern Economic Association Annual Meeting*, Conference on Field Experiments in Strategy*, UVA Theory/Experimental Student Workshop

2025 Economic Science Association North American Meeting

(* scheduled)

Grants and Awards

Director of Graduate Studies Research Grant (US$2,000), University of Virginia 2026
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences Council Grant (US$500), University of Virginia 2026
Travel Grant, Conference on Field Experiments in Strategy (US$400), Duke University 2026

Professional Activities

Organizer

UVA Theory/Experimental Economics Student Workshop 2025 – Present
UVA Theory/Experimental Economics Reading Group 2025 – Present

Research Experience

Research assistant for Prof. Peter Troyan, University of Virginia 2026
Research assistant for Prof. Denis Nekipelov, University of Virginia 2023

Summer School Attendance

Behavioral Game Theory Summer School, University of East Anglia 2026
Chicago School in Experimental Economics, University of Chicago 2024

Teaching

Instructor, University of Virginia

Intermediate Macroeconomics (evaluation: 4.6/5) Fall 2025, Spring 2026

Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia

Principles of Microeconomics Fall 2022
Principles of Macroeconomics Spring 2023
Intermediate Macroeconomics Fall 2023
Intermediate Microeconomics Spring 2024
Global Financial Markets Fall 2024, Fall 2025
Economics of Risk, Uncertainty, and Information Spring 2025

Teaching Assistant, Columbia University

Principles of Economics Summer 2020

Skills

Programming: Python, oTree, Stata, MATLAB, LaTeX, HTML, CSS, JavaScript
Languages: Chinese (native), English (near-native)
Certificate: CFA Level I

References

Charles Holt
Department of Economics
University of Virginia
holt@virginia.edu

Po-Hsuan Lin
Department of Economics
University of Virginia
plin@virginia.edu

Peter Troyan
Department of Economics
University of Virginia
pgt8y@virginia.edu

Ana Fostel
Department of Economics
University of Virginia
alf8p@virginia.edu

Abstracts

1. Auction for Prominence and Price-Directed Consumer Search: Theory and Experiment

We develop a model of paid search prominence and test its predictions in a controlled laboratory experiment varying the prominence level. Two sellers bid in a second-price auction for a prominent position that confers a search cost advantage over the rival, then simultaneously post prices observable to the consumer, who searches sequentially. The prominent seller is predicted to price higher, a gap qualitatively confirmed by the experimental results. But prices are more dispersed than theory implies, compressing this gap. Consistent with theory, the price gap widens with the prominence level. Sellers systematically overbid relative to the rational benchmark. Consumers depart from optimal search in both directions, which partly rationalizes sellers' observed behavior. Efficiency modestly declines with the prominence level, and most surplus accrues to consumers and the platform.

2. Revisiting the Intra-Team Communication Method to Elicit Level-k Reasoning in Beauty Contests and 11–20 Games

We provide the first replication of the original beauty contest experiment with the intra-team communication method of Burchardi and Penczynski (2014). We also apply this method to the 11–20 game, another canonical setting for studying level-k reasoning proposed by Arad and Rubinstein (2012). Focusing on the "re-ordered" version introduced by Goeree et al. (2018), which exhibits heterogeneous noisy behavior not well explained by the standard level-k model, we not only provide the first replication of this re-ordered 11–20 game, but also use the method to illuminate the reasoning underlying such behavior and its relationship to level-k thinking. Overall, our study offers an integrated perspective on empirical patterns in two canonical games with boundedly rational behavior.

3. Coordination under Uncertainty and Noisy Communication: A Generalized Email Game

Which information transmission protocols improve coordination under uncertainty and noisy communication? Theory is indeterminate between an inefficient "tacit" equilibrium, where information is ignored, and an efficient "vocal" equilibrium, where players act on it. We test this in a laboratory experiment based on a generalized email game, exogenously varying the message-generation rule across three protocols. Vocal behavior rises with the incentive to take the risky action, and relative to an automatic protocol, voluntary messaging significantly improves coordination. However, a sunk cost to sending reduces vocality by inducing senders to opt out. These patterns suggest that voluntariness credibly signals players' intent to coordinate via forward induction, and that the value of cost-free signaling for equilibrium selection hinges on the alignment of interests.