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Intentional commitment as a spontaneous presentation of self

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Abstract

Commitment is a defining feature of human rationality. This study explores a social origin of spontaneous intentional commitment, assuming commitment in individual decision-making arises from an internalized self-presentation, transferring the audience of commitment from a real partner to an inner eye perspective. To test this "social inner eye" hypothesis, we exposed participants to different social contexts while maintaining the individual nature of the task. Across three experiments, we found that (a) individuals consistently showed stronger commitment when acting in front of others, (b) different social contexts had different impacts on the process of commitment formation, with the mere outside observer accelerating commitment, while a parallel player delays it, (c) participants spontaneously coordinated their intentions to avoid conflicts when playing with another parallel player, despite no coordination was required. Taken together, we demonstrated how social context influences the strength, content, and timing of individual commitment. These findings align with the perspective that individual commitment has a social origin. They also contribute to an understanding of why commitment is universally valued across cultures and is seen as a virtue rather than a weakness in human decision-making.