

The Emergence of Social Conventions: An Experimental Study

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One of the classic problems in social science is understanding how self-enforcing norms emerge within large groups. While many different theoretical approaches have been developed to understand these collective behaviours, ranging from linguistic conventions to cultural practices to ideological consensus, studying these dynamics empirically has remained intractable. Using an experimental online environment, we study how the interaction of individual mechanisms with social networks drives the emergence of consensus even in the absence of the forces traditionally argued to be necessary, such as centralized authority, common knowledge, and focal points. We also show that a simple model describes well the experimental results on different classes of social networks.