HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS AND COMPLEX CONTAGIONS IN THE ADOPTION OF THE REFORMATION


In this article we use network theory to explain the adoption of the Protestant Reformation. We use new historical data on the connections between Hansa towns that allow us to conduct the first social network study of the Protestant Reformation. Based on an analysis of cities in central and Western Europe between 1517 and 1530, we find evidence for diffusion through both simple and complex contagion. Our operationalization of network data based on medieval Hansa Diets points to the complex association between tie weights (i.e., the strength of ties) and numbers of ties in network diffusion. Using optimal tuning parameters for simple adoption models, we show that a combination of strong ties and weak ties fostered Protestant adoption in northern cities.

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