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Anomy and Communication

The paper examines a hypothesis concerning the relationship between certain measures of anomy and the size and type of the personal network. In our 2006 survey we polled a 1000 strong representative sample of Hungarians between ages 14 and 70. Beyond standard media questions and demographics, we asked them about life events and their methods of information gathering (who they approached for help and where they found information useful for their decision). The questionnaire also included 28 questions (all 4 degrees Lickert scales) concerning different measures of anomy, trust and information overload. Our first hypothesis was that different anomy measures measure different attitudes, some relating to levels of generalized trust, others to perceived social norms and yet again others to personality traits such as self-confidence. We also tested if information overload, or a media rich environment, and anomy are related. The preliminary findings show that our 28 questions are most easily characterized by social groups of different status: as if they related to perceived coping skills or the chance to succeed in life (this supports a Mertonian view of anomy as opposed to a Durkheimian one). Our second hypothesis was that a varied personal network leads to lower anomy rates (at least on certain scales) because people tend to perceive their environment as less chaotic and more orderly if they know people from different walks of life. This hypothesis was partly supported by our empirical findings: people do tend to be more "anomy-stricken" if they live in a fairly closed group where people all know each other (such as small villages or gipsy communities in rural Hungary). Finally, we examined the relationship between anomy measures and communication channels: we wanted to see if ICT and mobile use increases or decreases anomy measures compared to predominantly personal, face-to-face communication. Even though it is not easy to differentiate the effect of age, of income and of education and the effects of the preferred means of communication, it seems that mediated communication does not imply more anomy.

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