



Parenting style and parental monitoring with information communication technology: A study on Japanese junior high school students and their parents

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ABSTRACT

Data were collected from 286 pairs of Japanese junior high school students and their parents to explore the association between parenting style and the intention to use monitoring systems incorporating advanced information technology such as GPS devices and IC cards. Results indicated that a majority of the participants had not experienced advanced monitoring systems, but more than half of the parents had some degree of intention to use them. The relationship between the intention to use monitoring systems and two types of parenting styles (i.e., responsiveness and control) reported by both parents and children was investigated. Categorical regression analyses revealed that parenting style was a predictor of the intention to use monitoring systems, with parent-reported control being the most significant predictor of parents' intention to use. Child-reported responsiveness also had a significant positive effect on child's intention to use, whereas child-reported control did not have such an effect. It became clear that parenting style was differently affected the intention to use advanced monitoring systems between parents and children; the significant predictor of parents' intention to use is their tendency of control and that of children's to use is their perceived responsiveness.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Social background and advanced technology monitoring systems

In recent years, there has been a growing feeling that public safety in Japan is deteriorating, even though the actual number of crimes has been consistently decreasing. The police in 2002 recorded a total of 2.85 million crimes, which was the worst recorded number in the period after the Second World War, whereas only 1.70 million crimes were recorded in 2010 (National Police Agency, Government of Japan, 2010). This is indicative of a decline of approximately 40%. Nonetheless, the polls on social awareness that are conducted annually by The Cabinet Office of The Government of Japan (2010) have documented that more than 30% of respondents have been reporting that “safety” is a growing problem since 2003 (note that multiple answers were allowed). Moreover, this proportion was only slightly below 30% in the poll of January 2010, when the actual crime rate was at a minimum. This trend was especially notable among respondents in the child-rearing generation between 30 and 40 years of age. In this generation, between 30% and 40% of both male and female respondents reported feeling progressively less safe each year.

Given the rise in parents' fear for their children's safety and an overall societal decline in perceived safety, various anti-crime approaches have been implemented on school routes and around

school property. The present study explored the desire to use the advanced information communication technology for child safety in Japan. Two types of systems were examined in this study. The first was a card with a built-in RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) that identifies the location of individuals by reading information in their cards (hereafter, “IC card”). The cards are able to track when students pass their school gate or a train station ticket gate. The second system was a mobile phone with a GPS function (hereafter, “GPS mobile”) that detected the location of the children who carried these phones. These systems are gaining popularity in Japan. With these systems, registered parents are notified by e-mail when their children pass train station ticket gates or cross onto school premises. They also allow parents to track their children's location and travel route information as needed. With these systems (hereafter, “monitoring systems”), it has become possible for parents to monitor their children continuously, 24 h a day.

1.2. Theoretical background

In this study, the attitude and intention to use the monitoring system both of parents and children was approached regarding the use of monitoring systems from two perspectives: developmental psychology and human–computer interaction.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, understanding the relationship between parental monitoring and parenting style is important for a number of theoretical and practical reasons. Parental monitoring is defined as “a set of

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correlated parenting behaviors involving attention to and tracking of the child's whereabouts, activities, and adaptations" (Dishon & MaMahon, 1998). A body of research has explored the relationship between parental monitoring and prevention delinquent behavior of children (Branstetter, Furman, & Cottrell, 2009; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). These studies have suggested that monitoring behavior is related to parenting style and that both parental responsiveness, that is the degree to which children experience a warm and affectionate relationship with their parents, and parental control, that is parental demands and directive attitudes and behaviors that intrude on the child's psychological world, are associated with monitoring behavior (Soenens, Vansteenkise, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2006).

The parental monitoring behavior investigated in above studies was mainly parents observing their children and asking children what they did, where they went, whom they played with, and so on. As new technologies such as the Internet and mobile phone penetrated homes, parents are driven to monitor their children using these new technologies. For example, Internet mediation that let parents set limitation on children's Internet activities are a new type of parental monitoring. It has been reported that Internet mediation to control children's use of the Internet was affected by parenting style (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2008). The use of monitoring systems is another new form of parental monitoring. Parenting style and parent–child relationships are expected to be potential variables influencing both parents' intention to use monitoring systems and children's intention to accept them. This study investigated two types of parenting: responsiveness and control.

Recently, many approaches have been implemented throughout Japan to ensure child safety, especially the safety of elementary school students. This study, however, investigated junior high school students (early adolescents) and their parents for a number of reasons related to developmental psychology. Parents with a junior high school child must balance the child's need for autonomy and their own anxiety about the safety of their child. As children reach junior high school age, their scopes of activities expand, in comparison kindergarteners and elementary school students, placing them in situations without adults. Students at this age have a tendency to distance themselves from their parents, and parents get to know increasingly less about their children's lives. This can be a concern to parents, because the number of crimes that victimize children increase in adolescence and consequently, some parents experience anxiety about their children's safety. It is assumed that under these circumstances, parents are likely to be strongly motivated to use monitoring systems that allow them to determine their children's whereabouts.

Children in elementary school are less likely to refuse or rebel against the use of monitoring systems. However, as they grow older, parental authority diminishes and children become more likely to ignore parents' opinions and wishes. Moreover, the psychological distance between children and their parents increases when children enter junior high school. In this developmental stage, it is reasonable to assume that factors such as parent–child relationship and parenting style, as perceived by the children, would affect their appraisal of parental monitoring behavior.

From the perspective of human–computer interaction, numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of new electronic tools and instruments, such as the Internet and mobile phones are associated with psychological problems, such as anxiety and loneliness. For example, the use of mobile phone mail, a very popular communication medium in Japan, is sometimes problematic and addictive (Kamibepu & Sugiura, 2005). Mobile phones enable users to keep in touch with acquaintances easily. However, when users try to contact others by mobile phone and cannot do so, it is likely to cause them feelings of anxiety and loneliness. Moreover, anxiety

and loneliness drives users to search for connections with others, again through the use of mobile phone mail (Tsuji, 2006). Likewise, there is also the possibility that monitoring systems cause anxiety in parents. The monitoring system enables parents to track their children continuously and some parents might get anxious when they are not using the monitoring system. If a parent constantly monitors their child's whereabouts to decrease their own anxiety of not knowing the location of their child, the parents' behavior becomes a means of fulfilling their own needs, rather than a means of watching over their children. The child perceives the parent's behavior as a form of control and an intrusion. This may presumably affect the parent–child relationships, as well as other family relationships.

Based on the above assumptions, this study explored the association between the intentions to use monitoring systems and parenting style by analyzing paired data of parents and children.

2. Survey

2.1. Survey participants

Questionnaires were distributed to students by their teachers in a junior high school in a mid-sized city in Japan during September 2008. The students (hereafter, "children") and one of their parents (i.e., a main caretaker) were both asked to complete the questionnaires. Teachers handed out envelopes that contained questionnaires for the children and their parents. The children were asked that they and their parents complete the questionnaires separately at home, place them both in one envelope, and return the sealed anonymous envelope to their teacher.

2.2. Survey content for parents

2.2.1. Current use of monitoring systems

Respondents were asked to what extent they were currently using a GPS mobile and an IC card. To clarify the systems under investigation in this study, the questions were as follows: "Currently, do you use a system with a mobile phone to monitor the location of your child?" and "Currently, do you use a system with an IC card that notifies you by e-mail when your child enters and exits a school or passes train station ticket gates?" Respondents were asked to use a four-point Likert scale from "1 = Never use it" to "4 = Often use it."

2.2.2. Intention to use monitoring systems in the future

Respondents were asked to what extent they would like to use a GPS mobile and an IC card in the future, using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = Never want to use it" to "4 = Very much want to use it."

2.2.3. Parent-reported parenting style scale

As mentioned above, this study examined an affectionate, watchful attitude toward children (i.e., responsiveness) and an overly intrusive and directive attitude to oversee children (i.e., control) as parenting styles. A relationship between these attitudes and the intention to use the monitoring systems was assumed. Fifteen self-report items about the parents' perception of their own attitudes towards their children were developed based on the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979), Parental Role Assessment Scale (Tanii & Uechi, 1993), and Mother's Separation Anxiety Scale (Hayashi, 2005). Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1 = Totally disagree" to "5 = Totally agree."

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