The Role of Attachment Insecurity in Intrinsic Interests in IT

Emergent Research Forum Papers

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Abstract

Much IS adoption research has examined factors related to one’s intrinsic interests in IT, such as computer playfulness and personal innovativeness, and their various implications for adoption and use. But why are certain people more playful and innovative with technology than others in the first place? Prior IS research provides few answers as to the origins of these intrinsic motivators. Building on psychology literature, this study takes an attachment theory perspective and explores how attachment insecurity can lead to intrinsic interests in technological objects. Expected contributions to research and practice are discussed.

Keywords
Attachment, computer playfulness, personal innovativeness, individual trait.

Introduction

One widely examined set of predictors of IT adoption and use concerns an individual’s intrinsic interests in technology, such as computer playfulness (Webster and Martocchio, 1992) and personal innovativeness with IT (Agarwal and Prasad, 1998). However, most research models have treated these two factors as exogenous and almost focused exclusively on their consequences in user attitudes and behavior. But why are certain people more playful and innovative with technology than others in the first place? Few answers exist in the current IS literature. As an initial step toward understanding their origins, we take an attachment theory perspective and examine how attachment insecurity leads to one’s intrinsic interests in technological objects and disinterests in social interactions.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is fairly new to IS research. It focuses on the nature of a child’s tie to his or her caregivers and its impact on a child’s subsequent adjustment throughout the course of the child’s life. It contends that the quality of a child’s attachment determines the level of security with which that child explores the world and forms the models from which future relationships in adolescence and adulthood are developed (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Fraley et al., 2011; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). More specifically, a child who is cared for in a responsive and consistent fashion develops the expectation that others will be available and supportive when needed (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Fraley et al., 2011; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2012). In contrast, those raised in a negligent or rejecting manner will form negative expectations regarding interpersonal relationships and social interactions at a young age (Zeinali et al., 2011) and focus instead on controlling and manipulating objects (Shotton, 1989).

Attachment Style and Intrinsic Interests in IT

One’s interests and hobbies tend to be either person-oriented or thing-oriented (Graziano et al., 2011), and the thing-orientation has long been attributed to a cold and rejecting, or warm but casually neglecting parenting style (Shotton, 1989). Research shows that individuals with a thing-orientation often devote their energies in the inanimate for feelings of control, satisfaction and intellectual stimulation as they also develop mistrust of others, self-sufficiency, and aloofness and shyness, and avoid social interactions (e.g.,
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Huang et al., 2010; Shotton, 1989). Such aversion to social interaction and devotion in objects for control has been seen as a factor of the scientific/technological personality (Shotton, 1989).

One’s thing-orientation can be manifested in a variety of ways, including many scientific/technological pursuits, amongst which modern IT has particular appeal as it can provide intellectual challenges and stimulation sought by thing-oriented individuals (Shotton, 1989). To the extent that computer playfulness and personal innovativeness reflect one’s orientation toward technological objects and the associated need for control over the inanimate, we would expect insecurely attached individuals to develop an intrinsic interest in technology.

H1: Attachment insecurity will be positively related to computer playfulness.

H2: Attachment insecurity will be positively related to personal innovativeness.

Methodology

The above relationships will be tested in a survey with college students as well as working professionals. The questionnaire will contain scales such as attachment style (Fraley et al., 2000), computer playfulness (Webster and Martocchio, 1992), and personal innovativeness (Agarwal and Prasad, 1998).

Initial results from a pilot sample of students provided general support for the influence of attachment style on intrinsic interests in IT. Further analysis will be completed by the time of the conference.

Expected Contributions

This work aims to make a number of contributions to IS research and practice. In addition to filling a gap in the literature, this comprehensive introduction of attachment theory to IS research is expected to stimulate other researchers’ interest in applying this theory to examine IS phenomena. This study also offers insights into why certain individuals are attracted to pursuing education and careers in IT.

REFERENCES


