Autistic Tendency, Attachment Insecurity, and Intrinsic Interest in IT

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Prior research has typically treated one’s intrinsic interest in IT (e.g., personal innovativeness with IT, Agarwal and Prasad 1998) as exogenous to our theoretical models and focused primarily on its effects on user attitudes and behavior. But why are certain individuals more interested in IT than others in the first place? The existing IS literature offers few answers regarding the origins of such intrinsic interest in IT.

While much prior research has studied intrinsic interest in IT as a user trait, it may also be a defining characteristic of IS students, professionals and researchers, who are presumably among those with the highest interest in IT. One would assume that this intrinsic interest in IT is a driving force behind pursuing an education and career in IT instead of humanities or social science-related disciplines. Thus, questions like “What makes us IS people?” are in many ways so central to our field and our understanding of the IS community, yet little IS research has attempted to answer them.

As with other individual traits, the formation of an intrinsic interest in IT likely results from the interplay of a plethora of antecedents, both genetic (i.e., nature) and environmental (i.e., nurture). While it is overly ambitious for one exploratory study to develop a comprehensive model of its etiology, we seek to offer some initial explanations based on existent autism research (e.g., Baron-Cohen et al. 2001) and attachment theory (e.g., Fraley et al. 2011) by exploring whether autistic tendencies and attachment insecurities contribute to one’s intrinsic interest in IT (i.e., personal innovativeness in IT).

Though autism has been called “IT’s open secret” in the popular press (Mayor 2008), and many media depictions hint at the prevalence of autistic traits and attachment insecurities in prominent individuals in IT, little has been written in the IS literature regarding how these traits may be relevant to the IS community. Thus, this work has the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of intrinsic interests in IT through (a) identifying some of its antecedents, (b) establishing it as a characteristic of members of the IT community, thus contributing to the perennial debate of “Are IS people different?” (e.g., Ferratt and Short 1986), and (c) providing insights to some underlying causes of gender disparity in the IT profession, namely, gender differences in autistic tendencies.

References


