Chapter 104
Cyber Behavior and its Impact in Japan

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid growth of Internet in Japan, many researches have examined whether Internet use affects social behavior on daily life positively or negatively. Early seminal researches in Japan demonstrated that the negative effects of the Internet are not universal, but such effects are dependent on the circumstances and on how the Internet is utilized by each user. Recent studies have been focusing on various activities on the Internet analyzing "what kind of user is using the Internet for what purpose." This chapter will introduce these studies in terms of three main characteristics of Internet users in Japan. These three characteristics are: preferences for weblog, participation in online communities, and switching to mobile Internet. At the end of this chapter, future research directions will be discussed, while introducing recently developed scales designed to measure various behaviors on the Internet from three aspects: self-expression, relationships with others, and balance with reality.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that the Internet has been gaining in popularity in Japan over the past 15 years. According to The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2011), the percentage of Internet users in Japan has been increasing since 1995, the year

the so-called "first year of the Internet." Half of the population became familiar with the Internet by the end of 2002, and the percentage rose to 78.2% by the end of 2010. As a result of this rapid spread, along with Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis (1998), many Japanese researchers conducted research studies to answer the following main question: What kind of effect does the Internet have on daily life? In

recent years, more and more studies have been focusing on how people behave on the Internet and effects of such behavior, while assessing the characteristics of Internet users.

This chapter will review research performed in Japan concerning the Internet, with particular attention to Internet users' activities and their various effects. In the first half of this chapter, two seminal studies conducted at the inception of the Internet in Japan will be introduced. In the first study, Hashimoto, Tsuji, Ishii, Kim, & Kimura (2002) empirically investigated the effect of the Internet on real-life interpersonal relations and psychological health by carrying out a large-scale survey. The second study was conducted by Takahira, Ando, & Sakamoto (2008) roughly at the same time as Hashimoto et al.'s study. The study by Takahira et al. (2008) performed a longitudinal study observing ten to twelve year-old children, because children at these ages are thought to be easily influenced by the Internet.

In the second half of the chapter, studies conducted in the last five years will be introduced, while discussing the three main characteristics of Internet users in Japan. The three characteristics are as follows: *Preferences for weblog*, *participation in online communities*, and *switching to mobile Internet*. Research that focuses on these issues is required not only to understand the current Internet society in Japan, but also the future society in this country.

The last part of the chapter will introduce a psychological scale that measures behaviors of Internet users based on the following three factors: *Self-expression*, *relationships with others*, and *balance with reality*. This recently developed scale is useful in figuring out how people "behave" on the Internet and can also be utilized to measure the "evolution (or regression)" of people through the technology of the Internet. Based on these points, the uniqueness of Internet usage in Japan will be clarified, and the direction of future research will be discussed.

EARLY RESEARCH IN JAPAN

Advancements in information technology have made our lives more convenient, but on the other hand, they have posed serious problems, too.

First, our reliance on information technology could give rise to the risk of mass panic, once technical problems in computing systems or networks occur. Also, the Internet allows its users to remain anonymous, thus creating opportunities for crimes such as presenting false information, fraud, and slander.

Second, high-tech societies familiarized with OA equipment such as computers have brought a serious issue. Although certain people still cannot get accustomed to OA equipment, there are a rising number of people who can only communicate via computer and have trouble forming relationships with family members at home and colleagues at work. Furthermore, there are certain people who confuse real life with virtual reality, resulting in committing anti-social behaviors. (Suken Shuppan, "Ethics for high school students," 2006)

The spread of the Internet has been phenomenal in Japan since 1995, and such a phenomenon was termed the "IT revolution." However, the Internet has often been a subject of criticism as something that has negative impacts on human life and has not necessarily been accepted with arms wide open.

The quotation described at the beginning of the section is taken from an ethics textbook that high school students actually use in Japan (Suken Shuppan, 2006). As indicated by research on the "Internet Paradox" by Kraut et al. (1998), the negative effects of the Internet are too emphasized. Other influential analysts and experts have been claiming the Internet as a danger to sociability (see Okonogi, 2000) and arguing that it is a tool that promotes impulsivity and aggression (see Muta, 2004).

However, at the same time, empirical research was conducted to examine whether the Internet was truly detrimental as it had been made out to be. Hashimoto et al. (2002) conducted a large-scale

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