The relationship between Internet parenting styles and Internet usage of children and adolescents

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A B S T R A C T

Parenting styles, which are known to have a significant effect on children's development, also have a significant effect on children's Internet use. This study was designed to demonstrate how parenting styles in relation to Internet use are perceived by children and parents and how these styles affect children's Internet use. Both qualitative and quantitative data-collection techniques were used in the study. The quantitative data-collection process was carried out through the participation of 1289 students, and the qualitative data-collection process was carried out with 20 parents and 23 children. The result of the study showed that the Internet parenting styles could be categorized as laissez-faire, permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian. A significant relationship was shown between Internet parenting style and child's gender and mothers' education level. It was also found that as the students' age and grade level increased, Internet parenting styles that were interpreted as initially authoritative were later interpreted as laissez-faire. As the grade level increased, the Internet parenting style tended to lean toward laissez-faire.

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1. Introduction

As a means of accelerating and facilitating communication and access to information, the Internet has become an important constituent in the lives of all users, particularly children and adolescents. Providing these facilities and opportunities to its users, the Internet serves a wide range of purposes for many individuals in many fields worldwide. Internet use in Turkey is increasing incrementally every year, as in other countries. In parallel with the increase in Internet service providers and the decrease in prices, the number of individuals with access to the Internet is also increasing every day in Turkey (Turkish Statistical Institute [TurkStat], 2015). Data from TurkStat (2015) indicate that the household Internet usage rate is 69.5% and that its usage has increased by 1.5% from the previous year. TurkStat (2013) showed that the Internet usage rate is 50.8% for children ages 06—15 years, 36.9% for those ages 06—10 years, and 65.1% for those ages 11—15 years. Similarly, also influenced by the F@TIH project (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improvement Technology, abbreviated as F@TIH), which was launched in 2010, the technological infrastructure of all schools has been improved, tablets are distributed to foster students'

technological literacy, and Internet access is aimed at every child. The number of children and adolescents with access to the Internet is increasing every day in parallel with these developments and opportunities (TurkStat, 2013). Moreover, it was found that 45.6% of children ages 06—15 years use the Internet almost every day (TurkStat, 2013) and that the Internet is mostly used at home by both children and adults (Hofferth, 2010; Kaşıkcı, Çağıltay, Karakuş, Kurşun, & Ogan, 2014; Livingstone, Mascheroni, Ólafsson, & Haddon, 2014; TurkStat, 2015).

Although the Internet has many utilities and facilities, its unconscious, uncontrolled, and extreme use creates risks for all users, particularly children and adolescents. Unconscious and uncontrolled Internet use causes academic failure (Yang & Tung, 2007; Young, 1996), social isolation, and other negative effects, e.g., anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Chen & Lin, 2015; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Yen, Ko, Yen, Wu, & Yang, 2007), cyber bullying (Aricak & Ozbay, 2016; Gezgin & Çuhadar, 2012; Peluchettea, Karl, Wood, & Williams, 2015; Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013), the tendency to commit crime (Oktan, 2015; Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013), a decline in life satisfaction and quality (Bulut-Serin, 2011; Çelik & Odacı, 2013; Çuhadar, 2012) and some other psychological problems (Cao, Sun, Wan, Hao, & Tao, 2011; Kim & Davis, 2009; Ko, Yen, Yen, Chen, & Chen, 2012; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006).

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Research emphasizes that parental control and guidance are effective in reducing the negative situations that children face through the Internet medium (Leung & Lee, 2012; Valcke, Schellens, Van Keer, & Gerarts, 2007), but strict rules and control could compromise a child's future acquisitions (Cankaya & Odabasi, 2009). Cankaya and Odabasi (2009) state that exhibiting parenting attitudes may help limit a child's Internet usage and thus protect the child from the Internet's negative aspects. These researchers also state that a change in attitude of parents who used to have a negative attitude toward Internet use may enable their child to gain the maximum benefit from this medium.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Parenting styles and Internet parenting styles

Although the Internet is a technology that children and adolescents frequently use and has an important place in their lives, families bear the great responsibility to prevent the risks that children may encounter from this medium (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012; Erdur-Baker & Kavsut, 2007; Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2008; Valcke, Bonte, De Wever, & Rots, 2010). Indicating that children's Internet use is affected by numerous factors, researchers emphasize that parenting style is one of these factors (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Rosen et al., 2008; Valcke et al., 2010). Baumrind (1991, p. 57) defined parenting style as the actions taken by parents during the period in which the child socializes and how the child is controlled. In the following years, in addition to the studies on parenting styles that Baumrind had defined in consideration of the degree of control in the interaction between parents and children, Maccoby and Martin (1983) also indicated that the degree of warmth in the interaction between the parents and child is important in parenting style.

Parental control in Internet usage includes guidance for children's online activities, setting up rules to regulate Internet use, and taking measures to restrain children's inappropriate online activities. In the relevant literature review, it is noted that children's Internet-use processes should be kept under control (Cho & Cheon, 2005; Pauwels, Bauwens, & Vleugels, 2008; Rosen et al., 2008), and to this end, parents should use content-filtering software and monitor their children's Internet history (European Commission, 2008; Liau, Khoo, & Ang, 2005; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005; Stark, 2007; Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). Additionally, the literature review revealed that a very small number of parents set up rules in relation to Internet usage duration (Duimel & de Haan, 2007; Wang et al., 2005).

Parental warmth in terms of Internet usage includes advanced communication with children during their use of this online medium and support for the children. In the related literature, some research emphasizes the importance of parental guidance (De Rycke, 2007; Walrave, Lenaerts, & De Moor, 2008), and some research notes the necessity for parents to be in closer proximity to their children and to demonstrate more care toward them during their Internet-usage process (Cho & Cheon, 2005; Law, Shapka, & Olson, 2010; Lei & Wu, 2007; Lwin, Stanaland, & Miyazaki, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Research also shows the necessity of parents to adopt a more respectful and understanding attitude towards their child's preferences during Internet usage (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias, & Morrison, 2006; Lwin et al., 2008). In their studies, Lee and Chae (2007) and Kerawalla and Crook (2002) find that when parents and children use the Internet together, the child better learns the negative aspects of the Internet.

The four parenting styles formed by the intersection of parental control and parental warmth (see Fig. 1) can be defined as follows:
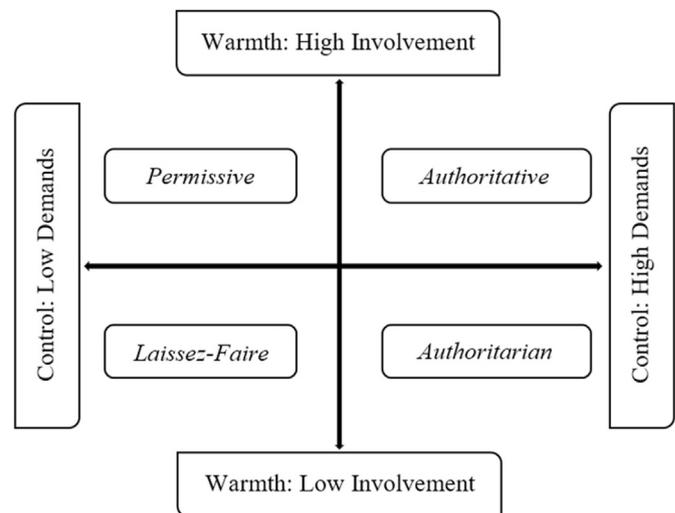

Fig. 1. Parenting styles (based on Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

- *Authoritative Parenting Style:* Authoritative parents have solution-oriented communication with their child, share ideas mutually and support the child's special skills and tendencies (Maccoby, 1992). These parents usually establish practical rules, e.g., the Internet-use duration (Valcke et al., 2010).
- *Permissive Parenting Style:* Permissive parents do not demand much of their child, avoid facing their child and do not refuse the child's requests (Darling, 1999).
- *Laissez-faire Parenting Style:* Having a tendency to rarely give feedback to their child, these parents provide little or no support, emotionally or as guidance, for their child. Parents with this style have poor communication and low interaction with their child (Maccoby, 1992). Laissez-faire parents do not reflect a correct supportive or restrictive attitude with regard to their children's Internet use (Valcke et al., 2010).
- *Authoritarian Parenting Style:* In the authoritarian parenting style, which is defined as the intersection of low parental warmth and high parental control, the child is expected to obey and not to break the strict rules established by the parents (Darling, 1999).

The reviewed literature in relation to parenting styles indicates that mothers primarily act in the authoritative style, whereas fathers have a tendency to lean toward the authoritarian style (Aunola, Stattin, & Nurmi, 2000). With the increase in their education level, parents' control and warmth also increase (Pauwels et al., 2008). It was found that girls adapt to the authoritative parenting style better, whereas boys accept the laissez-faire style more (Aunola et al., 2000).

The reviewed literature in relation to Internet parenting styles indicates that parents who are younger, more educated and hence more aware with regard to the Internet establish more rules and have warmer interactions with their children with respect to their children's Internet usage in comparison with those parents who are unaware (European Commission, 2008; Valcke et al., 2010). Other studies show that younger children, compared to adolescents, are controlled and limited more strictly by their parents (European Commission, 2008; Lwin et al., 2008; Valkenburg et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2005) and receive more explanation about Internet-usage rules (Valcke et al., 2010). The literature also reveals an adverse effect of the increase in the number of children in a family on Internet usage control and warmth (Duimel & de Haan, 2007). The research indicates that the rules established by the families for