Few Youngsters Would Follow Snowden’s Lead in Japan

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Abstract

Purpose – This study deals with the attitudes towards and social impact of Edward Snowden’s revelations in Japan, taking the Japanese socio-cultural and political environment surrounding privacy and state surveillance into account.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire survey of 1820 university students and semi-structured follow-up interviews with 56 respondents were conducted, in addition to reviews of the literature on privacy and state surveillance in Japan. The outcomes of the survey were statistically analysed and qualitative analyses of the interview results were also performed.

Findings – Snowden’s revelations have had little influence over Japanese youngsters’ attitudes toward privacy and state surveillance, mainly due to their low level of awareness of the revelations and high level of confidence in government agencies.

Practical implications – The study results imply a need for reviewing educational programmes for civic education in lower and upper secondary education.

Social implications – The results of this study based on a large-scale questionnaire survey indicate an urgent necessity for providing Japanese youngsters with opportunities to learn more about privacy, liberty, individual autonomy and national security.

Originality/value – This study is the first attempt to investigate the social impact of Snowden’s revelations on Japanese youngsters’ attitudes toward privacy and state surveillance as part of cross-cultural analyses between eight countries.

Keywords Edward Snowden, privacy, state surveillance, social impact, Japan

Paper type Research paper
1. Introduction

In June 2013, The Guardian in the UK and The Washington Post in the US began publishing internal electronic documents from the US’ signals intelligence (SIGINT) organisation the National Security Agency (NSA), provided to them by Edward Snowden who had obtained the documents while employed as a systems administrator at the NSA for contractor Booz Allen Hamilton. As they have done previously, the NSA and other parts of the US government generally will not confirm or deny the validity of the documents, however on 21st June 2013, the US Department of Justice charged Snowden with violating the Espionage Act. The activities detailed in the documents included activity undertaken by the NSA and its main SIGINT partner the UK’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and with the SIGINT agencies of three former British colonies (Canada, Australia and New Zealand), as well as joint activities with similar agencies in other countries such as Germany’s Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND).

In 2014, the Pew Research Center (Madden, 2014) undertook the first of a number of surveys of US citizens’ attitudes to Snowden and the documents he revealed. In particular, they asked questions such as whether respondents believed that Snowden’s revelations had served or harmed the public good, whether Snowden should be prosecuted or not. Inspired by these surveys, a group of academics at Meiji University in Tokyo developed a pilot survey deployed in Japan and Spain using students as the primary research population (for reasons of resource constraints) and conducted follow-up interviews. The results of this pilot survey are presented in Murata, Adams and Lara Palma (2017). Having revised the survey after analysis it was deployed with the cooperation of local academics in Mexico, New Zealand, Spain and Sweden (in English), and in translation in Japan and Germany. With the aid of graduate students studying in Tokyo, it was also translated into Chinese and deployed in Taiwan (using traditional Chinese characters) and the People’s Republic of China (using simplified Chinese characters). The choice of countries was a combination of deliberation and pragmatism. The following countries had suitable resources available: New Zealand was chosen as a Five Eyes member; Germany, Spain and Sweden provide an EU perspective; Mexico provides a US neighbouring perspective as well as a Spanish-influenced culture outside Spain; and Japan, China and Taiwan provide a South East Asian viewpoint. This paper presents the results of the survey in Japan.

1.1 Roadmap

This paper focusses on the local content of Snowden’s revelations in the rest of this introduction section. In Section 2 an overview is given of the general cultural and historical context of government surveillance. Section 3 gives an overview of the survey and of respondent’s demographic information, while section 4 provides the detailed survey results. Section 5 presents the
political and cultural impacts of Snowden as perceived by the authors, while the final section gives some conclusions and identifies avenues for future research.

1.2 Snowden’s Revelations and Japan
This study deals with the attitudes towards and social impact of Edward Snowden’s revelations in Japan through a questionnaire survey and semi-structured follow-up interviews, taking the Japanese socio-cultural and political environment surrounding privacy and state surveillance into account. Although it is claimed that both his act of revelations and the NSA’s indiscriminate mass surveillance programmes he exposed drew worldwide attention, Japanese news media did not seem to acknowledge the newsworthiness of the contents of his revelations and reported about them in relatively smaller articles and less frequently compared with other countries. In general, the Japanese mass media rarely report on surveillance issues, including state surveillance issues. This behaviour may have been developed based on Japanese people’s tendencies to have a high degree of general trust in their governments and to express little interest in political issues especially in foreign countries. The latter tendency has been pronounced among youngsters since the end of the student movement in Japan in the early 1970s.

In addition, according to Murata and Orito (2016), typical young Japanese Internet users (a) recognise the importance of privacy protection without clearly understanding what the right to privacy is, why protection of the right is important, who may infringe their privacy, and what technology can threaten their privacy, (b) underestimate the damage caused by invasions of their privacy, and (c) have an intention to secure their privacy for personal reasons like for protecting their lives and property, but not for social reasons such as for assuring individual autonomy and protecting civil liberty. These findings are generally reflected in the portions of this survey covering attitudes to privacy and surveillance in general.

Considering these, the finding by Pew Research Center (2014) that in the US most young people say Snowden’s leak served the public interest may not be the case in Japan. Awareness of and concern about Snowden’s revelations in Japan is much more limited than in other countries, and Japanese youngsters’ attitudes towards the revelations are significantly different from those of young people in other countries (Adams et al., 2017).

2. State Surveillance in Modern Japan
2.1 Before the Defeat in the Asia-Pacific War
Since the restoration of the monarchy in 1868, Japan’s governments have continually focussed on preservation of a stable national polity, embodied in Articles 1 and 4 of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan proclaimed in February 1889 (Ito, 1906):

Article 1. The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.
Article 4. The Emperor is the head of the Empire, combining in Himself the rights of sovereignty, and exercises them, according to the provisions of the present Constitution.

This initial political framework, centred on the emperor’s ruling power (Nakazawa, 2012, p.56), which was affirmed by the Supreme Court in May 1929 (Nakazawa, 2012, pp.123-124), has overtly and covertly been considered a key social and political principle in Japan. In order to maintain this principle, the Home Ministry played a pivotal role in surveilling and disrupting the activities of anyone suspected of wishing to disrupt that order.

After the end of the Seinan War in 1877 (the last inland war in Japan), the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement demanded establishment of a constitution and a national representative parliament, which would guarantee freedom of speech, movement and assembly. This movement was the target of and impetus for the creation of a secret police (Marx, 2001): the Higher Police Division and their extensive state surveillance operations (Ogino, 2012, pp.8-9).

The original oligarchy surrounding the Meiji Emperor was supplanted by the establishment of the Imperial Diet (the official English name for the parliament) in 1890. The consequences of this included the development of party politics and the emergence of a political cabinet in 1898 which shifted the focus of government surveillance away from this civil rights group, which had largely achieved their goals. On the other hand, the rapid industrialisation and transition to a capitalist economy in Japan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to the emergence of other groups challenging the central government’s power. Issues such as growing industrial pollution, typified by the Ashio Copper-mine poisoning incidents (Shoji and Sugai, 1992) led to the development of social, labour, agrarian and socialist movements. Those engaged in these movements were regarded as a threat to the national polity and hence became targets of state surveillance. The Public Order and Police Law (Act No. 36 of 10 March 1900) regulated citizen’s (subjects’) political activities and was used to suppress these movements and their activities.

In the wake of the High Treason Incident in May 1910 in which socialists and anarchists allegedly attempted to assassinate the emperor (Giffard, 1996), these groups were further targeted. Special Higher Police Divisions, known as Tokkō, established initially in Tokyo in August 1911 and subsequently in other prefectures, were created to monitor and control individuals and groups deemed to be a threat to the national polity and to conduct “thought control” through censorship. The subjects of their surveillance gradually broadened to include communists, liberals, labour activists, levellers movement activists, student movement activists, (core Japanese and colonial) nationalists, foreign residents and visitors (especially from the Soviet Union), returnees (especially from the Soviet Union) and religious groups (Ogino, 2012, pp.8-31).

In addition to Tokkō, the Imperial Japanese Army’s military police (Kempei-tai) functioned not only to police military personnel but also acted as “security police” under the authority of Article 1 of
Imperial Ordinance No. 337 (Kempei Ordinance) of October 1898. This allowed and authorised the Kempei-tai to monitor the speech and behaviour of ordinary people and control their thought (or at least their expressions) in order to maintain the nation’s readiness for war (in peace time) or to maintain the war-footing (in war time). Kempei-tai conducted some strict crackdowns against communists and socialists (Koketsu, 2008). Both Tokkō and Kempei-tai police used preventive arrest and detainment of suspects as well as torture to elicit confessions (Ogino, 2012, pp.73-84; Koketsu, 2008, pp.109-112).

From July 1928, prosecutors specialising in “thought crimes” (Shisō Kenji) were placed in each local prosecutor’s office in the main cities following the roundup of around 1,600 members of the Japanese Communist Party on 15 March 1928. Shisō Kenji performed a complementary role to Tokkō in surveillance of security risks. In addition, they studied the theories of communism and socialism and developed effective techniques and probation systems to re-educate people into “true Japanese” attitudes (Ogino, 2011).

These activities by the Tokkō, Kempei-tai and Shisō Kenji were authorised under a series of “peace preservation laws” such as the Public Security Preservation Law (Act No. 46 of 22 April 1925; Act No. 54 of 10 March 1941). These laws were presented to the populace as measures to prevent revolutionary threats to the established order while allowing universal male suffrage, by preventing the creation of revolutionary parties (particularly communist party) but initially preserving modest individual freedom of speech. However, the original law was soon found quite ineffective in controlling political propaganda against the existing system. Consequently, the law was revised twice and the resultant “evil law” (Nakazawa, 2012) allowed the police agencies to monitor any member of the public and to support strongly the conduct of the Asia-Pacific War, even during Japan’s steady decline towards the end of the war.

2.2 After the War

The Human Rights Directive (Memorandum on Removal of Restrictions on Political, Civil, and Religious Liberties) issued by the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ) on 4 October 1945 required (a) the repeal of laws which limited freedom of thought, religion, assembly and speech, (b) the dismantling of all organisations which had engaged in thought control including Tokkō, (c) the dismissal of the Home Minister, other top police commanders and all Tokkō police officers, and (d) the immediate release of political prisoners. Consequently, Tokkō was dismantled on 6 October, 353 political criminals and 1,896 people who were on probation for political crimes were freed by 15 October. The Public Security Preservation Law and the Public Order and Police Law were repealed on 15 October and 21 November 1945, respectively. 4,990 people who were regarded as involved in Tokkō were dismissed. Kempei-tai was eliminated on 16 January 1946 (Ogino, 2012, pp.211-214; Nakazawa, 2012, pp.216-219). In reality a significant number of people who were
involved in Tokkō escaped dismissal, and almost all of the Shisō Kenji continued their careers as ordinary state prosecutors after the war, despite the abolition of their special office by the Ministry of Justice on 15 October 1945 acting without specific GHQ orders (Ogino, 2011, pp.185-192). The GHQ directive was understood as a measure to democratise and liberalise Japan and encouraged people who were suppressed during the war to claim their place in civil society. However, the resultant surge of social and labour movements and of the Japanese Communist Party were regarded as disruptive of public order by conservative Japanese politicians, and soon came to be viewed as dangerous by GHQ in the early stages of the Cold War. The Public Security Division (Kōan) was established in the Security Bureau of the Home Ministry on 19 December 1945 (and in each prefectural police department afterwards) supposedly to protect democracy (i.e. the status quo) from the threat of violent social and labour movements. In June 1946, Kōan started to collect domestic intelligence that they considered vital to national security and with GHQ’s approval continually increased their personnel and intelligence-gathering capabilities. Despite the Japanese police structure being significantly changed by the dismantling of the Home Ministry in December 1947 and the full-scale revision of Police Act (Act No. 162 of 8 June 1954) in June 1954, Kōan’s organisation and surveillance activities were consistently expanded and reinforced to control supposedly anti-democratic and anti-social activities until the early 1970s (Aoki, 2000, pp.42-71; Ogino, 2012, pp.202-232).

It is alleged that Kōan inherited ideas, principles, technique, expertise and know-how concerning their intelligence activities from Tokkō, and in fact many of Tokkō police re-joined Kōan despite their earlier purge, when the ban on them was lifted (Ogino, 2012, p.230). Kōan is now regarded as the most successful intelligence agency in Japan: their ability and human resources are significantly greater than other similar agencies like the Public Security Intelligence Agency and the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (Noda, 2005, pp.64-114; Omori, 2005, pp.24-80). Kōan maintains a centralised system of command with the Security Bureau of the National Police Agency at the top, and monitors a broad range of individuals and groups deemed to be a security risk including the Japanese Communist Party, Communist Sympathisers (comsymps), trade unions, rightist groups, far-left militant groups, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, cult groups, radical environmental groups, anti-globalisation groups, anti-imperial system activists, espionage agents and Muslims (Oshima, 2011). In 2010, information was leaked from a division of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (TMP) containing personal information on Muslims which had been gathered through various surveillance means. 17 people sued the police for invasion of privacy. In January 2015, the Tokyo District court awarded damages of over ¥90m to the plaintiffs (a decision upheld by the Higher Court in April 2015). However, the award was solely in respect of the leak and prompted by the TMP’s poor data security and auditing. The court upheld the authority of the police to conduct the surveillance, despite the blanket nature of the surveillance which
appeared to target any Muslim who came to the attention of the TMP for any reason (The Asahi Shim bun, 2014). This attitude by both police and courts emphasises the claim by Aoki (2000, pp.32-33) that Kōan engages in “general information gathering” monitoring ordinary people who are not deemed to be a security risk, except for a single social sorting marker (nationality, membership in a social group, religion, etc.).

The Japan Self-Defence Force (SDF) Intelligence Security Command (ISC) was established in August 2009 as a counterintelligence agency despite concerns that it could play a role similar to Kempei-tai. For example, its predecessor organisation, the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF) ISC undertook surveillance against peaceful anti-war activists protesting against SDF forces deployment to Iraq in 2004 (Koketsu, 2008, pp.1-2).

3. Overview of the Surveys

To investigate social impact of Snowden’s revelations in Japan, a questionnaire was developed by the authors in October 2014, based on the outcomes of pilot surveys conducted at four Japanese universities and one Spanish university in June and July 2014. An online survey using the questionnaire was conducted in October and November 2014 among students at twenty-nine highly-rated (for teaching and/or research) Japanese universities. 1581 completed responses were received (out of 1887 submitted). All respondents held Japanese citizenship (two held dual citizenship with the US). The gender and age distribution of the respondents are shown in Table 1. 33.7% of respondents (614 of 1820) majored in commerce/business administration, 18.3% (333 of 1820) in informatics, 10.0% (182 of 1820) in law, 8.3% (151 of 1820) in economics, 7.6% (139 of 1820) in sociology, 6.5% (119 of 1820) in policy making and 5.8% (106 of 1820) in technology/engineering.

| Gender | Male | Female |
|--------|------|--------|
|        | 1002 (63.4%) | 579 (36.6%) |
| Age    |      |        |
| 18     | 132  | (8.4%) |
| 19     | 385  | (24.4%) |
| 20     | 497  | (31.4%) |
| 21     | 300  | (19.0%) |
| 22     | 138  | (8.7%) |
| 23     | 63   | (4.0%) |
| 24     | 26   | (1.6%) |
| 25+    | 40   | (2.5%) |

The outcomes of the survey were statistically analysed. Responses to open-ended questions included in the questionnaire were analysed using template analysis: a coding approach widely used in qualitative research; each text answer was summarised into one or more keywords, and then the frequency of keywords or categories into which semantically similar keywords were grouped was analysed. A list of keywords and categories were preset by the authors in advance of the analysis,
and then the list was repeatedly refined through the text data interpretation process (King, 1998; Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

Follow-up semi-structured interviews with 56 survey respondents at Meiji and Ehime Universities were also carried out in May/June 2015. In this paper, respondents’ attributes such as age, gender or course studied, are not analysed with respect to their other answers. The focus of this paper is primarily on the relationship between attitudes to privacy and attitudes to Snowden’s revelations. Further work will consider other analyses of the data.

3.1 Analytical Approaches

Much of the date from the surveys consists of Likert Scale responses, usually on a four option scale. For all such questions, respondents could skip any question they did not wish to answer, either giving an explicit “I do not wish to answer this question” response, or by simply not selecting an answer. For those questions requesting an evaluation or opinion in response, a “no opinion” box was also shown separately (to the right hand side of the “opinion-exposing” answers to avoid the well-known problem of median answers). The answers varied depending on the question, including zero-to-positive indications from “none” to “a lot” or negative/positive evaluations “disagree a lot” through to “agree a lot”.

These likert scale responses are then analysed using continuous statistical approaches to answer questions about their relationship to respondents' attributes or other answers. While not a universally accepted approach (Kuzon, Urbanchek and McGabe, 1996) it is quite common and if done appropriately is accepted by many as a robust approach (Labowitz, 1967; Norman, 2010). In particular the use of likert scale responses in this paper are primarily used for explanatory purposes and to show relationships between attributes/responses, and are not used as numerical input data for further analyses.

The following abbreviations for statistical terms are used in presenting quantitative analyses: SD: Standard Deviation; M: Mean; SE: Standard Error; D: (average) Difference; CI: Confidence Interval; t: t-test result.
4. Survey Results and Discussion

4.1 Japanese Circumstances Related to Snowden’s Revelations

4.1.1 Attitude towards the Right to Privacy in Japan

Whereas 90.5% of respondents (1430 of 1581) answered that the right to privacy was “very important” (36.1%) or “important” (54.4%), over half of respondents (58.4%; 896 of 1581) self-evaluated that they “hardly” (55.2%) or “don’t” (1.5%) understand that right (Table 2). Moreover, as shown in Table 3, the majority of those respondents who felt that the right to privacy was “very important” or “important” (56.4%; 841 of 1491) indicated that they did not understand it, while more than nine out of ten respondents who did not understand the right (91.3%; 841 of 921) nevertheless felt that it is important. These results show that privacy is an emotional desire for Japanese young people rather than an intellectually understood legal right (actual or aspirational), and are consistent with the outcomes of the authors’ previous studies (Anonymised, 2014; Anonymised, 2013; Anonymised, 2014). Many respondents in interviews admitted that although they often regard the right to privacy as important, they are only vaguely aware of what it entails. They reported that their belief in the importance of privacy was a reaction to mass media reports and/or to high school or university ICT classes which stress the importance of privacy without providing much understanding of it.

The results of text analyses of responses to Q11, an open-ended question to ask the reason why respondents consider their right to privacy important, indicate many of them thought that the right enabled and legitimatised the protection of their personal information, secret and private space from others’ malicious acts (501 records), and that they would suffer monetary and/or physical/mental damages (428) if their right to privacy was infringed. A minority of respondents pointed out that invasions of their privacy could undermine or limit their civil liberties (80) or threaten their existence as independent individuals (40), or expressed concern about damages to their family or close associates (22), or deterioration of community safety (118).
Table 2. Frequency table of Q10 and Q13

| Q10. Is your right to privacy important? | Q13. How well do you understand what the right to privacy is? |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Answers                                 | Frequency (%)                                                |
|                                        | Answers                                                      | Frequency (%) |
| Very important                         | 570 (36.0%)                                                  | Understand very well | 45 (2.9%) |
| Important                               | 860 (54.4%)                                                  | Understand       | 587 (37.1%) |
| Not so important                       | 90 (5.7%)                                                    | Hardly understand | 873 (55.2%) |
| Not important at all                   | 5 (0.3%)                                                     | Don’t understand at all | 23 (1.5%) |
| Total                                  | 1525                                                        | Total            | 1528 |

Table 3. Contingency table of Q10 and Q13

| Q13. How well do you understand what the right to privacy is? |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| “Understand very well” or “Understand”                        | “Hardly understand” or “Don’t understand at all” | Total |
| “Very important” or “Important”                               | 611 | 800 | 1411 |
| “Not so important” or “Not important at all”                  | 18  | 76  | 94  |
| Total                                                          | 629 | 876 | 1505 |

As shown in Figure 1, over eighty percent of respondents (81.0%; 1451 of 1791) felt their privacy to be under threat when using the Internet, whereas just over half of respondents perceived a privacy threat from their non-Internet activities (52.0%; 931 of 1792). Taking a four point Likert scale as a quantitative evaluation by respondents of the level of perceived risk from 0 ("Not at all") to 3 ("Strongly"), the mean score of perceived privacy risk of the Internet use (2.00) was higher than that of non-Internet activities (1.56) and the difference (D = 0.44) was significant at the one percent level (t (1790) = 26.712, p < .01). In follow-up interviews, respondents who had indicated that they felt their non-Internet activities were a risk to their privacy mentioned their own use of credit cards and of loyalty cards, and others’ use of smartphone cameras, as worrying issues.
Table 4 shows the average score of respondents’ perceptions of various types of organisation (from a pre-defined list in the survey) as a source of privacy invasion, measured with a quantified four point Likert scale (0 = “Not at all”; 1 = “Not much”; 2 = “To an extent”; 3 = “Very much”). The three types of organisation regarded as most privacy invasive were “Internet companies” (2.17), “telecom companies/Internet providers” (1.78) and “other for-profit companies” (1.65). All three types of government agencies listed had low mean scores (“law enforcement”: 1.16; “secret service”: 1.24; “other government”: 1.18), being ranked 13th, 11th and 12th out of the 15 types of organisation.

Concerning privacy threatening technologies whose average scores were measured in the same way, “smartphones” (2.28), “personal computers” (2.20) and “GPS” (2.06) were ranked the most privacy invasive, followed by several online service technologies such as “social media services” (1.94), “online shopping” (1.92) and “online auction” (1.92) as shown in Table 5. Technologies and groups that are intertwined, such as smart phones and telecom companies, received similar average privacy threat scores, providing evidence that respondents are providing real evaluations and not random selections.
| Group                                      | Mean | S.D.  |
|-------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Internet companies                        | 2.17 | 0.797 |
| Telecom companies/ Internet providers      | 1.78 | 0.835 |
| Other for-profit companies                 | 1.65 | 0.884 |
| Computer software companies                | 1.57 | 0.854 |
| Individuals who you don't know             | 1.54 | 0.942 |
| System Integrators                        | 1.53 | 0.881 |
| Individuals who you know but not well      | 1.50 | 0.778 |
| Computer hardware companies                | 1.45 | 0.857 |
| Individuals who you know well              | 1.43 | 0.875 |
| Educational institutions                   | 1.34 | 0.886 |
| Secret service government agencies         | 1.23 | 0.920 |
| Other government agencies                  | 1.18 | 0.884 |
| Other not-for-profit organisations         | 1.16 | 0.833 |
| Law enforcement government agencies        | 1.16 | 0.889 |
| Health-care organisations                  | 1.15 | 0.863 |
Table 5: Ranked means (0: low; 3: high) of 19 technologies as perceived privacy threat

| Technologies                        | Means | S.D.  |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Smart phone                        | 2.28  | .789  |
| PC                                 | 2.20  | .807  |
| GPS                                | 2.06  | .848  |
| Social media services              | 1.94  | .927  |
| Online auction                     | 1.92  | .951  |
| Online shopping                    | 1.92  | .902  |
| Making payments online             | 1.86  | .932  |
| Online games                       | 1.67  | .922  |
| CCTV                               | 1.62  | .829  |
| Smart card                         | 1.41  | .871  |
| Behavioural targeting              | 1.37  | .940  |
| RFID                               | 1.19  | .846  |
| Automatic Number Plate Recognition | 1.12  | .789  |
| Portable vid. game                 | 1.07  | .847  |
| Smart meter                        | 1.03  | .758  |
| Home vid. game                     | 1.02  | .813  |
| Personal body monitor              | 0.96  | .794  |
| Home Automation                    | 0.89  | .790  |
| Home-based health monitor          | 0.88  | .770  |

The survey results mentioned above indicate that Japanese youngsters tend to feel at higher risk of privacy invasion in respect of activities, organisations and technologies which have a direct association with use of the Internet. Meanwhile, the threats posed by other types of organisation (e.g., government agencies and non-profit organisations) seem to be considered lower by Japanese respondents.

Very few follow-up interviewees had any significant understanding of the organisation or activities of the three types of government agency involved in surveillance activities. Very few even knew of the existence of Kōan or the Investigative Department of the National Tax Agency. Several interviewees had the view that both the police and intelligence agencies in Japan were well-intentioned groups which acted to enhance societal security, and so they did not need to worry about their activities because they did not do anything wrong.
4.1.2 The Degree of Recognition of and Interest in Snowden’s Revelations in Japan

Before the survey, only 43.3% of Japanese respondents (680 of 1572) had heard about Snowden’s revelations. This percentage was the lowest amongst our surveyed countries and much lower than most others (Germany: 98.6%, Sweden: 93.3%, China: 76.4%, New Zealand: 69.1% and Spain: 60.4%; Mexico: 46.7% and Taiwan: 46.5% were similar). Furthermore, the knowledge level of respondents who had heard the revelations was low: only 27.2% knew “a lot” (2.6%; 18 of 680) or “a fair amount” (24.6%; 167 of 680) about the contents of the revelations, 34.9% respondents knew “a lot” (4.3%; 29 of 680) or “a fair amount” (30.6%; 208 of 680) about the US government reactions to Snowden’s revelations and 19.0% respondents knew “a lot” (2.1%; 14 of 680) or “a fair amount” (16.9%; 115 of 680) about the current status of Mr Snowden. This shows that Snowden’s revelations were not well known among young people in Japan.

Mass media such as TV news (81.9%; 557 of 680), news on the Internet (44.7%; 304 of 680) and newspaper articles (34.7%; 236 of 680) were the main channels through which respondents had heard about Snowden’s revelations, while personal communication channels were rarely the first contact with the information (social media: 11.0% (75 of 680); lectures at university: 7.1% (48 of 680); talks with friends/acquaintances: 2.7% (18 of 680)). Over eighty percent of respondents who knew about the revelations had not discussed it with their friends (82.1%: 558 of 680) and/or had not searched for more information about it (80.3%: 546 of 680). The fact that Japanese respondents mainly gathered information from mass media and that a high percentage of them did not bother to gather additional information via active information search or having a discussion with others indicates that Japanese university students tend not to elaborate their knowledge and that Snowden’s revelations did not consciously seem that relevant to their lives.

In follow-up interviews, those who had heard about Snowden’s revelations reported an inability to understand or act upon them and/or that such things were irrelevant to their lives. The activities disclosed by Snowden seemed as though they came from another world or from a movie. They reported that they found it hard to imagine why Snowden had decided to act as he did. This was consistent with their general attitude to political and social issues: almost all of the interviewees reported a lack of interest in such things, and that it was not “cool” to discuss the Snowden revelations with their friends because it was such a non-issue.

According to the outcomes of text analyses of responses to the open-ended question Q27 (Why do you think Snowden determined to make those revelations?), the majority of respondents considered Snowden made the revelations based on his sense of justice saying such phrases as “exposure of evil in secret” (529 records), “reformation of social abuses” (496) and “creation of an opportunity to let the public know the truth about their privacy” (109). On the other hand, just a small number of respondents pointed out Snowden’s self-centred motivations such as “self-interest” (24), “ambition” (23), “economic rewards” (23) and “spying for other organisations” (13).
4.1.3 Evaluation of Attitudes in Japan to Snowden’s Activities

Of respondents who gave a judgement on the social contribution of the revelations, more than sixty percent believed Snowden’s activities had had positive effects on the public interest (60.6%; 636 of 1049), whereas around thirty percent of respondents (479 of 1528) avoided judging the public value of Snowden’s revelations saying “no opinion”. Over half of respondents felt that Japanese individuals should not need to give up privacy and freedom in order to ensure the safety and security of society and individuals (55.8%; 706 of 1265). On the other hand, however, only 17.8% of respondents answered Q36 (What social changes do you think have happened because of Snowden’s revelations?) with “some social changes have happened” (258 of 1452). A large majority of respondents (69.0%; 1002 of 1452) could not make a clear judgement (selected “no opinion”) on the impact on society and 13.2% respondents (192 of 1452) reported “no” impact. These results seem to indicate that whereas the majority of Japanese students have a positive opinion of Snowden’s actions, they tend not to feel that his revelations have had a strong impact on their society.

42 of the follow-up interviewees were willing to express an opinion about surveillance generally in Japan. Of these, 32 believed that “suspicious characters” (which to them included cultists, ex-convicts, gangsters and all foreigners in Japan) should be monitored by government agencies. They believed that they themselves would never become targets of state monitoring. A few were of the opinion that Muslims living in Japan should be kept under 24/7 surveillance.

4.2 Empirical Consideration about Influence of Snowden’s Revelations

4.2.1 Influence of Snowden’s Revelations over Risk Perception of Privacy Invasion

To analyse the impact of Snowden’s revelations on their perception of the risks of privacy invasion, respondents were divided into two groups on the basis of whether they had heard about Snowden’s revelations (“Heard” group) or not (“Not heard” group) before the survey. T-tests on numeric interpretations of the answers to the relevant questions (0= “not at all” – 3= “very much”) with “Not heard” as control and “Heard” as treatment groups demonstrated the followings.

(a) Those who had heard about Snowden’s revelations reported feeling more at risk of privacy invasion in their online activity than the group who had not heard. The average score of answers to Q6 (Do you feel that your use of the Internet involves taking risks with your privacy?) from the “Heard” group (2.06, SE=.026) exceeded that of the “Not heard” group (1.95, SE=.021), with a statistically significant difference at the one percent level (D=.11, 95% CI [.042, .170]; t (1407.717) = 3.322, p<.01).

(b) Respondents in the “Heard” group were on average more concerned about privacy risk from government agencies than those in the “Not Heard” group, all at a one percent significance level as shown below:
There are two possible interpretations of these results. Either those who were more skeptical about government surveillance were more likely to have heard about Snowden’s revelations, or that hearing about Snowden’s revelations made respondents more skeptical about government surveillance. Existing concerns might also have been heightened by hearing about Snowden’s revelations.

4.2.2 Influence of Snowden’s Revelations over Actions of Respondents

Of those respondents who had heard about Snowden’s revelation, 73.7% (501 of 680) reported not changing their way of communicating online using systems such as social media, Messenger, YouTube, blogging, Skype, email and instant messaging since they heard about Snowden’s revelations (Q24). Converting the four options for answers to Q23 (How much do you know about the contents of Snowden’s revelations?) into binary categorical data (i.e. respondents who answered “A lot” or “A fair amount” are categorised as the “High-knowledge” group while those who answered “Not much” or “Little” are labelled the “Low-knowledge” group), the relationship between respondents’ knowledge level about Snowden’s revelations and responses to Q24 was examined via a Chi-squared test. The result demonstrates that these two variables are independent (Chi-square (1) = 0.508, p>0.1; ϕ= -0.028, p>0.1), so there appears to be no evidence of impact on Japanese respondents’ actions for protecting their privacy depending on their self-evaluation of their level of knowledge about Snowden’s revelations.

Many of the follow-up interviewees expressed a doubt that they needed to change their practices in response to Snowden’s revelations, because they were not doing anything wrong. This fits with the above-mentioned attitude that respondents felt both trusting of the good will of at least Japanese government agencies which might be monitoring them, and that they had little understanding of the issues surrounding foreign government monitoring of their communications by the NSA/GCHQ.

4.2.3 Japanese Students’ Hesitation to Follow Snowden’s Lead

Responses to the two hypothetical questions, QUS (If you were an American citizen and were faced with a similar situation to Snowden, do you think you would do what he did?) and QL (If you were
faced with a similar situation to Snowden in Japan, i.e. you found out that a Japanese intelligence agency was conducting similar operations to those of the NSA and GCHQ, would you, as a Japanese citizen or a resident in Japan, do what he did?), showed Japanese respondents’ hesitation in following Snowden’s lead. Only 13.9% (169 of 1212) (QUS) and 15.3% (174 of 1134) (QL) of respondents reported that they believed they would take the same actions as Snowden. As shown in Figure 2, Japanese young people are the low outliers amongst those studied internationally. This is consistent with our other results that Snowden’s revelations have had very limited conscious impact on Japanese students.

The results of text analyses of free-text responses to questions asking about reasons for following Snowden’s lead found similar keyword structures in both the US and Japanese situations; they hoped to make the situation better for themselves and their society out of a sense of justice mentioning “reformation of society” (107 regarding the US and 87 regarding Japan) and “exposure of dark side” (32 and 19). Only a few gave selfish reasons such as “self-protection” (9 and 4) and “ambition” (1 in each case), and none touched on “economic reward”.

Likewise, general similarity was observed between the keyword structures of reasons for respondents not to follow Snowden’s lead in the US and Japan. The main category of keywords found by the text analyses was related to the risks or sanctions they would suffer from as a result of their following Snowden’s lead such as “self-protection” (436 records in the US and 364 in Japan), their “lack of courage” (123 and 129) and “(super)power of the government” (111 and 74). They accepted the necessity of his revelations, but simultaneously feared possible reprisals from government agencies. The second category has a relevance to the recognition that the revelations are
not the best way for their society. Some suggested that the revelations might harm security of societies (68 and 62), that revelations would have no positive effects on their society (43 and 57), and there are other ways to improve the situation (30 and 46).

5. State Surveillance Following Snowden

As if reflecting Japanese students’ low level of interest in Snowden’s warning about increasing, and increasingly high-tech and covert, state surveillance, legislation to enhance the powers and capacity of government agencies including Kōan to monitor general inhabitants in Japan has been brought forward. For example, the Act on Wiretapping for Criminal Investigation (Act No. 137 of 18 August 1999) is being revised to broaden the range of permissible wiretap target crimes and simplify legal authorisation procedures for wiretapping (Kawaide, 2015). As discussed by the Asahi Shimbun (2014) in the report on the Muslim surveillance case, the recent adoption of a severe and wide-ranging new state secrecy law (Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets; Act No. 108 of 2013) is an additional concern in this area, given that police surveillance activities are highly likely to be classified and are clearly within the scope of this act. Furthermore, multiple war contingency laws were enacted in 2003 (three acts) and 2004 (seven acts) respectively, the National Security Council was set up in January 2013, and a re-interpretation of Japan’s pacifist constitution to allow a “right of collective self-defence” was endorsed by the Abe cabinet in July 2014. Based on this decision, the Act for the Establishment of the Legal Systems for Peace and Security (Act No. 76 of 30 September 2015) and the Act for Supporting International Peace (Act No. 77 of 30 September 2015), that opposition groups described as “acts for engaging in warfare”, were enacted in September 2015 despite strong citizen opposition campaign including that made by the Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) which has become a new surveillance target of the Public Security Intelligence Agency (Public Security Intelligence Agency, 2016).

In January 2016, a new citizen and resident numbering system called “My Number” began operation in Japan’s. The government’s claimed justifications for the system were a fair and proper operation of social security systems, fair taxation, and personal verification in a time of serious disaster (there have been criticisms of the official responses to the March 2011 earthquake/tsunami due to poor knowledge of the populations in affected areas). My Number, a unique lifetime personal ID number, as with almost all such bureaucratic systems is expected to have it functions expanded far used beyond these original purposes: administrative procedures related to private assets, family registration, and healthcare have already been suggested by civil servants and ministers (Osaki, 2015). My Number could also easily be used as a strong and convenient tool for state surveillance, when the number is linked to a wide variety of personal data under the veil of “developing efficiency in administration”. 

6. Conclusions and Future Research

Coverage of the Snowden revelations in the Japanese mass media has been limited, shallow and often misleading. The presence in Japan of US military bases almost certainly carrying out NSA interception operations has not been mentioned, a stark contrast with coverage in other countries where in addition to the NSA/GCHQ international surveillance questions, local issues such as cracking of local telcos (e.g. in Belgium (Burton, 2013)) or surveillance of local politicians (e.g. in Germany (Der Spiegel, 2013)) was given significant coverage.

Japanese young people are far less likely than their counterparts in other countries to have heard about Snowden’s revelation, to know much about them if they have heard, or to have taken conscious actions in response. Despite this, those who have heard the revelations do exhibit significant though modest increases in concern about privacy.

The inclusion by follow-up interviewees of foreign residents of Japan as suitable subjects of surveillance and their placement alongside cultists, ex-convicts and gangsters, shows a strong streak of racism and xenophobia among Japanese university students. The statement by a few that Muslims should, simply by the nature of their religion, be under 24/7 surveillance shows that whatever the legality, ethicality or utility of the Tokyo Metropolitan police surveillance of Muslims (Oshima, 2011, pp.171-192), the court ruling that this is valid is probably a reflection of public opinion (young people tend to be more liberal than older people and more highly educated people tend to be more liberal than less highly educated people, suggesting that such attitudes among university students are probably even more prevalent in Japanese society in general).

Japanese young people are strong outliers internationally in their unwillingness to follow Snowden’s example if placed in a hypothetical similar situation. As one interviewee insisted: “I don’t stick my neck out for anyone”.

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