

Perceived Digital Etiquette Behaviors among College Students: Gender and Study Program Comparisons

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Abstract: The purpose of this present study was to examine perceived digital etiquette behaviors among college students, and to compare gender and study program differences. Samples were selected from the first year students who enrolled in the preparation courses prior to the start of new semester. A total of 109 respondents agreed to participate and complete the survey questionnaire. A newly developed instrument called “perceived digital etiquette behaviors” consisting of 10-item of 5-point rating scale was employed for data collection. Findings revealed that the overall digital etiquette behaviors of these college students were at a high level. Results of independent samples t-test analysis indicated no significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between males and females. Nonetheless, this study found a significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between management and accounting students ($t = -3.297$, $p = .001$). Discussions and recommendations for further studies were also conferred.

Keywords: Digital etiquette, Digital etiquette behaviors, Digital citizenship, Netiquette, College students.

INTRODUCTION

Most college students nowadays own and use technology as part of their daily life for education, business, and entertainment purposes. They can use these technologies to access the internet, application, social media, and online game to fulfill their individual needs. However, while college and university students have experienced the enhancement of digital technology usage, some students may not have sufficient knowledge and awareness of how to use technologies in an appropriate way [1]. The empirical evidence of digital technology misuse all over the world has extensively increased and widely discussed in a past few years leading to the increase of digital etiquette, which is perceived as an important component to ensure students' responsibility of digital technology usage [2]. Etiquette is not a new topic, but when digital component has been added, distinction exists [3].

Digital etiquette refers to the users' positive action and attitude towards the use of digital technology, which is one of digital citizenship elements. Digital etiquette is applied not only internet usage but

also other digital technologies. If the emphasis is placed on the internet, the etiquette is frequently known as netiquette [4]. Digital etiquette encompasses the code of conduct on the electronic platform in which an individual has to carefully think about the consequence that may affect one and others when using digital devices [5]. For students, digital etiquette refers to the demonstration of appropriate behaviors while they are using digital technologies [6]. As students' online presence can be easily monitored and captured with a screenshot, they need to be aware of how to treat others with politeness and respect regardless of the different platforms they use [7]. Students are expected to understand and realize how the use of technology in their daily life affects others as they participate in various digital and online activities [3]. Inappropriate actions that harm the standard of conduct while online can haunt students for their life time [8]. Thus, it is essential for students to learn how to behave and treat others in a proper way while using digital technologies. Failure to develop digital etiquette can lead to technology abuse, cyberbullying, and electronic harassment [7].

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Despite the importance of digital etiquette is perceived as a vital component needs to be included in academic goals for students in both classroom and online platforms in order to ensure their awareness of impact on digital technology usage on others, the investigation on this area is still overlooked and needed more attention. Past studies showed that digital etiquette was not emphasized properly despite its importance for today's society. As noted, 40 percent of respondents who were asked about their learning experience for digital etiquette reported that they never learned about this issue while 60 percent of them disclosed that they learned a bit about this topic [10]. Measuring digital etiquette among students can help answer two essential questions including "are students aware of others when they use technology?" and "do students realize how their use of technology affects others?" [11]. Hence, this study seeks to explore perceived digital etiquette behaviors among college students in Thailand to examine their awareness of using digital technology in their daily life, and also to enhance a body of knowledge in this area for a future research extension.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Digital etiquette has increasingly become an interesting topic in a past few years [3]. Digital etiquette is often known as a term of "netiquette", which refers to protocols or guidelines for appropriate actions that enable human interactions over the digital platform. Digital etiquette is tied directly to the concept of politeness [12]. Students must realize the importance of digital etiquette, and learn how to properly use in a real situation. Distinctive forms of digital technology require different types of etiquette [13]. Lack of digital etiquette can deteriorate individual relationships as well as online communities [14].

Ribble and Bailey [5] pointed out three vital features of digital citizenship for students including student learning and academic performance, student environment and student behavior, and student life outside the school environment. Digital etiquette is fallen into the second feature of digital citizenship, which alludes to electronic standard of conduct or procedure. The fundamental concept of digital etiquette is "treat others like you what to be treated while getting involved with digital and online activities." Numerous issues are involved with digital etiquette, and students need to understand and behave properly when they experience in the specific situation. For example, students need to responsibly select the proper behaviors when dealing with others in a digital world. They need to be careful and avoid engaging in inappropriate behaviors such as cyberbullying, electronic harassment, making fake news, flaming others, using loutish or offensive languages, and sharing personal and privacy information [15]. The basic etiquettes while online were proposed in many articles and features, which encompassed using proper language, think before posting, assume permanence, always check spelling and

grammar, avoid flaming and threatening others, respect copyright and intellectual property, try to be courteous, polite, and respect others as human being, never provide personal information to anyone, and have a good common sense [16].

Numerous studies attempted to examine the importance of digital etiquette and search for the appropriate way to develop these behaviors. Rahman *et al.* [4] conducted an online survey via social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ to gather data from parents who looked after children aged between 7-12 years old to evaluate children's awareness and understanding of digital etiquette. Results showed that students did not have enough knowledge about digital etiquette as 67 percent of them reported that they were not ever informed about the meaning of digital etiquette. Also, to prove whether they know how to apply their digital etiquette into practice, this study provides five different situations for them to answer based on their digital etiquette understanding. Among these scenarios, students could get more than 50 percent of the correct answer for only two situations out of five. Findings of this study led to the proposal for a game based learning application development to help increase understanding and knowledge of digital etiquette.

Arouri and Hamaidi [17] studied the implementation of netiquette practices among college students in Jordan. A sample of 245 students both males and females was selected for data collection. Results showed that university students had a unanimity regarding the general rules of netiquette. Nevertheless, they reported the confined awareness and understanding of netiquette rules and features leading to fluctuated levels of implementation. In addition, this study found no significant relationships between netiquette and gender, specialization, or study level. Similarly, Abulibdeh [1] collected data from 350 students who were studying IT and non-IT course at two private universities in UAE. This study found a strong correlation between digital etiquette and belief-oriented technology. Furthermore, findings of this study revealed no significant difference between IT and non-IT students in digital etiquette.

Additionally, Kumazaki, Suzuki, Katsura, Sakamoto, and Kashibuchi [18] explored casual associations between cyberbullying, ICT skills, and netiquette using a questionnaire for data collection. Three levels of students in different schools in Japan including elementary, secondary, and high school were randomly selected to participate in this study. Results found that proficiency of ICT skills had a significant impact on cyberbullying in secondary students. However, students' good etiquette did not have a significant effect on cyberbullying but significantly affect school bullying in elementary and secondary students. This suggested that netiquette can help diminish bullying in schools. However, the interesting point needed to be extensively

discussed was the relationship between netiquette and cyberbullying. Although this research found that netiquette did not significantly decrease cyberbullying, which did not support the assumption based on theory of politeness and digital etiquette, the appearance rate of cyberbullying needed to be detected in a future research.

Although past studies attempted to seek for the benefits of digital etiquette, they heavily placed their emphasis on students in schools rather than college students. Also, the examination on gender differences or study program differences in digital etiquette among students was flouted. As a result, this study aimed at examining digital etiquette among college students and comparing digital etiquette in terms of gender and study program differences.

According to literature reviews, the research hypotheses were proposed as follows:

H₁: There was a significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between males and females.

H₂: There was a significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between different study programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive study, which a self-administrated questionnaire was employed to measure respondents' perceived digital etiquette behaviors. Data were gathered from 109 students who studied at a selected government university in Bangkok, Thailand. There were three groups of students in different programs of study including management, accounting, and information systems majors involved with this study. These respondents were asked to participate in this study as part of their preparation course prior to the start of a new semester. A newly developed instrument namely "perceived digital etiquette behaviors" was utilized for data collection. This scale measurement consisted of 10-item of 5-point rating scale ranging from 1(almost never) to 5 (always). Respondents were inquired to rate each statement in terms of their frequency of action to do that kind of behavior. The examples of statement used to measure respondents' digital etiquette behaviors were item#1 "using your real name instead of avatar while using

digital technology" or item#9 "sending messages to strangers or requesting to be friend with a person you don't know personally", etc. In addition, question#3 to question#10 were a reversed score item.

To ensure the internal consistency of this scale, validity and reliability were also conducted. The alpha score of 0.68 indicated that this instrument was acceptable and could be used for data collection, according to Nunnally [19]. To examine the perception of digital etiquette behaviors among Thai college students, descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were calculated. In addition, to compare the differences in perceived digital etiquette between genders and study programs, independent samples t-test was computed.

RESULTS

Demographic variables of sample respondents showed that the majority of respondents was female (74.3%). Average age of these respondents was 18.94 years with the maximum age of 22 years and minimum age of 18 years. The vast group of participants was management students (65.1%) followed by accounting students (27.5%) and information technology students (7.3%), respectively. The average of digital technology usage among these participants was 7.49 years with the maximum period of using technology at 13 years and the minimum use of technology at 4 years. For the length of time spending on using digital technology a day, respondents reported the maximum of 21 hours/day and the minimum of 3 hours/day leading to the average of 8.23 hours/day. The overall mean score of digital etiquette behaviors was at the high level (M = 3.85, S.D. = .573), which implied that this group of college students adequately realized and being aware of the impact of their digital technology usage on themselves and others.

To compare gender differences and study program differences in perceived digital etiquette behaviors, independent samples t-test analysis was conducted. Table 1 revealed no significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between male and female students ($t = -1.671$, $p = .098$). Nonetheless, when compared each item of digital etiquette behaviors, this study found that item#8 and item#9 had a significant difference between males and females.

Table-1: Gender Differences in Perceived Digital Etiquette Behaviors (n = 109)

Dimensions	Males (n=28)		Females (n=81)		t	P
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Digital Etiquette	3.69	.578	3.90	.566	-1.671	.098

As shown in Table 2, female students had a higher score on the inappropriate behavior of using digital technology in terms of "sending or inviting

others to play online games in order to receive special items from the game" ($t = -2.158$, $p = .037$) and "sending messages to strangers or requesting to be

friend with a person you don't know personally" (t = - 2.611, p = .013) than male students.

Table-2: Gender Differences in Perceived Digital Etiquette Behaviors: Each Item Separation (n = 109)

Dimensions	Males (n=28)		Females (n=81)		t	P
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Item#8	3.46	1.42	4.09	1.05	-2.158	.037*
Item#9	3.82	1.21	4.48	.936	-2.611	.013*

*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 indicated the significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between management and accounting students (t = -3.297, p = .001). Results demonstrated that management students had a lower score on digital etiquette (M = 3.72, S.D. =

.551) than accounting students (M = 4.11, S.D. = .489). However, no significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between management and information technology students, and accounting and information technology students were found.

Table-3: Study Program Differences in Perceived Digital Etiquette Behaviors (n = 109)

Dimensions	Management (n=71)		Accounting (n=30)		t	P
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Digital Etiquette	3.72	.551	4.11	.489	-3.297	.001**

**Significant at 0.01 level

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed at investigating perceived digital etiquette behaviors among college students in Thailand. Findings revealed that this group of college students had a good digital etiquette as the overall mean score of digital etiquette behaviors was at a high level. This suggested that students demonstrated proper behaviors while using digital technologies or doing online activities. However, it might be beneficial for students to increase their digital etiquette through the provision of education developed by the university. To examine gender differences, analysis of independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference in perceived digital etiquette behaviors between males and females. This finding supported the work of Arouri and Hamaidi [17] in which gender did not have an effect on netiquette among Jordanian university students. Nonetheless, this present study found interesting points, which contributed new knowledge in this area. As discussed in the previous section, this study revealed that female students had a higher score on the inappropriate behavior of using digital technology in terms of "sending or inviting others to play online games in order to receive special items from the game" and "sending messages to strangers or requesting to be friend with a person you don't know personally" than male students. This might be detected based on the different size of male and female students, but it suggested that females tended to ignore or lessen their digital etiquette behaviors when they needed to get some special items from the online game or when they wanted to get to know new friends. These findings need to be detected carefully and retested repeatedly in a further study.

Additionally, results of this study demonstrated a significant difference in digital etiquette

behaviors between management and accounting students, which accounting students had a higher level of digital etiquette behaviors than management students. This suggested that accounting students were aware of how digital technology usage affected others while online or doing digital activities. This might be described based on the characteristics of accounting students that had been cultivated ethical behaviors and professional manner when having interactions with others. This finding added new knowledge in this arena as a previous study of Abulibdeh [1] compared difference in netiquette between IT and non-IT students solely.

For limitations of this study, the instrument used for assessing digital etiquette behaviors was confined to some digital devices and activities, which may not completely encompass all digital technology usage in students' real life. Thus, a future study should develop a new scale measurement and ensure the quality of instrument through the test of validity and reliability once again. Also, samples of this study were selected from freshmen students and management students were heavily collected, which might reflect the bias of sampling. Hence, the further study should extend the sample size and use a probability sampling technique in order to avoid the sampling bias.

For research applications, the university can gain a lot of benefits and advantages from this present study. Firstly, the university can develop the curriculum and program that places an emphasis on digital citizenship in which digital etiquette is seen as one of digital citizenship elements. Secondly, to increase students' proper behaviors while online, the university should encourage instructors and professors to develop online activities as part of their academic focus in each course. Lastly, other research can use information and findings of this study as a guideline for developing and

expanding related research topic in this area in a near future.

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Author Contribution

Dr. Chaiyaset Promsri developed the conceptual framework and scale measurement, collected data from management students, performed the computation, analyzed and interpreted data, and wrote the final manuscript for publication.

Dr. Suchira Chaigusin helped validate the instrumentation, collected data from IT students, and provided the feedback for the final manuscript.

Dr. Thanatas Tupmongkol helped validate the instrumentation, collected data from accounting students, and provided the feedback for the final manuscript.

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