

# UAE Undergraduate Student Digital Etiquette and Belief-Oriented Technology USE: An Exploratory Survey

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## ABSTRACT

The objectives of this article are: explore the adherence to digital etiquette and belief-oriented technology use, examine the relationship between digital etiquette and belief-oriented technology use, and examine the influence of IT Course on students' digital etiquette. The sample comprised 350 students, who were taking IT and non-IT Courses at two private universities. The research employed a cross-sectional survey using a two-part questionnaire. The first part measured digital etiquette, while the second part measured technology use orientation results showed a widespread adherence to digital etiquette among the respondents with very small numbers reporting the violation of ethics. The same positive pattern was found with use orientation where most respondents reported a positive technology use orientation based on their belief. The correlation analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between digital etiquette and belief-orientation ( $r = .932$ ), while the t-test results revealed a non-significance difference between IT and non-IT students in their digital etiquette.

## KEYWORDS

Digital Citizenship, Digital Etiquette, Orientation To Technology Use, Responsible Use of Technology, Technology Ethics, UAE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is without argument that digital technology enhances campus life and campus learning, and it greatly facilitates university administration processes. However, at the same time, it has created opportunities for abuse and misuse. Inappropriate and unethical use of digital technology is a widespread and a well-documented phenomenon among university students. Indeed, technology misuse among university students has become a rising concern for lecturers. As discovered by Young, Yue and Ying (2011), Internet abuse ranged from 13% to 18.4% among university students, significantly higher than that reported among adolescents (4.6% to 4.7%). In a recent study, Begley et al. (2015) surveyed university students' use of digital technology and found that during class, 75.1% of the respondents checked their e-mail or text messages during class, 56.2% multitasked and did assignments not related to the class, and 33% accessed social media sites. In the same study, majority of the lecturers surveyed (between

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51 and 60.7%) “experienced significant problems regarding students’ use of technology during class time for non-academic purposes” (p. 5).

While the affordances of digital technology have expanded the physical boundaries of learning, its exploitative use has created new tensions in the classroom. For instance, university lecturers and authorities find students’ disregard for ethics when using digital technology to be a persistent problem that is getting more challenging to handle, and indeed, more worrisome (Crona, Foltz & Jones, 2006; Reynolds, Burek, Henson & Fisher, 2013). In a recent survey in October 2016, university faculty found technology distractions as the fifth biggest day-to-day challenge in the classroom (Schaffhauser, 2016). Unethical and irresponsible use of digital technology is a serious misconduct that leaves a digital footprint, which in later years could turn out to be detrimental to students’ career path and future employment.

Digital etiquette surfaces as an important concern in today’s digitally enhanced campus life and learning where students’ lack of regard for appropriate and responsible use of digital technology prevails. Hence, in view of the new challenges confronting faculty and university students today, it is paramount that digital etiquette be imparted directly or indirectly through university curriculum. Out of concern for the prevalent disregard for ethics among students, Ribble and Bailey (2004) and Ribble (2015) suggest a rather comprehensive multidimensional framework to educate students of appropriate technology use, and the proper ways that benefit themselves and others. They call the framework digital citizenship and it has nine elements comprising digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security.

Digital etiquette is the fifth element in this digital citizenship framework. It refers to acceptable standards of conduct or procedure that define students’ use of digital technology, their online participation, and social interaction with others in the virtual world. Digital etiquette provides students with precise examples of appropriate action or procedure of using technology in the classroom, and educates students to consider the ramifications of their inappropriate and irresponsible technology use on others. For example, digital etiquette guidelines create an awareness that students should keep their mobile phones on silent mode in the classroom so as not to disturb the ongoing teaching and learning process. In addition, the guidelines teach them about treating other online users with respect and courtesy, and not to breach the rules of privacy and infringement.

Using digital technology is part of the larger realm of human behaviour, which is influenced in varying degrees by belief systems and value orientation. Belief system refers to a set of beliefs and principles that governs one’s attitude (Nugent, 2013). Numerous classic studies have documented the impact of belief system on human behaviour, such as that of Harvey et al. (1964-1966) and Brown and Webb (1968). Harvey and his associates (1964, 1965a, 1965b, 1966) discovered that belief system had a pronounced effect on teachers’ behaviour in and outside the classroom, and the former could be used as a predictor of the latter. Meanwhile, Brown and Webb (1968) concluded that teachers’ set of philosophical beliefs about teaching is related to how they behave and what they do in the classroom. More contemporary studies tend to agree with these findings on the connection between behaviour and belief system. For example, McCullough and Willoughby (2009) proved the two constructs to demonstrate a positive causal relationship. According to Jaeger (2006), belief systems anchored in religion tend to “bring out the best in people” (p. 12) and have the ability to socialize children to conform to society’s norms and socially desirable behaviours (Baier & Wright, 2001). People who have a more concrete and definite belief system, particularly that of a philosophical or religious nature, tend to exhibit more positive social behaviours, as indicated in studies on religiously inclined Muslims, Jews and Christians (Hill, Burdette, Ellison & Musick, 2006; Islam & Johnson, 2003; Shmueli & Tamir, 2007; Wallace & Forman, 1998). In Yang, Young, Li and Huang’ study (2016), belief system was shown to impact strategic decision making and performance both on the short and long terms.

Using these empirical evidences as support, this study postulated that technology use that is oriented by belief system would influence undergraduates’ adherence to digital etiquette. In other

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