

# The Evolution of Etiquette in Modern Society: From Tradition to Digital Transformation

Bingxiao Zhang

Zhejiang Yuying College of Vocational Technology, Zhejiang 310018

**Abstract:** The digital age has reshaped modern etiquette, especially through social media's impact on communication. This article examines traditional etiquette's evolution within digital contexts, highlighting new cross-cultural norms and exploring how technology will continue to influence interpersonal relationships, underscoring the need for adaptability in a globalized world.

**Keywords:** Etiquette evolution; Digitalization; Social media; Cross-cultural communication

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Etiquette, as a crucial form of interpersonal communication, has a long history and is deeply rooted in cultural and social structures. Traditional etiquette reflects moral values and beliefs while maintaining social order and harmony. However, with the rapid development of technology and the advancement of globalization-particularly the onset of the digital age-traditional etiquette is facing unprecedented challenges. The prevalence of social media and online communication has altered how people interact, disrupting established etiquette norms. In this context, examining the evolution of etiquette in modern society is of paramount importance.

### 1.2 Research Purpose and Significance

This study aims to analyze the evolution of etiquette in modern society, focusing on the impact of digitalization on traditional norms. By exploring the historical context of etiquette and its changes in digital environments, we aim to uncover new norms and trends that are emerging in contemporary social interactions. This research not only provides a new perspective for understanding the complexities of modern etiquette but also offers theoretical support for adapting etiquette in cultural exchanges and social interactions. Ultimately, the study seeks to foster reflection on the future direction of etiquette development, providing insights for related fields.

## 2. The Evolution of Traditional Etiquette

### 2.1 Historical Background

Etiquette began in ancient societies as a means to uphold social order and interpersonal relations. Each civilization developed distinct etiquette based on cultural norms and beliefs: Ancient Egypt prioritized social hierarchy, Greece valued public courtesy, medieval Europe established courtly rules, and Asia, especially China and Japan, emphasized respect for elders and hierarchy, influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism. These etiquette practices have evolved with shifts in cultural and social contexts.

### 2.2 Major Forms of Etiquette and Their Cultural Significance



In traditional societies, etiquette permeated daily life, influencing family gatherings, social activities, and business interactions. Greetings, toasting, and gift-giving were important ways to express respect and emotions. In Asia, bowing signifies humility and respect, contrasting with the Western handshake, which symbolizes confidence. In China, the tea ceremony is a gesture of respect, especially during weddings and family gatherings, where the younger generation serves tea as a blessing to their elders. Traditional greetings, such as clasped hands with a slight bow and a deep bow gesture used to demonstrate humility, hold significant meaning in formal settings. These gestures not only strengthen social bonds but also preserve cultural heritage. When performing the deep bow gesture, hand positioning reflects gender distinctions: men place their left hand on the outside with the right hand inside, while women reverse this, with the right hand on the outside and the left hand inside. This attention to detail illustrates the sophistication of etiquette and helps maintain the essence of traditional decorum in modern society.

### 2.3 Drivers of Etiquette Evolution

The evolution of traditional etiquette is a response to industrialization, urbanization, and technological advancements. The Industrial Revolution changed social structures and interpersonal relationships, leading to shifts in how people interacted. As cities grew, standardized behavior became necessary to manage diverse populations, resulting in the emergence of etiquette manuals. Changes in family structures and the rapid rise of globalization have also driven the adaptive evolution of etiquette. Many Chinese families still value the tradition of paying New Year visits, and despite geographic challenges, virtual celebrations through text messages and video calls have become increasingly common, demonstrating the adaptability of modern Chinese etiquette<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 2.4 Traditional Etiquette in Modern Society

Traditional etiquette holds enduring significance in modern society, as many cultures actively preserve and adapt customs to fit rapidly evolving environments. Celebrations such as Spring Festival visits, Dragon Boat Festival gatherings, and Mid-Autumn gift-giving continue to reinforce cultural identity and familial bonds. In China, traditional etiquette has evolved within digital platforms; for example, WeChat red envelopes have become a popular form of digital etiquette, preserving the spirit of blessings while seamlessly adapting to modern technology.



## 3. The Impact of Digitalization on Etiquette

### 3.1 Background of Digitalization

The rapid development of information technology has significantly changed people's lifestyles and communication patterns. Social media and instant messaging tools have made interactions more convenient, prompting a reevaluation of traditional etiquette. Communication has shifted from face-to-face interactions to digital ones, altering etiquette practices. The widespread use of the internet has democratized access to information and enhanced global communication, requiring the establishment of new etiquette frameworks that adapt to digital platforms and reflect the integration of technology into daily life.

### 3.2 The Rise of Social Media

Social media has become a primary communication channel, changing how information is shared and reshaping interpersonal relationships. In China, WeChat and QQ have made sending New Year greetings through emojis, voice messages, or videos an important ritual during the Spring Festival, with WeChat red envelopes enhancing interactions. This digital form retains the emotional connection of traditional greetings, but the anonymity and immediacy of social media pose challenges to etiquette, leading to the emergence of "netiquette," which emphasizes respect and politeness in online interactions to preserve harmony.

### 3.3 Etiquette Norms in Virtual Communication

In digital communication, etiquette includes language, visual elements, and response speed. Emojis and GIFs compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues in text while preserving the meaning of traditional blessings. Timely responses and appropriate tone reflect respect for others. Digital etiquette not only continues the respect and care found in tradition but also evolves in the era of social media.

### 3.4 Cultural Differences and Digital Etiquette

In the context of globalization, digital communication has added more complexity to cross-cultural etiquette. Different cultures have unique expectations and interpretations of online interactions, leading to varied understandings of digital etiquette. Recognizing and adapting to these differences is essential for effective communication in cross-cultural digital interactions.

## 4. Trends in Modern Etiquette

### 4.1 Emerging Etiquette Practices

Social changes have led to new etiquette norms, particularly in the context of remote work and the widespread use of digital tools. Workplace etiquette has undergone significant shifts, with virtual meetings and online communication becoming a regular part of daily work life. The concept of "digital presence" requires employees to maintain appropriate attire, suitable backgrounds, and punctuality in meetings to demonstrate professionalism.

### 4.2 The Fusion of Cross-Cultural Etiquette

Globalization has deepened cultural interactions, making the understanding and adaptation of cross-cultural etiquette important. Chinese individuals value humility and formal titles, while Westerners tend to be more casual. This requires both sides to adjust their etiquette to ensure smooth communication and promote mutual respect.

### 4.3 The Further Impact of Technology on Etiquette

The digital revolution has changed the way people interact, with etiquette norms continuously adapting to new challenges. Social media has made actions like liking and commenting important components of etiquette, where failing to respond promptly is often considered impolite. Automation tools also require maintaining politeness when interacting with machines.

### 4.4 Individualization and Self-Expression

In contemporary society, individuality and self-expression have made etiquette more diverse and inclusive, helping individuals find a balance between personal expression and traditional norms. For example, many companies have relaxed dress codes, and personalized greetings and gifts have replaced traditional forms. However, personalized etiquette must consider others' feelings to avoid self-centeredness that could undermine social harmony. Modern etiquette encourages a balance between self-presentation and respect for others, promoting harmony between personal expression and social interaction.

### 4.5 Future Directions of Etiquette Development

As society evolves, so do etiquette forms. In the future, inclusivity and respect for diversity will be crucial in personal and professional interactions. Etiquette will focus on fostering empathy and understanding, ensuring everyone feels respected. Technological advancements, especially in digital environments, will drive innovation in etiquette, with new interaction norms emerging. The future of etiquette lies in its adaptability to changing social, cultural, and technological realities, balancing tradition with modernity while respecting core values, thus fostering positive relationships globally.

## 5. Case Studies

### 5.1 Etiquette Transitions in Different Cultures

Globalization has facilitated frequent interactions between different cultures, leading to changes in etiquette practices. For example, in business cultures, China emphasizes relationships and humility, while the United States favors efficiency and directness; these differences can lead to misunderstandings, requiring both sides to understand each other's etiquette norms to promote effective communication.

### 5.2 Examples of Etiquette Changes in Specific Industries

Etiquette changes are increasingly significant across various industries. In the tech industry, remote work has made online communication etiquette important, with many companies requiring participants to dress formally. In the finance industry, strict etiquette standards must be followed at international investment conferences, where failing to introduce oneself properly can be perceived as unprofessional. Adapting to these etiquette changes is crucial for individual image and business success.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explores the evolution of etiquette in modern society, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities traditional etiquette faces

amid digitalization and globalization. Etiquette not only expresses cultural identity but also maintains interpersonal relationships and social order. In the future, etiquette will become more diverse, requiring a balance between individual expression and traditional norms to adapt to the changing social demands.

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