

Phubbing in Social Interaction: A Phenomenological Study on the Urban Young Generation in Pontianak

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly changed the pattern of social interaction, especially among urban youth. One form of this transformation is "phubbing". It is a behavior in which individuals ignore others who are physically present because they are too focused on the smartphone. This study aims to understand "phubbing" as a new cultural pattern in the social interaction of urban youth in Pontianak. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study involved ten informants aged 18-25 years who actively used smartphones and had experienced phubbing, both as perpetrators and recipients. The results of the study show that phubbing has become socially normalized and integrated into everyday life, reflecting shifts in social values and norms of interaction. Although it is often considered a routine, phubbing also creates the ambivalence of being accepted and hated. This study shows that phubbing is more than just a digital habit but is also a cultural practice that redefines presence, attention, and social relationships in the digital age.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in human communication patterns. The presence of gadgets, especially smartphones, has not only revolutionized the way we communicate, but also created new forms of social interaction (Hanika, 2015). One of the impacts of this development is the emergence of the phenomenon of "phubbing", a term derived from the combination of the words "phone" and "snubbing" which refers to the behavior of individuals ignoring other individuals around them because they are too focused and busy with gadgets (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016).

In the era of globalization and increasingly widespread digitalization, the phenomenon of phubbing is not only a local or individual problem, but has become a significant social phenomenon in various major cities around the world. The influence of digital culture has extended to various aspects of daily life, which include interpersonal communication, media consumption patterns, and even the formation of social identities (Turkle, 2011). In this context, phubbing emerged as a practice that reflects the tension between the need to be digitally connected and the demands of authentic face-to-face social interaction.

Phenomenon Phubbing It is increasingly prevalent in the lives of urban people, especially among the younger generation. In the context of Pontianak City where Pontianak City has experienced rapid urbanization and digitalization in recent years, this habit has become part of the dynamics of daily social interaction. Based on the Digital 2023 report from We Are Social and Hootsuite, internet users in Indonesia reached 212 million, with the highest penetration of smartphone use among the 16-24 year olds

(Safrudiningsih, R. D., & Gurning, 2023). This reinforces the assumption that the younger generation is particularly vulnerable to changes in digital lifestyles, including in practice Phubbing.

Sociologically, the phenomenon Phubbing marking the formation of a new culture in society that places digital presence more important than physical presence. In Goffman's perspective, this can be seen as a form of failure in Impression Management, where individuals no longer prioritize creating positive impressions in direct interactions (Goffman, 1959). Meanwhile, Bourdieu (1990) highlights that gadgets are now part of "symbolic capital" which indicates social status and is a marker of a new habitus among the urban middle class (Schirato & Roberts, 2020).

However, this habit poses its own problems in the realm of social interaction. Physical presence no longer guarantees social presence, and interpersonal relationships become distorted (Harahap et al., 2025). Phubbing Marking a shift in the meaning of presence, attention, and engagement in interactions. In addition, the phenomenon of phubbing also poses complex psychological and social implications. Dependence on digital technology can trigger feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and interpersonal relationship disruption (Hakim & Yulia, 2024). Therefore, it is important to understand how these practices shape and shape social norms as well as how implications on social interaction in urban adolescents today.

The phenomenon of phubbing is not only relevant in the micro-realm of face-to-face interactions, but also reflects broader social dynamics. In the context of urban society, the use of digital technology has blurred the boundaries between private and public spaces, between social presence and digital engagement. Young people, as the most technology-adaptive group, play a central role in redefining social values through their daily practices (Putra S., 2016).

This research aims to uncover the subjective meaning behind the practice Phubbing from the perspective of the urban young generation in Pontianak through a phenomenological approach. This study is expected to contribute to the sociological understanding of digital culture and its implications for contemporary social interaction (Arianto, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods because it aims to understand the subjective meaning and individual experience related to phenomena Phubbing. According to Creswell, the phenomenological approach is used to delve deeply into the participants' experience of a phenomenon that they experience firsthand (Mackiewicz, 2018). This method is relevant to answer the question of how the younger generation understands and practices Phubbing in their social life.

A total of 10 informants aged 18-25 years who live in Pontianak City became participants in this study. Informants were selected through purposive sampling techniques with the following criteria: (1) actively using smartphones; (2) have experience as a perpetrator or recipient of phubbing; and (3) often interact in public spaces. The city of Pontianak was chosen as the location of the research because it represents the dynamics of urban communities that are undergoing digital transformation.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observations in social spaces (cafes/coffee shops, city parks, public waiting rooms), and visual documentation. This technique aims to capture the informant's personal narrative as well as the social context in which phubbing occurs. The validity of the data is maintained by triangulating sources and methods (Moleong, 2019).

Data are analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin. The stages of analysis include: (1) reading and repeating interview transcripts, (2) identifying meaningful themes, (3) interpreting the subjective meaning of the informant's experience, and (4) constructing a thematic narrative based on a common meaning (Larkin et al., 2019).

RESULTS

Phubbing as a Normalized Social Practice

The informant stated that they often phubbing without feeling guilty. This phenomenon has undergone social normalization and is no longer considered deviant behavior. This is in accordance with the habitus theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), which states that individual actions are influenced by social structures and habits embedded in the self. Phubbing has become a new habitus in the context of digital interaction.

Ambivalence in Social Relations

Although it is considered natural, informants feel ambivalence when they become victims of phubbing. They feel disappointed, disturbed, and even unappreciated. This phenomenon reflects Goffman's (1959) view of the importance of "face" in social interaction. When a person is ignored in face-to-face communication, his or her social face is threatened, and this has an impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Changing the Meaning of Social Presence

The practice of phubbing suggests that physical presence is no longer the primary indicator of social presence. Theory Networked Individualism Wellman explained that individuals now live in digital networks that shape their social identities and presence. Informants feel more "present" when active on social media than in physical interactions (Rosmita D. & Karim A., 2025).

Expression of Identity Through Technology

Some informants associate activities with gadgets as part of self-expression. Uploading content, following online trends, or updating statuses is considered a social image strategy. This is in line with the concept Presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), where individuals present themselves according to expected social roles, both in the real world and digitally.

DISCUSSION

Behaviour Phubbing can be seen as an individual's failure to maintain a direct social impact in front of others. Instead of being fully present in real interactions, individuals prefer to build their image through digital media such as social media or instant messaging applications (Goffman, 1959). This choice creates new dynamics in social interactions, which tend to be more artificial, one-sided, and lacking authentic emotional closeness.

On the other hand, when viewed from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (1990), gadgets can be understood as a form of "symbolic capital" that plays a role in forming new habitus, especially among the urban middle class (Schirato & Roberts, 2020). In this context, Phubbing It is no longer simply considered an individual habit, but rather a reflection of a social structure that emphasizes efficiency, speed of response, and digital connectivity as part of valuable cultural capital in the modern era.

The results of the study show that phubbing behavior has become part of the social routine of the urban young generation in Pontianak. Most informants realize that they often ignore the interlocutor when using gadgets, either for entertainment reasons, seeking information, or because of social media demands.

This phenomenon shows that there has been a shift in values in the interpretation of social interaction. Some informants revealed that they felt uncomfortable when they didn't hold their phones while talking, indicating an emotional dependence on digital presence. This supports Turkle's view, which states that technology creates the illusion of closeness but instead dissipates emotionally (Turkle, 2011).

From the results of observations that have been made on informants who are also samples from this study, it can be described that phubbing behavior has been used as a normalization of behavior in the process of social interaction among urban young people in Pontianak City. This happens in social spaces such as cafés/coffee shops, public areas, and also campus environments. The following is a table of the frequency of phubbing behavior that occurs based on the observation location.

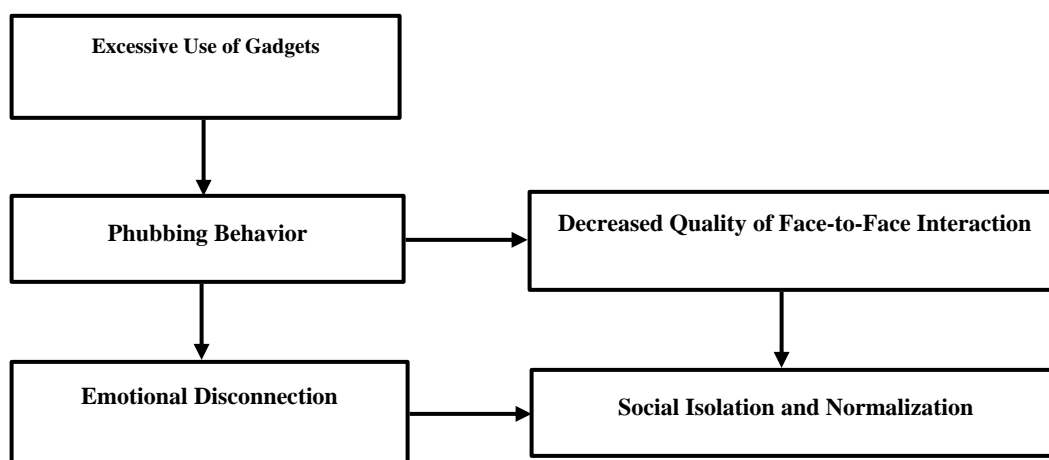
Table 1. Percentage of Phubbing Behavior Based on Observation Location

Observation Location	Number of Participants	Number of Seen Phubbing	Percentage (%)
Café/Coffe Shop	30 people	25 people	83.3%
Public Areas (City Park)	20 people	14 people	70.0%
Campus Environment	25 people	18 people	72.0%

Source: Results of field observations, 2025

From this table we can see that phubbing behavior is often encountered and occurs in Cafes/hangouts, which incidentally this place is one of the places where there are many intense social interactions between individuals, but in practice this has experienced social changes in urban society, especially among the younger generation.

To see more clearly the contribution of this phubbing behavior, we can look at the following scheme. This scheme will provide a brief overview of how the implications of phubbing behavior on the social interaction of the urban young generation in Pontianak City become a normalized behavioral value.



Source: Researcher Review Results, 2025

Figure 1. Schema of the Implications of Phubbing Behavior on Social Interaction

The scheme above is very much in accordance with the phenomenon that occurs in several places where interaction often occurs, such as in cafes/coffee shops, public spaces, and also campus environments. This can be seen in the following image as a form of visualization of the schema linkage in Figure 1. with the phenomenon of phubbing behavior practices that occur in the field.



Source: Field Documentation Results, 2025

Figure 2. Visualization of *Phubbing Behavior* in Public Spaces

From the results of this documentation, we can see that gadgets become "symbolic capital" in the interaction of the urban young generation, where the meaning of presence has changed its definition; it is no longer a literal "face" or physical that is a symbol that the individual is present in social interaction, but it is online presence that is interpreted by the individual to be present in social interaction for the current urban young generation, especially in the city of Pontianak. This is true and "relatable" to the reason stated by Bourdieu (1990) that excessive use of gadgets will become a function in social interaction in the digital society. Then the phubbing behavior itself will be normalized by most of the urban young generation.

CONCLUSION

Phubbing has become part of the culture of social interaction of the urban young generation in Pontianak. This practice is no longer considered deviant, but has become part of a new social structure. However, phubbing also presents a social dilemma because it has an impact on the quality of relationships and feelings of acceptance in social groups. Using a phenomenological approach, this study shows that phubbing behavior is not only related to technology, but also related to the value structure, identity, and social existence of the younger generation.

Phubbing behavior reflects a profound transformation in the way individuals interpret presence, attention, and involvement in social relationships. Although this practice has been normalized, informants' experiences show a tension between digital convenience and the need for presence in real social interactions.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, phubbing behavior is not just a habit of individuals who use gadgets excessively, but has become part of a new cultural structure among the urban young generation. This practice reflects changes in values, norms, and meanings in everyday social relations. Therefore, a cross-sectoral approach is needed to reduce its negative impact and strengthen the quality of social interaction in a real way. Researchers realize that this research still needs improvement. For this reason, based on the results of the research, the author provides the following suggestions:

First, for academics and researchers, it is recommended to expand and continue research related to the digital behavior of the younger generation, especially in the fields of digital sociology, social interaction, and identity formation. Develop a new theoretical model of "digital social presence" to explain changes in today's interaction norms. Further research needs to be conducted to develop new theoretical models of social presence in the digital age.

Second, educational institutions, both at the secondary and tertiary levels, are advised to integrate digital literacy education into the learning process. This literacy focuses not only on technical skills, but also on digital communication ethics and social awareness. Workshops, class discussions, or campus activities that encourage interaction without devices can be an alternative to building a healthier and more meaningful communication culture among students and students.

Third, to parents and families who play the role of primary social structures, it is important to be an example in the wise use of gadgets. Moments of togetherness at home need to be interpreted as a space for emotional interaction that is free from screen distractions. Open communication with children about the benefits and risks of using gadgets can help build more reflective and responsible digital awareness.

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