

# The Impact of Phubbing on Generation Z Social Interaction

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**Abstract:** The invention of smartphones as a form of advancement in communication and information technology gave rise to a behaviour called phubbing. Phubbing is a smartphone- focused attitude that ignores the interlocutor. This study aims to know in-depth the impact of phubbing in social interaction on generation Z. The type of research used is descriptive studies with qualitative approaches. Data collection methods are conducted by interviewing, observation, and documentation. The informant in this study is a student of the Communication Science class of 2018. This study uses the theory of Media Dependence (Media Dependency). This theory sees the audience's dependence on the media, where the audience has different degrees of dependence ranging from individuals, groups, and even cultures. The higher the dependence on the media, the greater the influence of such communication. The results showed that impacts of phubbing in generation Z social interactions include: Miss Communications, decreased value in the message conveyed by the communicator, decreased quality in relationships, social exclusion, becoming a topic among students, decreased empathy towards the interlocutor, losing information during the ongoing conversation, and wasting time during the assignment completion.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The use of smartphone has positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts encompass facilitating communication, improving social relation, and removing stress due to its wifi feature. This feature can facilitate someone to acquire information. Its negative impact causes a person to experience changes in social interaction behaviors and verbal communication disorders both directly and indirectly (Mariati & Sema, 2019). Another negative impact that occurs is the raising of phubbing phenomenon.

Phubbing is currently occurring in every social layer, including students. Phubbing phenomenon is a tendency to play around with smartphone rather than establishing direct interactions with the surrounding people. Phubbing is taken from the words phone and snubbing, used to indicate an attitude that harms the interlocutor by excessive smartphone usage (Hanika, 2015). The harming is essentially in the context of the feeling of being disrespected because the interlocutor frequently looks at the smartphone. Phubbing can also be interpreted as a behaviour that ignores other people during social interactions as the person is focused more on his cell phone (Ratnasary & Oktaviani, 2020).

Phubbing can be caused by the anxiety of not accessing smartphone in a long time. This condition is usually referred to as nomophobia (nomobile phone phobia) (Hanika, 2015). Robert Kaunt (in Sparks, 2013:261) states that individuals who excessively use their smartphones will have short attention span. At this level, they are unable to understand the delivered information comprehensively because technologies such as smartphone causes disorders. The long term effect of excessive smartphone use is they would experience health disorders (Hanika, 2015). Smartphone usage can affect transactional processes. The dynamic and reciprocal communication quality is felt to have decreased, especially during the face-to-face interaction (Mariati & Sema, 2019).

A person with phubbing behaviour uses smartphone as the escape to avoid discomfort in a crowd. For instance, in a lift or during traveling alone in public transports. At present, phubbing behaviour is getting worse, young people are not only doing phubbing because they are in public transports, they do it at any time and to everyone, either towards the elder people or their peers

Phubbing is considered as inappropriate behaviour that can harm emotional intimacy in human interaction (T'ng et al., 2018). Smartphone that is meant to be a communication device actually causes disruptions in

direct communication whereas Indonesian people have eastern culture, namely having characteristics that still follow values, norms, and ethics in a relationship that is based on mutual respect when being involved in a conversation (Hanika, 2015).

Smartphone usage is certainly substantiated by internet usage. The internet is mostly used by young population and Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest young population amidst world countries (Purwani, 2021). This condition shows that the current young generation have the potential to conduct phubbing. Most of the young generation have relied their lives on electronic gadgets, including smartphone. They use it for various needs, such as the supporting device to do assignments, finding knowledge, finding reading sources, and following updates (Ratnasary & Oktaviani, 2020). Especially, generation Z that is characterized as very familiar with technologies, and phubbing is born due to technological advances. This generation gets i-generation as their nickname. By year of birth, generation Z born between 1996-2010 (Putra, 2016).

Phubbing behaviour will threaten the social interaction of generation Z if it happens continuously. Thus, it is very important to know profoundly the impact of phubbing behaviour on students as the future young generation of the nation, including Communication Science students who become the subject of this study. In practice, Communication Science students study various forms of communications and how to interact properly. They would certainly attempt to achieve effective communication. However, in reality, the researcher discovered phubbing behaviour among Communication Science students. In addition, most of them have not been aware of the term of this phenomenon despite many of them have realized the occurrence of phubbing behaviour. Based on this gap, the researcher was interested to raise the phubbing theme into the study with Communication Science students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in the class of 2018-2019 as the subject. The subject is selected because the class is having lectures and becoming the organizer in department annual events, so they are potentially meeting in person and interacting face-to-face.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Media Dependency Theory

Stanley and Davis (2010) reveal that Media Dependency Theory is a theory of media system

dependency. The assumption of this theory is the more someone depends his needs to be fulfilled by media usage, the more important the role of media in the life of the person (Hidayatullah, 2017). This theory was proposed and developed by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1975 (Musfialdy, 2020).

According to McQuail (2010), this theory assumes that an individual is an active person in determining the media option to use (Hadi, 2020). Grant et al. (1991) reveals that in this theory, individuals actively choose media they use, hear, watch, and read. The bigger expectation of individuals for information that can help them to reach their purpose, the stronger their dependency on such media. As long as they are not disappointed by the media, which means that individuals have to rely on specific media to fulfil their needs (Hadi, 2020).

According to this theory, media realize their capability to create dependency towards audiences and capable to reach goals through several stages, namely:

- a. Individuals are interested with the media that have diverse contents to fulfil their needs.
- b. The higher intensity, the stronger cognitive and affective boosts .
- c. Cognitive and affective boosts activate a higher engagement level that allows reception and memorization process towards information.
- d. A bigger involvement allows the increase of media effects towards individuals at cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels in a long term (Musfialdy, 2020).

There are three effects of Dependency Media Theory, namely:

- a. Cognitive effect is the effect occurs in audiences when the information is informative for them. Cognitive effect can remove ambiguity and attitude formation.
- b. Affective effect is higher than cognitive effect. Audiences are not only being informed regarding an information, it is more than that, this includes sharing the feeling of joy, upset, anger, fear, and others.
- c. Behavioural effect is the effect occurs in audiences in the form of behavior. Behavioural effect might activate, move, or alleviate an issue (Musfialdy, 2020).

### 3 METHOD

This study used a method with a qualitative approach because it was oriented towards cases and contexts. While descriptive study was used to generate descriptions regarding reality to provide comprehensions about the reality (Pawito, 2007). This method is aimed to explain phenomena profusely. The collected data are words, images, and not numbers. The data are originated from interview scripts, field records, photos, videotapes, personal documents, notes or memos, and other official documents (Moleong, 2007).

In this study, Communication Science students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in the class of 2018-2019 were used as the subject. The object of this study was the impact of phubbing in the social interaction of generation Z, particularly students of Communication Science of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in the class of 2018-2019. The data collecting methods used were interview, observation, and documentation.

The data analysis method used was the Miles and Huberman Punch's model of interactive analysis technique. This analysis technique is principally consisting of three components, namely data reduction, data presentation and withdrawal as well as conclusion testing (Pawito, 2007). The type of data validity used was source triangulation. Source triangulation is the researcher's effort to access more varied sources to acquire data related to the same issue. In this technique, the researcher attempts to test data obtained from one source (to be compared) with the data from other sources (Pawito, 2007). The researcher conducted the source triangulation with an academician, namely Mr. Mufid Salim, S.Ikom., M.B.A as a lecturer of Communication Science Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan.

## 4 RESULT

### 4.1 Phubbing among Communication Science Students

From the results of the conducted observations, the researcher often found phubbing behaviour among Communication Science students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. Then, the researcher profoundly analysed the issue related to the reason why Communication Science students who study communication theories and social interaction are instead often get focused on their smartphones rather than interact directly with interlocutors. Thus, effective communications are not

manifested. The researcher tried to conduct the initial survey by giving several questions to some informants regarding the phubbing phenomenon. The results indicate that most of Communication Science Students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga have yet to know the phubbing term although they often met and committed phubbing. As indicated by the interview with an informant as follows.

*"Ofien. When the lecturer is boring. Probably like when the lecturer is monotonous and the materials are not appealing. Looking at other people's status, scrolling around. In my opinion, phubbing is when you stuck on the phone during a conversation or when there is another person talking. If you focus on the surrounding, you can't focus on your phone, so you have to choose between the phone or talking with the people around the environment."*

The interview results with the informant are relevant to Robert Kaunt's study (in Sparks, 2013:261) that states that individuals who excessively use their smartphones will have short attention span. At this level, they can not understand the delivered information comprehensively because technologies like smartphone causes some disturbances (Hanika, 2015).

The other informant who encountered the same issue also expressed that some peers in the Communication Science department often conduct phubbing. The phubbing behaviour that occurs in students of Communication Science does not completely hinder their social interactions. The occurring phubbing behaviour in Communication Science students does not completely inhibit their social interactions. This is because field results indicated that Communication Science students still apply some communication etiquettes during the direct interaction with interlocutors. The conducted phubbings were not fully abandoning the ongoing conversation. They only checked their smartphones if there are notifications.

### 4.2 The Causative Factors of Phubbing

The causative factors of phubbing explained by (Karadağ et al., 2015) in their study encompass smartphone addiction, internet addiction, game addiction, and social media addiction. Interview results with one informant indicated that many of his friends in Communication Science Department conduct phubbing because they are focused on social media. The interview result with one informant related to phubbing behaviour due to social media addiction:

*"For instance, during the class at the campus, if the person is watching live streaming of this versus*

*that, he will even reject the class list of presence, he'd be like 'later, later', something like that. I saw people taking selfies and fooling around. It doesn't matter whether there is a lecturer or not. Creating stories, are those categorized as phubbing? There's a lot of them. Many of my friends are like that during lectures. There are many phenomenon of phubbing. Mostly due to gamers, social media, things like that".*

Researcher's findings related to factors causing phubbing in the environment of Communication Science students encompass: phubbing actors who currently in a bad mood condition, students who are busy with their organizations, tedious lecturers during class lectures, students who are sleepy during the class, phubbing actors who do not understand the ongoing conversation topic, topics that are not appealing for phubbing actors, and phubbing actors who are not close to the interlocutor.

As the following informant exposure:

*"If this semester also follows the organization and others. So connecting with outsiders is also a lot through smartphones. Not only scrolling, like we contact someone, continue to other communities. Mostly Whatsapp. I'm also a public relations officer so there's a lot to be contacted".*

### **4.3 The Impact of Phubbing in Social Interactions of Communication Science Students**

The field study showed that social interactions that occurred indirectly are ineffective and less intense. Miscommunications were often happened due to much focused on smartphone. Such an action might also cause upsets because you have to repeat what has already been told. This expressed by an informant as follows.

*"it's like a miscommunication. We have explained, we have talked a lot, and he just went 'hah', 'what'?. So we have to repeat ourselves again, it's not as optimal as we said the first time because we have to repeat what we are saying. We are getting very excited during the first talk then the second time the interlocutor just responded like 'hah, what's that', and I was like 'oh my, do I have to repeat myself again'. There must be a decrease of value in the message".*

A study showed that continuous phubbing behaviour might affect social relationships (Amelia et al., 2019). Including the study conducted by Roberts and David (2016) in which phubbing behaviour can improve conflicts that indirectly might affect the satisfaction towards the relationship and cause one's depression (Amelia et al., 2019).

From the results of field interviews, the researcher analysed that phubbing is highly influencing social interactions happen directly. Phubbing also affects the quality of social relationships amidst Communication Science students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga. Phubbing does not only affect direct social interaction, but also affect social life of the phubbing actor. These are the impacts of phubbing occurring among Communication Science students:

1. Miscommunications
2. Decreased value in the message conveyed by the communicator
3. Decreased quality in friendship
4. Social exclusion
5. Becoming a topic among students
6. Decreased empathy towards the interlocutor
7. Losing information during the ongoing conversation
8. Wasting time during the assignment completion

Phubbing also affects the value of the delivered message because communicators have to repeat their messages when someone is phubbing. Phubbing also decreases the quality of friendship. This condition is caused by the upset towards phubbing actors because they often ignored the conversation during the direct social interaction.

Besides affecting social interactions, phubbing also causes social exclusion towards phubbing actors. When a social exclusion occurs, the phubbing actor becomes the topic among Communication Science students. Phubbing also makes someone to lose empathy towards the interlocutor due to much focused on the smartphone. Phubbing also makes someone to lose information because he ignores the interlocutor when being in a forum. Being too focused with smartphone wastes the time, so it could delay the work that can be completed at that time.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

According to the results of study, observation, and data collecting on Communication Science students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, it can be concluded that based on research problems, the impact of phubbing causes social interactions that happen directly to be ineffective and makes many miscommunications.

Future studies about phubbing would be more appealing if being focused towards other aspects, such



as causative factors of phubbing or solutions to reduce phubbing behaviour. From the perspective of research subject, it will be more developed if a wider community is used, such as housewives.

The researcher's recommendation for generation Z is to be wise in using technological advances, such as smartphone. And not to forget that we are social creatures that require each other. It would be better if social relationships in the real life are established properly despite that we could have many friends online through smartphone. Do not consider that phubbing behaviour is a normal action in the era of sophisticated technological advances because this assumption will become a norm in the community.

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