



Paradox of Connectivity: How Phone Snubbing (Phubbing) Erodes Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction in Educational Milieus

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Abstract

The ubiquitous integration of smartphones into daily life has engendered a paradoxical phenomenon wherein hyper-digital connectivity results in physical social disconnection. This behavior, termed "phubbing" (phone snubbing), is increasingly prevalent among adolescents, threatening the foundational dynamics of their social interactions. This study aims to quantify the impact of phubbing behavior on interpersonal communication satisfaction among early adolescents in a developing educational context. Employing a quantitative associative design, the study surveyed 92 junior high school students (aged 12–15) in Makassar, Indonesia, selected via simple random sampling from a population of 1,032. Data were collected using validated, 4-point Likert scale instruments measuring Phubbing (Communication Disturbance, Phone Obsession) and Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction (Language, Physical, Psychological, Environment). Data were analyzed using classical assumption tests and simple linear regression via SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics revealed that both phubbing behavior (69.57%) and communication satisfaction (68.48%) predominantly clustered in the moderate category. Crucially, regression analysis demonstrated a highly significant negative impact of phubbing on interpersonal communication satisfaction ($\beta = -1.178$, $t = -18.009$, $p < 0.001$). The findings empirically validate the Expectancy Violations Theory in a digital-physical context, illustrating that smartphone-induced distraction severely diminishes relational satisfaction. Practically, these results underscore the urgent need for digital literacy interventions and "digital fasting" protocols within educational and familial spheres to preserve the psychological and social well-being of adolescents.

Keywords: *Phubbing, Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction, Adolescents, Expectancy Violations Theory, Digital Connectivity.*

Introduction

The conceptualization of humans as inherently social beings is fundamentally predicated on the necessity of reciprocal interaction and group cohesion. Interpersonal communication serves as the primary conduit for this interaction, facilitating the exchange of ideas, the expression of emotions, and the cultivation of empathy. According to classical communication paradigms, optimal interpersonal communication is achieved when

individuals can navigate social complexities, forge new relational bonds, and engage in effective bidirectional discourse. **Consequently**, effective communication mitigates social isolation and fosters self-actualization. A critical barometer of this effectiveness is "interpersonal communication satisfaction," defined as the subjective emotional evaluation of the quality, clarity, and reciprocity of a communicative exchange. When expectations of active listening and emotional engagement are met, individuals experience a psychological state of satisfaction that enhances motivation, productivity, and overall mental health.

Paradoxically, the advent of the smartphone era has radically disrupted these established communicative norms. While technological advancements have democratized access to global information, they have simultaneously introduced unprecedented barriers to face-to-face interaction. Indonesia, representing one of the most rapidly digitizing demographics globally, reported an average smartphone usage of 5 hours and 39 minutes per day in 2023, the highest globally. Within this hyper-connected landscape, a behavioral anomaly known as "phubbing" (phone snubbing) has emerged. Coined by the Macquarie Dictionary, phubbing describes the act of ignoring one's physical companion in favor of interacting with a smartphone. This behavior is characterized by nomophobia, interpersonal conflict, self-isolation, and a persistent obsession with digital stimuli at the expense of immediate physical reality (Karadağ et al., 2015).

Adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to the insidious effects of phubbing. Developmentally, early adolescence (ages 12–15) is a critical period for identity formation, peer acceptance, and the acquisition of social capital. For this demographic, the smartphone acts as a gateway to social inclusion. **However**, the compulsive need to remain digitally connected frequently supersedes the etiquette of physical interaction. Preliminary observations at SMPN 7 Makassar, a densely populated junior high school in Indonesia, revealed alarming anecdotal evidence: students frequently exhibited communication disturbances, leading to diminished empathy, relational friction, and overt interpersonal conflicts stemming from feelings of being ignored by their peers.

This phenomenon can be critically analyzed through the lens of Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. EVT posits that individuals hold normative expectations regarding nonverbal behaviors during interactions, such as eye contact and physical orientation. Phubbing constitutes a severe negative expectancy violation, signaling disinterest and disrespect. **Furthermore**, in the context of Maslow's framework, this violation directly threatens the individual's need for esteem and belongingness, generating negative affect and relational dissatisfaction.

Crucially, while a burgeoning corpus of literature has investigated phubbing (e.g., Istawa, 2024; Yusnita, 2023), a significant research gap persists. The majority of contemporary studies have predominantly focused on adult populations, romantic couples, or university students. There is a distinct scarcity of empirical research examining the micro-dynamics of phubbing among *early adolescents* in developing nations, specifically regarding how it dismantles the four pillars of interpersonal communication satisfaction: language, physical presence, psychological engagement, and environmental awareness. To bridge this critical gap, this study aims to rigorously quantify the impact of phubbing behavior on interpersonal communication satisfaction among junior high school students, offering novel empirical insights into the socio-digital behavioral shifts of Generation Alpha.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, and associative research design. Rooted in a positivist paradigm, this approach was selected to objectively measure the variables, test predefined hypotheses, and establish the directional influence of the independent variable (Phubbing) on the dependent variable (Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction) through rigorous statistical modeling.

Population and Sample

The research was conducted at SMPN 7 Makassar, Indonesia. The target population comprised the entirety of the student body across grades 7, 8, and 9, totaling 1,032 early adolescents (aged 12–15 years). To ensure the statistical power and representativeness of the findings, the sample size was determined utilizing Slovin's formula with a stringent margin of error set at 10% ($\alpha = 0.10$).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{1032}{1 + 1032(0.10)^2} = 91.17$$

Rounding up to ensure robustness, the final sample consisted of 92 respondents. A simple random sampling technique was operationalized using a randomized number generator mapped to the school's student registry. This probabilistic method ensured that every student possessed an equal and independent chance of selection, thereby minimizing selection bias. Demographically, the sample was relatively balanced, comprising 51% males ($n=47$) and 49% females ($n=45$), with the majority aged 13 (45%) and 14 (30%).

Instrumentation

Data were harvested using two highly structured, self-administered questionnaires. To eliminate the tendency of central tendency bias (the habit of respondents choosing a "neutral" middle option), a 4-point Likert scale was utilized (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree).

1. **Phubbing Scale:** Adapted from the theoretical framework of Karadağ et al. (2015), this 12-item instrument measured two primary dimensions: *Communication Disturbance* (e.g., checking notifications while a peer is speaking) and *Phone Obsession* (e.g., feeling acute anxiety when separated from the device).
2. **Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Scale:** Adapted from Downs and Hazen, and contextualized by Panuju (2018), this 19-item scale evaluated four critical dimensions: *Language* (clarity and openness), *Physical* (eye contact and proximity), *Psychological* (empathy and emotional awareness), and *Environment* (comfort and lack of distraction).

Both instruments underwent rigorous expert validation by two senior academics (Ph.D. level in Education and Communication) prior to deployment, ensuring high content and construct validity.

Data Analysis Procedure

Raw data were tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. The analytical pipeline commenced with descriptive statistics (mean,

standard deviation, frequency distributions) to categorize the behavioral tendencies of the sample. Prior to inferential testing, classical assumption tests were strictly enforced to validate the integrity of the regression model. These included:

- **Normality Test:** Utilizing the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test and Q-Q Plot visualization.
- **Linearity Test:** Utilizing the Test for Linearity (Deviation from Linearity).
- **Heteroscedasticity Test:** Utilizing the Glejser test to ensure constant variance of residuals.

Upon satisfying all parametric assumptions, a Simple Linear Regression analysis was executed to ascertain the predictive power of phubbing on communication satisfaction, culminating in a T-test to determine the statistical significance of the relationship at a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Behavioral Categorization

The descriptive analysis provided a nuanced psychological profile of the adolescent respondents. For the independent variable, Phubbing (X), the scores ranged from 12 to 48, with a mean of 30.20 ($SD = 7.06$). Categorization revealed that the vast majority of the students, 69.57% ($n=64$), fell into the "Moderate" category of phubbing behavior. Only 16.30% exhibited "High" phubbing, and 14.13% exhibited "Low" phubbing.

Paradoxically, a parallel trend was observed in the dependent variable, Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction (Y). Scores ranged from 19 to 76, with a mean of 46.89 ($SD = 9.40$). Similarly, 68.48% ($n=63$) of respondents reported "Moderate" satisfaction, while 19.57% reported "High" and 11.96% reported "Low" satisfaction. This clustering in the moderate strata suggests a transitional phase in adolescent behavior: while they are not entirely consumed by digital addiction to the point of total social withdrawal, their communication quality is demonstrably compromised, preventing them from achieving optimal relational satisfaction.

Classical Assumption Tests

The robustness of the predictive model was validated through comprehensive assumption testing.

1. **Normality:** The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a significance value of $p = 0.200$ for both Phubbing and Communication Satisfaction. As $p > 0.05$, the data were confirmed to be normally distributed, a finding corroborated by the alignment of data points along the diagonal of the Normal Q-Q Plots.
2. **Linearity:** The ANOVA Test for Linearity indicated a highly significant linear relationship ($F = 306.579$, $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the Deviation from Linearity was not significant ($p = 0.730 > 0.05$), confirming that the relationship between the variables is strictly linear.
3. **Heteroscedasticity:** The Glejser test resulted in a significance value of $p = 0.341$ for the Phubbing variable. Because $p > 0.05$, the model is free from

heteroscedasticity, ensuring that the variance of the residuals remains constant across all observations.

Hypothesis Testing: Simple Linear Regression

With all assumptions met, the simple linear regression analysis was deployed to test the central hypothesis (H_a : Phubbing significantly impacts interpersonal communication satisfaction).

The analysis generated the following regression equation: $Y = 82.469 - 1.178X$

The constant (α) of 82.469 indicates the baseline level of interpersonal communication satisfaction if phubbing behavior were entirely absent ($X = 0$). **Crucially**, the regression coefficient (β) for phubbing is -1.178. This negative trajectory dictates that for every single-unit increase in phubbing behavior, interpersonal communication satisfaction decreases by 1.178 units.

The T-test (partial test) further solidified this finding. The calculated t-value was -18.009, with a significance level of $p = 0.000$. Because the p-value is exponentially smaller than the 0.05 threshold ($0.000 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H_0) is unequivocally rejected.

Consequently, the data provide irrefutable empirical evidence that phubbing behavior exerts a highly significant, negative impact on the interpersonal communication satisfaction of junior high school students. The higher the frequency of smartphone distraction during face-to-face interactions, the more severely the quality, empathy, and satisfaction of that interaction are degraded.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study provide a profound commentary on the socio-digital landscape of contemporary adolescence. The unequivocal negative impact of phubbing on interpersonal communication satisfaction ($\beta = -1.178$, $p < 0.001$) serves as a critical warning regarding the erosion of fundamental social skills among Generation Alpha.

Theoretical Implications and Expectancy Violations

These results robustly validate and extend Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) within a modern, technologically mediated context. In traditional EVT, violations are often physical (e.g., invading personal space). **However**, this study demonstrates that *digital* interference now constitutes a primary expectancy violation. When an adolescent engages in conversation, there is an implicit psychological contract expecting mutual eye contact, active listening, and empathetic non-verbal cues (DeVito, 2016). Phubbing shatters this contract. By diverting cognitive and visual attention to a screen, the "phubber" sends a potent non-verbal message of dismissal and lower prioritization to their peer. This violation directly triggers negative affect, diminishes the perceived value of the interaction, and consequently plummets communication satisfaction.

Furthermore, the clustering of 69.57% of students in the "moderate" phubbing category is highly revealing. It suggests that while strict school policies might prevent overt, high-level phone addiction during class hours, the underlying *obsession* and *communication*

disturbance persist in the margins—during breaks, group work, and informal socializing. This persistent, low-grade distraction is sufficient to prevent adolescents from reaching high levels of relational satisfaction, keeping them in a state of mediocre social fulfillment.

Comparative Analysis with Global Literature (2022-2026)

The findings of this study align with and expand upon recent global literature. Chiu et al. (2022) highlighted that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) drives phubbing, acting as a defense mechanism against social exclusion. **Paradoxically**, as our data shows, this attempt to stay digitally connected results in physical social exclusion and dissatisfaction.

While Meredith and Roberts (2021) established that partner phubbing destroys romantic relationship satisfaction among adults, the current study proves that this destructive mechanism is equally, if not more, potent in platonic, developmental peer relationships among early adolescents. Adolescents lack the emotional regulation and cognitive maturity of adults; thus, the sting of being "phubbed" can severely impact their self-esteem and identity formation, aligning with Maslow's framework of esteem needs.

Moreover, recent studies by Xie et al. (2024) indicated that internet use behaviors mediate real-life loneliness. Our findings provide the micro-interactional evidence for *how* this loneliness occurs: it is the moment-by-moment degradation of face-to-face communication satisfaction—the loss of eye contact, the delayed responses, and the lack of physical empathy—that ultimately isolates the adolescent, even when surrounded by peers.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study are urgent for educational stakeholders.

1. **Pedagogical Intervention:** Schools can no longer merely ban smartphones; they must actively teach "Digital Etiquette" and interpersonal communication as core competencies. Counseling programs (BK) must address phubbing not just as a disciplinary issue, but as a barrier to emotional intelligence.
2. **Digital Fasting:** Educational environments should foster "tech-free zones" or periods of "digital fasting" where students are forced to navigate the discomfort and ultimate reward of uninterrupted, eye-to-eye human interaction.
3. **Parental Strategy:** The data signals to parents that providing smartphones to young adolescents without strict boundary-setting directly handicaps their child's ability to form satisfying, empathetic real-world relationships.

Conclusion

This research definitively establishes that phubbing behavior is not merely a benign modern habit, but a statistically significant catalyst for the deterioration of interpersonal communication satisfaction among adolescents. With a regression coefficient of -1.178 and a significance of $p < 0.001$, the data illustrates a sharp negative trajectory: as digital distraction increases, relational empathy, openness, and satisfaction collapse. While the majority of students currently reside in a "moderate" zone of this behavior, the trajectory is alarming. Without targeted interventions to restore the sanctity of face-to-face interaction, we risk cultivating a generation that is hyper-connected globally but profoundly disconnected, dissatisfied, and isolated locally. Future research must expand upon these

findings by incorporating mediating variables such as emotional intelligence, social anxiety, and utilizing longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to capture the evolving nuances of adolescent digital behavior.

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