

## **Phubbing: A Technological Invasion Which Connected the World But Disconnected Humans**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of social networking sites and other mobile applications have been growing intensively. Several researches indicated that it is one of the factors that impact the relationship maintenance between one another. It is highly desirable for all citizens to have a good interpersonal communication to maintain and develop further relationships. Bad communication skills may have harmed the interpersonal relationships. With technology advancing, Smartphone's play an important part in people's lives. It's easy to see people talking, slipping, or even playing on their phones in public places. Certainly, when people are concentrating on the small screens in hands, they won't care about their plights. So the probability of an accident is higher than before. Some countries even set up the "mobile phone sidewalk" to reduce potential hazards. But that is just palliatives. People needed to find a solution that "describe the annoying situation and further remind people to put their phones down, and get talking to each other again." In response to this request, a new word "phubbing" was created.

*Keywords: Phubbing, Relationship, Communication*

**M**odern technologies like the Internet, social networking, and cell phones have facilitated the communication between people. In particular, according to Srivastava (2005), the mobile phone has decentralized our networks of communication. This means that nowadays communication is not only possible from one fixed point to another fixed point, but a multitude of different points can communicate with a multitude of moving targets. Hence, communication is possible from every point with every person who has a mobile communication device. This provides us the opportunity to be continuously connected to each other (Geser, 2006; Powers, 2010).

Globally there are more than six billion users of cell phones. The need for people to connect with others frequently is apparent in our society. People use mobile phones everywhere and every

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time, to make phone call and messaging friends, surf the web, social sites and attach themselves to their communication devices round the clock. The use of social networking sites and other mobile applications have been growing tremendously day by day. With advancing technology, Smartphone's play a crucial role in people's lives. Seeing people talking, slipping, or even playing on their phones in public places is common nowadays. People use internet for informational knowledge but somehow nowadays, it was used for communication and news updates for trends and/or as entertainment channels.

There are undeniable advantages associated with having constant contact with others (Chayko, 2008). By the use of a mobile phone people have the opportunity to contact close acquaintances and other people with whom they have something in common. This can be extremely rewarding and help to feel more emotionally connected to others (Chayko, 2008). Moreover, constant contact with others can be useful since people are able to get valuable information and social support when they need it (Chayko, 2008). Furthermore, it can be very comforting for people knowing that others are around and in their lives (Chayko, 2008).

However, the attachment of people to their mobile phones can have negative social consequences. Concerns have risen among theorists about the impact of mobile phones on conversations in offline social settings. First, messages and push notifications lead to interruptions in the conversation flow (Turkle, 2011). This result in a feeling we need to be available at all times and that if we stay offline for too long, we miss out on things. Therefore, it might become difficult for people to turn off their mobile phone (Turkle, 2011). Secondly, mobile phones can create feelings of discomfort and anxiety since large amounts of information are always within reach (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma & Raita, 2012). In order to stay up-to-date, users may refresh pages frequently to see if they are not missing out on things. The above mentioned distractions are likely to influence our social face-to-face interactions in a negative way because they prevent the user from maintaining contact with the immediate face-to-face conversation partner (Ling, 2008). Mobile phone use in the presence of others, even during social face-to-face interactions, is a phenomenon that is called "phubbing" (The Guardian, 2013). Phubbing refers to snubbing someone in a social setting by looking at your phone instead of paying attention to your immediate environment (*The Guardian*, 2013).

The Macquarie Dictionary (Australian national dictionary) (Phubbing: A Word is Born, 2013) claimed that phubbing behavior have been around the society since 2007 but no one have talked about such bad behavior because there was no one to describe it. In May 2012, the dictionary and the McCann Melbourne, the advertising agency of the campaign, invited a number of lexicologist, phoneticians, cruciverba list (cross-word maker profession), authors, and poets to find a word to describe the behavior of ignoring others by using your phone. Phubbing (Verb) is the act of snubbing someone in a social setting by looking at your phone instead of paying attention (Phubbing: A Word is Born, 2013). In another word, phubbing is the action of ignoring

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others during social events and hours by using smart phones, whether it is checking Facebook, using whatsapp or using other chatting applications. Phubbing can be seen anywhere during human beings daily activities, i.e. during meals, meetings, lectures, or social gatherings with friends and family. Phubbers (those who phub) often neglect and ignore the importance of maintaining and/or developing relationships by not communicating with others.

An underlying mechanism that may explain the supposed negative impact of phubbing behavior on social conversations is the nonverbal behavior that is displayed when a mobile phone is used. During a face-to-face interaction contact between speaker and listener is established and maintained primarily with the help of nonverbal cues. There is a wealth of research on nonverbal behavior that shows that immediacy cues are behaviors conversational distances, lean, body orientation, gaze and touch that indicate greater closeness and/or liking (e.g., J.F. Andersen, P.A. Andersen & Jensen, 1979; Mehrabian, 1981). These immediacy cues are likely to be absent when people display phubbing behavior and may therefore lead to perceived distance and disinterest. One of the most important nonverbal signals in face-to-face settings is the direction of a speaker's gaze. When two people are gazing at each other at the same time (mutual gaze) "eye contact" occurs (McIntosh, 2013). Jackson and Hogg (2010) state that eye contact is generally perceived as more immediate because it conveys understanding, closeness and attentiveness during a conversation. On the other hand, a lack of eye contact is usually perceived as rude or inattentive, and conveys distance and disinterest between people during a conversation (Rothwell, 2010). Necessarily, eye contact will be interrupted when a person directs his/her gaze towards a mobile phone instead of the conversation partner.

During conversations people make relational judgments with respect to affiliation (Laery, 1957; White, 1980). This judgment can be influenced when phubbing behavior occurs. Since eye contact indicates more closeness between people, the use of a mobile phone can have a negative influence on affiliation. Specifically, the non-phubbing person will perceive gaze directed to a mobile phone instead of him/her as more negative because there is less eye contact between the two people during a conversation. The social issues caused by mobile phones are well known by the majority of modern society. However, little research has been done to investigate the impact of mobile phone use during social face-to-face interactions. It is expected that phubbing has a negative influence on affiliation. A person will probably be evaluated more negatively in terms of affiliation when he or she is using a mobile phone during a social face-to-face conversation.

Mobile phone devices have become an important aspect of people's lives. Besides the fact that mobile phones have increased in number, they also moved from being a merely 'technological' object, to a key 'social' object (Srivastava, 2005). People use mobile phones more to communicate with each other socially. The social objects link us in a relationship, but also affect people's lives and relationships. According to Geser (2006) and Powers (2010) they changed people's behavior in many ways since: (1) phone users socialize and perform tasks in new ways,

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and (2) share and gather information in different ways now. This has an influence on the way people interact face-to-face. According to Katz and Aakhus (2002) people include more often their mobile phone as a participant rather than a face-to-face dyad, which means that people rather interact with others via their mobile phones than interact with others face-to-face. A mobile phone creates distractions and disturbances, which can have a negative influence on the face-to-face interaction. The use of a mobile phone in the presence of others is called “phubbing”, and is a common phenomenon in today’s society. A social paradox is going on: on the one hand we always want to socialize and want to be in contact with others. On the other hand, however, when we are spending time with someone face-to-face, we are mentally absent since we are also in contact with other people via mobile communication technology. It has led to a fusion of the physical- and virtual place in which conversations take place (Plant, 2001).

Previous literature has to a limited extent already discussed the negative influences of mobile phone mobile communication technologies on conversation and relationship quality (e.g., Kools, 2011; Wei & Leung, 1999; Wester, Werkhoven & Tas, 2010; Turkle, 2011; Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Although few of these articles present actual research findings, a number of conclusions can be drawn from them. Firstly, people get annoyed when their conversation partner is gazing at his or her mobile phone during the conversation (Kools, 2011; Wei & Leung, 1999; Campbell & Park, 2008). Likewise, Wester et al. (2010) report that 73% of the participants felt most annoyed when a phone was used during a conversation; the most important reason was the uninterested attitude displayed by the person who used a phone. Secondly, Turkle (2011) argued that mobile communication technology can have a decidedly negative influence on interpersonal relationships, as mobile phones can direct people's attention away from offline face-to-face interactions. Consequently, Turkle (2011) states that the conversation partner can conceive of phubbing behavior as rude and the behavior may cause a feeling of rejection among the conversation partner. Lastly, the use of a mobile phone in the presence of others during social face-to-face interactions is believed to create a certain social absence where space is limited for other social contacts. Katz and Aakhus (2002) state that we have been erased by an “absent presence”, which means that mobile phone users are physically present in the social face-to-face interaction, but their mental orientation is on someone else via their mobile phone (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Hence, the mobile phone user is socially and mentally in another place instead of ‘in’ the immediate face-to-face conversation.

Although these negative effects are widespread and probably recognizable by the majority of modern society, very little research has been done on the impact of mobile phone use during face-to-face interactions. To date, only one remarkable study (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012) addressed the influence of mobile communication technologies during social face-to-face interactions. This study examined the extent to which the mere presence of mobile communication devices affects the relationship quality in dyadic settings. The manipulation during the experiments was the presence or the absence of a mobile phone. The authors

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concluded that the presence of mobile phones in offline social interactions could have a negative effect on closeness, connection and conversation quality. The presence of a phone during a conversation decreased the extent to which participants felt that their partners understood them and showed empathy (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2012). However, in this study, none of the conversation partners were actually *using* a phone.

The above articles suggest that phubbing behavior creates distance between the phone user and the conversation partner. It is reasonable to assume that phubbing can have a negative impact on closeness because people have the need to come into close relationships with others (Zimbardo & Formica, 1963). In other words, people feel the need to become “affiliated” with others. As previously mentioned, people constantly make relational judgments with respect to affiliation (Laery, 1957; White, 1980). However, when a person displays phubbing behavior it is possible that he or she will be evaluated more negatively on affiliation.

### ***Phubbing context: Phubbing while listening or speaking***

People switch constantly from speaking and listening positions when they are in a conversation. According to Rogers (1995) attentive listening during a conversation means giving the conversational partner total and undivided attention. It tells the partner that the listener is interested and concerned (Rogers, 1995). The interest during a conversation can be conveyed to the speaker by using nonverbal cues such as maintaining eye contact. Hence, eye behavior during a conversation is a cue of attentive listening. Speakers, on the other hand, indicate respect and honesty for the listener by keeping his/her eyes focused on the listener during conversations. When the eyes of the listeners are not focused on the speaker or eyes that are looking elsewhere may indicate a listener’s boredom or indifference, which can have a negative influence on affiliation. In contrast, having eyes focused on the speaker during a conversation may exhibit the interest and sincerity of a speaker, thus a positive influence on affiliation. Mutual gaze refers to a situation in which both the speaker and listener are looking at each other, in other words eye contact (Knapp & Hall, 2010; Reis & Sprecher, 2009). According to Knapp and Hall (2010) it is the speaker’s gaze that determines the moments of mutual looking since speakers gaze less than listeners. During these moments of mutual gaze, it is highly likely that the listener will respond with a ‘listener response,’ which means attention (Bavelas, Coates & Johnson, 2002). Facial expressions such as smiles, sounds such as ‘mm-hmm’ and nodding the head reflect these listener’s responses. Therefore, the listener’s behavior during the interaction is an important determinant of the timing of these responses.

However, when the listener displays phubbing behavior during a conversation there are no responses to the speaker, which can have a negative impact on affiliation. Knapp and Hall (2010) claim that when the speaker seeks feedback concerning the reaction of the conversational partner, he/she gaze at this other person. A listener’s gaze suggests not only attention, but also whether or not the listener is interested in what is being said (Knapp & Hall, 2010). Hence, the

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disinterest or interpreted disinterest behavior (i.e. phubbing behavior) of the listener, through gaze, will lead to a more negative impact on affiliation.

### CONCLUSION

It is common nowadays that everybody, young or old, is equipped with a Smartphone wherever they go. However, Smartphone's not only bring convenience but also cause problems. While people enjoy the innovative device to the fullest, it is wise to stop awhile and ask themselves whether they are "phubbing" for fun consciously or "phoning" for things important. As long as people start to reflect on their behavior while slipping their Smartphone's, the word "phubbing" was not created in vain. Though most people don't think phubbing wrong or evil, they admit it addictive and offensive. Once people are aware of the problems caused by phubbing, they will more or less try to ward them off by limiting their time of using Smartphone's. The Aim of this paper was to inform people about the negative influences of the use of a mobile phone during face-to-face interactions. When people frequently direct their gaze to a mobile phone (i.e. a Phubber) during a dyadic conversation they are perceived as less affiliative than people who direct their gaze to the conversation partner. Gaze and its effects do vary in different situations, because gaze directed to a mobile phone during a dyadic conversation is perceived as less affiliative than gaze exclusively directed to a newspaper, and gaze directed to a mobile phone while listening is perceived as less affiliative than gaze directed to a mobile phone while speaking. In conclusion, when people use their mobile phone during a social conversation it has a negative influence on affiliation. Also such behavior while interaction makes a person feel the person is not interesting in conversation and in relation to the listener a person can't be able to pick the body language which is important component of our communication.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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