

PHUBBING BY GEN-Z AND GEN-Y: EXPLORING SMARTPHONE USAGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

This research examines "phubbing" behavior among Gen-Z and Gen-Y employees at PT Siloam International Hospitals, Indonesia. Phubbing refers to the act of using smartphones while in the presence of others, diverting attention from face-to-face interactions. The study employs a qualitative case study approach, interviewing six participants selected through purposive sampling. Findings reveal a hybrid work system at Siloam, with a mix of face-to-face and virtual communication. Smartphones and laptops play vital roles in work-related communication, with some participants using smartphones for 80-90% of their work hours. Urgency, multitasking, and avoidance of certain topics are cited as reasons for phubbing. Understanding these drivers can help organizations address communication challenges and foster attentive interactions. Promoting mindful smartphone usage can lead to improved workplace dynamics and productivity, emphasizing the importance of empathy and open communication



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Introduction

In the past few decades, the world has witnessed an unprecedented technological revolution that has fundamentally transformed the way we communicate and interact with one another (Lindgren, 2017). Central to this revolution is the ubiquitous smartphone, a portable and versatile device that has become an integral part of modern life (Kemp, 2022). From connecting with loved ones to accessing a wealth of information at our fingertips, smartphones have undoubtedly revolutionized the way we navigate the world.

However, amid the convenience and connectivity offered by these devices, a growing concern has emerged – the phenomenon of "phubbing" (Roberts & David, 2022; Thomas, Carnelley, & Hart, 2022). Coined from the combination of "phone" and "snubbing," phubbing refers to the act of engaging with one's smartphone while in the presence of others, thereby diverting attention away from face-to-face interactions. This digital dilemma has become a pervasive issue in today's society, affecting interpersonal relationships, social dynamics, and overall communication patterns (Yousaf, Imran Rasheed, Kaur, Islam, & Dhir, 2022).

The rapid proliferation of smartphones can be traced back to the early 2000s when they were initially introduced as advanced mobile phones with basic features like text

messaging and limited internet access (Lindgren, 2017). As technological advancements accelerated, subsequent generations of smartphones evolved to offer an extensive array of features and applications, such as social media platforms, online gaming, video streaming, and various productivity tools (Alvin, 2022; Alvin & Dewi, 2022; Cipta & Alvin, 2023; Robin, Alvin, & Hasugian, 2022). These advancements not only captivated users but also contributed to an exponential rise in smartphone adoption worldwide.

While smartphones have undeniably enhanced our ability to stay connected and informed, the extensive use of these devices has also led to inadvertent consequences. Phubbing has emerged as a concerning side effect of constant smartphone usage, often resulting in the deterioration of face-to-face interactions and the quality of relationships (Wang, Zhou, Geng, & Lei, 2022). Individuals preoccupied with their smartphones during social gatherings or even intimate moments inadvertently convey a sense of disregard for those physically present, leading to feelings of exclusion, neglect, and frustration (Gao, Shen, Luo, & Xu, 2023).

Moreover, phubbing has been observed in various social settings, including restaurants, public transportation, and family gatherings, where individuals find themselves engrossed in their smartphones rather than engaging with others (Gao et al., 2023). This behavior has sparked debates on whether excessive smartphone use contributes to a decline in empathy, social skills, and emotional intelligence, all of which are vital components of healthy interpersonal relationships (Shen, Xie, & Wu, 2023).

Phubbing poses a significant challenge to interpersonal communication, as it undermines the basic tenets of meaningful human interaction. Effective communication relies on active listening, mutual respect, and non-verbal cues, which can be disrupted when one party is preoccupied with their smartphone (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2023). The lack of undivided attention can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a diminished sense of connection between individuals, hindering the establishment of genuine rapport.

In a professional context, phubbing can also have adverse effects on workplace dynamics. Meetings, for instance, are critical spaces for collaboration, brainstorming, and decision-making. However, the presence of smartphones during meetings can lead to distractions, reduce productivity, and ultimately hinder effective communication among team members.

Beyond the immediate social implications, phubbing has also been associated with psychological and emotional repercussions. Individuals who frequently experience phubbing, either as the perpetrator or the victim, may experience feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and reduced self-esteem. The dependence on smartphones for validation, entertainment, and social approval can create a cycle of addiction, leading to a compulsive need to check notifications and social media updates constantly.

As smartphones continue to shape the fabric of modern society, the issue of phubbing becomes increasingly pertinent to our interpersonal relationships and overall well-being. While these devices provide unmatched convenience and connectivity,

striking a balance between digital engagement and genuine face-to-face interaction is crucial to maintaining healthy social bonds. Acknowledging the impact of phubbing and adopting conscious smartphone usage practices can pave the way for a more mindful and meaningful approach to communication in the digital age.

Siloam Hospital is one of the largest hospital networks in Indonesia. It was founded in 1996, with its first hospital located in Lippo Village Karawaci, Tangerang (Siloam Hospital, 2023). Currently, Siloam operates 41 hospitals across more than 20 provinces and 30 cities in Indonesia. Behind the medical services provided by healthcare professionals, Siloam has well-structured corporate management similar to any other company. The headquarters of Siloam is situated in Karawaci, Banten, and employs around 500 people. Despite being the central hub for managing hospital branches across different regions, communication challenges persist at Siloam's headquarters. Phubbing behavior continues to be practiced by various employees, whether in a professional or personal context.

The prevalence of phubbing behavior among employees at Siloam's headquarters can be attributed to the widespread use of smartphones in today's technologically driven world. As Siloam operates in multiple locations, smartphones have become indispensable tools for communication, facilitating interactions between employees and branches throughout the country.

While smartphones have undoubtedly improved communication and efficiency, their excessive use can lead to unintended consequences, such as phubbing. Employees may inadvertently prioritize their smartphones over face-to-face interactions, leading to decreased engagement and attentiveness during meetings or important discussions. As a result, the quality of interpersonal communication within the workplace may suffer, impacting team dynamics, collaboration, and overall work culture.

Moreover, the fast-paced nature of the healthcare industry may exacerbate phubbing tendencies, as employees juggle multiple tasks and respond to urgent matters on their smartphones (Ayar & Gürkan, 2022).

In the professional work world, effective communication is key. Achieving this effective communication, requires a commitment from all communication participants to deliver messages without obstacles or disruptions (Sheehan et al., 2021). Phubbing is one of the behaviors or habits that is considered to be a hindrance or disruption in achieving effective communication. As a result, both communicators and recipients may convey and receive messages inaccurately. If phubbing behavior can be detected and addressed properly, effective communication in the professional work world can be achieved, minimizing the occurrence of misinformation.

Based on the background and problem statement above, the research question for this study is: How is the phubbing behavior that occurs in interpersonal communication among employees at PT Siloam International Hospitals?

Method

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research. The selection and application of qualitative research are based on the discussion and the research object, which involves real-life human experiences. Qualitative research aims to describe a study with a theoretical foundation without analyzing numerical data.

The use of qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of a specific condition or cause-effect context, making this research suitable for utilizing a descriptive case study approach (Yin, 2018). By employing qualitative methods, phenomena can be described in more detail, primarily addressing "how" questions. Therefore, this study is descriptive, aiming to provide a detailed and clear description of interpersonal communication in phubbing behavior among employees at PT Siloam International Hospitals.

In this study, the research method used is a case study. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an appropriate empirical method to answer research questions related to "how" or "why" events or phenomena occur, representing true events that have genuinely happened. With a case study approach, researchers can observe a phenomenon within a context that may not be readily apparent. The case study method, combined with a descriptive approach, allows for a more comprehensive description of the research context.

The researcher uses Robert K. Yin's case study method with a single case (holistic) type to gain a deeper understanding of one case, specifically the phubbing behavior among employees at the headquarters of Siloam Karawaci. For this study, the sample selection follows a purposive sampling approach, where the researcher selects participants based on their relevance and connection to the research's purpose and objectives during the data collection process. The selection of participants as informants is not only based on the criterion of having rich information and credibility to account for their information but also to represent other sources with similar information. Therefore, for this study, the informants need to have in-depth information about their experiences with phubbing behavior in the workplace at Siloam Hospitals' headquarters.

Based on the criteria mentioned above, the researcher selected six participants, which are summarized in the following table.

Table 1
List of Informants

No.	Initial Name	Category
1.	JN	Gen-Z
2.	LF	Gen-Z
3.	TY	Gen-Z
4.	IH	Gen-Y
5.	VK	Gen-Y
6.	VH	Gen-Y

Results and Discussion

Based on the work system regulations implemented at Siloam Hospitals Karawaci headquarters, employees can apply the WFH (Work from Home) and WFO (Work from Office) work systems, commonly known as hybrid. Therefore, interpersonal communication activities are carried out through two different media, namely online or virtual media and direct face-to-face interactions. From the participants' statements, participants I.H., L.F., V.H., and V.K. mentioned that their communication activities are balanced between face-to-face and virtual interactions. On the other hand, participant J.N. stated that they always prefer face-to-face communication, while Participant T.Y. mostly prefers virtual communication.\

In performing coordination and interpersonal communication in the workplace context, employees usually engage in pre-communication or communication that takes place before a meeting, such as making prior appointments to discuss important matters. This could be done by sending official emails or just sending short messages through applications like WhatsApp. As stated by Participant I.H., communicating face-to-face can sometimes be as simple as approaching the person they want to talk or discuss with. This observation is validated by the researcher's findings, as participants I.H., J.N., L.F., and V.H. were observed approaching their colleagues in the office when they wanted to communicate without making prior appointments.

"If possible, through email, we make it clear that we'll have a 30-minute meeting to discuss performance in financials A, B, and C, and we provide the data that you can read before the meeting. So, the meeting will be more substantial, and we can go straight forward." (V.H., May 9, 2023)

"We make appointments or just go over to their desks, or we call them using extensions." (I.H., May 8, 2023).

In the interpersonal communication conducted by all participants while working, it was found that communication takes both one-way and two-way forms. One-way communication is conducted without any response or feedback from the conversation partner, such as participant V.H., who often provides information to the Siloam Hospitals' network units across Indonesia.

All employees engage in both virtual and face-to-face communication. All communication activities can be one-way or two-way, depending on their respective positions or roles. However, both media used for communication and coordination also present challenges or noise. Nevertheless, all participants stated that the most comfortable form of communication is direct face-to-face interaction, without the use of virtual media.

Phubbing Practices in Siloam

In their day-to-day activities, while carrying out their tasks and responsibilities as employees, each participant is equipped with a company-provided laptop and a personal smartphone. With different tasks and responsibilities, all participants stated that both smartphones and laptops are crucial communication tools.

"...both are equally important, so it's hard to say which one is more important. But, let's

just mention a brand, like WhatsApp, it's available on both smartphones and laptops. Sometimes, it's more comfortable for us to use chat when we're moving from one room to another, so we use our smartphones. But when we're sitting at our desks, we might use gadgets more, like laptops." (V.H., May 9, 2023)

While both laptops and smartphones are equally essential for work, participant T.Y. mentioned that they tend to prefer their smartphone over their laptop. According to them, using a smartphone for communication is more comfortable than using a laptop. *"But, I prefer my smartphone."* (T.Y., May 24, 2023)

"...somehow, I can't open WhatsApp through my laptop, for example, if there's a WhatsApp notification on my laptop, I'll still respond to it using my smartphone." (T.Y., May 24, 2023).

Considering the importance of smartphones in work-related communication and coordination, each participant has an analogy to describe how intensively they use their smartphones in their daily lives. Participants V.H. and V.K. mentioned that they actively use smartphones for about 80-90% of their working hours.

"...how intense, for example, let's say, during working hours, 8 working hours, it might be, say, 80-90% of the time, we use it, even during breaks, we use it intensively." (V.K., May 8, 2023).

With such high intensity of smartphone usage, the researcher connected this with questions about phubbing behavior as understood by each participant. The results showed that two out of six participants, J.N. and T.Y., admitted that they had never heard the term "phubbing."

"Not yet (never heard of it)." (T.Y., May 24, 2023).

On the other hand, the other four participants had heard of and had a good understanding of the term "phubbing."

"Phubbing, let me guess. It's when you're chatting while having a conversation, right?" (L.F., May 7, 2023)

After being provided with a comprehensive explanation of phubbing behavior, the participants admitted to having engaged in phubbing behavior at times. Participants J.N., V.K., and T.Y. mentioned that they would sometimes engage in phubbing when there were urgent matters that needed immediate responses through their smartphones.

"Maybe on one side, I'm working on something really important, so I need to focus on it first to solve the issue." (J.N., April 5, 2023)

Following the explanation of phubbing behavior, the participants admitted that they sometimes engage in phubbing, particularly when urgent work matters require immediate attention on their smartphones. Additionally, some participants find it necessary to phub during meetings for note-taking or responding to essential messages.

Reason for Phubbing

Regarding the reasons behind phubbing behavior, all participants share a common opinion that many urgent and sudden matters require immediate responses.

"Definitely about urgency. We often encounter situations where urgent matters become a priority, and those become the ones we bid farewell to because they suddenly take precedence." (L.F., May 7, 2023).

This notion is supported by statements from participants I.H., V.H., and T.Y., who mention that the healthcare industry operates with a dynamic and fast-paced rhythm, leading to frequent changes, sometimes within just 5 minutes.

From the perspective of being on the receiving end of phubbing, participants have their reasons for continuing to communicate and coordinate with other parties. Participants J.N., I.H., L.F., and V.K. consider the person's actions, capabilities, and the context of the phubbing behavior.

"So, if we know each other better and have had frequent conversations, we come to realize that they are not phubbing us to ignore us, but rather, they are occupied with other tasks. Some people might be responding to chats or making quick decisions while still listening to us." (I.H., May 8, 2023)

On the other hand, V.H. and T.Y. do not see it as a significant problem because they understand this behavior and acknowledge that it might occur during face-to-face conversations.

The study delves into the phenomenon of phubbing behavior among employees at Siloam Hospitals Karawaci headquarters. Based on the criteria set by the researcher, six participants from different generational categories (Gen-Z and Gen-Y) were selected to provide insights into their communication practices and preferences, particularly in the context of using smartphones and laptops for work-related communication.

The results indicate that Siloam Hospitals implements a hybrid work system, allowing employees to choose between working from home (WFH) and working from the office (WFO). As a consequence, interpersonal communication occurs through both virtual media and direct face-to-face interactions (Chatterjee, 2020). Among the participants, there were varying preferences for communication mediums. Participants I.H., L.F., V.H., and V.K. mentioned a balanced approach, engaging in both face-to-face and virtual interactions. On the other hand, participant J.N. preferred face-to-face communication, while Participant T.Y. leaned toward virtual communication. These preferences could be influenced by factors such as individual comfort, task nature, and job roles (Sun & Samp, 2022).

Communication practices at Siloam Hospitals also involve pre-communication activities, such as making appointments or sending official emails, to discuss important matters before meetings. Participants I.H., J.N., L.F., and V.H. were observed engaging in face-to-face communication without making prior appointments. These practices align with the participants' communication needs, allowing them to efficiently coordinate tasks and discussions, especially when immediate responses are required. Understanding the communication patterns and preferences of employees in different work settings can help organizations design more effective communication strategies and improve overall productivity (Roberts & David, 2020).

The study highlights the significant role of smartphones and laptops as essential communication tools for employees at Siloam Hospitals. Participants acknowledged the importance of both devices, with some emphasizing the versatility of applications like WhatsApp, available on both smartphones and laptops. Smartphones were preferred

when mobility was required, while laptops were favored when working at desks. However, it was interesting to note that participant T.Y. expressed a personal preference for smartphones over laptops for communication. This raises questions about device usability, user experience, and the potential impact on work efficiency. Organizations may need to consider providing devices that best suit employees' communication needs to optimize workplace productivity (Al-Saggaf & MacCulloch, 2019).

Regarding the concept of phubbing, the study revealed differing levels of awareness among the participants. While four participants demonstrated a good understanding of the term, two participants had never heard of it before. Phubbing behavior was linked to urgent work matters, multitasking, and the desire to avoid specific topics during communication (Tandon, Dhir, Talwar, Kaur, & Mäntymäki, 2022). The fast-paced nature of the healthcare industry, as mentioned by participants I.H., V.H., and T.Y., could contribute to the occurrence of phubbing as employees strive to respond to ever-changing situations promptly (Khan, Shahzad, & Bartels, 2022). Understanding the reasons behind phubbing behavior allows organizations to address potential communication challenges and promote more focused and attentive interactions.

The high intensity of smartphone usage, with participants V.H. and V.K. actively using smartphones for about 80-90% of their working hours, raises concerns about work-life balance and potential distractions. As smartphones play a central role in work-related communication and coordination, employees may need to find ways to manage their smartphone usage effectively. Organizations could implement policies or provide training on managing digital distractions to foster a more focused and productive work environment.

The findings also shed light on the need for multitasking during meetings. Participant V.H.'s statement about the unwritten rule of checking WhatsApp during meetings indicates the pressure to handle multiple tasks simultaneously. While multitasking can enhance efficiency in some cases, it may also lead to reduced engagement during important discussions. Organizations should be mindful of the potential negative consequences of excessive multitasking and explore ways to promote focused and meaningful interactions during meetings.

The study emphasizes the importance of understanding phubbing from different perspectives. Participants on the receiving end of phubbing acknowledged that the behavior might not necessarily stem from disinterest but rather from simultaneous task handling. This highlights the significance of empathy and open communication in addressing potential misunderstandings related to phubbing behavior in the workplace.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of phubbing, defined as the act of engaging with one's smartphone while in the presence of others, has become a pervasive issue in today's technologically driven society. The widespread adoption of smartphones, coupled with their extensive features and applications, has revolutionized the way we communicate

and interact with one another. While smartphones offer unparalleled convenience and connectivity, excessive use has led to unintended consequences, such as phubbing, which has a detrimental impact on face-to-face interactions and the quality of relationships.

The research conducted at Siloam Hospitals Karawaci headquarters sheds light on the prevalence of phubbing behavior among employees, particularly in the context of work-related communication. The hybrid work system implemented at Siloam allows employees to choose between working from home and working from the office, resulting in a mix of face-to-face and virtual interactions. The study revealed varying communication preferences among participants, with some preferring face-to-face interactions, while others leaned towards virtual communication. Smartphones and laptops emerged as essential communication tools for employees at Siloam Hospitals. However, while these devices enhance communication efficiency, the high intensity of smartphone usage raised concerns about work-life balance and potential distractions. The study also highlighted the need for multitasking during meetings, which could hinder focused and meaningful interactions. The reasons behind phubbing behavior were linked to urgent work matters, multitasking, and a desire to avoid specific topics during communication. The fast-paced nature of the healthcare industry contributed to the occurrence of phubbing, as employees needed to respond promptly to dynamic situations. Understanding the drivers of phubbing behavior can help organizations address potential communication challenges and promote more attentive interactions.

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