

PHUBBING AS A RESULT OF THE DIGITALISATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE: TENDENCES AND RISKS IN THE ASSESSMENTS OF YOUNG

PHUBBING COMO RESULTADO DA DIGITALIZAÇÃO DA VIDA COTIDIANA: TENDÊNCIAS E RISCOS NA AVALIAÇÃO DOS JOVENS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore how digitalisation influences young people's communication practices, particularly focusing on the phenomenon of phubbing and its impact on interpersonal relationships.

Methods: The study employed a mixed-method approach, using online questionnaires and focus groups to gather data from young individuals in Kazan. This approach helped to analyze both quantitative and qualitative aspects of phubbing behaviors.

Results: Findings indicate that phubbing is a common but often unrecognized behavior among the youth, affecting their social interactions and interpersonal relationships. Despite the widespread usage of digital devices, many are unaware of phubbing as a concept, yet they experience its effects, such as feelings of exclusion and diminished personal interaction.

Conclusion: The study suggests that while digital devices are integral to modern communication, their intrusive use in social settings (phubbing) can undermine real-life interactions, necessitating strategies to mitigate its negative impacts on relationships.

Keywords: Phubbing; Communicative practices; Social networks; Internet space.

Objetivo: Explorar como a digitalização influencia as práticas de comunicação dos jovens, focando particularmente no fenômeno do phubbing e seu impacto nas relações interpessoais.

Métodos: O estudo utilizou uma abordagem de métodos mistos, empregando questionários online e grupos focais para coletar dados de jovens em Kazan. Essa



abordagem ajudou a analisar tanto os aspectos quantitativos quanto qualitativos dos comportamentos de phubbing.

Resultados: Os resultados indicam que o phubbing é um comportamento comum, mas muitas vezes não reconhecido entre os jovens, afetando suas interações sociais e relações interpessoais. Apesar do uso generalizado de dispositivos digitais, muitos desconhecem o phubbing como conceito, embora experienciem seus efeitos, como sentimentos de exclusão e diminuição da interação pessoal.

Conclusão: O estudo sugere que, embora os dispositivos digitais sejam integrantes da comunicação moderna, seu uso intrusivo em ambientes sociais (phubbing) pode prejudicar as interações da vida real, necessitando de estratégias para mitigar seus impactos negativos nas relações.

Palavras-chave: Phubbing, comunicação digital, relações interpessoais, jovens, digitalização.

INTRODUCTION

Phubbing is a dismissive attitude to the interlocutor, expressed in the distraction of a person on a smartphone. In the last decade, the need to study this phenomenon began to be noticed by representatives of social science in different countries (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019; Erzen et al., 2021; Maksimenko et al., 2021; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). In the discourse of research on communication practices and phubbing, young people are most often studied. Most of the processes in all spheres of society are organised in such a way that a person needs to be able to use digital technology and be included in the use of the Internet (Putra et al., 2024). Being a confident user and intuitively setting up a new smartphone are, if not daily habits, then mandatory skills in today's world. There is a difference in how each generation uses and embraces digital technology (Setyaningrum et al., 2024). Young people are more likely and quicker than others to adopt new practices, partly borrowed from the internet, from everyday life to communication. By studying young people, it is easiest to track the emergence of new practices that older generations will later adopt (Eflova et al., 2024).

Teenagers and young adults are more influenced by the Internet than other generations. This may be due to the fact that children born from the 2000s onwards grew up and socialised in a world where the internet already existed. On average, teens spend between 2 and 5 hours online each day, with at least 1 in 25 teens spending more than 12 hours online. Another peculiarity is that teenagers perceive



themselves as living in two parallel spaces - offline and online - while for the older generation the Internet is only an additional space to real life. The volume of communication and content consumption is growing every year and the practice of everyday activities such as eating, chatting with friends, walking in the park and using the phone in parallel is becoming ubiquitous.

There is a wide range of studies examining the modern digital society and its transformation under the influence of digitalisation as a global process. For example, studies of young generations and their susceptibility to the risk of losing social interaction skills and, as a consequence, acquiring deviations from the norm of psychosocial state are reflected in the works by B. Wellman, B. Hogan (2005), M. Abeele et al. (2016) and M.R. Berlinger (2000).

Phubbing as a phenomenon and its impact on interpersonal relationships have not been studied extensively enough to form a comprehensive understanding of the nature of this behavioural pattern and its consequences for society. Despite the fact that the term "phubbing" appeared in 2012 and some researchers have paid attention to its problems, after more than 10 years there are very few works on this topic in the research field. Thus, among the representative studies we can highlight the works of T. Nazir and S. Bulut (2019), V. Chotpitayasunondh, K.M. Douglas (2016), E. Karadag, S.B. Tosuntas (2016) and J. Roberts, M. David (2017). Also researcher S. Turkle in her book discusses phubbing as a consequence of the fear of being alone, not being heard (Turkle, 2012).

The study aims to explore how phubbing, as a form of digital communication, manifests among young people and influences their interpersonal relationships. Additionally, it seeks to determine the most prevalent behaviors and reactions related to phubbing within this generation.

METHODOLOGY

The empirical base of the work is represented by the materials of secondary analysis and the author's research conducted in 2023. The research was conducted in the framework of qualitative-quantitative approach. The methods of online questionnaires and focus groups were applied. Such a synthesis was necessary for a comprehensive description of the object and subject of the research, in order to study in more detail phubbing as a social phenomenon, its causes, manifestations and



consequences. Three focus groups with 8 participants in each were conducted. The questionnaire survey collected 400 questionnaires among Russian youth, using a quota representative sample.

RESULTS

Regardless of the fact that fubbing is practised by the majority of people, only 12% of young Russians surveyed had heard of the term itself, while 83% said they had not heard of it.

Phubbing is invisible to society, there is little research about it and there is practically no information in the information field. It should be clarified that phubbing is not synonymous with Internet addiction, but addiction to gadgets can be one of the causes of phubbing. PHUBBING is a complex and complicated phenomenon, so it includes FOMO-effect, second screen syndrome and many others. Research in this area is still in its infancy, so there is a need for more research to understand the phenomenon of phubbing.

The results of the survey showed that only 7% of respondents consider themselves really dependent on their smartphone, being distracted by every message, while 77% respond promptly only to messages from people important to them. This once again proves that it is not the phone itself that is important, but what it contains and the functions it fulfills. This idea was also confirmed by the focus group participants:

There were times when I was distracted by my phone while walking. I was responding to my friend's messages, it was acceptable to me. I didn't want to ignore (female, 18 years old).

Phubbing at school and work is one of the common phenomena among Russian youth. To a greater extent, phubbing at school or work is related to a person's multitasking, not only to the fact that he or she is distracted by a useless task. In practice, there is room for both the first and the second case:

Well, it's a pause, a respite. (female, 19 years old).

Well, at work, no, it does not interfere, because we are all immersed in one process, and the process where - in the laptop or in the phone, we just interact with each other. But when we communicate and solve some tasks, we cannot go into the



phone, because otherwise no one will hear and understand what to do next (female, 21 years old).

I use my phone in class, often if I need to find information, sometimes I just get distracted by it if the subject is not very important (male, 25 years old).

Many informants confirmed that they could do other things in parallel with talking on their smartphones, including playing games. We called this combination online phubbing. 75% of respondents noticed online PHUBBING both for their friends and for themselves. At the same time, the evaluation of online PHUBBING by the interlocutor is about equally negative and moderate. That is, 35% of respondents react neutrally to online PHUBBING by their interlocutor, and 34% react negatively, considering that a conversation with such an interlocutor becomes meaningless. At the same time, a quite fair correlation is observed - when a person is a phubber in a phone or video call, he or she reacts normally to phubbing on the other side of the screen. Thus, online PHUBBING is the same phenomenon as regular phubbing, the only difference is that it is less visible to the interlocutor and takes place in a virtual environment.

Of the statements about phubbing by the interlocutor: "I feel like other people are constantly checking their phone for messages and social media updates" and "I feel like other people have a hard time leaving their phone alone" agreed with the majority of women, namely 72% and 56% respectively. And 25 per cent of men, the majority on this statement, agreed with the statement: "I find it difficult for other people to just put their phone screen down".

The connections we form through the Internet are not ultimately binding ties. But they do occupy us and our time. We text each other over family dinners, while jogging, while driving, while we're on our way home or to work. Not wanting to impose on each other, we do it all the time, but not in "real time". We go online because we're busy and want to have more time, but we end up spending more time with technology and less time actually interacting with each other. This is why we see in both the survey results and focus groups that people are most painfully affected by phubbing by loved ones. Interacting with family, friends, or a partner implies that you're going to make time for each other, not technology.

Yes, even if you're there with your friends, it's probably unlikely that you'll be on your phone... (male, 22 years old).

A large proportion of research on phubbing and ours, among others, confirms that phubbing by those close to us is most visible and influential.



When it's one-on-one, it's a bit annoying because well, come on: "Well, let's have a chat" ...you're not really giving that time, but, like, I'm here - pay attention to me, then you can get stuck when I'm done, here's more attention I don't need (mail, 22 years old).

I have a girl friend, who refuses to continue telling if I get on my phone for 5-10 seconds during his narration. And then she won't tell me any more at all. I have already been brought up... (mail, 21 years old).

These statements confirm people's need for attention from their immediate environment.

The results of the questionnaire confirm that those who notice phubbing for themselves more often notice this pattern of behaviour among their friends. Those who are not phubbers or simply do not notice it, but at the same time believe that their friends have Internet addiction - 10%. Based on this, we can say that we monitor our close environment as closely as we monitor ourselves, at least when we meet in person.

In the following quotes from the focus groups, attention should be paid to how informants reflect their own and their interlocutor's reaction to phubbing in face-to-face interactions:

You sit and think: "Do you even need me here?" (female, 19 years old).

Sometimes you think, "Why am I even talking to you?" And this is not in terms of like, wasted time, but in terms of: "Am I so uninteresting to you?" (female, 21 years old).

*Yes, when we communicate, I, for example, put the phone away. If something is urgent, it takes a microsecond - I answer, that's it, I put it down, we chat. And they sit like this (*shows complete immersion in the gadget*). Are you bored with me? - Don't go anywhere with me then! (female, 18 years old).*

Refusal of gadgets or their removal from the field of vision during a meeting with friends and relatives is justified by the frequent negative reaction to the use of a smartphone during a conversation. When comparing the questions about whether respondents reprimand their friends-phubbers and whether they themselves are distracted by the phone during a conversation-we see that 52% of respondents are sometimes or rarely distracted by the phone, and 25% try not to be distracted. This is confirmed by the statements of the focus group participants:



During personal communication I try not to get into the phone myself, but it happened in front of me and it annoys me very much (female, 23 years old).

Well yes, I don't get distracted sincerely if the person is interesting, but if not, I don't get distracted just out of respect (husband, 27 years old).

The questions of how a person feels about phubbing and how he/she will behave if he/she notices phubbing on the part of the interlocutor directly correlate with each other. We can see that 44% of respondents consider phubbing a bad habit and will wait until the interlocutor returns to the conversation or pretend that nothing happened and continue the dialogue.

In general, in principle, I am such a person who rarely makes a remark, that is, I can not take and attack, my character does not allow (female, 19 years old).

Well, I think I can make a remark. But usually it doesn't come to that (male, 20 years old).

According to the survey results, 20% of respondents can reprimand their interlocutor to put the gadget away. A notable peculiarity is that 2% of respondents consider phubbing to be the norm, but at the same time they would not hesitate to point out that their interlocutor is too immersed in the smartphone. Focus group participants also share a similar opinion:

If my friends and interlocutors start to sit on their phones during a conversation, I will ask them to put them away, as we are talking to each other now, except if there is something important on the phone. In general, I don't care, as long as the conversation does not lose the thread of the narrative and the person answers me normally on the topic and understands the question, then everything is ok (female, 19 years old).

It is unpleasant, in short, with a partner one-on-one, but I can tell him not to stick to the phone (male, 21 years old).

The results of the questionnaire confirm that the attitude to phubbing depends on the presence of this practice in the respondent's behaviour. Thus, we see that in percentage terms, among those who consider phubbing as a norm, 81.5% often and sometimes may use the phone during a face-to-face meeting. Among those who consider phubbing not a good tone, more than others are inclined not to be distracted by the phone or put it away (35.5% of those who chose the answer option "It is not a good tone, I trust the interlocutor less"). Nevertheless, there are phabbers among them (45.6%). Accordingly, among those who think that phubbing can be forgiven, more than



70% of those who practice distraction into a smartphone during communication, but there is also a share of those who try not to do it (19%). We can conclude that attitudes towards phubbing come from a person's personal position as a phubber. If phubbing is not practised, the attitude towards it is most likely to be negative, but among young people the percentage of such people is extremely small (Table 1).

Table 1. Attitudes towards phubbing depending on from its manifestation in the respondent's behaviour

How do you feel about the manifestation of phubbing?	Do you ever find yourself distracted by your phone during a face-to-face meeting with someone during a conversation?					Total
	frequently	occasionally	infrequently	No, I try not to get distracted.	No, I always put my phone away	
It's a bad habit, but it can be forgiven	16	90	46	32	4	188
	8,5%	47,9%	24,5%	17,0%	2,1%	100,0%
It's not a good tone, I trust the interlocutor less	2	61	26	40	9	138
	1,4%	44,2%	18,8%	29,0%	6,5%	100,0%
It's the norm, everyone's doing it now	10	34	8	2	0	54
	18,5%	63,0%	14,8%	3,7%	0,0%	100,0%
I can't answer that	1	9	2	7	1	20
	5,0%	45,0%	10,0%	35,0%	5,0%	100,0%
Total	29	194	82	81	14	400
	7,2%	48,5%	20,5%	20,3%	3,5%	100,0%

While revealing the peculiarities of digital technologies entering real life and the role of phubbing within our communications, there is almost no unequivocal consensus on any of the aspects. Putting everything into a unified picture, the question arises about the prospects for the development of communication practices in the future. In addition, it is important to identify and understand how the respondents think - phubbing is a new form of communication or a problem of modern society. Accordingly, there are those who consider phubbing to be a problem:

People can't help being distracted, they go there for their comfort, they have moved their lives there. Life has become so abstracted that you almost physically need to get on the phone! (husband, 21 years old).



In its purest form, it's a problem. But again, the cause and effect relationships are important, why he is sitting on the phone, if it is something important, then okay, no questions asked, if he is there, well, he was distracted for a while, then okay, forgivable. Again, within reason. But in its pure form - it is bad (husband, 20 years old).

We cannot claim completely polar positions in the informants' views on phubbing, all agreed that there needs to be a balance in how often we use smartphones in our communication with each other:

I treat it normally, as I said, you need to know the measure, and then the introduction of technology will be a good support, not a burden, the world is forced to develop for our own convenience, and how we use this development depends on us. (male, 20 years old).

Phubbing... It's just ignoring. And you can ignore without a smartphone, in fact, the attention is distracted. But, in principle, phones are harmful when you are in them and texting without stopping (husband, 27 years old).

DISCUSSION

All the actions that we perform regularly when interacting with the digital environment and that can be included in our communication with other people are the basis of phubbing. The author's research, analysis of works on the topic of transformation of communication practices, as well as the few studies of phubbing, together allow us to assert that PHUBBING is an amalgamation of habits, syndromes, Internet addictions, which partially manifest themselves in interaction with other people.

Phubbing is a self-reproducing phenomenon, because in an attempt to escape to a virtual, comfortable, interesting and eventful reality, in an attempt to escape from the loneliness we often experience in life, we provoke this loneliness again. Informants confirmed the occasional feeling of exclusion from conversation, alienation and loneliness at times when being phubbed by the interlocutor. In the company of friends, phubbing is "contagious" - the first person who is immersed in a smartphone will be followed by the others until absolutely everyone in the company starts doing something on their phones. This can continue until one of the company makes a remark about the situation. Also, by correlating the results of the questionnaire and the statements of the focus group informants, we found out that frequently manifested phubbing in close



relationships can project a negative reaction, ultimately having a destructive effect on communication. At the same time, none of the interviewees noted a positive impact of phubbing on the relationship. But most people may not notice phubbing in their lives because they don't care.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can distinguish two polar positions of young people in the perception and practice of phubbing: those who consider PHUBBING as a norm and may themselves resort to it and those who seek a balance in the use of gadgets and live communication. In cases of its extreme manifestation and full immersion of people in gadgets, when the balance between virtual and real life is disturbed, it can become a serious social problem.

Phubbing provoked by subjective reasons generates itself as a response. Society gets used to this mechanism. In addition, the spread of phubbing is influenced by the sense of crowd, among other things. Seeing how people around us can chat with friends and do something on the phone in parallel, we unconsciously legitimise phubbing for ourselves and in relation to our surroundings, if there is no agreement otherwise in the relationship. According to the results of the study, we can assert that phubbing, in the general sense, is the result of superimposing a person's subjective perception, taking into account their psychological characteristics and social-behavioural patterns in society.

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