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**PHUBBING AS A PHENOMENON IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF YOUNG PEOPLE
– THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF
CREATING CONSCIOUS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Phubbing jako zjawisko w życiu codziennym młodzieży – rola środowiska wychowawczego w kontekście tworzenia świadomych relacji interpersonalnych

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Introduction

Advances in mobile technologies and improved Internet access have led to a rapid increase in people's preference for using mobile devices. In today's world, we are constantly connected to our smartphones. Thanks to technological devices, we are in constant contact with other people, whether in our private or professional lives. Not only do we use technological innovations for communication, but more and more often they serve as a convenient and portable “window to the world.” Today, the way we communicate with each other is changing. The ease of sending messages via instant messengers and social networks means that direct interpersonal contact is increasingly being neglected¹.

Spending too much time on mobile devices can cause a number of social and psychological problems, significantly change habits, lead to unusual behavior, and damage social relationships. We often ignore the people around us, focusing on our devices. This behavior has a name – phubbing. It is a phenomenon in which a person ignores their surroundings, focusing on using their phone or other mobile device. All this, combined with ignorance about the consequences of phubbing, poses an increasing threat to interpersonal relationships. Ignoring loved ones and family members in favor of an electronic device can lead to a breach of trust, the creation of communication barriers, and an increase in conflicts.

Parental phubbing refers to a situation where parents ignore their children's communication needs in favor of using communication technology. In the case of the “child-parent” relationship, phubbing also occurs in the opposite direction - when children direct their attention towards mediated communication while remaining in conversation with their parent. This is referred to as adolescent phubbing. Both types of behavior are interrelated, as Martyna Rajska points out, “the occurrence of this phenomenon among parents contributes to its

¹ P. Łokić, *Zjawisko phubbingu jako konsekwencja mediatyzacji życia społecznego*, „Przegląd Politologiczny” 2023, nr 4, s. 213-227.

normalization in everyday life and is a kind of consent to this type of behavior among children”².

Family relationships are often the foundation of our emotional support and well-being. So when they are disrupted by phubbing, it can negatively affect our overall mental and emotional health. It is particularly worrying that children are increasingly becoming victims of phubbing – ignored and emotionally neglected by parents absorbed in the digital world. Simple interactions with parents are the foundation for the development of a healthy self. Through them, children learn that they are seen and heard. Based on this sense of self, they will then build beliefs about themselves, other people, whether the world is safe or not, and many others that will influence their behavior and decisions in adulthood. Without being noticed, our healthy sense of self cannot develop. And this is exactly what phubbing does – the child disappears from the field of vision of adults who are important to them³.

The phenomenon of phubbing violates two of the most important human needs – the need for belonging and love, and the need for respect and recognition. As a result, people who experience this phenomenon from those around them may feel socially excluded.

1. Definition and causes of phubbing

The phenomenon of the mediatization of social life is a natural result of the development of media and communication technologies that have become widespread in society. Phubbing is most often understood as the excessive use of a mobile phone (smartphone) in the presence of other people, a natural effect of the development and popularity of new media as tools of communication accompanying us in our daily lives, both interpersonal and mass communication.

For phubbing to occur, it is essential to be in real time with other people, and the manifestation and essence of this behavior is to engage with one's mobile device in such a situation. Some definitions emphasize the issue of “disappearing” from interpersonal communication in favor of communication with a smartphone, while others directly link this behavior to specific mobile applications and social networking services, such as Facebook, platform X (formerly Twitter), or WhatsApp. There is no doubt that the phenomenon in question is closely related to the use of modern communication technologies and is a manifestation of their attractiveness in everyday life, which often surpasses the actual communication acts in which people participate⁴.

The term “phubbing” comes from a combination of the words ‘phone’ and “snubbing.” It means nothing more than ignoring another person by using a cell phone. The term first appeared in 2012 in the Australian Macquarie Dictionary. The term attracted worldwide attention and sparked widespread debate. Before the term appeared, this contemporary phenomenon was referred to in various ways in scientific literature: absence, technofence, and parallel communication. However, the term phubbing seems to most accurately describe this specific phenomenon⁵.

Examples of such behavior include:

- looking at your phone while talking to someone else,

² M. Rajska, *Epidemia phubbingu – czym jest phubbing i dlaczego jest dla nas szkodliwy?*, <https://5krokowdodzrowia.pl/epidemia-phubbingu-czym-jest-phubbing-idlaczego-jest-dla-nasszkodliwy/>, [dostęp: 10.04.2025].

³ W. Smółkowska, *Phubbing – gdy smartfon staje się ważniejszy od człowieka. Przegląd badań*, [w:] *Wyzwania i problemy społeczeństwa XXI wieku*, E. Chodźko, K. Talarek, (red.), Wyd. TYGIEL, Lublin 2020, s. 224-242.

⁴ T. Sasińska-Klas, *Przywódcztwo publiczne w erze globalnego zarządzania – wyzwania, innowacje, możliwości*, [w:] *Marketing polityczny w grotesce mediów*, R. Wiszniowski, A. Kasińska-Metryka (red.), Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, s. 12-14.

⁵ N. G. Ugur, T. Koc, *Time for Digital Detox: Misuse of Mobile Technology and Phubbing*, “Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences”, 2015, nr 195, s. 1022-1031.

- ignoring others while eating at a restaurant,
- inappropriate use of your phone during social gatherings, etc.

According to research, phubbing has become a common phenomenon. About 70% of people admit that they have experienced phubbing or have been the perpetrator of this behavior. Smombie is a neologism that comes from the words “smartphone” and “zombie.” It refers to a person who is so absorbed in their smartphone that they do not pay attention to their surroundings and the people around them. This is an increasingly common problem in modern society, as people are becoming more and more attached to technology and find it difficult to disconnect from it. Nomophobia is a term that describes the fear of not having access to a cell phone. Nomophobia can lead to severe anxiety when the phone is unavailable or low on battery, as well as difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, and problems with relationships with other people⁶.

Digital dementia is a term used to describe excessive use of digital technology, which results in cognitive decline. Short-term memory pathways begin to deteriorate due to underuse if we overuse technology, as it takes over our cognitive processes. In terms of physical development, it causes the following abnormalities: poor posture, fine and gross motor skills disorders, obesity, and vision problems. In terms of psychosomatic development, the following abnormalities appear: lack of full cognition of the physical world through the senses, circadian rhythm disorders, sensory deprivation, and depression⁷. Young people who are heavily addicted to the Internet and smartphones are characterized by high levels of loneliness and poor social relationships. They struggle with social interactions and compensate for these shortcomings by using the Internet and their phones, which perpetuates the problem.

Another social problem is phubbing walking, i.e. when a user uses their phone while walking, which can pose a serious threat to their own and others' safety. Phubbing while driving also poses a great danger to us and others on the road. Constant use of devices can also lead to FOMO, or the fear of missing out on something interesting or perhaps important the moment we put our phone down. It usually manifests itself online in the form of constantly checking your email and social media profiles and an obsessive fear that the Internet will go down. The fear of being disconnected from the Internet, not having access to information, or missing the latest posts on social media is real and very dangerous.

Walking down the street, you can increasingly see people who are highly focused on their cell phones. Easy access to favorite websites via cell phones means that people affected by FOMO syndrome can visit the same sites and services dozens of times a day⁸. Symptoms that may indicate FOMO syndrome include, for example, the need to keep others informed about your life on social media, the constant urge to check your phone, email, or social media, and the desire to always be able to use the Internet or your phone.

2. Consequences and risks of phubbing

There is a link between phubbing and behavioral addictions related to smartphone and Internet use, and it also correlates with moderating negative phenomena such as depression⁹. Theoretically, teenagers believe what they see on the Internet, reinforcing their belief that they are virtual frauds, their lives are hopeless, and everyone else is beautiful, happy, and doing great. This mechanism explains the link between social media use and a decline in mental well-being

⁶ K. Bocheńska-Włostowska, *Bądź świadomym użytkownikiem nowych technologii. Scenariusz: Klik, Klik – mamy Cię*, „Remedium” 2023, nr 2, s. 9-10.

⁷ M. Spitzer, *Cyfrowa demencja: W jaki sposób pozbawiamy rozumu siebie i swoje dzieci*, Wyd. Dobra Literatura, Gdańsk 2013, s. 44-47.

⁸ D. Miller-Siekierska, *Syndrom FOMO jako współczesne zagrożenie*, [w:] *Współczesne zagrożenia. Prawda czy fikcja?*, J. Zimny (red.), Stalowa Wola, 2015, s. 28-29.

⁹ V. Chotpitayasunondh, K. M. Douglas, *The effects of “phubbing” on social interaction*, “Journal of Applied Social Psychology”, 2018, s. 1-13.

among young people: the more social media, the lower the self-esteem, the worse the mood, and the greater the sense of loneliness¹⁰.

The most traps and dangers concern the youngest users – children and young people. The fact is that we can find literally everything on the Internet, useful and useless information, valuable and worthless things, both friends and enemies, etc. Therefore, in the case of young people, the Internet can also play a negative role. Uncontrolled use and exceeding time limits can lead to addiction. Virtually everyone has access to content posted on the Internet. However, the freedom to use its capabilities does not go hand in hand with the ability to recognize threats. Young Internet users may be exposed to these risks by encountering harmful content posted on the Internet or by contacting strangers surfing the web.

Phubbing also poses risks such as:

- Threat to belonging.
- Weakening interpersonal relationships leads to a loss of trust and respect, and even to misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Deterioration of mood on both sides through showing and experiencing ignorance.
- It affects the way we perceive and evaluate ourselves and our value.
- It lowers self-esteem.
- It diminishes the meaning of existence.
- It lowers mood – people who are often ignored, who are, in a sense, losing out to electronic devices, feel underappreciated, unnoticed, rejected, and lonely.
- Loss of concentration.
- Reduced eye contact.
- Decreased work efficiency.
- Overall deterioration in mental well-being.
- Development of addiction to the Internet and social media¹¹.

All these aspects can have a very broad impact on both mental and physical health, as well as threaten the fundamental needs of every human being, which are: belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaning of existence. There is a clear need for research and observation in the area of the impact of new technologies on society, as well as a clear need for media education, which should play a role in raising awareness of the risks associated with the use of technology and online media. These are double-edged swords – when used incorrectly, they not only fail to improve social communication, but can also lead to its significant weakening and disintegration.

The causes of phubbing are:

- Our addiction to technology and social media
- Lack of awareness and respect for other people
- The desire to escape reality.

It has been noticed that young people, when sending text messages, add smiles or sad faces to their messages, without actually expressing these feelings in front of their phone screens. They are losing the ability to express their feelings, and as a result, they also have problems communicating non-verbal behaviors in face-to-face communication.

They are developing a personality characterized by a lack of facial expressions, gestures, and sounds.

It is easier for young people to socialize online because it is less demanding: we can talk to several people at once, we escape to a virtual reality where there is always something going on, and we cannot find our place in the real world, which is boring and overwhelming, and full of problems. Young people create themselves online, they are micro-scale stars, celebrities, they

¹⁰ A. Jupowicz-Ginalska, M. Kisijowska, J. Jasiewicz, T. Baran, A. Wsocki, *FOMO 2018. Polacy a lęk przed odłączeniem – raport z badań*, Warszawa 2018, s. 16-22.

¹¹ J. Wiktorowicz, I. Warwas, M. Kuba, E. Staszewska, P. Woszczyk, A. T. Stankiewicz, *Pokolenia – co się zmienia? Kompendium zarządzania multigeneracyjnego*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2016, s. 57-68.

feel needed and important. And thanks to smartphones, they can maintain this state all the time. They do not necessarily meet in real life with those they know online. They live in two parallel realities. Simultaneously participating in online and offline life¹².

Observations of everyday life, media reports, and literature on the subject show that young people are at risk of phubbing, which can have a negative impact on real interpersonal relationships. We are pessimistic about a world in which playing with a cell phone can replace contact with a living person, and where people focus their gaze on their phone screen instead of their conversation partner, constantly have a tablet in their hands, and pass each other by without paying attention to the space around them. Today, however, this is, unfortunately, a warning of what reality may look like if people prioritize playing with technological gadgets over real contact with other people. A cell phone is a tool that should be used skillfully, and it is worth remembering that it should only be used to establish and maintain real contacts, not replace them. The priority is to raise awareness about the consequences of phubbing.

3. The role of the educational environment – identifying the challenges and benefits of integrating technology into young people's lives

The abuse of digital media and the Internet threatens the mental health of young people and the interpersonal relationships they build. Public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the educational community are joining forces to protect young users from online threats.

Research conducted among young people shows that phubbing occurs regularly and frequently in their environment. It is also significant that the frequency of classroom phubbing correlates with the age of phubbers – it has been proven that this phenomenon is characteristic of younger age groups, especially Generation Z and Y, who have been in constant contact with new media since the beginning of their conscious functioning in society. However, most young people are free from problems of Internet addiction, cyberbullying, and the risky behaviors mentioned above, which can provide a basis for preventive strategies aimed at reversing the false normative beliefs of young people that the vast majority of their peers engage in risky and problematic behaviors. Reversing these beliefs, in turn, encourages young people who have been ashamed of their healthy attitudes, considering them rare and unpopular, to “come out of the shadows”.

Most young people belong to school or extracurricular clubs, and sometimes get involved in activities that benefit other people, the local environment, or animal welfare. Very often, these same teenagers engage in various risky behaviors at the same time. So, we are dealing with a majority of young people who lead a generally healthy lifestyle and a minority who engage in problematic behaviors, sometimes more than one type. When planning educational activities and universal prevention measures, it is very important to be clearly aware that the goal of the work with the majority of the target audience is to reinforce a healthy lifestyle.

Young people should be encouraged to engage in conscious interactions, where the quality of online relationships translates into the quality of offline relationships. Strengthening community ties requires active participation in online life, but also awareness of when to disconnect from the virtual world in favor of real relationships.

Awareness:

- We are aware of our behavior and its consequences.
- Talk about it with loved ones.
- We also look at our habits of using electronic devices to identify areas for improvement.

¹² A. Andrzejewska, *Dzieci i młodzież w sieci zagrożeń realnych i wirtualnych. Aspekty teoretyczne i empiryczne*, Wyd. Difin, Warszawa 2014, s. 48-51.

We should ensure that we use devices appropriately. As in other aspects of everyday life, it is important to strike a balance between using smartphones or other devices and resting in the real world¹³.

Cyberspace has become part of everyday life. It is difficult to imagine modern society functioning without access to the Internet. The benefits of the Internet are virtually limitless. People used to treat computers as a form of entertainment. Today, they serve many more functions, making it easier to get things done. Without a doubt, they facilitate learning, provide access to vast amounts of information, are a source of knowledge, develop interests, etc. Computers with an Internet connection enable quick and easy access to information, allow people from different parts of the world to communicate at the same time, make information from around the world available to all users, and allow many tasks to be completed without leaving home. However, certain rules should be established:

- Let's establish rules for using phones and other devices in our relationships
- Let's set aside time and places free from technology
- Let's remember to:
 - spend time outdoors,
 - put away our devices when talking to other people;
 - silence notifications and calls, e.g., by using dedicated modes available on devices (e.g., silent mode or sleep mode);
 - using an app that monitors screen time; if we spend a lot of time online, high statistics can be an impulse to change our current behavior and reduce the time we spend in the virtual world;
 - paying attention to the behavior of others and expressing our emotions¹⁴.

Practicing presence:

- Let's focus on what is happening around us
- Let's attach importance to conversations with others and building relationships
- Let's take breaks – for a while, let's focus on other activities, such as walking, reading books, taking a coffee/tea break, etc.

Summary

Computer technologies are becoming increasingly important in modern society, allowing young people to find their place in the new reality and to better acquire the skills to use technology creatively, consciously, and safely in realizing their own ideas and solving problems. Attention is also drawn to the ethical aspects of using new media, especially in the context of education, internet ethics, and the sustainable use of technology in the area of youth safety in the digital world.

Phubbing is a common and inevitable phenomenon. It is an example of the effects of the mediatization of social life, showing the growing importance of technology in everyday interpersonal communication. As a social phenomenon, it has psychological consequences for users and shows the indirect impact of technology on human attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

To sum up the above considerations, it is worth emphasizing once again the importance of the educational environment in terms of its impact on the effectiveness and quality of young people's conscious interactions with their peers. A broader perspective on the problem allows us to conclude that the current and important task facing modern education is to equip young people with knowledge about the dangers of information technology, as well as to provide them

¹³ K. Lichkańska, *Hipermediatyzyzacja rzeczywistości – wzrastanie dziecka i nabywanie kompetencji medialnych w obliczu wyzwań współczesnoŹci*, „Pedagogical Contexts”, 2022, nr 1, s. 90–94.

¹⁴ M. Bereźnicka, *Media – szanse, wyzwania i zagrozenia a potrzeba edukacji medialnej*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis” 2022, nr 20, s. 641–660.

with the right knowledge about the surrounding world, to stimulate their interests, passions, and talents, and to develop their skills for harmonious coexistence and work in a social environment.

The conclusions drawn from the role and awareness of the educational environment in shaping safe online habits are clear, modern, and inspiring. Respect for the dignity of others and the development of empathy are becoming the foundation for creating a positive online environment. Cooperation and interpersonal interaction emerge as key, requiring regular communication, joint standard setting, and care in monitoring online activity.

New media provide opportunities for learning, working, and fulfillment in both professional and private life. However, it is important to remember the risks of participating in the world of new media and to exercise caution when using them.

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