

Phone Snubbing (Phubbing) as a Social Challenge: Insights from Empirical Research on Smartphone Multitasking in Poland and China

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Abstract

This study investigates phubbing behaviors among young adults, focusing on in-person, phone call, and video call contexts. An online survey collected responses from 730 participants aged 21–30, including 367 from Poland and 363 from China. Findings reveal a correlation between population density and the likelihood of phubbing; individuals in large urban areas are more likely to experience face-to-face interactions interrupted by others engaging with their smartphones. The study demonstrates that phubbing is not limited to one situation but constitutes a pervasive pattern that shapes communication in both physical and virtual spaces. Its social impact is significant: it weakens interpersonal bonds, increases feelings of neglect, and contributes to digital overuse. In densely populated urban environments, this behavior may amplify social disconnection despite physical proximity.

This paper presents findings from the international #HumanPhone project, which investigates smartphone habits across six continents. By combining cross-cultural data from Poland and China, the research highlights the need for targeted interventions, particularly among young adults in large cities. Gender differences emerged from the study, revealing that Chinese women are more likely to phub their conversation partners, while Polish men exhibit higher tendencies to engage in phubbing during in-person meetings. Moreover, women in both countries showed increased awareness of being phubbed during phone calls, illuminating gender issues in digital communication contexts. The empirical research on smartphone multitasking underscores the importance of addressing phubbing to promote healthier interactions and enhance social dynamics in the digital age.

Keywords: Phubbing; Multitasking; Urbanization; Gender; Culture