

**The Phubbing Phenomenon In Teenagers' Communication Ethics  
(A Case Study at SMPN 14 Depok)**

Arum Muthi Shabira, Cut Dhien Nourwahida, Andri Noor Ardiansyah\*

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

Email: [andri.noor@uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:andri.noor@uinjkt.ac.id)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh perhatian peneliti terhadap peserta didik SMPN 14 Depok mengenai fenomena *phubbing* dalam etika komunikasi yang dianggap relevan dengan efektivitas komunikasi saat proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk perilaku *phubbing* dalam sudut pandang etika komunikasi, mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor penyebab terjadinya *phubbing*, dan memahami perspektif sekolah dan guru dalam mengatasi *phubbing*. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Metode pengambilan sampel yang digunakan adalah *purposive sampling* dengan informan berjumlah 6 orang. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi, wawancara, dan studi dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fenomena perilaku *phubbing* pada peserta didik merupakan bentuk pelanggaran terhadap prinsip etika komunikasi. Adapun faktor yang menyebabkan terjadinya *phubbing* saat proses pembelajaran di antaranya adalah kecanduan *smartphone*, kurangnya kontrol diri, rasa kebosanan, fleksibilitas peraturan sekolah, dan lingkungan berupa teman sebaya. Upaya sekolah dalam mengatasi perilaku *phubbing* meliputi penerapan aturan pengumpulan *smartphone*, peningkatan kesadaran melalui kesepakatan kelas, peneguran dan pemberian sanksi pada peserta didik.

**Kata kunci:** *Phubbing*, Etika Komunikasi, Remaja, Peserta Didik

Abstract

*This research is prompted by the researcher's concern for students at SMPN 14 Depok regarding the phenomenon of phubbing in communication ethics, which is considered relevant to the effectiveness of communication during the learning process. This study aims to analyze the forms of phubbing behavior from a communication ethics perspective, identify the factors causing phubbing, and understand the school and teacher's perspectives in overcoming phubbing. The research employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. The sampling method used was purposive sampling, involving 6 informants. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Data analysis techniques applied were data reduction, data display, and conclusion; drawing/verification. The research findings indicate that the phenomenon of phubbing behavior among students constitutes a violation of communication ethics principles. The factors contributing to phubbing during the learning process include smartphone addiction, lack of self-control, boredom, flexible school regulations, and peer influence. The school's efforts to address phubbing behavior include implementing smartphone collection rules, raising awareness through class agreements, and issuing warnings and sanctions to students.*

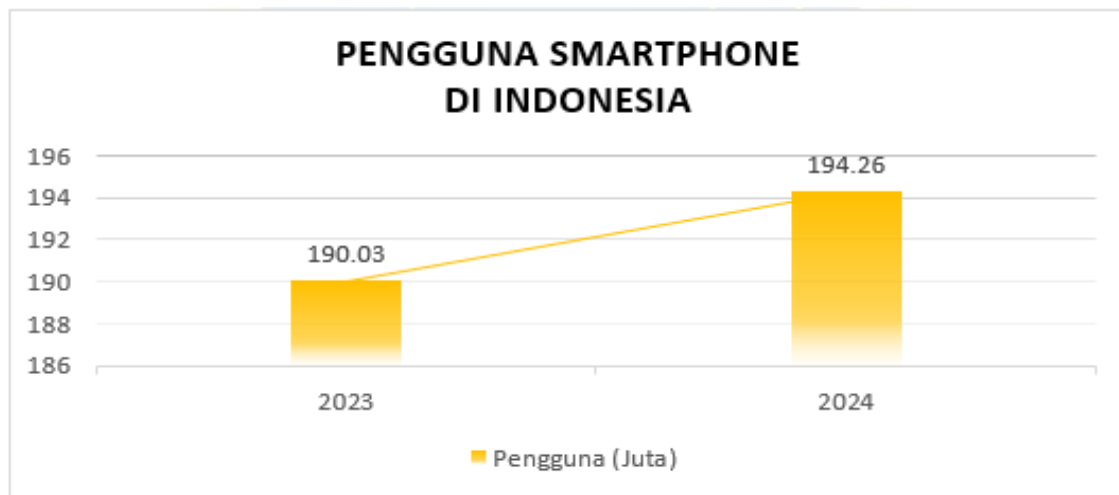
**Keywords:** *Phubbing, Communication Ethics, Teenagers, Students*

## Pendahuluan

Advances in information and communication technology have triggered significant social changes within society. Among these innovations, smartphones have emerged as one of the most influential devices. Functioning similarly to mobile computers, smartphone technology continues to advance by offering an array of sophisticated features. Consequently, their utility is no longer limited to making calls and sending messages; they now integrate

multimedia features such as music, video, cameras, games, health applications, and ubiquitous internet access, all of which facilitate daily human activities.

According to NEWZOO, Indonesia ranks fourth globally in terms of smartphone users, trailing only behind China, India, and the United States. (Arradian, 2024) The country's user base is projected to reach 194.26 million by 2024 (Muslim, 2024). as illustrated in Figure 1 below:



Gambar 1 smartphone users in Indonesia  
(Sumber: investor.id/bussiness.com)

Naturally, the widespread adoption of smartphones is closely linked to the growing propensity of the Indonesian population to access the internet.

This ease of access and the compelling features offered by smartphones frequently fuel dependency. On average, Indonesians spend 6.5 hours a day using smartphones with internet access. Generation Z, particularly teenagers aged

13–17, are in a critical phase of identity exploration. Due to their ongoing brain development, they are highly susceptible to impulsivity. This vulnerability places them at the highest risk of developing internet and smartphone addictions, which have far-reaching impacts on their mental health, behavior, academic performance, and the quality of social interactions. (Bestari, 2024).

One of the most prominent negative effects of smartphone dependency on social interactions is 'phubbing' (a portmanteau of 'phone' and 'snubbing'). This term refers to the act of ignoring a conversation partner due to an excessive focus on a smartphone. (Hanika, 2015:42). Phubbing has been officially listed in the Macquarie Dictionary, reflecting its recognition as a growing problem in contemporary social dynamics. (Varoth & Douglas, 2018:4). The term was first introduced by the McCann Group in 2012 through a campaign aimed at curbing the habit of ignoring others during communication. An individual who engages in phubbing is termed a phubber, while the recipient of this behavior is known as a phubbee. (Varoth & Douglas, 2016:10). Extensive literature demonstrates that this behavior damages interpersonal relationships, degrades communication quality, fosters social isolation, and causes a decline in empathy (Normawati, 2018:106).

Previous research said that before smartphones appeared, the intensity of communication between people was higher. Many stories and pieces of information could be shared and understood through direct interaction. However, current reality shows that when people gather, they tend to be busy with their own smartphones, making communication unfocused. (Zis,

2021:79). Actually, communication is a process of exchanging information that results in deep mutual understanding (Effendy, 2019:9). This process occurs effectively when two or more parties exchange messages to establish shared meaning. Consequently, if phubbing behavior persists unchecked, the core objectives of communication will remain unachieved, social interactions will be disrupted, and interpersonal relationships will deteriorate.

In an educational context, phubbing has escalated into a serious issue as it increasingly occurs within the classroom environment. The unauthorized use of smartphones during lessons—such as during presentations, discussions, or teacher explanations—significantly diminishes the quality of teacher-student interactions. (Setiawan, 2024). For instance, a study conducted at MI Dlauul Islam demonstrated that phubbing driven by social media use leads to a decline in students' learning interest and concentration, ultimately undermining their academic achievement. (Umam, 2023:8723). This situation indicates that phubbing extends beyond basic communication hurdles; it directly compromises the ethics of interaction.

Empirical observations of classroom dynamics reveal that phubbing severely hinders effective classroom

discourse, both between teachers and students and among peers. This behavior manifests as a fundamental lack of respect and consideration for the interlocutor.

From an Islamic perspective, respecting one's conversation partner is highly mandated, as stated in Surah An-Nisa, verse 86:

وَإِذَا حُيِّئْتُمْ بِهِ بِحَسَنَةٍ فَكُونُوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِيبًا

*“If you are shown respect, then return that respect with something better than it, or return it in kind. Verily, Allah takes account of all things.”* (Q.S. An Nisa [4]: 86)

In this regard, communication ethics serve as a critical framework to determine the appropriateness of a behavior. (Tumanggor, 2018:146). Therefore, instilling an understanding of communication ethics in smartphone usage is vital to fostering mutual respect and ensuring that messages are conveyed and received in their entirety.

Within school environments, upholding communication ethics is paramount, particularly during the instructional process. Consequently, this study aims to analyze phubbing from a communication ethics perspective, identify its driving factors within the classroom, and examine institutional efforts to address it. It

is hoped that these findings will serve as a reference for schools to raise student awareness and reduce classroom phubbing. If left unaddressed, there is a risk that phubbing will become normalized and no longer be viewed as a breach of communication ethics.

The selection of SMPN 14 Depok as the research site was informed by preliminary observations during the Introduction to the School Environment (PLP) program. The researcher observed that while the school mandates the collection of smartphones, this policy only applies until the second recess. This gap created an interesting research focus, as students were observed resuming social media use and mobile gaming during subsequent class hours. An interview with a student further revealed that smartphones frequently caused communication breakdowns during lectures, preventing students from fully comprehending the instructional material. This evidence suggests that smartphone presence in schools can severely disrupt effective learning and serves as a primary indicator of phubbing behavior among students.

### **Metode Penelitian**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach. The case study design was selected for its capacity to uncover meaning,

investigate operational processes, and gain a profound understanding of individuals or groups within a bounded situation. (Emzir, 2018). Specifically, the researcher sought to explore the phubbing phenomenon comprehensively to generate a detailed overview of communication ethics among adolescents at SMPN 14 Depok.

The research informants comprised five students from Class IX.5 and their respective homeroom teachers. Informants were selected via purposive sampling based on explicit criteria. The student criteria included: (1) enrollment in Class IX.5 (aged 14–18), (2) a high propensity for social media usage and online gaming, and (3) a history of disciplinary referrals to the guidance counselor due to classroom smartphone infractions. The teacher room was selected because they possess the most comprehensive understanding of the students' characters, behaviors, and academic developments compared to subject-specific teachers.

Data collection techniques are through observation, interviews, and documentation. Then, the validity of the data in research is checked using credibility. (Hardani, 2020:201). To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation techniques, including the triangulation of sources, methods, and time.

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four concurrent flows of activity: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as illustrated in Figure 2: (Winarni, 2018:171).

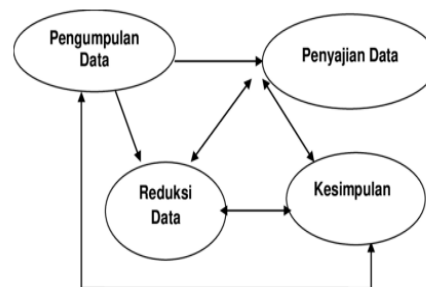


Figure 2: Interactive Analysis Model  
(Source: Miles dan Huberman)

Data collection was carried out continuously until the empirical data reached a point of saturation.

## Hasil dan Pembahasan

### A. Bentuk perilaku *phubbing* dalam etika komunikasi saat pembelajaran

The research findings indicate that phubbing behavior among Class IX.5 students at SMPN 14 Depok is highly prevalent and manifests across various learning contexts, including teacher lectures and peer group discussions. This behavior is not merely individual but is heavily mediated by classroom social dynamics. Broadly, phubbing is characterized by a shift in student attention from face-to-face interaction toward digital devices, primarily marked by an overt disregard for the speaker. Students admitted to frequently

checking their smartphones while the teacher explained material, splitting their cognitive focus between the lesson and digital activities, which subsequently degraded their listening comprehension.

In general, phubbing is marked by students' tendency to shift their attention from direct interaction to using their smartphones. The first form that appears is ignoring the person they're talking to, whether it's the teacher or peers. Students admit they often check their phones while the teacher is explaining the material, so their attention is split between learning and digital activities. This situation lowers the quality of listening and can potentially hinder understanding of the material.

The second form is the tendency to prioritize smartphones over direct communication. In this context, the decision to use a smartphone is not only based on personal needs but is also influenced by the social environment. When friends around them use smartphones, students tend to do the same. This shows that phubbing has a strong social dimension, where this behavior becomes an unwritten norm within the group.



*Figure 3 the classroom situation when students are focused on their smartphones.  
(Source: author data, 2024)*



*Figure 4 peserta didik mengakses media sosial saat kerja kelompok di kelas.  
(Source: author data, 2024)*

The third form is shifting the focus of communication through partial attention to the smartphone. Even though students claim to keep listening, their attention is split because they occasionally check notifications or open apps. This reflects a form of partial attention that affects the full reception of the communication message.

Besides that, another form found was secretly using smartphones, like playing games under the table, as well as actively accessing social media during lessons. Observations showed that students were more engaged with digital devices than direct interaction, making communication less effective.

This phenomenon aligns with the definition of phubbing as the behavior of

prioritizing a smartphone over direct social interaction. The impact can be seen in the decline of communication quality, both cognitively and emotionally. Students who are the targets of phubbing often feel ignored, unappreciated, or even offended.

From a communication ethics standpoint, this behavior directly violates several fundamental principles:

1. Focus on the Conversation Partner: Students struggle to maintain sustained attention on the speaker, leading to information loss.
2. Focus on the Topic of Conversation: Digital distractions prevent students from maintaining the concentration necessary to grasp complex subject matters.
3. Providing an Appropriate Response: Phubbing encourages inauthentic responses, such as pretending to understand a lesson, which distorts the feedback loop.
4. Mutual Respect: The normalization of device usage signals a decline in respect for the instructor, forcing teachers to repeatedly reiterate instructions.

Ethically, phubbing represents a clear deviation from communicative norms that demand attention, honesty, and mutual respect, thereby requiring rigorous

intervention to restore an ethical classroom culture.

### **B. Factors causing phubbing behavior during learning**

The phubbing behavior observed in Class IX.5 is driven by an interplay of internal and external factors, including smartphone addiction, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), low self-control, situational boredom, flexible institutional enforcement and peer influence.

The primary internal driver is smartphone addiction, reflected in extreme daily screen times. Informants AP (15) and KA (15) reported utilizing their devices for up to 12 hours per day, indicating severe digital dependency. This aligns with Lee, Ahn, and Choi's framework, which defines smartphone (dalam Demelia, 2023) which states that smartphone addiction is excessive use that can interfere with daily activities, including the learning process.

Besides that, this addiction also affects emotional attachment to smartphones, as MP (14) said: "I can't be far from my phone, so I bring it everywhere" and NP (14): "Yeah, I get anxious, like, what if my phone goes missing...". This shows that the dependency is not just behavioral, but also psychological.

Another major factor is FoMO, or the psychological anxiety of missing digital updates. Informant NP (14) and AP (15)

noted an compulsive urge to stay updated with viral TikTok trends. According to Varoth and Douglas, FoMO directly drives individuals to continuously monitor digital networks, accelerating phubbing tendencies. Furthermore, deficient self-control directly harms academic performance; NP (14) admitted that an inability to regulate phone use led to decreased concentration and a subsequent drop in grades. Situational boredom also acts as a catalyst, prompting students to seek instant gratification through applications like TikTok when lectures feel unengaging.

Externally, the flexibility and inconsistent enforcement of school regulations create structural loopholes. While homeroom teacher SH (51) noted that phones are collected in the morning, they are returned during the second recess, leaving the remaining class periods vulnerable to infractions as students routinely bypass the collection boxes. Lastly, peer influence strongly reinforces this behavior. Informants AP (15) and MP (14) admitted to phubbing simply because "everyone else was doing it." This pattern validates Sutherland's Differential Association Theory, which posits that deviant behaviors are socially learned and modeled through close group interactions. From a Habermasian perspective of

Communicative Action, phubbing signifies a communicative failure, where actors abandon mutual understanding in pursuit of egocentric digital gratification.

### **C. School Efforts to Mitigate Phubbing Behavior**

When someone is phubbing, they aren't really aware of their behavior and actions. However, the person on the receiving end of phubbing can see it as rude and it can even hurt them because they feel ignored and unappreciated. In the learning process at school, communication is important to help improve the quality of education. (Iriantara, 2013:73). This needs to be addressed so that phubbing behavior doesn't keep spreading among students at school, allowing for effective communication with teachers and fellow students to achieve the best learning outcomes by implementing policies related to smartphone use at school.

At UPTD SMPN 14 Depok, student conduct is governed by Chapter II, Article 7 of the school code, which bans unauthorized phone use during instructional hours. Infractions are categorized under code B15 (bringing a camera-equipped phone without permission) and code B16 (activating a phone during class), carrying disciplinary weights of 50 and 25 points, respectively. Operationally, the school mandates that devices be collected before

the first period and stored in the staff room, to be returned at the second recess.

Additionally, Class IX.5 established localized classroom compacts stating that "students must listen to and respect all instructions from the teacher." While this rule does not explicitly mention smartphones, it implicitly demands undivided attention. However, students routinely exploit loopholes, such as hiding phones in their bags instead of depositing them in the classroom box.

Based on school rules, the students of class IX.5 at SMPN 14 Depok, along with their homeroom teacher, have rules or commitments that are made together based on mutual agreement, and they also create class regulations. One of the rules states, "Students must listen to and respect every instruction from the teacher." This means that students are aware of and have control over their smartphone use.

Although it doesn't directly state a ban on smartphones, the rule indirectly emphasizes the importance of staying focused during the learning process. This agreement serves as a reminder that smartphone use is only allowed if it aligns with learning needs. As SH (51), a teacher, explained to remind students not to break the rules regarding smartphone use at school: "... just a reminder that phone use has to follow the instructions. For example,

for lesson A it's fine to use it, but if it's not for lesson A, then it should be put away." Students often find loopholes or opportunities to phub during classroom learning. As NP (14) explained: "I've done that violation before, and then I put it in my bag instead of the class box..." This behavior happens when students choose to focus more on their smartphones rather than paying attention to the teacher.

This kind of phubbing clearly breaks the rules that have been set. Besides showing a lack of respect for teachers who emphasize the importance of attention, active participation, respect, and discipline, this behavior can also disturb the class's focus and reduce the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

In implementing the existing policy, teachers actively give warnings to students who break the rules on smartphone use in class. Then, for students who violate the rules, teachers enforce discipline regarding smartphone use in class through a gradual approach. Teacher SH (51) said: "We've given advice warnings, and if there's no improvement, we make a statement letter, and if there's still no improvement, the phone will be confiscated or held for a day or two, and we call the parents to make an agreement." This type of warning starts with verbal warnings and advice aimed at changing students' behavior through

communication. However, when this approach doesn't work, teachers move to administrative sanctions like temporarily confiscating smartphones and calling the students' parents.

On the other hand, there was an effort chosen by the IX.5 grade students to minimize smartphone use and prevent phubbing behavior during the learning process. This effort involved collecting and putting their smartphones in their bags or on the desk and interacting more directly. This was done so that students wouldn't get easily distracted and could focus on the teacher and the lesson material.

Based on interviews with the homeroom teacher, one way to reduce phubbing in class as a teacher is by giving reminders. Teachers can regularly remind students at the beginning of the lesson that using smartphones is only allowed if there's an instruction from the teacher for learning purposes. This reminder can also be reinforced by showing a shared commitment to classroom rules to create discipline and collective awareness, so that students are more disciplined and respectful of communication during class. Therefore, efforts to minimize phubbing during the learning process should be consistently applied by both students and teachers.

Thus, SMPN 14 Depok effort to address phubbing behavior is carried out by

implementing rules for collecting smartphones and increasing awareness through class agreements, verbal warnings, and if the behavior continues, strict sanctions from teachers. These steps not only guide students to focus more on the learning process but also apply communication ethics principles such as paying attention to the person you're talking to, focusing on the issue, not interrupting, and respecting each other. Collaborative efforts between teachers and students are key to reducing phubbing behavior and creating a conducive and ethical learning environment.

### **Kesimpulan**

Phubbing behavior among students constitutes an explicit violation of the core principles of communication ethics. This phenomenon is characterized by indifference toward interlocutors due to an obsessive focus on smartphones, specifically social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok) and mobile games. Such actions directly contradict the ethical mandates of communication, which require sustained attention, topic focus, non-interruption, and mutual respect within the classroom. The prevalence of phubbing at SMPN 14 Depok is driven by a combination of internal factors (smartphone addiction, FoMO, low self-control, and boredom) and external factors (flexible rule

enforcement and peer modeling). In response, the institution's mitigation strategies involve a progressive framework: executing a smartphone collection policy, developing mutual classroom pacts, issuing verbal warnings, and applying strict administrative sanctions, including temporary device confiscation and parental interventions.

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