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Role of Smartphone Addiction in Instigating Phubbing Behavior: Perspective of the University Students in Multan City, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Phubbing is a socio-psychological phenomenon of turning a blind eye to interpersonal relationships and networking with long-distance friends. The salient underlying reasons behind phubbing behavior are to line up online interaction with distant people, constantly check notifications/updates on mobiles, and divert from real-life situations. Consequently, the people feel lonely, isolated, ignored, impaired, and disrespected by the phubber. The noteworthy theoretical underpinnings of the present study were i) Media dependency theory, accompanied by ii) The uses and gratification theory. Data was collected from N=400 university students through a self-administered questionnaire. Using a multistage sampling technique, the students were approached through a survey method for data collection. Afterward, the data was analyzed through SPSS (version 25). Results of the study illustrated that smartphones played a domineering role in instigating the phubbing behavior among university students with high correlation, i.e., r=0.939** to 0.984**, and significant regression, i.e., 75.6%. Vigilance of faculty members and university administration, complemented by parental monitoring, can lessen the screen timings of the students to curb their phubbing behavior.

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1. Introduction

In the present technological era, smartphones have become integral for accessing social media platforms, educational forums, entertainment channels, and social interaction (Jesse, 2016). Researchers in the past decades have emphasized that using smartphones in moderation is advantageous, but overdependence and disproportionate usage of this tool have become a double-edged sword (Parajuli, 2025). Mostly adolescents and youngsters become the foremost victims of smartphone addiction. In the academic domain, students became the major bull's eye of smartphone reliance, creating non-compliance towards academics, impairing social ties, and disengaging from close-seated social networks (Aljomaa et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2018). The 21st century brings technological innovations for educated youth. In this regard, the invention and development of smartphones became a notable scientific shift for portable devices (Miller, 2012). Diverse software and gadgets encompass email, social media, web browsing, stopwatch, clock, timer, calendar, calculator, and social media apps (such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp). Additionally, the diverse features of smartphones (touchscreens, media players, high-definition cameras, internet connectivity, media player installation, and GPS-based mapping) also affect social connectivity and academic distraction for educated youth (Mahmud & Islam, 2023). Based on these features, the notable purpose of this technological tool was to augment communication and productivity for personal and professional life. The escalation of an individual's screen time resulted in social disconnection and psychological distancing from close relations. Consequently, the terminology

used for the overly usage of smartphones is called "smartphone addiction" (Amin et al., 2024; Wang, Gong, & Lin, 2025).

The global statistics showed that there were 1 billion smartphone users in 2014, which exceeded 4.69 billion by 2024. On average, people from the US spend an average of 3 hrs. 45 min. on their smartphones. It was also estimated that more than 56.9% of smartphone addiction cases belonged to the age group of teenagers (15-16 years old). The screen time was estimated to be 1 hour and 38 minutes in 2014, which was anticipated to be 3 hrs. 45 min. in 2024. According to the 2023 statistical data on smartphone usage at the global level, there was an increase in their screen time, i.e., Indonesia (6.05 hrs.), Thailand (5.64 hrs.), Argentina (5.33 hrs.) India (4.77 hrs.), Mexico (4.7 hrs.), US (4.34 hrs.), UK (3.81 hrs.), Canada (3.8 hrs.), China (3.72 hrs.) (Backlinko Team, 2025). Over the past decade, empirical research studies have focused their attention on the usage of smartphones and the resultant phubbing behavior among educated youth. The term "phubbing" means snubbing someone in face-to-face communication. The major underlying factors behind phubbing are based on several psychological issues of phubbers, such as being ignored, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, stress, and less satisfaction with close relations. Resultantly, the phubber applies the same psychological and social ailments to other people by snubbing them through smartphone addiction (Arenz & Schnauber-Stockmann, 2024). The sociological significance of the study is apparent as phubbing persistently affects personal relationships, the integrative social environment, psychological compatibility, and interactional dynamics (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018).

A well-adjusted and vigorous collective environment is obligatory for the social networking between university students. These educated people negatively alter social norms due to overdependence on their smartphones. The normative patterns included responsiveness, respect, connectedness, consideration, attention, and empathic behavior toward the close-seated people. Due to the emergence and dissemination of social media and smartphone addiction, the students are unable to use normative coping strategies to ensure interpersonal adaptability (being connected and establishing harmonious social relationships with the interactive relations) (Emmanual et al., 2024; Jouty, Molla, & Othman, 2024). The study findings are beneficial to various social media platforms and university administrations. To the best of our knowledge, previous literature is silent on the effects of smartphone addiction on phubbing behavior among educated youth of Multan city, Pakistan (Bajwa et al., 2021; Rehman, Zulfiqar, & Khan, 2024). Therefore, the major objectives of the study are mentioned subsequently i) To find the major demographic correlates of the university students ii) To illustrate the effects of demographics on the phubbing behavior among the university students iii) To demonstrate the intensity of smartphone usage among the educated youth iv) To scrutinize the level of phubbing behavior through smartphone addiction among the university students, and v) To put forth recommendations to lessen the effects of smartphone usage on the phubbing behavior among the university students.

2. Theoretical underpinnings of the present research

2.1. Media dependency theory and its application in the present research

The theory was coined by Sandra Ball-Rokeach & Melvin DeFleur in 1976. The major theme of the theory was that people get psychologically influenced by social media networking sites. The conspicuous content of social media became the major source of enthralment for their audience. Other notions establish the link between media sources and viewers' desire to remain updated on content such as education, relaxation, and enjoyment. Moreover, the needs of the people are also fulfilled by the media sources in industrialized modern societies, such as casting votes, following fashion trends, and attending online classes using technological tools. The recent social media apps encourage connectivity among long-distance and close-seated friends by sharing daily life routines and remaining updated with other people. The core notion of the theory also encircles the "hypodermic needle perspective," which divulged that people get attracted by the disseminated information on media apps (also see the studies of Akhlaq et al. (2024); Ang, Chong and Lau (2019). The application of this theory was used to put forth the assumption that individuals rely on social media to fulfill their needs, such as connectivity and information gathering. For this purpose, the notable technological innovation is the excessive usage of smartphones, which ultimately leads to snubbing close ones by breaking conversations with them. The application of this theory indicated that university students fulfill their need for connectivity, staying updated about recent media trends, get entertained to

prioritize their perceived needs, and stay informed about real-life acquaintances. The present study also illustrated that the differential norms, values, social context, and level of acceptance towards smartphone addiction also provoke phubbing behaviour.

2.2. The uses and gratification theory and its application in the present research

This theory divulged that people actively choose social media for numerous purposes, such as information gathering, following fashion trends, social connectivity, ensuring personal identity through unique media content, and indulging in entertainment. Jay Blumler & Elihu Katz (1974) also revealed that the active consumers on social media were based on different types of gratification and needs-based selection. The propositions of the theory put forth that there are five major needs and gratification for people. These needs are affective, cognitive, personal, interactive, social, integrative, and tension-free. The theory also disclosed that getting addicted to smartphones fulfills various needs, such as entertainment, knowledge acquisition, tension relief, and data gathering. The theory was also cited in subsequent research studies, i.e., Korhan and Ersoy (2016); Weiyan (2015). The application of this theory emphasized that due to the continuous availability of a wide range of smartphone functions, people started to interact with long-distance relationships and close their eyes to their nearby social circle. In this phase, people prioritize their smartphones for the gratification of their needs rather than interacting with their social circle. University students usually use their smartphones to interact with social media apps, accessing education, seeking entertainment, and prioritizing media programs (such as comedy, drama, and movies). Aligning with the propositions of this theory, university students express themselves through various domains, such as creating virtual identities, posting details about daily life, conveying their ideas, and presenting their academic and extracurricular skills. The major underlying factor that provoked the phubbing behavior among students was to keep updating their profile information. The students also wanted to uphold a positive media image with a happy, stress-free life through media followers, likes, and comments. The students also gain social acceptance on various media platforms through the excessive usage of smartphones, which results in snubbing close-seated relations.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Study site and recruitment of respondents

The present cross-sectional study was conducted among the enrolled registered students of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, from 20th April 2024 to 4th May 2024. This public sector university comprised 10 faculties: 1) Arts and Social Sciences 2) Commerce, Banking and Business Administration 3) Engineering and Technology 4) Islamic Studies and Languages 5) Pharmacy 6) Sciences 7) Agriculture and Sciences Technology 8) Veterinary Science 9) Food Science and Nutrition accompanied by 10) Law. Among these faculties, the researchers selected the currently enrolled students from BS, M.Phil., and Ph.D. programs from the Arts and Social Sciences departments. The recruitment criterion comprised of the subsequent parameters i) students must be enrolled in the Morning/Evening classes of the said programs ii) students must not be engaged in any political activity (such as part of some student federation) and iii) students who owned a smartphone and use it for various social media networking purposes.

3.2. Sampling procedure and sampling technique

Using Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 university students was selected through a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, the researcher selected the following departments of Social Sciences from the 10 faculties of BZU through a purposive sampling technique (mentioned in Table I). In the subsequent stage, the researcher asked for the list of the programs running in the departments (Morning/Evening). Subsequently, the semesters' attendance sheets/award lists were used as the sampling frame. Due to a shortage of time and economic resources, we used a de-facto sampling method to collect data. In this method, the students present in the class during data collection were selected as a sample. Contrariwise, the students who were absent from class, attending some seminar, or waiting for their research appointment with a supervisor were excluded from the sample.

Table 1: Sample derivation procedure and response rate from the departments of Social Sciences (N=400)

Name of the department	Total number of enrolled students	Sampled students and questionnaires distributed (with 10% proportionate)	Questionnaire received	Finalized sample after excluding error-based questionnaires	Response rate percentage
Sociology	479	47	43	34	72.3
Psychology	700	70	68	49	70.0
Education	998	99	87	70	70.7
Political Science	295	29	25	21	72.1
Sports Science	226	22	20	16	72.7
Library Science	83	08	07	06	75.0
Environmental Science	356	35	34	25	71.4
Economics	1800	180	133	127	70.5
Geography	237	23	21	17	73.9
Communication Studies	500	50	42	35	70.0
Total	5,674	563	480	400	71.0

3.3. Tool for the data collection process

A self-administered questionnaire comprising four sections, i.e., demographics, smartphone addiction, phubbing behavior, and suggestions to lessen phubbing behavior, was used to collect the data from university students. Both open and closed-ended questions were used to analyze the responses of the participants. Aligning with this, the first section comprised demographic variables such as age and gender segregation, academic enrollment, time spent on smartphones, and the extent to which respondents experienced phubbing behavior. After that, the second section covered the Smartphone Addiction Scale (SAS) developed by Kwon et al. (2013). The six major factors of SAS encompass the scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Afterward, the response variable was measured through the "Generic scale of phubbing behavior," which was given by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018) with a scale range of 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). This scale extends the phenomenon of phubbing through two dimensions, i.e., i) execution of phubbing and ii) the experience of being phubbed.

3.4. Pre-testing and the data collection process

Before the data collection, the tool was pre-tested with 20 university students. It was mirrored by the students' responses to construct a separate section for suggestions to lessen the phubbing behavior among them. After the pretesting, the researchers went to the Social Science departments and asked for the list of enrolled students through the permission of the higher administrative authorities, i.e., the Dean, Chairman, and committees of senior faculty members. Later on, by thoroughly analyzing the sampling frame, the students were randomly selected from each class. The major stumbling block was the students' ongoing lectures and research appointments with their supervisors. After getting access to the enrolled students, the first author explained the aims and rationales of the research to the students in the targeted classrooms. The first author, along with the supervisor (second author), ensured the students' anonymity and the confidentiality of their data. Afterward, the questionnaires were distributed by the researchers and were labeled with the specified code. For example, a questionnaire from the Department of Sociology, BS 6th (Evening) class was labeled as SOC-BS-6th-EVE. These codes ensured the anonymity of the respondents and helped the researchers to analyze the response rate in each department. After collecting the filled questionnaires, the researchers distributed the certificates of appreciation to the students who participated in the research process.

3.5. Data analysis

After collecting the data, the researchers sorted out the questionnaires and analyzed the response rate. N=563 questionnaires were sent to the university students, while the turnover frequency was n=480 transcripts. The researchers analyzed the responses manually and excluded the questionnaires with content errors. The participants who were unable to understand the questions and left 1/3rd of the document blank were excluded. Moreover, the repetitive overwriting and ink spots on the answers were also considered to be left out of the final sample. Based on these prerequisites, the finalized questionnaires were n=400, with a

response rate of 71%. The separate response rate of each department is also mentioned in Table 1. Subsequently, the data were analyzed by SPSS (version 25). Codes were formulated with numerical figures to determine the relationship between the predictor and the response variables. The researchers used correlation and simple linear regression to analyze the relationship between the study variables.

4. Results

Table 2: Demographic correlates of the respondents (N=400)

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage	Binary Logistic Regression Analysis OR's (95% CI)	P value
Gender segregation				
Females	222	55.5	1 (RC)	
Males	178	44.5	4.31 (3.99-4.65)	<.05
Age segregation				
<20 years	68	17.0	1 (RC)	
21-25 years	196	49.0	0.811 (0.62-0.78)	<.05
26-30 years	84	21.0	0.30 (0.27-0.43)	<.05
>30 years	52	13.0		
Academic enrollment of students				
Bachelors	196	49.0	1 (RC)	
Masters	120	30.0	0.87 (0.33-0.94)	<.05
M.Phil.	52	13.0	0.61 (0.44-0.72)	<.05
Ph.D.	32	8.0	0.27 (0.21-0.33)	<.05
Time spent by the respondents on their smartphones				
1-2 Hrs.	21	5.3	1 (RC)	
3-4 Hrs.	32	8.0	6.24 (5.38-7.43)	<.05
4-5 Hrs.	56	14.0	6.71 (4.97-7.13)	<.05
More than 6 Hrs.	291	72.7	8.47 (7.03-9.88)	<.05
Extent of respondents experiencing phubbing behavior				
Rarely	37	9.3	1 (RC)	
Occasionally	66	16.5	2.54 (1.03-3.79)	<.01
Frequently	297	74.2	5.77 (4.32-7.86)	<.01

4.1. Demographic correlates of university students engaged in smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior

Table 2 illustrates that n=222 (55.5%) were female students while n=178 (44.5%) were male students. Linking this fact, male students were 4.31 (3.99-4.65) times more addicted to their smartphones, which elevated their phubbing behavior (p <.05). The age segregation showed that n=196 (49.0%) respondents belonged to the 21-25 year age group. Outcomes of the binary logistic regression analysis exhibited that the students aged 21-25 years were 0.811 (0.62-0.78) times less addicted to their smartphones and inclined towards phubbing behavior (p <.05) as compared to the students aged <20 years. The academic enrollment also divulged that n=196 (49.0%) students were from the Bachelor's level, while n=120 (30.0%) were from the Master's level. The regression results divulged that smartphone addiction was 0.61 (0.44-0.72) and 0.27 (0.21-0.33) times less at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels as compared to the BS level. The time spent on smartphones illustrated that n=291 (72.7%) students who spend more than 6 hours on their mobile phones were 8.47 (7.03-9.88) times more hooked to their smartphones and persuaded towards the phubbing behavior. The above-mentioned statistical fact also indicated that n=297 (74.2%) respondents showed 5.77 (4.32-7.86) times more addiction due to their frequent usage of smartphones.

Table 3: Agreed frequency and percentage responses of the university students related to their smartphone addiction (N=400)

Smartphone addiction scale	Frequency / Percentage	Smartphone addiction scale	Frequency/ Percentage
Missing planned work	133 (33.3)	Getting irritated in the absence of a smartphone	138 (34.5)
Lack of concentration during class hours	125 (31.3)	Take your smartphone to the toilet	148 (37.0)
Experiencing blurred vision	198 (49.5)	Meeting more people on a smartphone	232 (58.0)

Feeling pain in wrists, back, and neck	201 (50.3)	Showing more intimacy with smartphone buddies than real-life friends	196 (49.0)
Feeling tired and inappropriate sleep patterns	178 (44.5)	Feeling more pain on losing a smartphone than a friend	225 (56.3)
Feeling calm and cozy	206 (51.5)	Having a better understanding of smartphone friends than real-life buddies	124 (31.0)
Feeling pleasant and excited	153 (38.3)	Constantly keep in touch with smartphone friends	155 (38.8)
Feeling confident	177 (44.3)	Constantly checking the social networking services	139 (34.8)
Being able to get rid of stress	133 (33.3)	Prefer to interact with smartphone buddies rather than social networks	162 (40.5)
Feelings of fun and enthrallment	200 (50.0)	Always searching for a smartphone	147 (36.8)
Emptiness in life	134 (33.5)	Battery timings are less than a day	138 (34.5)
Feelings of liberty	202 (50.5)	Using smartphones less than intended	158 (39.5)
Showing excitement and fun emotions	109 (27.3)	Constant urge to use a smartphone	163 (40.8)
Not being able to stand having a smartphone	185 (46.3)	Failed to shorten the time spent on smartphones	170 (42.5)
Feeling impatient and fretful	139 (34.8)	Thinking of shortening my mobile usage timings	168 (42.0)
Always thinking of the smartphone	143 (35.8)	Complaints of a social circle about the overuse of smartphones	159 (39.8)

4.2. Smartphone addiction among university students

Table 3 divulged that the students' feelings related to usage of mobile phones, such as pain in the wrists, back, and neck (n=201, 50.3%), irregular sleep patterns (n=178, 44.5%), calm and cozy (n=206, 51.5%), confident (n=177, 44.3%), and enthralling (n=200, 50.0%). In addition, the respondents also showed feelings of liberty (n=202, 50.5%) and more pain on losing the smartphone (n=225, 56.3%). The other noteworthy findings divulged that the university students agreed that they need the constant urge to remain online on their smartphones (n=163, 40.8%), failed to shorten the time spent on their smartphones (n=170, 42.5%), and were thinking of shortening their mobile usage timings (n=168, 42.0%). The respondents experience blurred vision on excessive usage of smartphones (n=198, 49.5%), but they still feel pleasure while interacting with people on their smartphones (n=232, 58.0%).

Table 4: Significant frequency and percentage responses of the university students related to their phubbing behavior (N=400)

Generic scale of phubbing behavior	Category	Frequency/ Percentage
Feelings of anxiousness in the absence of a smartphone	Always	147 (36.8)
Cannot stand without a smartphone	Usually	145 (36.3)
Placement of the smartphone where it can be seen	Always	159 (39.8)
Worrying about missing important stuff in the absence of a smartphone	Always	157 (39.3)
Facing conflicts with others over using smartphones	Sometimes	140 (35.0)
People reflect on the overly usage of smartphones	Sometimes	134 (33.5)
Feelings of irritation on asking others about getting off my mobile phone	Always	188 (47.0)
Usage of smartphones, even if it irritates others	Always	189 (47.3)
Paying more attention to smartphones than talking to others	Always	151(37.8)
Feeling content with paying attention to the smartphone instead of others	Always	139 (34.8)
Feeling good about using a smartphone and stopping focusing on others	Always	146 (36.5)
Getting rid of stress by ignoring others and paying attention to the smartphone	Always	156 (39.0)
Paying attention to my smartphone for longer hours than I intend to do so	Always	189 (47.3)
Missed opportunities as more focused on smartphones	Always	136 (34.0)
Find myself thinking just a few more minutes than using my mobile phone	Always	198 (49.5)

4.3. Phubbing behavior among university students

Empirically supporting the present research objectives, Table 4 depicts the data from the generic scale of phubbing behavior. Results reflected that phubbing is caused by the subsequent dimensions i.e. feelings of anxiousness (Always: n=147, 36.8%), worrying (Always: n=157, 39.3%), irritation (Always: n=188, 47.0%), contentment (Always: n=139, 34.8%), and getting rid of stress (Always: n=156, 39.0%) among the university students. Data elucidated that the respondents were addicted to their mobile phones even though they knew that they faced conflicts with others while using the phones (Sometimes: n=140, 35.0%), irritate other fellow beings (Always: n=189, 47.3%), and missed opportunities to talk to others (Always: n=136, 34.0%). The respondents agreed that there were multiple causes of their phubbing behavior, i.e., i) they cannot stand leaving their phone (Usually: n=145, 36.3%), and ii) place their phone where they can see it (Always: n=159, 39.8%). The table also validated that the respondents pay more attention to their phones than their actual intention (n=189, 47.3%).

5. Hypothetical Model

The hypothetical underpinning of the present study is that "Smartphone addiction is the major baseline factor that elevates the phubbing behavior among university students." The present study used two statistical tests to analyze this hypothetical statement: correlation and simple linear regression.

Table 5: Correlation analysis between smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior (N=400)

Scale items	1	2	3	4	5	6	PB^
Missing planned work due to smartphone usage	1	.939**	.945**	.936**	.929**	.937**	.565**
Feeling fun while having a smartphone		1	.958**	.962**	.944**	.942**	.570**
Frequent complaints from people about distraction from smartphones			1	.984**	.943**	.944**	.595**
Eyes started wandering for a smartphone in its absence				1	.943**	.942**	.624**
Feeling of irritation at someone's demand to put off smartphone					1	.978**	.424**
Feeling irritated by others while concentrating on smartphones						1	.456**
Phubbing behavior							1

^PB=Phubbing Behavior
**Level of significance <.01

5.1. Correlation between smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior

The results in Table 5 demonstrated a high correlation, r=0.939** to 0.984**, and a moderate correlation, i.e., r=0.456**, between predictor and response variables. These variables showed that the students knew that their smartphone usage irritates the other person through their lack of interaction through phubbing. Another significant correlation, i.e., r=0.624**, indicated that the students became anxious as their eyes started to wander toward their smartphones, even in the presence of other people in the social circle (significance level at p=<.01). The correlation analysis indicated that university students' social interaction and social integration are negatively affected by their phubbing behavior.

Table 6: Regression analysis between smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior (N=400)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	R Square Change	F Change	Sig. *p* value
1	.810[a]	.756	.653	.756	188.554	.000**

Predictor variable: Smartphone addiction scale
Response variable: Phubbing Behavior
**Significance level is 0.01 (2-tailed)

5.2. Simple linear regression between smartphone addiction and phubbing behavior

The statistical results in Table 6 validated that the usage of smartphones is responsible for 65.6% of phubbing behavior among university students. The major items in the scale

indicated that the respondents are addicted to their mobile phones through various parameters, such as checking their mobile phones as they wake up early in the morning, feeling empty/pleasant/excited, and facing multiple psychologically distressing issues without using their smartphones. The value of F=188.554, p=.000, <.01 indicated the significant relationship between the said variables. It also stated the importance of smartphone usage, managing stress, and feelings of pleasure in using smartphones.

6. Discussion

In alignment with the objectives of the present study, previous empirical pieces of evidence from the international context highlighted that the major underlying factors behind phubbing behavior are social media addiction, emotional coping strategies, psychological impairment, and social discomfort. These contextual factors are provoked by smartphone addiction and the premeditated urge to remain updated on recent media trends. Hence, the youngsters became dependent on smartphones and started snubbing their interpersonal relationships (Al-Saggaf, 2022; Davey et al., 2018; Isrofin & Munawaroh, 2021; Yam & Kumcağız, 2020). To support the linear hypothetical model, the present study used the Generic Scale of Phubbing Behavior, which consisted of four dimensions: nomophobia, interpersonal conflict, self-isolation, and problem acknowledgment. Using this previously devised scale of GSP by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas (2018), the researchers measured the response variable by social disconnection among university students through digital snubbing (Chi, Tang, & Tang, 2022; Tandon et al., 2022). The phenomenon of nomophobia, i.e., no-mobile-phone-phobia, is also mentioned in the scale when the students frequently start worrying about their mobile phones. Preceding studies from the international and Pakistani contexts authenticated these empirical findings (Karaduman et al., 2023; Maia & Sousa, 2024; Mujahid et al., 2024).

Supporting the above measurement, the research reflected that the usage of smartphones among university students is a source of irritation and distress for others. The nearby people feel isolated, ignored, and phubbed by the social distancing of a phubber. These findings are empirically confirmed in the previous Turkish and Pakistani studies, i.e., Rehman, Zulfiqar and Khan (2024); Yam and Kumcağız (2020). In addition, the preceding theoretical underpinnings also validated the present research issue. The politeness theory argued that phubbing ruins a person's emotional state. The major reason is that a person feels their physical presence is not worthy, which leads to social distancing, loneliness, anxiety, and stress (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017). The subsequent theory is the social exclusion theory, which discusses that smartphone addiction leads to social exclusion. These excluded feelings lead to social distancing among people, which ruins their normative intimacy towards each other. The other supporting theoretical framework was the expectancy-value theory, which articulates that the feelings of being snubbed and ignored ruined and violated the expectations of the social interaction (Gao et al., 2023; Roberts & David, 2024). Likewise, the boredom theory highlights that people use the technological tool of smartphones to escape from feelings of boredom, anxiety, stress, and loneliness, which leads to phubbing (Al-Saggaf, MacCulloch, & Wiener, 2019). These theories supported our hypothetical linear relationship between smartphone addiction and phubbing among university students. The theoretical underpinnings, along with the hypothetical statement, were also confirmed by the Pakistani research studies conducted by Ansari et al. (2024); Safdar Bajwa et al. (2023); Shahzadi, Ashraf and Tariq (2024).

Our study findings depicted that smartphone usage is a major hurdle in focusing on studies and interaction with close-seated friends. Validating this fact, the previous studies conducted by Gürbüz, Bayrakli and GezgiN (2023); Yang et al. (2024) illustrated that excessive usage of smartphones is the major factor behind student burnout. These studies also found that the academic grades of the students were affected, and they started to suffer from several psychosocial problems, such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low-quality interaction with classmates and social networks. The students started to escape from their psycho-social pathologies by hiding them through social media interaction with long-distance relationships. They started ignoring their close-seated people, which generated feelings of ignorance among the other people. This empirical evidence was also supported in the two Pakistani studies conducted by Ansari et al. (2024); Qayyum, Sikandar and Zahra (2024). Our study findings also showed that students are socially and mentally dependent on smartphones for various purposes, such as academics, entertainment, emotional support, cultural exchange, and influencing others. Our study findings illustrated that 50.5% of students constantly thought about their mobile phones when they were not using them for a while. Furthermore, 34.8% of

respondents also agreed that they were more connected with their long-distance relationships than real-life friends. These findings were confirmed by the international and Pakistani studies of Rahman, Duradoni and Guazzini (2022); Tanhan et al. (2024); Younas, Amjad and Qayyum (2022). The study also showed that the students feel more integrated and connected with their long-distance friends. Current data reflected that n=50.5% of university students felt that their minds are captivated by numerous thoughts on mobile phones. Previous studies from Canada and Pakistan also validated these facts (Adorjan & Ricciardelli, 2021; Khan et al., 2021).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, phubbing is a phenomenon that negatively affects the interactional patterns and psychological calmness of university students. The foremost prerequisite behind the escalation of phubbing behavior was the overdependence and excessive usage of smartphones, which gradually became an addiction for the educated youth. The urge to remain updated about recent hustle and bustle on social media, fashion trends, profile updates, and staying connected with long-distance social media friends are the foremost reasons behind the phenomenon of "phubbing." The hypothetical extraction concluded that the university students missed their planned work (such as assignment completion and preparation of presentations, along with working on projects) due to smartphone addiction. Although they know their overuse of smartphones has become a source of irritation for other people, they remain connected with this technological tool and snub the close-seated social circle. The concluding remarks also highlighted that young phubbers have negative perceptions and experiences about emotions, coping strategies, and social relationships. Based on the empirical findings, the researchers set forth the following recommendations to lessen smartphone usage and resultant phubbing behavior among university students.

1. Awareness campaigns should be launched by the university administration (in collaboration with Sociologists and Psychologists) to highlight the detrimental effects of smartphone addiction on their social and psychological well-being.
2. The university administration should include extracurricular activities as a segment of mandatory coursework. Accordingly, students will be bound to engage in academic and sports activities rather than wasting time on their smartphones.
3. The faculty should monitor the screen time of enrolled students to overcome their smartphone addiction.
4. The faculty should promote events in the departments, such as alumni, educational gatherings, sports galas, and musical shows, to promote social networking and psychological well-being of the students.
5. University students should restrict their social media apps and unfollow irrelevant pages. Moreover, the habit of constantly checking notifications on social media, followed by the aspiration to remain updated about social media activities, must be curbed.

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