



Phubbing in Workplace: The Effect to Employees' Work Engagement

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Highlights

- Phubbing in workplace negatively influences work engagement on employee. The higher the tendency of employees to phubbing, the lower their work engagement, vice versa
- This study is a novel contribution to the industrial and organizational psychology literature because no study has yet explored the impact of phubbing behavior on employees' work engagement.

Abstract

Employees' work engagement plays a significant role in enhancing the sustainability and performance of the company in industrial sector. However, phubbing can have a negative impact on employees' work engagement, as it can lead to reduced productivity in the workplace. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive investigation for the impact of phubbing on negative employee outcomes, such as reduced work engagement. The data was collected using a snowball sampling strategy. A total of 221 employees from Indonesia were included as participants in the study, ranging in age from 18 to 39 years ($M = 26.9$, $SD = 3.35$). Among the participants, 66% were working in private sector companies, 26% were employed in government offices, and the remaining 32% worked in other sectors. The Generic Scale of Phubbing (Indonesian Version) (15 item, $\alpha = 0.91$) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9) (Indonesian Ver.) (9 item, $\alpha = 0.91$) were used to measure the variables. The quantitative research method utilized regression analysis via JASP 0.17 for MacOS Catalina to determine the relative strength between two variables. This research indicate that phubbing in workplace negatively influences work engagement on employee. 25.1% of the changes in work engagement on employee is due to phubbing behavior in workplace, and the remaining 74.9% comes from other variables. The higher the tendency of employees to phubbing, the lower their work engagement, vice versa.

Keywords: Phubbing; Work Engagement; Employees

INTRODUCTION

Within the past 20 years, researchers in the fields of human resources and organizational behavior have placed considerable emphasis on promoting employees' sustainable engagement in their work, recognizing its potential benefits for human performance (Kim et al., 2019). Work engagement is a subject that receives significant attention in the areas of organizational development and industrial psychology due to its close relationship with the efficient management of human resources (Satata, 2021). Work engagement refers to the presence of positive and influential actions connected to the enthusiastic, committed, and deeply involved performance of work tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2006). When employees are actively engaged in their work, it fosters professionalism and ultimately leads to improved work quality. Work engagement also represents a state of employee well-being, characterized by positivity and high levels of activation (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011). The level of employees' work engagement significantly influences the sustainability and performance of companies in the industrial sector (Mokaya & Kipyegon, 2014). However, there are various factors that can detrimentally affect employees' work engagement, and one of them is excessive use of mobile phones. This behavior could be a distraction, leading to reduced productivity in the workplace.

In modern times, the extensive use of smartphones has become a routine for people to communicate and collaborate with one another (Kocak, 2021). Employees in different workplaces are spending more time using their smartphones to check emails and communicate with their colleagues in real-time (Pitichat, 2013). The use of smartphones during work also arises from various reasons, such as work demands, entertainment purposes, or social media activity (Wang et al., 2016). The desire to look at smartphones can be so strong, that it often results in individuals failing to experience the advantages of in-person communication, as the presence of smartphones often disrupts conversations (Geser, 2004). This situation may lead individuals to pay less attention to the person who is physically present with them (Kocak, 2021). Additionally, the mere presence of mobile phone, even if not used, can result in decrease feelings of closeness, trust, and the quality of relationship (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Abeele et al., 2016).

The problem of phubbing is increasing in workplaces. The term "phubbing," a modern smartphone-related behavior, has become prevalent with the growth of smartphone technology. Phubbing is a term that combines "phone" and "snubbing." It describes the behavior of using a phone in the presence of others while disregarding their need for attention (Haigh, 2015). Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas (2018) define phubbing as a behavior of neglecting social interaction by appearing preoccupied on their phone instead of actively listening to others, that can be interpreted as a form of snubbing. The term "phubber" refers to the individual who engages in phubbing (the one who commits the act), while "phubee" denotes the person who is being ignored or neglected during the interaction (the conversational partner) (Yasin, 2021).

Lately, there has been increasing attention focused on the connection between excessive phone usage and the level work engagement. For example, Chen & Casterella (2019) discovered that technology can disrupt the balance between work and personal life. Van Zoonen, et al. (2017) has shown that employee engagement is negatively affected by the use of social media due to work interruptions it causes. Similarly, Syrek et al. (2018) indicated that engaging in non-work-related social media activities during working hours was linked to reduced levels of work engagement. In a comprehensive study, Chu et al. (2020) stated that the impact of social media use on work engagement was inconclusive, with effects ranging from none to significant.

As the concept of phubbing is still relatively new, there are some important questions in the literature have yet to be addressed. Phubbing has only recently been researched as a significant social phenomenon, and there are only a few studies that conducted phubbing in the business settings (Yasin

et al., 2020). The majority of studies focusing on partner or social phubbing (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). As business involves frequent social interactions and the number of these interactions is increasing rapidly, it is important to investigate the actions that take place during these interactions (Kocak, 2021). Recent studies have highlighted the importance of the quantity and quality of social interactions in the workplace (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). As the quality of social interactions can have significant implications for work engagement, it is important to study whether phubbing can have negative effects on workplace interactions (Yasin, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive investigation for the impact of phubbing on negative employee outcomes, such as reduced work engagement. This study is a novel contribution to the field because no study has yet explored phubbing behavior on employees that directly affects their work engagement. Our findings raise important implications for academicians as well as practitioners, such as human resource (HR) managers.

METHOD

Study design

This study used quantitative research method with regression analysis to indicate the relative impact of phubbing behavior on employees' work engagement. All participants willingly participated in the study and provided informed consent before responding to the questionnaire, which measured their phubbing behavior and work engagement in the workplace. The respondent was also informed that there were no specific correct or incorrect criteria for their answers, and they were encouraged to provide honest responses for each item. This approach, called Reduced Evaluation Apprehension, is used as a procedural technique to prevent biases that can occur due to a common method (Kocak, et al., 2021). The research was conducted in Indonesia by web-based survey, with data collection taking place from April 25th to May 5th, 2023.

Participant

This study included a total of 221 participants who were employees from various industries in Indonesia, representing both the public and private sectors. The job sectors were categorized into four groups, namely Government Departments, State-Owned Enterprises, and Regional-Owned Enterprises. The majority of the participants were women, accounting for 60.18% of the sample. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 39 years old.

In order to qualify for inclusion in this study, participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, and employed for at least 6 months at either Private Sector Company, Government Departments, State-Owned Enterprises, or Regional-Owned Enterprises in Indonesia. Any participants who did not meet the criteria would be excluded from the analysis. The individuals in this research study were recruited using snowball sampling, a method of non-probability sampling. In this approach, the participants who fulfill the specific requirements of the study are chosen, then they are asked to recommend other potential participants from their social circle who also meet the criteria (Obilor, 2023).

Instruments

Phubbing. In this study, Generic Scale of Phubbing (Indonesian Version) by Isrofin (2020) is used to measure phubbing behavior on employees. The GSP consists of 15 elements that are evaluated using a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = "Never"; 5 = "Always"). These elements are divided into 4 categories, such as nomophobia, interpersonal conflict, self-isolation, and problem acknowledgment. To test the reliability of GSP, researcher computed The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, and the result was 0.917. Values above 0.90 considered as very reliable/excellent.

Work Engagement. To assess the level of employee work engagement, the researcher used Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Kristiana et al. (2018). The participants completed UWES-9 which assess their work engagement by answering 9 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (0 = Never; 6 = Everyday). UWES-9 consists three indicators, such as enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in the present sample was 0.915, which is considered very reliable/excellent.

Procedure

The participants were asked to fill out an online survey, which was shared across popular social networks in Indonesia, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, following a snowball sampling strategy. The link was distributed to participants, and then they were instructed to share it on their social networks and encourage others to participants in the study. The study's purpose, as well as guidelines for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality were explained to participants before they completed the online survey. Participants were assured that their responses would be used only for research purposes and would remain anonymous. After giving their informed consent, the participants confirmed their current employment in various sectors in Indonesia, including Private Sector Companies, Government Departments, State-Owned Enterprises, and Regional-Owned Enterprises. for at least 6 months, and were mobile phone users. The survey typically took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. All potential participants were included, and there were no instances of missing data since it was mandatory to answer all the questions before submitting the survey.

Data analysis

This study used a simple linear regression to analyze the data. Researcher used JASP 0.17 for MacOS Catalina.

RESULT

Participant's characteristics

This study involved individuals employed in both public and private sectors across various industries in Indonesia. Out of 221 participants, the largest participant segment was employed in Private Sector Company (n = 145, 65.61%), followed by Government Departments (n = 57, 25.79%), Stated-Owned Enterprises (n = 18, 8.14%), and Regional-Owned Enterprises (n = 1, 0.45%). Approximately, 60.18% were women (n = 133), and 39.81% were men (n = 88). The average age was 27 years (SD = 3.35 years). About 47.51% of the participants had a work experience of 2-4 years, while 19.91% having 1-2 and 4-5 years of experience. Moreover, 8.14% had been employed for 6-12 months, and the remaining 4.52% had acquired over 5 years of work experience.

Data analysis

Table 1.

Regression analysis of phubbing on work engagement

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r²</i>
Phubbing and Work Engagement	221	0.501	0.251

Table 2.*Analysis of variance of phubbing on work engagement*

<i>Model</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	4234.599	1	4234.599	73.521	< .001
Residual	12613.700	219	57.597		
Total	16848.299	220			

Table 3.*The coefficient table of the regression analysis*

<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Standardized</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
H0	(Intercept)	41.434	0.589		70.387	< .001
H1	(Intercept)	55.474	1.715		32.343	< .001
	Phubbing	-0.350	0.041	-0.501	-8.574	< .001

The aim of this study is to determine the impact of phubbing on employees' work engagement in workplace settings. Based on the results of the analysis in present study, researcher found that phubbing had a significant effect on work engagement with F coefficient of 73.521 and the probability value of < 0.001. The R Square value is 0.251, which if converted into a percentage form is 25.1%. This indicates that 25.1% of the changes in work engagement on employee is due to phubbing behavior in workplace, and the remaining 74.9% comes from other variables. The regression coefficient in this study is -0.501. It means that every 1% increase in the value of phubbing, the value of work engagement decreases by -0.501. The regression coefficient is negative, which means that phubbing in workplace negatively influences work engagement on employee. Specifically, the higher the tendency of employees to phubbing, the lower their work engagement. On the contrary, the lower the tendency of employees to phubbing, the higher their work engagement.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential impact of phubbing on employees' work engagement within workplace settings. This study found that phubbing had a significant effect on work engagement. Phubbing in workplace negatively impact work engagement on employee. 25.1% of the changes in work engagement on employee is due to phubbing behavior in workplace, and the remaining 74.9% comes from other variables. Specifically, the higher the tendency of employees to phubbing, the lower their work engagement. On the contrary, the lower the tendency of employees to phubbing, the higher their work engagement. Additionally, every 1% increase in the value of phubbing, the value of work engagement decreases by -0.501.

Although there is limited research on the relationship between phubbing and employees' work engagement, previous studies explained that there is a negative connection between the two variables (Tandon et al., 2022). A study by Roberts & David (2017) found that boss phubbing has an indirect and negative association with employee engagement. These studies supported the researcher's hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between phubbing and employee engagement. This hypothesis is based on the understanding that phubbing can capture employees' attention to the same extent as in-person interactions (Stathatos, 2020; Thulin et al., 2020). The primary concern of overusing smartphones (which is the sign of phubbing) is that it can lead to addiction, which can lower productivity and negatively impact work performance (Pitichat, 2013). Additionally, Roberts & David (2017) stated that phubbing would reduce employee's motivation to fully engage in workplace.

Kahn (1990; Roberts & David, 2017) stated that psychological availability could affect employee engagement. An employee's psychological availability occurs when they have the necessary physical, emotional, and intellectual resources available to fully engage in their job. If an employee feels

they lack adequate resources to perform their job, they may restructure their workload to prevent burnout, or employ maladaptive coping strategies, which would likely lead to reduced levels of employee engagement and job performance (Kahn, 1990; Roberts & David, 2017). One of the maladaptive coping strategies that might be done by employee is excessive smartphone use, which lead to phubbing behavior on workplaces. Without the distractions and energy depletion caused by a perceived lack of resources, employees can focus their energy and attention on achieving higher goals, resulting in increased engagement (Roberts & David, 2017).

Regular communication with co-workers is crucial for work engagement, which impact their performance and overall satisfaction as well. Involved workers experience a sense of attachment to their job (Kahn, 1990). Additionally, Braganza et al. (2021) suggest that individuals who are highly engaged in their work tend to feel a stronger sense of connection to their job duties. Work engagement also associated with a range of positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, good physical and mental health, organizational citizenship behavior, and high job performance levels. (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Additionally, other studies have found a positive association between work engagement and favorable outcomes such as positive mood at work (Weigl et al., 2010), job performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), and pro-social behavior (Griffin et al., 2010). Rich et al. (2010) proposed that engaged workers are more likely to experience affirmative emotional states, which contribute to their overall sense of well-being. Given the importance of work engagement among employees, factors that can hinder work engagement such as phubbing should be handled well by the company.

Phubbing, whether during meals or meetings, is a detrimental behavior that undermines any corporate culture that values respect for others. It is crucial for corporations to promote a culture that prioritizes mutual care and consideration (Roberts & David, 2017). To create such culture, it is important to ensure that each employees do not feel pressure to immediately respond to email and messages from higher up or colleagues, which may lead to sacrificing in-person interactions with subordinates in favor of immediate smartphone responses (Roberts & David, 2017). Organizations may find it necessary to provide their employees with training on the effects of phubbing on interpersonal relationships. Employees should be taught how to use their smartphones in a way that supports healthy coworker relationships. This means that both employees and supervisors should be trained on the importance of in-person interactions and made aware of how phubbing can negatively impact employees' work engagement. Moreover, HR could include good interpersonal relationships between employees as a standardized measure of successful employee performance (Roberts & David, 2017).

In accordance with Roberts & David (2017), if informal approaches, such as corporate culture, are ineffective in addressing the problems related to phubbing, companies could consider implementing formal "smartphone policies." These policies should outline clear rules regarding smartphone usage, access, and security, along with specific consequences for breaching those rules. By establishing defined boundaries and guidelines for smartphone use in the workplace, managers and employees can have a consistent understanding of when and where smartphones are appropriate to use. In creating strict policies, businesses may even go as far as creating "smartphone-free" workspaces where the use of cell phones is not permitted. Alternatively, they could designate "smartphone-safe" areas where employees can use their devices when necessary, such as to check on a sick family member. Additionally, companies may consider allowing "smartphone breaks," similar to designated smoking areas, to encourage healthier and more productive work environments, where phubbing is minimized (Roberts & David, 2017).

This study acknowledges several notable limitations that should be considered in future research. First, it is important to recognize that phubbing may influence not only work engagement but also other factors such as job performance, job satisfaction, and workplace creativity. Therefore, future

studies could benefit from incorporating additional control variables to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Second, it is important to mention that this study did not consider an employee's position and hierarcial level in the organization, which could contribute to the level of work engagement. Future research should explore these organizational factors to gain a better understanding of how phubbing can affect work engagement in the workplace. Exploring these factors may contribute to the advancement of research about phubbing and work engagement that provide stronger predictions. Despite the limitations, the findings of this study carry substantial significance to the phubbing and work engagement literature. This study provides a unique contribution as it is the first to examine the direct impact of phubbing behavior on employees' work engagement. Moreover, this study have significant implications for both academics and practitioners, including human resource (HR) managers.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study found a significant negative effect of phubbing on work engagement among employees in the workplace. Higher levels of phubbing were associated with lower work engagement, while lower tendencies of phubbing were linked to higher work engagement. The findings highlight the need for organizations to address and mitigate phubbing behavior to promote positive work engagement. Implementing strategies such as fostering a culture of respect, providing training on interpersonal interactions, and establishing smartphone policies can contribute to creating a healthier and more engaging work environment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares there is no potential conflict of interest. This research was not funded by any party and all data were taken based on the consent of the respondents

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