

## **Book review: *The Psychology of Phubbing* by Al-Saggaf, Yeslam, Springer, 2022, 89pp**

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### **Abstract**

This book takes us through the various relationships where phubbing occurs. Beyond providing a valuable and insightful window into the connections and networks between phubbing and society, Yeslam Al-Saggaf presents key themes and core concepts that readers must understand to make independent and non-bias interpretations of the phubbing phenomenon. He successfully draws a connection between phubbing and social theory.

**Keywords:** *Psychology of Phubbing, phubbed individuals, phubbing behaviour, phubbing and social theory,*

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In his book, Al-Saggaf reminds us that the rapid development of technology and the digital world is contributing to quickly changing social norms. In order for society to find solutions to issues that emerge due to new realities and new social norms, we need to interpret and understand how these changes have come about and what the impacts look like. Al-saggaf accomplishes this aim by looking at the phenomenon of 'phubbing' through the lens of two key theories, technological determinism and mediation theory.

Phubbing is a phenomenon that emerged at the same time as the massification of mobile phones, specifically smartphones at the end of the last century. Phubbing, as defined by Al-Saggaf, is the momentary shift between participation in face-to-face conversations and interaction with a smartphone, and inevitably moving between real and digital worlds. While this may not be new, Al-Saggaf contributes to both scholarly and social conversations by providing theoretical lenses that have not yet been considered by the existing literature on the phenomenon.

Al-Saggaf's book comprising of eight chapters takes us through the various relationships where phubbing occurs. Beyond providing a valuable and insightful window into the connections and networks between phubbing and society, Al-Saggaf's theorising provides researchers in this area an opportunity to move beyond data-driven research, towards more interpretation that provides a tool for handling the impacts of phubbing on society: "...summarising the findings of published research on phubbing and presenting these summaries in one place allow readers the opportunity to understand phubbing phenomenon better. The aim is to raise awareness of the serious consequences of phubbing behaviour." (p. 2).

Of the eight chapters, five chapters explicitly explores the effects of phubbing on the doer and the receiver, moving from family relationships to friendships; from human interactions to interactions with other living things, e.g., pets. Presenting both sides of the phenomenon, i.e., doer and receiver, the book chapters add to the scholarly field where most of the research has been focused on the impacts on the doer. By providing

a 180-degree position, the reader can weigh up the consequences of phubbing in their own community, thereafter, considering its impact on global contexts.

In the final three chapters, Al-Saggaf provides a space for in-depth analysis of psychological triggers and theoretical frameworks' discussion that is currently silent in the literature. Chapters six through to eight sees Al-Saggaf asking the readers and researchers to consider two key theories which could help interpret the data-driven literature, namely, technological determinism and Verbeek's mediation theory (see Verbeek, 2015. COVER STORY beyond interaction. *Interactions*, 22(3), 26–31).

Technological determinism views technology as being neutral, and the how, what, and why of using technology is solely at the discretion of the doer. Al-Saggaf provides examples based on this view such as the guns' debate globally, and the COVID-19 QR code usage in Australia. However, Al-Saggaf then provides an alternative lens to this phenomenon. He argues that on the surface technological determinism could be attributed to society's changing norms, but for the phenomenon of phubbing the theory of mediation may be better positioned to help analyse the impacts of phubbing. Mediation which is a theory introduced by Verbeek (2015) does not see technology as being neutral, but rather as one that facilitates our actions and therefore influences the way we perceive the world. As opposed to technological determinism, mediation proposes that humans' behaviour and therefore their choices are informed by their own perception of the world around them, whether real or digital. Therefore, the relationship and the way they participate in society is impacted by their use of the smartphone.

Another aspect that Al-Saggaf brings to light is the impact of phubbing on minority groups. While phubbing's impact has been observed in different levels of society, it is interesting to note that its impact on migrants, individuals with disabilities and minority groups are under-researched. With the rise of cyberbullying and self-image and mental health issues resulting from interacting with the digital world, this book comes at an opportune time. Al-Saggaf does not provide definitive answers, however

this book highlights areas where researchers have focused their energies and where important research needs to occur so that the impacts of phubbing can be understood at all levels of society and communities.

The structure of each chapter makes the discussion around phubbing not only relevant to the academic reader, but it also becomes accessible to a general reader who walks in the shoes of both doer and receiver. Each chapter is structured in a way that helps with readability. An ethnographic account is presented to illustrate the type of relationship the chapter will cover. The literature around this theme is then expounded on. Finally, each chapter ends with an analysis of the findings in the literature against the psychological theories behind triggers and behaviours of Phubbing.

While there may be some recognisable stories and themes mentioned, the introduction of mediation theory and how phubbing has impacted on social norms is an interesting read. Al-Saggaf metaphorically puts his finger on the concepts and ideas, defining them for consumption and reflection. He does this successfully and in a clear non-biased voice. An essential book for those who work in well-being and mental health industries, as well as those who research in digital technologies' impact on society.

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