

An Examination of Postgraduate Studies on Phubbing (Sociotelism) in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the studies on phubbing in Türkiye with certain criteria. In the study, 25 theses on phubbing, which were published in the CoHE National Thesis Center between 2019-2023 and open to access, were examined by the document analysis method. The SPSS 25 package program was used to analyse the data. As a result of the research, it was seen that phubbing research was also examined with the concepts of sociotelism and “tele-hiçleme”. It was determined that the first thesis was published in 2019 and the studies showed a great increase in 2023, with a sample group of at least 148 people and at most 1050 people, with university students at most, with teachers at least, and all of the studies were conducted with quantitative methods. One of the results obtained from the studies is that there is no qualitative thesis study on phubbing. Another conclusion reached in the study is that the experimental methods are not applied in phubbing studies. In line with the findings obtained from the studies, it was determined that there were no studies on phubbing at the primary and secondary school level, and few studies were conducted at the secondary education level. It was concluded that research can be conducted with activities in different age groups, with different research methods, in student, parent, teacher and adult sample groups.

Keywords: Phubbing, sociotelism, document analysis, graduate theses.

Introduction

The use of technology has increased rapidly in recent years. As of 2023, 5.16 billion people used the Internet worldwide. Corresponding to 64.4% of the global population. It has been observed that smartphones are more convenient to use than other technology products (Akbari et al., 2024). The number of unique mobile phone users globally reached 5.61 billion at the beginning of 2024. In addition, the number of users of social media applications, an indispensable element of smartphones, reached 4.76 billion worldwide by 2023 (wearesocial.com).

Türkiye is among the countries with high internet

usage. 87.1% of the Turkish population between the ages of 16 and 74 uses the internet (TÜİK, 2023). Türkiye ranks 14th globally in terms of the ratio of the number of social media users to the total population. Türkiye ranks 20th in the world with 6 hours and 57 minutes in terms of time spent online per day by country. The number of users of Instagram, the most widely used social media program in Türkiye, is 57 million and ranks 5th in the world (wearesocial.com).

The rapid development of technology and the fact that smartphones have become an integral part of our lives

have radically changed the way in which we interact socially. Because of this change, the term “phubbing” was coined. Phubbing, a mixture of the words “phone” and “sneering”, refers to the act of ignoring other people by focusing on one’s smartphone in a social environment and looking at and dealing with one’s smartphone during conversations with other people (Karadağ et al., 2015). Phubbing means that a person neglects the individuals around them by excessively focusing on their phone during face-to-face interactions (Roberts & David, 2016). This behaviour has attracted considerable attention in recent psychological research because of its negative effects on interpersonal relationships and individual mental health. Numerous studies have demonstrated a growing occurrence of phubbing among individuals. Garcia and Sinchi (2016) identified that 72% of participants had been subjected to phubbing, whereas Davey et al. (2018) reported a prevalence rate of 49%.

With the global rise in smartphone usage, gaining insights into the dynamics and consequences of phubbing are becoming increasingly critical. Phubbing a term that has emerged at a meeting of a team consisting of Macquarie Dictionary writers, poets, advertisers and dictionary writers who came together at the University of Sydney in 2012

(Karadağ et al., 2015; Uğur & Koç, 2015). Refers to the practice of ignoring those physically present in favour of engaging with a smartphone—typically for browsing social media platforms or utilizing other digital communication channels (Nazir & Pişkin, 2016). The multifunctionality of smartphones, which now encompass features traditionally associated with computers, has led to the conceptualization of phubbing as a multidimensional phenomenon, comprising dimensions such as mobile phone use, internet use, social media use, and gaming addiction (Karadağ et al., 2016). These dimensions are often interrelated and form a complex behavioural structure. Evidence suggests that excessive smartphone use can interfere with physical activity during leisure time and foster sedentary behaviour, particularly among habitual users. Individuals who engage in phubbing are more likely to participate in sedentary smartphone activities such as social media engagement (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), mobile gaming, app usage, and web browsing (Davey et al., 2018).

Phubbing comprises various factors. According to Karadağ et al. (2015), the phenomenon is driven by two primary factors: communication problems that impair the quality of face-to-face interactions during mobile phone use, and the perceived necessity of using a mobile phone in social contexts where direct interpersonal communication is absent.

Phubbing has negative effects. For example, in addition to the risk of turning into spiral phubbing behaviour, individuals who exhibit phubbing behaviour may also experience negative emotions (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). To protect their reputation, people who are subjected to phubbing want to reduce these negative emotions by spending time on the internet despite the possibility of similar behaviours to others, and also people who want to obtain information from their family, friends, and current events engage in phubbing behaviour (Çoban, 2024).

The reasons for phubbing behaviour are the desire to reduce loneliness and boredom, the desire to communicate with relatives online, and the desire to do more than one job at the same time, such as researching a topic quickly and making payments. In addition, when the emergence process of phubbing is examined, it is possible to discuss a process that has evolved from internet addiction to smartphone addiction and, in addition, social media addiction and game addiction (Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019; Davey et al., 2018; Karadağ et al., 2016).

According to Orhan (2023), the person who is subjected to phubbing may perceive the situation as a disrespectful

attitude and consider it rude for the person with whom they interact to focus on their phone. According to the Expectancy Violation Theory, individuals anticipate active participation from others during communication (Burgoon et al., 1989) and rely on mutual closeness and undivided attention in their relationships (White, 2008). Drawing from this theory, the existing literature views phubbing as a breach of relational expectations. Because people hold specific expectations for behaviour during communication, diverting attention to smartphones rather than engaging with the other person can lead to conflict between individuals in interaction (Al-Saggaf et al., 2018; Beukeboom & Pollmann, 2021; Bröning & Wartberg, 2022; David & Roberts, 2021; Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2015).

It is stated that these behaviours exhibited by the phubbing perpetrator have negative effects on interpersonal communication, satisfaction obtained from relationships, and subjective well-being (Roberts & David, 2016). The effects of phubbing on social relationships have become an important research topic in the fields of psychology, education, and social sciences in recent years (Karslı & Açık-Yavuz, 2024). In this context, understanding how phubbing shapes individuals' emotional and behavioural responses can contribute to the development of healthier social interaction strategies at both the individual and societal levels. The concept of phubbing was added to the Macquarie Dictionary in 2013 and is now used. Therefore, research on the concept of phubbing began after 2013 (Parmaksız, 2021). In Türkiye, postgraduate studies on phubbing began in 2019. Phubbing has become a growing research topic in Türkiye.

The concept of phubbing is named with the concept of "sociotelism" in some graduate studies in Türkiye (Altıkulaç, 2022; Alver, 2023; Atalay, 2023; Ballı, 2020; Erdem, 2023; Gökkaya, 2022; İlhan 2020; Karakoç, 2023; Karaman, 2023; Karaş, 2019; Kahraman, 2023; Kızıltan, 2023; Küpeli, 2023; Özbilir, 2023; Saatçı, 2021; Sözen, 2023; Şafak, 2022; Tecdelioğlu, 2021; Uyar, 2022; Vuslat-Erdem, 2023). In their study, Karadağ et al. (2015) translated the word Phubbing into Turkish literature as "Sosyotelism" and called people who exhibit Sosyotelism behaviour as "Sosyotelist" (phubber). The concept of phubbing was used only in Sevinç's (2021) master's study as "Tele-hiçleme". Tele-hiçleme behaviour can be defined as individuals preferring to take care of their phones to communicate with people in their environment, thus ignoring them (Sevinç, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

In this study, postgraduate studies on phubbing (sociotelism) prepared between 2019 and 2023 in the Higher Education Council (CoHE) National Thesis Centre

database were analysed using the document analysis method. This research aims to examine the years, types of postgraduate theses, institutes, departments, languages in which they were written, data collection tools, research models, number of participants and sample groups of the concept of phubbing in Türkiye

Method

Research Model

This study is designed using document analysis, a qualitative research methodology. Document analysis is defined as the analysis of written documents containing information about the facts and phenomena to be examined (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Furthermore, current study conducts an analysis of postgraduate theses on phubbing (sociotelism) in Türkiye with the aims of identifying prevailing trends within the field.

Data Sources of the Research

The population of this study comprised graduate theses on phubbing (sociotelism) published in the CoHE National Thesis Centre database. To ensure a sufficient and up-to-date sample, the study was restricted to 25 master's and doctoral theses on "Phubbing (Sociotelism)" published between 2019-2023.

The research data were accessed through the CoHE National Thesis Centre database. A systematic search was conducted by including the terms "phubbing" and "sociotelism" in their titles or abstracts. The relevant theses were subsequently reviewed, and the data were transferred into the SPSS 25 (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) software package for statistical analysis.

The ethical process in the study was as follows:

- The study data were obtained from the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center database. Ethics committee approval is not required.

Data Analysis

The graduate theses focusing on phubbing (sociotelism) from 2019 to 2023 were analysed according to the following research questions:

- How is the distribution of theses across years?
- How is the distribution according to the thesis types?
- How is the distribution according to the languages in which the theses were written?
- How is the distribution across different institutes?
- How is the distribution across academic disciplines?
- How is the distribution according to the data collection instruments?
- How is the distribution according to the research models employed?

- How is the distribution based on the number of participants?
- How is the distribution according to the sample groups?

The study aimed to provide answers to these research questions. In doing so, it sought to uncover trends and patterns in graduate theses published on phubbing (sociotelism) by examining the methodologies, scopes, and academic orientations reflected in the analysed studies.

Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research requires the involvement of experts with proficiency in both the research topic and qualitative methodology (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In line with this principle, the current study was reviewed by two academics with expertise in both the subject area and qualitative research methods. Based on their feedback, necessary revisions and improvements were made to enhance the rigour and credibility of the research.

Results

The findings obtained from the theses on Phubbing (sociotelism), accessed through the CoHE National Thesis Centre, are presented in terms of years, types of sources, languages in which they were written, the institutes where they were conducted, the academic departments, sample regions, research methodologies, educational levels applied and data collection instruments. These findings are illustrated using percentage and frequency tables.

The distribution of graduate theses related to the concept of Phubbing (sociotelism) by years is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of Graduate Theses by Years

Year	f	%
2019	1	4
2020	2	8
2021	3	12
2022	5	20
2023	14	56
Total	25	100

The percentage distribution and frequency values of the graduate theses accessed within the scope of this study, according to years, are presented in Table 1. Based on the data obtained, the year with the highest number of theses written was 2023, accounting for 56% of the total. This is followed by 2022 (20%), 2021 (12%), and 2020 (8%). The year 2019 had the fewest theses written on the topic, with only 4%. These findings suggest that the topic of Phubbing (sociotelism) has gained prominence in recent years and

has increasingly been selected as a research subject.

The findings related to the types of graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Distribution of Graduate Theses by Type

Types	f	%
Master Theses	21	84
Doctoral Dissertations	3	12
Expertise Theses	1	4
Total	25	100.0

Table 2 provides the frequency and percentage distributions of the types of graduate theses. According to these data, out of the 25 graduate theses written between 2019 and 2023 on sociotelism, 21 (84%) were master's theses, 3 (12%) were doctoral dissertations, and 1 (4%) was an expertise thesis. It is evident that the topic has been more frequently chosen for master's theses.

Table 3.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Languages in which They were Written

Languages	f	%
Turkish	24	96
English	1	4
Total	25	100.0

Table 3 shows the distribution of graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) written in Türkiye between 2019 and 2023 by language. According to this data, of the 25 graduate theses, 24 (96%) were written in Turkish, and only 1 (4%) was written in English. The majority of theses in this field were written in Turkish.

The findings related to the institutions where the graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) were conducted are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Institutes where They were Conducted

Institutes	f	%
Education Sciences	7	28
Social Sciences	4	16
Natural and Applied Sciences	1	4
Health Sciences	6	24
Postgraduate Education	4	16
Other	3	12
Total	25	100.0

Table 4 provides the distribution of the graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) written between 2019 and 2023 by

the institutes where they were conducted. According to the data, 7 theses were written in the Institute of Educational Sciences, accounting for 28% of the total. The Institute of Educational Sciences is followed by the Institute of Health Sciences with 6 theses (24%). In other institutes, the proportion is significantly lower. It was observed that researchers at the Institute of Educational Sciences more frequently chose to study this topic.

Table 5 provides the distribution of graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) written between 2019 and 2023 by the data collection tools used.

Table 5.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Data Collection Tools

Data Collection Tools	f	%
Quantitative		
Scale +form	23	92
Scale	1	4
Scale+survey	1	4
Total	25	100.0

The data indicate that the proportion of theses utilizing both scales and forms is 92%, while only 4% of the theses used scales alone. This suggests that the combined use of scales and forms is the most commonly preferred method in these studies. The ease of collecting personal information using these methods appears to be a key reason for their frequent use.

The findings regarding the distribution of graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) by academic departments are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Departments in which they were Conducted

Department	f	%
Education Sciences	10	40
Nursing	5	20
Business Administration	1	4
Computer Education and Instructional Technology	1	4
Industrial Engineering	1	4
Communication Design and Management	1	4
Public Health	1	4
Psychology	3	12
Paediatric Nursing	1	4
Sports Management and Recreation	1	4
Total	25	100.0

Table 6 shows the distribution of graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) written between 2019 and 2023 by academic departments. According to the data, the majority

of thesis related to phubbing (sociotelism) were written in the field of Educational Sciences, accounting for 46% (n=10) of the total. Other departments where theses concentrated include Nursing with 20% (n=5) and Psychology with 12% (n=3). As illustrated in both the table and figure, the percentages in other academic departments are significantly lower. This suggests that researchers in the Educational Sciences department tend to focus more on this research topic.

The findings on the research models used in the graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Research Method

Method	f	%
Relational Screening	15	60
Cross-Sectional Analytics	1	4
Scanning	2	8
Descriptive	2	8
Researcher Owned Model	1	4
Correlational and Descriptive	1	4
Correlational Research	1	4
Structural Equality	1	4
Descriptive, Cross-Sectional and Correlational	1	4
Total	25	100.0

When Table 7 is examined, it is observed that all 25 studies are quantitative (100%). Among the quantitative research models, the correlational survey model is the most commonly employed, composing 60% of the studies. Additionally, the survey model (8%) and descriptive model (8%) are also used. Other less frequently used models include cross-sectional analytical (4%), researcher-specific models (4%), correlational and descriptive (4%), correlational research (4%), structural equation modelling (4%), as well as combined descriptive, cross-sectional, and correlational models (4%). The findings on the number of participants in graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) are provided in Table 8.

Table 8.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to the Number of Participants

Number of Participants	f	%
100-200	2	8
201-300	1	4
301-400	9	36
401-500	3	12
501-600	2	8
601-700	2	8
701-800	2	8
801-900	1	4
901-1000	1	4
1001-1100	2	8

Total	25	100
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Table 8 reveals that the smallest sample size used in the studies was 148 participants, while the largest was 1050. The data show that 4% of the studies had sample sizes between 201-300, 801-900 and 901-1000, and 8% between 100-200, 12% between 401 and 500, 501-600, 601-700, 701-800 and 1001-1100, 36% between 301 and 400 participants.

The findings on the distribution of sample groups in graduate theses on Phubbing (sociotelism) are presented in Table 9. Table 9 shows that 8% of the studies were conducted with adolescents, 48% with young adults, and 44% with adults.

Table 9.

Distribution of Graduate Theses According to Sample Group

Sample Group	f	%
Adolescents	2	8
Young Adults	12	48
Adults	11	44
Total	25	100.0

Discussion

In this study, graduate theses on phubbing (sociotelism) registered in the YÖK National Thesis Center database in Turkey between 2019 and 2023 were examined. The first postgraduate study on phubbing (sociotelism) in Turkey was a master's thesis conducted in 2019. Until 2024, 25 postgraduate studies were conducted. In line with these findings, phubbing has become an increasingly popular research topic in Turkey in the last decade. It is seen that half of the graduate theses on phubbing (sociotelism) in Turkey were written in 2023. Interest in phubbing (sociotelism) is increasing in the world and in Turkey due to internet addiction and the increasing use of technology. Phubbing (sociotelism) has also been examined in research areas other than smartphone addiction. Partner phubbing (Özbilir, 2023; Sevinç, 2024; Tecdelioğlu, 2021), manager phubbing (Altıkulaç, 2022; Erdem, 2023), and parent phubbing (Gökkaya, 2022) are other phubbing research areas. Twenty-one graduate theses published on phubbing (sociotelism) are master's theses. It is expected that more studies on phubbing (sociotelism) will be published in doctoral and medical specialty fields in the coming years. Twenty-four of the 25 graduate theses were written in Turkish and one thesis was written in English. The postgraduate studies were mainly conducted at the Institute of Educational Sciences and the Institute of Health Sciences.

It is seen that phubbing (sociotelism) is intensively studied in the departments of Guidance and Psychological

Counselling. Phubbing (sociotelism) is intensively studied in the departments of Guidance and Psychological Counselling, Psychology and Nursing. Since phubbing (sociotelism) is a situation that also concerns the mental health of individuals, it can be said that studies are concentrated in these areas (Karslı & Açık-Yavuz, 2024). It is seen that all of the postgraduate theses were conducted using quantitative methods. Accordingly, it is seen that scales and forms were used together in almost all of the studies conducted with the relational survey model. Quantitative research methods provide convenience in reaching faster and more individuals (Garip, 2023). Quantitative studies can be attributed to this. The lack of qualitative and experimental studies is seen as a deficiency in this regard. Looking at the sample groups, it was determined that the minimum sample group was 148 people, the maximum sample group was 1050 people, the maximum sample group was university students, and the minimum sample group was teachers. In this study, how phubbing (sociotelism) was handled in master's and doctoral theses prepared between 2019 and 2023 in Turkey was examined through a qualitative document analysis method. Despite the increase in research, some gaps remain.

More longitudinal studies are needed to understand the long-term consequences of phubbing and to establish causal relationships. Further qualitative research may provide richer insights into the lived experiences and motivations behind phubbing behaviour. Studies involving more diverse and representative samples of the Turkish population are also needed to increase the generalizability of the findings. The growing academic interest in phubbing in Turkey reflects a global trend towards examining the social impact of mobile technology. The focus on adapting and validating the measurement scales to the Turkish context demonstrates a commitment to methodological rigour and cultural sensitivity within the national research community.

The findings revealed that phubbing (sociotelism) has started to attract the attention of academic circles, especially in the last five years, and is a popular concept addressed at the thesis level. The analysed theses generally focused on university students and adolescents, predominantly preferred quantitative methods, and frequently examined in relation to variables such as internet addiction, social media use, loneliness and psychological well-being.

It is noteworthy that the theoretical frameworks used in the theses are mostly shaped within the framework of technology addiction and social interaction theories, but in some studies, there is a conceptual disorganisation

regarding the definition and theoretical grounding of the concept of phubbing (sociotelism). This may be because the concept is relatively new and there is not yet a consensus on a common definition and theoretical structure in the literature. In addition, although most of the theses focus on the causes and consequences of phubbing (sociotelism) behaviour, it is seen that intervention programs for the prevention of this behaviour have not been sufficiently developed and limited number of studies have been conducted in this field. These findings indicate that academic interest in phubbing (sociotelism) is increasing, but there is room for improvement in terms of methodological diversity, theoretical depth and intervention. As a matter of fact, when compared to the literature abroad, it is understood that although the number of thesis studies in Turkey has increased, they still have a limited scope and, especially, qualitative research remains in the minority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a result of this research, it was determined that the phenomenon of phubbing (sociotelism) in postgraduate theses conducted between 2019 and 2023 in Turkey was generally examined in the context of university students and adolescents, mostly with quantitative methods. In the theses, relationships with variables such as social media use, loneliness, subjective well-being, and digital addiction were generally investigated; however, it was observed that a standardisation in the theoretical framework has not yet emerged. In addition, the scarcity of intervention-based studies aimed at preventing phubbing (sociotelism) or coping with this behaviour is a striking finding.

In line with the findings obtained from the studies, it was determined that there were no studies on phubbing in primary and secondary schools, and only a few studies were conducted in high school education. It was concluded that the research could be conducted using different research methods, student, parent, teacher and adult sample groups and activities in different age groups. In the light of these results, it can be asserted that academic research on phubbing (sociotelism) should place greater emphasis on strengthening its theoretical foundations, include various age groups, and incorporate detailed analyses supported by qualitative methods. In addition, psychoeducational programs, intervention studies and longitudinal studies to be developed in the future will make important contributions to the literature.

A better understanding of the effects of phubbing at the individual and societal level will allow for increased awareness and the development of effective solutions, especially in the fields of psychological counselling,

education, and social work. Phubbing is believed to be a construct that can be observed throughout society, including adolescents, parents, managers, and partners. Therefore, it is useful to conduct research on phubbing using different methods and age groups.

While quantitative studies using standardised scales dominate the current landscape, it is known that more diverse methodologies, larger participant samples and longitudinal designs are needed to better understand this complex phenomenon in the Turkish context. As smartphone use continues to proliferate in Turkey, the findings from these graduate studies provide valuable insights for individuals, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers seeking to address the potential negative effects of phubbing on social interactions and overall well-being.

As a result, this study comprehensively examined the postgraduate theses on phubbing (sociotellism) between 2019 and 2023 according to predetermined criteria and reached many findings. It can be asserted that this study can serve as a guide for researchers working on this topic.

Ethics Committee Approval: The study data were obtained from the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) National Thesis Center database. Ethics committee approval is not required.

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