

# A Public Service Advertisement Response to Parental Phubbing: A Gramscian Hegemony and Good Eye Photography Approach

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| ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | KEYWORDS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <p>Parental phubbing — a parent’s neglect of direct interaction with a child caused by absorption in a smartphone — has become a form of child neglect that has grown alongside the widening penetration of mobile devices over the past decade. A substantial psychological literature now documents its developmental consequences, yet the visual strategies through which public awareness campaigns represent and contest it remain largely unexamined. This article examines, visually and ideologically, how a photography-based public service campaign addresses parental phubbing. The corpus is the public awareness material of the “Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me” campaign initiated by the Langley Infant Mental Health Collaborative in British Columbia, Canada, examined together with an earlier Indonesian campaign on child neglect arising from transferred caregiving. The design is descriptive qualitative: content, colour, and spatial organisation are analysed within Gillian Rose’s good eye framework, the result is read ideologically through Antonio Gramsci’s distinction between common sense and good sense, and the two campaigns are then compared. The analysis finds that documentary photography builds a realist impression critiquing the habit through the contrast between physical closeness and attentional distance, and that parental authority is eroded here not by an identifiable adversary but by a diffusely naturalised habit that a non-judgmental campaign works to make visible. The article contributes a visual-communication account of a phenomenon studied so far mainly in psychology, and specifies the evidentiary and reflexive limits within which such an account can be made.</p> | <p>child neglect<br/>good eye photography<br/>Gramscian hegemony<br/>phubbing<br/>public service advertising</p> <div></div> <p>This is an open access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/">CC BY-SA 4.0</a> license.</p> |

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## INTRODUCTION

Child neglect is a form of emotional maltreatment that, according to Brittain (2006), may take the form of rejecting, ignoring, terrorizing, isolating, or corrupting behaviour by a parent or caregiver towards a child. Prior research on the design of public service advertisements addressing child neglect has examined the transfer of caregiving responsibility to a babysitter as a cause of weakened emotional bonds between mother and child (Taju, 2020). Alongside the rapid penetration of mobile devices and social media over the past decade, however, a new form of child neglect has emerged, caused by parents' own digital distraction and known as phubbing, a contraction of phone and snubbing.

Phubbing is defined as the behaviour of ignoring direct interaction with an interlocutor because of absorption in smartphone use (Karadağ et al., as cited in Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). When this behaviour is directed by a parent towards a child it is termed parental phubbing, which, according to Hong et al. (as cited in Amelia et al., 2019), affects children's self-esteem, produces feelings of being undervalued and ignored, and disrupts family social interaction. Studies in Indonesia confirm similar symptoms. Sirupang et al. (2020) found that phubbing reduces family harmony, Handayani and Husnita (2021) found that it contributes to reduced intensity of family communication, and Aditia (2021) reads the phenomenon more broadly as a degradation of social relations produced by social media. These symptoms became more pronounced during the pandemic, when families spent more time together yet paradoxically increased their individual device use.

Parental phubbing presents a visual communication challenge distinct from the earlier problem of neglect caused by caregiving transfer. In the babysitter case the source of emotional distance is external, a third party replacing the mother's role, whereas in phubbing the source is internal and subtler: the parent is physically present in the same space as the child, yet attention and emotional engagement are diverted by a device. This subtle, largely unrecognised quality of neglect demands a visual strategy capable of exposing sharply the contrast between physical closeness and emotional distance, without slipping into a judgmental tone that could provoke audience resistance.

One public communication initiative that addresses this issue consistently is the "Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me" campaign (#mywellbeingstartswithyou), launched by the Langley Infant Mental Health Collaborative in British Columbia, Canada, which uses documentary photography to depict a parent holding a device even while interacting closely with a child, for instance during breastfeeding. This approach differs from the graphic illustration commonly used in similar campaigns about the dangers of devices for children, and offers a realist impression that confronts audiences directly with an everyday situation they recognise.

The scale and clinical significance of parental phubbing has been documented with increasing rigour in recent international research, lending further weight to the case for a dedicated visual communication response. McDaniel and Radesky (2018), studying 170 American families, coined the term *technofence* to describe how everyday technology-based interruptions in parent–child interaction predict greater externalising and internalising behaviour problems in children. Kildare and Middlemiss (2017) found, in a review of the literature, that parental mobile device use correlates consistently with reduced verbal and nonverbal engagement during parent–child interaction. Kushlev and Dunn (2019) showed experimentally that smartphone use distracts parents from cultivating feelings of connection even during time dedicated to their children, while the systematic meta-analytic review by Arenz and Schnauber-Stockmann (2024) shows that the personal and situational predictors of phubbing

recur consistently across a large body of studies and across cultural contexts. Liu et al. (2024) extend this line of research to adolescents, finding that parental phubbing predicts problematic internet use through reduced quality of parent–child communication. Al-Saggaf (2024) further shows that the harm is not unidirectional: children’s own phubbing of parents also measurably affects parents’ psychological wellbeing, suggesting a reciprocal erosion of attention within the family unit rather than a one-way parental failing.

Research on the visual representation of caregiving and of parent–child relationships has developed along a separate track. Aji and Taju (2022) examined visual representation and collective memory in photographs by Hasan Sakri Ghozali, finding that photographic material can build social power and animate reality both synchronically and diachronically when connected to specific events and social facts. Zataadini and Yudha Sasongko (2022) examined the design of audiovisual content as a learning medium, affirming the importance of alignment between visual approach and the characteristics of the target audience. Sathotho (2023), although working in cultural performance studies, affirmed the relevance of an ecofeminist perspective in examining representations of caregiving and domestic roles in Indonesian culture. At a more general theoretical level, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) established that photographic and graphic composition operates as a structured visual grammar capable of encoding social relations of attention and power, a claim consistent with Barthes’s (1977) earlier observation that photographic naturalness is itself a connoted, ideologically loaded effect rather than a neutral recording of reality. Both perspectives support treating a documentary photograph as a legitimate ideological object of study rather than a transparent window onto an unmediated event.

On the hegemony side of the literature, the theoretical vocabulary for reading media as a site of ideological consent-building is well established but has rarely been brought into contact with the phubbing literature reviewed above. Hall (1980) and Fairclough (1992) each demonstrate, from within media and discourse studies respectively, how everyday texts encode and naturalise dominant assumptions without requiring an identifiable coercive actor. Femia (1981) and Crehan (2016) provide the standard historical and anthropological accounts of Gramscian hegemony as operating through culture and common sense rather than force, and Crehan in particular shows that Gramsci’s distinction between common sense and good sense remains analytically productive well beyond the historical setting in which it was formulated.

Taken together, these two bodies of work leave a specific deficiency in knowledge. The empirical literature measures the psychological and behavioural harms of parental phubbing but does not examine how those harms are represented, and contested, in public communication; the visual and ideological literature supplies instruments for reading such representations but has not been applied to a campaign addressing digitally mediated parental attention. The gap, in other words, lies between a well-developed account of the harm and an undeveloped account of its visual contestation. This article is the first to analyse a documentary-photography public service campaign on parental phubbing through a combined Gramscian and good eye framework, and the first to compare that campaign systematically with a campaign addressing a structurally different source of child neglect.

This study therefore aims to analyse the visual elements of the photography in the “Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me” campaign material within Gillian Rose’s good eye framework; to analyse the ideological content of the campaign through Gramsci’s theory of hegemony as it bears on parental authority and role; and to compare this campaign’s visual strategy with that of the Child Neglect Reduction public service advertisement (Taju, 2020) in order to identify similarities and differences in visual communication approach across two forms of child neglect with different sources.

## Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary frameworks. The first is Brittain's (2006) theory of child neglect, which classifies five forms of emotional maltreatment of children: rejecting, ignoring, terrorizing, isolating, and corrupting. Parental phubbing is understood here as a contemporary manifestation of the ignoring form, a condition in which a parent is physically present with a child but not fully present emotionally or attentionally. Brittain's framework is clinical and individualising in character: it is designed to classify a caregiver's behaviour, not to explain why that behaviour persists at a social scale. This study treats the typology strictly as a naming device for the phenomenon under analysis, turning to Gramsci for an explanation of the phenomenon's persistence and invisibility.

The second framework is Gramsci's (1999) theory of hegemony, which views domination as achieved through consensual intellectual and moral leadership, in which the hegemonised group agrees to certain ideological values without coercion. A precise reading distinguishes further between *senso comune* (common sense), the fragmentary, taken-for-granted, and often internally inconsistent set of assumptions through which a group experiences the world as simply given, and *buon senso* (good sense), the more critical and coherent understanding that can be cultivated to contest that taken-for-granted view (Crehan, 2016; Femia, 1981). Applied here, the naturalisation of parental phubbing as an ordinary, unremarkable habit is read as an instance of *senso comune*, while a campaign such as "Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me" can be understood as an attempt to cultivate *buon senso*, a more reflective awareness of the costs of that habit, without resort to blame or coercion.

It is necessary to specify the register at which hegemony is claimed to operate. It is not proposed that a personified actor, whether a corporation, a device manufacturer, or the state, deliberately imposes phubbing as an ideology in the manner of a classical propagandist. Rather, following Hall (1980) and Fairclough (1992), hegemony here operates diffusely, through the routine design and social integration of mobile technology and through everyday parenting culture, such that no single identifiable agent need intend the outcome for the outcome to be ideologically consequential. In the context of campaigns about child-rearing, the framework is used to examine how a visual campaign works to re-awaken parental authority and responsibility as shapers of the next generation, an authority quietly eroded not by an intending adversary but by a diffusely naturalised habit.

The third framework is the good eye approach set out by Rose (2001), which divides compositional analysis into three aspects: content, the main message intended to be conveyed; colour, the elements of hue, saturation, and value used for emphasis; and spatial organisation, the placement of visual elements and the focaliser that directs the gaze towards a particular idea. This study situates that framework within the broader tradition of social semiotic visual analysis. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) demonstrate that compositional choices such as framing, salience, and gaze direction function as a systematic visual grammar for encoding social relations, while Barthes (1977) shows that the apparent naturalness of a photograph is itself a rhetorical and ideological effect. Read together, these sources justify treating the good eye framework not as a descriptive checklist but as an instrument capable of surfacing ideological content, which is what allows the good eye analysis below to connect directly to the Gramscian analysis rather than standing beside it. Unlike its use in creative-practice research (Taju, 2020), where it served as a design guide, the framework is applied here as a critical analytical instrument for an existing photographic work.

## Scope and Significance of the Study

This study is a visual and textual analysis of material from the "Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me" campaign, rather than a creative-practice study as in prior research (Taju, 2020). The visual material analysed belongs to the campaign organiser, was documented through

media reporting (CBC News, 2018), and is examined solely for academic purposes under the principle of fair dealing for scholarly criticism and comment; it is not claimed as the authors' own creative work. The study limits itself to visual representation and ideological content, without audience reception data. Conclusions about communicative effectiveness therefore rest on textual and visual analysis within the frameworks applied, not on measurement of impact on audience behaviour.

Two further scope conditions qualify every visual claim made below and are stated here rather than left to the closing pages. First, because the original photograph is not reproduced in this manuscript, every observation about colour, framing, and gaze direction rests on the authors' interpretation of the image as encountered through news reporting, rather than on inspection of a high-resolution original file. Second, the comparison campaign, the Child Neglect Reduction public service advertisement (Taju, 2020), is a creative work by one of this manuscript's own authors, which creates an asymmetry in evidentiary access: the study can draw on privileged, self-reported creative intent for one comparison object but only external inference for the other. How that asymmetry is handled analytically is set out in the Method and revisited in the Result and Discussion.

The significance of the study lies in bridging phubbing research, long dominated by psychology and interpersonal communication, with visual communication design studies that examine representation strategy as a medium of public awareness. Its academic contribution is to extend Gramscian hegemony theory and the good eye framework to a contemporary form of child neglect rarely examined from a design perspective. Its practical contribution is a reference for designers of awareness campaigns on parental phubbing, on documentary photography strategies for exposing the contrast between physical closeness and emotional distance without a judgmental tone.

## METHOD

### Research Design and Approach

The study uses a descriptive qualitative design with a visual and textual analysis technique (Moleong, 2007; Sugiyono, 2019), a design suited to tracing meaning and ideological content in publicly available visual and textual data. Two theoretical frameworks are brought to bear at defined points in the analysis. Rose's (2001) good eye framework is applied first, to the compositional description of the photographic material; Gramsci's (1999) theory of hegemony, in the *senso comune* and *buon senso* reading developed by Femia (1981) and Crehan (2016), is applied second, to the interpretation of what that composition does ideologically. Brittain's (2006) typology is used only to name the form of neglect at issue, and is not carried into the ideological stage of the analysis.

### Corpus and Comparison Object

The primary object of analysis is the photographic material of the "Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me" campaign as documented through news reporting (CBC News, 2018), depicting a mother breastfeeding her baby while holding a smartphone, her eyes directed at the screen rather than at the baby's face. The corpus consists of that single campaign image together with the accompanying campaign and news text. It was selected purposively on three criteria: the campaign uses documentary photography rather than graphic illustration, which makes the good eye framework applicable; it foregrounds parental phubbing explicitly as its central theme; and it carries clear public documentation and campaign context, which permits adequate contextual and ideological analysis. Campaign material using illustration, or addressing screen time without reference to parental attention, was excluded.

The comparison object is the Child Neglect Reduction public service advertisement (Taju, 2020), a black-and-white photographic poster addressing the transfer of caregiving to a

babysitter, selected because it addresses the same phenomenon of child neglect through a structurally different source and was analysed with the same theoretical instruments, which allows the frameworks themselves to be tested across objects. Both objects are held in the public domain of their respective publications and remain open to independent inspection.

### Data Collection

Data were collected by documentation. The campaign's photographic material was traced together with its news context, yielding the image as reproduced in reporting, the campaign slogan and hashtag, and the organiser's stated purpose. A literature review was conducted in parallel, covering academic sources on the phubbing phenomenon, on public communication campaign design, and on the theories used as the analytical framework; searches combined the terms phubbing, parental phubbing, technofence, public service advertisement, and hegemony across international and Indonesian databases. Reported prevalence figures for device use during caregiving were extracted from that literature as contextual evidence of scale, not as primary data on the campaign itself.

### Data Validation and Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages. In the first, the image was described under each of Rose's (2001) three good eye categories in turn: content was recorded as the principal depicted action and the relation between the figures; colour was recorded through three checkable cues, namely the range of skin tones, the presence or absence of shadow and highlight detail, and the apparent white balance relative to ordinary indoor ambient light; and spatial organisation was recorded by plotting the gaze-line between the mother's eyes and the device and the position of the child relative to that line. These descriptions were then written up as compositional categories rather than as impressions.

In the second stage, each compositional category was read against the Gramscian vocabulary: a compositional feature was coded as an instance of *senso comune* where it depicted the habit as unremarkable, and as an attempt at *buon senso* where it isolated or estranged the habit so that it became available for evaluation. In the third stage, the same two sets of categories were applied to the comparison object, and the resulting pairs were tabulated so that similarities and differences in strategy could be read off directly; five of those dimensions were additionally rendered on an interpretive scale for summary display.

Credibility was established by source triangulation, comparing the researchers' visual interpretation against the textual context of news reporting on the campaign's purpose and background, so that interpretation does not rest on subjective visual reading alone. A methodological safeguard specific to the comparative stage should be recorded here. Because one author of this study created the comparison object, the comparison applies a consistent evidentiary rule across both objects: claims about visual composition are drawn from direct observation of each object's visual material under the same good eye criteria, while claims about creative intent that rely on the creator's own account are labelled explicitly as self-reported rather than treated as independently verified. Comparative claims that could plausibly favour the 2020 campaign are phrased as descriptive differences in strategy rather than as evaluative rankings of quality.

### Research Ethics and Positionality

The study analyses published campaign material and secondary literature only. No human participants were recruited, no interviews were conducted, and no identifying data were collected, so no institutional ethical approval was required; the individuals depicted in the campaign photograph consented to its publication through the campaign organiser, and the image is discussed here, but not reproduced, under fair dealing for criticism and review. The authors' positionality is declared directly: the first author is the creator of the comparison

object analysed in this article and therefore occupies a dual role as both analyst and practitioner. That relationship is disclosed in the tables below, governed by the evidentiary rule stated above, and revisited as a limitation in the Result and Discussion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Study as a Reflective Continuation of Prior Research

Before the detailed analysis, it is worth explaining how this study positions itself in relation to the earlier creative-practice study on the Child Neglect Reduction public service advertisement (Taju, 2020). That study focused on the design of a photographic poster addressing the transfer of caregiving to a babysitter, the most salient form of child neglect at the time the research was conducted. Since then the technology landscape and patterns of family interaction have shifted, particularly through the accelerated adoption of devices and social media following the Covid-19 pandemic, giving rise to a subtler but equally consequential form of neglect.

The present study is not intended to repeat or replace the earlier one, but to extend the scope of child neglect analysis from a visual communication design perspective to a more contemporary form of neglect, while testing how far the same theoretical frameworks can be applied consistently to a different object. This cross-object approach permits the identification of both general and context-specific patterns in the visual strategy of child neglect awareness campaigns, a methodological contribution that a single-object study cannot make.

### Profile of the Two Objects of Study

Table 1 sets out the profile of the campaign examined here alongside that of the comparison object, establishing the terms on which the two are compared in the subsections that follow.

**Table 1.** Comparative profile of the two objects of study

| Aspect             | Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me (2018)                            | Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020)     |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Initiator          | Langley Infant Mental Health Collaborative, British Columbia, Canada | Fransisca Sherly Taju (independent creative work)      |
| Medium             | Documentary photography, public health campaign material             | Black-and-white photographic poster                    |
| Source of neglect  | Digital distraction (parental phubbing)                              | Transfer of caregiving to a babysitter                 |
| Target audience    | Parents and caregivers of young children in general                  | Urban, middle- to upper-class young mothers            |
| Evidentiary access | External inference from published material only                      | Self-reported creative intent available to the authors |

Note. Compiled by the authors from campaign documentation (CBC News, 2018) and from Taju (2020).

### Visual Content Analysis

Figure 1 sets out the three good eye categories through which the photographic material is described below.

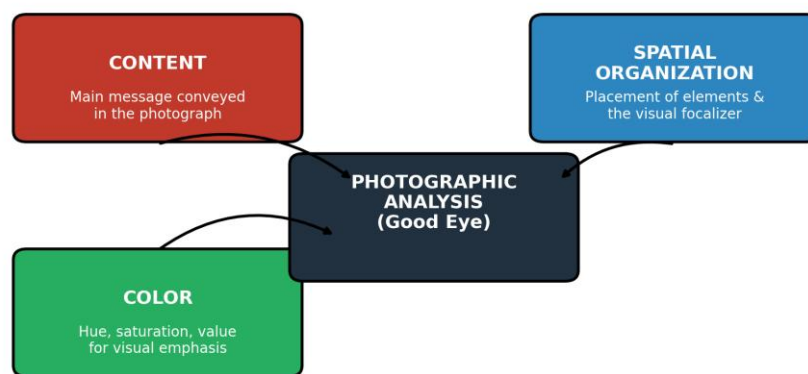


Figure 1. Good eye photographic composition analysis framework, adapted to trace the elements of content, colour, and spatial organisation in the object of study.

Diagram by the authors, 2024, after Rose (2001).

The content element in the “Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me” photograph is a mother breastfeeding her baby while her other hand holds a smartphone, her eyes directed at the screen rather than at her baby’s face. This content confronts audiences with a familiar everyday situation rarely recognised as a form of neglect. It differs from the content of the Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020), which depicted the moment of a child being handed from mother to babysitter, a more explicit and readily identifiable representation of transferred caregiving responsibility.

The difference in the level of explicitness reflects a difference in the character of the two forms of neglect. Transferring caregiving to a babysitter is a decision a parent can consciously identify, so its representation can show the moment of transition in responsibility directly. Parental phubbing is an unrecognised habit, so its representation must capture a subtle but sharp contrast, physical closeness through breastfeeding set against attentional distance towards the screen, within a single frame. This finding qualifies the assumption, implicit in much campaign practice, that a more explicit depiction is always the more persuasive one: where the behaviour is already recognised as a decision, explicitness works; where it is not recognised at all, the work of the image is first to make it visible.

### *Gender representation as an element of content*

In both campaigns examined, the figure represented as the actor in need of awareness is the mother rather than the father or a male caregiver. This tendency reflects a broader social construction associating caregiving predominantly with the maternal role, a construction that a number of gender studies regard as a form of hegemony in itself, placing the responsibility for care disproportionately on women. It can also be read pragmatically as a reflection of caregiving demographics in each cultural context, though it risks perpetuating the assumption that care is primarily the mother’s responsibility.

This observation is not an external comment on casting; it belongs inside the content analysis. Content, in Rose’s (2001) sense, is the main message a photograph conveys, and the choice of a mother rather than a father as the sole represented parent is part of that message: it tacitly frames phubbing-driven neglect as a specifically maternal failing to be corrected, even though the empirical literature on parental technoference does not restrict the phenomenon to mothers and indeed reports paternal technology use as an equally strong predictor of interference (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). Read this way, the campaign’s content performs two kinds of ideological work at once: it critiques device-driven inattention while implicitly reinforcing a hegemonic assumption about whose attention is the one that counts. Future campaigns could

be enriched by representing fathers as subjects who also need to be made aware of the effects of phubbing.

### **Colour and Spatial Organisation**

In terms of colour, the documentary photography in this campaign uses a natural palette without heavy digital manipulation, producing an authentic, unstaged impression that reinforces the photograph's function as a representation of a real situation rather than a hypothetical illustration. Three specific cues ground that reading and make it checkable rather than impressionistic: skin tones fall within an ordinary, unexaggerated range rather than being pushed towards a stylised or artificially warmed grade; a visible dynamic range preserves both shadow and highlight detail rather than crushing or blowing them out in the manner typical of high-contrast dramatic grading; and the white balance is consistent with ordinary indoor ambient light rather than carrying the deliberately cooled or warmed cast commonly used to signal mood in advertising photography. Together these cues distinguish an editorially restrained colour treatment from a heavily art-directed one, subject to the evidentiary limit noted above, namely that the reading is based on the image as reproduced in news media rather than on an unprocessed source file.

This approach contrasts with the black-and-white concept chosen for the Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020), which, according to its creator, was chosen deliberately to create a dramatic impression and to emphasise visual value more strongly. The two claims rest on different evidentiary footing, and the difference is flagged rather than smoothed over: the black-and-white rationale is a self-reported statement of intent by its creator, one of the present authors, whereas the natural-colour reading of the phubbing campaign is this study's own inference from the visual material, with no equivalent first-person confirmation available from its photographer. On the visual evidence available, both treatments nonetheless appear suited to their respective contexts: natural colour emphasises the authenticity of an everyday phubbing situation without excessive dramatisation, while black and white emphasises the emotional weight of a more deliberate caregiving handover.

In terms of spatial organisation, Figure 2 presents a diagrammatic reconstruction of the photograph's composition, illustrating the specific cue on which the following analysis rests. The mother's line of sight is angled directly towards the smartphone screen, forming a short, direct gaze-line, while the child's head occupies a position below and to the side of that line, placing the child in the periphery of the frame's implied focal geometry despite being physically closest to the mother's body.

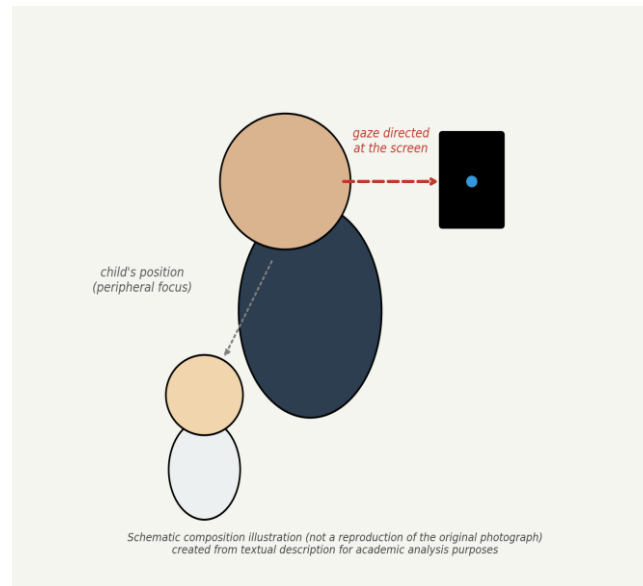


Figure 2. Schematic illustration of spatial organisation, showing the angled gaze-line from the mother's eyes to the smartphone screen and the child's peripheral position relative to that line.

Diagram by the authors, 2024. A diagrammatic reconstruction based on textual description, not a reproduction of the original photograph.

This placement functions as an effective visual critique: the compositional structure literally shows how visual attention, and by extension the mother's attention, is directed towards the device rather than towards the child in her arms. The arrangement works performatively rather than merely descriptively, meaning here, in a plain visual-analytic sense rather than the technical sense associated with speech-act theory, that the composition itself enacts the imbalance of attention it critiques rather than illustrating a caption that states the imbalance in words. This is precisely the capacity that Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) attribute to compositional salience, and it is what allows a single still image to carry an argument about attention without a verbal claim.

### Reflexivity and the Comparison Object

Before turning to the ideological analysis it is necessary to address directly a concern inherent in the study's design: the comparison object was created by one of this manuscript's own authors. This is disclosed in Table 1 and in the Method, but disclosure alone does not resolve the interpretive risk it introduces. Two specific risks are worth naming. The first is self-favourable calibration: an author assessing their own prior creative work risks, even unintentionally, reading its choices more charitably than an outside analyst would. The second is evidentiary asymmetry: the authors have privileged first-person access to the 2020 campaign's creative rationale, reflected in phrases such as according to its creator used above, that is simply unavailable for the externally authored phubbing campaign, whose creative team was not interviewed for this study.

The study manages, rather than eliminates, these risks in three ways. Wherever a claim can be grounded in directly observable visual evidence rather than in reported intent, the same observational criteria are applied to both objects, and self-reported intent is treated as supplementary context rather than as evidence on a par with visual observation. Comparative claims that could plausibly favour the 2020 campaign are phrased as descriptive differences in strategy rather than as evaluative rankings of quality. And the limitation is stated openly here and revisited below, where independent, non-author replication of the comparison is recommended. Readers should weigh the comparative findings that follow with this asymmetry in mind.

### Gramscian Hegemony: Parental Authority Quietly Eroded

Figure 3 diagrams the conceptual sequence through which, this study argues, the phubbing habit becomes ideologically invisible, moving from an ordinary behavioural habit to a fully naturalised assumption no longer available for critical reflection.

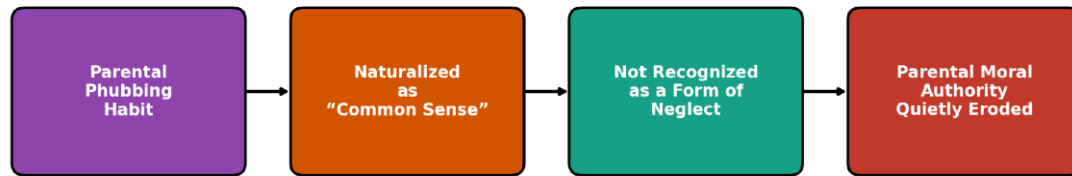


Figure 3. Conceptual flow of Gramscian hegemony in the parental phubbing phenomenon, showing how the habit is naturalised to the point of no longer being recognised as a form of neglect.

Diagram by the authors, 2024.

Within Gramsci's (1999) framework, parental authority is ideally built through intellectual and moral leadership consented to by the child rather than through coercion. The phenomenon represented in this campaign's photography discloses how such authority can be eroded not through open conflict but through a subtle, unrecognised absence: the mother in the photograph displays no explicit rejecting or hostile attitude towards her child, yet her emotionally diverted presence gradually erodes the quality of interaction on which that moral-leadership authority rests.

Applying the distinction introduced above, the first three stages in Figure 3, habit, naturalisation, and non-recognition, together describe the operation of *senso comune*: a fragmentary, unexamined common sense in which checking a device while caring for a child feels like an ordinary fact of contemporary life rather than a decision with a cost. The campaign's photographic intervention can then be read as an attempt to convert that *senso comune* into *buon senso*, a more coherent and critical awareness, by visually isolating and dramatising a single instance of the habit so that it can be seen and evaluated rather than merely lived through unreflectively (Crehan, 2016).

It is important to specify precisely what or who occupies the hegemonic position in this account, since the term hegemony can otherwise be used loosely as a synonym for any structural disadvantage. This study does not claim that a smartphone manufacturer, a social media platform, or any other identifiable institutional actor deliberately cultivates parental phubbing as an ideology in the way a classical propagandist might cultivate consent to a political programme. Rather, following Hall's (1980) and Fairclough's (1992) accounts of diffuse ideological reproduction, the hegemonic effect here is emergent: it arises from the routine social and technological integration of mobile devices into daily life, reinforced by genuine external demands on parents' attention, from work communications to caregiving logistics and social contact, such that no single actor need intend the erosion of parental attentiveness for that erosion to become naturalised and resistant to critique. The photograph's critical force lies precisely in interrupting that naturalisation by rendering one instance of it visible and nameable.

This pattern differs from the hegemonic mechanism analysed in the Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020), which critiqued a more structured transfer of caregiving authority to a third party, an arrangement with an identifiable social role and a consciously made parental decision behind it. In the phubbing case the hegemonic challenge is more complex for exactly the reason specified above: the third party that captures attention is not a person with a clear social role but a technological device so thoroughly integrated into daily life that

its presence is no longer perceived as an intrusion by its own users. The campaign must therefore work harder to make audiences recognise what Gramsci would describe as a naturalised common sense, the assumption that multitasking between child-rearing and device use is normal and unproblematic, precisely because, unlike a babysitter handover, no single conscious decision point exists at which a parent could readily notice a trade-off being made.

### Non-Judgmental Communication Strategy and the AIDCA Model

An important feature distinguishing the “Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me” campaign from a judgmental approach is its explicit emphasis on a non-judgmental tone, affirming that the initiative is not about blaming parents but about acknowledging the real pressures contemporary parents face in balancing work, home life, and a constant stream of digital notifications. This design choice is consistent with the broader public health communication literature. Atkin and Rice (2013) and Randolph and Viswanath (2004) both note that campaigns addressing widespread, normalised behaviours are more persuasive when they invite reflection than when they trigger defensive rejection, since audiences who feel accused of a moral failing tend to disengage from the message rather than reconsider the behaviour. The approach can be related to the AIDCA model of attention, interest, desire, conviction, and action, also used in the Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020): the conviction stage requires the audience to be persuaded that the issue deserves attention without becoming defensive, a balance that appears to be maintained in both campaigns.

The prevalence of the behaviour reinforces the case for an empathy-based rather than judgmental approach. McDaniel and Radesky (2018) report that most parents in their sample described at least some technology-based interruption of interaction with their children, rather than the behaviour being confined to a minority, and Kildare and Middlemiss (2017) find device use during caregiving described across the studies they review as an ordinary feature of contemporary family life. A campaign addressing a behaviour that the majority of its audience already practises cannot position that audience as deviant without losing it; the finding here is that prevalence itself is what makes the non-judgmental register a strategic requirement rather than a matter of courtesy.

### Comparison of Visual Strategies Between the Two Campaigns

Table 2 summarises the qualitative comparison of the visual strategies of the two campaigns, setting out both the similarities and the differences in approach across two forms of child neglect with different sources.

**Table 2.** Comparison of visual strategy between the two child neglect campaigns

| Aspect                        | Talk to Me, Play with Me, Carry Me                                     | Child Neglect Reduction advertisement (Taju, 2020)                             |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Photographic technique        | Documentary, natural colour                                            | Good eye composition, black-and-white concept                                  |
| Function of visual contrast   | Physical closeness set against attentional distance towards the device | Closeness that should exist set against distance caused by caregiving transfer |
| Communication approach        | Non-judgmental, grounded in published evidence                         | Emotional insinuation                                                          |
| Target of hegemonic awareness | Renaturalising the importance of full presence                         | Reaffirming the mother’s authority as primary caregiver                        |

Note. Compiled by the authors. Entries for the 2020 campaign draw in part on the creator’s self-reported intent, as explained in the Method.

The comparison shows that although both campaigns use realist photography and proceed from a similar hegemonic framework concerning parental authority, each adapts its technical elements and its level of emotional confrontation to the specific character of the neglect it addresses. This confirms that no single visual formula applies universally to every form of child neglect awareness campaign; each form of neglect instead demands a calibration of visual strategy suited to the degree of awareness, or unawareness, of those who practise it.

Figure 4 renders five of these dimensions as a comparative chart, using an interpretive five-point scale assigned by the authors rather than a validated measurement instrument. The visualisation carries a caveat that qualifies every value in it: the scores were assigned by the same research team that created one of the two campaigns being scored, without an independent or blinded rater. The chart should therefore be read as an illustrative summary of the qualitative comparison already given in Table 2 and in the preceding text, not as a precise or independently verified measurement, and the qualitative discussion rather than the chart's apparent precision should be weighed as the primary evidence.

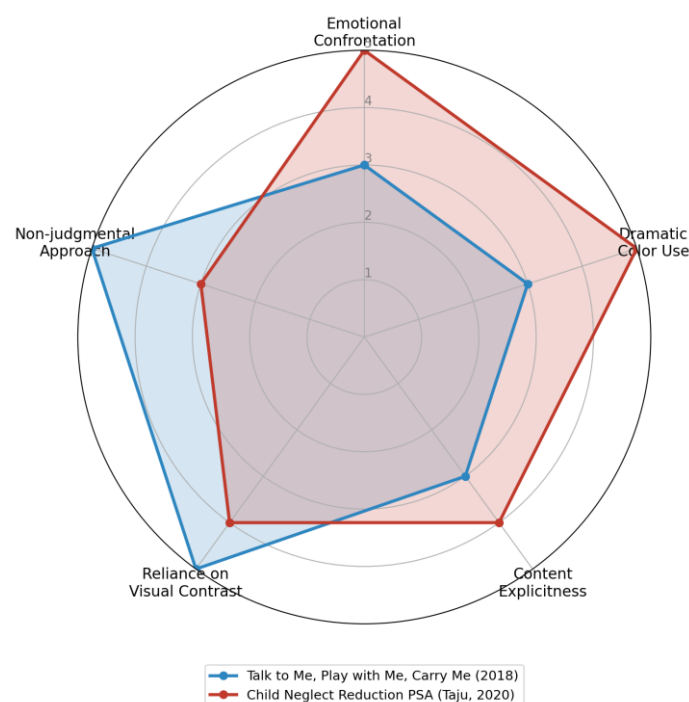


Figure 4. Illustrative, author-assigned comparison of five dimensions of visual strategy across both campaigns.

Chart by the authors, 2024. Interpretive five-point scale, not independently validated; see the caveat in the text.

### Empirical Evidence on Parental Phubbing as Context for Urgency

The urgency of the phenomenon these campaigns address can be traced through empirical data on its scale, in Indonesia and internationally. Sirupang et al. (2020) found that phubbing significantly affects family harmony in a case study in Kadia, Kendari, showing that the phenomenon is not confined to developed countries but is experienced across social strata in Indonesia. Amelia et al. (2019) found a fairly high level of phubbing among students of the Faculty of Public Health at Universitas Indonesia, indicating that a younger generation who will eventually become parents is already accustomed to interaction patterns prone to phubbing before having children.

The international literature on parental technoference provides more methodologically rigorous evidence of scale and consequence than was available when the comparison campaign was designed, which is itself part of the explanation for the difference in

communication strategy identified in Table 2. McDaniel and Radesky's (2018) study of 170 American families found that both maternal and paternal problematic technology use predicted greater technofence in parent–child interaction, which in turn predicted externalising and internalising behaviour problems reported by both parents, and their longitudinal work linked repeated technofence to rising parenting stress over time, suggesting a self-reinforcing cycle rather than an isolated incident. Kildare and Middlemiss (2017) concluded that parental mobile device use is consistently associated with reduced verbal and nonverbal responsiveness during interaction, regardless of the specific device or activity involved. Kushlev and Dunn (2019) extended this evidence experimentally, showing that smartphone use measurably distracts parents from cultivating feelings of connection even during time deliberately set aside for their children.

Meta-analytic evidence strengthens the case that these findings generalise across cultural and national contexts rather than reflecting an artefact of any single study population. Arenz and Schnauber-Stockmann (2024), systematically synthesising the predictors of phubbing behaviour across a large body of studies, report that the same personal and situational predictors recur across a range of measurement instruments and cultural settings, which is what licenses treating the phenomenon as a shared object of campaign design rather than a local one. Liu et al. (2024) extend the evidence to adolescents, finding that parental phubbing predicts adolescents' own problematic internet use partly through a reduction in the quality of family communication, a finding that resonates with the Indonesian survey evidence of Handayani and Husnita (2021). Al-Saggaf (2024) adds an important complication to the picture of parental responsibility emphasised throughout this article: children's phubbing of their parents also measurably affects parents' psychological wellbeing, indicating that the erosion of attention may run in both directions within a family rather than constituting a one-way parental failing. The visual finding of this study should be qualified accordingly: a campaign that depicts only the parent as the inattentive party represents one direction of a reciprocal process, a simplification that is communicatively efficient but empirically partial.

### **Tensions Between the Theoretical Frameworks**

The three frameworks used here are related, but the relation is one of productive tension rather than seamless fit, and the tension is worth naming rather than merely asserting coherence. Brittain's typology is clinical and individualising: built to classify a caregiver's behaviour against a normative standard of adequate care, it is analytically useful for naming phubbing as a form of ignoring, but taken alone it risks locating the problem entirely within an individual parent's conduct. Gramsci's theory of hegemony pulls in the opposite direction: structural and non-individualising, it explains persistent social patterns through diffuse cultural naturalisation rather than through the choices of any single actor. Applied without qualification, a Gramscian frame could appear to excuse individual parental responsibility altogether by locating the cause in an impersonal common sense that no one individually authored.

This study resolves the tension by using each framework at a different level of analysis rather than treating them as interchangeable. Brittain's vocabulary names what is happening at the level of the individual interaction depicted in a single photograph; Gramsci's vocabulary explains why that same behaviour is so widely practised and so rarely recognised as neglect at the level of the surrounding culture. Rose's good eye framework, read through Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) and Barthes's (1977) accounts of photographic ideology, then serves as the connective instrument, tracing how a single photograph can simultaneously depict an individual instance and visually indict a naturalised cultural pattern without collapsing the two levels into one another. A photograph that appears simple, a mother breastfeeding while holding a smartphone, can therefore be read at both levels at once: as one parent's momentary

lapse of attention, and as a visible instance of a much broader pattern that the campaign asks its audience to recognise as such for the first time.

### **Implications for Campaign Design in Indonesia**

The findings carry practical implications for designers of awareness campaigns in Indonesia addressing, or planning to address, parental phubbing. First, the documentary approach with a natural palette is likely to be more effective than graphic illustration in capturing the subtle, unrecognised character of phubbing moments, since the authentic impression of documentary photography is harder for audiences to dismiss as exaggerated. Second, the principle of non-judgmental communication combined with large-scale survey evidence is more persuasive than a judgmental approach, given that phubbing is a habit of the majority of contemporary parents rather than the behaviour of a negligent few.

Third, adapting a visual strategy from a Canadian context to an Indonesian one must account for differences in caregiving norms and family structure, including the role of the extended family commonly involved in child-rearing in Indonesia, a dynamic not always present in nuclear-family contexts in Western countries. A campaign designed for the Indonesian context should accommodate this diversity of caregiving structures rather than adopting a foreign visual strategy wholesale. The gender finding above sharpens this recommendation: in a setting where grandmothers, aunts, and paid household workers frequently share care, a photograph that isolates a single mother with a device may misdescribe the attentional economy it seeks to critique.

### **Methodological Reflection and Limitations of the Study**

The visual and textual approach used here has the advantage of examining the ideological content of a visual work in depth without requiring direct access to its creator. Its fundamental limitation is that interpretation of the intent and creative strategy behind particular visual choices remains inferential, based on the researchers' reading rather than on direct confirmation from the photographer or campaign team, at least for the externally authored campaign. A second reflection concerns the dual role occupied by one author, who is both a researcher analysing the phubbing campaign and the creator of the comparison campaign. That dual role is not unusual in creative-practice-adjacent fields, and it does not invalidate the comparison, since the visual evidence for both campaigns remains open to independent inspection; it does mean that the comparative judgments offered here should be treated as a first, author-situated pass rather than a neutral third-party benchmark.

All visual and ideological interpretation in this study is descriptive and qualitative, without statistical testing or quantitative data on audience perception. The categorisation of elements in Table 2, and the corresponding scores plotted in Figure 4, are the result of the authors' qualitative interpretation of patterns observed in publicly available material, not of standardised measurement with a validated instrument or independent coding.

The limitations may be consolidated as follows. As a visual analysis conducted partly on another party's work, the study cannot confirm the creative intent behind each visual choice in the phubbing campaign. The visual evidence for that campaign is secondhand, mediated through news reporting rather than a high-resolution original, which constrains the precision of claims about colour and framing. The comparison object is a creative work by one of the authors, introducing a risk of self-favourable interpretation that consistent evidentiary criteria and explicit disclosure manage but cannot eliminate. The qualitative scoring underlying Table 2 and Figure 4 was performed without independent or blinded raters and without a validated instrument. The study involves no audience reception data, notwithstanding the strong external evidence that the underlying problem is real and consequential. And the comparison

spans two objects from different cultural and geographic contexts, so generalising patterns of visual strategy across cultures requires additional caution.

## CONCLUSION

The photographic choices of the campaign examined here, a natural colour palette and a spatial organisation that positions the device as a competing visual focaliser, work together to expose a form of neglect enacted not through open conflict but through a quietly naturalised habit. Following Gramsci, that habit is best understood as an instance of common sense, a taken-for-granted assumption about ordinary contemporary life, which a well-designed campaign can help convert into the more critical good sense that makes the habit available for evaluation. Parental authority, on this account, is eroded in the phubbing case by no identifiable adversary at all, which is precisely why a photograph that isolates a single instance of the habit does ideological work that a verbal warning cannot.

The comparison with the earlier campaign on caregiving transfer shows that this hegemonic framework is not a fixed formula but a lens that must be recalibrated to the character of the neglect addressed. A consciously identifiable transfer of care invites a more explicit visual confrontation; a diffusely naturalised habit requires a more patient, evidence-based, non-judgmental approach aimed at making an invisible pattern visible rather than at accusing an identifiable decision-maker. The contribution of the study to visual communication design is this principle of calibration, and to the wider study of local culture it is a demonstration that a campaign image imported across cultural contexts carries assumptions about who cares for children that the receiving context may not share.

The findings are bounded in several ways that should be stated plainly. The visual evidence for the principal object is secondhand, mediated through news reporting rather than an original file; the comparison object is the prior creative work of one of the authors, an asymmetry managed through consistent evidentiary criteria and open disclosure rather than resolved; the comparative scoring was performed without independent or blinded raters; and no audience reception data were gathered, so claims about persuasive effect remain analytical rather than measured.

Four lines of further research follow directly. Comparative work of this kind should be conducted, or at minimum independently replicated, by researchers with no creative authorship stake in either compared object, and any scoring exercise should employ multiple blinded raters with a reported measure of agreement. A study of Indonesian audience reception towards parental phubbing campaigns would supply the empirical evidence of effectiveness that this study could not. Creative-practice research designing such a campaign within an Indonesian cultural context, adapting the strength of documentary photography while accounting for extended-family caregiving structures, would be a valuable practical contribution. And comparative research across a larger and more diverse set of campaigns, drawn from several countries and from independent creative teams, would distinguish universal from culturally specific patterns in the visual and hegemonic strategy of child neglect awareness campaigns.

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## DECLARATIONS

**Author contributions.** F.S.T. – conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, writing (original draft). F.P. – formal analysis, visualisation, writing (review and editing). P.F.A. – validation, supervision, writing (review and editing). All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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**Conflict of interest.** The first author is the creator of the Child Neglect Reduction public service advertisement analysed in this article as a comparison object. This relationship is disclosed in the Method and in Table 1, and the measures taken to manage it are set out in the Result and Discussion. The authors declare no other conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval and informed consent.** Not applicable. The study analyses published campaign material and secondary literature only; no human participants were recruited and no identifying data were collected. The campaign photograph is discussed but not reproduced, under fair dealing for criticism and review.

**Data availability.** The campaign material analysed is publicly available through the reporting cited in the reference list, and the comparison object is published in Taju (2020). The analytical tables underlying Table 2 and Figure 4 are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Use of generative artificial intelligence.** The authors used a generative artificial intelligence tool for language editing and for the preparation of the diagrams in Figures 1 to 4. No analytical content, interpretation, or citation was generated by the tool, and the authors take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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