

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DYNAMICS OF "FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS" AMONG GENERATION Z

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the dynamics of interpersonal communication in friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z in the city of Denpasar. Friends with benefits relationships have become an increasingly common phenomenon in the modern era, especially among Generation Z, who are known for their more liberal approach to interpersonal relationships. With a qualitative approach and case study method, this research analyzes the experiences of individuals involved in friends with benefits relationships through in-depth interviews. The focus of the research is to understand the role of interpersonal communication in building, maintaining, and managing friends with benefits relationships, including the social penetration process, as explained in the penetration theory, which is clearly seen in how individuals gradually share personal information, starting from more superficial aspects to more intimate ones. The research findings suggest the need for education on effective communication and awareness of social stigma, as well as the importance of maintaining a balance between personal freedom and emotional responsibility for a healthy relationship.

**Keywords:** Friends with benefits; Interpersonal communication; Social penetration theory.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika komunikasi interpersonal dalam hubungan *friends with benefits* di kalangan Generasi Z di Kota Denpasar. Hubungan *friends with benefits* menjadi fenomena yang semakin sering terjadi di era modern, khususnya di kalangan Generasi Z yang dikenal memiliki pendekatan lebih liberal terhadap hubungan interpersonal. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus, penelitian ini menganalisis pengalaman individu yang terlibat dalam hubungan *friends with benefits* melalui wawancara mendalam. Fokus penelitian adalah memahami peran komunikasi interpersonal dalam membangun, menjaga, dan mengelola hubungan *friends with benefits*, termasuk proses penetrasi sosial, seperti yang dijelaskan dalam teori *penetration theory*, terlihat jelas dalam bagaimana individu berbagi informasi pribadi secara bertahap mulai dari hal-hal yang lebih permukaan hingga aspek yang lebih intim. Temuan penelitian menyarankan perlunya edukasi tentang komunikasi efektif dan kesadaran mengenai stigma sosial, serta pentingnya menjaga keseimbangan antara kebebasan pribadi dan tanggung jawab emosional untuk hubungan yang sehat.

**Keywords:** *Friends with benefits*; Komunikasi interpersonal; Teori penetrasi sosial.

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## BACKGROUND

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012 (Anindasari *et al.*, 2023), known as the "Internet Generation" due to their close relationship with technology from a young age. This generation grew up in a rapidly digital era, relying more on smartphones than on television, and is active on social media (Christiani *et al.*, 2020). In interpersonal relationships, they prioritize freedom and self-exploration over traditional values such as formal commitment (Adhani *et al.*, 2024). One of the emerging phenomena is friends with benefits, a relationship without emotional commitment that involves romantic aspects. This phenomenon is influenced by changing lifestyles, cultural exposure through social media, and more flexible societal moral values. (Anjani *et al.*, 2018).

Generation Z often procrastinates and focuses more on their careers, choosing relationships like friends with benefits to meet emotional and physical needs without the pressure of formal commitment. This relationship allows both parties to enjoy each other's company as long as there is open and honest communication to prevent misunderstandings. When one party desires more than a physical relationship, it is important to express feelings clearly (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2023). The phenomenon of friends with benefits reflects the changing behaviour patterns of modern teenagers who are more open to non-traditional relationships.

Sucitra *et al.* (2024) analyses Social Construction in the Relationship of Friends with Benefits (Study on Young People in Manado City). This research discusses the concept of friends with benefits is not only limited to the physical dimension but also involves emotional and social aspects. The similarity of this research is to discuss the dynamics of the relationship between

friends with benefits in generation Z, and to explore the social construction and meaning of the relationship between friends with benefits. Safitri *et al.* (2021) examined the application of Social Penetration Theory to Social Media: The Effect of Identity Disclosure through Tik Tok on Social Assessment. This study discusses the application of social penetration theory to social media, especially the use of the TikTok application. The similarity of this study is that it discusses self-disclosure and its impact in the context of interpersonal communication. The difference from this study focuses on self-disclosure through self-disclosure in the context of friends with benefit relationships. The social penetration theory by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor in (Kustiawan *et al.*, 2022) serves as a framework for understanding the dynamics of friends with benefits, particularly among Generation Z. This theory explains that the process of gradual self-disclosure brings relationships from a superficial level to deeper intimacy. Although they tend to be open in digital communication, Generation Z remains selective in maintaining privacy. In the context of friends with benefits, self-disclosure becomes an important element in creating comfort and a pressure-free relationship.

This research aims to understand how interpersonal communication affects the dynamics of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z in Denpasar. Honest communication, the ability to listen, and understanding each other's needs are the foundations of the success of this relationship. The social penetration theory, particularly the concept of self-disclosure, helps explain how Generation Z manages their self-disclosure process gradually. This research highlights the role of the conducive social environment in Denpasar in supporting the exploration of non-traditional relationships such as friends with benefits, providing insights into

how Generation Z builds interpersonal relationships amidst changing social values.

Previous studies, such as highlighting Generation Z's connection with technology that enables more open communication without the pressure of formal commitments. Meanwhile, Adhani *et al.* (2024) and Zafarani *et al.* (2023) note that changes in lifestyle, social norms, and technological advancements are important factors in facilitating flexible interpersonal connections. Local studies in Denpasar show that the city has become an exploration space for Generation Z to try friends with benefits relationships and according to data from BPS-Statistics Indonesia Denpasar Municipality shows that the population data of generation Z in Denpasar in 2023 for the age group of 15-19 years is 57.1%. By integrating social penetration theory, this research contributes to understanding the interpersonal relationship patterns of Generation Z in an ever-evolving social context.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **TYPE OF RESEARCH**

The qualitative descriptive research method is an approach that aims to describe and depict existing phenomena or realities, whether natural or human-engineered (Kartika *et al.*, 2023). This research pays more attention to the quality, characteristics, and interconnections between activities. The research process involves data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation, as well as data analysis that is inductive and based on the obtained data (Fadli, 2021).

This researcher analyses the dynamics of interpersonal communication in friends with benefits relationships in the city of Denpasar through interviews, observations, and document studies. The technique for determining informants to be used is purposive sampling (Jailani, 2023, p. 3), where the researcher deliberately selects informants who are considered to be

able to provide relevant and in-depth information related to the research topic. The main informants will consist of Generation Z, namely the generation born between 1997 and 2012 and aged 15-29 years, and have experience or are involved in the dynamics of friends with benefit relationships in Denpasar City (key informants). Meanwhile, additional informants are taken from the community who are actively involved in the trend and community relations of friends with benefit. A total of 14 informants. Some of the informants interviewed by the researcher who were significant to the research were:

1. Generation Z spread across the city of Denpasar who knows the meaning of Friends with Benefit.
2. Generation Z in the city of Denpasar who are undergoing Friends with Benefit.

The results of the interview with the informants revealed that the couple values the freedom provided by a friend with benefits relationship. In this relationship, the couple enjoys companionship and intimacy without the pressure of meeting long-term expectations. The informants also stated that open and honest communication is an important factor in maintaining this relationship. By understanding each other's goals, partners can avoid misunderstandings that often arise in more conventional relationships.

Field observations indicate that interactions between partners in friends with benefits relationships are relaxed and not bound by conventional norms or the usual dynamics found in romantic relationships. Friends with benefits couples spend time together in an atmosphere unburdened by commitment, allowing them to enjoy the moments without feeling pressured. This creates a freer dynamic, where both parties feel free to explore their feelings for each other without the risk of losing one another. Clear communication about what is wanted and unwanted is key to maintaining balance in a friend with

benefits relationship. Informants revealed that a good agreement helps friends with benefits couples to remain comfortable and reduces the likelihood of conflicts. Although friends with benefits relationships are characterized by freedom, this study also found that some informants experienced challenges, such as anxiety related to feelings that might develop over time. There are concerns that one party might want to change the status of the relationship which could lead to tension.

In this modern era, the phenomenon of interpersonal relationships is undergoing significant changes, especially among Generation Z. One form of relationship that is interesting to study is friends with benefits which often becomes a choice for couples who want to establish closeness without clear ties. The aim of this research is to examine how interpersonal communication dynamics occur in friends with benefits relationships in the city of Denpasar with a particular emphasis on how Generation Z manages emotions, boundaries, and individual expectations within these relationships. This research uses a qualitative approach to collect data and study the communication patterns that occur, as well as the social and communicative impacts of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z because Generation Z is a generation that is growing rapidly and a generation that grows up. Generation Z is known for its more liberal approach to relationships and commitment (Agustian *et al.*, 2023). Generation Z tends to prioritize personal experience and self-exploration, choosing to explore relationships without the pressure of formal commitments such as marriage or other formal relationships. Generation Z also prefers friends with benefits due to lifestyle changes such as postponing marriage and focusing on career success (Adhani *et al.*, 2024). Due to the influence of cultural changes and exposure to different lifestyles through social media and associations, the phenomenon of friends with benefits is increasingly occurring

among Generation Z (Suminta *et al.*, 2024). This study is expected to provide further insights into the communication patterns and social impacts of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z. By understanding this phenomenon, the research is anticipated to contribute to the study of communication and social relationships in the current digital era.

Interpersonal communication is the process of exchanging information and forming messages between two or more people in a specific context. (Pratiwi *et al.*, 2019). Important elements of interpersonal communication include the sender, receiver, message, communication channel, feedback, and context. Openness and honesty are key to building deeper relationships through the process of self-disclosure, which starts from general information and moves towards personal information. This process is influenced by the individual's personality, culture, and social context. In the context of friends with benefits relationships, interpersonal communication becomes the main foundation for building comfort without the pressure of commitment. Friends with benefits relationships involve emotional and physical intimacy without serious attachment, allowing individuals to share experiences and support while maintaining their respective freedoms.

The social penetration theory by Altman and Taylor explains that interpersonal relationships develop through gradual stages of self-disclosure. The first stage, the Orientation Stage, involves surface-level communication that is general in nature. Exploratory Affective Stage allows for the sharing of more personal information with caution to build trust. Next, in the Affective Exchange Stage, communication becomes more emotional, spontaneous, and profound, creating a closer relationship. The final stage, the Stable Exchange Stage, shows emotional stability and full openness between individuals, where the relationship runs

harmoniously with efficient communication.

In a friend with benefits relationship, these stages are relevant for understanding the emerging emotional and psychological dynamics. Initial interactions often begin with superficial communication, which gradually develops into the revelation of deep values and emotions. This relationship requires an understanding of boundaries to prevent conflicts due to imbalanced emotional depth. Generation Z, which is more dynamic and flexible in interpersonal relationships, often utilizes this communication model to build relationships without traditional pressures. With effective communication, friends with benefits relationships can create satisfying interpersonal experiences while maintaining individual freedom.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative, Adlini et al (2022), approach aimed at understanding the dynamics of "Friends with Benefits" among Generation Z in the city of Denpasar. This type of research is used to describe and illustrate existing phenomena or realities, whether natural or human-engineered. In this research, the role of informants is very important, not only as informants but also as owners and sources of information. The main informants will consist of Generation Z, namely the generation born between 1997 and 2012 and aged 15-29 years, and have experience or are involved in the dynamics of friends with benefit relationships in Denpasar City (key informants). Meanwhile, additional informants are taken from the community who are actively involved in the trend and community relations of friends with benefit. A total of 14 informants. The research location is where the social situation will be studied, such as in schools, universities, cafes or restaurants, in communities or forums, at festivals, and so on.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Field observations indicate that interactions between partners in friends with benefits relationships are relaxed and not bound by conventional norms or the usual dynamics found in romantic relationships. Friends with benefits couples spend time together in an atmosphere unburdened by commitment, allowing them to enjoy the moments without feeling pressured. This creates a free dynamic, where both parties feel free to explore their feelings for each other without the risk of losing one another. Clear communication about what is wanted and unwanted is key to maintaining balance in a friend with benefits relationship. The informants revealed that a good agreement helps friends with benefits couples to remain comfortable and reduces the likelihood of conflicts occurring.

Although friends with benefits relationships are characterized by freedom, this study also found that some informants experienced challenges, such as anxiety related to feelings that might arise over time. There is a concern that one party might want to change the status of the relationship, which could lead to tension. In this modern era, the phenomenon of interpersonal relationships is undergoing significant changes, especially among Generation Z. One form of relationship that is interesting to study is friends with benefits, which often becomes the choice for couples who want to establish closeness without clear ties.

The aim of this research is to examine how interpersonal communication dynamics occur in friends with benefits relationships in the city of Denpasar, with a particular emphasis on how Generation Z manages emotions, boundaries, and individual expectations within these relationships. This research uses a qualitative approach to collect data and study the communication patterns that occur as well as the social and communicative impacts of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z.

This study is expected to provide further insights into the communication patterns and social impacts of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z. By understanding this phenomenon, the research is anticipated to contribute to the study of communication and social relationships in the current digital era.

### **Stages – Stages of Communication Approach according to Social Penetration Theory**

According to the Social Penetration Theory proposed by Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor in (Habibah et al., 2021), interpersonal relationships develop gradually through four main stages that reflect the depth of communication, starting from superficial and formal interactions, and then evolving into more intimate and complex connections as self-disclosure increases. These stages illustrate the process of emotional and intellectual intimacy forming through the gradual and mutual disclosure of information.

#### **a. Orientation Stage.**

The orientation stage in social penetration theory, as explained by Altman & Taylor (1973) in (Fitriyani et al., 2020), describes the beginning of interpersonal interactions where communication occurs at a superficial level with a focus on acquaintance and the creation of comfort. In the context of friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z in Denpasar, the orientation stage is visible through interviews with informants who explain that interpersonal communication and self-disclosure are important elements at the beginning of the relationship, where friends with benefits relationships often start from regular friendships that develop through casual conversations and discussions of mutual needs. At this stage, communication is still light. But gradually begins to open up space to set boundaries and expectations. The orientation stage is one of the indicators of the social penetration theory proposed by Altman &

Taylor (1973). Understanding of interpersonal communication and self-openness at the beginning of a friends with benefits relationship. The results of an interview with an informant named Abel (18 years old) shared his views on friends with benefits, here is his explanation:

*"At first, I was from an ordinary friend or had an acquaintance who was close enough, from that casual conversation I suddenly connected about each other's needs. For example, the two of us are connected because we both need close friends to talk to, but we don't want to commit to that. At first, he also needed a friend to pick him up, while he also needed a friend who could talk but didn't want to be tied to complicated commitments" (Interview, November 07, 2024).*

The same statement was also conveyed by Nathan (21 years old) which reflects the modern and efficient communication pattern of the young generation in the technological era, following his statement;

*"I use honesty as the main basis in maintaining the relationship between friends with benefits not to exceed the limit and remain comfortable for both parties. I practiced open communication at the beginning so that I could determine that this relationship would go well without any misunderstandings when establishing friends with benefits. For other benefits issues, I don't really look for it because I only need a partner who can listen to the story" (Interview, November 07, 2024).*

In addition, this informant added that:

*"In a friend with benefits relationship, each party must understand and set boundaries from the beginning to avoid misunderstandings or different expectations. That way, both me and my partner can maintain a harmonious relationship without worrying about feelings that may arise in the future" (Interview, November 07, 2024).*

Discussion about boundaries is also a crucial aspect, where friends with benefits couples need to set rules together to avoid misunderstandings regarding emotional expectations and engagement with others. Although challenges such as jealousy and misunderstandings remain, open communication helps couples deal with

these issues more effectively. Thus, the pattern of open communication not only prevents conflict, but also strengthens bonds and creates a more positive experience in living a relationship with friends with benefits.

Generation Z, who are very accustomed to technology, utilize social media and instant messaging applications, Fitriyadi et al (2023), to initiate communication in friends with benefits relationships. These digital platforms have high flexibility, allowing messages to be delivered quickly and efficiently without being hindered by time or distance. Through the results of interviews with informants, it was also mentioned that the importance of honesty at the beginning of a relationship is to ensure that boundaries and expectations are agreed upon. The approach at the orientation stage allows both parties to maintain a comfortable relationship without the risk of excessive expectations or misunderstandings. Support for this view indicates that effective communication needs to be established from the beginning by agreeing on mutual rules, so that a friends with benefits relationship can proceed according to its purpose without involving deep emotions.

Besides open communication, discussing boundaries becomes a crucial aspect in the orientation stage (Romadona et al., 2020). These boundaries include emotional expectations, privacy, and relationships with others. By setting these boundaries, both individuals can avoid conflicts or jealousy that may arise later on. However, challenges still exist, especially if one party starts to feel uncomfortable or has different expectations. Therefore, transparent and honest communication becomes an important tool to maintain harmony in a friend with benefits relationship.

### **b. Exploratory Affective Stage.**

In the Exploratory Affective Stage, interpersonal relationships develop from superficial communication to deeper

openness (Fitriyani et al., 2020). In the context of friends with benefits relationships, this stage reflects both parties' efforts to get to know each other better, in terms of interests, preferences, and emotional needs (Abdurrahman et al., 2021). Social media plays an important role in facilitating communication at this stage. Social media allows interactions to occur quickly and flexibly without the need for direct meetings (Nasution et al., 2022). Digital platforms make it easy for friends with benefits to talk, arrange meetings, or simply pour out their hearts, allowing the relationship to continue smoothly without major obstacles. Emphasizing the importance of clarity in communication through social media to avoid the risk of misunderstandings that can affect the comfort of both parties.

In the Exploratory Affective Stage, individuals begin to share more personal information, such as opinions, values, or meaningful experiences, although still with caution in expressing overly deep emotions. The intensity of communication is also regulated to avoid creating an excessive sense of attachment. As with communication in a friend with benefits relationship, its intensity needs to be maintained to avoid mismatched expectations. Partners usually determine the right time to communicate, such as when there is an important need or a desire to meet. This is done to ensure that the relationship remains relaxed and does not resemble the dynamics of a conventional romantic relationship (Ramadhani et al., 2023).

Getting to know your partner's interests and preferences becomes part of the interaction at this stage. Discussing hobbies or interests with your partner can create enjoyable conversations without going too deep. This approach helps keep the relationship comfortable and light, in accordance with the boundaries that have been previously agreed upon. However, there is still hesitation to share overly personal information, indicating that the

relationship remains in a comfortable zone without involving overly intense emotional closeness.

The results of an interview with Gekdi (22 years old) as an informant who undergoes friends with benefits said that social media also has an important role to start a deeper openness. Here's the statement:

*"Social media is really helpful to make the relationship between friends with benefits smoother. We can communicate quickly without having to bother meeting. For example, if one of us wants to meet or just vent, it's very easy to just send a chat, no need to wait for the moment to meet in person. Social media also gives us the freedom to chat at any time. So relationships continue without much drama or obstacles." (Interview, November 10, 2024).*

The Exploratory Affective Stage becomes an important bridge towards greater emotional closeness if both parties feel comfortable continuing the relationship to a deeper level. Although communication becomes more open, individuals at this stage remain cautious to maintain a balance between closeness and freedom. A relaxed and transparent approach, friends with benefits relationships at this stage can run smoothly, creating a positive experience for both parties without crossing the established boundaries.

In the Exploratory Affective Stage, individuals begin to share more personal information, such as opinions, values, or experiences that are more meaningful, but are still cautious about expressing emotions that are too deep. The intensity of communication and seeing the interests and preferences of the partner also occurs in the friends with benefits relationship, although with a more relaxed approach than the usual romantic relationship. Recognizing your partner's interests and preferences is also part of the interaction, knowing what they like, such as a particular hobby, music, or activity, can help create a fun conversation without feeling too personal.

This was conveyed by an informant named Nadia (20 years old), who stated that:

*"Ngatur intensitas komunikasi dalam hubungan friends with benefits itu penting banget biar nggak jadi berlebihan atau malah bikin salah satu pihak ngerasa terlalu terikat. Biasanya sih aku sama dia ngobrol di awal soal kapan waktu yang pas buat komunikasi. Misalnya, kalau mau ketemu atau ada yang penting aja, baru hubungin. Jadi nggak harus chat tiap hari atau ngabarin terus-terusan kayak hubungan pacaran." (Wawancara, 15 November 2024).*

### c. Affective Exchange Stage

In the Affective Exchange Stage, the relationship reaches a deeper level of emotional closeness compared to the previous stages (Puspitasari et al., 2022). At this stage, the informants said that they began to feel comfortable sharing their feelings, both positive and negative, spontaneously and honestly. In the context of friends with benefits relationships, this closeness often presents significant challenges (Shandery et al., 2023), especially when deeper emotional feelings begin to emerge unconsciously. Although friends with benefits relationships are initially built on the agreement to remain free from commitment, the naturally developing emotional comfort can lead the relationship in a more complex direction, as experienced by several informants.

In the beginning, friends with benefits relationships are usually agreed only to seek comfort without emotional involvement, but over time, deeper feelings can arise without realizing it. Informant Nathan (21 years old) gave a statement that:

*"Honesty is like the initial foundation, we must dare to say what you want, what you are not comfortable with, and what are the limits. If you are not honest from the beginning, you will eventually misunderstand or someone feels disadvantaged. Well, empathy is important so that you don't just think about yourself." (Interview, November 07, 2024).*

On the other hand, this makes the couple Redy (24 years old) and Triska (24 years old) face confusion, because they don't know whether to express their feelings or continue to live the relationship with the boundaries they have agreed upon.

Emphasizing the importance of honesty as the main foundation in a friends with benefits relationship. Individuals believe that openness and empathy can help avoid conflicts and maintain the boundaries that were agreed upon from the beginning. However, challenges arise when feelings begin to exceed the boundaries of the initial agreement, feeling that the longer the relationship lasts, the harder it becomes to remain unaffected by the attention and support given by one of the partners. Starting to feel emotional uncertainty that blurs the line between a casual relationship and deeper emotional involvement.

Enjoying the comfort of a friends with benefits relationship free from the pressure of commitment, but also feeling a dilemma when signs of a more serious desire from one partner start to become apparent. Worried that discussing feelings openly could change the dynamics of a comfortable relationship into something serious and full of pressure. This uncertainty makes individuals hesitant to take clearer steps, as they do not want the friends with benefits relationship to end or lose the comfort that has been established. Individuals describe this dilemma as something that places the relationship on the brink of uncertainty where neither party truly knows which direction to take.

This stage shows that although this friends with benefits relationship is meant to maintain physical and emotional closeness without commitment, the increasing emotional intensity is often unavoidable. This uncertainty creates a complex communication dynamic, where both parties feel trapped between maintaining comfort or facing the risk of change in the relationship. Thus, the Affective Exchange Stage in friends with benefits relationships highlights the

importance of honest communication and empathy to address the emotional challenges that arise although it does not always guarantee an easy solution (Ardianty, 2024). Relationships at this stage are at a critical point that can either develop into something more serious or remain in the comfort zone depending on both parties' readiness to face it.

#### **d. Stable Exchange Stage**

In the Stable Exchange Stage, the relationship has reached a high level of emotional closeness and trust, where communication flows smoothly, openly, and without obstacles. In the context of a friends with benefits relationship, this stability is created through a commitment to maintaining honest communication, mutual respect, and openness in sharing feelings, hopes, and concerns. Effective communication becomes the main foundation to prevent misunderstandings and maintain comfort in the relationship (Martoredjo, 2024).

Honesty is considered the best way to address changes in feelings, whether by aligning expectations or making joint decisions for the future of the relationship. Honest communication can help relationships avoid unnecessary conflicts or drama.

As a result of interviews with a couple named Emma (20 years old) and Yuda (23 years old), this couple shared how to maintain the stability of the friends with benefits relationship that they have been living for 2 years. Here's the statement:

*"My partner and I have agreed from the beginning if one of us starts to feel a change in our feelings, we will talk without fear of taking. At first, I was hesitant to start a discussion, afraid that he would think I was bored or lazy. But the longer you stay in these friends with benefits relationship, the more fear slowly disappears on its own. We are even more comfortable talking about anything, including feelings that may change. Now I feel like our relationship is more open, nothing is covered up, and it makes everything more relaxed and*

*less complicated." (Interview, November 08, 2024).*

Openness not only eliminates the fear of judgment but also creates a greater sense of comfort. This allows the relationship between partners to remain relaxed and pressure-free, with each party feeling free to speak their mind. Moments of togetherness, such as engaging in enjoyable activities together, also strengthen the stability of a friends with benefits relationship. Activities like those create positive memories that add meaning to friends with benefits relationships, even though they are non-committal in nature.

Openness in communication also serves to maintain a balance between emotional closeness and personal freedom (Ramadhani et al., 2023). When individuals feel free to share without fear of being judged, friends with benefits create a safe space to express themselves. Open communication helps prevent feelings of bias or confusion due to unclear attitudes. Thus, friends with benefits couples can quickly and efficiently address discomfort or potential issues.

Stability in a relationship also depends on mutual respect. Although this relationship is non-committal, attention to each other's needs and emotional signals remains a priority. By maintaining respect for each other, both parties create a comfortable and safe environment for interaction. This stability allows the relationship to continue according to the initial agreement, without exceeding the established boundaries (Baiturohim, 2021).

Overall, the Stable Exchange Stage in friends with benefits relationships shows that openness, honest communication, and mutual respect are key elements to maintaining a healthy and meaningful relationship. By understanding each other and maintaining a balance between freedom and closeness, the relationship can proceed harmoniously without unnecessary pressure or conflict. This shows that even in relationships like friends with benefits

stability can be achieved through trust and transparent communication.

### **Friends With Benefits in Generation Z Relationships**

Friends with benefits relationships are often viewed as a form of relationship free from emotional ties or deeper romantic commitments. In some cases, the main goal of engaging in this type of relationship is not solely for physical satisfaction, but also to gain other practical benefits that can enrich daily life. One of the common benefits in such relationships is assistance with transportation. In a busy life, having someone reliable to drive or pick you up can be very helpful, especially if the distance or time is very limited. Such practical advantages can feel more comfortable because there are no expectations involved just a mutual agreement or habit that benefits both parties.

Additionally, in some friends with benefits relationships, giving gifts can also be a form of mutual attention. For example, partners can buy items that are needed or liked, such as clothes, accessories, or certain gadgets. For some people, receiving items as a form of attention can add value to a friend with benefits relationship making it feel more enjoyable without emotional demands or commitments. This could be something small, like buying their favorite food after meeting or paying the bill for a meal out to larger purchases like clothes or other gifts that show one party cares.

However, it is important to note that although friends with benefits relationships can provide such practical benefits, communication remains very important. Boundaries and expectations must be clear from the beginning so that neither party feels trapped in expectations that do not align with the initial agreement. For example, if someone feels uncomfortable with financial assistance or the frequent giving of gifts, or if one party feels that the relationship is more than just a casual friendship, it can lead to confusion or

unwanted feelings. Therefore, even though friends with benefits relationships offer comfort in the form of practical assistance, it is important for both parties to always be open about their feelings and needs, so that the relationship remains within healthy boundaries and aligns with each person's goals.

In the end, a friend with benefits relationship that focuses solely on practical benefits such as pick-ups or gift-giving can be a solution for those who want to keep the relationship light and free from emotional burdens, while still giving each other attention in a mutually acceptable form. If both parties feel comfortable and have open communication, this relationship can be an effective way to gain practical support without needing to engage in a more serious commitment.

### **The Dynamics of Communication in Friends with Benefits Relationships**

The dynamics of communication in friends with benefits relationships are very unique because they lie at the intersection of friendship and relationships that involve emotional intimacy without romantic commitment. Friends with benefits relationships often begin with a mutual agreement to enjoy the benefits of the relationship without the emotional pressure or obligations typically found in romantic relationships (Ahmad et al., 2024). However, communication becomes a very important aspect, both at the beginning of the relationship and during its course because without clear and open communication, a friend with benefits relationship can easily get caught up in conflicts or misunderstandings.

One of the main indicators in this communication dynamic is the role of verbal and non-verbal communication in building mutual understanding and expectations. In a friend with benefits relationship, verbal communication is often more direct and structured with conversations focusing on physical and emotional boundaries, such as

agreements on emotional detachment or how the relationship will continue in the future. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, also plays an important role in expressing comfort or discomfort, even when both parties do not directly talk about their feelings.

At the initial stage, communication is usually focused on setting boundaries (Muafiah *et al.*, 2021). Both parties must agree on the extent to which the relationship will progress, what is allowed, and what is not. For example, whether they will continue to meet other people romantically, how often friends with benefits couples will interact, and whether they will maintain emotional boundaries. However, even though the agreement has been made, reality is often more complicated. One of the biggest challenges in communicating within a friend with benefits relationship is handling changes in feelings and expectations. There is a possibility that one party will develop romantic feelings, while the other remains comfortable with the initial arrangement. In many cases, both individuals agree to keep the relationship casual without emotional commitment, but it is important for them to regularly communicate any changes in their feelings or expectations. Failure to manage these expectations can lead to tension or confusion in the relationship, which is often reflected in changes in communication patterns.

A friend with benefits relationship can develop into something more serious, especially if both parties feel comfortable with each other, both emotionally. However, this is only possible if communication is smooth, open, and honest. Conversely, if communication is not well-managed, a friend with benefits relationship can end with a rift in friendship, hurt feelings, or even resentment. It is important to have the courage to discuss feelings, whether about boundaries or changes in the dynamics of the relationship, even if it may be uncomfortable.

At its core, good communication in a friend with benefits relationship heavily relies on openness, appreciation, and the willingness to discuss difficult matters. Openness in discussing feelings, expectations, and boundaries is very important to ensure that both parties understand what is desired and expected from the relationship. Appreciation for each other's feelings and decisions is a crucial element that must be maintained. Respecting the agreements made at the beginning and mutually honoring each other's decisions and boundaries can prevent the emergence of conflicts or misunderstandings in this relationship.

Effective and open communication is essential to ensure that these changes do not undermine the initial agreement or damage the underlying foundation of friendship. However, although basic principles such as openness, appreciation, and good communication generally apply, it is important to recognize that each relationship has its own unique patterns and dynamics. What works in one friend with benefits relationship may not necessarily apply to another. Each individual brings different experiences, feelings, and expectations, so the way they manage a friend with benefits relationship can also vary. Therefore, sensitivity to each other's feelings and needs becomes very important to maintain the stability and sustainability of this relationship. Each party needs to be sensitive to the emotional changes or dynamics occurring in the relationship, and be ready to adapt to the evolving situation. Thus, a healthy and harmonious FWB relationship can be maintained, as long as both parties continue to maintain open communication and respect each other's needs and feelings.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research highlights the importance of interpersonal communication in friends with benefits relationships among Generation Z in Denpasar City. The characteristics of Friends with benefits are flexible relationships without deep emotional commitment, relying on open, honest, and transparent communication to maintain comfort and establish clear boundaries. This means that the limits of these relationship characteristics can be determined and agreed upon by each individual involved in this relationship by using open interpersonal communication between each individual, especially in generation Z who chooses this type of relationship because of the freedom it offers, although challenges such as emotional uncertainty, conflict, and social stigma often arise. The research results show a dominant tendency among informants to feel more comfortable engaging in non-committed relationships, as they appreciate the flexibility of these relationships, forming emotional closeness without the burden of responsibilities typically found in more serious romantic relationships.

The social penetration theory helps understand the development of this relationship, starting from the orientation stage with sharing basic information, moving towards the more personal affective exploration stage, and then to the affective exchange stage involving emotional openness. However, many friends with benefits relationships do not reach a stable stage, where full trust and deep communication are established.

The city of Denpasar provides an environment that allows for the exploration of these non-conventional relationships, although societal stigma remains a barrier. Friends with benefits relationships reflect more flexible social norms. But they require a deep understanding of communication

and emotional management. This research emphasizes the importance of healthy communication and awareness of boundaries to face challenges.

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