

Navigating Face-To-Face Communication in the Era of Remote Work among Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z faces difficulties in communicating due to remote working, although they are tech savvy, their ability to interact face-to-face and their levels of “digital fatigue” have declined. The aim of this research is to investigate how generation z communicates with one another in the era of remote working, and also to develop an integrative communication model to help bridge human connections in the workplace. This transition has create an ambivalent professional landscape for them. As digital natives, they possess technological navigation skills that surpass those of previous generations. For gen z informants experienced in hybrid work, we employed a qualitative exploratory approach using purposive sampling techniques. The Braun & Clarke method was used to analyse the data. Finding indicate that face-to-face communication remains crucial for picking up non-verbal cues (such as eye contact and belonging). Nevertheless, there is a sense of “professional social anxiety” when interacting spontaneously without digital filters. Conclusion gen z values digital flexibility but requires direct connections for mentoring and career progression. Helping gen z realise that the anxiety they experience when interacting without a “digital filter” is a collective phenomenon that must be addressed if they are to advance in their careers. Implications & recommendations the research supports social presence theory. It is strongly recommended that organisations implement a structured “Team Communication Agreement”. Recommendations to avoid staff turnover and intergenerational collaboration issues, companies must create a psychologically safe environment to develop the soft skill of younger employees.

Keywords: *Generation Z, Face-to-Face, Communication Work*

INTRODUCTION

In the ongoing digital era, the workplace landscape has undergone fundamental changes, particularly with the widespread adoption of remote work systems post-pandemic. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is now a crucial element of the contemporary workforce. As individuals who grew up in the digital age, Gen Z is inherently adept at using digital collaboration tools like Slack, Zoom, and Google Workspace. This transition has created an ambivalent professional landscape for them. As digital natives, they possess technological skills that surpass those of

their predecessors, but this advantage has led to a communication paradox. Asynchronous collaboration tools improve administrative efficiency, but the depth of meaning in human interactions has diminished. The disruption of non-verbal cues like body language, facial expressions, and intonation has created social capital and trust in organizations. However, the underlying issue is not technical incompetence. This change is crucial for Indonesia because our work culture is tied to collectivism and strong interpersonal relationships. A "meaning vacuum" emerges when small boxes on a Zoom screen replace in-person interactions, often fraught with misplaced beliefs or social anxiety. This is why the theme "Navigating Face-to-Face Communication in the Era of Remote Work among Gen Z" is so important. It's not about opposing digitalization, but rather finding ways in which technology can support human connections, not replace them. (Saputri et al., 2025).

Analysis Through the Lens of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) The CMM theory is used in this study to explain how Generation Z constructs their social reality in the workplace. CMM argues that communication is a process in which people co-create meaning through constitutive and regulative rules, not simply sending messages. For Gen Z, "professionalism" might mean a quick response on Slack (a digital rule), but for a senior manager, it might mean the ability to have a deep conversation in the boardroom (a conventional rule). Intergenerational conflict often arises from incompatible interpretations. This study seeks to illustrate how "team communication agreements" can be formed so that face-to-face communication is perceived as a ritual that strengthens emotional cohesion and professional identity rather than an administrative burden. (Pattimura, 2026).

However, despite its technological advantages, new challenges have emerged in the realm of conventional interpersonal communication, where face-to-face interaction is now seen as a competency that requires re-evaluation and development amidst the dominance of asynchronous communication. Significant negative impacts arise from excessive reliance on digital media, resulting in a degradation of the quality of face-to-face interpersonal interactions. Recent studies indicate that Generation Z often experiences social anxiety or what is known as "digital fatigue" due to the lack of adequate non-verbal cues in long-distance communication. (Mufarrihati et al., 2023). This phenomenon leads to misunderstandings, obstacles in the process of building trust, and the erosion of emotional bonds between colleagues that are ideally formed through physical interactions in the office environment. (Harmen et al., 2025).

Without adequate competency in navigating face-to-face communication, the long-term productivity and psychological well-being of these young workers are at risk. Previous research has investigated the impact of remote work on productivity. (Reicher & Arumi, 2021). However, in-depth studies on face-to-face communication strategies for Generation Z in the work context in Indonesia are still limited. This research presents innovation through the application of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) framework to analyze Generation Z's interpretation of face-to-face interactions as an element of professionalism, going beyond mere administrative functions as an alternative solution, this study proposes a "team communication agreement" model that integrates digital flexibility with structured physical interaction sessions to increase organizational social capital.

Research based on SDGs is research that aims to answer one or more of the 17 global goals set by the United Nations, focusing not only on "discovering new things", but on sustainable solutions. Broadly speaking, SDGs are categorized into several main frameworks by SDGs professionals as a Systems Approach (Systemic) Sustainable development experts emphasize that the 17 goals are an interconnected network. Criticism of the Economic Growth Model Some critics argue that the conflict between economic growth goals (SDG 8) and environmental sustainability (SDG 12-15) has existed from the beginning. They question whether the current economic model can truly sustain the Earth without exceeding its ecological limits. From the explanation above, the correlation with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Several points in the global sustainable development agenda (SDGs) are influenced by a combination of effective communication and the well-being of young workers. Entering SDG 8, namely Decent Work and Economic Growth, technical and healthy work environments increase productivity in the long term. Generation Z's digital fatigue due to lack of physical interaction can reduce employee retention. This research offers an integrative communication model that ensures workers remain humanized during the transition to a digital economy, prevents mental exploitation, and ensures that young employees remain successful. This falls under SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being (Healthy Lives and Well-Being). Mental health is impacted by social isolation while working from home. Organizations can help reduce levels of depression and social anxiety among young workers by creating structured (hybrid) physical interaction sessions. This is crucial for a prosperous society. It also falls under SDG 10, which is to reduce the communication gap in the office between Gen Z and Gen X (or Baby Boomers and Gen X), which can lead

to social exclusion. By using an inclusive face-to-face communication approach, organizations can address communication differences, ensure knowledge transfer continues, and create a welcoming work environment regardless of age differences. (Baksh, 2025).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze Generation Z's navigation of face-to-face communication in the era of remote work. Furthermore, this study seeks to develop an integrative communication model that can bridge the limitations of digital interaction with the need for human connection in a professional work environment. This research is crucial considering that the Indonesian workforce is currently transforming toward a hybrid work model. A deep understanding of how Generation Z integrates their digital competencies with the need for face-to-face interaction is fundamental for organizations in developing accommodating human resource management strategies. If this communication disparity is not promptly addressed, institutions risk experiencing increased employee turnover rates and a decline in the efficiency of intergenerational teamwork. (Darma, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Remote Work & Communication Shift

The organizational communication paradigm has changed from synchronous to asynchronous as a result of the development of remote work. The new study shows that there is a significant "loss of non-verbal cues" even though technology enables efficiency. The use of digital tools like Zoom, Slack, and Teams doesn't necessarily replace physical interactions (Ibrahim et al., 2025). For Generation Z, this environment leads to multitasking and data overload pressure. Generation Z emerged in the world of work at a time when the paradigm shift from the physical office to the digital space was massively occurring. In the current literature, it shows that Gen Z has high expectations for flexibility and the use of collaborative technologies such as Slack or Microsoft Teams as the primary standard at work.

Where Gen Z is indeed very tech-savvy, which really helps them in their work to be easier, and faster. Despite being digitally proficient, there are findings that "digital natives" have experienced a decline in quality *soft skills* interpersonal due to the lack of physical interaction during the pandemic and transition *remote work*. Although a large number of studies have addressed remote work productivity, there are some important flaws in previous findings. Most studies have concentrated too much on "technical efficiency," or speed of work, and ignored the "psychosocial dimension" of face-to-face communication. According to many studies, digitalization is an ideal substitute for physical interaction. However, due to the pandemic and the transition to longer remote work, the "digital population" is losing its subtle interpersonal abilities. The overly focused focus of research on technology has led to misconceptions about how humans interact in a hybrid modern work environment. This technology enables unprecedented speed and accessibility of information. However, there is a paradox behind this convenience that the more dependent it is on digital mediums, the more difficult it is to create a humane form of communication (Psychology, 2025).

Gen Z Communication Characteristics

Gen Z is often referred to as the Digital Newcomer, but they have a paradoxical way of communicating in the workplace. They are very proficient in using instant and visual media, but they often feel less confident in their ability to interact formally and tend to avoid conflict (passive communication style). They expect prompt and honest feedback from their boss (Rumayanto et al., 2025). A study in early 2026 found that the quality of communication between colleagues contributes 35% to the mental health of Gen Z. The tendency to avoid conflict or choose a passive communication style in physical interaction is not a form of incompetence, it is an adaptation strategy that comes from dependence on asynchronous media. In the study Navigating Face-to-Face Communication in the Era of Remote Work among Gen Z, this phenomenon can be understood through the lens of CMM Theory. Generation Z is more likely to view face-to-face communication as a high-risk "evaluation space" than a collaboration space. In CMM, the tension between superiors' expectations of traditional professionalism and Gen Z's desire for digital efficiency led to Strange Loops. There, young employees become anxious and leave the company because of their boss's attempts to establish a physical relationship. The study found that "team communication agreements" can help restore the meaning of face-to-face interactions. This can be achieved by using the CMM approach. By changing the story from "face-to-face as surveillance" to "face-to-face as a safe collaboration space," Gen Z can reduce social anxiety and improve coordination

of meaning. Ultimately, this will have a positive impact on mental health and productivity in the workplace in the long run (Putri et al., 2026).

Face-to-Face Communication & Interpersonal Presence

Although Gen Z enjoys watching on screens, they still recognize that face-to-face interaction is essential for building trust and understanding "body language" and "tone of voice," which are often lost in digital media. Physical interactions serve as a broad conduit for verifying trust. Gen Z feels socially isolated and difficult to be "seen" professionally if they are not present in person. Professional trust has endured for many years. We shook hands. Across the table, we looked at each other and shared coffee during breaks. It's more than just social ethics. These physical actions provide an environment with high "bandwidth" in which we can quickly determine whether a person is trustworthy, according to years of sociological and communication theory research. Although travel is eliminated as a result of the use of remote work around the world, we are losing more than just commuting time. We have lost the basic mechanisms that ensure human relationships function properly. To understand why making video calls every day actually makes us feel isolated instead of connected, we have to look at what happens when we leave. Three major deficits identified in the literature are the loss of media wealth (media wealth), the loss of physical closeness, and the erosion of "social presence". Of the three, the most troubling is the eroded social presence. How "real" a person feels when interacting is measured in social presence theory. Attendance is standard in the physical environment. You can't ignore those who are standing in front of you.

In the digital world, presence is a variable that we must actively strive for. Studies show that screen-based communication naturally reduces social presence. This makes us see them at the end of there as abstract beings rather than humans. The figure of the "other person" becomes unreal when visual cues such as direct eye contact are eliminated. This explains a common frustration in the digital age that some people may feel offended if a co-worker doesn't reply to their emails. In a physical office, they seem overwhelmed or calling differently than in a digital inbox, their silence is unclear and creates doubt. There is nothing economists call a "high-cost signal", which exacerbates this deficit. Humans use "expensive" signals to show that they are serious in uncertain situations. Over the years, traveling to conferences or meetings has always indicated that it will be very expensive. It takes a lot of effort, time spent outside of family, and flight costs. You are categorized as an "insider" as soon as the physical act of "present" indicates commitment. The cost of digital interaction is almost non-existent. Joining a video call is inexpensive and doesn't require much effort. As a result, what is seen on the screen serves as a weak signal. It cannot distinguish a committed partner from an ordinary observer. This is why building deep trust remotely is so difficult. Too much noise, or interference, enters through a filter that is too porous. To address this issue, organizations must do more than simply replace their in-person meetings with Zoom accounts they must also revitalize society by using electronic devices (Reda Sadki.s 2026).

Social Presence Theory

This theory analyze how "real" a person is in an interaction. Social Presence must be actively "created" in the context of remote work. If co-workers are not socially present, they are perceived as abstract beings rather than whole human beings, which can lead to loneliness and miscommunication among Gen Z. In the context of remote work, social presence is not just "being in front of the camera" it is the ability of communication media to transmit social cues (such as warmth, facial expressions, and tone of voice) that give others the impression that they are truly present. For Gen Z, social absenteeism leads to "Digital Depersonalization". When co-workers are only seen as chat bubbles on Slack or names without photos on Zoom, they are considered "tasks" or "objects" rather than individuals. This is what causes fatigue and loneliness, because the basic human need for emotional connection is not met. Intimacy, or intimacy, including the use of video, eye contact, and non-formal topics of conversation, is a major factor that creates a social presence.

Immediacy (Immediacy) Enthusiasm and speed in interacting. Imagine a Gen Z college student just coming into a company that is completely remote and doesn't have a strong social tradition and without this social engagement leads to Communication only through email and access to Google Drive. During the meeting, his co-workers never turned on the camera. What was the result? He feels like he's working with robots, hesitant to ask questions for fear of being annoying, and ends up feeling emotionally isolated. With Social Presence where the Company held a "Virtual Coffee Break" via Zoom, where everyone turned on the camera and was not allowed to talk about their work. Co-workers use

relaxed language, GIFs, and emojis in group chats. Employees feel "seen" as whole human beings, not just "operational costs" because of this (Gumasing et al., 2022).

Research Gap & Conceptual Positioning

Focus on Interpersonal Resilience This journal offers a new perspective on how Generation Z builds communication resilience by avoiding in-person meetings, but by redefining face-to-face meetings as quality "emotional connection" opportunities and not just information exchange. **The Hybrid Adaptation Model** This study considers mental health and work effectiveness factors when transitioning from text or video screen communication to physical communication. The study developed a Hybrid Adaptation Model to fill that gap. Face-to-face communication is considered a source of emotional support that is difficult to replace by digital media. Most of the research currently conducted is still general (macro) on remote work, the Methodological Gap and Not many studies specifically address the psychological adaptation mechanisms of Gen Z when they have to return to face-to-face communication after getting used to anonymity or "distance" behind the scenes. Although much of the literature focuses on the technical barriers to working remotely in the Contextual Gap, few study "professional social anxiety," also known as social anxiety, that arises in Generation Z when dealing with negotiations or conflict resolution in person in the office.

Not many Intergenerational Gap communication models effectively explain how Gen Z balances their digital-first preferences with the immediate expectations of the senior generation (Gen X or Boomers) in a hybrid work environment. It is not easy to resolve direct conflicts that are not resolved by digital media, according to practice on the ground. As for the Theoretical Gap, there is no communication model that can explain how Gen Z balances their digital-first tendencies with the expectations of the older generation, such as Gen X or Boomers, in the hybrid office. **Methodology and Empirical Gaps** are Most research still relies on secondary data or general quantitative surveys. To dissect the psychological adaptation mechanisms of Gen Z, a qualitative or experimental approach is needed. **Evidence & Population Gap** Rarely has there been research that specifically targets the transition of Gen Z's communication behavior in the context of a specific post-pandemic transition. The results of this study are expected to help turn in-person meetings into places for "emotional connection" rather than "administrative burdens." So that Generation Z no longer sees face-to-face communication as an obstacle, but rather as a strategic asset for their professional careers, their main focus is on building interpersonal resilience. In terms of how companies can facilitate a "safe space" for Gen Z to develop soft skills, there are plenty of research opportunities. Neuro-linguistic-based communication training or curriculum for the work environment can be an innovative step in addressing the need for human connection in an increasingly digital world (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Based on these gaps, future research opportunities include to analyze the face-to-face communication navigation of Generation Z in the era of remote work. In addition, this research seeks to develop an integrative communication model that can bridge the limitations of digital interaction with the need for human connections in professional work environments. How does the phenomenon of "missing non-verbal cues" affect the effectiveness of communication in a remote work environment?

METHODOLOGY

This study uses an exploratory qualitative study method that has the goal that this research is to explore phenomena that are not widely known, little literature, or do not have an established definition. The focus is on looking for new patterns, ideas, or hypotheses and to understand social reality, that is, seeing the world as it is, not as expected. Therefore, a qualitative researcher must be open, and the results mean they have a window to understand the world of psychology and social reality. Qualitative research is conducted in a natural environment. It is an important tool in qualitative research. Therefore, to be clearer about Scientific Research. Research must have a broad theoretical and knowledge base. This research emphasizes more on the meaning and value of bonding. Qualitative research is used if the problem is not yet clear, to discover hidden meanings, to understand social interactions, to make theories, to guarantee the correctness of data, and to study the history of development, In this study, the phenomenon of Generation Z's communication transition from an online to offline environment is discussed through exploratory qualitative approaches and thematic analysis. By using purposive sampling techniques, researchers can ensure that the data they obtain is very in-depth because the source comes from informants who have direct experience. To compare cross-

sectoral perspectives, these sources were then tested by triangulating the sources. This method is particularly relevant to your research subject because it is able to transform personal stories from various corporate backgrounds (such as logistics, education, and universities) into consistent scientific patterns. It managed to reveal that, despite psychological issues such as awkwardness, face-to-face interactions still have greater meaning and emotional value for Generation Z employees (Riyanto, 2022).

In line with what Riyanto expressed, Creswell & Poth (2022) argue that qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups consider to come from social or humanitarian problems. The focus is on participant views and the formation of themes from complex data. (Meina & Samiha, 2025)

The data collection technique was carried out using Purposive Sampling. Dana P. Turner (2020) states that research uses purposive sampling, also known as selection or judgmental sampling, when they want to target individuals who have certain characteristics that can help answer complex research questions. The main focus includes. In-depth information and selecting participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon being researched or who "know best". Inclusion criteria are that before choosing a subject, the researcher sets strict standards. Fit to ensure that the sample is in accordance with the original purpose of the research so that the resulting data is not misused (Shaheen & Pradhan, n.d.). Informants include Generation Z (born 1997-2012). Employees who have experienced remote work, remote internships, or remote learning. Transitioning from online work to offline (face-to-face) meetings. And informants who are active in the interaction (not just passive). This informant has covered the needs of the researcher to further deepen the research.

DISCUSSION

This study uses data analysis techniques according to Braun & Clarke (2021) data analysis techniques in the form of interviews, data analysis, and documentation. This research was carried out by systematically searching and compiling field data. This is done through organizing, describing, synthesizing, drafting patterns, selecting important elements, and drawing conclusions from field data. (Wigati et al., 2025). The following is a table of informants who have been interviewed to complete this research process :

Table 1. Research Informants

Number	Name Of The Informant	Company Name	Department/Division
1	Fauzan Shidiq Kurniawan	PT Pendidikan Ganesha Operation	Staff Selling Pusat Buah Batu
2	Azrina Sabilla	German SOEs	Provincial Consultant
3	Sarah Syifa Namita	Telkomunikasi University of Indonesia	Staff of the Directorate of Research and Publications
4	Gianti Kesumawardani	PT DHL Global Forwarding Indonesia	Ocean Freight Operation

Source Table 1: Results of Interviews with Informants

The validity test technique carried out in this study is source triangulation, which is a method to check the validity of data by comparing and checking back the level of trust of information obtained through various qualitative and time methods. This means, in the context of your research, comparing data collected from multiple informants (Fauzan, Sarah, Triana, and Gianti) to determine whether there is consistency or difference of opinion about face-to-face communication. In qualitative research, Lexy J. Moleong said that triangulation with sources means comparing and evaluating the level of trust of information obtained through various tools and time. This is done by comparing data from observations and interviews. Compare the statements of people in the research situation with their personal

statements. In this study, the data was tested by the source triangulation method, which means checking the consistency of the data by comparing information from interviews with other sources and with diaries or work reports. To ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with what the participants intended, the researcher reconfirmed the results of the interview summary to the informants. If the data is considered still doubtful or unsaturated, the researcher returns to the field to conduct further observations or interviews. Peer Debriefing Talking about the results of the analysis with peers or experts in relevant fields to get important advice on data interpretation. (Borneo Novelty, n.d.)

Table 2. Data Source Triangulation Matrix

Research Theme	Fauzan S.	Sarah S.	Triana O.	Hosted by K.
The Meaning of Face-to-Face	Live Information Exchange	More focus and faster	More effective and lots of ideas	More Valuable and Emotional
The Importance of Attendance	More noticeable presence	More lively and personal	More meaningful attendance	Humans are more "present"
Gen Z Challenges	Awkwardness with new people	It was awkward at first.	Awkwardness and groaning with new people	Uneasy because you have to dress well
Adaptation Strategy	Get used to greeting	More active and focused	Reading Body Language	Listening and Reading situations

Source Table 2: Results of Interviews with the Informants

Data Validity Analysis Based on the comparison above, it can ensure that the research data is correct, namely Confirmability (Honesty) All informants provide mutually supportive answers about how direct communication after the pandemic has changed. Direct communication is considered "more meaningful" and "more valuable", regardless of the different corporate backgrounds (education, university, logistics). The transferability and findings suggest that Gen Z feels awkward when returning to face-to-face interactions with new people. This provides a solid foundation for the idea that your results can be applied or relevant to other Gen Z people in the context of remote work. Credibility Due to pattern repetition (pattern recognition) on important aspects such as the effect of nonverbal reactions (eye contact and expression) on communication comfort, the data collected is highly reliable.

The results of the study interpret face-to-face communication in the era of remote work, where informants say that Interpreting face-to-face communication in the current remote work era is very important, **Azrina said "face-to-face communication in the current era is much more effective than online communication because the exchange of information carried out in person usually generates more ideas"** (Azrina, March 02, 2026). Because even though remote work requires them to do face-to-face work, for example when doing an important meeting that has to make an agreement for signatures requires them to work face-to-face which cannot be done when working hybridly. Strengthened by the statement of the informant named Sarah says, **"Face-to-face communication becomes more meaningful in this era of remote work, when there is an opportunity to visit directly, the discussion feels more focused and the information is conveyed faster"** (Sarah, March 02, 2026). The difference is most noticeable when face-to-face communication and digital communication in terms of voice intonation and energy because meeting the team directly, as well as in interaction. Face-to-face is more spontaneous and emotionally felt, while digital communication is more practical and flexible, but sometimes lacks full expression and intonation. Not to mention when there is noise that causes miscommunication when working hybrid. The comfort of working talking directly or through digital media informants say that it is more effective to work directly because their work requires meeting directly with the team and clients and being able to make decisions in real time, but informants say it depends on the conditions because if a meeting has to be held suddenly they inform that in a hybrid way they can streamline time, also with the interlocutor with whom they interact, If with peers or teams they prefer face-to-face, if they interact with

their direct supervisors, they are more comfortable hybrid because it minimizes pressure that feels less than face-to-face. When communicating face-to-face and feeling emotionally directly because you can see directly the gestures, gestures and body language movements of the interlocutor, besides that there are also touches such as greetings or high-speed messages which also affect the emotional connection with the interlocutor, and feel more "connected" because we can see directly the expressions and responses of the interlocutor. Small things like eye contact, smiles, or nods turned out to be quite influential to my confidence and comfort when speaking. If done in a *online* It can sometimes still be conveyed but *feelis* different. Face-to-face communication makes communication feel more alive, and face-to-face communication minimizes misunderstandings. Working Face – To – Face feels more appreciated and "seen" because you can see directly in terms of facial expressions and responses from the interlocutor when carrying out work in person. Nonverbal reactions (eye contact, facial expressions, body language) have a great effect on communication, because through nonverbal reactions such as eye contact, friendly expressions we can see and from the interlocutor, so that when communication takes place we can regulate how the reaction action that we will show to the interlocutor and make the atmosphere more comfortable if the interlocutor is responsive, it feels more comfortable for us to interact. However if it is flat it will be more awkward, and also through nonverbal reactions it is usually more honest than the words that we usually do virtually. Also conversely, if the nonverbal response feels more rigid or closed, we usually become more careful in expressing our opinions. According to Social Presence (SPT) is a user's personal perception, not a technological feature. For Gen Z and remote work, this is their media category. One important tax return results that you can raise is Media Synchronicity Generation Z often feels tired of video calls (also known as Zoom Fatigue) due to overly forced social engagement. However, they feel email is too "cold" to foster trust. Intimacy Gap Generation Z has difficulty building social capital, or social capital, if they do not have Face To Face interactions. This is because they don't have a sense of "real presence" of coworkers behind the scenes. The Gen Z Factor where even though they are tech-savvy, Gen Z often look for "warmth" with video calls or gamification features to make colleagues feel closer (Riva et al., n.d.).

After doing work remotely and doing it again face to face, there is no significant difference, it's just that you are used to using email, whats app, and also for the interlocutor people you already know, who will not feel awkward if you meet in person. The strategy is to adjust to direct interaction more listening, and reading situations and then speak up if necessary, and being able to be active in a forum discussion, by making eye contact and trying to focus on what is being said. Get used to communicating directly by greeting each other. Also by adapting to the communication style that must adapt to the interlocutor. According to the Informant **Sarah argued, "At first, it was awkward, because I was used to conveying messages via chat or online meetings. But as time goes by, direct communication trains me to be more confident and more ready for ceremonies"** (Sarah, March 02, 2026). Learn to read body language or people's expressions. Learn to control ourselves so that we can reduce anxiety when communicating with the interlocutor later. Although remote work has created a digital comfort zone, it risks worsening soft skills, body language reading, and deep professional relationship building. In this article, we examine how Generation Z is coping with the transition from text-based interactions to physical office dynamics that demand spontaneous responses (Piasek et al., 2022), the factors that affect the performance of Generation Z when working face-to-face are Atrophy Interpersonal Skills Gen Z tends to experience anxiety when having to communicate spontaneously without the help of buttons *edit* or *Delete*.

Authorized by the Informant **Fauzan who said, "Actually, there is no significant difference if you have met the person you have met in person before, but with a new person there is a little awkwardness and nervousness. Difficulties that arise when responding to unaccustomed nonverbal reactions when communicating digitally".** (Fauzan, March 4, 2026). According to the theory *Media Richness Theory*, face-to-face communication is the most "rich" medium because it includes tone of voice, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gen Z who are used to "poor" media (text) often feel overwhelmed processing these signals simultaneously. The effect of the "Digital Buffer" and Social Anxiety Remote work helps reduce the risk of social rejection. Gen Z's stress levels are often higher compared to Gen X or millennials due to the transition back to the physical office. According to research published in the Journal of Cyberpsychology, relying on asynchronous communication, such as Slack or email, reduces your psychological resilience in the face of direct interpersonal conflict. The importance of "Proximity Bias" Although Gen Z is adept at working remotely, they realize that their careers depend on visibility. The ease of face-to-face communication is not just a matter of convenience, it is a career strategy.

They began to realize that the mentoring relationship in front of a coffee machine worked better than a Zoom meeting. According to Harvard Business Review research, workers who are physically visible in the office are more likely to be promoted because managers have a near-bias bias. Challenges of Reading Body Language (Non-Verbal Cues). In a remote work environment, we can only see the head and shoulders. But when in the office, everyone talks. Generation Z has difficulty interpreting microcorrections in coworkers' body language, which can lead to misunderstandings in collaboration between teams. For Gen Z, speaking in person while working from home is no longer an instinct; It is a skill that must be relearned. Companies must provide a "safe" environment where these social skills can be practiced without undue pressure on performance (Piasek et al., 2022).

To regulate the way of speaking or behaving differently when face-to-face needs adjustments, and that is very natural, because you have to face the dynamics of communication directly. Because the interlocutor from whom the city communicates has habits such as body language and different ways of speaking. It is feared that there is a misunderstanding with what is conveyed, especially from facial expressions, and gestures or sitting positions. The factor that makes a person feel comfortable during the face-to-face communication process is when the interlocutor appreciates what is conveyed, does not interrupt the conversation and also body gestures by looking at eye contact where the emotional interlocutor will feel more appreciated and can see how they understand the feelings of our speaker. And as for the factors that make it uncomfortable during face-to-face communication, where the person who is communicating with is distracted or more engrossed in using a mobile phone than talking to the interlocutor, also from the way they respond whether they are open or look less receptive to conversation, it greatly affects the comfort of communicating face-to-face. In general, according to several of the following factors can cause discomfort in face-to-face interactions and worry about direct judgments from others in the absence of "filters" or pauses for thinking, such as in chat. Digital Primacy also communicates through the screen feels draining (draining). Non-Verbal Overload where people who are used to text communication may be afraid because we have to process body language, eye contact, and intonation when interacting directly (Gaster Health Journal, 2024).

This finding is in line with research (Anna Albrychiewicz, 2022), Generation Z has a great commitment or dependence on modern information technology. Generation Z prefers smartphones. The use of these basic communication tools often overshadows direct communication. Through these tools, Generation Z gained and various knowledge. One of the main advantages of working remotely can be increased organizational flexibility, reduced operational costs, reduced attendance (Słocińska, 2022). The effect of working hybrid changes the way direct interactions are and makes moments more precious, because they rarely meet with other teams. Generation Z is more expressive and open because they are used to fast and digital communication, so they are more likely to be to the point and two-way. Even in face-to-face, they usually like a more open and less rigid atmosphere towards equal communication and listening to each other.

No technology can replace direct communication due to its unique nature. The two main components that determine comfort in direct interaction are responsiveness and the full presence of the interlocutor. According to the source, one of the main obstacles or obstacles that cause discomfort is the excessive use of gadgets or the dominance of conversations by other parties. This damages emotional connection and mutual respect. The experience of working remotely affects the way resources communicate. They tend to be more organized, appreciate the time spent speaking, and are shorter. Interestingly, for some interviewees, online communication is considered a "bridge" or a paving way before face-to-face interaction. Due to its increasingly infrequent frequency, in-person meetings are becoming more valuable and anticipated moments. There are different but mutually supportive perspectives on the characteristics of Gen Z. according to Informant **Gianti said "Working ambience + environment, mood and attitude of the interlocutor. If the atmosphere is supportive, it will feel comfortable" (Gianti, March 4, 2026).** Gen Z tends to communicate more expressively, openly, and egalitarian because they are a generation that grew up in the age of computers and the internet. However, their emotional dynamics are quite complex. On the one hand, they are very flexible and capable of using technology to communicate, but they are also more sensitive than previous generations.

Overall, Generation Z shows the ability to adapt to a variety of situations and conditions, as well as continuously improve their ability to communicate with others in real life. The above facts are closely related to a number of different concepts of communication, namely the Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel) which explains why people refuse to speak directly. Face-to-face media is considered "rich" because it allows for quick feedback and the exchange of non-verbal cues, such as eye contact and body language, which improves emotional understanding. **According to**

Azrina, "Usually, what makes us comfortable, such as the connection, gaze, eye contact, we can see directly how the other person listens and appreciates our existence. Then we can also directly see their body language and see how they understand the feelings of our conversation. But from all of that, there are things that can make us uncomfortable, one of which is when we are engrossed in chatting, our interlocutor is distracted by his cellphone so that he feels that we are not in front of them. Then the dominance of the conversation from the interlocutor makes us feel *underestimate*" (Azrina, March 02, 2026). The phenomenon of phubbing, namely the discomfort of the interviewee with the use of a mobile phone when talking is the core of phubbing. Research shows that this behavior significantly reduces the quality of social interaction because one party feels unappreciated (Roberts & David, 2016). And Generational Adaptation, where Generation Z is currently experiencing a transition between the need for social-emotional validation and practical digital communication styles. This results in a more expressive communication profile but sensitive to the mood of the surrounding environment (Forsell, 2016).

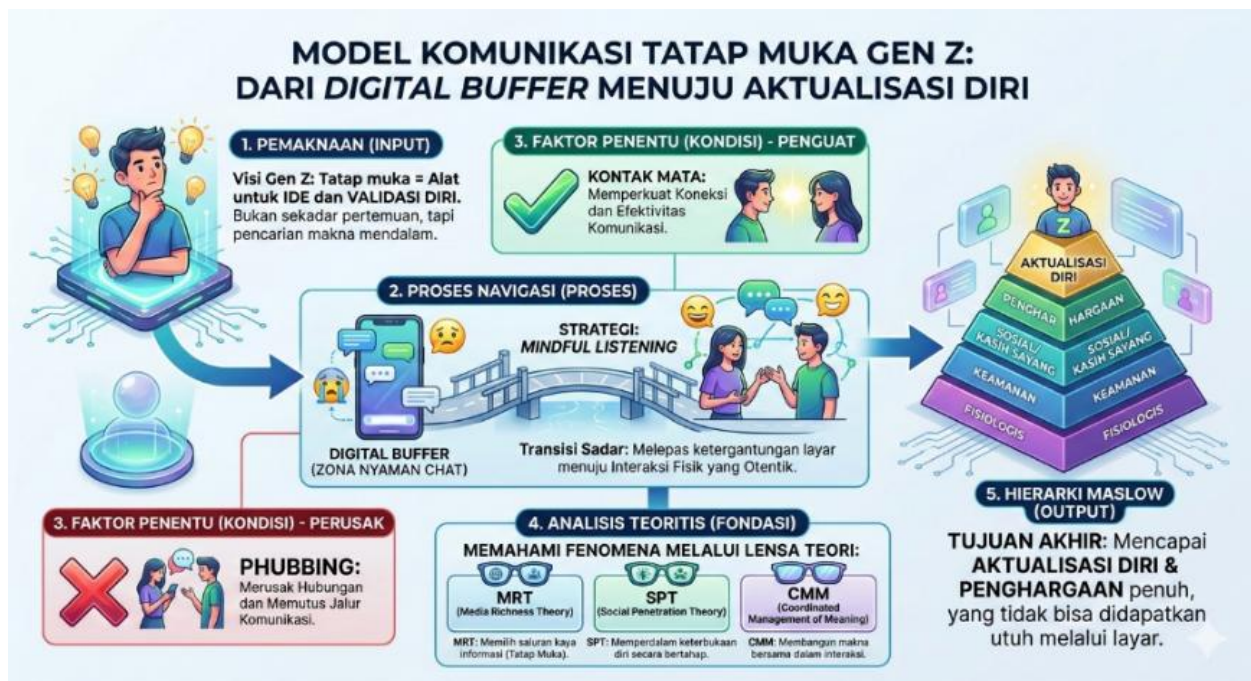


Figure 1. Research Result Model

Source: Gen Z face-to-face communication model: From digital buffer to self-actualization.

To dissect the problem of Gen Z, you can use the main point of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory, developed by W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen, considers communication to be a process of shaping social reality rather than just the exchange of information. To dissect the problem of Gen Z, you can use the main point of CMM which is Reality Construction. According to CMM, people "live" in stories they make up themselves. Since Gen Z is so accustomed to digital productivity, stories about the "office" may be considered a tiring place. CMM helps you analyze how they apply the definition of "professionalism" directly. And also the Hierarchy of Meaning where CMM emphasizes that context (episodes, relationships, identities, and cultures) form meaning. The use in this study is that When Gen Z and previous generations had different hierarchical meanings, problems arose. For example, for bosses, "face-to-face" is about hierarchy and compliance, while for Gen Z, it's a threat to time efficiency. Coordination versus Coherence where Coherence is how Gen Z understands messages and Coordination How Gen Z changes their behavior to achieve a common goal Here, CMM is very useful to show that Gen Z will always feel awkward or weird if there is no mutually agreed "agreement on meaning". In this study, the Coordinated Management

of Meaning (CMM) theory was used to dissect how Gen Z constructs meaning behind physical interactions. Using the hierarchy of meaning of CMM, this study explores how conscious communication coordination, or mindful coordination, can bridge the gap between the younger generation's perception of digital efficiency and conventional professionalism expectations (Jensen & Penman, 2018). This study has limitations according to the perceptual theory of Social Presence, because the sense of "presence" of generation Z is very different, so the results may be difficult to generalize to other generations such as Baby Boomers. As mentioned in the classical literature, this study focuses on communication navigation, but has not dissected the influence of internet speed or hardware quality that technically affects the level of social presence.

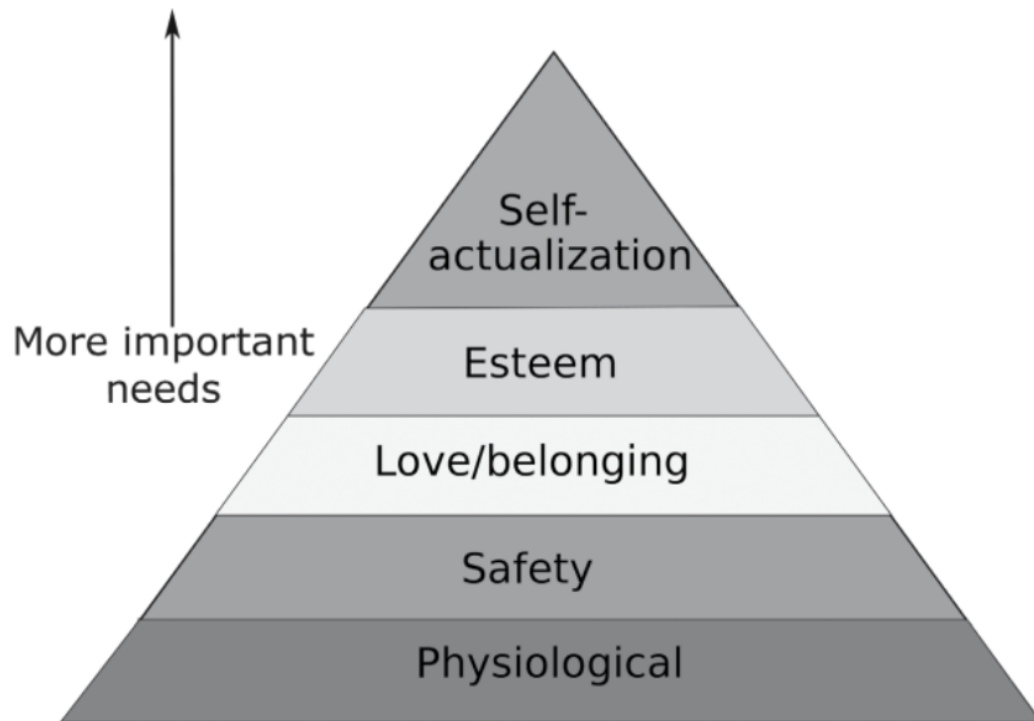


Figure 2. Maslows's hierarchy of needs

Source: Giuseppe Riva, Brenda K. Wiederhold, Pietro Cipresso (Eds.)

Although remote work technology provides a sense of security (Security Needs), Gen Z has difficulty gaining a sense of belonging due to the lack of social interaction in digital media. To meet the higher psychological needs in Maslow's hierarchy, it is essential to switch to face-to-face communication (Riva et al., n.d.).

Physiological Needs Low social presence is not a problem at this level because the focus is on physical comfort. However, navigation begins when digital isolation begins to interfere with sleep or mental health due to screen fatigue, also known as Zoom fatigue.

Safety Needs Gen Z believes communicating via text is "safe" because they have time to think before responding, avoiding social anxiety. However, a lack of social presence, which is also indicated by facial gestures, can make them feel psychologically insecure because they are afraid of misunderstanding the boss's intentions.

Love/Belonging Often , "cold" and impersonal remote communications, such as Slack or email, do not meet these standards. To address this, Gen Z is looking to face-to-face (F2F) interactions or video calls to feel a sense of belonging and "warmth." They feel isolated from the company's culture if there is no real presence.

Esteem It is very difficult to give a sincere appreciation through text. Gen Z navigates this by looking for opportunities to meet in person to build a stronger reputation and personal branding. Compliments over chat often feel less valuable than a pat on the shoulder or a handshake when people talk to each other.

Self-Actualization Gen Z needs guidance to reach this stage. Instruction requires strong social engagement (intimate, responsive, and emotional). In the remote era, Face To Face navigation is done so that they can learn directly from seniors, which is difficult to obtain if interaction is limited to rigid task instructions.

In general, this study shows that Generation Z is experiencing a process of moving from communicating digitally to interacting in person, which is an effort to move from a sense of security in cyberspace to deeper psychological needs. Using the theory of Social Presence and Media Richness, it can be seen that although digital media is more efficient, direct interaction remains the most "rich" medium because it is able to provide valuable signals that help build trust and emotional bonds that cannot be replaced. By implementing a Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) approach, companies can help Generation Z overcome social anxiety and phubbing habits. The trick is to create a "safe space" that changes the way they view face-to-face meetings from just a routine task to an opportunity to grow and meet basic needs according to Maslow's hierarchy. Here, the real presence of colleagues is an important part of increasing a sense of belonging and professionalism, especially in hybrid working times.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A digital paradox faced by Generation Z in Indonesia is the basis for this research. Gen Z, who come from the original digital generation born between 1997 and 2012, have an incredible technical ability to use asynchronous collaboration tools like Zoom, Slack, and Google Workspace. However, in the wake of the pandemic, the major transition to remote work systems has created obstacles in their usual interpersonal skills. Which aims to examine how Gen Z navigates and understands face-to-face communication amid the dominance of digital work culture. Identify mental issues such as "professional social anxiety" and "digital burnout," also known as Zoom burnout. Develop a communication model that integrates digital capabilities with the need for human connection (social capital). Evaluate how interpersonal communication functions within Maslow's hierarchy of needs for young employees. This research reached several important conclusions based on qualitative analysis and discussions conducted.

1) **Redefining the Meaning of Face-to-Face Communication**

Almost one hundred percent of respondents said that, even in a remote work system, face-to-face communication is still important. It's interesting that Generation Z sees physical meetings as a strategic tool rather than just an administrative task. Face-to-face is used for the following purposes: Legality and Trust Affairs, for Signing important contracts and deals that require physical certainty, Transmission of Energy and Emotion Capturing the intonation and "vibe" of the team that is often absent from the text. Spontaneity Reduces technical barriers, such as sound, and allows for immediate decision-making.

2) **Convenience dichotomy where Peers vs. Superiors Show different levels of comfort.**

To reduce mental stress or stress, the informants prefer a hybrid model in their interactions with their superiors. However, to build emotional closeness, they prefer direct cooperation with peers. Digital media serves as a "buffer," or buffer, that protects them from social anxiety when confronted with authority.

3) **The Importance of Non-Verbal Gestures (Social Presence)**

Studies show that elements of confidence include eye contact, facial expressions, and body gestures (such as shaking hands or nods). Gen Z realizes that face-to-face is "rich" while text is "poor" (lean medium). Despite the fact that Generation Z loves the ability to work from anywhere and at any time, they are starting to realize that a physical presence in the office has a significant impact on their career success and possible promotions. When mentoring is done at a "coffee machine" or at lunch, it turns out to be more effective than a formal Zoom session. The results of the study resulted in the following suggestion for organizations and individuals that the Company should implement the "Team Communication Agreement" model, which means the company should create clear protocols about when to use email (routine tasks) and when to meet in person (for celebrations, conflict resolution, brainstorming). "Psychological Safety" environment to Create an environment where Generation Z can make mistakes in social communication without being overburdened by their performance.

Onboarding should include soft skills training. Digital Gamification and Humanization If total remote work has to be done, use features that increase "social presidency" in digital media to make it warmer. Structured Hybrid Policy Avoid irregular hybrids and fill the office day with interactive activities instead of just moving a desk from home to the office to make a Zoom call. For Generation Z, Invest in Interpersonal Resilience, which is to practice speaking without digital "filters" to become more resilient in negotiations. Use the opportunity to meet face-to-face as an investment in your career future, not just an administrative responsibility. Theoretical Implications This research improves on previous research on Social Presence Theory (SPT) and Media Wealth Theory in the context of work culture in Indonesia.

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