

Examining the Effect of Communication Style on Romantic Relationship Satisfaction in Adults

Running Title: Communication Styles and Relationship Satisfaction

Prajakta Pravin Patil¹, Hemanthbau²

¹III Semester, Department of Psychology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, India
Email: [prajakta.patil\[at\]jainuniversity.ac.in](mailto:prajakta.patil[at]jainuniversity.ac.in)

²Professor, Department of Psychology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, India

Abstract: *The quality and longevity of romantic relationships are fundamentally shaped by the communication patterns adopted by intimate partners. This study investigated the empirical impact of communication styles on romantic relationship satisfaction among adults. Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were gathered from a sample of 171 adults (M age range = 25–34 years; 67.3% male, 32.7% female; 57.9% married) associated with JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University) through purposive sampling. Standardized self-report questionnaires measuring constructive communication patterns and relationship satisfaction were administered via an online survey platform. Descriptive statistics, Pearson bivariate correlation, and simple linear regression analyses were conducted. The empirical findings demonstrated a robust, statistically significant positive correlation between constructive communication styles and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r = .906$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis indicated that communication style accounts for 82% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .820$, $F(1, 182) = 520.140$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .906$, $t = 22.807$). These results underscore that constructive, open, and respectful communication styles serve as vital determinants of romantic relationship stability, emotional attachment, and mutual understanding. The study provides theoretical extensions to Social Exchange Theory and Attachment Theory while highlighting actionable insights for clinical intervention, couples counseling, and relationship enhancement programs.*

Keywords: communication styles, relationship satisfaction, romantic relationships, adult couples, social exchange theory, attachment theory

1. Introduction

Examining the Effect of Communication Style on Romantic Relationship Satisfaction in Adults

Romantic relationships constitute a fundamental cornerstone of human social connection, serving as a primary source of emotional support, personal fulfillment, and overall psychological well-being. At the heart of romantic relational functioning lies communication— a dynamic, multi-faceted process encompassing verbal exchanges, non-verbal behaviors, and affective expressions (Gottman, 1994). Communication is not merely a mechanism for information transmission; rather, it actively constructs the emotional climate, relational climate, and mutual satisfaction experienced by romantic partners (Gottman & Silver, 2012). Research in relationship science has consistently demonstrated that the quality and functional style of interpersonal communication serve as primary predictors of relational stability, conflict resolution efficacy, and long-term durability (Markman et al., 2010; Yager, 2020).

In seminal marital research, Gottman and Silver (2012) highlighted that destructive communication patterns specifically criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (termed the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse") predict relational distress, emotional detachment, and higher probabilities of dissolution. Conversely, constructive communication styles characterized by open self-disclosure, active listening, respectful conflict negotiation, and empathetic validation foster positive relational outcomes and deep emotional attachment. Despite extensive literature affirming the core

role of communication, significant gaps remain regarding how communication styles systematically account for variance in overall relationship satisfaction among specific adult populations, particularly within contemporary socio-demographic contexts.

The present study aims to address this critical empirical gap by examining the direct impact of communication styles on romantic relationship satisfaction in adults. By evaluating structured quantitative survey data from adult partners across varied relationship stages and durations, this study seeks to clarify the functional link between communication patterns and relational outcomes.

2. Theoretical Framework

To formulate a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding communication dynamics and relationship satisfaction, this investigation synthesizes five complementary theoretical perspectives:

a) **Social Exchange Theory.** Developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals evaluate their relationships through a cost-benefit lens, seeking to maximize rewards while minimizing interpersonal costs. In romantic contexts, communication acts as a primary vehicle for social exchange. Constructive communication characterized by active listening and validated expressions functions as a high-reward exchange that minimizes psychological stress and enhances mutual relational satisfaction.

- b) **Attachment Theory.** Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) asserts that early interactions with primary caregivers shape internal working models of self and others, which endure into adult romantic relationships. Securely attached adults tend to utilize collaborative and open communication styles, enabling high relational satisfaction. Conversely, insecurely attached individuals (anxious or avoidant) often exhibit destructive patterns, such as hypervigilance or stonewalling, leading to relational dissatisfaction (Larson, 2013; Nelson, 2018).
- c) **Five-Factor Model of Personality.** The Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) highlights individual differences, particularly Emotional Stability (versus Neuroticism). Emotional stability plays a vital role in mediating communication responses, as individuals higher in emotional stability process relationship stressors more adaptively and maintain positive, constructive communication during conflict (Karatatar, 2019).
- d) **Couples Communication Models.** Specific frameworks, such as the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984), operationalize couples' interaction patterns into constructive (e.g., mutual discussion, problem-solving) and destructive behaviors (e.g., demand-withdraw, mutual avoidance). These models provide the structural basis for measuring communication style in intimate partnerships.
- e) **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.** Formulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), this model conceptualizes communication styles as cognitive and behavioral coping mechanisms utilized to manage relational stressors. Flexible, problem-focused communication strategies reduce perceived stress and mitigate the adverse impacts of conflict on relational quality.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The specific objectives of this study were: (a) to examine the bivariate relationship between communication styles and romantic relationship satisfaction in adults, (b) to quantify the empirical impact and predictive strength of communication styles on relationship satisfaction, and (c) to discuss practical implications for clinical interventions and couples therapy.

Based on these objectives, two primary research hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is a statistically significant positive relationship between constructive communication styles and romantic relationship satisfaction in adults.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): Communication styles significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction in adults.

3. Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design. Cross-sectional designs are particularly efficient for evaluating relational phenomena at a specific point in time across a diverse sample (Fraenkel et al., 2018; Lavner et al., 2016). Furthermore, a correlational and regression-based analytic approach was utilized to evaluate

the natural associations between the predictor variable (communication styles) and the outcome variable (relationship satisfaction) without experimental manipulation (Hayes, 2013; Lucido, 2015).

Participants and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised adult individuals associated with JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, including support staff, students, faculty, and administrative employees. A two-stage sampling procedure was implemented. First, a stratified random framework was conceptualized across academic and non-academic employee strata to minimize within-group variance (Banning et al., 2012). Second, purposive sampling was applied to recruit individuals who met specific eligibility criteria: being at least 18 years of age and currently engaged in a romantic relationship (cohabiting, married, or dating).

A total of 300 prospective respondents were invited to participate, from which 171 completed surveys were successfully obtained, yielding an effective response rate of 57% (representing 83% usable completion among engaged respondents). The demographic breakdown of the final sample ($N = 171$) is detailed in Table 1. Males comprised 67.3% ($n = 115$) of the sample, while females accounted for 32.7% ($n = 56$). The predominant age bracket was 25–34 years (70.8%, $n = 121$), followed by 45 years and above (15.2%, $n = 26$), 18–24 years (7.0%, $n = 12$), and 35–44 years (7.0%, $n = 12$). Regarding relationship status, 57.9% ($n = 99$) were married, and 42.1% ($n = 72$) were single/dating. In terms of relationship length, 62.0% ($n = 106$) reported being in their current relationship for 3–5 years, 25.1% ($n = 43$) for 1–3 years, 9.4% ($n = 16$) for less than 6 months, 1.8% ($n = 3$) for 6–12 months, and 1.8% ($n = 3$) for over 5 years.

Measures and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured online survey administered via Google Forms, requiring approximately 20 to 30 minutes for completion. The questionnaire contained three distinct sections:

Socio-Demographic Questionnaire. Collected background information regarding age, gender, marital/relationship status, and relationship duration.

Communication Style Scale. Communication preferences and patterns were measured using adapted items aligned with established couples communication instruments (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample items included: "My partner and I communicate openly about our feelings," "We resolve conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner," and "I feel heard and understood when communicating with my partner."

Relationship Satisfaction Scale. Relational fulfillment was assessed using items adapted from standard relationship assessment scales (e.g., Relationship Assessment Scale; Hendrick, 1988), scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Sample items included: "I am satisfied with the overall quality of my

romantic relationship" and "I feel fulfilled and happy in my romantic relationship."

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were computed to summarize demographic attributes. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis (r) was executed to evaluate the strength and direction of the bivariate association between communication style and relationship satisfaction. Simple linear regression analysis was performed to test the predictive capacity of communication style on relationship satisfaction.

4. Results

The statistical analysis proceeded in three stages: descriptive demographic analysis, bivariate correlation testing, and linear regression modelling.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 171)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	115	67.3
	Female	56	32.7
Age (Years)	18–24	12	7.0
	25–34	121	70.8
	35–44	12	7.0
	45 and above	26	15.2
Relationship Status	Single / Dating	72	42.1
	Married	99	57.9
Relationship Duration	Less than 6 months	16	9.4
	6 months to 1 year	3	1.8
	1–3 years	43	25.1
	3–5 years	106	62.0
	More than 5 years	3	1.8
Total		171	100.0

Note. Data derived from primary survey collection.

To test Hypothesis 1, a Pearson bivariate correlation was performed between communication style scores and relationship satisfaction scores. As displayed in Table 2, a strong, statistically significant positive correlation was observed ($r = .906$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher scores in constructive communication styles are strongly associated with higher levels of romantic relationship satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlation Between Communication Styles and Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	1	2
1. Communication Styles	—	.906**
2. Relationship Satisfaction	.906**	—

Note. ** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). N = 171.

To evaluate Hypothesis 2, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted with communication style as the predictor variable and relationship satisfaction as the outcome variable. The regression model statistics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Communication Styles

Model/Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	.113	.107	—	1.054	.294
Communication Styles	.936	.041	.906	22.807	<.001

Note. $R = .906$, $R^2 = .820$, Adjusted $R^2 = .819$, $F(1, 182) = 520.140$, $p < .001$, Standard Error of Estimate = .40493. Regression Model Sum of Squares = 85.288 (df = 1), Residual Sum of Squares = 18.693 (df = 182).

The regression analysis revealed a powerful linear model. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .820$) demonstrates that 82.0% of the variance in romantic relationship satisfaction is directly accounted for by communication styles. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(1, 182) = 520.140$, $p < .001$. The standardized regression coefficient indicated a strong positive effect ($\beta = .906$, $t = 22.807$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was fully supported.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study provide robust support for the critical role that communication styles play in determining romantic relationship satisfaction among adults. The primary hypothesis—that constructive communication styles positively relate to relationship satisfaction—was supported by a correlation of $r = .906$. Furthermore, regression results confirmed that communication styles account for 82% of the variance in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .820$). These results strongly align with established marital and relational literature (De Netto et al., 2021; Gottman & Silver, 2012; Markman et al., 2010), reinforcing the assertion that how couples communicate is paramount to relational success.

From the framework of Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), constructive communication interactions such as feeling heard, sharing deep feelings, and resolving disputes respectfully act as valuable relational rewards. When partners engage in constructive dialogue, the perceived rewards of the relationship substantially outweigh the transactional costs, leading to heightened overall satisfaction. Conversely, when communication is defensive or obstructive, relational costs escalate, undermining trust and intimacy.

Similarly, these findings support Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Larson, 2013). Secure attachment orientations facilitate open emotional expression and mutual responsiveness. In contrast, insecure attachment patterns often manifests in destructive communication cycles (e.g., demand-withdraw or emotional withdrawal), which directly impair relational quality (Guerrero et al., 2009; Nelson, 2018). The high predictive power observed in this sample highlights that active, empathetic, and respectful communication serves as a operational mechanism through which adult partners establish relational security and emotional stability.

6. Practical Implications

The findings offer important practical implications for clinical psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and relationship educators:

- 1) **Targeted Communication Training:** Therapeutic interventions should prioritize concrete skill-building in constructive communication, including active listening, active-constructive responding, and the elimination of destructive communication habits (e.g., criticism, stonewalling).
- 2) **Pre-Marital and Relational Counseling:** Given that 70.8% of participants were aged 25–34 and 62.0% were in relationships lasting 3–5 years, early intervention during these critical developmental stages can prevent relational distress and build long-term stability.
- 3) **Integrating Personality and Attachment Perspectives:** Therapists should address underlying attachment anxieties and personality traits (such as emotional stability/neuroticism) alongside communication skill training to foster deep, lasting behavioral change (Karatatar, 2019).

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations must be considered when interpreting these findings:

First, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw definitive causal conclusions. While regression analysis demonstrates strong predictive power, longitudinal designs are necessary to determine whether communication styles drive relationship satisfaction over time or whether higher satisfaction naturally produces better communication (Lavner et al., 2016).

Second, data were gathered via self-report measures through an online platform. Self-report measures are susceptible to social desirability bias, particularly regarding sensitive relational topics where partners may overestimate their constructive communication skills.

Third, the sample was derived using purposive sampling within an academic institution (JAIN Deemed-to-be-University), resulting in a sample that was predominantly male (67.3%) and aged 25–34 years (70.8%). This limits generalizability to broader demographic or cultural populations. Future studies should utilize dyadic data collection (sampling both partners within a couple), employ observational methodology to evaluate real-time conflict interactions, and examine longitudinal panels across diverse non-academic cohorts.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research confirms that communication style is a major predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in adults. Constructive, open, and empathetic communication styles significantly enhance relational satisfaction, accounting for over 80% of its variance. By improving communication habits and fostering supportive interaction patterns, adult partners can cultivate enduring, emotionally fulfilling, and resilient romantic relationships.

Author Note

Prajakta Pravin Patil, Department of Psychology, Centre for Distance and Online Education, JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, India.

This research article was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's degree in Psychology.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Prajakta Pravin Patil, Department of Psychology, JAIN (Deemed-to-be-University), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

References

- [1] Arumugam, A., Shanmugavelu, G., Balakrishnan Parasuraman, P., Ariffin, K., & Kanapathy, K. (2021). Effective communication skills among married couples: An overview. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(3), 112–124.
- [2] Banning, J. H., Clemons, S. A., & McKelfresh, D. A. (2012). Stratified simple random sampling in institutional research design. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 4(1), 45–58.
- [3] Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.
- [4] Christensen, A., & Sullaway, M. (1984). *Communication Patterns Questionnaire* [Unpublished manuscript]. University of California, Los Angeles.
- [5] Costa, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) professional manual*. Psychological Assessment Resources.
- [6] De Netto, P. M., Quek, K. F., & Golden, K. J. (2021). Communication, the heart of a relationship: Examining capitalization, accommodation, and self-construal on relationship satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 767908. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.767908>
- [7] Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2018). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- [8] Gottman, J. M. (1994). *What predicts divorce?: The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [9] Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2012). *What makes love last?: How to build trust and avoid betrayal*. Simon and Schuster.
- [10] Guerrero, L. K., Farinelli, L., & Hahn, M. C. (2009). Patterns of emotional communication and relational satisfaction across attachment styles. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(5), 659–681. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509347933>
- [11] Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. Guilford Press.
- [12] Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50(1), 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/352430>
- [13] Karatatar, G. (2019). *Perceived parenting styles, personality traits, and relationship satisfaction in emerging adults* (Master's thesis). Middle East Technical University.

- [14] Larson, E. (2013). Attachment styles and their impact on adult romantic relationship satisfaction (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Minnesota.
- [15] Lavner, J. A., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2016). Does couples' communication predict marital satisfaction, or does marital satisfaction predict communication? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(3), 680–694. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12301>
- [16] Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- [17] Lucido, N. (2015). *Communication habits and relationship satisfaction within college students' romantic relationships* (Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- [18] Mallory, A. B. (2022). Dimensions of couples' sexual communication, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(3), 358–369. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000921>
- [19] Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Ragan, E. P., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). The premarital communication roots of marital distress and divorce: The first five years of marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), 289–298. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019481>
- [20] Marquez, M., Ruiz, A., & Davis, K. (2015). Perceived similarity and relational satisfaction in online dating profiles. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research*, 3(1), 12–21.
- [21] Nelson, E. (2018). *Technology, relationship satisfaction, and online infidelity behavior* (Master's thesis). Kansas State University.
- [22] Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [23] Yager, H. (2020). The effects of communication styles on marital satisfaction. *University of West Florida Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 1(1), 1–12.

- 6 months to 1 year
- 1–3 years
- 3–5 years
- More than 5 years

Section 2: Communication Style Scale

Instruction: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

- My partner and I communicate openly about our feelings.
- We resolve conflicts in a constructive and respectful manner.
- I feel heard and understood when communicating with my partner.
- We often engage in deep, meaningful conversations.
- My partner and I share similar communication preferences.

Section 3: Relationship Satisfaction Scale

Instruction: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

- I am satisfied with the overall quality of my romantic relationship.
- I feel fulfilled and happy in my romantic relationship.
- Communication style significantly influences my level of satisfaction in the relationship.
- Emotional stability plays a crucial role in my relationship satisfaction.
- I am confident in the long-term success of my romantic relationship.

Appendix

Research Instrument: Survey Questionnaire

Section 1: Socio-Demographic Background

1) Age:

- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45 and above

2) Gender:

- Male
- Female

3) Relationship Status:

- Single / Dating
- Married

4) How long have you been in your current romantic relationship?

- Less than 6 months