

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CONFLICT RESOLUTION, RELATIONAL SATISFACTION AMONG INTIMATE PARTNERS

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Abstract. Romantic relationships significantly impact individuals' mental health, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction. Effective communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution are critical to maintaining relational harmony. However, contemporary challenges, including technology use and work-life balance, complicate relationship dynamics, necessitating a deeper exploration of these factors. This study investigates the interplay between communication patterns, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution techniques, and relational satisfaction in intimate relationships. The objectives include identifying key communication strategies, exploring the role of emotional intelligence, analyzing the impact of technology-mediated communication, and understanding the balance between work-life and relational satisfaction. A qualitative, exploratory design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with 25 couples (N=50). The data were collected through guided discussions on communication styles, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software to identify key themes and subthemes. The study revealed six major themes: effective communication, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution, technology-mediated communication, work-life balance, and relational satisfaction. Active listening, empathy, and open communication emerged as pivotal for fostering intimacy and satisfaction. Technology-mediated communication demonstrated both benefits and challenges, while work-life balance significantly influenced relational harmony. This research underscores the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence, balanced communication strategies, and effective conflict resolution to enhance relationship dynamics. The innovative application of blockchain technology concepts in managing relational conflicts was also noted as a novel approach to selective information sharing. Future studies should examine the long-term impacts of technology-mediated communication, delve into diverse relational contexts, and develop interventions that integrate emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies to strengthen intimate relationships.

Keywords: romantic partners; interpersonal communication; emotional intelligence; conflict resolution; relational satisfaction; blockchain.

JEL Classification: D91, H55, M14

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Introduction. Romantic relationships play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' mental health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. The dynamic nature of such relationships requires continuous communication, mutual understanding, and effective conflict resolution to maintain satisfaction and harmony.

Literature review. Romantic relationships significantly impact mental health, emotional well-being, and general quality of life (Gottman & Silver, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Effective communication is crucial for building and maintaining satisfying relationships. However, contemporary interactions pose unique challenges, including technology integration and work-life balance. Despite the growing literature, in-depth investigations of communication processes in romantic relationships remain necessary (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004).

This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring couples' experiences with communication dynamics, emotional closeness, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction. Understanding these factors is essential, as they influence mental health outcomes and overall life satisfaction (Gilliland & Dunn, 2003; Zeidner et al., 2013).

Research has shown that emotional intelligence positively correlates with relationship satisfaction (Gupta, S. K. 2024). The mediating effect of organizational communication on emotional intelligence and turnover intention. Constructive conflict resolution techniques and effective communication patterns also contribute to relationship satisfaction (Gupta et al., 2020). However, most studies have examined these factors separately, focusing on individual emotional skills.

Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory introduced a systematic approach to understanding relationship development through graduated self-disclosure. While their model of progression from superficial to intimate exchanges has been influential, critics note that its linear nature may not fully capture modern relationship dynamics.

Guerney's (1977) Relationship Enhancement Model focused on practical skill-building approaches, emphasizing empathic understanding and problem-solving capabilities. Research has validated this structured approach's effectiveness in improving relationship outcomes.

Walster et al. (1978) applied equity theory to romantic relationships, demonstrating how perceived inequities influence relationship satisfaction and communication patterns. Their work provides crucial insights into how partners evaluate fairness and reciprocity.

Hazan and Shaver's (1987) Attachment Communication Model applied attachment theory to adult relationships, demonstrating how early experiences influence adult communication patterns. Their identification of secure, anxious, and avoidant patterns has significantly impacted understanding of individual differences in relationship communication.

Christensen and Heavey's (1990) research on the demand-withdraw pattern revealed a common destructive communication dynamic where one partner pursues while the other withdraws. Their work has been particularly valuable in understanding gender differences in conflict behaviour.

Building on this foundation, Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) Dialectical Model presented a non-linear perspective, emphasizing the importance of managing ongoing tensions between competing desires such as autonomy versus connection. Their research suggests that successful relationships are characterized by the effective management of these inherent contradictions rather than their resolution.

The foundation of relationship communication research was established by Gottman and Silver's (1999) Four Horsemen Model, which identified criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling as key predictors of relationship dissolution. Their longitudinal studies demonstrated up to 93% accuracy in predicting divorce when these patterns were observed alongside specific physiological responses, providing a crucial framework for identifying destructive communication patterns in romantic relationships.

Finally, Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management Theory examines the negotiation of privacy boundaries in relationships, providing valuable insights into how modern couples manage information sharing in an increasingly digital world.

Solomon and Knobloch's (2004) Relational Turbulence Model addresses how couples navigate transitions, demonstrating how uncertainty and partner interference can create communication challenges during these periods. This model has proven particularly relevant for understanding relationship dynamics during major life changes.

Emmers-Sommer (2004) conducted a study examining the effects of communication quality and quantity on intimacy and relational satisfaction. The study surveyed 200 couples, revealing that communication quality predicted intimacy and satisfaction. Specifically, results showed that the quality of communication, rather than quantity, was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Coyne et al. (2011) investigated media use in romantic relationships, surveying 1,300 participants. Findings indicated that texting positively correlated with expressions of affection, but also contributed to negative communication when used for conflict or hurtful messages.

Cordova et al. (2016) examined emotional validation's role in sustaining intimacy and satisfaction. The study surveyed 200 couples, finding that emotional validation predicted intimacy and satisfaction, highlighting the importance of emotional skilfulness.

The Sound Relationship House Theory, developed by Gottman and Gottman (2017), emerged from decades of observational research, identifying nine crucial components of relationship success. This comprehensive model emphasizes both conflict management and positive relationship building, providing a practical framework for therapeutic intervention.

McDaniel et al. (2017) investigated texting's impact on relationship satisfaction, surveying 300 couples. Results showed that regular, positive texting correlated with increased relationship satisfaction, while excessive or conflict-driven texting harmed relationships.

Bary (2019) examined disengaged couple communication's impact on depressive symptoms. The study found that disengaged communication linked to depressive symptoms, emphasizing the importance of effective communication.

Gupta, Uygun, Reznik, and Sipahi (2020) examined Ethiopian Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (TCRMs), highlighting their vital role in maintaining social harmony through community elders and traditional leaders. Their research revealed TCRMs' effectiveness in rural areas for resolving various conflicts, while noting challenges such as balancing tradition with modern legal requirements and ensuring gender equality. Despite these challenges, TCRMs remain essential in Ethiopia's conflict management system.

Cloutier (2021) systematically reviewed 43 studies on romantic relationships and sexuality in individuals with psychotic disorders. Results underscored the need for improved communication and support.

Pereira et al. (2022) examined the impact of communication patterns and forgiveness on physical and psychological morbidity in young adults. The study found that destructive communication patterns interfered with forgiveness, increasing morbidity, while constructive communication predicted better physical health.

Sharma, Mishra and Gupta (2024) identified a critical research gap regarding the potential mediating role of organizational communication in the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee turnover intentions.

Despite the existing body of research on relationship communication, significant gaps remain in our understanding of effective communication strategies, conflict resolution, and relationship maintenance. Specifically, further investigation is needed into the role of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution, the connection between adult attachment styles and relational maintenance strategies, and the relationship between love styles and relationship satisfaction. Additionally, research on emerging communication platforms and their impact on relationships, non-traditional relationships, and communication's influence on mental health is limited. Effective conflict resolution strategies, attachment communication patterns in diverse populations, and relationship maintenance strategies in modern relationships also require further exploration. To address these gaps, future studies should develop and evaluate interventions targeting communication skills and relationship satisfaction, ultimately informing strategies for building and maintaining healthy, satisfying relationships.

Aims. This study investigates how emotional intelligence affects conflict resolution styles in intimate relationships, contributing to our understanding of relationship dynamics. By integrating these interrelated components – relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution techniques, and emotional intelligence – this research provides a comprehensive framework for understanding relationship dynamics.

The main goal of the article is to study the key communication patterns, strategies, and challenges, conflict resolution, role of emotional intelligence and relational satisfaction among intimate partners.

The main research objectives are:

- to identify key communication patterns which are present among the intimate partners.

- to investigate effective conflict resolution techniques in romantic relationships.
- to examine the impact of technology-mediated communication on relationship dynamics.
- to identify the importance of Emotional intelligence in Intimate relationships.
- to explore the relationship between work-life balance, non-verbal communication, and relationship satisfaction.

Hypotheses:

H1: Effective Communication is positively related to relational satisfaction among romantic partners.

H2: Conflict Resolution Strategies mediate the relationship between Effective Communication and Relationship Satisfaction among romantic partners.

H3: Technology-Mediated Communication negatively impacts Emotional Intimacy among romantic partners.

H4: Emotional intelligence is positively related to Relationship Satisfaction among romantic partners.

Methodology. This qualitative study employed interview method to explore communication in intimate relationships. A qualitative, exploratory design was used to gain in-depth insights into the communication dynamics of intimate relationships.

Sample size. Purposive sampling was employed to select 25 couples (50 participants) aged 20-30. Inclusion criteria included having a graduate degree, being working professionals, belonging to a middle-class socioeconomic status, and being in a romantic relationship for at least 1 year.

Data Collection. Semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes) were conducted with each couple. An interview protocol guided the discussion, covering topics such as emotional intimacy, relationship satisfaction, technology-mediated communication, communication gaps, communication style, and conflict resolution.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was employed, involving verbatim transcription of the interviews, initial coding based on the research questions, identification of emerging subthemes, and the interviews, initial coding based on the research questions, identification of emerging subthemes, and the development of overarching themes.

Trustworthiness. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness included member checking, peer debriefing, and providing thick descriptions of the methodology and context.

Ethical Considerations. The study maintained informed consent, confidentiality, and non-maleficence was maintained throughout the research process.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis using NVivo software. This methodology enabled an in-depth understanding of communication in intimate relationships, providing valuable insights into the complexities of romantic relationships.

Results. The main results of the study are presented in Table 1.

The obtained results were interpreted using thematic analysis method. Six major themes and related subthemes emerged from the responses. They are:

1. Active listening is a key component of effective communication: "Active listening, good listening, try to understand perspective, clarify confusions." "Quality

time (talking, live language)" is the quality time option. It is said that "open communication matches the style."

2. Emotional Expression and Intimacy: "By openly sharing my feelings." Understanding and Empathy: "Understand each other's emotions, expression of emotions." One area of vulnerability is "Being silent, taking some personal space."

3. Open Communication-Based Conflict Resolution: "By openly communicating, taking time to understand each other's perspective." The regulation of emotions: "Being silent, taking some personal space."

4. Communication Mediated by Technology "Both (technology-mediated and face-to-face)" is a convenient option. The statement "We don't set boundaries for technology" concerns boundary setting.

5. Balance between work and life One strategy for setting priorities is "prioritizing after work hours." "88% Full support" is the partner support rating.

6. Quality Time - Relationship Satisfaction: "Quality time is missing" "Understanding each other" is an example of understanding.

Table 1. This table explains the Themes, Sub-Themes and Supporting Quotes

Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Quotes
Effective Communication	Active Listening	"Active listening, good listening, try to understand perspective, clarify confusions."
	Quality Time	"Quality time (talking, live language)"
	Open Communication	"Open communication matches the style."
Emotional Intimacy	Emotional Expression	"By openly sharing my feelings."
	Empathy and understanding	"Understand each other emotions, expression of emotions."
	Vulnerability	"Being silent, taking some personal space."
Conflict Resolution	Open Communication	"By openly communicating, taking time to understand each other's perspective."
	Emotional Regulation	"Being silent, taking some personal space."
Technology-Mediated Communication	Convenience	"Both (technology-mediated and face-to-face)"
	Boundary Setting	"We don't set boundaries for technology"
Work-Life Balance	Prioritization	"Prioritizing after work hours."
	Partner Support	"88% Full support"
Relationship Satisfaction	Quality Time	"Quality time is missing"
	Understanding	"Understanding each other"

Source: developed by the authors

Discussion. Based on the data obtained from the Thematic analysis, the key components found for the Intimate relationships were: effective communication; emotional intimacy; conflict resolution strategies; technology-mediated communication; work-life balance; relationship satisfaction. These components reflect a multidimensional approach to understanding the dynamics of intimate relationships, integrating emotional, communicative, and contextual factors that influence relational success.

Active listening played an important role in effective communication where it includes empathy and open communication. Most of the Intimate partners expect the communication to be open and empathetic involving deeper understanding of each other's perspective. However, in the majority of cases, communication also involves censorship and filtration to prevent conflicts. This is also the case with blockchain technology, where data is stored in files and discrete units, but only the necessary data

is accessible to the user, limiting the amount of data that is used for management purposes. Similar to the analogy of blockchain technology, intimate relationship communication occurs when a partner reveals just the necessary details while keeping the rest private, which may affect how conflicts are resolved. One of the statements cited by the subject was the use of concept of Block-chain technology. "Hiding the information that makes my partner angry and may cause a fight is the best tactic I use to resolve the conflict." This illustrates how the idea of blockchain technology is effectively applied to resolve disputes that arise in close relationships.

Conclusion. This study highlights the central role of interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution strategies, and relational satisfaction in intimate relationships. The findings emphasize that active listening, empathy, and open communication are pivotal in fostering emotional intimacy and relationship satisfaction among partners. Additionally, technology-mediated communication has a dual impact: while it enhances convenience, it also raises challenges like boundary-setting and emotional distance.

Conflict resolution emerges as a critical factor in maintaining healthy relationships, with strategies such as emotional regulation and open communication proving effective. Work-life balance, supported by prioritization and mutual support, significantly influences relational satisfaction. Non-verbal communication and quality time were also identified as essential components in nurturing relationship dynamics.

The integration of novel concepts, such as the analogy of blockchain technology to manage conflict through selective information sharing, provides an innovative perspective on modern relationship communication. While such strategies can mitigate immediate disputes, they also underscore the need for transparency and trust in long-term relational harmony.

This study underscores the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence, effective communication patterns, and balanced relational strategies to enhance relational satisfaction. Future research should explore the long-term implications of technology-mediated communication, the intersection of work-life dynamics, and emerging techniques in relational conflict resolution across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of intimate relationships and offer actionable insights for practitioners and individuals seeking to improve relational dynamics.

Author contributions. The authors contributed equally.

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