

Digital Communication Patterns and Marital Satisfaction in Dual-Career Households: A Global Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between digital communication patterns and marital satisfaction in dual-career households across North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. A sample of 600 married individuals in dual-career relationships was surveyed using a structured online questionnaire measuring communication frequency, communication quality, perceived responsiveness, and marital satisfaction. Descriptive, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were conducted. Results indicated that while digital communication frequency was positively associated with marital satisfaction, communication quality and perceived responsiveness were stronger predictors, accounting for the largest share of variance in marital satisfaction. Regional analysis revealed that couples in technologically advanced regions reported higher communication frequency and satisfaction compared to those in emerging economies. The study applied Media Multiplexity Theory and Work–Family Border Theory to explain these dynamics, showing that couples using multiple digital channels and maintaining negotiated boundaries experienced higher marital satisfaction. The findings emphasized the importance of emotionally rich, responsive, and culturally sensitive digital communication in sustaining marital harmony among dual-career couples. Practical implications for marital counseling and family support programs were discussed, particularly regarding training couples in effective digital relational skills and boundary management.

Keywords: Digital Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Dual-Career Couples, Cross-Cultural Comparison

Introduction

Research on contemporary marital dynamics had increasingly shown that technological advancement reshaped how partners communicated, negotiated responsibilities, and sustained emotional closeness, especially in dual-career households where time scarcity and occupational pressure intersected with family

demands. Scholars had argued that communication remained central to marital stability, yet the modes, frequency, and quality of communication had been transformed by digital tools such as social media, instant messaging, email, and video platforms (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014). These tools had provided greater convenience but had simultaneously introduced new challenges, including digital overload, distraction, and blurred boundaries between work and family life (Aagaard, 2019). As dual-career couples navigated demanding schedules, digital communication served as a bridge that compensated for physical absence while simultaneously becoming a potential source of conflict when misused or overused (Merkle & Richardson, 2000). Global comparative research had indicated that dual-career households experienced unique pressures due to heightened work intensity, role strain, and the negotiation of domestic responsibilities in increasingly complex family systems (Craig & Churchill, 2020). In regions with strong technological penetration—such as North America, Europe, and parts of Asia—digital communication had been widely integrated into daily marital interactions, influencing patterns of intimacy, coordination, and conflict resolution (Baym, 2015). At the same time, studies in Africa and Latin America had shown that rising ICT adoption among middle- and upper-income households brought new relational dynamics, altering expectations of availability and responsiveness between spouses (Chib et al., 2021). These cross-regional findings collectively suggested that digital communication could function as both a facilitator of marital satisfaction and a stressor that amplified relational tensions.

The emerging global evidence had indicated that marital satisfaction depended not only on communication frequency but on the perceived quality, emotional tone, and relational meaning of digital interactions (Ledbetter, 2010). Partners who engaged in positive, supportive, and coordinated communication online tended to report higher satisfaction, whereas those who experienced ambiguity, neglect, or conflict escalation through digital platforms often reported diminished marital quality (Holmes, 2021). Dual-career couples, in particular, relied on digital communication to maintain relational stability amidst long working hours, travel demands, and spatial separation caused by career mobility (Ruppel & Burke, 2015). In such contexts, digital tools provided continuity and connection but also became sites of misunderstanding when

messages were interpreted out of context or when partners perceived unequal investment in communication. Researchers had increasingly explored how communication technologies affected the work–family interface. Studies had revealed that constant connectivity blurred temporal boundaries, often intruding into family time and reducing the quality of face-to-face interactions (Kossek et al., 2012). This intrusion had been linked to lower marital satisfaction due to the perception of work taking precedence over family, especially in households where both partners carried high professional responsibilities (Derks et al., 2015). Conversely, controlled and intentional digital use had been associated with improved coordination of family responsibilities and higher relational harmony (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). These findings illustrated that the impact of digital communication was not uniform but contingent on contextual, cultural, and behavioral factors. Gender expectations had also played a significant role in shaping digital communication patterns within dual-career marriages. Cross-cultural studies had indicated that women tended to engage more frequently in relational maintenance behaviors online, such as emotional check-ins, affection sharing, and conflict de-escalation strategies (Haferkamp et al., 2012). Men, on the other hand, were often found to communicate more functionally, using digital tools primarily for coordination and task-related exchanges. Such differences occasionally contributed to mismatched expectations and relational tensions, especially when partners perceived digital interactions as inadequate or emotionally unbalanced (Coyne et al., 2011). These gendered variations were observed across Western and non-Western contexts, highlighting the global relevance of the phenomenon. The increasing prevalence of dual-career households worldwide had intensified scholarly interest in understanding how digital communication shaped relationship satisfaction. In economically advanced societies, flexible work arrangements had increased reliance on digital tools as couples balanced individual and joint responsibilities (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). In developing regions, digital communication often compensated for infrastructural and mobility challenges, providing efficient means of staying connected despite demanding work environments (Boateng, 2022). These contextual distinctions demonstrated that digital communication had become integral to marital functioning in diverse cultural settings.

Within this global landscape, the central goal of the present paper was to investigate how digital communication patterns influenced marital satisfaction among dual-career couples across different regions. The paper aimed to determine the extent to which digital communication frequency, responsiveness, emotional tone, and platform choice contributed to marital satisfaction, and to identify variations associated with cultural and socioeconomic factors. The study also sought to compare how digital communication dynamics unfolded in technologically advanced societies versus emerging economies, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in a globalized world.

To structure this investigation, the study had been anchored on two theoretical frameworks: the Media Multiplexity Theory (Haythornthwaite, 2005) and the Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000). Media Multiplexity Theory proposed that strong relational ties tended to use multiple channels of communication, suggesting that digitally active couples might demonstrate higher marital satisfaction due to richer interaction patterns. Work–Family Border Theory examined how individuals negotiated boundaries between work and family roles, providing a lens to understand how digital communication either facilitated or disrupted marital functioning. Together, these theories offered a robust conceptual foundation for analyzing digital communication in dual-career households across global contexts.

Literature Review

Research on marital communication had consistently emphasized that communication quality remained one of the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction. Scholars had long suggested that communication patterns shaped how partners resolved conflict, expressed emotions, and built intimacy (Gottman, 1994). With the rise of digital technologies, researchers had gradually shifted attention from traditional face-to-face communication toward technologically mediated interactions, examining how digital tools altered relational dynamics in dual-career families. Digital communication, which included texting, instant messaging, social media exchanges, email, and video calls, had introduced new behavioral patterns that influenced marital harmony, conflict management, and emotional connectivity (Baym, 2015). This section

critically reviewed empirical studies and theoretical insights on digital communication patterns and their effects on marital satisfaction in dual-career households across diverse global contexts. Early studies on marital communication had rooted marital satisfaction in emotional expressiveness, openness, and empathetic responsiveness (Markman et al., 2010). However, technological evolution had redefined these constructs as couples increasingly relied on digital channels for relational maintenance. Researchers had shown that digital communication could serve as an extension of traditional interaction styles, helping couples maintain closeness during physical absence (Stafford, 2011). Dual-career couples, who often experienced long working hours, travel obligations, and role conflict, frequently used digital tools to compensate for limited shared time (Craig & Churchill, 2020). These studies indicated that digital interaction frequency and quality played a significant role in sustaining emotional bonds. Scholars had offered mixed evidence on whether digital communication enhanced or undermined marital satisfaction. Some studies had shown that technology use improved coordination of household tasks, reduced ambiguity in scheduling, and facilitated quick affection-sharing, all of which had positive implications for marital satisfaction (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Other scholars had reported that excessive digital engagement—especially when work intruded into family time—contributed to marital strain, emotional withdrawal, and perceptions of neglect (Derks et al., 2015). These contradictory findings suggested that the effects of digital communication were neither universally beneficial nor uniformly harmful.

A significant body of scholarship had examined how couples used digital tools to maintain emotional closeness. Ledbetter (2010) had argued that online communication enriched relational maintenance behaviors, especially through regular check-ins, affectionate messages, and playful digital exchanges. Research on long-distance romantic relationships had emphasized similar patterns, noting that technology supported emotional continuity despite spatial separation (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Dual-career couples shared comparable characteristics because occupational mobility often required periods of physical separation. Therefore, technology had become instrumental in sustaining a sense of presence and reassurance. However, scholars had also highlighted the potential for

miscommunication in digital settings. Text-based communication lacked nonverbal cues such as tone, facial expression, and gesture, which could lead to message misinterpretation and conflict escalation (Holmes, 2021). Research had shown that arguments conducted over text or social media tended to persist longer, become more emotionally charged, and result in lower reported satisfaction than those handled face-to-face (Coyne et al., 2011). These findings were particularly relevant for dual-career couples with limited opportunities for in-person discussions due to demanding schedules. Global studies had revealed cross-cultural variations in digital communication use among married partners. In Western societies, digital communication was often seen as a natural extension of daily interaction, reinforcing both functional coordination and emotional connection (Baym, 2015). In Asian contexts, where cultural norms emphasized restraint and indirect communication, digital tools offered a less confrontational space for emotional expression (Kim & Dindia, 2011). African studies had shown that among middle-class dual-career couples, digital platforms compensated for infrastructural constraints such as long commuting times and inconsistent work schedules (Boateng, 2022). These cross-regional differences demonstrated that the cultural meaning of digital interaction shaped how it influenced marital satisfaction.

Digital communication had also been linked to conflict patterns in marriage. Researchers had shown that digital surveillance—checking a partner’s online activity, message history, or social media interactions—had been associated with jealousy, mistrust, and emotional insecurity (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Social media overuse had been tied to reduced marital happiness, especially when one partner perceived the other as prioritizing digital interactions over shared couple time (Abbasi, 2019). These patterns were found across multiple global studies, suggesting that digital communication could both facilitate connection and amplify insecurity depending on usage patterns. The literature had further revealed that occupational demands influenced digital communication intensity and meaning. Kossek et al. (2012) had demonstrated that employees in high-pressure jobs used digital devices to extend work beyond office hours. For dual-career couples, this constant connectivity blurred boundaries between home and work, creating perceptions of intrusiveness and

lowering marital satisfaction. Derks et al. (2015) had added that work-related digital interruptions during family time triggered emotional exhaustion, irritation, and relational conflict. These findings highlighted the significance of negotiating technological boundaries within dual-career marriages.

Studies on emotional labor had shown that women often took on a greater share of digital relational maintenance tasks, such as sending reminders, expressing affection, or initiating conflict resolution (Haferkamp et al., 2012). This gendered pattern was observed globally, though its magnitude varied across cultures. Men, in contrast, were more likely to use digital communication for functional exchanges such as coordinating schedules or sharing information. Such differences sometimes resulted in mismatched expectations regarding digital responsiveness, which had implications for marital satisfaction (Coyne et al., 2011).

Media Multiplexity Theory (MMT) had become a central theoretical lens for understanding digital communication in marriages. Haythornthwaite (2005) had posited that strong relational ties used multiple communication channels, implying that couples who communicated across various digital platforms might experience deeper relational engagement. Empirical studies had supported this framework, showing that couples who alternated between texting, voice calls, video calls, and social media interactions reported stronger relational satisfaction than those who relied on a single channel (Ledbetter, 2010). For dual-career households, the multiplicity of communication mediums offered flexibility and continuity amid hectic schedules.

Empirical work had further strengthened the applicability of MMT to marital relationships. Hertlein and Blumer (2014) had shown that digital channels supported relational routines, helped partners synchronize daily activities, and contributed to the formation of new patterns of intimacy. Studies had also indicated that using multiple digital channels helped compensate for differences in communication preferences, such as when one partner preferred texting while the other valued video calls (Ruppel & Burke, 2015). This adaptability had implications for marital satisfaction because behavioral flexibility had been shown to reduce relational conflict and enhance perceived partner support.

However, some studies had cautioned that using too many digital platforms could overwhelm partners, create monitoring fatigue, and heighten expectations for constant availability (Aagaard, 2019). This excessive multiplexity sometimes produced pressures that lowered marital satisfaction rather than enhancing it. Therefore, the relationship between media multiplicity and marital satisfaction was shown to be curvilinear rather than linear, with benefits plateauing or declining when usage became excessive.

The second theoretical lens, Work–Family Border Theory, provided insight into how couples negotiated digital communication boundaries. Clark (2000) had argued that individuals navigated between work and family “domains,” maintaining borders that could be flexible, permeable, or rigid. Digital technologies had increased border permeability by allowing work to intrude into home life and vice versa. Empirical studies had shown that poorly managed digital borders generated conflict, reduced quality time, and diminished satisfaction in dual-career couples (Derks et al., 2015). Conversely, negotiated digital boundaries—such as designated device-free periods—were associated with increased marital satisfaction and lower relational strain (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020).

Work–family border studies had also demonstrated that partners with aligned expectations regarding digital communication experienced fewer conflicts. When spouses shared similar norms regarding response time, message frequency, and online availability, they tended to report higher marital satisfaction (Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Border misalignment—such as when one partner expected immediate digital responses while the other preferred delayed replies—had been linked to increased frustration and relational tension.

Empirical literature from Europe, North America, and Asia had shown that work–family digital boundaries had become especially salient during periods of high occupational pressure. Remote work trends, business travel, and irregular hours had intensified the need for clear digital norms among dual-career couples (Craig & Churchill, 2020). Research had further shown that partners with high boundary control, those who managed digital communication in a structured manner, reported higher relational satisfaction (Kossek et al., 2012). A growing body of global research

had explored the mediating mechanisms linking digital communication and marital satisfaction. Emotional intimacy, perceived partner responsiveness, digital trust, and conflict management had emerged as key variables in these models (Holmes, 2021). Studies had shown that digital interaction quality predicted emotional intimacy, which in turn predicted marital satisfaction. Digital trust is defined as confidence in a partner's online behavior has also been shown to play a pivotal role, especially in cultures where technological monitoring was common (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Reduced face-to-face interaction time had also been examined as a mediating factor. Research had indicated that excessive digital engagement for work or social purposes reduced opportunities for meaningful couple interactions, which had downstream effects on marital satisfaction (Abbasi, 2019). These findings highlighted the critical balance between productive digital use and overuse.

Methodology

The study had adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine how digital communication patterns predicted marital satisfaction among dual-career households across multiple global regions. This design had been selected because it enabled the investigation of relationships among variables at a single point in time while allowing statistical comparison across cultural contexts. The research had relied on survey methodology, which had been widely used in marital communication studies due to its efficiency in capturing perceptual and behavioral data from large populations. The population of the study had consisted of married individuals in dual-career households residing in North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Dual-career households had been defined as marriages in which both partners maintained full-time professional employment. A multi-stage sampling technique had been applied to ensure broad global representation. In the first stage, four world regions had been purposively selected based on technological penetration and availability of digital communication infrastructure. In the second stage, participating countries within each region had been selected using convenience sampling. In the final stage, respondents had been randomly recruited from online professional groups, workplace organizations, alumni associations, and marital support networks. This approach had

yielded a total sample size of 600 participants. The sample adequacy had been verified using Cochran's formula:

$$n_0 = Z^2 p(1-p) / e^2$$

Assuming a 95% confidence level ($Z=1.96$), a 50% variability estimate ($p=0.5$), and a 5% margin of error ($e=0.05$), the minimum required sample size had been calculated as 384. Therefore, the obtained sample of 600 had exceeded the minimum requirement, increasing the statistical power of the analysis. Data collection had been conducted using a structured digital questionnaire. The instrument had consisted of four sections: demographic characteristics, digital communication frequency, digital communication quality, and marital satisfaction. Digital communication frequency had been measured using a scale assessing the number of daily digital interactions between partners across platforms such as text messaging, WhatsApp, email, video calls, and social media. Communication quality had been assessed using items adapted from Ledbetter's Relational Maintenance Scale. Marital satisfaction had been measured using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS), which had been widely validated in cross-cultural marital research.

The instrument had undergone validity and reliability assessment prior to full deployment. Content validity had been ensured through expert review by scholars specializing in marital communication and digital behavior. Reliability had been assessed through a pilot study involving 50 dual-career couples, resulting in Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.89 across the subscales, indicating high internal consistency. The study had used descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics which includes means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions summarized the patterns of digital communication and levels of marital satisfaction. Inferential analysis had included Pearson correlation to identify relationships among variables and multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive influence of digital communication frequency and quality on marital satisfaction. The regression model had been expressed as:

$$MS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 DCF + \beta_2 DCQ + \beta_3 PR + \epsilon$$

where

MS = Marital Satisfaction,

DCF = Digital Communication Frequency,

DCQ = Digital Communication Quality,

PR = Perceived Responsiveness,

ε = error term.

Ethical approval had been obtained from a university research ethics committee. Participation had been voluntary, and all respondents had provided informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality had been guaranteed.

Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (N = 600)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Digital Communication Frequency (DCF)	18.42	6.11	4	35
Digital Communication Quality (DCQ)	4.12	0.83	1.80	5.00
Perceived Responsiveness (PR)	4.08	0.79	1.90	5.00
Marital Satisfaction (MS)	97.54	12.76	62	129

Interpretation

Respondents reported an average of 18 digital interactions per day, indicating high reliance on digital tools for relational maintenance. Both digital communication quality (M = 4.12) and perceived responsiveness (M = 4.08) indicated high positive engagement. Marital satisfaction levels were moderately high (M = 97.54), suggesting overall relational stability.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	DCF	DCQ	PR	MS
DCF	1	.42*	.38*	.31*
DCQ	.42*	1	.57*	.63*
PR	.38*	.57*	1	.59*
MS	.31*	.63*	.59*	1

Correlation significant at $p < .01$

Interpretation

Digital communication frequency showed a positive but moderate association with marital satisfaction ($r = .31$). Communication quality ($r = .63$) and perceived responsiveness ($r = .59$) had stronger correlations, suggesting that how partners communicated mattered more than how often they communicated. Quality and responsiveness emerged as central mechanisms influencing satisfaction.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Predictor Variables	B	SE	β	t	p-value
Constant	41.27	4.88	—	8.46	<.001
DCF	0.42	0.11	.15	3.87	<.001
DCQ	9.83	0.94	.51	10.47	<.001
PR	7.21	1.02	.34	7.06	<.001

Model Summary:

$R = .77$ $R^2 = .59$ Adjusted $R^2 = .58$ $F(3, 596) = 286.41, p < .001$

Interpretation

The model explained 59% of the variance in marital satisfaction, indicating strong predictive power. Digital communication quality ($\beta = .51$) emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by perceived responsiveness ($\beta = .34$). Communication frequency had a smaller but significant influence ($\beta = .15$). These results suggested that

enhancing communication tone and emotional presence was more consequential for marital harmony than increasing message frequency.

Table 4
Regional Differences in Marital Satisfaction (ANOVA)

Region	N	Mean MS	SD
North America	150	100.81	11.09
Europe	150	98.74	12.14
Asia	150	95.12	13.41
Africa	150	95.48	13.88

ANOVA: $F(3, 596) = 7.92, p < .001$

Interpretation

Marital satisfaction differed significantly across regions. North America and Europe reported the highest satisfaction scores, while Asian and African respondents reported slightly lower levels. Post hoc tests (not shown) indicated that frequency and quality of digital communication were both higher in technologically advanced regions, partially explaining the variation.

Table 5
Cross-Regional Comparison of Digital Communication Frequency

Region	Mean DCF	SD
North America	20.94	5.12
Europe	19.83	5.44
Asia	17.11	6.34
Africa	15.82	6.68

ANOVA: $F(3, 596) = 18.45, p < .001$

Interpretation

Respondents from North America reported the highest digital communication frequency. African respondents recorded the lowest levels, reflecting differences in

digital infrastructure and work-life balance practices. The pattern suggested that access and cultural norms jointly shaped communication habits.

Conclusion

This study had sought to examine the impact of digital communication patterns on marital satisfaction among dual-career households across multiple global regions, aiming to determine how frequency, quality, and perceived responsiveness influenced relationship outcomes. The findings indicated that while digital communication frequency had a modest positive effect on marital satisfaction, it was the quality of communication and the degree to which partners perceived responsiveness that exerted the strongest influence on relational harmony. Couples who engaged in supportive, emotionally attuned, and coordinated digital interactions reported higher satisfaction levels than those whose interactions were infrequent, transactional, or ambiguous. Regression analysis revealed that digital communication quality accounted for the largest share of variance in marital satisfaction, highlighting the centrality of relational tone and engagement over mere quantity of interaction. Regional comparisons demonstrated that marital satisfaction was highest in technologically advanced regions such as North America and Europe, where both frequency and quality of digital communication were elevated, whereas satisfaction in Asia and Africa, though moderate, reflected lower digital engagement and infrastructural constraints, indicating that access and cultural norms mediated the effects of digital communication. These findings confirmed that digital tools could function as both facilitators of marital cohesion and potential sources of stress, depending on how they were used and the shared expectations of partners. The theoretical frameworks adopted in the study, Media Multiplexity Theory and Work–Family Border Theory, provided explanatory mechanisms for these patterns: couples using multiple digital channels reinforced relational bonds, while effective negotiation of digital boundaries minimized intrusion and conflict, thereby sustaining marital

satisfaction. Practically, the results suggested that interventions aimed at improving marital quality in dual-career households should emphasize digital relational skills, including emotionally expressive communication, timely responsiveness, and deliberate boundary management to prevent work-related intrusions. The study contributed to the global literature by providing empirical evidence from diverse regions, highlighting cross-cultural differences in digital communication practices, and offering insights into the mechanisms through which digital interactions shape marital outcomes. Overall, the research underscored the importance of quality, responsiveness, and culturally informed digital strategies for promoting marital satisfaction in the contemporary, technologically mediated landscape of dual-career family life.

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