

From Texts to Truths: How Communication Modalities Shape the Link between Authenticity and Happiness in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract: This investigation explores whether different communication channels affect how authenticity relates to happiness in romantic partnerships among young adults. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory alongside Media Richness Theory, we tested whether texting, phone conversations, and in-person interactions serve as mediating pathways in this connection. Through mediation analyses with 360 young adults (ages 18-29) from Delhi NCR, we found that being authentic strongly predicted greater happiness. Interestingly, text messaging stood out as the only significant mediator, actually weakening the authenticity-happiness link, while neither phone nor face-to-face communication showed mediating effects. These results underscore the value of thoughtfully choosing communication methods that genuinely allow authentic expression. For practitioners working with couples, this research offers insights into how various communication platforms might either facilitate or hinder authentic connection in romantic partnerships. The study advances our understanding of how the medium through which we communicate influences relationship well-being in our increasingly digital world.

Keywords: authenticity, romantic relationships, communication medium, happiness, mediation, young adults

Introduction

Romantic partnerships rank among life's most consequential relationships, profoundly influencing our happiness, psychological health, and overall satisfaction (Kansky & Allen, 2018; Robles et al., 2014; Teoh, 2024). While past scholarship emphasized simply being in a relationship, contemporary research reveals something more nuanced: relationship quality and authenticity matter far more than relationship status when predicting life satisfaction and positive functioning (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2022).

Authenticity—when our inner experiences align with our outward behaviour—has emerged as fundamental to well-being within intimate partnerships (Galinha et al., 2022). This alignment appears to enhance mindfulness and self-awareness, deepening intimacy and strengthening psychological outcomes (Lenton et al., 2020). When people express themselves genuinely, they don't just feel more personally fulfilled; they also build deeper intimacy, mutual trust, and relationship stability (Arslan & Allen, 2021; Lenton et al., 2020).

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001) frames authenticity as a core psychological need supporting autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Through emotional transparency and genuine self- disclosure, authenticity strengthens bonds and contributes to both individual and relational well-being (Lopez & Rice, 2006; Matz, 2023). Yet despite this robust theoretical foundation, we know surprisingly little about how authenticity is actually communicated and which mediums support or constrain it.

Communication represents the primary vehicle for expressing authenticity in romantic contexts. Different communication methods, however, vary dramatically in their capacity to convey nuance, immediacy, and emotional presence. Face-to-face interaction offers the richest channel, enabling verbal and nonverbal cues, immediate feedback, and spontaneous expression (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Text-based communication lacks these elements and often leads to emotional filtering or carefully curated self- presentation (Toma & Hancock, 2013; Derk et al., 2008). These distinctions become especially important in romantic relationships, where subtle expressions of authenticity—tone of voice, facial expressions, and vulnerable disclosures—carry substantial weight for relationship satisfaction and individual happiness.

While mediated communication has been linked to feelings of connection and intimacy maintenance (Vanden Abeele et al., 2016), it simultaneously risks constraining authenticity. Digital platforms frequently encourage selective self- presentation, potentially weakening emotional transparency between partners (Kim & Dindia, 2011). This creates tension in contemporary relationships: technology expands interaction opportunities but may alter how authenticity is conveyed and received.

Surprisingly little research examines how communication mediums function as conduits or barriers for authenticity's influence on well-being in romantic partnerships. Most existing work assumes authentic expression occurs uniformly across channels or neglects to test modality's mediating role. Integrating Self-Determination Theory with Media Richness Theory offers a novel lens for examining not just what we say, but how the medium of expression influences emotional well-being in romantic contexts.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how specific communication mediums (texting, phone calls, and face-to-face interaction) mediate the relationship between authenticity and happiness in young adult romantic relationships. Our investigation

seeks to provide nuanced understanding of emotional congruence and communication behaviour within the digital landscape of contemporary romantic partnerships.

Present Study

This research examined whether specific communication modalities (face-to-face, phone calls, and texting) function as mediators linking authenticity to happiness in young adult romantic relationships.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate whether authenticity significantly predicts happiness in young adult romantic relationships.
2. To examine the mediating role of communication modalities (face-to-face, phone, and texting) in the relationship between authenticity and happiness.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: Authenticity will positively predict happiness in romantic relationships.

H₂: Communication modalities (face-to-face communication, phone calls, and text messaging) will mediate the relationship between authenticity and happiness.

Methodology

Participants

We recruited 360 individuals using convenience sampling over three months (March–May 2025). A priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1 indicated that 230 participants would suffice to detect a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) at $\alpha = .05$ with .95 statistical power. We included 360 eligible participants to enhance robustness and generalizability.

Participants met these inclusion criteria:

Aged 18–29 years

Residing in Delhi NCR

Currently in a hetero sexual romantic relationship of six months or longer.

Living in the same city as their partner Minimum educational qualification of Class 12.

No diagnosed psychiatric illness history

Participants averaged 23 years old ($SD = 3.53$), with 64.7% identifying as female and 35.3% as male. Relationship durations ranged from 6 to 60 months ($M = 14.87$, $SD = 12.71$).

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional design to investigate the mediating role of communication modalities—face-to-face interaction, phone calls, and text messaging, in the association between authenticity and happiness among young adults engaged in romantic relationships.

Measures:

Authenticity in Relationships Scale – Short Form (AIRS-SF): Wickham's (2013) 12-item scale evaluates how genuinely individuals feel they can behave and express themselves in romantic relationships. Participants rated items on a five-point scale from strong disagreement to strong agreement, with higher scores representing stronger relationship authenticity. Wickham (2013) reported high internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$), strong two-week test-retest reliability ($r = .78$), and construct validity evidenced by significant correlations with general authenticity measures ($r = .64-.71$). Discriminant validity emerged through weaker associations with unrelated traits like sensation seeking. Predictive validity appeared through associations with relationship satisfaction and emotional closeness. In our study, the AIRS-SF demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$).

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire – Short Form (OHQ-SF): We used Hills and Argyle's (2001) brief version to measure overall happiness and psychological well-being. This 8-item instrument captures core aspects of subjective well-being. Participants responded using a six-point agreement scale, with higher scores indicating greater happiness. The OHQ-SF shows good internal consistency ($\alpha = .74-.92$; Hills & Argyle, 2002) and moderate three-week test-retest reliability ($r = .67$). Convergent validity appears through strong correlations with life satisfaction measures ($r = .65$) and positive affect ($r = .68$), while discriminant validity emerges through low social desirability correlations ($r = .21$). The measure demonstrates stability across diverse populations and cultural contexts (Francis et al., 2017).

Communication Modality: We assessed communication modality preference by asking participants to indicate their preferred communication mode with their romantic partner. Responses were categorized into face-to-face communication, phone calls, and text messaging. For mediation analysis, these modalities were coded as separate indicator variables and entered simultaneously as parallel mediators in Hayes' Process Model 4.

Procedure: Data collection utilized standardized self-report measures administered both in-person and via online surveys (Google Forms) at college campuses across Delhi NCR. Participants completed questionnaires containing demographic items and standardized instruments. All participants provided informed consent, with confidentiality and anonymity assurances. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [anonym Zed University] approved this research.

Data Analysis: We analysed data using IBM SPSS Statistics. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics summarizing participant characteristics and key variables. Mediation analyses employed Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 4.2), with Model 4 examining whether communication modalities (face-to-face communication, phone calls, and texting) mediated the authenticity-happiness

relationship. We evaluated statistical significance at $p < .05$, with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals estimated using 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Results:

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Age, Relationship Duration, and Gender

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	360	18.00	29.00	23.35	3.53
Relationship Duration (months)	360	6	60	14.87	12.70
Gender (1 = Female, 2 = Male)	360	1	2	1.35	.47
Valid N (listwise)	360				

Note. Gender was coded as 1 = Female, 2 = Male. Relationship duration is reported in months. Means and standard deviations are rounded to two decimal places.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for age, relationship duration, and gender. The sample comprised 360 young adults aged 18-29 years ($M = 23.36$, $SD = 3.54$). Relationship duration ranged from 6 to 60 months ($M = 14.87$, $SD = 12.71$). Gender coding (1 = female, 2 = male) yielded a mean of 1.35 ($SD = 0.48$), indicating approximately 65% females and 35% males. Complete data were available for all variables ($N = 360$).

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Preferred Communication Medium

Communication Modality	Frequency	Percent
F2F	120	33.4
Phonecall	118	32.9
Textmsg	121	33.7

Note. Text messaging (33.7%) was the most preferred communication method, followed closely by face- to-face interaction (33.4%) and phone calls (32.9%).

Mediation Analysis

We conducted mediation analyses using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (version 4.2; Hayes), employing Model 4 to examine whether different communication modalities mediated the authenticity-happiness relationship.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis: Effect of Communication Medium in the Link between Authenticity and Happiness

Path	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value (t)	p-value (p)	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)
Authenticity → Face-to-Face Use	0.055	0.006	9.75	< .001	0.044	0.066
Authenticity → Phone Call Use	0.043	0.006	7.50	< .001	0.032	0.055
Authenticity → Texting Use	-0.027	0.007	-4.12	< .001	-0.040	-0.014
Face-to-Face Use → Happiness (controlling Auth.)	0.070	0.367	0.19	.850	-0.653	0.792
Phone Call Use → Happiness (controlling Auth.)	0.100	0.357	0.28	.779	-0.601	0.802
Texting Use → Happiness (controlling Auth.)	-0.899	0.245	-3.67	< .001	-1.382	-0.417
Overall impact of authenticity on happiness	0.661	0.016	42.20	< .001	0.630	0.692
Direct effect of authenticity (controlling Med.)	0.628	0.033	19.28	< .001	0.564	0.693

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B) are reported. Analyses were conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4). Authenticity served as the independent variable, happiness as the dependent variable, and face-to-face communication, phone calls, and text messaging were entered simultaneously as mediators.

Path a: Effects of Authenticity on Communication Modalities

As Table 3 shows, authenticity significantly predicted all three communication modalities. Higher authenticity associated with increased face-to-face communication and phone call use. Conversely authenticity negatively associated with text messaging, indicating that individuals reporting higher authenticity relied less on text-based communication in their romantic relationships.

Path b: Effects of Communication Modalities on Happiness (Controlling for Authenticity)

When examining communication modalities effects on happiness while controlling for authenticity, text messaging emerged as a significant negative predictor. Greater texting reliance associated with lower happiness levels. In contrast, face-to-face communication and phone call use did not significantly predict happiness after accounting for authenticity.

Path c: Total Effect of Authenticity on Happiness

The total effect of authenticity on happiness was positive and statistically significant, indicating that individuals with higher relationship authenticity reported greater happiness.

Path c': Direct Effect of Authenticity on Happiness (Controlling for Mediators)

After controlling for communication modalities, authenticity's direct effect on happiness remained significant. This indicates that authenticity contributes to happiness independently of communication modality, with communication accounting for only a portion of this relationship.

Table 4: Bootstrapped Indirect Effects of Communication Modalities in the Relationship between Authenticity and Happiness

Indirect Path	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	95% CI (Lower)	95% CI (Upper)
Authenticity → Face-to-Face → Happiness	0.004	0.019	-0.032	0.044
Authenticity → Phone Call → Happiness	0.004	0.014	-0.025	0.032
Authenticity → Texting → Happiness	-0.024	0.007	-0.039	-0.011

Note. Indirect effects were estimated using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Confidence intervals that do not include zero indicate statistically significant indirect effects.

Bootstrapped analyses based on 5,000 resamples revealed that text messaging had a significant indirect effect on the authenticity-happiness relationship, as the confidence interval excluded zero. This suggests that lower text messaging reliance partly explains why individuals with higher authenticity report greater happiness.

In contrast, indirect effects through face-to-face communication and phone calls were not significant because their confidence intervals included zero. This indicates that these communication modalities did not mediate the authenticity-happiness relationship.

Figure 1: Displays the mediation model in which authenticity (TAI) influences happiness (THI) directly and indirectly through preferred communication medium (Mdm). Path coefficients reflect PROCESS Model 4 results, highlighting texting's negative indirect role as a communication preference.

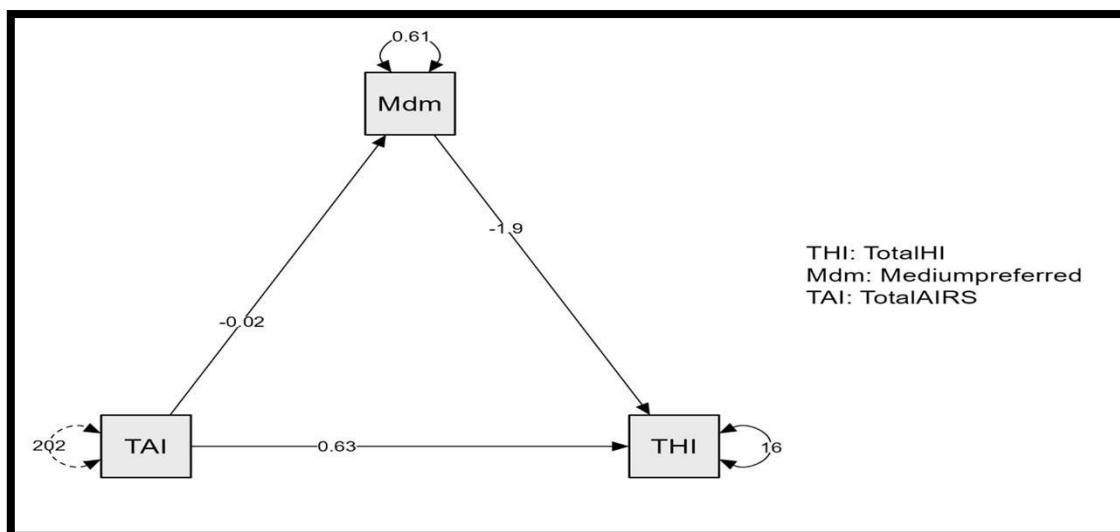


Figure 1. Mediation model illustrating the direct effect of authenticity on happiness and indirect effects through communication modalities (face-to-face communication, phone calls, and text messaging). Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients obtained from PROCESS Model 4. $p < .05$.

Discussion

This study explored whether specific communication modalities mediate the relationship between authenticity and happiness in young adult romantic relationships. The findings provide meaningful insights into how communication modes shape emotional well-being within romantic contexts.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, authenticity emerged as a significant positive predictor of happiness. Participants who reported higher levels of authenticity in their romantic relationships also reported greater happiness. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001), which emphasizes that psychological well-being improves when individuals are able to express their true selves while experiencing autonomy and meaningful connection with others. Previous research has similarly established

that authentic self-expression is linked to higher life satisfaction, emotional stability, and overall psychological well-being (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008). For instance, Lenton et al. (2016) demonstrated that moments of authentic living are associated with increased happiness and psychological coherence, particularly within relational contexts. In romantic relationships, authenticity may facilitate openness, trust, and emotional safety, which in turn promote relational satisfaction and enhance overall well-being (Brunell et al., 2010).

Regarding Hypothesis 2, among the three communication modalities examined, text messaging emerged as the only significant mediator. Higher authenticity was associated with lower reliance on text messaging, which, in turn, predicted lower happiness. This suggests that reduced dependence on text-based communication partially explains why individuals with greater authenticity tend to experience higher levels of happiness.

While authenticity also predicted greater use of face-to-face interactions and phone calls, these modalities did not significantly predict happiness when controlling for authenticity. Therefore, face-to-face communication and phone calls did not mediate the authenticity-happiness relationship. Although authentic individuals may prefer richer, more direct forms of communication, these channels do not explain the association between authenticity and happiness beyond the direct effects of authenticity itself.

The negative mediating role of texting aligns with Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), which suggests that communication channels differ in their ability to convey emotional nuance, immediacy, and social cues. As a lean and asynchronous medium, texting limits nonverbal cues and immediate feedback, which are critical for conveying emotional depth and vulnerability. Previous studies indicate that frequent reliance on texting in romantic relationships is associated with lower relationship satisfaction, increased misunderstandings, and greater conflict (Coyne, 2013; Jiang et al., 2011). More recently, Kanik et al. (2024) reported that while face-to-face and phone communication enhance intimacy and emotional clarity, heavy texting is linked to psychological distress.

These findings suggest that while texting is convenient and widely used, it may not optimally support authentic emotional engagement in romantic relationships. Reduced richness in text-based communication may encourage selective self-presentation, delay emotional responsiveness, and weaken the immediacy of emotional expression, thereby diminishing authenticity's positive impact on happiness. Overall, the results indicate that communication modality does not uniformly enhance or undermine well-being; instead, its effects depend on the medium's capacity to support genuine self-expression. When individuals communicate in ways that reflect their authentic selves, happiness is more likely to follow.

Theoretical and practical implications

The study extends Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating that the association between authenticity and happiness is shaped by the medium through which individuals communicate. Integrating insights from Media Richness Theory, the findings highlight that text-based communication may constrain the emotional depth required for authentic self-expression. Practically, these results suggest that excessive reliance on texting may undermine relational well-being. For relationship counsellors and mental health practitioners, the findings underscore the value of encouraging couples to engage in richer, more immediate communication modes, particularly during emotionally significant interactions.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions regarding the relationships among authenticity, communication modality, and happiness. Second, the use of a convenience sample from the Delhi NCR region may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or geographic populations. Finally, focusing on young adults in heterosexual romantic relationships restricts the applicability of the findings to other age groups, sexual orientations, and relationship types. Future research employing longitudinal designs, more diverse samples, and multi-method approaches would provide stronger evidence and broaden the generalizability of these findings.

Conclusion

This study identifies authenticity as a strong predictor of happiness in young adult romantic relationships and demonstrates that text messaging—but not face-to-face or phone communication—mediates this relationship. Text messaging emerged as a negative mediator, weakening the positive association between authenticity and happiness. These findings emphasize the importance of considering communication modality in understanding how authentic self-expression influences emotional well-being. From a practical standpoint, relationship counsellors and therapists may benefit from guiding couples toward communication modes that facilitate genuine emotional expression. Future research can explore how communication modality interacts with other relational processes across diverse relationship contexts to better understand the dynamics of emotional well-being in digital-age romantic relationships.

Contribution of the study

This study contributes to the literature by empirically examining communication modality as a mediating mechanism between authenticity and happiness in romantic relationships. By differentiating between face-to-face communication, phone calls, and text messaging, it offers a nuanced understanding of how various communication channels function in intimate relationships. Additionally, the study provides context-specific evidence from an urban Indian young adult sample and employs rigorous

mediation analyses, thereby strengthening both theoretical and methodological contributions to the field.

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