

# The Influence Of Whatsapp Usage On Persuasive Communication In Romantic Relationships: A Study Among Indonesian Generation Z

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between WhatsApp usage and persuasive communication in romantic relationships among Indonesian Generation Z university students. Integrating Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, this research tests how perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness influence four dimensions of persuasive communication: expressions of love, attention and affection, security and trust, and conflict resolution. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 308 university students aged 18-24 years in Greater Jakarta using stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis. Results demonstrate that WhatsApp usage significantly predicts persuasive communication ( $R^2 = 0.378$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with the strongest effects on security and trust ( $R^2 = 0.444$ ) and the weakest on conflict resolution ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ). Perceived ease of use exhibits stronger correlations with persuasive outcomes than perceived usefulness, indicating interface experience priority for digital natives. This study provides the first empirical integration of Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model in romantic communication contexts, demonstrating differential platform acceptance patterns across relationship dimensions. Practical implications suggest relationship education should acknowledge platform-specific limitations, particularly emphasizing face-to-face communication for conflict resolution while leveraging digital platforms for positive relationship maintenance.

**Keywords:** Whatsapp; Generation Z; Persuasive Communication; Social Judgment Theory; Technology Acceptance Model

## Introduction

In today's digital era, human communication patterns have undergone substantial transformations, as highlighted by various scholars (Laksana & Fadhillah, 2021; Onyeator & Okpara, 2019). The advent of social media has revolutionized the way individuals interact, enabling new forms of communication and relationship building that diverge markedly from traditional face-to-face interactions (Venter, 2019). This shift is particularly evident in the realm of romantic relationships, where digital platforms have introduced novel ways to express affection and connect emotionally (Duke, 2018; Walęcka-Matyja & Dębska, 2023).

The emergence of WhatsApp as Indonesia's dominant communication platform, with 112 million active users, represents the world's third-largest user base, and creates a unique context for examining digital romantic communication among Generation Z (Prasastisiwi, 2024). This demographic, as digital natives, has fundamentally integrated instant messaging into their relationship practices. However, the theoretical understanding of how platform-specific characteristics influence different dimensions of romantic persuasion remains underdeveloped. The widespread adoption of WhatsApp in Indonesian romantic relationships presents an unprecedented opportunity to examine how digital platforms shape persuasive communication patterns in culturally specific contexts.

Despite extensive research on digital communication and romantic relationships, three critical gaps persist in current scholarship. First, no previous studies have systematically integrated Social Judgment Theory with the Technology Acceptance Model to explain platform-specific romantic communication patterns. Second, existing research lacks examination of how SJT's acceptance/rejection latitudes operate within specific platform characteristics, such as WhatsApp's text-based, multimedia, and asynchronous communication features. Third, the Indonesian context—representing the world's third-largest WhatsApp market—remains unexplored in academic literature

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on digital romantic communication, despite its significant cultural and demographic implications for understanding Generation Z's relationship practices.

Previously, expressions of love and social bonding were constrained by the need for physical proximity. Today, these can be conveyed digitally through texts, images, and video, making it possible to maintain and even deepen relationships despite geographical distances (Okdie & Ewoldsen, 2018). The implications of this shift are profound, affecting not only how relationships are initiated and developed but also how they are sustained over time (Sánchez et al., 2017). Social media platforms offer various tools and features that facilitate continuous and instantaneous communication, allowing users to share daily experiences, convey intimate thoughts, and respond to each other's life events in real-time. This accessibility to one's partner's life creates a sense of closeness and immediacy that was less feasible in the pre-digital age.

However, the shift to digital communication also brings challenges. The lack of physical cues and the potential for misinterpretation of digital communications can sometimes strain relationships. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of digital communication means that individuals must navigate the balance between connectivity and privacy, which can add complexity to modern romantic relationships. These challenges highlight the need to understand how digital platforms shape the dynamics of romantic interactions in the contemporary world.

Social media has transformed information exchange, moving beyond traditional text-based communication to encompass a richer array of audio and visual messages (Carr & Hayes, 2015). This evolution has been particularly impactful in personal relationships, where sharing multimedia content such as photos can significantly strengthen romantic bonds. Such exchanges create shared experiences and enjoyable interactions that enhance connections between individuals (Jänkälä et al., 2019). Moreover, social media extends its role to maintaining relationships over long distances, which were once challenging due to geographical separation. Current platforms facilitate regular and rich communication through various forms of media, which are vital for nurturing these relationships. Studies indicate that engaging via social media contributes effectively to the maintenance and growth of long-distance relationships, allowing for continual emotional support and presence (Gutzmann, 2018).

Digital interactions on social media platforms often lead to deeper bonds as they allow individuals to express support, share everyday experiences, and communicate affection in a manner that feels immediate and genuine (Utz, 2015). Even simple actions like liking or reposting content serve as signals of support and acknowledgment, reinforcing social bonds and conveying a sense of closeness. Through these mechanisms, social media not only sustains but also enhances interpersonal relationships by facilitating frequent and meaningful interactions, demonstrating the powerful role of digital communication in today's social fabric.

While social media offers vast opportunities for enhancing communication between couples, it also introduces potential challenges that can lead to conflicts within romantic relationships. Researchers have identified several issues, including miscommunication, misinterpretation of messages, and jealousy, all of which can deteriorate relationship quality (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019; Yacoub et al., 2018). These challenges arise from the inherent limitations of digital communication, such as the absence of non-verbal cues, which can lead to misunderstandings among partners. Despite these potential pitfalls, social media can also serve as a powerful tool to strengthen romantic bonds in certain scenarios (Arikewuyo et al., 2021). The continuous and instant nature of digital communication allows couples to maintain a sense of closeness even when physically apart. However, the dual nature of social media means that while it can enhance communication, it can also create tensions within relationships, depending on how it is used (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017).

The long-term impact of social media on personal relationships often manifests in the formation of durable bonds, facilitated by platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, and direct messaging features on various social media sites (Farrugia, 2013). These tools enable the exchange of persuasive messages, which play a critical role in building and maintaining romantic relationships. Such messages typically involve expressions of affection, positive affirmations, and supportive communications aimed at fostering emotional connections between partners. According to Miguel et al. (2018), even though these messages are mediated by digital platforms, they can effectively convey

affection and strengthen bonds between individuals. Expressions of love, such as saying "I love you" (Floyd, 2006), or other supportive phrases like expressing gratitude or providing encouragement, enhance the harmony and emotional depth of relationships. These communications, when crafted thoughtfully and sent with sincerity, can transcend the physical and emotional barriers posed by digital media, ultimately enriching personal connections between partners.

Persuasion in communication involves transmitting messages from a communicator to a recipient, aiming to influence and modify the recipient's attitudes (Eneizat & Wen, 2023; Wahl, 2016). This process is crucial in various contexts, including personal relationships, where persuasive messages often manifest implicitly (Kristanto et al., 2025). For instance, expressions of affection need not always be as overt as saying "I love you." They can also come in the form of supportive statements such as "I will always be by your side when you need help." This type of communication, as identified by (Gareis & Wilkins, 2011), serves as an emotional expression that one partner uses to show their love, aiming to elicit reciprocal feelings from the other partner.

The persuasive content in these expressions often extends to honest affirmations, where a person aims to convince their partner of their genuine feelings. Chan et al. (2020) highlight that these messages are crafted to reassure the partner of the sender's love and commitment, emphasizing the foundational role of honesty in maintaining relationship integrity. These persuasive strategies are not merely verbal tactics but are deeply intertwined with the emotional and psychological dimensions of relationship building.

Effectively communicated persuasive messages, particularly those that convey affection, play a pivotal role in cementing romantic relationships. Kansky (2018) points out that strong romantic relationships are characterized by several qualities such as sexual intimacy, relational satisfaction, happiness, life satisfaction, and the presence of positive affect. Another crucial aspect is the sense of security and the ability to manage conflicts effectively, indicating the broader implications of effective communication in sustaining and enhancing relational dynamics.

Among digital communication platforms, instant messaging services have become particularly significant. The advent of applications like WhatsApp, Telegram, Line, and Facebook Messenger has transformed interpersonal communication, offering new venues for expressing persuasive messages. These platforms facilitate continual and immediate connection, which is vital for maintaining relationships, especially in contexts where physical proximity is challenging. According to Waigumo in (Chan et al., 2020), the persistent nature of digital communications can fortify previously established relationships, making them more resilient against the strains of distance and time. These platforms not only enhance communication but also create environments where couples can develop deeper connections through consistent interaction.

The demographic most adept at navigating these digital environments is Generation Z, those born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s. As digital natives, they have never known a world without the internet, social media, and digital communication technologies (Venter, 2019). This exposure from a young age has made them exceptionally skilled at utilizing technology for information gathering, skill acquisition, and communication (Bratina, 2023). Generation Z is characterized by being highly connected through social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, which serve not only as tools for entertainment but also for self-expression and building social networks (Laksana & Fadhillah, 2021). They engage actively with digital content, reflecting their preference for instant and on-demand information exchange (Onyeator & Okpara, 2019). Visual and video content particularly appeal to Generation Z, who gravitate toward platforms emphasizing images and videos because they prefer engaging with content that is visual, succinct, and impactful (Bratina, 2023). Despite their comfort with sharing personal information online, Generation Z is also privacy-conscious, preferring communication tools that offer control over privacy settings and ephemeral content features (Venter, 2019).

To understand how individuals adopt and use technology for communication, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) provides a valuable framework. TAM identifies two key factors influencing technology adoption: perceived usefulness (the degree to which an individual believes that media technology will enhance their daily communication activities) and perceived ease of use (the degree to which an individual believes that media technology will simplify

their communication activities). These factors have led many people to shift their preference toward social media interactions rather than face-to-face communication. While digital messaging facilitates quicker responses and offers comfortable discussions without requiring physical presence, the absence of non-verbal cues such as body language and tone of voice, can diminish emotional connections and lead to misunderstandings. The TAM model helps explain the evolving dynamics of human interaction in the digital age, particularly in romantic relationships.

Despite the established importance of persuasive communication in romantic relationships, current research lacks systematic examination of how specific digital platforms influence different dimensions of romantic persuasion. Persuasion, characterized by symbolic messages, can significantly influence an individual's emotions and attitudes (Kasmani, 2022). When themed around love, persuasive communication becomes particularly powerful in shaping thoughts and behaviors. Showing respect and expressing love to a partner not only fosters a strong emotional bond but also promotes positive interactions (Hendrick et al., 2011). Messages of love that express empathy and concern can deeply influence interpersonal relationships by fostering moral empathy, which is essential for nurturing strong connections (Betzler, 2020). Such messages encourage positive thinking and actions, enhancing relationships through affectionate communication and paving the way for long-term bonds.

More specifically, previous studies examined general social media effects but lack a systematic analysis of how platform characteristics influence multiple relationship dimensions through Social Judgment Theory frameworks. This study addresses this gap by examining how WhatsApp usage influences four distinct persuasive communication dimensions, applying SJT to explain differential platform acceptance patterns.

To better understand how individuals interpret and respond to these persuasive messages, Social Judgment Theory, pioneered by Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Sherif (Murphy, 2017), offers valuable insights. This theory explains how individuals process social information and form judgments about others based on their own internal frames of reference, shaped by social and cultural experiences. In romantic relationships, partners form perceptions and judgments of each other through the lens of their own mental categories, expectations, and standards. Differences in cultural background, personal experiences, or communication styles can lead partners to perceive and evaluate each other's messages differently, affecting how persuasive communications are received and interpreted.

Social Judgment Theory posits that individuals process persuasive messages through cognitive anchoring, where existing attitudes serve as reference points for evaluating new information. This cognitive processing creates three distinct response zones: the latitude of acceptance encompasses messages that align with existing beliefs and are readily embraced; the latitude of rejection contains messages that conflict with established attitudes and are dismissed; while the latitude of non-commitment includes messages that neither strongly resonate nor conflict with current perspectives (Boer & Lesmana, 2018). In romantic communication contexts, this theoretical framework illuminates why identical expressions of affection may be interpreted differently by partners. Messages that fall within one partner's latitude of acceptance based on their relationship expectations and cultural background may simultaneously fall within another's latitude of rejection due to differing experiential anchors.

The multidimensional nature of romantic relationship quality provides a complementary lens for understanding digital communication effectiveness. Relationship quality encompasses four interconnected dimensions: sexual intimacy, emotional satisfaction through love expression, security and trust development, and conflict resolution capabilities Kansky's, (2018). These dimensions create distinct domains where Social Judgment Theory operates differently digital platforms may facilitate latitude of acceptance in certain areas while encountering latitude of rejection in others. For instance, text-based communications may effectively build trust through consistent messaging patterns while simultaneously proving inadequate for complex conflict resolution requiring emotional nuance. This framework suggests that WhatsApp's influence on persuasive communication will vary systematically across relationship dimensions, with platform characteristics aligning more favorably with some relationship functions than others.



WhatsApp has emerged as the dominant communication platform among Indonesian users, with Indonesia ranking as the third-largest WhatsApp user base globally, reaching 112 million active users in 2023 (Prasastisiwi, 2024). This widespread adoption is particularly pronounced among Generation Z, who have integrated WhatsApp into various aspects of their daily communication, including romantic relationships. The platform's appeal stems from its data efficiency, reliability, and accessibility factors that are especially important in Indonesia's diverse internet infrastructure landscape (Prasastisiwi, 2024). For Indonesian Generation Z, WhatsApp has evolved beyond a simple messaging application to become a primary medium for relationship initiation, maintenance, and emotional expression, offering features such as text messaging, voice notes, video calls, and status sharing that facilitate continuous romantic communication. This creates a unique challenge for digital-native generations who increasingly rely on these platforms for relationship maintenance.

The role of persuasive communication in romantic relationships is well-documented, with expressions of love, support, and commitment serving as foundations for strengthening bonds between partners. In traditional interactions, these expressions are enhanced by non-verbal cues that convey sincerity and deepen emotional impact. In contrast, text-based instant messaging strips communication of these physical and emotional layers, potentially altering the receiver's perception of the message's authenticity and the sender's intentions. This creates a unique challenge for digital-native generations who increasingly rely on these platforms for relationship maintenance.

However, existing research presents significant theoretical and empirical gaps in understanding platform-specific romantic communication dynamics. While some studies suggest digital platforms enhance relationship maintenance (Miguel et al., 2018), others highlight communication limitations (Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Critically, no previous research has systematically examined how Social Judgment Theory's acceptance/rejection latitudes operate within WhatsApp's specific characteristics, nor has research integrated the Technology Acceptance Model with Social Judgment Theory to explain platform-specific romantic communication patterns among Indonesian Generation Z. This represents both a theoretical gap (lack of integrated SJT-TAM frameworks for romantic communication) and an empirical gap (absence of platform-specific analysis in the Indonesian context with the world's third-largest WhatsApp user base).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between WhatsApp usage and persuasive communication effectiveness in romantic relationships among Indonesian Generation Z university students. The research employs an integrated theoretical framework combining Social Judgment Theory (to explain how WhatsApp's platform characteristics align with users' acceptance/rejection latitudes across different relationship communication contexts) and the Technology Acceptance Model (to understand adoption motivations through perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness dimensions).

The research questions are: 1) To what extent does WhatsApp usage (measured through perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness) predict persuasive communication dimensions (expressions of love, attention/affection, security/trust, and conflict resolution) in romantic relationships among Indonesian Generation Z? 2) How do Social Judgment Theory's latitude concepts explain differential platform acceptance patterns across these persuasive communication dimensions?

This study contributes theoretically by providing the first empirical integration of Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model in romantic communication contexts, and empirically by examining these relationships within Indonesia's unique digital communication landscape as the world's third-largest WhatsApp market. Practically, the findings will inform relationship education strategies and digital communication guidance specifically tailored for Indonesian Generation Z.

### **Method**

This study employed a quantitative research paradigm using a cross-sectional survey methodology, allowing for data collection from a large sample at a specific point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The target population for this study comprised Generation Z individuals in Indonesia, specifically university students aged 18-24 years. This demographic was selected based on their status as digital natives with high technological literacy and active participation in romantic relationships during this life stage. The sampling frame consisted of undergraduate students in the

Greater Jakarta metropolitan region (Jabodetabek), including Jakarta, Bekasi, South Tangerang, and surrounding areas.

To ensure representative sample selection, a probability sampling technique was employed (Taherdoost, 2016), specifically stratified random sampling with proportional allocation across three variables: gender (target: 52% male, 48% female), age brackets (target: 46% for 18-21 years, 45% for 22-24 years, 9% for >24 years), and relationship status (target proportions based on preliminary survey: 27% currently in a relationship, 25% with previous experience, 24% other statuses, 14% never in a relationship, 10% in early stages). The final sample achieved close alignment with these target proportions.

Data collection was conducted using a structured online questionnaire comprising three main sections: demographic information, WhatsApp usage scale, and persuasive communication in romantic relationships scale. The WhatsApp usage scale (10 items) was adapted from (Davis, 1989) Technology Acceptance Model, measuring the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness dimensions. The persuasive communication scale (24 items) was developed based on Kansky's (2018), relationship quality framework, covering expressions of love, attention and affection, security and trust, and conflict resolution. All items utilized 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Content validity was established through expert judgment by three communication specialists who evaluated item relevance and theoretical alignment. Construct validity was assessed through exploratory factor analysis (KMO = 0.891, Bartlett's Test  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the proposed dimensional structure. Reliability testing demonstrated excellent internal consistency for both variables, with Cronbach's Alpha values significantly exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.7 (Taber, 2018). The particularly high reliability coefficients (0.922 for WhatsApp usage and 0.970 for persuasive communication in romantic relationships) indicate robust measurement tools, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Data collection was carried out between January and March 2024 using Google Forms as the online survey platform. A total of 325 responses were initially collected, but after screening for completeness and validity (checking for response patterns indicating inattentive responding), 308 valid responses were retained for analysis. The data analysis process involved descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis implemented using SPSS Version 25.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Respondent Profile**

This study involved 308 Generation Z respondents with a gender-balanced composition of 51.9% male and 48.1% female, providing comprehensive perspectives across genders. The age distribution revealed that 45.8% of respondents were 17-21 years old, 44.5% were 22-26 years old, and 9.7% were over 26 years old, ensuring thorough representation across the Generation Z age spectrum. Most respondents were students (61%), with the remainder balancing work and study (39%), reflecting the typical life stage of this demographic cohort. Geographically, respondents were concentrated in Jakarta (44.8%), followed by Bekasi (18.2%) and South Tangerang (11.7%), providing a representative sample from various areas of the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region.

The romantic relationship status of respondents varied significantly, with 27.3% currently in a relationship, 25% having previous relationship experience, 23.7% reporting other relationship statuses, 14% never having been in a relationship, and 10.1% in the early stages of relationship formation. This diversity of relationship experiences enriches the data by capturing perspectives from different relationship phases, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of digital communication patterns across relationship trajectories. Beyond WhatsApp, respondents also utilized other platforms, with Instagram being the predominant choice (42.5%), followed by Facebook and Twitter (12.7% each). This multi-platform engagement aligns with previous research indicating that Generation Z typically maintains presence across multiple social media platforms simultaneously (Bratina, 2023; Venter, 2019).

### **Descriptive Analysis**

Table 1 reveals compelling patterns in how Generation Z perceives and utilizes WhatsApp in romantic relationships.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables**

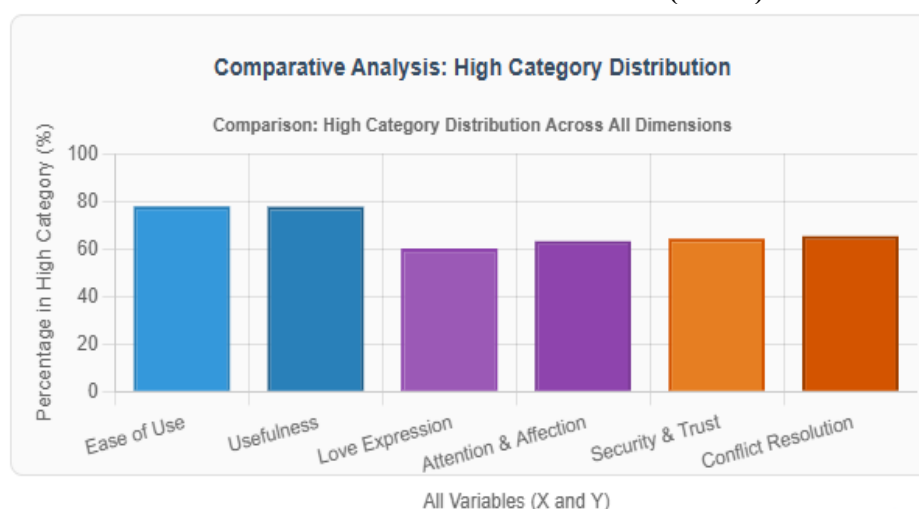
Variable	Low	Medium	High	Mean	SD
Perceived Ease of Use (X1)	5.2%	16.9%	77.9%	2.73	0.55
Perceived Usefulness (X2)	0%	22.4%	77.6%	2.78	0.42
Expressions of Love (Y1)	9.7%	30.2%	60.1%	2.50	0.67
Expressions of Attention and Affection (Y2)	8.4%	28.2%	63.3%	2.55	0.65
Security and Trust (Y3)	6.2%	29.5%	64.3%	2.58	0.61
Conflict Resolution (Y4)	34.7%	0%	65.3%	1.65	0.48

source: data research processing

The high percentages for perceived ease of use (77.9%) and perceived usefulness (77.6%) align with Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) principles, confirming previous research suggesting that the adoption of communication technologies is strongly influenced by these dimensions (Davis, 1989). Notably, the perceived usefulness dimension shows no respondents in the low category, indicating universal recognition of WhatsApp's practical value among Generation Z users.

When examining the persuasive communication dimensions, security and trust emerge as the dimension with the highest percentage in the high category (64.3%), followed by expressions of attention and affection (63.3%), expressions of love (60.1%), and conflict resolution (65.3%). Figure 1 demonstrates the comparative distribution of high-category responses across all variables, revealing distinct patterns between WhatsApp usage adoption (X variables) and persuasive communication effectiveness (Y variables). The visualization clearly shows that while WhatsApp achieves very high user acceptance rates (77.9% for ease of use, 77.6% for usefulness), its effectiveness varies considerably across different romantic communication dimensions, with security and trust showing the strongest performance (64.3%) among relationship variables.

**Figure 1. Comparative Distribution of High-Category Responses Across WhatsApp Usage and Persuasive Communication Dimensions (n=308)\***



\*Percentage of respondents rating each dimension as "High" (3.68-5.00 on 5-point Likert scale).  
 n=308 Indonesian Generation Z university students.

Most striking is the polarized distribution in the conflict resolution dimension, with 34.7% reporting low effectiveness and 65.3% reporting high effectiveness, with no responses in the medium category. This bimodal distribution suggests a fundamental dichotomy in how Generation Z perceives WhatsApp's utility for resolving relationship conflicts. This finding aligns with Social Judgment

Theory, indicating that respondents have distinctive latitudes of acceptance or rejection regarding WhatsApp's appropriateness for conflict management, with minimal neutral territory. The absence of medium responses in this dimension warrants further investigation and may reflect the complex nature of digital conflict resolution, where contextual factors significantly influence perceived effectiveness.

### Correlation Between Variables

The correlation analysis (Table 2) reveals significant positive correlations across all variables, with coefficients ranging from moderate ( $r = 0.426$ ) to strong ( $r = 0.867$ ).

**Table 2. Correlation Matrix Between Variables**

Var	X1	X2	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4
Perceived Ease of Use (X1)	1	0.739**	0.684**	0.715**	0.661**	0.444**
Perceived Usefulness (X2)		1	0.674**	0.686**	0.580**	0.426**
Expressions of Love (Y1)			1	0.867**	0.779**	0.632**
Expressions of Attention and Affection (Y2)				1	0.804**	0.610**
Security and Trust (Y3)					1	0.745**
Conflict Resolution (Y4)						1

source: data research processing

Note: \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The strongest correlation exists between expressions of love (Y1) and expressions of attention and affection (Y2) ( $r = 0.867$ ), demonstrating the substantial conceptual overlap between these dimensions. This finding aligns with (Hendrick et al., 2011) argument that expressions of love and affection are intrinsically connected elements of romantic communication.

Notably, perceived ease of use (X1) demonstrates stronger correlations with all persuasive communication dimensions compared to perceived usefulness (X2). This suggests that for Generation Z, the accessibility and intuitive functionality of WhatsApp may be more crucial than its practical benefits when facilitating romantic communication. This pattern diverges somewhat from classic TAM predictions, where usefulness often dominates adoption behavior (Davis, 1989), potentially indicating a generational shift where interface experience takes precedence for digital natives.

The weakest correlations appear between both TAM dimensions and conflict resolution (X1-Y4:  $r = 0.444$ ; X2-Y4:  $r = 0.426$ ), reinforcing the finding that WhatsApp's perceived ease of use and usefulness are less predictive of its effectiveness in resolving relationship conflicts. This supports Venter's (2019) assertion that text-based digital communication may be inadequate for complex emotional negotiations due to the absence of non-verbal cues. The strong correlation between security/trust and conflict resolution (Y3-Y4:  $r = 0.745$ ) suggests that trust forms a critical foundation for digital conflict management, consistent with Kansky's (2018) identification of trust as essential for relationship quality.

These correlation patterns can be interpreted through the framework of Social Judgment Theory: dimensions with stronger correlations likely fall within shared latitudes of acceptance, while weaker correlations may indicate greater divergence in how these dimensions are anchored in respondents' relationship expectations.

### Regression Analysis

The regression analysis results (Table 3) provide compelling evidence of the significant impact of WhatsApp usage on persuasive communication in romantic relationships among Generation Z.

**Table 3. Regression Analysis Results**

Var Y	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.	Regression Equation
Persuasive Communication (Y)	0.614	0.378	185.568	0.000	$Y = 1.506 + 0.729X$
Expressions of Love (Y1)	0.609	0.371	180.702	0.000	$Y1 = 1.752 + 0.439X$
Expressions of Attention (Y2)	0.631	0.398	202.085	0.000	$Y2 = 1.654 + 0.470X$
Security and Trust (Y3)	0.666	0.444	244.399	0.000	$Y3 = 1.486 + 0.529X$
Conflict Resolution (Y4)	0.426	0.181	67.826	0.000	$Y4 = 2.140 + 0.430X$

source: data research processing



All regression models demonstrated statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that WhatsApp usage is a meaningful predictor across all persuasive communication dimensions. Overall, WhatsApp usage explains 37.8% ( $R^2 = 0.378$ ) of the variance in persuasive communication within romantic relationships. This substantial contribution underscores the central role that digital platforms play in contemporary romantic dynamics among Generation Z, supporting Miguel et al. (2018) assertion that digital platforms have become integral to relationship formation and maintenance. The explained variance is comparable to findings from related studies on digital communication in interpersonal relationships (Okdie & Ewoldsen, 2018; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2017), suggesting consistent patterns across different research contexts.

When examining individual dimensions, WhatsApp usage demonstrates its strongest predictive relationship with security and trust ( $R^2 = 0.444$ ), followed by expressions of attention and affection ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ), expressions of love ( $R^2 = 0.371$ ), and finally conflict resolution ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ). The substantial contribution to security and trust aligns with Karandashev's (2019) emphasis on digital platforms as spaces where trust and honesty can be cultivated through consistent communication patterns.

The relatively weak predictive relationship with conflict resolution ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ) is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates that while WhatsApp significantly influences all aspects of persuasive communication, its impact on conflict management is markedly less pronounced. This finding supports research by Van Ouytsel et al. (2019) and Yacoub et al. (2018), suggesting that digital platforms may introduce unique challenges for conflict resolution due to the absence of non-verbal cues and the increased potential for misinterpretation.

The regression equations provide additional insights into the relationships between variables. For instance, the equation for security and trust ( $Y3 = 1.486 + 0.529X$ ) indicates that this dimension is not only most strongly predicted by WhatsApp usage but also shows the steepest slope, suggesting that incremental increases in WhatsApp engagement may yield more substantial gains in trust compared to other dimensions. Conversely, the relatively flat slope for conflict resolution, combined with its higher intercept value ( $Y4 = 2.140 + 0.430X$ ), suggests that baseline conflict resolution skills may be less dependent on digital platform usage.

### **Integration with Social Judgment Theory**

The findings from this study can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of Social Judgment Theory. WhatsApp usage demonstrates varying degrees of influence across different dimensions of persuasive communication, suggesting distinct latitudes of acceptance among Generation Z users. Security and trust ( $R^2 = 0.444$ ) and expressions of attention and affection ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ) appear to fall comfortably within the latitude of acceptance, indicating that Generation Z readily accepts WhatsApp as an appropriate medium for these relationship functions.

The weaker relationship with conflict resolution ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ) suggests that this dimension partially resides within the latitude of rejection for many users. The polarized distribution observed in the descriptive statistics (34.7% low, 65.3% high, with no medium responses) further supports this interpretation, indicating a clear division in attitudes toward WhatsApp's appropriateness for conflict management. This pattern aligns with Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif's conceptualization of social judgment, where individuals evaluate communication contexts against internalized anchors and reference points.

### **Technology Acceptance Model Implications**

The finding that perceived ease of use correlates more strongly with persuasive outcomes than perceived usefulness suggests that emotional and relational considerations may modify traditional Technology Acceptance Model predictions in relationship contexts. This highlights the interplay between technological features and relationship dynamics, where ease of use appears to facilitate the integration of digital communication into Generation Z's relationship practices.

These reliability values align with or exceed those reported in comparable studies examining digital communication in interpersonal relationships (Arikewuyo et al., 2021; Hollenbaugh et al.,

2019), suggesting that the measurement instruments effectively capture the constructs under investigation.

### Addressing Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** The findings reveal that Generation Z demonstrates intensive WhatsApp utilization with high percentages in both key dimensions: ease of use (77.9%) and usefulness (77.6%). Generation Z particularly values WhatsApp's anytime, anywhere accessibility and the ease of using communication features like chat, voice notes, and video calls that support affection expression and relationship maintenance.

These patterns align with previous research by (Pettegrew & Day, 2015) on smartphone-mediated relationships, but provide new insights into the specific features most valued by Generation Z. The findings suggest that WhatsApp's multimodal communication options—combining text, voice, and video—create an environment that can accommodate various relationship needs and communication preferences. The platform's high perceived usefulness, despite its limitations in conflict resolution suggests a strategic approach to technology use, where Generation Z may selectively employ WhatsApp for relationship aspects where it demonstrates the greatest effectiveness.

**Research Question 2:** The analysis reveals that persuasive communication manifests across four main dimensions, with security and trust as the strongest dimension ( $R^2 = 0.444$ ), followed by expressions of attention and affection ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ), expressions of love ( $R^2 = 0.371$ ), and conflict resolution as the weakest dimension ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ). Overall, WhatsApp usage perceptions significantly contribute 37.8% to persuasive communication in Generation Z romantic relationships.

These findings support Social Judgment Theory by demonstrating that Generation Z exhibits a high latitude of acceptance for using WhatsApp for affection expression and trust-building, but a higher latitude of rejection for conflict resolution. This indicates that while WhatsApp effectively facilitates the expression of affection and the building of security in relationships, the platform has limitations in resolving conflicts, which may still require face-to-face interaction for more effective outcomes.

### Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications extend beyond Social Judgment Theory to include refinements to the Technology Acceptance Model in relationship contexts. The finding that ease of use correlates more strongly with persuasive outcomes than usefulness suggests that emotional and relational considerations may modify traditional TAM predictions. This highlights the need for integrated theoretical frameworks that combine technological adoption models with relationship communication theories to fully explain digital relationship dynamics.

This study investigated the role of WhatsApp in facilitating persuasive communication within romantic relationships among Generation Z. Through a systematic analysis of survey data from 308 respondents, several significant patterns emerged that enhance our understanding of digital communication in contemporary romantic relationships.

WhatsApp usage significantly influences persuasive communication in Generation Z romantic relationships, explaining 37.8% of the variance across all dimensions. This substantial contribution demonstrates how deeply digital communication platforms have become integrated into modern relationship dynamics. The findings revealed varying degrees of influence across different aspects of persuasive communication, with the most profound impact on security and trust ( $R^2 = 0.444$ ) and expressions of attention and affection ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ), while showing more limited influence on conflict resolution ( $R^2 = 0.181$ ).

The strong predictive relationship with security and trust suggests that WhatsApp creates an effective environment for building relationship confidence through features such as message encryption, communication reliability, and message persistence. These attributes appear to foster a sense of emotional safety that serves as a foundation for other relationship dimensions. The substantial impact on expressions of attention and affection ( $R^2 = 0.398$ ) and expressions of love ( $R^2 = 0.371$ ) further demonstrates WhatsApp's effectiveness for positive relationship maintenance behaviors, supporting previous research on digital affection expression (Floyd, 2006; Miguel et al., 2018).

The notably weaker relationship with conflict resolution represents an important boundary condition for digital communication effectiveness. This limitation aligns with Social Judgment Theory's concept of the latitude of rejection, suggesting that many Generation Z individuals perceive WhatsApp as less appropriate for managing relationship conflicts. The polarized response pattern (34.7% low, 65.3% high, with no medium responses) further indicates divergent attitudes toward digital conflict management, with distinct groups either embracing or rejecting WhatsApp for this purpose.

Strong correlations between persuasive communication dimensions ( $r = 0.610-0.867$ ) indicate substantial interdependence among these relationship aspects, supporting Kinsky's (2018) conceptualization of relationship quality as a multidimensional construct with interconnected components. The particularly strong correlation between expressions of love and expressions of attention/affection ( $r = 0.867$ ) suggests these functions as complementary manifestations of emotional connection in digital contexts.

An unexpected but significant finding was that perceived ease of use demonstrated consistently stronger correlations with persuasive communication dimensions compared to perceived usefulness. This represents an important refinement to Technology Acceptance Model applications in relationship contexts, suggesting that for Generation Z, the accessibility and intuitive nature of digital platforms may outweigh pure utility considerations in relationship communication.

The theoretical implications of this study extend to both Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model. For Social Judgment Theory, the findings demonstrate how digital platforms have been incorporated into Generation Z's latitudes of acceptance for relationship communication, particularly for positive relationship dimensions. For the Technology Acceptance Model, the results suggest that relationship contexts may modify traditional adoption patterns, with ease of use taking precedence over usefulness in emotional communication.

Several practical implications emerge from this research. First, relationship education for Generation Z should acknowledge the platform-specific strengths and limitations of digital communication, encouraging the complementary use of face-to-face interaction for sensitive discussions. Second, digital platform developers might consider features specifically designed to support constructive conflict resolution while maintaining the security and ease of use that users value. Finally, communication practitioners should recognize the differential effectiveness of digital platforms across relationship dimensions when designing interventions or guidance for young adults.

### Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between WhatsApp usage and persuasive communication in romantic relationships among Indonesian Generation Z university students. Two primary research questions guided this investigation: (1) To what extent does WhatsApp usage predict persuasive communication dimensions in romantic relationships? (2) How do Social Judgment Theory's latitude concepts explain differential platform acceptance patterns across these dimensions?

WhatsApp usage significantly predicts persuasive communication in Generation Z romantic relationships, explaining 37.8% of the total variance. However, this influence varies dramatically across relationship dimensions. The platform demonstrates the strongest effectiveness in building security and trust (44.4% variance explained), followed by facilitating expressions of attention and affection (39.8% variance), expressions of love (37.1% variance), and shows notably limited effectiveness in conflict resolution (18.1% variance). This differential pattern indicates that Generation Z strategically leverages WhatsApp's strengths while recognizing its limitations.

Social Judgment Theory's latitude concepts effectively explain these differential acceptance patterns. Security and trust, along with positive emotional expressions, fall within Generation Z's latitude of acceptance for digital communication, as evidenced by high effectiveness ratings and strong predictive relationships. Conversely, conflict resolution partially resides within the latitude of rejection, demonstrated by the polarized distribution (34.7% low effectiveness, 65.3% high effectiveness, with no moderate responses) and a weak predictive relationship. This suggests that Generation Z maintains clear cognitive anchors distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate contexts for WhatsApp-mediated romantic communication.

This research provides the first empirical integration of Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model in romantic communication contexts. The finding that perceived ease of use consistently outweighs perceived usefulness in predicting relationship outcomes represents a significant refinement to TAM applications in emotional communication contexts. Additionally, this study offers unique insights into Indonesia's digital communication landscape as the world's third-largest WhatsApp market, revealing culture-specific patterns of platform adoption for romantic relationships.

Several practical implementations emerge from these findings. Universities and counseling centers should develop Generation Z-specific relationship education curricula that acknowledge WhatsApp's platform-specific strengths and limitations. Programs should emphasize complementary communication strategies—leveraging digital platforms for daily relationship maintenance and positive reinforcement while prioritizing face-to-face interaction for conflict resolution and sensitive discussions. Platform developers should consider implementing conflict resolution support features, such as "cooling-off" period suggestions before sending emotionally charged messages, guided communication templates for difficult conversations, or integration with relationship counseling resources. These additions could address the platform's weakest area while maintaining user privacy and autonomy.

Educational institutions should incorporate digital relationship literacy into communication curricula, teaching students to recognize when platform limitations may hinder effective communication and providing alternative strategies for complex emotional negotiations. Relationship counselors working with Generation Z clients should assess digital communication patterns as part of relationship evaluation, helping couples optimize their use of various communication channels based on context and communication goals. These practical applications demonstrate the immediate relevance of this research for professionals working with digital natives in educational, therapeutic, and technological contexts.

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about the relationship between WhatsApp usage and communication outcomes. Future longitudinal research should track how digital communication patterns influence relationship development over time. The geographic concentration in Greater Jakarta may limit generalizability to other Indonesian regions or cultural contexts, suggesting a need for broader national and cross-cultural comparative studies. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative analysis with qualitative exploration of specific strategies Generation Z uses to overcome digital platform limitations in conflict resolution. Additionally, investigating how other popular platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Discord) complement or substitute for WhatsApp in different relationship contexts would provide a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's multi-platform relationship communication ecosystem.

This research demonstrates that Generation Z has developed sophisticated, strategic approaches to digital relationship communication, selectively employing platforms based on contextual appropriateness rather than universal adoption. Understanding these patterns is crucial for educators, platform developers, and relationship professionals working with digital natives who will shape the future of romantic communication in increasingly mediated social environments. The integration of Social Judgment Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding how digital platforms are selectively adopted for different relationship functions, offering valuable insights for both theoretical advancement and practical application in the digital age.

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