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EMPIRICAL ARTICLE

Even Though the Long Distance: Are We Still Going on? Dyadic Trust, Relationship Maintenance Behaviors, and Relationship Quality Among Emerging Adulthoods

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ABSTRACT

Long-distance romantic relationships have become an increasingly common type of relationship. Especially among emerging adults, the preference for such relationships is increasing. This situation reveals the importance of analyzing how long-distance relationships are maintained and the quality that individuals perceive from these relationships. The study group of this research consists of emerging adults who have been in a long-distance romantic relationship for at least 6 months. The study examined the relationships between relationship maintenance behaviors, dyadic trust and relationship quality. The findings obtained using a serial mediation model show that relationship maintenance behaviors predict relationship quality both directly and indirectly through dyadic trust. In particular, openness and positivity play important roles in the formation of trust, which in turn increases overall relationship quality. The results emphasize that adaptive communication and relationship maintenance behaviors play a critical role in overcoming the difficulties encountered in long-distance relationships. The findings are discussed within the framework of family systems theory and the impact of stressors on the system and the role of effective relationship maintenance behaviors in maintaining relational balance and functioning are discussed. Finally, implications for practice and future research in the field of relationship counseling are discussed.

1 | Introduction

Long-distance romantic relationships (LDRs), defined as intimate partnerships in which partners live apart and face-to-face contact is limited, are increasingly common among young adults due to educational, occupational, and technological changes (Markman et al. 2022; Weber et al. 2022). Although physical distance can create emotional and logistical difficulties, a growing body of research has shown that long-distance relationships can be as satisfying and stable as geographically close relationships, especially when partners engage in intentional behaviors to maintain emotional closeness and relational stability (Kelmer et al. 2013; Merolla 2012). However, such relationships are particularly common among emerging adults, a transitional developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood characterized by identity exploration, instability and a strong desire for closeness (Arnett 2000). During this developmental period, emerging adults often experience tensions between identity formation and relational commitment as they strive to balance autonomy and competence with intimacy (Arnett 2007; Arnett et al. 2014; Deniz et al. 2023). Because emerging adults are still developing their emotional regulation skills, they may have more difficulty coping with the uncertainty inherent in close relationship experiences (Potterton et al. 2022). In the context of long-distance relationships, these developmental crises can become even more challenging. This is because the physical

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Summary

- This study examined how relationship maintenance behaviors (positivity, openness, and task sharing) influence relationship quality among emerging adults in long-distance romantic relationships.
- Dyadic trust was identified as a key mediating mechanism linking maintenance behaviors and relationship quality.
- Findings highlight that adaptive communication and emotional openness foster relational stability despite geographical separation.
- The study contributes to the understanding of long-distance relationships within a systemic and cultural framework, emphasizing implications for culturally sensitive couple counseling.

distance between partners requires a conscious relational investment, while emerging adults may also struggle with uncertainties regarding long-term commitment and self-definition (Beckmeyer et al. 2023).

Despite the increasing frequency of LDRs during this life stage, the psychological and relational mechanisms that sustain them have not been adequately explored. In many cultures, emerging adults are increasingly geographically mobile due to factors such as university education, urban migration and career development. These transitions often result in physical separation from romantic partners, thus increasing the prevalence of LDRs at this life stage. Some LDRs occur voluntarily, while others are contingent due to external constraints. For emerging adults whose emotional regulation and relational scripts are still developing, the impact of physical separation on relational dynamics may be particularly pronounced. Furthermore, these relational dynamics cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural context. In Western-based individualistic societies, the emphasis on autonomy and personal preferences can often shape how partners negotiate and sustain relational distance in a relationship (Goodboy et al. 2022; Knobloch et al. 2023). In contrast, in collectivist cultures such as Türkiye, family values, mutual dependence, and gender norms may have a stronger influence on how young adults maintain trust and behave in relationship-maintenance behaviors (Akçabozan Kayabol and Hatipoğlu Sümer 2022; Uçar 2022). This situation demonstrates that the strategies and meanings of long-distance relationships can vary according to culture, and highlights the importance of examining these relationships within developmental and cultural frameworks.

In long-distance romantic relationships where face-to-face interaction is scarce and opportunities for shared physical experiences are limited, relationship maintenance behaviors (RMBs) play a crucial role in maintaining emotional attachment and relational satisfaction (Weiser and Weigel 2016; Ogolsky and Bowers 2013). These behaviors, including positivity, openness, assurances, social networks and sharing tasks, serve as communicative strategies that encourage emotional intimacy and help partners regulate relational stress associated with physical separation (Canary and Stafford 1992). Underlying these processes is dyadic trust, which is the mutual belief in the reliability, honesty, emotional availability and goodwill of the partner (Holmes and Rempel 1989). Dyadic trust goes beyond individual perceptions of trustworthiness; it is a relational construct built over time through repeated interactions and maintained through open communication and mutual investment (Simpson 2007). Especially in the context of long-distance relationships, where real-time reassurances and daily rituals are often lacking, dyadic trust becomes a psychological mainstay that reduces uncertainty, promotes emotional security, and sustains long-term commitment (Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine 2017). Positivity can include expressing love and optimism about the relationship; openness involves sharing thoughts, vulnerabilities and relational concerns, while task sharing refers to the collaborative coordination of future plans and responsibilities despite distance. In LDRs, these behaviors may take the form of regular texting, video calls, and planning joint visits or common goals. Only these three subdimensions were included, as they are directly associated with dyadic-level interactions and reflect core emotional and communicative processes between partners. Other subdimensions, such as social network involvement or assurances, were excluded because they emphasize relational management through external figures rather than through direct partner-to-partner communication. Other subcomponents of maintenance behaviors, such as social network involvement or reassurances, are based on partners' interactions with others outside of dyadic interactions. From the perspective of family systems theory (Minuchin 2018), both RMBs and dyadic trust function as regulatory components of the dyad subsystem. While RMBs facilitate information flow and emotional availability, dyadic trust maintains systemic balance by buffering against external stressors and enhancing couple resilience. When couples engage in emotionally congruent and reciprocal behaviors, they reinforce trust, which in turn serves as the emotional infrastructure that sustains the overall quality and functionality of the relationship.

In addition to strengthening the emotional foundation of a romantic relationship, dyadic trust also plays a central role in shaping how individuals evaluate the overall quality of their relationship. Relationship quality represents a multidimensional assessment of a person's romantic relationship that encompasses emotional satisfaction, mutual support, intimacy, and perceived stability (Morry et al. 2010; Demir 2008). Unlike relationship satisfaction, which usually reflects momentary evaluations, relationship quality offers a more comprehensive and lasting assessment of how satisfying, secure, and emotionally responsive a relationship feels over time (Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine 2017; Körner and Schütz 2021). In long-distance relationships where relational continuity is threatened by physical separation, perceived relationship quality may be more vulnerable to emotional fluctuations unless reinforced by consistent maintenance behaviors and mutual trust. For emerging adults who simultaneously engage in identity development and intimacy formation, the ability to perceive their relationships as emotionally rewarding and stable is an important determinant of psychological well-being and long-term relational investment (Arnett 2006; Gómez-López et al. 2019). However, few studies have explored how relationship quality is shaped by everyday relational processes such as openness, shared tasks and trust in the context of long-distance partnerships. Understanding the dynamic factors that contribute to relationship quality can provide important

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knowledge about how young couples maintain resilient romantic bonds despite geographical and developmental transitions.

1.1 | The Present Study

Although previous studies have focused on geographically close relationships, little is known about how RMBs and trust interact specifically in long-distance contexts among emerging adults. Existing studies have typically examined RMBs and trust in isolation or focused on geographically close relationships, neglecting the unique emotional and systemic dynamics of romantic partnerships maintained across distances (Bouchard et al. 2023; Merolla 2012). Moreover, while some studies have recognized the role of RMBs in enhancing satisfaction, few have explored the mediating function of trust in a systemic framework. There is also a paucity of research examining these variables using structural models that conceptualize relationships as interdependent systems, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts. Drawing on family systems theory, this study aims to address these gaps by examining whether dyadic trust mediates the relationship between RMBs and perceived relationship quality in emerging adults participating in LDRs. Thus, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how emotional bonding is maintained across distances and contribute to culturally informed couple interventions. The current study, building on the theoretical and empirical foundations outlined above, examines the extent to which RMBs—specifically positivity, openness, and task sharing—are related to perceived romantic relationship quality and whether these relationships are mediated by dyadic trust. By focusing on emerging adults in long-distance romantic relationships, this study offers insights into the processes through which relational stability and satisfaction are enhanced despite physical separation. The conceptual model guiding the study is based on the propositions that emotionally adaptive behaviors increase interpersonal trust, which in turn contributes to higher relationship quality within the couple's systemic functioning. Therefore, the present study addresses the following research question: How do RMBs (positivity, openness, and task sharing) influence perceived relationship quality in long-distance romantic relationships among emerging adults, and does dyadic trust mediate these associations? Building on the theoretical foundations discussed, the present study hypothesizes that (H):

H1. *Relationship maintenance behaviors (positivity, openness, and task sharing) will be positively associated with dyadic trust.*

H2. *Dyadic trust will be positively associated with perceived romantic relationship quality.*

H3. *Dyadic trust will mediate the relationship between relationship maintenance behaviors and relationship quality.*

2 | Method

2.1 | Participants and Procedure

The data of the study were collected from university students studying at different universities in Türkiye via Google Forms prepared online. While collecting the data online, it was explained to the students the purpose of the research, how to fill in the Google Form, and that the information obtained would remain confidential within the framework of the purpose of use and ethical principles. After these explanations, it was stated that participation in the research was voluntary and the forms were delivered to the university students who volunteered through various online platforms. The data obtained from the participants were transferred to electronic media and analyzed using SPSS for Windows 27, AMOS Graphics 24.

The final sample consisted of 348 university students from Türkiye who identified as emerging adults and were currently involved in long-distance romantic relationships (LDRs). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 26 years (M = 21.03, SD = 1.51), and had been in a romantic relationship for at least six months (Mrelationship duration = 24.16 months, SD = 9.27, range = 6–115 months). In terms of gender, 57.2% were female and 42.8% were male. With regard to academic level, 87.3% were undergraduate students and 12.7% were enrolled in graduate programs. Participants were also distributed across year levels: 17.8% were in their first year, 21.6% in the second year, 33.0% in the third year, and 27.6% in the fourth year of university. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently involved in a romantic relationship in which partners were geographically separated and met in person no more than once every 2–4 weeks. In addition, married individuals were excluded because marriage is typically considered a later developmental stage beyond emerging adulthood, and therefore the study focused on relational dynamics prior to formal marital commitment. Same-sex couples were also excluded, as the instruments employed had primarily been validated in heterosexual samples within the Turkish cultural context. Physical distance between partners varied: 13.8% lived 15–50 km apart, 28.2% lived 100–300 km apart, and 58.0% lived more than 300 km apart. Technology-mediated communication was common: 91.0% used messaging, 84.0% used video chat, and 11.0% used phone calls as their primary means of contact. Communication frequency was also high, with 32.8% engaging in 1–3 h, 44.0% in 4–6 h, and 23.3% in 7–9 h of daily contact. Additionally, 38.8% reported checking their partner's online status, and 61.2% did not. Social media monitoring was also reported, with 8.6% stating they never follow their partner's activity, 27.6% rarely, 27.9% sometimes, 23.6% usually, and 12.4% always. Details about the participants are presented in Table 1.

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Relationship Maintenance Behaviors Scale

The Relationship Maintenance Behaviors Scale (RMBS) was originally developed by Stafford and Canary (1991) to measure maintenance strategies reflecting communication approaches used to sustain desired relational definitions. The Turkish version of the RMBS, adapted by Akçabozan-Kayabol (2017), was employed in the present study. Participants rated 28 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*. The original version of the RMBS has five subscales: positivity (10 items, e.g., "Don't criticize my partner"), openness (6 items, e.g., "Open about my feelings"), assurances (4 items, e.g., "I talk about our plans for the future"), sharing tasks (2 items, e.g., "Don't shirk my responsibilities"), and social networks (2 items, e.g., "I like to spend time with our same friends"). The adapted version of the RMBS includes five subscales: positivity (10 items, e.g., "Don't

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TABLE 1 | Demographic information of participants.

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	199	57.2
Male	149	42.8
Grade		
1st grade	62	17.8
2nd grade	75	21.6
3rd grade	115	33.0
4th grade	96	27.6
Is partner a university student?		
Yes	336	87.3
No	49	12.7
The physical distance between romantic partners (km)		
15–50	48	13.8
100–300	98	28.2
300-more	202	58.0
Frequency of using technology to communicate (h)		
1–3	114	32.8
4–6	153	44.0
7–9	81	23.3
Patterns of communicating with partner via technology		
Video chat	291	84.0
Texting	316	91.0
Phone call	39	11.0
Are you checking whether the partner is online?		
Yes	135	38.8
No	213	61.2
Frequency of following-up partner's activities on social media		
Never	30	8.6
Rarely	96	27.6
Sometimes	97	27.9
Usually	82	23.6
Always	43	12.4

criticize my partner"), openness (9 items, e.g., "Open about my feelings"), the social network of family (2 items, e.g., "Ask for help from a family member"), the social network of friends (2 items, e.g., "Include our friends in our activities"), and sharing tasks (4 items, e.g., "Don't shirk my responsibilities"). In this Turkish adaptation, the "assurances" dimension was not retained and therefore was not included in the present study. A high score on the scale indicates greater use of RMBs by individuals and their perception of similar behaviors from their partners. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.85, 0.89, 0.95, 0.88, and 0.75 for positivity, openness, the social environment-family, the social environment-friends, and task sharing, respectively.

2.2.2 | Dyadic Trust Scale

The Dyadic Trust Scale (DTS) was originally developed by Larzelere and Huston (1980) to measure the trust experienced by individuals in romantic or marital relationships. The scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Çetinkaya et al. (2008). The scale consists of eight items in a single dimension (e.g., "My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare") and uses a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 7 = *always*). The total score is calculated by summing responses to all items. The possible score range is 8–56, with higher scores indicating a greater level of trust in the relationship. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.90.

2.2.3 | Perceived Romantic Relationship Quality Scale

Perceived Romantic Relationship Quality Scale (PRRQS) was originally developed by Fletcher et al. (2000) to measure the quality of romantic partnerships. The Turkish version of the PRRQS was translated and validated by Sağkal and Özdemir (2018). The scale consists of six items measuring a single dimension, rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). It does not include subscales (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your relationship?"). Higher scores reflect a greater perceived romantic relationship quality. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

2.3 | Data Analysis

AMOS Graphics 24 and IBM SPSS version 27 were utilized for all data analyses. Descriptive statistics, including mean, SD, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as Pearson correlation coefficients, were calculated for each variable. Subsequently, a measurement model was developed, followed by testing the structural model. The validity of both the measurement and structural models was assessed using fit indices. Additionally, the item parceling method, aimed at minimizing measurement errors in single-factor measurements, was incorporated into the Structural Equation Model (SEM). In addition, responses to questions about the use of technology in maintaining long-distance relationships were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A total of 5000 bootstrap samples were used to assess the significance of the mediating variable, and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were generated for indirect effects.

3 | Results

3.1 | Preliminary Analysis

The relationships between relationship quality, RMBs and dyadic trust, which are the variables of this study, were calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis. As a result of the analyses, significant relationships at different levels were found between the sub-dimensions in the study. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and Pearson

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correlation coefficients for the study variables are shown in Table 2. According to the correlation analysis in Table 2, relationship quality has a positive relationship with positivity, openness, sharing tasks and dyadic trust. Relationship duration also has a positive relationship with all variables.

3.2 | Measurement Model

The measurement model consists of five latent variables: sharing tasks, openness, positivity, dyadic trust, relationship quality and 10 observed variables: two for sharing tasks, two for openness, two for positivity, two for dyadic trust, two for relationship quality. According to the results, the measurement model has goodness of fit indices, χ^2 (25, $N = 348$) = 2.750 $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.982; NFI = 0.972; TLI = 0.968; GFI = 0.963; SRMR = 0.022; RMSEA = 0.071. The observed variables meaningfully represent the latent constructs.

3.3 | Structural Model

The structural model examined the mediation of positivity, openness, and dyadic trust in the relationship between sharing tasks and relationship quality. The results supported a full mediation model, in which the effect of sharing tasks on relationship quality was fully mediated by positivity, openness, and dyadic trust. When relationship duration and partner distance were added as control variables, the overall model fit slightly improved and the mediation paths remained significant. The regression coefficients were updated but remained consistent with the original model. The goodness-of-fit indices indicated an acceptable fit to the data; χ^2/df (142.818/48) = 2.975, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.962; GFI = 0.948; IFI = 0.962; NFI = 0.954; TLI = 0.947; SRMR = 0.031; RMSEA = 0.075. The results are presented in Figure 1.

3.4 | Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping technique was applied to the full mediation model, which was hypothetically tested in the study and preferred as the best model in the SEM results. The results of bootstrapping to provide additional evidence for the significance of direct and indirect paths in the model are presented in Table 3.

4 | Discussion

Long-distance romantic relationships (LDRs) have become increasingly prevalent in recent decades, particularly among emerging adults who experience high geographical mobility due to educational and occupational factors (Stafford 2005; Pistole and Roberts 2011; Yoder and Du Bois 2020). As it is a new relational structure, it has the potential to affect the quality of life of individuals in emerging adulthood (Borelli et al. 2015). The current study investigated the relationships between specific RMBs (positivity, openness, task sharing) and dyadic trust that contribute to the relationship quality within this context. According to this goal, descriptive content analysis, correlation analysis and structural equation modeling were used. The results indicated

TABLE 2 | Descriptive statistics and correlation findings.

	Descriptive statistics						Correlations					
Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	ω	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Relationship duration	24.16	20.90	1.59	2.09			—					
2. Positivity	61.86	7.11	−1.04	0.87	0.85	0.84	0.178**	—				
3. Openness	56.67	7.44	−1.65	2.08	0.89	0.89	0.251**	0.693**				
4. Sharing Tasks	25.04	8.21	−1.40	2.25	0.75	0.75	0.156**	0.570**		—		
5. Dyadic Trust	40.41	8.21	−0.94	0.24	0.90	0.90	0.206**	0.533**		0.581**	—	
6. Relationship Quality	37.09	4.91	−1.28	2.08	0.84	0.85	0.202**	0.622**		0.515**	0.325**	—
										0.632**	0.427**	0.734**

*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

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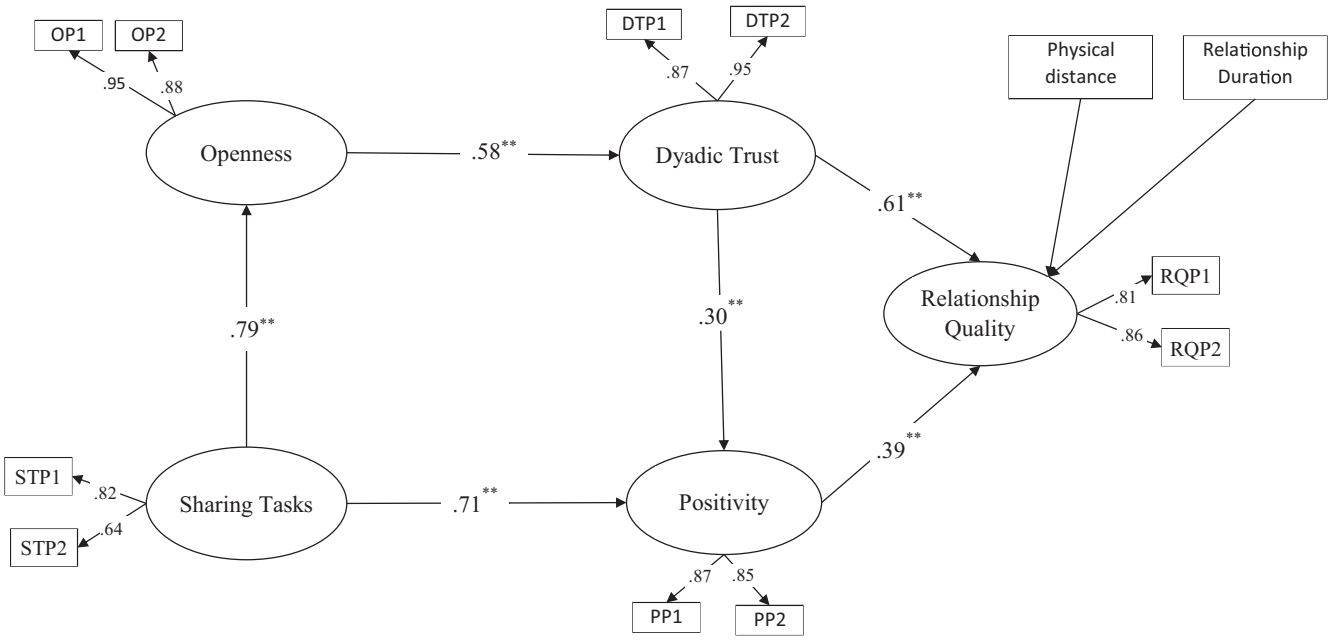

FIGURE 1 | Structural equation modeling for the serial mediation model. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, STP: parcel of sharing tasks, OP: parcel of openness, DTP: parcel of dyadic trust, RQP: parcel of relationship quality, PP: parcel of positivity, Physical distance and relationship duration as control variables.

that significant associations among these variables and supported a model in which dyadic trust partially mediated the link between RMBs and relationship quality. According to the correlation analysis, as shown in Table 2, it was concluded that there were significant relationships at different levels between RMBs, dyadic trust and relationship quality. According to the results of structural equation modeling, positivity, openness and dyadic trust have partial and full mediating roles between task sharing and relationship quality.

As family systems theory mentioned, relational dynamics are understood not as isolated individual behaviors, but as mutually influential patterns within a larger system (Kim-Appel and Appel 2015). In this study, a strong association was found between dyadic trust and RMBs—particularly positivity and openness. These findings are consistent with prior literature indicating that emotionally positive exchanges and open communication strengthen interpersonal trust (Sousa-Gomes et al. 2023). Particularly within the framework of structural family therapy (Minuchin 2018), vivid and flexible boundaries between partners facilitate emotional access, thereby enhancing openness and closeness in communication. The observed association between sharing tasks and openness may reflect these systemic principles, whereby collaborative efforts signal investment in the relationship and encourage emotional disclosure (Weeland et al. 2021). These dynamics appear particularly critical for long-distance emerging adulthood couples, for whom physical separation may amplify the importance of perceived dyadic trust. In this context, partners' optimistic orientations and supportive interactions may contribute to the establishment of a stronger emotional foundation.

The study also revealed a positive association between openness and dyadic trust. This finding aligns with Uysal et al. (2012), who observed that diminished sharing between romantic partners corresponds with reduced trust levels. In the context of emerging adulthood, open and flexible emotional expression may function as a relational asset, enhancing trust by fostering mutual understanding. Openness facilitates the development of clear communication channels, which—according to family systems theory—supports the transparent functioning of the partner subsystem (Schade et al. 2013). Furthermore, positivity appears to act as a protective factor by reducing relational tension and mitigating potential conflict within the dyad (Goldsmith and Byers 2020). Relevant dynamics may become particularly important in long-distance romantic relationships, where maintaining emotional connectedness requires deliberate effort. As research with intercultural couples and families (Reiter and Gee 2008; Warner Colaner et al. 2023) shows that the idea that open dialogue enhances mutual understanding. The findings, taken together, suggest that building a foundation of trust through openness and positivity may be particularly critical for emerging adults managing romantic relationships across physical distances (Holmes and Rempel 1989; Dainton and Aylor 2001; Campbell et al. 2010).

Another key finding of the study was the significant positive association between dyadic trust and perceived relationship quality. This result is in line with previous research suggesting that trust serves as a central regulative principle in romantic relationships, especially for emerging adults (Fitzsimons and Shah 2008). Within the framework of family systems theory, trust contributes to the homeostasis of the relational system—that is, its emotional equilibrium and structural coherence. When individuals perceive their partner as trustworthy, they are more likely to feel secure, emotionally connected, and invested in the partnership, which supports systemic integrity (Minuchin 2018). In the context of long-distance relationships, where partners face heightened stressors such as physical separation and uncertainty, trust may act as a buffer that facilitates effective

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TABLE 3 | Indirect and direct effects for the paths of the final model.

Model pathways	Estimated	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Indirect link			
Sharing Tasks → Openness → Dyadic Trust	1.40	1.045	1.759
Sharing Tasks → Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Positivity	0.35	0.218	0.495
Sharing Tasks → Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Positivity→ Relationship Quality	0.09	0.051	0.157
Sharing Tasks → Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Relationship Quality	0.48	0.335	0.673
Sharing Tasks → Positivity → Relationship Quality	0.46	0.257	0.700
Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Positivity	0.14	0.079	0.212
Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Positivity→ Relationship Quality	0.04	0.019	0.063
Openness → Dyadic Trust→ Relationship Quality	0.19	0.140	0.255
Dyadic Trust→ Positivity→ Relationship Quality	0.06	0.032	0.111
Direct link			
Sharing tasks → Openness	0.79	0.662	0.869
Openness → Dyadic trust	0.58	0.473	0.677
Sharing tasks → Positivity	0.71	0.558	0.832
Dyadic trust → Positivity	0.30	0.150	0.436
Dyadic trust → Relationship quality	0.62	0.467	0.736
Positivity → Relationship quality	0.38	0.241	0.536

communication and emotional continuity (Merolla 2012). From a systemic perspective, mutual trust can act as a buffer against external stress factors by reducing uncertainty about the fidelity of a distant partner, alleviating anxieties associated with physical separation, and regulating relational boundaries in the face of family or social pressures. This buffering function is grounded in the empathic nature of trust, which provides partners with a sense of stability and continuity. This regulatory role of trust maintains homeostasis within the couple subsystem and enables partners to preserve emotional continuity even when external demands increase. The present findings are also consistent with studies showing that higher levels of trust are associated with increased commitment and mutual harmony (Adamczyk and Segrin 2015; Gómez-López et al. 2019). Cultural factors may further shape the observed dynamics. In the Turkish collectivist context, family values and social expectations often play a central role in defining romantic relationships (Kütük 2025). RMBs may be exhibited not only to sustain the couple's closeness but also to gain family approval and align with broader social norms. Additionally, gender roles may influence how task sharing, openness, and trust are negotiated between partners, thereby either enhancing or constraining their effectiveness in sustaining relationship quality. Moreover, similar relational dynamics appear to operate in both long-distance and geographically close relationships, highlighting the universal relevance of trust for relationship quality. For emerging adults, the capacity to develop and sustain trust within their romantic partnerships may also support the successful navigation of developmental tasks related to intimacy, identity, and emotional regulation (Arnett 2006).

The study also identified significant associations between RMBs—particularly positivity and openness—and perceived relationship quality. These results highlight the importance of emotional support, constructive communication, and positive relational framing in sustaining high-quality romantic relationships. Within a systemic framework, relationship quality can be conceptualized as an emergent outcome that reflects the overall health and functioning of the dyadic subsystem (Acosta-Rodas et al. 2020). When maintenance behaviors such as task sharing, openness, and positivity are associated with enhanced relationship quality through their impact on dyadic trust, it suggests that the couple system is operating in a balanced and adaptive manner. Supporting this view, previous research has shown that partner support and emotional availability are positively linked to relationship satisfaction and stability (Reis et al. 2004; Overall et al. 2010). Similarly, Haas and Lannutti (2022) found that maintenance behaviors foster resilience and quality across diverse romantic contexts, including heterosexual and same-sex couples. In line with these findings, the current study underscores the role of trust and emotional openness in promoting shared emotional experiences and improving the overall quality of communication. These dynamics may be especially critical for emerging adults managing the challenges of long-distance romantic relationships, as they work to establish relational security during a developmentally sensitive life phase.

The final model of the study demonstrated that both RMBs and dyadic trust were significant predictors of perceived relationship quality. This finding is consistent with prior research emphasizing the combined importance of emotional support strategies

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and interpersonal trust in sustaining satisfying romantic relationships (Weiser and Weigel 2016; Ledbetter 2017; Bouchard et al. 2023). From a systemic perspective, the family systems theory underscores that relational functionality depends on the balanced distribution of roles and tasks within the partner subsystem. In line with this framework, task sharing in the current study was found to be positively associated with both openness and positivity, which in turn were related to dyadic trust and relationship quality. These associations suggest that when partners engage in collaborative behaviors—even at a distance—they may foster emotional accessibility and reinforce mutual investment, both of which are essential for system coherence (Holtzman et al. 2021). Among the predictors examined, dyadic trust emerged as the strongest contributor to relationship quality, followed by openness and positivity. These results emphasize the central role of emotional security and transparent communication in promoting relational well-being. Interestingly, while task sharing itself did not directly predict relationship quality, it showed an indirect association via its effects on openness and trust. This finding may be explained by the non-linear and recursive processes that define family systems (Becvar and Becvar 2013). In the context of long-distance romantic relationships, opportunities for task sharing may often be limited due to physical separation. Unlike geographically close couples who can coordinate daily routines or household chores, couples in long-distance relationships often share tasks that are symbolic or future-oriented, such as planning visits, coordinating schedules and setting long-term goals. This structural difference may explain why task sharing does not directly increase perceived relationship quality, but instead has an indirect effect by promoting openness and trust. In such systems, seemingly peripheral behaviors—like shared responsibilities—may initiate a sequence of adaptive changes that cascade throughout the relational structure. Thus, task sharing may serve as a trigger point for a broader systemic transformation, enhancing openness, increasing positivity, and strengthening trust. These cascading effects ultimately contribute to the quality of the romantic relationship. For couples with limited opportunities for task sharing, the present findings emphasize the compensatory importance of positivity and openness. These behaviors can maintain overall relationship quality by enabling partners to sustain emotional closeness and relational security despite the absence of shared responsibilities. In the specific context of long-distance relationships, where direct physical interaction is limited, trust and emotionally adaptive behaviors appear to be especially critical for emerging adults seeking to build and maintain meaningful partnerships. Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of literature that highlights the systemic interplay between RMBs, dyadic trust and relationship quality, particularly within the developmental context of emerging adulthood and the structural challenges of long-distance partnerships.

5 | Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes any conclusions about causality or temporal changes in relationship dynamics. Future longitudinal studies are needed to examine how long-distance romantic relationships evolve over time and how trust and RMBs fluctuate across different phases of the relationship. Second, the sample consisted only of heterosexual individuals in romantic (but unmarried) relationships. Married individuals were excluded from the sample because marriage typically represents a later developmental stage of adulthood that goes beyond the transitional characteristics of emerging adulthood, which was the main focus of this study. Similarly, same-sex couples were not included because the instruments used in this study have primarily been validated for heterosexual samples within the Turkish cultural context. We acknowledge that this sampling strategy restricts the generalizability of the findings, and therefore future research should include more diverse populations, such as same-sex couples, married and engaged individuals, and those in culturally diverse relationship structures. Such inclusion will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the relational dynamics specific to different identity and commitment groups. Third, the current study relied solely on quantitative, self-reported data. In addition, the reliance on single-informant reports prevents capturing dyadic processes from both partners' perspectives. Future research could benefit from mixed-method or qualitative designs to gain deeper insights into the subjective experiences of individuals in long-distance partnerships. For instance, interviews could explore how partners negotiate relational expectations, manage emotional distance, or conceptualize trust. Thematic findings from these studies could inform the development of culturally and contextually grounded measurement tools and psychoeducational programs. Fourth, additional comparative studies should investigate how relationship quality in LDRs may vary by developmental stage (e.g., adolescence, emerging adulthood, middle adulthood, late adulthood), cultural norms, and digital communication habits. Addressing these limitations will not only broaden the generalizability of findings but also inform the design of more culturally sensitive and developmentally tailored couple counseling interventions. Finally, the “assurances” subscale could not be examined because it was not retained in the Turkish adaptation of the RMBS. This may limit comparability with studies using the original version.

6 | Implications

6.1 | Conclusion

This study emphasizes the complex dynamics of long-distance romantic relationships among emerging adults and underscores the pivotal role of RMBs—particularly task sharing, openness, and positivity. The findings suggest that these behaviors not only contribute directly to perceived relationship quality but also foster dyadic trust, serving as essential mechanisms for relational stability. Framed within the lens of family systems theory, these behaviors appear to regulate emotional balance and facilitate systemic adaptation in the face of geographical separation. Notably, adaptive practices such as open communication and positivity function as stabilizing forces that enable relational systems to thrive despite physical distance. These insights offer valuable implications for family and couple counseling, highlighting the importance of interventions that enhance trust-building capacities and emotional accessibility between partners. Counseling interventions should emphasize building openness and positivity to enhance dyadic trust, particularly in long-distance relationships. Future research should further

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explore how individual, cultural, and technological factors shape the relational processes of long-distance couples, thereby contributing to more culturally responsive and developmentally informed intervention strategies.

Author Contributions

Ali Berke Körün was responsible for the writing, data collection, data analysis and reporting of the article. Seydi Ahmet Satıcı supervised the writing, data analysis and reporting of the article.

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Ethics Statement

The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki and approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Aydın Adnan Menderes University.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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