

## Relational Maintenance Behavior as a Predictor of Marital Satisfaction in Commuter Marriage

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**Abstract.** This study aims to examine the predictive role of Relationship Maintenance Behavior and its strategies (positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talk, assurances, sharing tasks, social network) on marriage satisfaction among commuter marriage couples. Instruments used included the Relational Maintenance Behavior (self-reported and partner-reported) to see the use of RMB strategies, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) to see the marriage satisfaction. Data were collected from 152 individuals who participated in commuter marriage, aged below 38, and have been married for less than 13 years (the adjusting type). Finding reveals that both the use of Relationship Maintenance Behavior and perception of partner's use of Relationship Maintenance Behavior significantly predict marriage satisfaction in commuter marriage. Specifically, the Relationship Maintenance strategy that significantly predicts marital satisfaction is positivity, and the Relationship Maintenance strategies used by the partner that significantly predict marital satisfaction are shared task and positivity.

**Keywords:** Commuter Marriage; Marital Satisfaction; Relational Maintenance Behavior; Shared Task; Positivity

A commuter couple is defined as a married couple who lives apart for at least a few days a week due to the demands of work (Sandow, n.d.). One of the reasons for separate living is because individuals work too far from home, making it less practical to commute on a daily basis (Lee, 2017). In general, couples consider one residence as the main residence, and the other as a satellite residence (Lee, 2017). Both work and meeting financial needs play a major role in making the decision to have a long-distance relationship by living in two different residences (Wijayanti, 2021), but besides that, familial and residential situations could also be significant contributing factors to this decision (Wagner & Mulder, 2015).

Gross (1980) distinguished commuter pairs into two, namely adjusting couples and established couples. Adjusting couples have characteristics of being younger (under 38 years), have been married for less than 13 years, and not having children or having young children, whereas established couples have characteristics of being older (over 38 years), have been married for more than 13 years, and having grown children or no children at all (Gross, 1980). He did not, however, provide reasons for determining cut-off points in distinguishing these two types of commuter pairs (Rhodes, 2002).

According to Gross (1980), adjusting couples face more difficulties in undergoing long-distance

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marriages than established couples for three reasons. First, the short duration of marriage means that the couple does not have much shared experiences that can be used as a guide when facing pressure and trust has not been fully established in the relationship. Second, as relatively new professional workers, they try to force themselves to face large job demands as an effort to attest to success. Third, compared to established couples, adjusting couples often argue over whose career aspirations should be prioritised, thus causing pressure on the couple.

Compared to partners who are geographically close, individuals in long-distance relationships tend to experience greater pressure from within and outside of their relationship (Bois et al., 2015). The stressors encountered extend from division of roles in caring for children, loneliness, pressure from household chores, the burden of taking care of two homes, interpersonal and relational differences, to issues of trust and unfulfilled emotional needs. Conflict between work and family is also a challenge related to dissatisfaction among couples undergoing commuter marriages (Wu & Wang, 2022). Previous studies in Indonesia reported a tendency for dissatisfaction in commuter marriages, and this dissatisfaction was mainly experienced by the wife (Nastiti & Wismanto, 2017). Nonetheless, another study in the context of commuter marriage in Indonesia shows that couples who undergo commuter marriages have higher marital satisfaction than dual-earner couples who live together (Chrishianie et al., 2018).

Relationship satisfaction can be defined as a person's subjective evaluation as a whole regarding the quality of one's marriage (Li & Fung, 2011). Studies demonstrate a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and individual psychological well-being, gratitude and life satisfaction (Kaushik, 2021). Marital satisfaction can also affect parent-child relationships and family functions (Kwok et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for couples, especially commuter marriage couples who face greater pressure in marriage, to maintain a fulfilling relationship.

Indeed, various efforts are needed to maintain the continuity of the relationship, especially in long-distance marriages. Efforts made to maintain satisfying relationship conditions for the people within the relationship are known as Relational Maintenance Behavior (RMB) (Canary & Stafford, 1992). The relationship conditions mentioned here refer to characteristics that are crucial to personal relationships, such as commitment and satisfaction (Canary & Stafford, 1992). RMB becomes important in long-distance relationships due to the continuous cycle of separations and new engagements (Belus et al., 2019). The separation cycle in long-distance relationships can be assessed as a situational stressor, thus requiring the efforts of both parties as a unit and each party as an individual, to adapt and use new ways to maintain intimacy and closeness while living apart (Belus et al., 2019).

Using the RMB strategy can help maintain a high level of satisfaction in relationships (O'Brien, n.d.). Individuals who are satisfied with their interpersonal relationships will display more RMB (Canary & Stafford, 1992). The continuous use of RMB can predict partner liking, relationship commitment, and marital satisfaction (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Stafford et al., 2000), whereas the absence of RMB can lead to a decrease in the quality of the relationship or eventually, the end of the relationship (Adams & Baptist, 2012).

(Canary & Stafford, 1992) created a five-factor model of Relational Maintenance Behavior and

identified the types of behavior that individuals use to maintain romantic relationships with others. The five behaviors consist of positivity, openness, assurance, sharing tasks, and social networks. Positivity is defined as "interacting with your partner in a cheerful, optimistic and non-critical way"; openness refers to "discussing the conditions of the relationship directly and expressing one's desire for the relationship"; assurances refers to "messages that emphasize the continuity of the relationship"; sharing tasks is defined as "efforts to maintain relationships by carrying out responsibilities", and social networks are defined as "interacting with the same colleagues or relatives" (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Furthermore, (Stafford, 2011) revised the overlapping dimensions. He divides the dimensions of positivity into two, namely positivity in general and understanding, and the dimensions of openness into self-disclosure and relationship talk. Seven strategies for relational maintenance behavior according to Stafford (2011) are positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talk, assurance, sharing tasks, and social networks. The advantage of the seven-factor RMB model is that this model provides a more specific explanation than the previous model. For example, branching openness into 2 factors can reveal differences between self-disclosure in general and relationship talk from one sample to another. The seven-factor model showed more stable results in all three measurement model testing studies conducted by Stafford (2011) and contributed slightly more variance in the relational characteristics (ie, satisfaction, commitment, liking, and love) than the five-factor RMB model.

Although the literature studies examining relationship maintenance behavior are sufficient, most of them still use the five-factor model proposed by Canary and Stafford (1992). Published studies using the seven-factor RMB model tend to be limited, so the supporting studies in this research would also involve more research results using the five-factor model.

In addition to the use of relational maintenance behavior by oneself, the perception of the use of relational maintenance behavior by partners is another variable that can affect one's marital satisfaction. Canary and Stafford (1992) state that perceptions of a partner's RMB use are strong predictors of relational outcomes, such as liking, control mutuality, commitment, and marital satisfaction. In his research, Dainton (2000) found that the higher the individual perceives the relationship maintenance behavior of their partner, the higher the individual's relationship satisfaction.

Various studies show that the five management strategies are consistent and strong predictors of relational characteristics such as love, liking, satisfaction, commitment, and mutual control (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton et al., 1994; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Stafford and Canary (1991) found that the five relationship management behaviors predict relationship satisfaction, whereas 56% of the variance of relationship satisfaction can be predicted by relational maintenance behavior Stafford and Canary (1991). The RMB strategy which contributes as the biggest predictor of relationship satisfaction is assurance and positivity (Dainton et al., 1994). Contrary to the results of previous studies, the study conducted by Stafford et al. (2000) showed that openness actually decreases relationship satisfaction. Disclosure in the form of self-disclosure is considered not important to maintain relationships (Dainton, 2000). One theory suggests that openness and self-disclosure are important in the literature because they are idealized as signs of a successful relationship (Stafford, 2003). Openness has the potential to hurt partners, compared to its function in maintaining relationships (Adams

& Baptist, 2012). There is no empirical basis to suggest that unconditional openness is considered important and useful in relationships. Nonetheless, previous studies have found conditions where openness is considered useful, namely openness regarding the current relationship, openness that is done little by little, reciprocal openness, openness in acknowledging and taking into account the feelings of partners. Openness to these conditions can improve the quality of relationships and form a climate of mutual trust and support (Adams & Baptist, 2012). Research does not empirically show that openness is correlated with positive relationship characteristics like other forms of management behavior, but openness is still included in relationship management behavior (Adams & Baptist, 2012).

Dainton and Aylor (2001) conducted a research about long-distance couples and found that individuals who were in a long-distance relationship without face-to-face meetings for a week reported lower RMB strategies than individuals who were in a long-distance relationship with regular face-to-face meetings (1 to 2 times per week), especially on assurance strategies and sharing tasks. Elbaliem et al. (2020) conducted a dyadic analysis of 52 long-distance marriage couples in Indonesia and found a correlation between husband and wife's RMB strategies, especially in assurance, disclosure, sharing tasks, relationship talks, and social relationships strategies. This correlation indicates the presence of positive non-independence or a reciprocal relationship in early adult married couples who are in a long-distance relationship. This means, if the husband engage in relationship maintenance behavior, then the wife will also do the same, and vice versa.

Kusumowardhani (2013) conducted a meta-analysis study of 19 effect sizes from 4638 subjects, which showed a positive correlation between the five relationship maintenance strategies and relationship satisfaction, where the highest correlation was also found in positivity and assurance strategies. Based on the 11 articles involved in the meta-analysis, 19 effect sizes were obtained which showed a correlation between positivity and relationship satisfaction, and 17 effect sizes showed a correlation between the factors of openness, assurance, social networking, and sharing tasks each with relationship satisfaction. The articles involved in this meta-analysis study were published between 1991 and 2011, so the RMB strategies measured were the five RMB strategies defined by Canary and Stafford (1992).

This study intends to look at the significance of relationship management behavior, both self-relational maintenance behavior (self-relational maintenance behavior, hereinafter referred to as sRMB) and perceived partner behavior (perceived relational maintenance behavior, hereinafter referred to as pRMB), in predicting marital satisfaction in long-distance marriages, as well as identify what strategies are significant predictors of marital satisfaction.

There are two general hypotheses in this study, namely that there is an effect of Relationship Maintenance Behavior on Marital Satisfaction in individuals undergoing adjusting type of commuter marriage and there is a perception effect related to Relationship Maintenance Behavior carried out by couples on Marital Satisfaction of individuals undergoing adjusting type of commuter marriage.

## Method

This study used a quantitative method with a non-experimental design, which means that the researcher does not control the independent variables related to the research topic. The variables in this study were Relational Maintenance Behavior (sRMB), perceptions of partner's RMB (pRMB), and marital satisfaction. Relational Maintenance Behavior is an activity, effort, action, and strategy used by someone to manage and maintain a relationship so that it remains in the expected condition (Canary & Stafford, 1992). The operational definition of Relationship Management Behavior is the use of strategies of positivity, understanding, self-disclosure, relationship talk, assurances, sharing tasks, and social networks in an effort to maintain relationship satisfaction.

Perception of partner's Relational Maintenance Behavior is an individual's perception of the partner's efforts to maintain the relationship so that it remains in the expected condition. The operational definition of perceptions of Relationship Maintenance Behavior is an individual's assessment of the use of positivity, understanding, assurance, self-disclosure, relationship talk, sharing tasks, and involvement with social networks strategies done by their partner in an effort to maintain relationship satisfaction.

Relational Maintenance Behavior variables and perceptions of partner's Relational Maintenance Behavior were measured using the Relational Maintenance Behavior Measurement (RMBM) compiled by Stafford (2011). This instrument consists of 28 items that measure 7 aspects of RMB which are positivity, understanding, assurance, self-disclosure, relationship talk, sharing tasks, and social networks. Positivity contains communication items related to a cheerful attitude in interactions. Understanding contains items that focus on mutual understanding. Assurance entails items that examine behavior and interactions to let couples know the relationship will last. Self-disclosure contains items regarding the disclosure of thoughts and feelings. Relationship talks contain items about the quality of the couple's relationship so far. Social networks contains items related to utilizing social networks that are mutually recognized (example: Couples ask family members for help). Sharing tasks contains items that look at the obligations and tasks in the relationship. This measurement tool uses a Likert scale of 7 points, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The score of each strategy is grouped into 4 categories, namely low (1 - 2.5), tends to be low (2.5 - 4), tends to be high (4.0 - 5.5), and high (5.5 - 7). This instrument has been adapted into Indonesian by Elbaliem et al. (2020), with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90. This measuring tool is used in a self-reported form to measure individual RMB, and in a partner-reported form to measure individual perceptions of partner's RMB).

The third variable in this study is marital satisfaction. Olson et al. (n.d.) defines marital satisfaction as a subjective feeling of a married couple regarding the quality of their marriage as a whole. The operational definition of marital satisfaction is an individual's assessment of the overall quality of his marital relationship. Relationship satisfaction is measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) instrument compiled by Hendrick (1988). This instrument consists of 7 self-report items, with 5 answer choices (1 = "very dissatisfied" to 5 = "very satisfied"). There are

2 items by way of scoring that are given the opposite value, namely on items number 4 and 7. Satisfaction scores are grouped into 3 categories, namely high (score 22-35), medium (15-21), and low (7-14). Dermawan et al. (2020) have adapted this instrument to Indonesian, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.790 for male marital satisfaction and 0.838 for female marital satisfaction.

Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, with the criteria of having a long-distance marriage, being under 38 years of age, living separately from their partner for at least three nights a week, having been in a long-distance marriage for at least three months, and having been married for less than 13 years. Data collection is done online. Researchers distributed posters on social media which included research descriptions, participant criteria, and Google Docs links containing the used questionnaires. Participants who met the criteria and completely filled out all research instruments were then selected as participants in this study.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 22 with multiple regression analysis techniques using the stepwise method to measure the effect of individual RMB strategies (sRMB) and those perceived by partners (pRMB) on individual marital satisfaction. In the stepwise method, variables are added into the regression model in stages based on the relative contribution of these variables. Each time a predictor is added to the model, the predictor with the least contribution is removed from the model. Thus, the regression equation is constantly being reassessed to remove unnecessary predictors (Field, 2009). The researcher uses the same analytical technique to measure the effect of sRMB and PRMB on marital satisfaction based on gender, namely in the husband and wife analysis unit.

As an additional analysis, the researcher conducted a t-test of marital satisfaction based on demographic data. The variables of gender and involvement in the study were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test, while the variables of the number of children, duration of commuter marriage, age of marriage, and distance from partner were tested using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Researchers also carried out different tests based on gender on the Relational Maintenance Behavior (sRMB) variable and perceptions of partner's RMB (pRMB) using the Mann-Whitney U test.

## Results

The total participants in this study were 152 people, but the data from 16 participants were classified as outliers. Therefore, this study only used data from 136 participants.

**Table 1**  
*Description of Research Subjects*

Variable	Category	Amount	Percentage
Gender	Male	64	47,1%
	Female	72	52,9%
Age	21-25	8	5,9%
	26-30	78	57,4%
	30-35	40	29,4%

**Tabel 1 (Continued)**

*Description of Research Subjects*

Variable	Category	Amount	Percentage
Marriage Age	36-40	10	7,4%
	<4 years	76	55,9%
	4-8 years	44	32,4%
Duration of Long Distance Marriage	8-12 years	16	11,8%
	<1 years	36	26,5%
	1-3 years	47	34,6%
	3-5 years	38	27,9%
	5-7 years	8	5,9%
	>7 years	7	5,1%

Table 1 shows that 52.9% of the participants were female and 47.1% were male. When viewed from age, this study was dominated by participants from the age group of 26-30 years (57.4%). The majority of participants (55.9%) had been married for less than four years, while the commuter marriage duration for the majority of participants was 1-3 years (34.6%).

**Table 2**

*Description of Relationship Assessment Scale Score*

Total Number of Items	Maximum Score	Mean (N=136)	Standard Deviation (N=136)	Lowest Score	Highest Score
7	35	29,46	3,521	20	35

Table 2 shows that the participants' scores are in the range of 20 to 35, with an average score of 29.46. Based on the marital satisfaction level category on the RAS measuring instrument (Dermawan et al., 2020), 133 participants had a high level of marital satisfaction and as many as 3 participants had an average level of marital satisfaction. Thus, it can be concluded that all participants were satisfied with their marital relationship.

**Table 3**

*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of sRMB and pRMB in Wives*

RMB Strategy	Low		Relatively Low		Relatively High		High	
	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB
Positivity	0	0	0	0	12,5	4,4	87,5	95,6



**Tabel 3 (Continued)**

*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of sRMB and pRMB in Wives*

RMB Strategy	Low		Relatively Low		Relatively High		High	
	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB	sRMB	pRMB
Understanding	0	0	1,5	2,9	21,3	18,4	77,2	78,7
Disclosure	0	0	2,9	4,4	18,4	24,3	78,7	71,3
Relationship Talks	0	2,9	10,3	9,6	18,4	19,1	71,3	68,4
Assurances	0	0	0,7	5,1	17,6	14,7	81,6	80,1
Sharing Task	0	0	1,5	0	16,9	12,5	81,6	87,5
Network	7,4	13,2	34,6	30,9	42,6	38,2	15,4	17,6

In table 3, it can be seen that the use of positivity, understanding, disclosure, relationship talks, assurance, and sharing tasks strategies for the majority of participants is high, while the use of network strategies is in the high category (42.6%). The majority of participants perceived the use of positivity, understanding, disclosure, relationship talks, assurance, and sharing tasks as strategies, which were relatively high for their partners, while for the network strategy, most participants rated the level of use which tended to be high (38.2%) for their partners.

**Table 4**

*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of sRMB and pRMB in wives*

Variable	sRMB			pRMB		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Positivity	.687	.119	.446***	.541	.114	.418*
Understanding			-.043			.047
Disclosure			-.091			.048
Relationship Talk			-.094			-.086
Assurances			.038			.114
Sharing Task			.005	.283	.130	.192***
Network			-.088			-.107
R <sup>2</sup>		.199			.303	
F		33.274***			28.938***	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The results of multiple regression analysis show that relationship maintenance behaviors can significantly predict marital satisfaction ( $R^2=0.199$ ,  $F(1.134)=33.274$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In addition to that, it can be concluded that as much as 19.9% of the variance of marital satisfaction can be predicted by relationship maintenance behaviors. The relationship maintenance behaviors strategy that can



significantly predict marital satisfaction is positivity ( $t(136) = 5.768, p < 0.001$ ). Other relationship maintenance strategies, namely understanding ( $t(136) = -0.462, p > 0.05$ ), self-disclosure ( $t(136) = -1.050, p > 0.05$ ), relationship talks ( $t(136) = -1.108, p > 0.05$ ), assurances ( $t(136) = 0.432, p > 0.05$ ), shared tasks ( $t(136) = 0.049, p > 0.05$ ), and network ( $t(136) = -1.134, p > 0.05$ ), were not proven to significantly predict marital satisfaction.

The results of multiple regression analysis show that perceptions of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by spouses can significantly predict marital satisfaction in individuals undergoing long-distance marriages  $R=0.303, F(2,133)=28.938, p < .001$ ). It can be concluded that for individuals undergoing commuter marriage, as much as 30.3% of the variance of marital satisfaction can be predicted by perceptions of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by the couple. Relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by couples that can significantly predict marital satisfaction are shared tasks  $t(136) = 4.741, p < 0.001$  and  $t(136) = 2.182, p < 0.05$ . Other strategies of relationship maintenance carried out by the couple are understanding  $t(136) = 0.480, p > 0.05$ , self-disclosure  $t(136) = 0.586, p > 0.05$ , relationship talks ( $t(136) = -1.031, p > 0.05$ ), assurances  $t(136) = 1.204, p > 0.05$ , and network  $t(136) = -1.465, p > 0.05$ , were not proven to significantly predict marital satisfaction.

**Table 5**  
*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of sRMB and pRMB in Wives*

Variable	sRMB			pRMB		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Positivity	.779	.165	.490***			.228
Understanding			-.035			.209
Disclosure			.114			.171
Relationship			.052			.117
Talk			.195			.228
Assurances			.089	.706	.120	.577***
Sharing Task			-.080			-.081 <sup>b</sup>
Network						
$R^2$		.240			.333	
$F$		22.154***			34.942***	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The results of multiple regression analysis show that relationship maintenance behaviors can significantly predict marital satisfaction among wives undergoing commuter marriage ( $R^2=0.240, F(1,70)=22.154, p < .001$ ). Aside from that, it can be concluded that for wives who are undergoing commuter marriage, as much as 24% of the variance in marital satisfaction can be predicted by relationship maintenance behaviors. The relationship maintenance behaviors strategy that can significantly predict wife's marital satisfaction is positivity ( $t(72) = 4.707, p < 0.001$ ), with a positive correlation direction. Other relationship maintenance strategies, namely understanding ( $t(72) = -0.282, p > 0.05$ ), self-disclosure ( $t(72) = 0.869, p > 0.05$ ), talks relationship ( $t(72) = 0.434, p > 0.05$ ), assurances

( $t(72) = 1.556, p > 0.05$ ), shared tasks ( $t(72) = 0.733, p > 0.05$ ), and network ( $t(72) = -0.764, p > 0.05$ ), were not proven significant predicting wife's marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that perceptions of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by husbands could significantly predict wife's marital satisfaction ( $R^2=0.577, F(1.70)=34.942, p < .001$ ). It can be concluded that for wives undergoing commuter marriage, as much as 57.7% of the variance of wife's marital satisfaction can be predicted by perceptions of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by husbands. The strategy of relationship maintenance behaviors that the wife perceives as carried out by the husband which can significantly predict the wife's marital satisfaction is shared tasks ( $t(72) = 5.911, p < 0.001$ ), while the other strategy is positivity ( $t(72) = 1.968, p > 0.05$ ), understanding ( $t(72) = 1.931, p > 0.05$ ), self-disclosure ( $t(72) = 1.660, p > 0.05$ ), relationship talks ( $t(72) = 1.147, p > 0.05$ ), assurances ( $t(72) = 1.983, p > 0.05$ ), and network ( $t(72) = -0.822, p > 0.05$ ), were not proven to significantly predict wife's marital satisfaction.

**Table 6**  
*Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of sRMB and pRMB in Husbands*

Variable	sRMB			pRMB		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Positivity	.600	.164	.421**	.475	.187	.352
Understanding			-.129			.064
Disclosure			-.167			.112
Relationship			-.175	-.479	.148	-.409
Talk			-.106			.139
Assurances			-.151	.573	.201	.573
Sharing Task			-.061			-.134
Network						
$R^2$		.177			.335	
F		13.369***			10.066***	

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The results of multiple regression analysis show that relationship maintenance behaviors can significantly predict marital satisfaction in husbands undergoing commuter marriage ( $R^2=0.177, F(1.62)=13.369, p < .001$ ). Additionally it can be concluded that for husbands undergoing commuter marriage, as much as 17.7% of the variance of marital satisfaction can be predicted by relationship maintenance behaviors. Referring to table 4.26, the relationship maintenance behaviors strategy that can significantly predict marital satisfaction in husbands undergoing commuter marriages is positivity ( $t(64) = 3.656, p < 0.01$ ), while the other strategy is understanding ( $t(64) = -0.904, p > 0.05$ ), self-disclosure ( $t(64) = -1.379, p > 0.05$ ), relationship talks ( $t(64) = -1.447, p > 0.05$ ), assurances ( $t(64) = -0.835, p > 0.05$ ), shared tasks ( $t(64) = -1.042, p > 0.05$ ), and network ( $t(64) = -0.518, p > 0.05$ ), were not proven to significantly predict husband's marital satisfaction.

Besides that, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that the wife's perception of relationship maintenance behaviors can significantly predict husband's marital satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.335$ ,

$F(3.60)=10.066, p<.001$ ). It can be concluded that for husbands undergoing commuter marriage, as much as 33.5% of the variance of husband's marital satisfaction can be predicted by perceptions of the wife's relationship maintenance behaviors. Relationship maintenance strategies that are perceived by husbands as carried out by wives, which can significantly predict husband's marital satisfaction are positivity  $t(64) = 2.536, p<0.05$ , relationship talks  $t(64) = -3.232, p<0.01$ , and shared tasks  $t(64) = 2.854, p<0.01$ . Field (2009) explains that a positive B value indicates a positive relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable, while a negative B value indicates a negative relationship between the predictor and the dependent variable. Thus, it can be concluded that positivity and task sharing are significant predictors of marital satisfaction with a positive relationship direction, while relationship talks are a significant predictor of marital satisfaction with a negative relationship direction. Other strategies of relationship maintenance behaviors that are perceived by husbands are carried out by wives, namely understanding  $t(64) = 0.392, p>0.05$ , self-disclosure  $t(64) = 0.684, p>0.05$ , assurances  $t(64) = 0.886, p>0.05$ , and network  $t(64) = -1.248, p>0.05$ , were not proven to significantly predict husband's marital satisfaction.

**Table 7**  
*T-Test in Marital Satisfaction based on Demographic Data*

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mann Kruskal Wallis U/	Sig.	Description
Gender	Male	64	30,20	3,377	1752	0,016	Significant
	Female	72	28,79	3,536			
Amount of Children	0	41	29,32	3,902	3,952	0,267	Not significant
	1	66	29,15	3,574			
	2	27	30,11	2,621			
	3	2	33,50	2,121			
Duration of commuter marriage	<6 months	13	29,46	4,034	0,199	0,963	Not significant
	6-12 months	26	29,81	3,430			
	1-2 years	25	29,80	3,253			
	2-3 years	20	28,95	4,071			
	3-5 years	37	29,35	3,713			
	>5 years	15	29,20	2,757			
Marriage Age	<4 years	76	29,16	4,11	0,603	0,740	Not significant
	4-8 years	44	29,70	2,67			

**Table 7 (Continued)**

*T-Test in Marital Satisfaction based on Demographic Data*

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mann U/ Kruskal Wallis	Sig.	Description
Distance with partners	8-12 years	16	30,19	2,32	6,049	0,642	Not significant
	<50km	4	27.75	2.872			
	50-100 km	7	29.86	2.410			
	100-200 km	24	29.00	3.388			
	200-500 km	15	29.20	3.427			
	500-1000 km	24	29.00	3.624			
	1000-1500 km	14	28.71	3.891			
	1500-3000 km	12	30.58	3.029			
	3000-5000 km	7	30.43	4.077			
	>5000 km	29	30.14	3.870			
Involvement in research	Both partners filled out the questionnaire	100	29,78	3,437	1412	0,055	Not significant
	Only one of the partners filled out the questionnaire	36	28,56	3,645			

Based on the results of the t-test, it was found that there was a significant difference between the marital satisfaction of men and women, where the marital satisfaction of men was significantly higher than that of women. The t-test demonstrated that there is no significant difference in marital satisfaction when compared based on the number of children, duration of long-distance marriage, duration of marriage, and distance from partner.

Researchers suspect that there are differences in satisfaction scores between individuals whose partners participate in the study and individuals whose partners do not participate in the study. The results of the t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups.

**Table 8**  
sRMB T-Test Based on Gender

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mann U	Sig.	Description
sRMB	Male	64	162,31	17,09	2062	0,291	Not significant
	Female	72	165,07	15,18			
Positivity	Male	64	25,44	2,370	2278	0,910	Not significant
	Female	72	25,47	2,226			
Understanding	Male	64	24,63	3,175	1860	0,051	Not significant
	Female	72	23,92	2,772			
Self-Disclosure	Male	64	24,02	3,411	1626	0,002	Significant
	Female	72	25,61	3,142			
Relationship Talks	Male	64	17,27	3,414	1857	0,046	Significant
	Female	72	18,31	3,196			
Assurances	Male	64	25,06	3,044	2260	0,845	Not significant
	Female	72	25,18	2,894			
Shared Tasks	Male	64	24,73	2,869	2048	0,259	Not significant
	Female	72	24,33	2,732			
Network	Male	64	21,17	6,858	2070	0,307	Not significant
	Female	72	22,25	5,515			

T-tests shows that there was no significant difference in relationship maintenance behavior when compared by gender ( $U=2062, n1=64, n2=72, p>0.05$ ). Furthermore, the researchers conducted a differential test of RMB strategies between men and women. The results show that there is a significant difference in the self-disclosure strategy ( $U=1626, n1=64, n2=72, p<0.05$ ). and relationship talk ( $U=1857, n1=64, n2=72, p<0.05$ )., where women scored significantly higher on both strategies than men.

**Table 9**  
PRMB T-Test Based on Gender

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mann U	Sig.	Description
pRMB	Male	64	167,20	16,689	2,316	0,022	Significant
	Female	72	160,32	17,819			
Positivity	Male	64	25,55	2,507	2170	0,545	Not significant
	Female	72	25,85	2,299			
Understanding	Male	64	24,69	3,246	2241	0,781	Not significant
	Female	72	24,86	3,069			
Self-Disclosure	Male	64	25,16	2,918	1661	0,004	Significant

**Table 9 (Continued)**

*PRMB T-Test Based on Gender*

Variable	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mann U	Sig.	Description
<i>Relationship Talks</i>	Female	72	23,33	3,893	2112	0,391	Not significant
	Male	64	17,98	2,887			
<i>Assurances</i>	Female	72	17,01	4,234	1823	0,032	Significant
	Male	64	25,45	3,039			
<i>Shared Tasks</i>	Female	72	24,14	3,941	1866	0,047	Significant
	Male	64	26,03	2,443			
<i>Network</i>	Female	72	25,10	2,888	1870	0,058	Not significant
	Male	64	22,34	7,167			
	Female	72	20,03	6,393			

Contrary to the results of the differential test on self-report relational maintenance behavior (sRMB), a significant difference was found in perceived relational maintenance behavior (pRMB) between men and women ( $t=2.316, p<0.05$ ), where the male pRMB score -males are significantly higher than females. This means that men’s perceptions regarding the use of the RMB strategy in their partners are higher than women’s perceptions regarding the use of the RMB strategy in their partners.

Furthermore, researchers conducted differential tests on perceptions of partner RMB strategies between men and women. The results show that there are significant differences in self-disclosure strategies ( $U=1661, n1=64, n2=72, p<0.05$ ), assurances ( $U=1823, n1=64, n2=72, p<0, 05$ ), and shared task ( $U=1866, n1=64, n2=72, p<0.05$ ), where the male scores on all three strategies were significantly higher than the female scores.

## Discussion

The results of the analysis of the first hypothesis in this study indicate that relationship maintenance behaviors can significantly predict marital satisfaction in individuals undergoing commuter marriages, with a prediction up to 19.9%. These results are in line with previous studies which state that the use of relational maintenance behavior strategies is a predictor of marital satisfaction (Baker et al., 2013; Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton et al., 1994; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2012; Stafford, 2003). This study shows that the dimension of relationship maintenance behaviors that can significantly predict marital satisfaction is positivity, with a positive relationship direction. This means that cheerful and optimistic interactions with partners are a high predictor of marital satisfaction in

individuals who are in long-distance marriages. Positivity as a strategy has indeed been shown to be a strong, consistent, and positive predictor of marital satisfaction (Stafford et al., 2000; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008).

The results of the analysis of the second hypothesis in this study indicate that perceptions of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by couples can significantly predict marital satisfaction in individuals undergoing commuter marriages, with a prediction of 30.3%. It can be seen that the perception of the use of the couple's RMB has a greater influence on individual marital satisfaction than the individual's use of the RMB. According to previous literature, individual perceptions of the use of relational maintenance behavior by partners have indeed been shown to be an important and unique predictor of marital satisfaction with stronger predictions than the use of relational maintenance behavior by the individuals themselves (Lee, 2017; Ogolsky & Bowers, 2012).

In this study, the strategy of relationship maintenance behaviors carried out by couples that can significantly predict marital satisfaction are shared tasks and positivity. Thus, this study shows that there are two aspects of spouse behavior that affect marital satisfaction of individuals who are in long-distance marriages, namely the couple's efforts to display cheerful and optimistic interactions, and the couple's efforts to carry out responsibilities. This finding makes sense, because reported feelings of sadness and loneliness are experienced by couples undergoing commuter marriage (Arumrasmi & Karyono, 2013), and positivity in the form of joy and optimism is needed to manage these feelings. Likewise, it is reported that commuter marriage is difficult to live with, but it is carried out for certain purposes, for example financial means (Arumrasmi & Karyono, 2013). The shared task aspect that talks about the couple's efforts to carry out responsibilities can be associated with mutual assistance efforts to achieve the goals of the couple in a commuter marriage. Shared tasks are reported as one of the aspects that play a role in supporting marital satisfaction in the context of commuter marriage (Jannah & Wulandari, 2022). In this regard, this study found that men's perception score of their partner's RMB on the shared task strategy was significantly higher than that of women. Considering that in general men are the ones who undergo commuting in commuter marriages, this finding may be due to the perception of men as husbands that wives have a greater role in taking care of the house and children, while husbands are more likely to be away from home because they have to work far from home.

Apart from the shared task, the differential test also showed that men scored significantly higher than women in their perception of partner's RMB on self-disclosure strategies (expressing feelings and thoughts regarding matters outside the relationship) and assurances (providing messages that emphasize continuation of the relationship). The results of this study do not fully support a study previously conducted by (Ragsdale & Brandau-Brown, 2005), where a differential test demonstrated that men's perceptions of using positivity, assurance, and network strategies in their partners were significantly higher than women's perceptions of using the same strategy by their partners.

Furthermore, the two hypotheses were also tested on the wife and husband groups. An interesting finding is that the wife's relationship talks strategy, which is perceived by the husband, is a negative predictor of the husband's marital satisfaction. This means that the husband's perception



of the wife's efforts to discuss the state of the relationship and express her wishes in the relationship can reduce the husband's assessment of his marital satisfaction. This is in line with previous studies conducted by Dainton et al. (1994) and Dainton and Aylor (2001) which stated that openness (in the previous RMB categorization, relationship talk was part of openness) was a negative predictor of marital satisfaction. Research shows that individuals with higher relationship satisfaction tend to avoid the topic compared to individuals with lower relationship satisfaction (Mikel, 2019). This shows that individuals who are satisfied with their relationship will tend to avoid topics that can cause conflict with their partners, which can potentially lead to the end of the relationship (Mikel, 2019).

Based on the results of different tests on RMB strategies between men and women, significant differences were found in self-disclosure strategies (attempts to convey feelings and thoughts regarding matters outside the relationship) and relationship talk (attempts to convey feelings and thoughts regarding matters -things in the relationship), where women's scores on both strategies were significantly higher than men's. Both of these strategies in the previous categorization (Stafford & Canary, 1991) are classified into openness strategies, namely openness in conveying feelings and thoughts to partners. Thus it can be concluded that women report the use of openness which is significantly higher than men. This is in line with the results of previous studies which show that women display openness strategies significantly more often than men (Pauley et al., 2014; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). If it is associated with the results of the previous regression test, these two strategies do not significantly affect marital satisfaction for women who undergo long-distance marriages. Thus it can be concluded that although women reported high use of these two strategies, these two strategies did not affect their subjective assessment of marital satisfaction.

Based on the results of the different test, there was also a significant difference between the marital satisfaction of men and women, where the marital satisfaction of men was significantly higher than that of women. Literature has long identified gender as a predictor of marital satisfaction (Sorokowski et al., 2017). Research shows that men report higher marital satisfaction than women, in both western and non-western cultures (Sorokowski et al., 2017). Differential tests showed no significant difference in marital satisfaction when compared based on the number of children, duration of long-distance marriage, duration of marriage, and distance from partner. In this study, researchers have determined the criteria for participants with age of long-distance marriage under 13 years (adjusting type). Setting this as a criterion can be said to be a control that can explain the cause of the differential test of marital satisfaction based on the duration of long-distance marriage to be insignificant.

In addition, researchers suspect that there is a difference in the scores of marital satisfaction in participants whose spouses also take part in this study, with participants whose spouses do not participate in the study. The differential test results showed no significant differences. This can be explained, bearing in mind the three measuring instruments used in this study are individual and subjective, the answers given only represent the individual's own assessment, without involving the perspective of his partner. In addition to that, for participants whose partners were also involved in the research, the two individuals worked at different locations as a result of their long-distance

marriages, so that the possibility of the influence of their partners in filling out research instruments was minimized.

Researchers realize that there were certain shortcomings in this research. First, there is limited published literature discussing the effect of using RMB on marital satisfaction in long-distance marriages. As a result, in analyzing, this study lacks supporting evidence that is relevant to current developments. In addition, most studies that measure RMB use the five-factor model proposed by Canary and Stafford (1992). Published studies using the seven-factor RMB model tend to be limited, so the supporting studies in this study also involve more research results using the five-factor model. This is not an obstacle when analyzing the three dimensions which have not changed from the five-factor model to the seven-factor model, namely assurances, sharing tasks, and social networks, but creates limitations in analyzing the other four dimensions, namely positivity and understanding (previously classified as positivity dimensions) as well as self-disclosure and relationship talk (previously classified in the openness dimension).

Furthermore, the results of this study can only represent commuter marriage couples with average to high levels of satisfaction. The sampling selection technique in the form of convenience sampling used in this study caused the researchers to be unable to control the number of participants so that they could represent each category of marital satisfaction, so no participants with low marital satisfaction were found in this study. Thus, the practical advice given in this study is also only recommended to be carried out by individuals in commuter marriages with an average to high level of marital satisfaction.

## Conclusion

The results of multiple regression analysis show that both relational maintenance behavior performed by individuals, as well as perceptions of relational maintenance behavior performed by partners, significantly predict marital satisfaction for individuals undergoing long-distance marriages (commuter marriages). In particular, the relational maintenance behaviors strategy which is a significant predictor of individual marital satisfaction in commuter marriages is positivity, while the partner's relational maintenance behavior strategy which is a significant predictor of individual marital satisfaction in commuter marriages is shared task and positivity.

### *Recommendation*

Based on the shortcomings of this study, the researcher suggests that future studies use a sample selection technique in the form of quota sampling to ensure that the research data can represent all categories of marital satisfaction. Future researchers should first determine the proportion of numbers for each category of marital satisfaction, then distribute the marital satisfaction instrument until the quota for each category of marital satisfaction is met, then distribute the other two measurement tools (self-rated RMB and partner-rated RMB) to participants who meet the quota of marital satisfaction. Thus, the sample used can represent the population, ranging from individuals with low to high marital

satisfaction. In addition, future researchers are expected to consider analysis based on individual roles in long-distance marriages, namely as commuters (leaving the main residence and living elsewhere) or non-commuters (living in the main residence). Researchers suspect that there are differences in research results for each gender if they are differentiated based on these provisions. The researcher also suggested dyadic analysis to examine the interaction of the spouse's scores, both on the variables of marital satisfaction, RMB, and perceptions of the partner's RMB. Researchers hope that there will be a qualitative study that examines further the forms of relational maintenance behavior strategies carried out by individuals undergoing commuter marriage.

Researchers suggest couples who are undergoing commuter marriage to try to actively practice relational maintenance behaviors techniques in their marriage, especially positivity and shared task strategies. The positivity strategy can be enhanced by communicating with your partner in a cheerful, optimistic, and without criticism, both when you are away from your partner (via telephone and text) or when you meet your partner. The shared task strategy can be improved by discussing the division of household responsibilities and carrying each others' parts.

Researchers suggest practitioners in the field of mental health (psychologists, marriage counselors, and other involved professions) who provide assistance to couples undergoing commuter marriages, to include Relational Maintenance Behavior, especially positivity and shared task strategies, in an effort to help them increase satisfaction in their marriage.

## Declarations

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### *Author's Contributions*

YTP and RA designed the study. YTP collected and analyzed the data. YTP and RA wrote, edited, and finalized the manuscript.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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