

Companionship in the Digital Age: The Convenience and Controversy Regarding Matchmaking Applications in Pakistan

Maida Khan¹, Ahsan Raza², Sidra Shahid³

¹Lecturer, Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

²Lecturer, Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

³Lecturer, Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Correspondence: maidakhan@numl.edu.pk¹

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: In an environment that is exponentially becoming more digitally connected, matchmaking applications have reset the way in which people approach romantic relationships. This research paper explores how these matchmaking applications have provided convenience to their users as well as the possible issues accompanying these possibilities.

Methodology: Using data obtained through interviewing 20 respondents aged 18-35, the study shows the empowerment possibilities and the psychological and social ambiguities of using matchmaking applications.

Findings: The results found that digital literacy, design principles, which are ethically designed, and cultural sensitivity play a significant role in maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks to facilitate the development of the new digital matchmaking process. It is also evident that the matchmaking applications in Pakistan are transforming the relationship development process since priorities have shifted; people have autonomy, and reduced reliance on the traditional gatekeepers.

Conclusion: These sites provide access to a wide range of possibilities patterns unlike ever before; they also facilitate convenience, extreme individualization, a sense of inclusiveness, and numerous problems and scandals, including a sense of threat to privacy, superficial attachment, emotional exhaustion, and going against traditional norms of matchmaking.

Keywords: Traditional Matchmaking (vs) Digital Matchmaking, Matchmaking Online Applications, Privacy Terms, Mental Health.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ways through which people connect have been transformed due to the advancement in technology. Individuals are considerably reliant on technology in performing their daily duties and obligations. Technology has changed the way individuals initiate and continue with their relationships. Originating in 2003, dating applications became popular among users in 2007 (Quiroz, 2013). The purpose behind using

Article History

Received:
April 11, 2025

Revised:
June 18, 2025

Accepted:
June 25, 2025

Online:
June 30, 2025

these applications varies from person to person, i.e., dating, finding a suitable match, casual sex, or friendship, etc. These applications are gaining popularity among people due to their ease and convenience. People can connect with others worldwide, not limiting their interactions to a specific geographical area, social circle, or any other demographic and cultural boundary.

This study aimed at investigating the interdependence of social and psychological use of pattern of Tinder usage of Pakistani adults. The results indicated that major gender disparities exist in motives, with males more focused on the hook-up culture, and both genders were equally indulged in building relationships through Tinder. The results demonstrated the changing nature of dating in Pakistan against cultural taboos for fulfillment of motives behind it (Sohail, Mahmood, Gull, & Khan, 2019). In the Western world, the act of dating has become a very open and liberal practice. In comparison, however, dating in Pakistan, the place of very strong Islamic ideology, is considered controversial, culturally inappropriate, religiously forbidden, and morally questionable (Latif, Naseer, & Ahmed, 2021). Using the slogan “Muslims don’t date, we marry” Muzz, formerly known as Muzzmatch gained much popularity among Muslims all over the world because it intends the forming of halal relationship (Nisa, 2021). Therefore, people are more open towards the idea of matchmaking for serious and culturally aligned relationships rather than exploration of long-term relationships through casual dating.

Considering all the opportunities that these applications have provided people to find a suitable match, the challenges they foster cannot be overlooked. The first and important concern is the privacy of users. Several incidents related to identity theft and harassment have been reported, and the application developers are working to ensure the safety of users, but privacy remains one of the greatest concerns, especially for women in general, while using these applications.

Despite the use of matchmaking applications to find a suitable match gaining acceptability and popularity among people from different social and cultural backgrounds, the fear of rejection and its impact on the self-esteem of an individual, and the fear of judgment may lead to mental health challenges for users.

The perceptions associated with the use of “swipe culture” via matchmaking applications depend a lot on cultural and social context as well. In some cultures, the use of matchmaking applications to find a potential partner is seen as morally questionable and an ethically wrong way to approach a partner, whereas some cultures see it as an opportunity to explore better options based on personal preferences and requirements. In Pakistan, software such as MuzzMatch has brought the concept of halal-matchmaking by naming itself as the largest app on the planet that claims to have 600,000 successful relationships across the universe (Where Muslims Meet, 2025). The idea of finding a life partner through matchmaking applications has more acceptance among youth as compared to previous generations.

This paper explores the convenience and controversies regarding the use of matchmaking applications to find a potential partner among Pakistani youth that is already trying hard to find a middle ground between tradition and modernity.

1.1 Problem Statement

The quest to find a companion has taken a new face as we now live in a digital age, whereby the matchmaking applications have taken over the traditional social and family circles where people look towards them as a viable alternative, mostly in urban areas and among the younger generation. These platforms are both controversial and promising in Pakistan, where cultural norms are strongly used to associate marriage and relationships in a highly traditional manner. Although they are convenient, provide more independence, and enlarge the range of possible partners, they are also associated with the issues of privacy, trust, and cultural fit, as well as the possible loss in traditional values. Even with the increased popularity of these applications, there is little research available that has been done on the matter of Pakistani users operating on these services within the confines of societal norms and personal wants. This paper aims to fill this gap by looking at how digital matchmaking is transforming the quest to find

companionship in Pakistan and how it is both perceived to bring about positive aspects as well as cultural tensions it brings.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study is important because it will provide an insight into the current trends of companionship and marriage in a Pakistani context, which is a specimen of a traditional value-driven society but it is digitally advancing at a swift rate as well. This study helps to develop a more complete picture of the intersection of technological and cultural, religious, and social norms, in the Pakistani culture through the study of the convenience and shortcomings of the matchmaking applications. The results of the paper will provide useful implications to the study of media, sociology, and psychological areas of study as the paper would expose the impacts of digital matchmaking on user relationship, trust, privacy, and cultural values. Moreover, it can tell the app developers, policymakers, and social associations about the needs, concerns and the experiences of Pakistani users and this in turn can help inform platforms that are ethically responsible and culturally conscious. The study also offers a basis of future researches on the consequences of digital intimacy to conservative societies which are fast tracking the effects of technology.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ1: What is the reason behind the emergence of matchmaking applications that are increasingly becoming convenient among Pakistani users?

RQ2: How do matchmaking applications help to set up relationships, as opposed to the traditional way of matchmaking in Pakistan?

RQ3: Does gender make a big difference to the issues of privacy, harassment, and mental health of the users of matchmaking application in Pakistan?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The internet dating sites have commonly stated that they have reformed the dating world in a positive way. Access, communication, and matching are three factors that are likely to produce more desirable results than offline dating. Instead of using the subjective judgment of people around us, individuals leave their love life in the mathematical hands of an algorithm (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis, & Sprecher, 2012).

The findings of a survey study indicated that the attitude/perceived norm of people in predicting the intent to explore dating applications is seeking romance. Yet, additionally, the use of smartphones and sensation-seeking were directly linked with this intention (Chan L. S., 2017).

The survey undertaken in Malaysia (2022) demonstrated that the search for friendship and romantic interest appeared to be the most important motives for dating application usage. Statistics revealed that the usage of these applications increased during the pandemic as a result of boredom, loneliness, and the need to feel affection (Yahaya, Yang, Lin, Yu, & Fai, 2022).

The current trends in the usage of Muslim dating applications via smartphones by British Muslims provide some insights into the contemporary culture regarding marital and dating norms. Instead of finding a partner based on sectarian affiliation only, the users can customize searches in a way that prioritizes finding a “Muslim” match who shares similar values through a multicultural lens. Unlike past dates that only scored compatibility according to categorical identity, this orientation strives to shake the compatibility systems (Rooij, 2020).

In the past ten years, the development of digital platforms has played a significant role in allowing Muslim users to find a partner located outside of their physical and social proximity. Using the reference of MuzzMatch Muslim dating application, the research indicated that people are situated in doctrinally diverse contexts when interacting with digital space that emphasizes the doctrine of homogeneity.

Analysis revealed that the application was successful in gaining users who buy into the religious structure that it provides (Hasan, 2021).

The effect of the religious orientations on the perception of online dating among emerging adults was assessed in the course of a study on the intention as well as the use of online dating. The sample of 447 people aged between 18 and 30 was used. Results revealed the fact that more religious individuals reported lower usage, negative perceptions, and stronger concerns regarding online dating, indicating that current religious norms and ideologies still feel that online dating is a sexual culture. Frequency of use and concerns about online dating are the main factors that mediate the moderating role of religiosity, but not perceptions. It is because online dating will attain universal consumption as the use of technology increases (Almond & Malletteb, 2022).

Based on the findings of a study conducted in Malaysia, respondents discouraged the use of digital platforms to find a potential match due to a variety of perceived threats, and strongly recommended seeing potential partners in person (Yahaya, Yang, Lin, Yu, & Fai, 2022). China conducted an online survey study on 459 users of dating applications. The study revealed that users were victimized by cyberbullying while using these applications. Cyberbullying victimization correlates positively with the increased utilization of online dating applications, which is another factor that causes loneliness (Yang, Huang, Zhong, Liu, & Zhong, 2023).

An online survey was conducted on 401 respondents in Hong Kong. The data indicated that three in every 10 users of the dating applications were victims of internet-based fraud within the past two weeks. Cyber fraud victims experienced worse mental health problems than those who did not fall into the trap. Mental health issues of cyber fraud victims were positively associated with their education level, being a female, financial loss, and leakage of their personal information (Chan, Wang, & Yang, 2024).

Dating applications are believed to be the most widespread method of meeting a potential dating partner among young adults in the United States. The online survey was conducted on 1045 young adults ranging from age 18-35. Outcomes revealed that the practice of sexual objectification of others increased with the frequency of dating application use among the participants. Those who tend to sexualize others on dating applications also had a higher tendency to approve so-called digital consent cues, as they believed that a match or exchange of direct messages equals consenting to sex. The findings indicated they had more trouble discussing the topic of sexual consent with their partners whom they met on dating applications (Smith, Mucedola, La, Ortiz, & Tian, 2025).

The future behavior and that of dating applications will be finally dependent on the degree to which they implement and integrate empathy and active listening as vital virtues and rearrange of the algorithmic systems of dating towards focusing on building relationships that are emotionally satisfying and long-term. The primary challenge is filling in the gap between formal performance enshrined in digital dating and the extent of the authenticity with which meaningful relations with other human beings could be reaped (Paché, 2025).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The two theories that made up the theoretical framework were The Uses and Gratification Theory and Social Stigma Theory.

Uses and Gratification Theory Blumler and Katz proposed Uses and Gratification Theory in 1974 in which they wrote that media users are selective and active in using and applying media to meet their needs. These needs are termed by the theory to be affective, cognitive recognition, personal, integrative and tension-free. It also draws attention to the important role of audience in the shaping their media choices, which questions the classical understanding of media influence. The Uses and Gratification framework has now progressed and has put into consideration criticisms and has led to a more advanced design of the relationship of audiences towards media, and the effects media has on people's lives and the decisions made by them (Sichach, 2024).

In this paper, the Uses and Gratification Theory is also taken into consideration to draw the reason why people in Pakistan utilize digital matchmaking with the aim to satisfy some of their emotional, social, and psychological needs. Despite the religious and cultural opposition to such places, the users are attracted to find companionship, means of expressing themselves, and to release their emotions. The theory helps to achieve a deeper comprehension of individuals who selectively consume media to control their individual desire in the course of living in complicated socio-cultural environments. With the perspective of online matchmaking in Pakistan, where conventional rules are regularly opposed to digital association behaviors, Uses and Gratification Theory gives a strong scope to think about why some individuals utilize matchmaking applications even though this may lead to stigma or controversy.

Erving Goffman has developed a Social Stigma Theory that explains how some people are socially discredited for some behaviors, especially if these behaviors, traits, or affiliations are not in line with the established social standards. The form of discrediting is performed on three levels: experienced discrimination, internalized shame or fear of judgment, and expectation of negative treatment (Anderson, 2014). The given paradigm of theory can be of particular concern when it is implemented onto the use of matchmaking applications in the socio-cultural environment of Pakistan, where traditional, conservative values are practiced, and religious standards are formalized, and extended family communities are established.

The theory can be used to explain the behavior of users and attitudes in society, as it places in the foreground the contradiction between the current idea of individual autonomy and the longstanding values held in a society. The Social Stigma theory provides a clear analytical structure to challenge the psychosocial barriers and add cultural resistance in terms of adopting the matchmaking applications in Pakistan.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current research uses a qualitative research design, which is based on an interpretivist paradigm, to study the experience, perception, and driving forces of the people who are involved in matchmaking platforms within Pakistan. Since the nature of social behaviors and the cultural implications of this practice in a largely conservative society are complex, qualitative inquiry is the most suitable lens for it. Semi-structured interviews, face-to-face and on call were conducted to collect the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2018). The time duration of each interview ranged from 35 to 50 minutes, approximately. People felt more free to talk in the Urdu language; therefore, Urdu was used as the language during the interviews, which was later translated into English and typed. The interview technique allowed participants the degree of freedom, enabling them to answer the questions in an open-ended and self-guided narrative.

Purposive sampling method was employed to identify the participants with prior or current experiences in using online matchmaking applications such as Muzz, etc. The participants were between the ages of 18 years and 35 years. All of them were previous or current users of matchmaking applications. None of them was forced to participate; they deliberately became part of the research and were open to sharing their positive and negative experiences. 20 participants from diverse genders, socio-economic statuses, ages, and geographic locations within Pakistan were interviewed. The process of data collection was discontinued once theoretical saturation was achieved, and there was no new theme to discover.

The obtained data were thematically analyzed (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) using a process by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Creating base codes
3. Detecting themes
4. Reviewing the themes
5. Writing the report

The respondents were informed about the research and its purpose. Ten respondents were males and 10 were females. The interview was conducted upon their consent and by ensuring that their data would be used for research purposes only, and their privacy would be highly respected. The questions of the interview were categorized into five portions. At the very first stage, their personal information and demographics were taken into account. In the other four stages, questions were categorized in a manner that referred to addressing the themes related to each research question.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To complete the study, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Pakistani users between the ages of 18 to 35 who are/were users of matchmaking applications. To protect the privacy of participants only their age and gender are mentioned, with the highlighted parts from their interviews. These interviews were supported with a thematic analysis methodology that identified the following major themes, which are used to explain the increasing convenience and controversy regarding matchmaking applications in Pakistan.

4.1 Reason behind Emergence and Acceptance of Matchmaking Applications in Pakistan

4.1.1 Love and Compatibility as Priority in a Relationship

The current research indicated that a significant change has occurred in the conceptualization of romantic partnership and compatibility by the younger generation. Unlike in previous generations, where family approval alongside socio-economic equality were given the first priority, modern young people now place primary emphasis on emotional connection and value system about individuals' compatibility.

“In the olden days the good match was who your family liked. Today it is much more intimate: it is simply a matter of determining whether you get along with somebody or not” (Female, 25)

“I need to get married to somebody I can relate to or ‘vibe’ with, not somebody who my parents consider to be a suitable marriage partner” (Male, 28)

The growth of a more personalized, highly individualized approach to the intimate-partner finding is perhaps one of the most interesting current trends, and it is enabled by the presence of online matchmaking services, which enable individuals to maximize their personal desires and engage in virtual interactions with the other people before engaging in the process of formal commitment.

4.1.2 Change in the History of the Matchmaking

Respondents often complained about the existing rishta system, which they described as a time-consuming and even time-wasting process in most cases. They also said this system is rigid and judgmental. Conversely, the matchmaking applications were seen to be more empowering and time-saving.

“My family used the traditional methods to find a suitable match over the years, and I found more appropriate people during three months online.” (Male, 28)

“Imagine the scenario where you are in front of a crowd of strangers and they are staring at you from top to bottom. It is so much better online, you can get in when you want to, and you are the chooser.” (Female, 31)

Digital space is changing the traditional paradigm of matchmaking by eliminating its inefficiencies due to increased convenience, privacy, and the potential of self-directed interaction.

4.1.3 Going for Self-Choice rather than Arranged Marriage

Existing literature notes that one factor that drives the use of matchmaking applications is the desire to see more freedom of choice in partnership. The participants mention that they want to find partners in life

with a set of criteria based on individuality and not based on factors stemming from family pressure or expectations.

“Other people still manage to make arranged marriages, but I prefer to know the person.” (Female, 24)

“Whatever my parents say, I respect it, but I will be the one choosing my life partner; it is my life after all.” (Male, 30)

The rise of marriage-specific matchmaking applications is one such trend and represents the wider influence in contemporary Pakistani society, where people have even greater weight in the right to personal choice in marriage. These kinds of applications enable self-determination since participants are allowed to choose their partners, but also enable the consideration of cultural restrictions, especially the more serious matchmaking applications.

4.1.4 The use of Social Media as an element in branding the Matchmaking Applications

Some of the changes to achieve this perception include celebrity endorsement, Instagram reels, and branding the applications with the use of more culturally sensitive language.

“I have watched a video in which a couple discussed how they met on Muzz application, it seemed so natural and real. Well, I considered that I might do it, as well.” (Female, 22)

“These applications are now being promoted on YouTube in a very friendly manner, as compared to a few years back.” (Male, 29)

The discussion of media representations provides an insight into the careful depiction that may encourage the decrease of the stigma that makes the use of matchmaking applications in the building of long-term relationships.

4.2 Transforming the Customary Validation of Relationship Preparing

4.2.1 Old vs Emerging Patterns

One finding that has been noted by many users of matchmaking applications is that the sites promote early informal contact between potential partners. This allows communication on matters of compatibility and rapport, which commonly lack in the traditional procedure of matchmaking, to take place, even before involving the relatives in this process.

“I used to go and meet a new person on lunch or coffee, where I had this feeling in the back of my mind to accept or reject them by the end of the meeting. But now, I can talk to somebody, I can be able to vibe and I can decide to run away or to go in a direction.” (Female, 26)

“The discussion can bridge that gap between that random person I have just met and that particular person I would bring to my family in case I feel that we have good vibes together.” (Male, 32)

“Our parents were more focused on material things while finding a partner, but I personally feel compatibility matters more than material stuff. I hope I will find a match who will share similar values.” (Male, 29)

As a result of this, such applications encourage pre-engagement communication, which ultimately leads to both emotional and intellectual connection in a manner that is usually left out in a traditional matchmaking approach.

4.2.2 Decision Making Empowerment of both Genders

According to participants' interviewees, online matchmaking sites have increased the bounds of individual choice, especially for women, who, traditionally, had limited choice in an arranged marriage set up. Each gender appeared more sure and self-willed through the use of the matchmaking applications.

“My family is supportive, but if I talk about my extended family, girls are not expected to choose their potential partners, but these matchmaking applications give me the feeling that my choice and preferences also matter.” (Female, 23)

“I enjoy the fact that I am not forced to see the options just because my family feels they are compatible. Rather, I choose the people I get to meet.” (Male, 30)

These platforms represent communities of empowerment, where users, especially women, can experiment with potential partners without direct intervention by the elders.

4.2.3 A New Option in Traditional Way of Rishta Aunties and Family Elders Culture

Respondents denounced the role of role played by rishta aunties and other extended family members in the arranged marriage process. It has triggered the growing levels of dissatisfaction that have been attributed to inefficiencies, outside pressure, and a lack of privacy. Relative to them, digital matchmaking was perceived as more straightforward, time-saving and autonomous of the participants.

“I am sick of these rishta aunties who are only concerned about money-making by showing options based on looks and social status. I hope through these matchmaking applications, I will be able to pursue someone based on my terms and conditions, or more appropriately, priorities.” (Female, 27)

“My mother took months to find a suitable candidate after approaching different people and marriage bureaus, but these applications can filter results as per users' preferences, so I feel it takes less time to filter potential options than traditional ways.” (Male, 31)

The finding represents algorithm-based systems tend to bypass traditional selection of matches and seek out self-regulated exploration of relationships and partners.

4.3 Gender Role in The Encounter of Privacy, Harassment, and Mental Health Problems in Matchmaking Applications

4.3.1 Gendered Privacy Concerns

Analyzing the interviews, female participants were more concerned about their privacy in terms of information about themselves, profile pictures, and visibility on matchmaking applications. Some of the female respondents have taken the initiative to take some precautions like blurring the pictures, making up fake names, or locking down accounts so that they are not identified or can be manipulated.

“I have never used my first name or photo. I am careful because I have heard many stories about photos of girls being distributed in objectionable WhatsApp groups.” (Female, 27)

“I fear the most that someone I know will see me on the application and will judge me because of this.” (Female, 25)

Conversely, a majority of male respondents were comparatively less concerned about the issues of privacy. Though some of them claimed that they are overall more inclined to privacy, it was not associated with this fear of reputational and social costs.

“I am not a very open person and would like to keep my profile to myself, but I am not very bothered when someone sees my profile.” (Male, 34)

This theme indicates a strong gender gap in views on privacy and its management, with women being under greater scrutiny and risk of reputational damage, and perhaps, this is conditioned by existing gender norms and moral expectations of the Pakistani society.

4.3.2 Men vs Women Perception on the topic of Harassment

Every female participant said that they encountered some kind of harassment, starting with unwanted messages and leading towards sexually inappropriate content and stalking behavior. Such experiences were usually very uncomfortable, and in certain instances, they resulted in deleting the application.

“As soon as I posted a real picture, the mood of messages became different.” (Female, 26)

“There exist a bunch of men who don’t respect your boundaries, and they don’t realize when to stop texting. A couple of men approached me on Instagram when I unmatched them on the application.” (Female, 24)

The male participants testified that harassment does exist on these platforms, but in general, they see women experience it more often than men. Some participants confessed that they had witnessed other males indulging in such distasteful actions, but their ability to intervene in such incidents was limited.

“This is one of the issues that girls have to deal with. I have never felt unsafe, though I have viewed screenshots that my female friends shared with me, and they were disgusting.” (Male, 31)

This theme is important because it highlights the disparity, like harassment towards female users, whereby women endure the emotional and mental weight of having to behave in unsafe digital spaces, whereas men tend to act as inactive participants or not be directly affected by this issue.

4.3.3 Stress when being Exposed to Negative Experience on Matchmaking Applications

Most respondents narrated that the perceived negative experiences that are connected to the use of matchmaking applications, especially the issues of privacy and harassment, contributed to feelings of anxiety, stress, and emotional fatigue. This was more severe among the women and mostly associated with fear of being judged, social exposure, as well as manipulation of feelings by being merely an option or time passing for someone.

“I used to be so concerned whether someone saved or took a screenshot of my messages that it began to interfere with my sleep.” (Female, 23)

“I had a panic attack when an unknown person took my picture from the application, manipulated it using AI, and shared it on my Facebook messenger with a threat that he would make the picture go viral if I did not send him a certain amount of money.” (Female, 29)

Some male participants also reported experiencing adverse mental health effects, but their expressions were more linked to the feeling of rejection due to social status and family background, ghosting, and feeling their desires unfulfilled.

“You suffer a lot of neglect. So that screws with your self-esteem as the time passes by.” (Male, 27)

“One can easily become addicted to swiping, and when there is no one responding to it, one starts to wonder why he/she is not good enough.” (Male, 33)

Emotional stress spreading to both genders indicates the larger psychological effect of digital matchmaking. It seems, though, that the nature, severity, and the reasons behind this distress are strongly gendered, and women experience fear-based distress while men, contrary to it, regularly suffer when it comes to rejection and validation.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As per analysis, the growing popularity and expediency of the matchmaking applications in Pakistan can be explained by the changing social standards and the desire of youth to build a successful relationship, as well as the decisive nature of presenting such applications as innovative and, at the same time, culturally acceptable through the advertisements. With the increasing popularity of desires to be independent, effective, and compatible, matchmaking applications also seek to brand themselves as a revolutionary change to conventional ways of doing things, particularly with youth in the urban areas and educated individuals. The results here correlate with the Uses and Gratification theory, because people actively utilize matchmaking applications to meet different social and emotional requirements. Such platforms have gratification that cannot be found in traditional rishta culture, especially in a society like Pakistan, where the traditional way of doing things rules over everything. Another aspect of this theoretical framework is that this action of the users is both deliberated and required, which makes the relevance of Uses and Gratification Theory still work in examining the trends of digital matchmaking in culturally sensitive nations like Pakistan. The application of Uses and Gratification Theory to the findings confirms the notion that the need for autonomy, compatibility, efficiency, and an emotional bond are the motivators to resort the use of such matchmaking applications in Pakistan. These platforms do not provide the conventional rishta system, but still, they cannot fulfill all the requirements and desires of young, urbanized, and literate people easily. Uses and Gratification Theory hence, holds rich theoretical meaning in the aspect of idea of user autonomy, relationship with media, and the ability to form relationship in Pakistan that is culturally challenging.

The findings also demonstrate how the matchmaking applications in Pakistan are redefining the process of relationship building due to a shift of priorities, independence given to individuals, less dependency on the conventional gatekeepers, and direct communication. Users are not simply switching out of one approach, but are redefining matchmaking to mean something entirely different, and reshaping how it is done at the societal level.

The discussion denotes that gender is a main factor that determines issues experienced by users when using matchmaking applications in Pakistan. Privacy breaches, harassment, and the associated mental health implications affect women out of proportion (particularly because of cultural factors, practices, and norms regarding honor, modesty, and respectability). Although psychological impacts do not bypass the male users, they mainly worry about the effects on their self-esteem and the outcomes of interactions on their self-worth instead of focusing on their safety. The themes also reveal that there is an extreme necessity to have a gender-sensitive platform interface, increased safety, and awareness about online ethics and prevention of online harassment in Pakistan. Using the concept of Social Stigma Theory in the life of matchmaking application users in Pakistan, it may be identified that gender is the deciding factor in determining the level and nature of the stigma received. Women users deal with moral, cultural, and psychological stigmas, whereas men users have more ease when navigating in digital space, with most of the stigma related to self-worth loss without widespread community disapproval. It is possible that this theoretical framework would also enhance the idea of the collisions of norms of society and digital practices and it also indicates the need of gender-sensory policymaking, design and rhetoric within an up-and-coming sphere of technology moderated relations.

Matchmaking applications in Pakistan exceed the limits of being technological, and they are actually cultural mediators between tradition and modernity, gender and autonomy. To be effective and ethical, the use should be multifaceted, and with greater platform development, education of society, emotional support programs, and proactive policy action.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared NO conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The authors received NO funding to conduct this study.

ORCID iDs

Maida Khan¹  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5433-5140>

Ahsan Raza²  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9322-4450>

Sidra Shahid³  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5564-7827>

REFERENCES

- Almond, L. L., & Malletteb, J. K. (2022). Intentions, Results, and Disuse of Online Dating for Religious and Non-Religious Emerging Adults. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 21(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2021.2017738>
- Anderson, T. L. (2014). *Stigma and Social Identity*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Chan, C. k., Wang, X., & Yang, X. (2024). Prevalence and relationships of dating application usage, cyber-fraud and mental health among emerging adults in Hong Kong. *Psychiatry Research Communications*, 4(4), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psycom.2024.100197>
- Chan, L. S. (2017). Exploring the relationships among trust, sensation-seeking, smartphone use, and the intent to use dating apps based on the Integrative Model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 246-258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.02.053>
- Finkel, E. J., Eastwick, P. W., Karney, B. R., Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. (2012). Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13(1), 3-66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612436522>
- Hasan, F. (2021). Keep It Halal! A Smartphone Ethnography of Muslim Dating. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 10(1), 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10042>
- Latif , M., Naseer, D. M., & Ahmed, D. M. (2021). CULTURAL IMPERIALISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE OF WESTERN DRESSING THROUGH FACEBOOK IN URBAN AREAS OF PAKISTAN. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 4(4), 36-47. <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v4i4.312>
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2018). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Arrington, Indiana State University: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J)*, 8(3351-33514). <https://doi.org/10.62707/aishej.v9i3.335>
- Nisa, E. F. (2021). Online Halal Dating, Ta’aruf, and the Shariatization of Matchmaking among Malaysian and Indonesian Muslims. *Cyber Orient*, 15(1), 231-258. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.13>

- Paché, G. (2025). Dating Apps: A Logistics of Desire. *Journal of Social Science for Policy Implications*, 13, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.15640/jsspi.v13a1>
- Quiroz, P. A. (2013). From Finding the Perfect Love Online to Satellite Dating and ‘Loving-the-One-You’re Near’: A Look at Grindr, Skout, Plenty of Fish, Meet Moi, Zoosk and Assisted Serendipity. *Humanity & Society*, 32(7), 181-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597613481727>
- Rooij, L. d. (2020). The Relationship between Online Dating and Islamic Identity among British Muslims. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 9(1), 1-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10010>
- Sichach, M. (2024, March 14). Uses and Gratifications theory - Background, History and Limitations. SSRN, pp. 1-11.
- Smith, A. M., Mucedola, A. S., La, K., Ortiz, R. R., & Tian, Y. (2025). Swipe right to consent: How dating app usage by young adults contributes to sexual objectification and sexual consent miscommunication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 167, 108621. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2025.108621>
- Sohail, S. A., Mahmood, Q., Gull, Z., & Khan, M. H. (2019). Tinder use among pakistani adults: a sociopsychological need perspective. *JURNAL STUDI KOMUNIKASI*, 3(3), 316 - 331. <http://dx.doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v3i3.1954>
- Where Muslims Meet*. (2025, 7 7). Retrieved from Muzz: <https://muzz.com/en-US/success-stories/>
- Yahaya, A. B., Yang, C. Z., Lin, C. Q., Yu, C. Q., & Fai, H. K. (2022). *Exploring the Impact of Social Dating Applications on Relationships During the Covid-19 Pandemic Among Young Adults*. Malaysia: UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN.
- Yang, S., Huang, V., Zhong, L., Liu, X., & Zhong, R. (2023). Social compensation or social enhancement? A path model connecting rejection sensitivity and loneliness for Chinese online dating applications users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 149, 107-929. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107929>