

Critical analysis of the acceptability of matrimonial and Matchmaking sites in Pakistan

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The paper examines the acceptability of matrimonial and matchmaking websites in Pakistan through interviews, surveys, and social media campaigns on various social groups to identify the causes behind the limited adoption of such platforms in Pakistan. The study sought to discover the pain points and fears associated with the use of such platforms and to propose potential tweaks to improve the Muzz app's acceptability in Pakistan. Based on the findings, some features are suggested for the app that could potentially improve the acceptance of matrimonial applications in Pakistan. According to the study, it is possible to boost the acceptance of these applications among the Pakistani community by addressing the primary concerns of users and adopting the proposed adjustments.

CCS CONCEPTS • Interaction Design • Collaborative and social computing • Security and data privacy

Additional Keywords and Phrases: Acceptability, Culture, and traditions, Lack of trust, Social Stigma

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1. INTRODUCTION

Muzz, a free Muslim dating and marriage app for individuals, introduced by Shahzad Younas in the UK, was recently launched in Pakistan. The application is built keeping Muslim dating norms in context. However, the way religion is practiced in different regions is not the same and is generally influenced a lot by its culture and traditions; that is to say, an application accepted by the Muslims living in the UK might not be directly applicable in Pakistan, and hence, since its release in 2022, the application is getting mixed reviews. A lot of applications similar to nature, like Tinder, etc., get banned by the PTA. Jamat e Islami, a religiously extreme, widely popular political party in Pakistan, demanded the government ban the app because it is 'unethical' and prohibited in Islam.

Pakistan is a traditional, conservative society where arranged marriages are still the norm and casual dating is frowned upon. While the use of online dating and matchmaking applications are increasing over time, it is still a relatively small community. However, social relations have evolved over time. While on the one hand, virtual communities have come into existence, physical social circles have shrunk over time. Hence, online platforms provide access to a larger pool of potential partners than traditional match-making methods.

2. MOTIVATION

Our study researches the acceptability of the Muzz app in Pakistan. It aims to find pain points through intended users in the country in the hope of concluding with a few remarks and proposing potential tweaks that the app can make in order for it to increase its user base in this country. Increased acceptability of matrimonial help would help increase the accessibility for individuals to find their partners and reduce stigmatization while also increasing options better suited for them while also encouraging the idea of not settling for less, promoting healthy foundations to matrimony, and therefore, reshaping families.

3. BACKGROUND

The use of matrimonial websites in Pakistan is significantly influenced by the culture and religion of the country. The study “E-Arranged Marriages: How have Muslim matrimonial websites affected traditional Islamic courting methods?” was based on the effects of Muslim matrimonial websites on traditional Islamic courting methods. The study discovered that these Muslims were not averse to using the Internet to find a spouse. The study found that the Muslims in this study were not completely opposed to using these websites and finding a match, despite their religious beliefs. In addition, it also revealed that since Asian Muslims are more Islamically inclined, they are more motivated to use matrimonial websites (Ahmed, 2013). However, the study found that the matrimonial sites pose a major threat to the number of arranged marriages that exist in Pakistan. Another study, *New Cultural Structures: South Asian Matrimonial Websites*, is based on the experiences of The Asian community and explains that these matrimonial websites somewhat still maintain South Asian traditions with a similar process as an arranged marriage, but at some point, the experience shifts and becomes more relaxed, less emphasis is placed upon marriage, and the idea of dating is introduced (Shako, 2004). As a result, online social media sites create a lack of trust for the user, especially if the user is based in Pakistan. According to a study conducted in India, privacy and trustworthiness were the major aspects prospective grooms and brides looked for in a matrimonial site (Rajinikanth and Sailasri, 2020). While it is critical to understand how people perceive matrimonial websites in Pakistan, it is also essential to comprehend what kind of languages these matrimonial sites use to target the user. A study, *Stereotypical Gender Differences in Matrimonial Choices: A Study of Marriage Bureau Websites in Pakistan*, explored the languages used in the advertising of marriage bureau websites in Pakistan. Similarly, the advertising of matrimonial sites could also be an additional factor in the users' not being able to trust the sites. Overall, the acceptability of matrimonial sites depends on all the above-mentioned factors, from trust and privacy to cultural and religious norms.

4. METHODOLOGIES

The study employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the use of matrimonial sites in South Asian society, with a focus on the Muzz app in Pakistan. The literature review encompassed a range of sources, including journal articles, studies, reports, and grey literature. While there is a substantial body of research on the use of matrimonial sites in other countries, there is a paucity of data on the use of Muzz in Pakistan compared to the UK, where it was previously launched.

4.1. Survey:

To address this gap in knowledge, the study used a survey, interviews, and social media campaign to explore the stigma attached to the use of Muzz in Pakistan. Firstly, a concise and engaging survey was designed to gather user insights. The survey covered the signup process on the Muzz app and asked questions about matrimonial applications and the Muzz app. It targeted different categories:

1. People looking for a match
2. People who found a match

- a. through traditional methods
 - b. through matrimonial side
3. Parents who are looking for a match for their children

4.2. Interviews:

In addition to the survey data, informal interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of people's perceptions of matrimonial applications and the Muzz app in Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, and a consent form and interview guide were developed. The interview questions focused primarily on users' perceptions of Muzz. One of the questions also requested the participants to provide their opinions on why Facebook's matrimonial platform "Two Rings" has a larger user base compared to an app dedicated solely to matrimonial purposes.

4.3. Social Media:

To reach a wider audience, a social media campaign was launched on Instagram. A story consisting of three different questions was posted to gather additional insights from people. Instagram was chosen as a fast and efficient way to collect data for the study.

Overall, this mixed-method approach enabled the study to gain a comprehensive understanding of the stigma attached to the use of Muzz in Pakistan and the factors that influence its uptake.

5. PERSONAS

During the initial research phase, while collecting data, we were able to form three different personas which illustrated the pain points of the participants and what they wanted to achieve, which illustrated a better view of the modifications that can take place during the prototype process.

Sarah Khan, a 26-year-old MBA graduate from a traditional household in Karachi, Pakistan, is a successful marketing executive. While her parents want her to marry, Sarah is hesitant to use traditional matchmakers or planned weddings. Her ambition is to find a companion that shares her beliefs and interests, is financially solid and ambitious, and values her independence. Finding a compatible mate, on the other hand, is difficult in Pakistan, where conventional matchmakers focus on superficial criteria, and online dating/matrimonial applications can be stigmatized, raising privacy and safety issues. Sarah believes that the acceptance and reputation of the site are important factors to consider while utilizing marriage applications. She is at ease with technology and spends her leisure time socializing with friends and family while being connected via technology.

Ahmed Ali, a 30-year-old software engineer from Islamabad, Pakistan, wants to use a matrimonial app in order to find a companion who shares his beliefs and will help him achieve his professional ambitions. He is looking for a long-term relationship with a compatible partner who is educated, ambitious, and has a good sense of humor. However, Ahmed confronts difficulties with traditional matching, which may be time-consuming and shallow, as well as his family's network of contacts, which may pressure him into a marriage that is not suited for him. Ahmed is also concerned about the safety and privacy of utilizing a matrimonial app. Ahmed prefers a convenient and discreet way to find a partner and wants to use a platform that has a good reputation and takes privacy seriously.

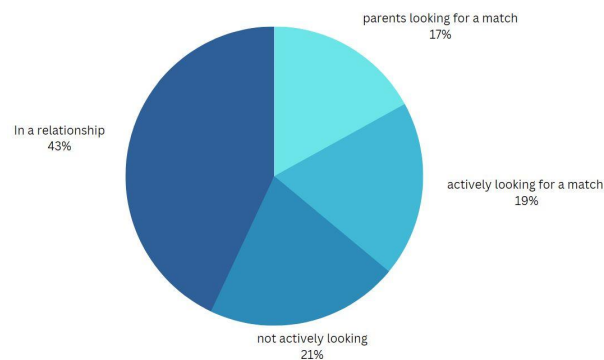
Zainab Sheikh, a 50-year-old Housewife from Lahore, Pakistan, is searching for a suitable match for her daughter. Her daughter is interested in marrying but does not like any of her matches made through traditional means. While she

understands her choices, Zainab is limited to the options provided for her daughter. Her daughter suggested the use of matrimonial apps, but Zainab fears for her daughter's privacy and safety. She is more hesitant as she is not aware of the people her daughter is interacting with. Being a mother, she wants to make sure she is involved in the process. Moreover, she fears what other people would think about the use of the app as it is not traditional and is also deemed non-religious. Zainab is a little old-fashioned. However, she knows how to navigate through technology with a bit of help.

6. RESULTS

The results obtained from the three approaches - the anonymous survey, the one-on-one interviews, and the social media campaign, all demonstrated a pattern of unacceptability of matrimonial apps in the region. About 95 people took part in the research through either of the means described above. The participant's ages varied from 18 to 52 years old, and their educational background varied from matric to Bachelor level.

The survey managed to get 42 responses, out of which 17% of the people were parents or relatives looking for a match for the children in the family, 43% were people who were already in a relationship through some means, 19% were actively looking for a match whereas 21% of the participants are not looking for a match.



6.1.1 Parents looking for their children

In this society, family involvement in the matchmaking process is culturally crucial. such a relationship is not just built between two partners, but it is between families. Hence family background matters when finding a match in this society. About 80% of the participants that fall into this category had the traditional way of finding a match preferred in their community, where the families meet each other and either decide on the two partners on their behalf or the families meet first and then introduce the two partners to decide for themselves. Needless to say, the majority -which is 70% of the participants voted that they would be extremely uncomfortable with their children using a matrimonial site to find a match, and the reason more or less was because it did not align with their traditional matchmaking approach or social values. This statistic is crucial to understanding the backlash that Muzz received when it was first introduced in Pakistan since it was mainly by the people of this generation. The study took into consideration this pain point of the participants while proposing features for the app.

6.1.2 People Already in a Relationship

It was quite surprising to see that out of the 43% of the participants who were already in a relationship, only one of them found a match through a matrimonial site. They said it was extremely difficult for them to use such applications in Pakistan and got backlash from their family as well. The rest of the participants managed to find their partners through traditional matchmaking approaches, in which the majority - 64% found a match in their social circles, 28% of them were introduced to their partners by their parents, and 12% of the participants got in a relationship by their parent's decision. The rest preferred not to say. About 90% of the participants said that their approach was different or somewhat different from their community's traditional approach. This points to the fact that the next generation might have some acceptability of matrimonial sites; however, due to their community's approach and mindset, they might not be able to choose it for themselves

6.1.2 People actively looking for a match

About 20% of the participants were actively looking for a match, however it was surprising to find that none of them were using a matrimonial site and were relying on their traditional approaches. 50% of the people said their approach was different or slightly different from that of their parents but 60% of them voted that they were extremely uncomfortable with the idea of using a matrimonial site.

6.1.2 People not looking for a match

This category of people either think they are not ready for such a commitment or are not yet of age to look. Most of them described their community's approach as the traditional match making approach where either the family decides or introduces the partners. About 65% of them had an issue with the approach their family has and 30% said that might be one of the reasons for reluctance. This points to how some individuals are not comfortable with the traditional approach and might be willing to adopt a new method to find a partner for themselves once they deem they are ready for the process.

6.2 The Social Media Campaigns

Even though the survey forms managed to get detailed responses with other demographics of the participants, they took much more time. They hence faced difficulty in getting more participants without any incentive for them in the research. Hence we introduced a social media campaign to get more participants on board. The questions were posed as polls on Instagram by multiple users to get a diverse set of responses. However, the majority of the responses were quite similar. About 220 people were introduced to the campaign; however, only about 25% of the people responded. This points to how much even the idea of answering basic questions about matrimonial sites might be a source of hesitation for the people of this region since the process was not anonymous. Out of the 51 participants, 47 people had never used a matrimonial site. When they were then introduced to the app through a walkthrough video link, 73% of the participants said they would not be open to the idea of using an app like Muzz, whereas two people were open to the idea, and the rest of the 23% voted maybe.

When asked about what was a turn-off for them for a matrimonial site such as that they just saw, 39% of them said they had a fear of being catfished, 36% said that it did not align with their social values, 11% were worried about the social stigma around match finding apps whereas 14% had Data security issues with their app. This campaign, however, suggests that the majority of the people have an issue with the kind of people on the platform since most of the people who answered were not worried about social stigma but had an issue with being catfished by the users on the app. This suggests that people are not verified by the user verification on the app, and it could be more helpful to screen users in a more efficient way to make people comfortable with the idea of using the app.

6.3 The interviews

After some research, it was quite evident that match finding process, or the way locals call it - the 'rishta' finding process is a very sacred process in this country and people do not indulge in it casually and even though majority of the people go through it at a certain stage in their life, conversations around this topic are still stigmatized. Hence it was hard to get responses from even a seemingly liberal group of people. We then included one on one interviews in the research, a more personal approach with the promise of keeping the identity of the participant anonymous, in order to create a human connection with the participants, to better understand their sentiments and empathize with them.

We managed to interview 15 people, which included parents looking for a match for their kids, people who were looking for themselves and people who were not completely willing to be involved in this process, however their parents were looking for them anyway. After creating a comfortable environment for them by initiating casual conversation and explaining our research, we asked what is the first word that comes to their mind when they think of matrimonial sites. Majority of them came up with words associated with negativity and fear - words such as 'Red Flag,' 'Problematic,' 'fraud', 'unacceptable' and related words were used. These spontaneous, of-the-top-of-the-head responses convey the mindset of the people in the region and how much they resent the idea of a matrimonial site. The interview then went with questions such as asking them about the reason for their resistance to the use of such sites, to further explore what makes them so hesitant to ever use such a platform. Most of the people said it's not the norm in their society and something about the fear of what other people would think about it. The people looking for themselves said that even if they were able to find someone through this platform, which they themselves did not believe to be very secure, they would not be able to convince their parents to meet a person they found, because it's against their tradition. The parents had a more resilient approach towards using the app but they also said something similar, that even if they managed to find someone through the app, how would they face the society. In a follow up question, where the participants were presented with a fictional scenario in the future, where everything is more electronic and this approach has migrated to online platforms, what is one thing they would want in that case, where the approach has to be online. The parents wanted more involvement in the process somehow, whereas the people looking for a match wanted more transparency and credibility of the users on the platform. The insights from the interview pointed out that the people of this generation had more issues with privacy and fraud from the users on the platform, whereas the parents were more concerned with the approach not aligning with their traditions.

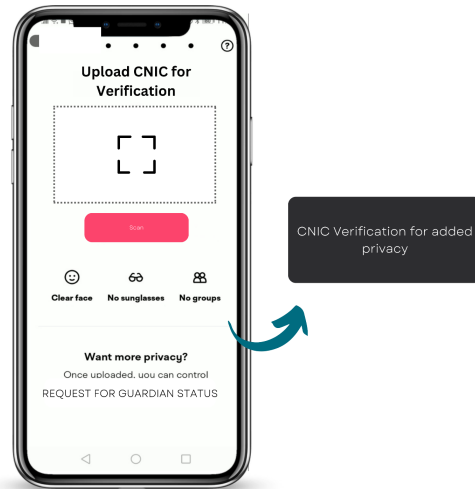
Since the study gathered enough data, with 90 participants it was a rigorous process to do the data analysis. However, each method helped us gain valuable insights from our participants. Moreover, the methods also helped us triangulate our data.

7. PROTOTYPE

The primary prototype for the research was the app itself, which we used to conduct a survey phase and gather feedback from potential users and understand their issues with the existing application. Based on the responses, we identified concerns related to data privacy, user safety, and stigmatization. To address these issues, we propose a few additional features to the app.

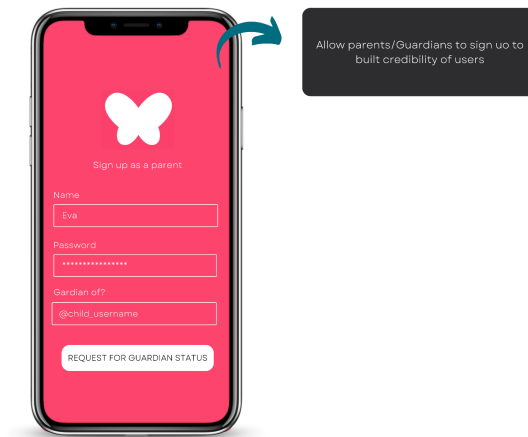
7.1. Stronger user verification

A lot of research participants, especially people of this generation, who are comfortable using online social platforms, had issues with using an online platform for finding a potential partner. Most of them had a fear of catfishing and fraud from the users of the platform, apart from the social stigma. Based on these results, the study believes that requiring users to verify their accounts via NADRA to ensure their true identity and increase security might increase acceptability of the app amongst youngsters. This would create reassurance and reduce the risk of being matched with a fake or imposed user



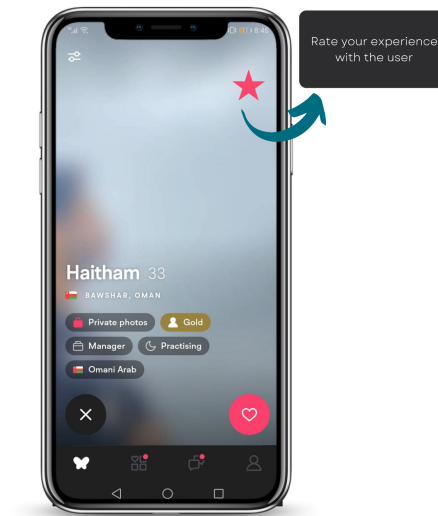
7.2. Parents portal

The research showed how important it is for this society to have parent and family involvement in the matchmaking process. We know that any new solution, whether it being an e-solution or a physical one, needs to be close to the traditional way of things being done, for it to be more adaptable for the people who are used to things a certain way. Hence we propose that adding a parent portal to the app, where a guardian can sign up and group with their relative or child to look for a match. This would introduce the traditional approach on the app, making the parents play a role in the process.



7.3. User Rating

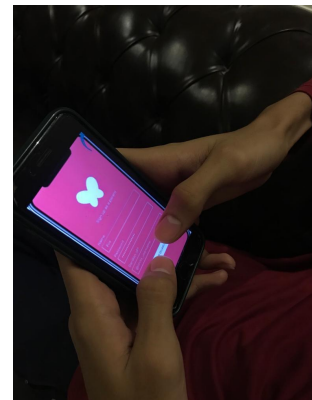
To further address the catfishing issue and user credibility, we propose a user rating feature, where anyone who interacts with the user gets to rate and comment on the interaction even if they did not move forward with the relation process. This will promote healthy behavior on the platform and reduce people from initiating baseless conversations, while also informing other users of the general behavior of the user so that they have an idea of their reputation before getting into conversation with them.



8. DISCUSSION

The research managed to identify some patterns of unacceptability for Muzz app in Pakistan. It gathered information from various potential users, tried to empathize and understand their stand point and mindset. It highlighted the stigma associated with using matrimonial sites in this society and proposed some features that could potentially improve the app's acceptability in the region.

However we understand that even though the data portrayed some patterns in the society, it is limited to conclude anything concrete. It was difficult to collect data and initiate conversation about a stigmatized process in a society like ours therefore recruiting participants was tedious. Moreover the study recognizes that the participants even though were from a wide range of people, could have included people from more ethnicities and backgrounds, and hence is not completely representative of the people of Pakistan. However it managed to collect data from a relatively more e platform acceptable users. Further work could be done by taking feedback on a prototype app with the proposed features to understand if that could increase the app's acceptability.



Pakistan is a very culturally influenced nation, where traditional practices are rooted quite firmly. The study concludes by saying that for a matrimonial app to be accepted in a country like Pakistan, it needs to take in regard not just the religious roots of the country but also its traditional practices and norms.

9. REFERENCES

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10. LINKS

[Survey Form](#)

[Muzz app User Walkthrough Video - Sign up](#)

[Muzz app User Walkthrough Video - App](#)