



Promoting Unhealthy Patterns of Spouse Selection and Family Formation for Youths: The Challenges of Cyberspace

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Abstract

The process of selecting a life partner significantly impacts both marital satisfaction and the formation of a family. The fulfillment of an individual's needs is often achieved through their marital relationship with their partner. The selection of a life partner greatly influences the establishment of a thriving and harmonious family. This research aims to investigate and shed light on the diverse patterns of selecting life partners across different cultures and regions worldwide. Detailed explanations are provided regarding the advantages and disadvantages of these patterns, the influence of cyberspace on marriage, the challenges it presents, and Islam's stance towards these patterns. The present study employs a comparative and descriptive methodology to examine the subject matter. If an individual chooses to commence their married life in accordance with Islamic principles, they can do so and strive to establish a healthy family, which is the ultimate objective of marriage. The primary focus of this article is to initially identify the various patterns of spouse selection across different regions worldwide. Subsequently, the article delves into the challenges posed by cyberspace in the

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context of spouse selection. Finally, it elucidates the principles and guidelines of Islamic teachings on selecting a suitable life partner. The article introduces the challenges arising from cyberspace in the process of selecting a suitable pattern for spouse selection. It provides solutions to effectively address these challenges in accordance with Islamic principles.

Keywords: Cyberspace, marriage pattern, family, youths

Introduction

Spouse selection is an immensely crucial decision in an individual's life as it marks the first step towards the establishment of a family. The choice of a spouse significantly impacts personal and social aspects of life, as well as the upbringing of children. Its importance is such that the happiness, satisfaction, or even regret experienced by a person in life can often be attributed to the process of spouse selection. Marriage, regarded as a sacred contract, holds great significance in most religions and is viewed as a spiritual and functional relationship between men and women in many cultures.

Recognizing the significance of marriage as a pivotal event in human life, extensive research has been conducted to explore marital satisfaction and family formation, which contribute to the maintenance of happiness within the marital bond. Marital satisfaction is defined by how well one spouse perceives their needs and desires being fulfilled by their partner. It is closely linked to the well-being of the family unit and a higher quality of life. Conversely, dissatisfaction in marriage can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and, in some cases, even the dissolution of the family.

The objective of this research is to examine the diverse forms and patterns involved in the process of marriage and spouse selection worldwide. Various methods, such as traditional intermediation, education and workplace relationships, and computer-mediated communications, have been investigated by social scientists who have authored numerous books and articles on the subject. By comparing these different patterns, the research provides illustrative examples to highlight which methods of spouse selection are considered more reliable and preferable.

This study, conducted through a descriptive-comparative approach, aims to outline the various patterns of spouse selection, including an exploration of the Islamic perspective on the topic. Additionally, the challenges posed by cyberspace within the realm of suitable patterns are examined. By delving into the intricacies of spouse selection, this research aims to enhance people's understanding of how to choose a suitable life partner before marriage. Ultimately, it endeavors to contribute to the promotion of successful marriages and the formation of healthy families.

Considering the paramount importance of the family institution, marriage holds a special significance as its bedrock. The well-being of the family is inherently tied to the strength of the marital bond and the principles and patterns that guide the decision-making process.

The advent of modernity and modernism has brought about transformative changes in social, moral, cultural, and family dynamics, not only in Western societies but also across various other societies, including Iran. These changes have had both positive and negative consequences. They have significantly influenced the collective lifestyle and reshaped societal perspectives on sexual relationships, giving rise to new forms of marriage and family formation.

One such emerging concept is what came to be known in Iran as "white marriage" or cohabitation, which has introduced significant challenges to society and families. These challenges include a decline in the prevalence of formal marriages, reduced rates of childbearing, and a lack of commitment and responsibility towards one another, among other issues.

The institution of the family faces significant challenges in the realm of social relations, particularly due to the shifts in attitudes, beliefs, norms, and customs surrounding marriage and spouse selection. These changes, observed at a macro level, have resulted in substantial transformations in the process of marriage, which serves as the fundamental cornerstone of family life in the present era.

This article aims to address the following inquiries: What are the diverse patterns of spouse selection observed globally? What are the challenges posed by cyberspace in the context of selecting a spouse? What are the appropriate guidelines for choosing a wife in accordance with Islamic principles?

1. The Concepts

1.1. Preaching (*Tabligh*)

The term "tabligh" has unfortunately undergone a misinterpretation in various contexts, including social, political, and cultural spheres, distorting its original meaning. It is crucial to reclaim and restore the true essence of the word "tabligh" from these incomplete and diverse interpretations.

Etymologically, *tabligh* means conveyance; however, within

Islamic culture, it encompasses more than mere message transmission. It involves a clear and comprehensive delivery of the message, as mentioned in the Quran: "Nothing is incumbent on the messenger but a plain delivering (of the message)." This underscores the importance of conveying the message in a way that is expressive, communicative, and culturally relevant to each era, effectively touching the hearts and minds of the audience.

The term "plain" mentioned in the aforementioned verse, along with other verses, signifies that *tablīgh* goes beyond mere message delivery. It necessitates presenting the content of the message, which encompasses the guidance of Sharia (Islamic law), in a clear and unambiguous manner, leaving no room for excuses or misunderstandings.

Considering the significance of *tablīgh* in Islamic culture, as well as the global mission of Islam and the role of preaching in fulfilling this mission, Islam places great emphasis on *tablīgh* through various means, including acts of worship, congregational prayers, Friday prayers, and religious occasions. These avenues serve as platforms for spreading the message and engaging with the community (Ganjīni-yi Ma'ārif 2010).

1.2. Patterns of Spouse Selection

Selecting a spouse entails choosing a lifelong partner who will be involved in all aspects of life. The advantages and benefits of making a wise and appropriate choice, guided by the right criteria and methods, are numerous, while the repercussions of hastily choosing based on incorrect criteria can be detrimental. Marriage represents a crucial and pivotal chapter in human existence, and a successful union serves as the foundation for the material and spiritual growth of family members. Conversely, a failed marriage brings unforeseen dangers, struggles, hardships, and challenges for survival. Therefore, it is essential for both men and women to possess self-awareness before embarking on marriage, as well as an understanding of the moral qualities and the objectives of marriage.

1.3. Cyberspace

The term "cyberspace" was first introduced by William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer* in 1984. It refers to a range of computer-accessible information resources. Gibson

conceptualized cyberspace as a graphical representation of data from computer systems, transcending the limitations of time and physical space. Essentially, he depicted cyberspace as a computer network within a world inhabited by artificial intelligent entities.

Initially, this concept was not fully defined, but it gradually became the subject of philosophical discourse in the realm of cyberspace. Soon enough, cyberspace was no longer seen solely as a laboratory or scientific field, but rather as an independent world. Over time, different perspectives on virtual space emerged. The concept of virtual space refers to the imagined and fictional realm of virtual reality and the Internet, where humans can enter and interact. It is a parallel world created and maintained by the communication lines and computers of our world. In this virtual space, there is a global exchange of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainment, and various other human activities.

Numerous definitions of virtual space exist. One such definition describes it as a computer-simulated place or environment that users can interact with through an interface (Khaniki and Babayi 2011).

2. Different Patterns of Spouse Selection Worldwide

Human social life is characterized by a rich tapestry of multiplicity and diversity. Geographical, racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural variations contribute to a wide array of behavioral examples and patterns within collective human existence. At times, these differences are so profound that identifying shared values among societies becomes challenging. As a result, due to the existence of diverse cultures and civilizations, behavioral patterns naturally vary across different societies.

Every society formulates distinct behavioral patterns based on its unique set of values, beliefs, traditions, and customs. Consequently, marriage, as a cultural practice, exhibits varying patterns within each society. Rather than a singular pattern, we can identify several diverse models or patterns of marriage. The primary classification that can be made and presented regarding marriage patterns is as follows.

2.1. Traditional Intermediaries in the Family and Neighborhood

In traditional societies, social interactions predominantly occur

within a network of closed relationships characterized by gender segregation. Daily interactions between individuals of different genders are limited and adhere to conventional social behavior, with specific boundaries and red lines that, if crossed, can result in losses and destruction for those involved.

In the traditional family system, the family is viewed as a simplified model of social structure, marked by a strong sense of collectivism. Family decisions are typically made through consultation and consensus among family members. As a result, individual autonomy in decision-making, particularly in matters concerning family honor and establishing kinship ties, is significantly reduced.

Within the context of traditional society, the process of pursuing marriage requires adherence to social customs and manners. Men's courtship of women follows a distinct protocol, and the marriage itself is facilitated through a series of customs and traditions. It is essential to approach marriage in a respectful manner, upholding societal norms and etiquette.

In traditional societies, matchmaking through intermediaries is a prevalent practice. Acting as intermediaries between two families is considered one of the most common forms of matchmaking. This approach serves as a valuable behavioral strategy, as it helps make men's courtships more acceptable to women.

Additionally, intermediaries often play a crucial role in providing essential information about the prospective partner's family. They serve as a vital source of knowledge, enabling individuals to access the necessary details and insights about the other party's background and characteristics. In many cases, intermediaries serve as the primary means of obtaining such information.

Intermediation in marriage is widely seen as a humanitarian endeavor, with individuals acting as intermediaries between families to foster cooperation and social harmony. It is not regarded as a profession, nor is it expected to be a means of earning a livelihood. Instead, the practice is rooted in traditional customs, where people express their appreciation and gratitude to the intermediary by offering property or monetary gifts.

In many traditional forms of intermediation, it is common for intermediaries to be appointed by the groom's family to facilitate communication and reach an agreement with the suitor's family. As a

result, the intermediaries often prioritize the interests and preferences of the groom's family. Unfortunately, this can lead to negative consequences. In certain instances, due to their strong allegiance towards the groom's family, intermediaries may resort to dishonest and fraudulent tactics, such as deception and trickery, in order to persuade the girl's family to give their consent to the proposal.

2.2. Building Acquaintances in Work and Study Environments

Universities and workplaces play significant roles in facilitating connections and relationships in non-traditional societies. In many countries, the educational system and work environments are not gender-segregated, allowing both boys and girls to study or work together. Presently, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, universities have emerged as crucial hubs for selecting potential spouses and eventually leading to marriage. The prevalence of university marriages is steadily increasing with each passing day.

Due to the nature of relationships formed at universities or workplaces, the process of reaching an agreement and taking action towards marriage and starting a family is generally smoother. The presence of a long-term acquaintance or relationship during the educational or employment period allows both parties to gain a relative understanding of each other's tendencies, emotions, likes, and dislikes. This familiarity provides a foundation for entering into marriage with a relatively comprehensive knowledge of each other.

The university serves as a prominent intermediary in both official and unofficial capacities when it comes to facilitating marriages. In an official context, the university is recognized as an institution that actively promotes and facilitates the formation of family bonds among students, aiming to address their needs and concerns. As part of this strategy, the university consistently encourages students to consider marriage and offers specific benefits to those who choose to marry. These benefits encompass educational support, research opportunities, and access to welfare facilities.

However, in the informal context, the university does not play a direct role in facilitating marriages or establishing matrimonial bonds between students. Instead, it serves as a platform where individuals have the opportunity to meet and form connections that may lead to marriage. In many societies, the university is

regarded as an informal intermediary, providing an environment that fosters the potential for marriage to develop among students.

2.3. Marriage Offices or Business Centers

In western societies, the utilization of computer information banks has become a prevalent method of marriage intermediation. Initially, intermediation companies recruit individuals from various social backgrounds and compile their relevant information into a computer network. This network allows individuals to browse through profiles and discover potential matches based on their preferences, desires, expectations, and preferred attributes in a partner. If someone finds a suitable match for marriage, the intermediation computer company assists both parties in getting acquainted by providing a platform for them to meet and offering necessary guidance on marriage. In certain cases, the computer company may also suggest matches by comparing the requirements and characteristics of both parties, offering marriage opportunities to individuals who share similar qualities and criteria.

2.4. Computer-Mediated Friendships

In recent times, online marriage has become an increasingly popular phenomenon, with many young individuals utilizing internet platforms to find their prospective life partners. Dating in the online realm typically occurs through two primary methods. Firstly, individuals often join websites that offer services for making friends, initially motivated by the intention of forming connections. However, as discussions progress and deepen, one party may propose marriage to the other, and despite knowing that they are not genuinely committed to the idea, the other party accepts the offer to sustain the relationship.

Another approach involves individuals who, after experiencing disappointment in their search for a compatible spouse, resort to specialized dating websites to find someone who aligns with their preferences and desires.

While utilizing the Internet and virtual platforms may appear as the easiest method to find a spouse, it is important to recognize that the uncertain nature of the virtual space does not provide a reliable and solid foundation for finding a long-term partner.

Initial assessments indicate that numerous individuals initially engage in online interactions with the intention of forming friendships and fostering communication. However, as time passes, these connections can evolve into romantic feelings, ultimately leading to marriages between the individuals involved. It is worth noting that while such outcomes are possible, relying solely on the virtual space as a criterion for finding a lifelong partner may not be deemed as a dependable approach.

The outcomes and conclusions of these marriages are often not particularly captivating. While there have been instances where couples have successfully sustained their relationships, there is typically a lingering sense of concern and lack of trust among individuals who have chosen to marry through this means.

In addition to the benefits, it is crucial to consider the significant disadvantages associated with online communication and virtual friendships in the context of the marriage process. Here are some of these drawbacks:

Firstly, the abundance of like-minded individuals within the online space, coupled with the physical separation from family, can contribute to feelings of isolation and depression.

Secondly, individuals within these online spaces often present their ideals and aspirations, making it unclear how closely aligned these aspirations are with reality.

Thirdly, individuals who rely heavily on online friendships and dating apps may encounter difficulties when it comes to engaging with the real world, potentially leading to mental health issues and psychological disorders.

Fourthly, mutual trust in relationships formed through online platforms is often compromised and uneasy. This is due to the possibility that individuals you encounter may have connections with multiple other people, leading to frequent comparisons and suspicions within such acquaintances.

Fifthly, in online friendships, attachment often develops before the parties truly get to know each other. This attachment can hinder a comprehensive understanding of the other person, as certain facts may be overlooked, particularly if the attachment was formed between individuals of opposite sexes prior to getting acquainted on a deeper level.

Sixthly, theft and fraud are significant and prevalent drawbacks

of virtual friendships. With the increasing accessibility of the Internet and online dating applications, opportunists have found ways to deceive and defraud young individuals. Virtual relationships are often challenging to monitor, and individuals involved in emotional entanglements or fearing damage to their reputation may be hesitant to address issues or follow up on suspicious activities. Moreover, criminal groups exploit virtual friendships by engaging in deceptive advertising strategies, leading unsuspecting individuals into criminal activities or forming illicit gangs.

Seventhly, cheating is a notable disadvantage of virtual friendships. Many individuals engage in extensive virtual relationships with others, using excuses such as being alone, needing emotional support, or experiencing difficulties in their lives. This can lead to extramarital affairs, as the virtual space provides a platform for infidelity. While some people may initially enter into these relationships out of sympathy or seeking friendship without intending to cheat, the mere act of getting to know someone in the virtual realm can create significant differences and problems within couples' lives. Moreover, in virtual friendships, individuals do not witness each other's flaws nor possess sufficient knowledge of one another, leading to an idealized perception of the other person that likely does not align with reality. As a result, the mental image they hold does not correspond to the actual person.

2.5. Cohabitation

Cohabitation poses as a concealed social challenge that presents significant obstacles to family, religious, and legal marriage within a society. In Iran, it is referred to as a "white marriage," as it lacks any official registration on individual identification certificates. Essentially, cohabitation entails couples starting a life together without a formal marriage contract (Ansari 2014). Such unions often arise when individuals, irrespective of gender, lack self-belief, confidence, and optimism for the future. They choose to live together under the same roof without assuming any obligations or reciprocal responsibilities. Additionally, as divorce rates increase in society, both formally and emotionally, some young people opt for secluded cohabitation as an alternative.

Unfortunately, there are instances where certain individuals disregard moral rules and principles altogether (Seddighi 2014).

From a psychological perspective, it is noteworthy that certain shifts have transpired in relationships between men and women within society, giving rise to the phenomenon of cohabitation. This term refers to marriages that are not officially registered or documented, hence the moniker "white." In instances where divorce rates escalate, some young individuals, both men and women, choose to cohabit without pursuing legal marriage registration. Moreover, some women, faced with challenges in obtaining their mahr (dower) or removing their ex-husband's names from their identification certificates, may opt for this approach. Others may engage in cohabitation to avoid being alone or to share living expenses with a partner.

From a sociological standpoint, it is observed that the concept of family holds a distinct definition in Iranian society, representing one of the most cherished and sacred social institutions. However, regrettably, its integrity and validity have been undermined by certain individuals over the course of several years. This is evident when a man and a woman choose to cohabit without engaging in an intimate relationship. In such cases, there is no future or shared responsibilities between the individuals involved. Unfortunately, this living arrangement has been influenced by Western influences. When religious and moral beliefs experience a decline in strength, these types of phenomena tend to emerge.

From a legal perspective, marriage is regarded as a contract. Similar to purchasing a house or a car where a contract deed is provided, marriage also involves a contractual agreement. When an individual's name and details are registered in a marriage certificate, it signifies the presence of specific rights and obligations. Conversely, the absence of a formal contract and certificate indicates the commission of a punishable offense as it involves engaging in a prohibited act. Moreover, in legal terms, when disputes arise between individuals in such relationships, neither men nor women have the ability to seek legal representation. They also face limitations in terms of inheritance rights. Furthermore, if they have a child, the child may be treated as

being born out of wedlock, thus potentially forfeiting inheritance rights from their parents.

In their research, Glass and Wright (1992) concluded that men's inclination towards excitement and their positive attitude towards extramarital relationships are contributing factors to the rise in such relationships. Their findings highlight key reasons behind the phenomenon of cohabitation, as evaluated by experts and individuals involved in these relationships. These reasons include a disregard for prophetic traditions and a lack of belief in the religious importance of lawful union. Additionally, factors such as a lack of commitment, fulfilling psychological needs, and dissatisfaction with existing laws concerning women in the country were also deemed significant. The ranking of vulnerability factors in cohabitation, categorized broadly, emphasized the influential role of cultural factors. The absence of belief in the religious significance of establishing lawful connections and aversion to traditional values are of particular cultural importance. It is possible that such attitudes arise from growing disillusionment with religion and resistance to established traditions. Regardless of the underlying causes, these issues suggest a lack of effective engagement between religious and cultural institutions and the new generation, leading to the distancing of youth from religious and cultural values.

Furthermore, the fulfillment of psychological needs and individual responsibility are best realized within the institution of marriage. However, due to the high costs associated with marriage, which are further compounded by potential separations, individuals may seek to satisfy their emotional and psychological needs outside of marriage. This pursuit allows them to avoid the significant expenses and responsibilities associated with formal marriage. Women's complaints about problematic laws in the country also contribute to their decision to forgo official and legal marriage. They argue that official marriage deprives them of certain rights, prompting a preference for alternative arrangements.

Additionally, based on the experts' analysis of existing conditions and trends, cohabitation is expected to continue increasing in the future.

An analysis of the relationship between categories, concepts, and contextual conditions reveals that several factors can potentially

diminish the prevalence of cohabitation. These factors include personality traits, individual characteristics, cultural influences, economic circumstances, and social dynamics. However, for the reduction in cohabitation rates to occur, specific societal changes in the economic and cultural domains, as well as shifts in people's attitudes towards social issues, are necessary. Moreover, effective intervention strategies can contribute to optimal control by promoting trust and honesty within society. These strategies may involve facilitating the conditions for traditional marriage in the society and increasing awareness through media platforms about the challenges and issues associated with unconsummated marriages. By implementing such measures, the societal centrality of cohabitation can be diminished.

3. Islamic Guidelines for Selecting a Suitable Spouse

As a unifying religion, Islam highlights the significance of all processes and matters that contribute to the strengthening of the foundations of social life. Hence, it is inherent in Islam to emphasize the institution of marriage as a fundamental process that fosters social cohesion and continuity. Islam consistently condemns hypocrisy and any actions that disrupt social harmony, instead calling upon individuals to cultivate empathy, promote harmony, and foster social integration.

As previously mentioned, the family stands as the central social institution. The stability, continuity, and overall social fabric of human collective existence are intricately linked to the presence and functioning of families. The cohesiveness of society, formed by individuals living together and sharing common values and norms, is fortified through the establishment of family systems. Serving as the facilitator of procreation, the family enables the perpetuation of the human population, forming the fundamental building blocks of collective and communal life. Moreover, marriage serves as a fundamental form of mediation, fostering empathy and social solidarity. It is therefore unsurprising that Islam places great significance on marriage as one of the pivotal means of shaping social life.

Islam places strong emphasis on the role of intermediation, or acting as a bridge between two individuals, particularly in the context of facilitating agreements regarding marriage. Imam al-

Ṣādiq (a) narrates a profound statement attributed to the Holy Prophet (s), wherein he proclaimed, "Whoever facilitates a believer in finding a spouse whom they find comfort in, Allah will reward them by granting them a heavenly companion (Hourī) and providing solace through their loved ones among family and friends."

In this hadith, the Holy Prophet highlights the rewarding outcomes of intermediation and linking people together for the purpose of marriage. The Prophet emphasizes the intermediary's acquaintance with friends, family members of the Prophet, as well as friends and religious brethren. Moreover, the hadith mentions the heavenly reward of marrying a hourī as a result of such intermediation and connection.

Imam ʿAlī (a) further emphasizes the significance of intercession by an individual who facilitates the union of two individuals and the establishment of a family. He regards this form of intercession as the most excellent and paramount intercession from the Ahl al-Bayt (a). One of the most commendable forms of intercession is facilitating the marriage between two individuals, leading to a divine attraction between them. As stated in verse 32 of Chapter al-Nūr in the Holy Quran: "And marry those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves."

One of the effective methods to facilitate marriage between two individuals is through introductions and connections. It is beneficial for individuals who are well-acquainted with families and friends to introduce suitable and virtuous individuals to one another. This is because one of the obstacles in pursuing marriage is the lack of familiarity between the parties involved. The aforementioned hadiths affirm that individuals who serve as intermediaries between two people will be rewarded. The Prophet (s) stated, "Whoever facilitates a believer in finding a spouse whom they find comfort in, Allah will reward them by granting them a heavenly companion (Hourī) and providing solace through their loved ones among family and friends" (Majlisī 1364 AH, 77:199).

According to narrations, Imam ʿAlī (a) has expressed that "one of the most commendable forms of intercession is facilitating the marriage between two individuals, leading to a divine attraction between them" (Ḥur al-ʿĀmilī 1409 AH, 20:45). Similarly, Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) stated, "Whoever assists an unmarried individual in

getting married will be counted among those whom God Almighty will favorably regard on the Day of Resurrection."

As mentioned earlier, the practice of intermediation in marriage is a significant aspect of familial dynamics and can be examined within the context of family behaviors. Consequently, alterations in the pattern of intermediation are closely intertwined with broader transformations occurring within families and societies. The traditional model of intermediation aligns with the conventional framework of family and societal norms, wherein parents play a central role in all family systems. On the other hand, the non-traditional form of intermediation is influenced by the structure and dynamics of contemporary family life, where many traditional functions and roles of the family, including fostering social connections in individuals, have diminished. Hence, it is evident that intermediation, as a process facilitating the establishment of family life, will naturally undergo changes to adapt to these evolving circumstances.

In non-traditional societies, one notable characteristic is the increased openness in relationships and social interactions across genders. The complexities of modern social life, urbanization, advancements in women's education and literacy, and the industrialization of societies have eroded many barriers and distinctions that previously delineated behaviors and transactions between women and men. In developed societies, there is a significant rise in women's participation in external affairs and activities beyond the confines of the family institution. This has undoubtedly facilitated direct communication between individuals of different genders who seek marriage, outside the realm of the family. Factors such as co-educational environments in universities, women's involvement in industrial production, the presence of diverse gender dynamics within economic, political, cultural, and social structures, and a new perspective on women's status and role across various levels of social life have created platforms for mutual interaction and recognition between individuals of opposite sexes. Consequently, the role of families, particularly parents, in the marriage process of young men and women has diminished in many cases, resembling more of an advisory role. In numerous instances, it is the young individuals themselves who make the decisions regarding marriage, and only

after reaching an agreement do their parents become aware of their intention to marry. As a result, the patterns, mechanisms, and frequency of intermediation in modern and non-traditional societies have undergone significant and fundamental changes.

While the average frequency of intermediation in non-traditional societies tends to be lower compared to traditional societies, the nature of marriage intermediation in non-traditional societies has undergone a notable transformation. It has evolved from an occasional occurrence to a recognized social profession. Institutions and organizations have emerged to actively engage in the business of marriage matchmaking, operating in a defined and formal manner. As a result, intermediation in industrial and non-traditional societies often takes on collective and communal characteristics, with a shift away from individual endeavors.

Non-traditional intermediation has a broader territorial reach compared to traditional methods. Intermediation centers in non-traditional societies identify and connect with a diverse range of individuals from various social strata who are seeking marriage, providing assistance and guidance in the process. As a result, intermediation extends beyond the boundaries of familial, kinship, and friendship networks, encompassing a much wider scope. Modern technological tools such as mass media, computers, and other communication means play a crucial and significant role in facilitating this expanded reach. Given the diverse methods and forms employed by intermediation in non-traditional societies, it is worthwhile to explore the various forms and centers that have emerged in these modern contexts.

Intermediation and matchmaking, like other social phenomena, undergo constant evolution. As human social life and interpersonal communication expand and diversify across various levels, new forms and patterns of marriage emerge. Traditional patterns gradually lose their effectiveness and efficiency, making way for newer patterns that align with evolving societal needs. It can be anticipated that in the future, existing methods and patterns of intermediation and spouse selection will be replaced by new approaches. What remains crucial for the religious community is to prioritize the incorporation of sublime religious values in the development of matchmaking methods and intermediation processes, with the ultimate objective of facilitating connections

between individuals for the purpose of marriage.

Some existing methods of spouse selection and intermediation solely focus on facilitating communication and laying the groundwork for the formation of a marital bond between a man and a woman, without adequately considering the spiritual, moral, humane, and religious dimensions. From a religious standpoint, such approaches not only fail to address the issue of marriage effectively, but they can also result in harmful moral and social consequences for society. In a religiously inclined society, behavioral patterns are guided by religious teachings. Therefore, if a behavioral pattern, such as the approach to intermediation in marriage and matchmaking, contradicts religious teachings, it should not be allowed to propagate.

Conversely, there should be continual efforts to update and refine the patterns inspired by religious teachings, utilizing the available modern resources in contemporary societies. These updated patterns can serve as viable and efficient alternatives alongside traditional methods in these modern contexts. Given the significant changes in the form and structure of social life, the traditional pattern has become inadequate, as it fails to address the diverse and expansive realms of social interaction. Conversely, the absence of a proper intermediation mechanism in marriage can complicate the process for individuals seeking to marry. This, in turn, can contribute to the exacerbation of social corruption and the proliferation of illicit and unhealthy sexual relationships within the community, further deteriorating the situation.

Hence, recognizing the significance of "marriage intermediation" and adapting its practices to uphold social cohesion and preserve the family system rooted in religious values and norms becomes crucial and foundational. Without a proper framework for establishing a lawful bond between individuals, we are bound to witness a surge in illicit relationships. The intertwined nature of our social lives has made interactions between men and women increasingly effortless, thereby expanding the breadth of their engagements day by day. Consequently, it is imperative to enhance and modernize the intermediation mechanism, while simultaneously rectifying misconceptions, values, and norms surrounding marriage. This multifaceted approach serves as the most effective means to

reduce and prevent illicit sexual relationships, as well as safeguard the integrity and stability of the institution of family.

4. Challenges of Cyberspace in Presenting Inappropriate Patterns

An essential message that must be communicated to the online dating community is to refrain from viewing matchmaking apps and websites as mere shopping platforms, where one can easily choose and obtain an ideal partner with specific desired traits. It is crucial to avoid approaching these platforms with the expectation that personal criteria should be rigidly met, as if one can demand any feature without any compromises. Occasionally, these criteria may be misguided or overly stringent, yet users eagerly anticipate the introduction of numerous options by the applications, even if their preferred choice may be potentially mistaken.

Users should take the initiative to assess whether their criteria align with the general consensus among marriage counselors. It is crucial to consider which criteria are more worthy of emphasis. This evaluation should consider how effectively the program incorporates protocols and algorithms that accurately capture and present human characteristics, in line with expert opinions and reflecting the realities of traditional society.

Furthermore, it is important for users to understand that these programs simply present them with potential options, without implying that the application itself confirms the suitability of a match for marriage. Users in the online realm should be mindful of seeking traditional qualities within these options, disregarding the features offered by the online platform. Instead, they should independently determine whether the individuals in question align with their own goals and intentions.

Even if the most sophisticated computer programs are meticulously designed and extensive personality tests are conducted, suggesting that case A1 in boys and case B2 in girls are a perfect match for forming a family, it is still an incorrect approach. Emotional and intellectual evaluations of both individuals should be prioritized, allowing each party to make their own personal decision rather than relying solely on artificial intelligence. Additionally, it is crucial to consider verifying the information provided by users through the National Organization for Civil Registration. This measure ensures that fraudulent

activities are prevented, and individuals who are already married, for instance, do not exploit the platform for dating purposes.

The anonymity and invisibility of users in internet relationships have significant moral and psychological implications, as individuals can hide their true identities in cyberspace and freely express themselves without fear of identification or blackmail. This characteristic diminishes users' self-restraint against engaging in immoral and anti-social behaviors. The implementation of punishments at the community level serves as a deterrent among society, particularly for criminals and dangerous individuals. However, this deterrent effect has been weakened due to the proliferation of crimes and offenses, especially those of a sexual nature, committed in the online realm. If this erosion of societal restraint continues, it may have a profound impact on crime rates and people's overall sense of self-control.

4.1. Drawbacks of Cyber-Mediated Marriage

In the realm of spouse selection, the virtual space is generally deemed an unsuitable environment due to the following reasons.

4.1.1. Overlooking Undesirable Qualities of the Other Party

This lack of awareness leads to individuals in marriages neglecting to consider the rights and wrongs of their partners, as well as the upbringing of future generations. Uninformed individuals, driven solely by their whims, desires, and lust, may unknowingly select an unsuitable spouse and subsequently find themselves entangled in the troubles that follow, ultimately contributing to the corruption of society's future. When embarking on the journey of marriage, it is essential for a man to contemplate the impact his chosen spouse will have on the life of their future child, just as a woman should carefully consider the qualities of a husband who will shape and nurture their child's life. This is why Islam regards a poor wife as being lower in value than soil itself. Imam al-Şādiq (a) states, "With regards to an unsuitable wife, her worth does not surpass that of soil; soil is superior to her" (Majlisī 1379 Sh, 100:233).

4.1.2. Choosing a Non-religious Spouse

The absence of religious beliefs among men and women is identified as a significant factor contributing to cyber-mediated

marriages. Regrettably, in the majority of cases where relationships begin online and culminate in marriage, both parties involved often lack a strong commitment to religious principles. It is worth considering how successful a marriage between individuals who disregard each other's religious values can truly be. One commendable tradition during the marriage ceremony is the inclusion of the Quran on the wedding table. This symbolizes the couple's commitment to align their actions with the teachings of the Quran and make it the guiding principle in their shared life. However, if their religious convictions are weak or deficient, the well-being of the family and the spiritual upbringing of their children become vulnerable. When the values, attitudes, and beliefs of prospective spouses are centered around indulgence, materialism, and hedonism, it is undeniable that their relationship will lack spiritual depth.

According to religious perspectives, it is not permissible to marry individuals of any belief indiscriminately. In Islam, it is considered unlawful for a Muslim to enter into a permanent marriage with a member of the People of the Book, as well as marrying a polytheist, either on a permanent or temporary basis. This is because a polytheistic or unbelieving woman is not regarded as an equal match (*kufw*) for a believer. The Quran states: "And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe, and certainly a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe, and certainly, a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you" (Quran 2:221).

If an individual's sole criteria for choosing a partner is based on superficial qualities such as physical attractiveness, wealth, or material possessions, while disregarding religious considerations, they are unlikely to experience a fulfilling and loving life, nor raise obedient children. A life devoid of spirituality tends to lack purpose and significance.

Having shared beliefs within marital relationships plays a crucial role in giving life meaning, fulfilling responsibilities, and avoiding prohibitions (Heidari 2015, 20-33). Virtual spaces, on the other hand, are unable to adequately provide suitable options for individuals in this regard.

4.1.3. Disregard to Moral Compatibility

One of the challenges faced in relationships is the absence of moral compatibility between couples. When a boy and a girl do not share similar religious beliefs, lifestyle choices, or accepted family values, such as one partner adhering to practices like hijab, prayer, and sharia rules while the other does not, or when one partner is content while the other is financially irresponsible, a future together becomes uncertain. In the virtual space, where emphasis is often placed on external factors, there is a lack of understanding regarding the moral values of individuals. The absence of moral compatibility not only disrupts the harmony within the family but also hinders the spiritual and moral development of children.

4.1.4. Intellectual and Cultural Inequality

It is important for individuals who choose to enter into marriage to be intellectually and culturally compatible, as the presence of such inequality can give rise to significant issues in their lives. Cultural heterogeneity serves as an indicator that distinguishes couples from one another, considering that marriage is a union established between two individuals. The greater the similarity in mindset and values between a couple, the stronger their bond will be, whereas the fewer shared values they hold, the weaker their bond becomes. In accordance with the principles of marital psychology, it is advisable to prioritize homogeneity, as a lack of ideological and cultural equality between husband and wife can result in conflicts and disagreements (Heidari 2015, 75), preventing the couple from attaining their marital goals.

When men and women are not intellectually and culturally equal, they often face disagreements on various matters, such as attending religious ceremonies or events where religious norms are violated, interactions with non-mahrams, compromising on certain matters, and distinguishing between halal and haram earnings. Such disagreements or similar conflicts can give rise to differences and conflicts between couples. Consequently, the secure and stable life of the husband and wife, including the spiritual and moral upbringing of their child, may suffer. With cultural disparities, each individual tends to raise the child according to their own beliefs and values. When there are divergent approaches, the realization of a

cohesive spiritual and moral upbringing becomes challenging, akin to constructing a building where one engineer wants to follow correct architectural principles to create a strong structure, while the other engineer aims to build it according to personal preferences. Therefore, intellectual and cultural compatibility between men and women can significantly reduce obstacles when it comes to raising children. The negative impact of intellectual and cultural inequality becomes more evident when couples completely reject each other's beliefs. As Imam al-Şādiq (a) states, "A knowledgeable woman should be with a knowledgeable man and not with anyone else."

4.1.5. Blind Love

In certain situations, young individuals may develop romantic feelings for one another based on superficial attractions, without truly knowing each other. However, if a marriage is founded solely on fleeting emotions and shallow grounds, it is unlikely to endure. Momentary romantic feelings may bring temporary joy, but a marriage built solely on such sentiments is destined to face challenges. Without a foundation rooted in prudence and rationality, the couple will struggle to provide successful spiritual education for their child.

During the course of marriage and throughout their lives, it is essential for couples to approach their decisions with rationality and prioritize the development of their intellectual capacities. By employing rational methods and adopting reasonable approaches, they can experience reduced mental stress and achieve a sense of tranquility (Imani 2002, 137). Marriages that solely rely on virtual acquaintances often face difficulties since they fail to consider the religious perspective or seek the guidance of experienced individuals. Such negligence can lead to detrimental consequences. How can one be certain that similar proposals were not made to others before? Sometimes, individuals spend hours seeking opinions on their clothing choices, while research and understanding about a prospective lifelong partner, who will not only impact their own lives but also contribute to the future generation, are of far greater significance and necessity.

4.1.6. Avarice

Some individuals, unfortunately, base their assessment of

others solely on their wealth, valuing a person's character based on their financial status. The virtual space, which often showcases material luxuries, can be misleading when it comes to selecting a life partner. Many people are eager to marry someone who is wealthy, even though wealth itself is unstable and true happiness cannot be attained solely through material possessions. In Islam, it is not permissible for a Muslim to marry their daughter to someone solely because of their wealth, even if it may be seen as an advantage. There are instances where parents, upon finding a financially well-off bride or groom, may attempt to force their child into a marriage against their will (Amini 2011, 121). If a wife is solely infatuated with jewelry and material possessions, she cannot fulfill the role of a good life partner who provides mental comfort for her husband and children. Therefore, if wealth and affluence become the primary motivation for selecting a spouse, rather than seeking the satisfaction of Allah and prioritizing the spiritual and moral education of the child, religious sources indicate that such a marriage will not be successful. As the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his family, said: "He who marries a woman for her wealth, Allah will leave him only with that; and he who marries a woman (only) for her beauty, he will see in her what he does not like; but he who marries a woman for her religion, Allah will gather those merits for him" (Hurr al-^ʿĀmilī, n.d., 14:31).

4.1.7. Marrying a Woman for Her Beauty

Undoubtedly, some individuals utilize the virtual space as a platform to showcase their physical attractiveness, and it is not uncommon for people to develop infatuations with individuals they encounter in this virtual realm alone. While it is natural for humans to be drawn to beauty and possess inherent inclinations and desires, solely marrying a woman based on her physical appearance will ultimately lead to relationship discord (Behpajoooh 2009, 21-22). Consequently, beauty should not be the primary objective, to the extent that it overshadows the qualities of faith, chastity, and decency in a wife. A devout and virtuous wife holds greater worth than a beautiful one. When faced with the choice between a physically attractive yet irreligious wife and a religious but less aesthetically pleasing wife, it is preferable to select the wife who possesses religious devotion.

Excessive emphasis on physical beauty when choosing a wife can lead to regret, as it should not surpass the usual limits. Allah, the Glorified, has established a balanced measure for each desire. Going to extremes and indulging in excessive behavior hinders the attainment of perfection. The pursuit of beauty should not overshadow the importance of other qualities in a wife. The Messenger of Allah (s) wisely stated, "Whoever marries a woman solely for her beauty, without considering her faith, will not find the satisfaction he desires. And whoever marries a woman solely for her wealth, Allah will leave him with only that wealth. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to seek a wife who is devout" (Hurr al-'Āmilī, n.d., 14: 31).

4.2. Islamic Solutions

Technological advancements have had a profound impact on social values and norms. One of the significant challenges faced by cultures is addressing this phenomenon. The advent of the Internet, accompanied by Western values, has presented new challenges in various countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, where certain aspects of this phenomenon clash with the prevailing culture. Consequently, it can be asserted that the Internet can give rise to numerous moral dilemmas for families, as it brings about substantial changes in the value system. Islam offers solutions that, if sought and implemented, can help mitigate the challenges posed by the virtual space. The following are the enumerated and explained solutions provided by Islam.

4.2.1. Encouraging Piety

In today's world, establishing secretive friendships with individuals of the opposite sex has become remarkably accessible. It is particularly convenient for those who are physically separated from their families due to reasons such as work or education, to engage in cohabiting relationships without the commitment of marriage. Given the ease with which individuals can form friendships with the opposite sex, it is crucial to identify the internal factors that can serve as deterrents, preventing individuals from embarking on relationships that may eventually lead to illicit sexual activities.

Undoubtedly, the strength and depth of an individual's religious

devotion, chastity, and piety play a significant role in reducing the likelihood of succumbing to wicked temptations. This is because a person's actions and behavior are largely shaped by their beliefs and worldview. The term "taqwā" is derived from "wiqāya," which means protection (Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1404 AH, 503). Piety, in this context, refers to safeguarding one's soul from the contamination of sin and the things it fears (ibid. 503). Legally speaking, piety entails protecting oneself from sinful acts and actions that are unworthy. From a religious standpoint, divine piety is an educational objective that every individual should strive for, ensuring that their actions, behavior, and speech are influenced by it (Faghihi 1997, 22).

Piety, as a behavioral-ethical principle, holds significant importance and is highly recommended in the Holy Quran. This principle finds particular relevance in the context of managing and controlling one's sexual instincts, as it is considered a crucial aspect of behavioral conduct. This is exemplified by the words of Prophet Lot to his people: "And his people came hastening to him, and before [this] they had been doing evil deeds. He said, 'O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?'" (Quran 11: 78).

Prior to the arrival of the angels, the people of Lot were immersed in a continuous cycle of sin. They brazenly engaged in various forms of immorality, including prostitution, driven by their addictive tendencies. Their actions were not restrained by modesty or repulsion towards the wickedness they indulged in. Preaching and condemnation failed to have any effect on them, as the power of habit had made every repugnant act appear desirable and even acceptable. When Prophet Lot (a) witnessed the people's unified plot against his guests and realized that mere words or forceful admonishment would not dissuade them from their impending evil, he resolved to prevent them from committing this sinful act. He decided to offer them a lawful and religiously legitimate alternative, one that did not involve sin: marriage. In doing so, he presented his daughters to them and emphasized the virtue of marriage, stating, "O my people, these (girls) are my daughters; they are purer for you" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1374 Sh, 10: 505).

While the ultimate aim of both paths is to fulfill the sexual instinct,

piety guides individuals to choose the lawful and wholesome means to satisfy this powerful need. Piety grants us the discernment to distinguish between right and wrong, righteousness and corruption, guidance and misguidance, and the straight path from treacherous pitfalls. Furthermore, piety influences a person's past and history in such a way that the Merciful God pardons their previous sins, preventing them from having a negative impact on the pious individual's future life (Modarresi 1998, 42). A hadith states, "For the one who possesses desires and inclinations but refrains from indulging in them out of fear of Allah, the Almighty and Glorious, Paradise will be made forbidden for the Fire, and protection will be granted against the Great Fear. Allah will fulfill what He has promised in His Book, where He, the Exalted, says, 'He who fears standing before his Lord will have two gardens'" (Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī 1413 AH, 4: 14).

Another hadith emphasizes the importance of restraining and controlling one's lustful desires: "Subdue your desires before they become strong, for if they overpower you, they will take control and you will be unable to resist them" (Tamīmī al-Āmidī, 1366 Sh, 241).

4.2.2. Refusal to Exhibit One's Adornments

To uphold the well-being of society and prevent the proliferation of sins and corruption, Islam prescribes certain codes of conduct for women, particularly when they venture outside their homes and participate in mixed gatherings. These codes of conduct aim to minimize sexual provocations within society, foster healthy social relationships, and provide guidelines for maintaining appropriate boundaries in sexual relations that may eventually lead to marriage. Two verses in the Holy Qur'an explicitly prohibit women from engaging in a conspicuous display of their adornments, known as "tabarruj." These verses are verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab and verse 60 of Surah An-Nur. The term "tabarruj" derives from the root "baraja," which, according to Ibn Fāris, signifies revealing, showing, and displaying one's finery (Ibn al-Fāris 1404 AH, 1: 238).

The term "Tabarruj" mentioned in verse 33 of Surah Al-Ahzab has been understood to refer to the explicit and ostentatious display of something with the intention of attracting attention. The

display of any object or action should be evaluated based on its inherent nature. Therefore, any movement or behavior by a woman that involves deliberately shaking her body or standing in a way that draws the attention of non-mahram individuals, or is deemed to reveal her adornments in a manner that entices them, would be considered *tabarruj*. Such behavior is prohibited according to the verse in question (Muṣṭafawī 1360 Sh, 1:242).

Tabarruj, as defined in dictionaries, refers to a woman's manner of dress or behavior that is excessive and aimed at attracting attention when she ventures out of her home. It involves intentionally displaying beauty and charm in the presence of others. The term "jāhiliyya" denotes a period of "ignorance" or "barbarism" and carries a negative connotation among Muslims, representing a comparison between the teachings and practices of Islam and the pre-Islamic life and culture in Arabia (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1374 Sh, 16: 462). In this context, *tabarruj* signifies the time when women experienced an unfortunate state and lacked individual and social rights. It was an era characterized by self-adornment, exhibitionism, and the public flaunting of ornaments and sexual allurements in social gatherings (Heidari 2016, 84).

Tabarruj, in its various forms, can serve as a source of stimulation for individuals who are unable to fulfill their sexual needs in a lawful manner. By reducing or eliminating these stimuli, it becomes possible to keep these desires within their normal bounds and prevent them from escalating. It is evident that adhering to hijab, Islamic modest clothing, and making adjustments to one's clothing style are among the measures that can contribute to diminishing sexual provocation and misconduct.

In Surah An-Nur of the Quran, women are instructed to maintain modesty and refrain from displaying their adornments. The verse states: "Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and not display their adornments except for what is apparent, and to draw their veils over their chests and not reveal their adornments."

According to the interpretation of 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, this verse implies that women should not gaze at anything that is impermissible for men to look at, and they are obligated to cover their private parts from strangers, regardless of their gender. The term "ibdā'" in this context means display. The

word "zīnat" (adornment) refers to the parts of a woman's body that she embellishes, as displaying and revealing ornaments like earrings and bracelets are not inherently prohibited. Therefore, the prohibition of displaying adornments pertains to their location rather than the ornaments themselves. God, the Almighty, has exempted from this prohibition what is apparent, including the face, the palms of the hands, and the feet (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1374 Sh, 15:156).

4.2.3. Observing Modesty and Decency

One effective approach to prevent sexual misconduct and deviations is by cultivating and strengthening modesty. Embracing modesty not only enhances sexual purity in individuals, but it also serves as a deterrent against various forms of social deviations. The stronger one's sense of modesty, the more powerful the restraining influence becomes (Taghipour 2016, 3). Hayā', which encompasses concepts such as bashfulness, decency, modesty, and shyness, refers to the natural inclination or inherent fear of engaging in unseemly actions (Ghorashi Bonabi 1412 AH, 2: 215). According to a hadith, it is mentioned that Hayā' (modesty) is a part of faith (Kulaynī 1407 AH, 3: 274). Just as faith prevents an individual from committing sins, modesty also safeguards them from engaging in forbidden acts and behaviors.

The term "iffa" (chastity) carries various meanings. In its literal sense, iffa denotes a state of the soul where one has the ability to overcome lust and desires. Essentially, it involves finding contentment with less (Rāghīb Iṣfahānī 1404 AH, 393). In other words, chastity refers to the state or practice of controlling one's sexual desires and sensual impulses through the eyes, guided by faith and certainty. The eyes serve as the primary gateway through which a person perceives and encounters sin. Failing to control one's gaze can lead to personal downfall and humiliation. Allah, as the Creator of humanity, possesses complete knowledge of all human inclinations. Allah desires what is ultimately best for mankind (Rabiee Nataj and Ruhollahzadeh 2010, 154). Therefore, the practice of maintaining chastity of the eyes is recommended to prevent an individual from engaging in impermissible gazes.

Chastity is widely recognized as one of the fundamental virtues, and its definition is sometimes understood by examining its opposite quality (Taghipour 2016, 3). Chastity should not be misconstrued as complete abstinence, but rather as the practice of moderating natural desires, such as the sexual urge. Psychologists suggest that this desire stems from the instinct to survive and propagate. Fulfilling these desires within certain limits is deemed necessary for human beings, and both Shari'a (Islamic law) and reason acknowledge this aspect (Hejazi 2017, 54). Hence, in many cases, chastity is described as the state of refraining from any sexual activities considered immoral (Makarem Shirazi 1372 Sh, 2: 308).

The Holy Quran emphasizes the significance of this precautionary measure and advises both men and women who are unable to marry to maintain chastity. It states, "And let those who find not the means for marriage keep themselves chaste, until Allah enriches them of His bounty" (Quran 24: 33).

This serves as a divine test to gauge an individual's strength of chastity and piety when they face the challenge of being deprived of the rightful and religious means to fulfill their sexual needs. The significance of chastity is such that God mentions it following prayer and zakat (Quran 23: 2 & 4), placing it above fulfilling pledges (Quran 23: 8). When describing the qualities of believers, God succinctly and meaningfully includes chastity and refraining from sexual sins: "And they who guard their private parts [from illegal sexual acts]" (Quran 23: 5).

Conclusion

The institution of marriage, serving as the primary foundation for legitimate reproduction and family formation, has witnessed significant transformations in the modern era. Alongside these changes, there have been shifts in the patterns of spouse selection. This article aims to explore various spouse selection patterns, focusing on the appropriate Islamic perspective while addressing the challenges posed by the virtual realm in presenting inappropriate patterns. Challenges such as a lack of knowledge about the negative qualities of potential partners, selecting a non-religious spouse, disregarding moral values, intellectual and cultural disparities, fostering infatuation, and prioritizing physical attractiveness in a potential life partner are prevalent in cyber-mediated spouse selection. Consequently, by highlighting the solutions offered by Islam to address these challenges, we discuss key principles that, if followed, can minimize the risks associated with the virtual space.

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