A Study of Online Impression Formation, Mate Preferences and Courtship Scripts among Saudi Users of Matrimonial Websites

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

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2016

Abstract

While traditional Saudi Arabian courtship is rigidly structured according to a set of Islamic codes of conduct, over the past decade, Saudis have increasingly turned to unconventional means of finding and courting a potential spouse: matrimonial websites. Given that little research has been done on this emerging form of courtship, which differs substantially from Western-style online dating, this research examines the impressions Saudi users intended to form when constructing their profiles on matrimonial websites, the characteristics these users seek in their potential spouses, and the acceptable Saudi script for courtships initiated on matrimonial websites. It unites hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory, and script theory into a theoretical framework. The research consisted of three sequential phases, starting with a quantitative questionnaire (N = 302), followed by quantitative content analysis of the website profiles (N = 111), and ending with a qualitative semi-structured interview phase (N = 36). The results of the research contribute to the debate in the literature on Computer Mediated Communication regarding whether online settings provide rich information about other users, as they show that online interactions can provide more information about the opposite sex for users who belong to gender-segregated societies than they can get through their offline lives. The results also reveal that there are similarities and differences between Buss and Schmitt's (1993) proposed strategic mate preferences and Saudis' preferences. Such findings contribute to the theories on mate preferences in general and sexual strategies theory in particular by advancing the understanding of mate preferences in an Islamic context. The results also provided an in-depth description of the script Saudi users follow in trying to find a potential spouse through matrimonial websites. The findings also contribute to the online dating literature by showing the similarities and differences between conservative, Islamic Saudi users and Western users in using websites to search for a potential mate. Although these Saudi users deviate from traditional methods of finding a potential spouse, the findings of this research reveal that they do not completely challenge their traditions. The research shows the power of both social and religious norms in affecting these users' behaviours and decisions when using matrimonial websites.

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Key Terms

Term	Definition
Online dating sites	Dating sites focus on "dating or enabling two persons to meet and engage in mutually agreed upon social activities" (Al-Saggaff 2013: 176). "Dating" term has been used in the current study when talking about sites that target non-Muslim users.
Matrimonial sites	Matrimonial sites focus on "bringing together two people who have a serious intention of getting married" (Al-Saggaff 2013: 176). This term has been used in the current study when talking about sites that target Muslim users.
Mating	Mating term has been used to refer to both Muslim and non-Muslim sites and users.
Tribe of origin	Descent root of Saudi people.
Qabily	Group of people who originally referred to as well-known Arabian tribes that lived in the Arabian peninsula for hundreds of years. These tribes vary in their positions and class based on historical issues and events. However, in this research "Qabily" refers to overall meaning of this type of origin without differentiation between sub classes.
Hadari	Group of people who settled in the urban parts of Arabian peninsula for different purposes and they are not from Arabian tribes.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Research

Saudi Arabian culture is considered the most conservative in the Islamic world; cultural norms and religious values are intertwined to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish between them (Al-Lily, 2011). Following their religious beliefs regarding the importance of protecting people from seduction, gender segregation is maintained in all aspects of Saudis' daily lives and is considered one of the pillars of Saudi society. Such segregation between genders is also in line with Arabic norms that tend to equate family honour with the honour of men's sisters and daughters. Therefore, Saudi society restricts interacting directly offline and developing a relationship with unrelated members of the opposite sex. While considered a normal practice in Western societies, having a friendship or a romantic relationship with the opposite sex is highly unacceptable in this conservative society. The only acceptable form of relationship between unrelated sexes in Saudi Arabia is marriage. This may explain why most marriages in Saudi Arabia are arranged marriages (Al-Romi and Al-Saeg, 2004), and why mate selection is considered a family and a community affair between two families rather than between partners (Hamon and Ingoldsby, 2003).

With advances in online connectivity, virtual platforms are starting to offer innovative spaces of social interaction that facilitate establishing and developing interpersonal relationships, thereby increasing and enhancing social interaction worldwide (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). They have made cross-gender communication between unrelated people possible in gender-segregated societies such as Saudi Arabia (Madini, 2012). These online settings include forums, chat rooms, social media platforms, and Saudi matrimonial websites (Al-Saggaf & Weckert, 2004). Among these websites, matrimonial websites have become increasingly attractive to Saudis, as they assist them in finding potential spouses in an unconventional way (Al-Saggaff, 2013).

Through these matrimonial websites, Saudis have been enabled, perhaps for the first time, to access thousands of profiles of potential spouses. This process is significantly different from the traditional courtship practice, in which the first impression of a potential

spouse is normally formed through the parents' or a matchmaker's description of the candidate's personality and physical attributes (Al-Khateeb, 2008; Al-Anzi, 2009). The first direct interaction in the traditional courtship process also takes place at a relatively later stage, in the presence of the female's guardian, when the couple and their families decide whether or not the marriage is suitable. However, constructing their own online profiles in these matrimonial websites enables Saudis to control the impressions they wish to leave on a future spouse and to be selective regarding the attributes they wish to reveal. According to Walther (1996), due to its asynchronicity, this online setting allows users to be quite strategic in lessening the potential partner's access to undesirable attributes because they can form, manage, and strategically modify their self-presentation more consciously than in initial face-to-face meetings.

In sexual strategies theory, Buss and Schmitt (1993) argue that, in long-term mating relationships, men seek attractive physical features and paternity confidence in their future wives, whereas women look for men's ability to provide material resources. While the traditional offline Saudi courtship script starts with a male informing his female relatives or a matchmaker about his mate preferences in a future wife, and the female only has the choice to accept or reject the potential husband (Al-Khateeb, 2008), this script has been altered through the usage of matrimonial websites. These websites offer both Saudi men and women the opportunity to decide and list their mate preferences for their future spouses by themselves.

As there are specific guidelines in the traditional Saudi courtship script for individuals who want to marry according to Islamic culture, which include common codes of conduct about etiquette and communication (Kamali, 2008), Muslim matrimonial websites have tried to develop terms and conditions in line with them. Given the scarcity in the literature regarding Muslim matrimonial websites and the courtship script initiated through them in general (Zwick and Chelariu, 2006; Ahmed, 2013; Al-Saggaff, 2013) and their popularity among Saudis in particular, this research aims to investigate the impressions Saudi users intend to create when constructing their profiles on matrimonial websites, the users' preferences in potential spouses, and the acceptable Saudi script for courtships initiated on matrimonial websites. Investigating these issues provides an in-depth understanding of this relatively new form of Saudi courtship process.

1.2. Justification for the Research

Scholars in the field of computer-mediated communication have based their arguments regarding online relationship development and impression formation on the lack of information and social cues in online settings in comparison with face-to-face settings. For instance, cues-filtered-out perspective theorists argue that computer-mediated communication reduces social context cues and nonverbal cues, the absence of which is said to deter interpersonal formation of impressions and relationship development. From this perspective, computer-mediated communication would be anticipated to be less socially-oriented and more impersonal in comparison with offline settings (Short, Williams, and Christie, 1976; Sproull and Kiesler, 1986).

When comparing impression formation in offline and online settings among conservative Saudi Muslims, on the other hand, it can be said that the offline setting is the one that lacks social and nonverbal cues between the sexes. Due to the *hijab*, Saudi females are obliged to cover their whole body, and the majority of Saudi females cover their faces as well. Further, unrelated sexes have limited acceptable offline interaction with each other. Thus, the current research argues that an online setting among Saudis could carry more information than face-to-face meetings, as an online environment would enable users to experience a more intensive interaction than in face-to-face meetings. Therefore, utilising Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal theory, which theorises that computer-mediated communication enables individuals to develop more intimate relationships and detailed impressions in comparison with offline communication, could help in understanding Saudis' interaction on matrimonial websites.

Moreover, studies of the mate preferences in online dating websites have used the lens of sexual strategies theory proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993), which is considered one of the major theories of relationships, to illustrate men's and women's preferred characteristics in potential mates. Some of these studies have revealed that men favoured young and good-looking women with potential parenting skills and that women sought males with high socioeconomic status (e.g. Schmitt, Shackelford, Duntley, Tooke, and Buss, 2001; Dawson and McIntosh, 2006; Hitsch, Hortaçsu, and Ariely, 2010; Gallant, Loriann, Fisher, and Cox, 2011). Nevertheless, these studies have neglected the role that both conservative culture and religion may play in influencing the preferences men and women seek in a potential spouse.

Gladue (1989) argues that considering the role of religion in mate preferences may reveal a more robust picture of mate selection. The role of religion may also affect individuals' strategy in constructing their own online matrimonial profiles. Therefore, the current research contributes to the literature by examining online mating preferences among Saudis, who belong to an Islamic religion and an Arabic conservative culture.

Although a few studies have elucidated the role of Saudi culture and Islamic religion in the offline script of the traditional Saudi courtship (e.g. Al-Romi and Al-Saeg, 2004; Al-Khateeb, 2008; Al-Anzi, 2009), these results should be taken with caution when investigating the courtship script initiated on matrimonial websites. Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, and Felt (2008) argue that when it comes to online dating, cultural and interpersonal scripts are significantly different from the traditional courtship script. In other words, the script for traditional courting is no longer accurate in an online environment. Therefore, the current research adds to the literature by utilising script theory proposed by Simon and Gagnon (1986) to investigate the socially acceptable script for Saudis' courtships initiated in matrimonial websites and to reveal the extent to which it matches or diverges from the traditional courtship script.

1.3. Research Objectives

The current research aims to investigate Saudis' usage of matrimonial websites to find potential spouses. In particular, the objectives of this research are threefold:

- Objective 1: To investigate the impressions Saudi users intend to form when constructing their profiles on matrimonial websites.
- Objective 2: To determine the preferences Saudi users seek in their potential spouses.
- Objective 3: To investigate the acceptable courtship script for Saudis that is initiated through matrimonial websites.

1.4. Research Questions and hypotheses

The research questions have been classified into three groups based on the research objectives and one additional group for general questions. The general questions group is regarding demographic characteristics of matrimonial website users and their usage. It assists

in examining the research hypotheses. Therefore, the current research aims to answer and examine the following questions and hypotheses:

1.4.1. General Questions and hypotheses

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites?

2. How do Saudis use matrimonial websites?

3. Do Saudi users differ in their usage of matrimonial websites according to their gender?

4. What are the outcomes of using matrimonial websites by Saudi users?

5. Do Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender?

6. To what extent does the information obtained from the content analysis phase validate the collected information from the questionnaire phase?

H1: Saudi users differ in their usage of matrimonial websites according to their gender.

H2: Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender.

1.4.2. Questions and hypotheses regarding Impression Formation

7. To what extent are Saudi users as senders selective in their self-presentation on matrimonial websites?

8. Do Saudi users differ in their selective self-presentation as senders on matrimonial websites according to their demographic variables?

9. What are the factors that influence the perception of Saudi users of matrimonial websites as receivers regarding their impression?

10. Does the influence of the receivers' factors differ according to their demographic variables?

11. What is the perception of Saudi users towards the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse?

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12. Do Saudi users differ in their perception of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse according to their gender?

H3: Saudi users differ by their demographic variables in their selective self-presentation of their positive and negative attributes on matrimonial websites.

H4: Due to the lack of social cues, the receiver utilises several strategies to fill in the blanks with regard to missing information about the sender.

H5: The influence of the receivers' factors differs according to their demographic variables.

H6: Saudi users differ by gender in their perceptions of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse.

1.4.3. Questions and hypotheses regarding Mate Preferences of Saudi Users

13. Do Saudi users of matrimonial websites utilize different strategies of mate preferences from the strategies proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993) to find a spouse?

14. Do Saudi male users of matrimonial websites differ in their strategies of mate preferences according to their demographic variables?

15. Do Saudi female users of matrimonial websites differ in their strategies of mate preferences according to their demographic variables?

H7: Saudi matrimonial websites users have different mate preferences from those described by Buss and Schmitt (1993)

H8: Saudi male users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables.

H9: Saudi female users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables.

1.4.4. Questions regarding the Courtship Script of Saudi Matrimonial Websites Users

16. What is the script Saudi users follow in trying to find a potential spouse through matrimonial websites?

1.5 Thesis Outline

Since the scope of this research falls within the online dating research, this thesis is divided into two parts: the theoretical part and the empirical part. Following the introduction chapter, the theoretical part of the thesis starts with reviewing the cultural and social specificity of Saudi Arabia regarding the relationship between men and women and the traditional courtship in Saudi society. The emergence of online dating within Western and East Asian context and the position of Islamic online matrimonial websites within this literature is then presented in the third chapter of the thesis. As there is a scarcity in the academic literature regarding the Islamic matchmaking phenomena, a following chapter reviews the relevant Western theories that attempt to explain the nature of mate preferences, impression formation and the courtship script. Following this broader review, a separate chapter provides a robust rationale for the selection of the core theories that underpin this research. The empirical part of the thesis consists of three chapters and aims to present the analysis and discussion of the data collected to answer the research questions. It starts with providing an overall review of the methodological approach taken to the current research. The following two chapters present the results and discussions of the data collected through the phases of the research. The thesis ends with a conclusion chapter.

In particular, this thesis consists of nine chapters, as the following:

The first chapter is the Introduction chapter. It presents the rational of this research, its objectives and research questions. It ends with an outline of the thesis.

Chapter Two examines the cultural specificity of interpersonal relationships, gender roles and matrimonial arrangements in Saudi Arabia. Challenges to traditional practices and expectations in relation to male-female relationships, female social status and factors that may be at play are also presented in this chapter. It forms a backdrop to the research reported in this thesis about the distinctive role played in this context by the Internet and online matrimonial websites.

Chapter Three examines online dating literature from around the world, providing a critique as well as description of that work. It provides an overview of the courtship methods used before the invention of online dating technology. It also reviews a description of dating website services, the differences between dating websites and matrimonial websites, the

attitudes toward using these websites, the types of their users, and the expected outcomes of using these websites. It takes into consideration the cultural specificity of this work as well as how well theoretically grounded it is.

Chapter Four provides a review of the theories relevant to the understanding of online dating. Dating as a concept and as an activity has a specific history and takes a specific form. It traditionally occurred in the offline world although there were mediated aspects to it with daters advertising themselves in newspapers and magazines and on other available platforms. There are theories that try to explain the dating process and how relationships form between humans. There are associated theories of impression formation which are not exclusive to the dating context but are nonetheless relevant to it. There is then the migration of these various theories from the offline into the online world. Chapter four reviews all this theoretical evidence through focusing on two key elements. The first is the efficacy with which offline theories can explain behaviour in the online world and the importance of new developments in the explanation of interpersonal relationships and communications in the online world. The second is the cultural specificity of specific theories and any research that has been produced to test them.

Following this review, Chapter Five presents the theories that are most central to this research. It provides a rationale for the selection of core theories that underpins the research. Thus, it outlines three main theories that underpin the theoretical framework of the research: sexual strategies theory, hyperpersonal theory, and script theory.

Chapter Six provides an overall review of the approach taken to the current research. It reviews the research paradigm and design as well as the research questions, the three research phases, methods, samples, data collection procedures, and analysis. It ends with an overview of the ethical considerations of the research.

Chapter Seven answers the research questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites, their usage of matrimonial websites, the impression they formed on these websites, the mate preference strategies they followed to search for a potential spouse, and the outcomes of such usage. The last section compares the matrimonial website members' responses in the quantitative questionnaire phase with content analysis phase of their profiles on the website.

Chapter Eight provides an in-depth description of the actions and stages Saudi marriage seekers follow when looking for spouses through matrimonial websites. Based on the collected data from the interview phase, this chapter illustrates the stages of the Saudi courtship process initiated online. It illustrates in details the model of the Saudi courtship process initiated online.

Chapter Nine is the conclusion chapter. It aims to provide a summary of the main findings and examines them against the objectives of the current research. It also presents the research's primary contribution to literature and practice, its limitations and recommendations for future research, and some concluding remarks.

Chapter Two
Saudi Culture and the Courtship Script

2.1. Introduction

As the main aim of the current research is to investigate Saudis' usage of matrimonial websites to find potential spouses, this chapter forms a backdrop to the research reported in this thesis about the distinctive features that impact how relationships which lead to marriage are established between men and women in Saudi Arabia. It seeks to shed light on the social norms of Saudi Arabia and the nature of its traditions and religious practices in order to provide a better understanding of how Saudis, belonging to one of the conservative cultures, are able to develop their relationships that lead to marriage utilising such relatively new technology.

2.2. Women, Men and Saudi Culture

Among Arab countries, Saudi Arabia is considered to have the most conservative Islamic culture, in which cultural norms and religious values are so intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish between the cultural and religious values (Al-Lily, 2011). It is the birthplace of Islam: within its borders lie the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and millions of Muslims direct their daily prayers towards its location. Besides its religious significance in the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia is located in the heart of the Arabic region. These aspects have resulted in Saudi culture having norms and beliefs stemming from both Islamic religion and Arabic culture (Yamani, 2010). This combination has formed Saudis' identities, views, and attitudes (Madini, 2012).

Such background has its influence on several aspects that distinguish Saudi culture from other countries, especially regarding the relationship between men and women within Saudi society. This section sheds light on the visibility and presence of women in Saudi society, the challenges of approaching a female in this culture, and the dependency of Saudi women and trusteeship.

2.2.1. The Visibility of Women within the Saudi Society

The hijab is a traditional symbol of Islam. Muslim women are required to cover their hair and attractive parts of their bodies. According to Koolmees (2004), wearing hijab implies three dimensions: the physical dimension, as the veil physically obscures men from women; the psychological dimension, as the veil puts a barrier between men and women, and the moral dimension, as the veil protects women from what is forbidden in Islam. Although moral and psychological dimensions are the ultimate aims of wearing hijab, the physical dimension is the visual part that can easily be observed in Islamic societies in general and in Saudi society in particular. A cross-cultural study of seven Islamic countries by Moaddel (2013) surveyed the perceptions of the participants regarding the most appropriate style of *hijab* (see Figure 2.1). The study reveals that the most appropriate style of *hijab* for Saudi females was the most conservative one. *Burka* and *niqab* (11% and 63% respectively), were the favourable *hijab* style for Saudis.

Figure 2. 1 Cross-National Variation in the Style of the Hijab (Moaddel, 2013)

	Burka	Niqab	Chador	al-Amira	Hijab	None
Tunisia	1%	2%	3%	57%	23%	15%
Egypt	1%	9%	20%	52%	13%	4%
Turkey	0%	2%	2%	46%	17%	32%
Iraq	4%	8%	32%	44%	10%	3%
Lebanon	2%	1%	3%	32%	12%	49%
Pakistan	3%	32%	31%	24%	8%	2%
Saudi Arabia	11%	63%	8%	10%	5%	3%
Median	2%	8%	8%	44%	12%	4%
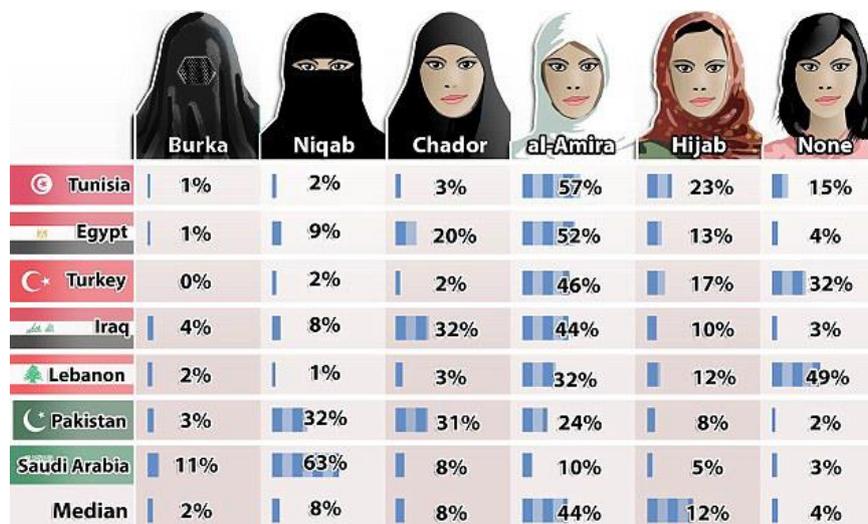
According to Yamani (2008) in the past, Saudi women's hijab varies from one region to another. However, the hijab of women in the central region of the kingdom *Najdi Abaya*, the most conservative hijab, spread to the rest of the Saudi society and became an obligation for women in various regions. This is due to the dominance of the *Salafist* movement, which maybe one of the main reasons of holding the most conservative style of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. By the definition, the hijab enhances concealing females from males' eyes. However, this type of *hijab* went beyond that and isolated women from men in Saudi Arabia and

segregate them even if they were in the same place, as it prevents men from seeing what women look like. Such a fact had, in turn, left its marks on forming the relationships between the sexes in Saudi society.

2.2.2. The Presence of Saudi Women

Based on the principle of protecting the society from seduction and following the Islamic instructions, Saudi state maintains gender segregation in public places. According to Elamin and Omair (2010), gender segregation is one of the most prominent features of Saudi society. This strict separation between the sexes is noticeable in different aspects of Saudis' life such as educational sectors, work environments, entertainment and shopping places. Le Renard (2008) explains that gender segregation in Saudi society is not a surface idea but it has its root in the Saudis' culture and religion to the extent that The National Development Plans of Saudi Arabia emphasizes that women's jobs should be isolated from men's jobs. Therefore, the government keeps this segregation in mind when designing buildings for schools, universities, and government agencies. According to Bahry (2008), this conservative perspective has led to the creation of two societies within the single Saudi society – one for men and another for women – and has also reduced the natural communication and interaction between the sexes.

To explain this condition in higher education sector in Saudi Arabia, Hamdan (2005) states that when female students graduated from high schools and enrolled in universities to pursue more advanced studies and there is a need for a male lecturer to teach them, television networks are used to transfer lectures from the men's section to the women's section. Female students can see their male teachers on the television screen, but the male lecturer and the male students cannot see them. Female students use a device similar to a telephone to ask their male lecturer questions. While the lecturer can hear their voices the male students cannot. This is the case in the majority of the Saudi universities' majors except medical field (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013; Meijer, 2010). Hence, the chance of creating a relationship between male and female students is very low.

In work environments, the means of communication between male and female employees is the telephone. Government agencies and most of the private organisations have private buildings or offices that isolated female staff from males. Although the opportunity to come into contact with a colleague of the opposite sex is still possible, it is strongly

discouraged by Saudi society and could be misunderstood and may lead to questioning the motivations behind such behaviour. However, the bright side of this segregation in workplaces, according to Yamani (2010), is that women do not have to enter into a competition with men to prove their proficiency. It also allows Saudi women to feel relaxed and to move around more freely in their offices and buildings (Baki, 2004).

In restaurants, there are separate sections for families and for single men, each with its own entrance. Some of the restaurants even have partitions between tables in the family sections. While single males are allowed to enter shopping centres during weekdays, they cannot go there during weekends because it is only for families. On the other hand, women are allowed to enter the shops at any day of the week (Le Renard, 2008).

Despite such maintained gender segregation in the public life of Saudis (Bukhari & Asim, 2013), the sexes in Saudi Arabia continue to mix in a variety of ways within Saudi families. Very poor and very high class Saudi families, for instance, do not apply gender segregation in their relationships, while middle class people are most affected by religious discourse and have separate entrances and reception areas in their houses for women and men (Al-Khateeb, 2008). In addition, mixing between the sexes is more common in the western and eastern regions of Saudi Arabia as compared to the central region, since the central region is the birthplace of the *Salafist* movement. However, lately, it has become difficult to classify the attitude towards allowing the interaction between unrelated sexes according to the region or social class.

In the modern days, the way of interacting and communicating between the sexes continues to be a daily concern for both men and women in Saudi society (Ibahrine, 2008). While conservatives believe that isolating men from women protect the society, these restrictions have been challenged by Saudi youth and new technologies. According to Sullivan (2006) and Zoepf (2008), younger Saudi generations, particularly teenagers, are not convinced that they should apply the rules of gender segregation to their lives. They use the houses of their relatives, coffee shops and restaurants to interact and communicate with the opposite sex. While Saudi youth practically confront these restrictions, other age groups criticize exaggerating in isolating men and women through journalism and new media. Moreover, Al-Saggaf (2012) found that the usage of online communities by Saudis is one of the important factors that lessen the segregation between sexes in Saudi society. However, the Saudi women' presences in the public life continues to be rare. This form of gender

separation clearly distinguishes Saudi Arabia from the rest of the world in general and from the Islamic societies in particular. It reduces the opportunities for the sexes to meet and interact with each other and directly impacts their chances of forming offline romantic relationships (Al Lily, 2011).

2.2.3. Approaching a Female in Saudi Society

Middle Eastern societies in general, and Saudi society in particular, tend to equate family honour with the honour of their sisters and daughters. According to Kulwicki (2002), two Arabic terms are commonly used to refer to honour: *Sharaf* and *'ird*. *Sharaf* is honour in the broader sense; *'ird* is the family honour based on the sexual conduct of a man's sisters and daughters. Female sexual misconduct that becomes public knowledge is considered a scandal (*Fadiha*) and often results in disgrace for the family name. This disgrace has negative consequences for the family in many aspects of life. Dialmy and Uhlmann (2005) assert that the virginity of the future wife is a necessity, as virginity is associated with family honour and reputation and a family's adherence to Islam. Therefore, most (if not all) Arab families take steps to prevent females from having premarital relationships as a way to protect family honour and reputation (Kulwicki, 2002). A recent study conducted by Poushter (2014) for the Pew research institution, among 40,117 respondents from 40 countries confirms this notion. According to the study, 90% of the respondents from the Middle East regarded premarital sex as morally unacceptable. This result was the highest in comparison with the rest of the world. Such norms discourage approaching a woman outside the acceptable forms between sexes in Saudi society.

2.2.4. Dependency of Saudi Females and Trusteeship

According to Pharaon (2004), Saudi women should have adult relatives as guardians of their affairs (either a husband, a son, or a brother). Guardianship is considered one of the fundamental pillars of Saudi culture. Al-Khateeb (2008) clarifies that guardianship in the Saudi context refers to the man who is responsible for the women in his family. Women cannot travel, work, or visit some government departments unless they receive approval from their male guardian. A guardian is also responsible for accepting or rejecting all potential husbands for women under his trusteeship (Deif, 2008). In other words, a Saudi woman cannot get married without the approval of her guardian in Saudi Arabia. This approval is considered an important part of Islamic Saudi courtship rituals (CEDAW, 2007).

The legislative trusteeship in Saudi Arabia shows that the relationship between men and women in Saudi society is a relationship of male domination and female dependency. The United Nations' report on women's rights in Saudi Arabia, entitled "Perpetual Minors" (Human Rights Watch, 2008), asserts that the status of a Saudi woman is close to the status of a child. As the guardian has the right to accept or reject marriage proposals on behave of a woman under his trusteeship, some of Saudi women's record their demand on the court to withdraw this right from their guardian. According to the Ministry of Justice (2013), the number of cases in Saudi courts raised by Saudi women against their guardians who refused to let them marry stood at 304 cases in 2012 and rose to 382 cases in 2013. Although there is a small but growing resistance to the notion of guardianship in Saudi Arabia, guardianship remains an important part of the courtship process.

2.3. The Acceptable Relationship between Sexes in Saudi Society

As many traditional Middle Eastern societies consider mate selection to be a family and community affair (Hamon and Ingoldsby, 2003), most marriages in Saudi Arabia are arranged between two families rather than between a couple (Al-Romi and Al-Saeg, 2004; Al-Khateeb, 2008). Based on the Saudi traditions, arranged marriages help to maintain social and religious traditions, preserve group solidarity, and strengthen the family's position (Zaidi and Shuraydi, 2002). According to Al-Khateeb (2008), marriages in Saudi Arabia are highly valued, as they are seen as religious duties that allow people to meet their social demands and physical needs. This legal relationship, the only religiously and socially acceptable relationship between the sexes in Saudi Arabia, is the foundation of family units. Saudi women gain their identities through marriage, and enhancing their social roles as wives and as mothers. It is important to note that the Islamic marriage requires three conditions: 1) a marriage contract between the groom and the bride; 2) the approval of the bride's guardian and the attendance of two witnesses, and 3) the dowry, which is a previously agreed-upon amount of money that the husband gives to his wife before marriage (Lo and Aziz, 2009).

A part from written conditions of marriage contract, the compatibility between the tribes of the groom and the bride is considered an important condition to some Saudi tribes and families. According to Samin (2008), Saudis are raised to be proud of their tribal origins. Although Islamic doctrine asserts that such an attitude is a forbidden practice, Saudis still practice it. Al-Anzi (2009) states that the first question a family asks a potential husband is

his tribal origin. The answer to this question often determines whether the potential suitor is accepted or rejected. Some families go so far as to reference historical books and tribal elders to ensure that the suitor is really a member of the tribe. The Ministry of Justice (2013) reports that during a year and a half, the Saudi Supreme Court received 31 cases asking for divorce because of the tribal incompatibility between married couples (*kafāʾa fī l-nasab*). Samin (2012) illustrates this point with one case in which a Saudi judge divorced a married couple because the woman's half-brothers did not acknowledge the man's tribal origin. Samin (2012) asserts that many Saudi intellectuals and educated members of the urban middle class feel themselves confronted by a resurgence of marital discrimination on the basis of tribal lineage. Even though this is the case, it still remains a fact that the family name, and by extension its tribal affiliation, is ranked as a highly important factor for Saudis when choosing potential mates. Therefore, it is worth to investigate the extent to which tribal affiliation plays a role in Saudis' mate preferences in the current research. The following sections provide an overview of the traditional Saudi courtship script and the alternative methods of finding a spouse by Saudis.

2.3.1. Traditional Courtship Script in Saudi Society

According to Al-Khateeb (2008), the Saudi courtship process begins when a man chooses a future partner. A Saudi woman only plays the role of either accepting or rejecting a proposed husband; she has no further role in selecting her future partner. Some Saudi families even deprive their daughters of the right of acceptance or rejection. Seth and Patnayakuni (2012) indicate that, traditionally, the background of the potential male spouse has been considered a critical issue. While caste and sub-caste are relevant, the educational level, occupation, economic status, and family background of this potential spouse are the highly determining factors of his suitability. In addition, previous relationships, bad habits (such as smoking and drinking alcohol), and the family's reputation are also investigated through interrogation of an informal network of the potential spouse's friends and relatives (Al-Khateeb, 2008). Once the family of the potential bride finds him a suitable match for their daughter, the prospective groom and his family visit them for a face-to-face meeting to assess the compatibility of both the families and the prospective partners. Too many rejections (especially of the prospective bride) can create tensions in the family and are considered to be a stigma on the family (Seth and Patnayakuni, 2012).

Aljuhani (2005) explains that the first step in the Saudi marriage process, after the

choice of a potential wife, is the *Khtba* ceremony, which is a coordinated effort between the man's and woman's families. The man is sometimes allowed to look at the woman in what is called the "legitimate look". However, some tribes do not allow the man to look at the woman, and he must depend on his mother and sisters to describe the bride to him. (Al-Romi and Al-Saeg, 2004). While the chance of improving the relationship between spouses at this stage is very rare, some families recently started to allow couples to have a chance of developing their relationship at this stage. However, Ali (2008) emphasises that premarital sex is clearly prohibited by several religious passages in the *Quran* and *Sunnah.* Thus, love or romance during *Khtba* should not include sexual intercourse. This is true not only for Saudi culture, but for most of the Islamic countries.

Al-Khateeb (2008) indicates that after this stage, the contract of marriage is created between the future husband and the bride's guardian in what is named as *Milka* ceremony; it requires the testimony of two attendees. The document is then sent to the future wife to sign. Al-Romi and Al-Saeg (2004) states that at this stage, the woman is, according to Islam, considered the man's wife. Some parents allow the man to visit his wife in her family's home because it is considered an opportunity for the couple to get to know each other before they are announced as married. Al-Khateeb (2008) indicates that Saudis differ in their means of supervision and how much freedom the couple is allowed to have during such visits. A parent or a brother may sit with the couple. Other parents may leave the couple in the guest room and enter the room from time to time. In contrast, some families prevent these visits completely until the announcement of the marriage celebration.

2.3.2. Saudis' Alternative Methods of Finding a Spouse

A study conducted by Al-Anzi (2009) indicates that the most common methods used in choosing a wife are a choice of relatives, a selection by a lady matchmaker, a personal choice, and finally, a friend's suggestions. However, the increasing mobility of Saudis from their hometowns to other locations inside or even outside the country (often in search of education and/or employment) makes it difficult for traditional family networks to find suitable matches for all eligible men and women in their communities (AlKhateeb, 2008). According to Bahry (2008), a number of Saudis have started to use alternative methods to search for a potential spouse. Some Saudi newspapers, TV channels, and social institutions supervised by religious leaders act as alternative ways to find suitable matches. There are two Saudi TV marriage channels. These channels run advertisements 24 hours a day and

broadcast a considerable number daily. It should be noted, however, that beyond the Bahry (2008) article no empirical study has investigated this emerging phenomenon.

The introduction of the Internet to Muslims in general has extended what the TV channels started in terms of potential marriage matching (Mishra, Chen, Chen, and Kim, 2007). According to Galal (2004), there are several different matrimonial websites used by Arab youths searching for marriage partners. Particularly, Asabi (2006) notes that by 2006, there were 70 online matrimonial websites operating in Saudi Arabia, with 20 of them owned by Saudis. Today, these matrimonial websites continue to offer their services to Saudis (Daily Tribune, 2013). It should be noted, however, that the above review is cited form articles about Saudi traditions and that the literature lacks an academic investigation regarding the usage of matrimonial websites by Saudis.

2.4. Summary of the Chapter

The conservative Saudi norms and traditions have their recognizable influence on several aspects of Saudis' daily life. Among these aspects are the segregation between sexes, the importance of family's honour, the position of women, and their dress code in the Saudi society. Such factors had, in turn, left their marks on the visibility of women in Saudi Arabia and on forming the relationships between the sexes in Saudi society. With such challenges of approaching a female in this culture, the acceptable relationship between unrelated sexes in Saudi society appears to be only through marriages after the approval of their guardians.

As in many traditional Middle Eastern societies, most marriages in Saudi Arabia are arranged between two families rather than between couples. To some Saudi tribes and families, the compatibility between the tribes of the groom and the bride is considered among the most important conditions in the marriage contract. The Saudi marriage process usually begins when a man chooses a future partner. A Saudi woman only plays the role of either accepting or rejecting a proposed husband. Once the family of the potential bride finds him a suitable match for their daughter, the prospective groom and his family visit them for a face-to-face meeting to assess the compatibility of both the families and the prospective partners. After the choice of a potential wife is made, the *Khtba* ceremony takes place, which is a coordinated effort between the man's and woman's families. The man is sometimes allowed to look at the woman in what is called the "legitimate look". However, some tribes do not allow the man to look at the woman, and he must depend on his mother and sisters to

describe the bride to him. The contract of marriage is then created between the future husband and the bride's guardian in what is named as *Milka* ceremony and the woman is, according to Islam, considered the man's wife.

With the increasing mobility of Saudis from their hometowns to other locations inside or even outside the country, which makes it difficult for traditional family networks to find suitable matches for all eligible men and women in their communities, a number of Saudis have started to use alternative methods to search for a potential spouse. Some Saudi newspapers, TV channels, social institutions supervised by religious leaders, and recently matrimonial websites act as alternative ways to find suitable matches among Saudis. Given that there is a lack of an academic investigation regarding the usage of such alternative approaches by Muslims in general and by Saudis in particular, the following chapter reviews the existing literature regarding finding spouses online among Western and East Asian users which falls within online dating literature. It also examines the similarities and differences between these users and Saudi users who use online matrimonial websites to find a potential spouse.

Chapter Three

Online Dating Websites and Matrimonial Websites

3.1. Introduction

Since the scope of this research falls within the online dating research, this chapter reviews the existing literature worldwide pertaining to online dating websites. Most of these studies relate primarily to Western and Asian contexts and are situated within the field of computer-mediated communication and psychology. The chapter starts with an overview of the dating methods used before the invention of online dating technology. It also provides a description of dating website services, the similarities and the differences between dating websites and matrimonial websites, the attitudes toward using these sites, the types of their users, and the expected outcomes of using such websites.

3.2. Pre-Online Dating Websites

The phenomenon of "dating" has been one of the significant changes to the history of courtship and intimate relationships between males and females in Western societies during the 20th century (Jerin and Dolinsky, 2007). Dating has changed the process of establishing romantic relationships. In the past, parents were the gatekeepers through which a man would approach a woman for the purposes of romance. With dating, males contact females or females contact males directly as the first step in any subsequent relationship (Bailey, 1988). Whyte (1992) argues that dating has somewhat weakened the supervisory role of parents over their daughters, as the current rites of courtship have been relocated from the private residence of the woman's family to more public settings such as theatres, restaurants, and cinemas (Bailey, 1988).

In his 2009 book entitled *Classified: The Secret History of the Personal Column*, Cocks indicates that matrimonial agencies were big business in Western societies in the 18th and 19th centuries. These agencies would be paid to print advertisements on behalf of men who were looking for a "good wife". By the early 20th century, the services offered by these agencies had been replaced by personal ads in newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, it took some time for personal ads to be considered as an acceptable way to seek a romantic

partner, primarily because these ads mainly provide superficial information and focus on individuals' looks or their preferences in their potential mates (Scharlott and Chris, 1995).

By the 1980s, personal ads started to give way to video dating services. These services allowed mate seekers to access a considerable amount of information, as the videotapes often featured an individual talking about themselves and their romantic preferences. The main drawback to video dating services, however, was that they could only be distributed to a limited number of potential partners from which the mate seekers could choose (Woll and Cozby, 1987). In the late 1990s, Deyo established the speed dating process to assist Jewish people in the USA in finding their potential spouses. Speed dating rapidly became an international phenomenon as a way to quickly meet potential romantic partners (Finkel, Eastwick, and Matthews, 2007). In a speed dating encounter, mate seekers attend an event in which they engage in a series of short dates (usually between 5 and 10 minutes) with several of the attendees at the event. People increasingly spend a considerable amount of money to attend these events (Eastwick and Finkel, 2008; Whitty and Carr, 2006). With the emergence of the Internet, however, the process of searching for a potential mate has changed, as individuals seeking a date began utilising its functions to search for a potential match (Whitty, 2010). Thus, dating in the 21st century has increasingly moved to a new realm: the online world (Henry-Waring, and Barraket, 2008).

3.3. Online Dating Websites

Online dating sites are considered new additions to those old methods of dating. However, they allow for much more than just a few lines of brief, superficial text, a short video clip, or a few minutes of interaction. Some of the features of online dating websites include lengthy descriptions of the individual and pictures, as well as the ability to search for specific criteria in a potential partner (e.g. ethnicity, religion, height, or body type), and the ability to communicate with people via e-mail prior to meeting face-to-face (Brozovsky and Petricek, 2007; Whitty, 2008).

Although some of the online dating sites require a registration fee, the way they work is almost always the same (Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn, and Hearst, 2008). A newcomer registers at an online dating site by answering a number of closed questions (e.g., age, gender, marital status, and occupation) and open-ended questions (e.g., "What would you like to do on a first date?"). When completing this registration process, the users can then use certain

preferential criteria to match their answers to those provided by other users. This process results in a list of names of potential mates whom the users have the chance to contact (Scharlott and Christ, 1995).

The popularity of online dating services have increased significantly over the past decade and a considerable number of individuals have gone on a date with a person they found through these sites (Sprecher, Schwartz, Harvey, and Hatfield, 2008). According to Valkenburg and Peter (2007), the popularity of these sites is unsurprising for several reasons. Firstly, geographical barriers are eliminated, which increases the chance of finding more people than in offline life. Secondly, its usage does not require an assessment of friends or family. Third, they can be autonomously and continually accessed. Finally, the limited visual and auditory cues that are associated with online communication enable a greater level of self-disclosure, an element that often plays a prominent role in developing relationships.

Although they have been increasingly popular, Gunter (2013) argues that the success of online dating sites has been reported by three main sources. The first is corporate evidence released by the online dating companies themselves. While the evidence provided by these corporate companies is impressive, it often lacks validation from independent sources. The second source of information comes from surveys in which users provide self-reported data about their online dating activities. Although this source is considered more transparent than corporate evidence, the main limitation with self-reported data is the unintentional inaccuracy. The final body of evidence comprises objective online digital logs, which measure the rate of website hits. Reports from these sources reveal the popularity of online dating sites in the Western world. Survey evidence from India, Japan, and South Korea also indicates the widespread use of these sites to find potential mates (e.g. Farrer and Gavin, 2009; Jha and Adelman, 2009; Lee, 2009).

With respect to Islamic online matrimonial websites, corporate evidence suggests that the number of registered members exceeds more than one million users and websites claim thousands of successful matches that have led to marriage. Online measurements of website hits also reveal that the number of people visiting Muslim matrimonial websites reaches up to million users per month (Bestdatingsites.com, 2014). Such a huge number of Muslim matrimonial websites' members highlights the importance of conducting more empirical studies regarding their usage of these sites.

3.4. The Applicability of Dating Terms on the Islamic Mating Concepts

Previous literature, particularly among Western and East Asian users, use the concepts of dating, mating and matrimonial concepts interchangeably to convey the meaning of finding a partner. Such usage of concepts does not provide an accurate meaning among Muslim users of matrimonial websites. In Islamic cultures, there are differences between online dating sites and online matrimonial sites. Matrimonial websites offer their users a relatively safer setting to encounter other marriage seekers and communicate with them concerning the possibility of finding a spouse while still maintaining their religious commitments. On the other hand, the majority of online dating sites provide dating opportunities that may not essentially lead to marriage. Thus, users of dating sites are not all searching for a potential spouse; some may have the intention of searching for a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Therefore, dating sites focus on "dating or enabling two persons to meet and engage in mutually agreed upon social activities". In contrast, matrimonial sites focus on "bringing together two people who have a serious intention of getting married" (Al-Saggaff 2013: 176).

Unlike with dating websites, matrimonial websites have registered matrimonial profiles that are managed by the individual registrants or their parents and guardians who will play a part in making the final decision about a marriage. These websites are predicated on the idea that the first offline meeting between two paired users will be to chat about their wedding. Although both dating websites and matrimonial websites provide users the chance to look at the profiles of a considerable number of potential partners without much effort and in a safe and anonymous way, matrimonial website users must adhere to a higher level of modesty guidelines and refrain from profanity and obscenities.

From the above review, it is recommended to use "matrimonial" term when talking about Muslim users and "dating" term for non-Muslim users. Mating concept could be used to refer to both Muslim and non-Muslim users.

3.5. Attitudes toward Online Dating Sites

Early Western studies in the field of online dating sites revealed widespread negative attitudes toward forming relationships through online websites. For instance, a study by

Wildermuth (2004) found that stigmatising discourse from offline American family and friends had an impact on the overall evaluation of any online relationship. The sample in the study (n = 159) comprised online relationship partners who were asked to fill an online questionnaire. They were asked to recount the messages they got from their families and friends about their online relationships and to comment on their perceptions of the level of stigma and quality of their online relationships. The study found that severe, disapproving, and explicit messages concerning the online relationship from the participants' families and friends were related to higher levels of perceptions of stigma among participants. In addition, respondents who received more messages of stigma were less satisfied with the quality of their online relationships. A later study conducted by Jacobsen and Raj (2008) also revealed that there is shame attached to using online dating sites in South Asian communities. These communities classify online dating as an obstacle to employing traditional routes to marriage. The authors argue that new methods of searching for a mate boost interracial marriage, which, although it is not considered a religious concern in South Asian communities, has been discouraged by first generation Asians.

More recent evidence reveals that online dating is starting to enjoy increasing acceptance. A study of sixteen European countries, Japan, and Brazil revealed that there has been a major positive shift in attitudes among Internet users toward using online dating sites to find a potential mate (Hogan, Li and Dutton, 2011). In addition, a recent Pew Internet research project conducted by Smith and Duggan (2013) indicated that public attitudes toward online dating started to be more positive in the few recent years. In 2012, 59% of American Internet users agreed with the notion that "online dating is a good way to meet people", in comparison with 44% in 2005.

Regarding Muslim matrimonial websites, although there is evidence that Muslims in general, and Saudis in particular, tend to use these sites in their search for potential partners, little else is known about the attitudes of Saudis toward using these sites and whether there has been a shift in attitudes over time (Bestdatingsites.com, 2014).

3.6. Types of Online Dating Site Users

A stereotype exists in media regarding the types of users who join dating sites as being males, old, and divorced (Wildermuth, 2004). Nevertheless, studies in this field have had contrasting results regarding the type of users who tend to visit online dating sites the

most. While some scholars argue that the differences in these variables have decreased over time (Gunter, 2013), other studies maintain that differences still exist among online dating site users (e.g. Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau, 2009; Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan, 2010).

Regarding the age of users, Gunter (2013) notes that while using online dating sites remains more popular among young adults in their 20s and 30s than any other age group, older adults are increasingly starting to use dating websites to find a partner. Although previous work differs in its results about the mean age of users who utilise dating websites, the body of evidence reveals that users from 18 – 60 use these sites. For instance, a Dutch study conducted by Valkenburg and Peter (2007) on single Internet users found that the ages of users ranged between 18 and 60 years old, with users aged 30 and 50 years old using dating sites more actively. A Canadian study by Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) revealed that engaging in online dating tends to increase with age; further, it found that older adults are increasingly turning to online dating sites in part due to a lack of satisfaction with the traditional ways of finding a date. An American study by Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan (2010) indicated that the mean age of Internet daters is 39.2. Hogan, Li, and Dutton (2011) found that older people in Europe, Brazil, and Japan are significantly more likely to have used online dating sites to find their present partners than the young. Around 23% of users below age 40 in this study initiated a relationship online, and around 36% aged 40 and older found their present partner on the Internet. A recent Pew research study on Americans conducted by Smith and Duggan (2013) shows that online dating peaks among people in their mid-20s through mid-40s. Islamic traditions emphasise the importance of getting married as young as possible: the Prophet Mohammad said "O young people! Whoever among you is able to marry, should marry, and whoever is not able to marry, is recommended to fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual power". Given that the average age at which Saudis leave home and marry is 30 for males and 24 for females (Salam 2013), it is unknown whether younger or older Saudis are the ones who utilise matrimonial websites most to find a potential spouse.

Regarding gender differences in using dating websites, Gunter (2013) notes that over time, both genders have come to make widespread use of such services. An early Canadian study conducted by Brym and Lenton (2001), however, reveals that Canadian men were 37% more likely than women to use online dating services. In 2007, Valkenburg and Peter

conducted a similar study among Dutch respondents and found that males stated that they visited online dating sites more than females. On the other hand, a relatively recent study by Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) shows that Canadian females tend to use online dating sites more than males.

As the female's role in Islamic culture is only to accept a marriage proposal, it is mainly the male's task to propose in this culture; therefore, little is known about whether there would be gender differences in the number of users visiting Islamic matrimonial websites. A study by Mishra, Monippally, and Jayakar (2013) found that 55% of the profiles on Islamic matrimonial websites were written by a parent or guardian. As such, further study is needed to investigate if the number of registered members on an Islamic matrimonial site differs as a function of gender. Besides, it is worth to investigate to the extent to which would females initiate the interactions with the potential spouses.

Regarding marital status, Canadian and Asian studies conducted in the online dating field reveal that the majority of online dating users tend to be single. For instance, Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau (2009) indicate that most of the Canadian users of these sites are singles, and few married or engaged users joined online dating sites. In addition, a Korean study by Lee (2009) confirms that online dating site users tend to be single. On the other hand, American studies reveal that divorced people and people in relationships comprise the majority of the users. For instance, Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan's (2010) study reveals that American users of these sites are mainly divorced and that the proportion of online dating site members who were married or in a relationship reached up to 30% (PRWeb, 2005). In Islamic society, polygamy is permitted and males could marry up to four wives at the same time. Based on this Islamic cultural norm, many matrimonial websites will ask male users about the number of wives they have as part of their personal information; indeed, some Islamic websites devote a separate section of their site to people who are searching for multiple wives (Mawada.net, 2014; Zawag.org, 2014).

From reviewing the differences in online dating users in the literature, it appears that it is difficult to align these differences with the time factor, especially because recent studies confirm that these differences continue to exist among users over time. Thus, it could be argued that cultural factors, the social context, and the sample size could affect the existence or disappearance of these distinctive attributes among online dating users.

3.7. Outcomes of Using Dating Sites

Baker (2002: 363) investigated the factors that determine the outcomes of relationships that started in online dating sites. The findings revealed four prominent factors that determine relationship outcomes: (1) "meeting place (where they first encountered each other online"; (2) "obstacles (barriers to getting together overcome by the couples, such as distance and previous relationships)"; (3) "timing (period spent writing or talking before meeting offline and how intimate they became before meeting offline)"; and (4) "conflict resolution (people's ability to resolve problems in communication)".

In contrast, Gunter (2013) suggests that outcomes of using dating websites in finding a potential partner vary in Western studies. Some of the results indicate that having a sexual relationship with the matched user is considered a sign of success. Others consider having a short-term relationship to be a successful outcome. Another possibility is that the relationship could be successful if two people who met on these sites became partners or even friends. The least-mentioned measure for determining if a relationship is successful is if matched users get married. In Islamic culture, the outcomes of using online matrimonial sites, on the other hand, are either to get married or to renew the search for a potential partner. There is no space, for instance, for having a friend, partner, or a premarital sexual relationship. Besides, short-term relationships are not favoured and are viewed with reservation in Saudi culture (Kulwicki, 2002; Ahmed, 2013). Nevertheless, there is a lack in the literature regarding the successful stories of Saudis who utilised these sites.

3.8. Summary of the Chapter

Reviewing online dating literature showed that the success of online dating websites has been reported by three main sources; corporate evidence, surveys, and objective online digital logs. The value of such sources should be taken into consideration when generalizing their results on the online dating literature. While early Western studies in the field of online dating websites revealed that there were widespread negative attitudes toward forming relationships through these websites, more recent evidence reveals that online dating is starting to enjoy increasing acceptance. While a stereotype exists in media regarding the types of users who join these websites as being males, old, and divorced, studies in this field have had contrasting results regarding the type of users who tend to visit online dating sites the most. It could be argued that cultural factors, the social context, and the sample size could

affect the existence or disappearance of these distinctive attributes among online dating users. Besides, the signs of successful outcomes of using dating websites in finding a potential partner vary in Western studies starting from having a sexual relationship with the matched user to getting married.

This review of Western and East Asian literature regarding online dating websites reveals that Islamic matrimonial websites differ from these dating websites. Concentrating on the concepts, it appears that dating websites focus on enabling a couple to meet and engage in mutually agreed upon social activities while matrimonial websites focus on matching between a couple who have a serious intention of getting married. Thus, it is recommended to use "matrimonial" term when talking about Islamic websites and "dating" term for non-Islamic websites. The review also showed the scarcity in the literature regarding Muslims' and Arabs' attitudes towards using these websites, the type of their users, and their expected outcomes from using such websites. In addition, some variables that have their values within the Islamic and Arabic culture, such as marrying a second wife and the role of the tribe of origin, have not yet fully covered through the Western online dating literature. Thus, there is a need to conduct more empirical studies regarding the usage of the matrimonial websites in order to fill this gap in the literature. This also raises a question regarding the extent to which Western mating theories could be utilised to explain the usage of the matrimonial websites by Saudi users who belong to a conservative culture. The following chapter reviews these theories. In particular, it provides an overview of the Western theories that investigate mate selection, online impression formations, and online courtship models.

Chapter Four

Theories of Mating Relationships

4.1. Introduction

Online dating provides a new setting and method for individuals to meet with potential partners for the first time, form impressions, and establish ongoing relationships. As the current overarching research objectives concerns mate preferences, impression formation, and the script of developing relationships between Saudis initiated through matrimonial websites, this chapter reviews theories that investigate offline mate selection and their applicability to online dating sites, theories of offline and online impression formations, and online courtship models. The chapter also evaluates the weaknesses and strengths of all the reviewed theories in relation to online environments in order to decide the core theories that would underpin this research and present them as the theoretical framework in the following chapter.

4.2. Mate Selection Theories

Scholars have investigated the criteria for selecting a partner in order to provide a better understanding of the process. Their approaches could be divided into three perspectives. The first perspective has focused on homogamy in personality traits, attitudes, and beliefs as the starting point in selecting a partner. The second perspective or the economic perspective has been adopted by scholars from different fields in their attempts to explain the mate selection process. The third perspective is the completion perspective. Some of the theories under these perspectives were not embraced in either offline or online mate selection studies, whereas others have only been studied offline, and the rest have been widely applied in both online and offline settings. This section provides an overview of the mate selection theories most relevant to the aims of the current research.

4.2.1. The Homogamy Perspective

Kerckhoff and Davis (1962), Reiss (1960), Lewis (1973), and Levinger (1983) based their theories on the homogamy perspective, that individuals are attracted to the company of people similar to themselves in characteristics such as race, social traits, and cultural

background. That means that deep homogamy in values and beliefs should lead to successful partner selection. In particular, Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) illustrate this principle through their filter theory, based on the idea of illuminating heterogeneous traits through certain phases. Lewis' (1973) dyadic formation theory, Reiss's (1960) Wheel Theory of Love, and Levinger's (1983) "ABCDE" model echo this notion that homogamy enhances mutuality in certain circumstances that mainly depend on the partners' consensus in values and beliefs drawn from a shared culture, religion, and educational background. According to Määttä and Uusiautti (2013), in spite of the extensive body of mate selection research, there is insufficient support for these theories.

Hoyt and Hudson (1981) used another way to explain homogamy in mate selection by focusing on the similarities of personality traits. They collected a ranked list of preferred characteristics in a partner that revealed in previous research from 1939–1977. Based on their list, people had ranked "reliability" and "emotional balance" as significant. "Mutual attraction", "social character", and "education-intelligence" were characteristics that have increasingly become appreciated. "Decency" had become less important both in males' and females' lists, as had "good cooking and housekeeping skills" in males' preferences. However, Buss (1984) utilised three different methods (surveys, spouse rating, and interviews) to measure the correlation between married couples on 16 personal traits dimensions. Any of these traits has to be consistently demonstrated to be the aspect that governs partner choice, but the results revealed low correlations among them for all of these traits.

It is worth noting that the main strength of this perspective is that its main principle of similarity among partners has become an essential concept in some of the subsequent theories. The concept of homogamy is also in line with some of the traditional Saudi principals in mate selection. For instance, Saudi and Islamic cultures value the consensus between partners in their religion and beliefs. This principle is a must for women and favourable for men. However, the homogamy perspective might fail in providing a complete understanding of the mate selection process in an offline setting because it requires a direct interaction among partners. This interaction is necessary in order to determine or clarify their feelings toward each other and to decide together or individually to continue to the next stage, which is difficult to apply to Saudi culture in an offline setting. However, an online setting differs from an offline setting in some aspects. The former may provide individuals,

especially those from a conservative background, more opportunity to know the extent of homogeneity between them and their potential partners in essential characteristics given their profile descriptions and screen names, and provide them the chance to interact directly with each other.

4.2.2. The Economic Perspective

Social exchange theory is the main branch of the economic perspective proposed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) to explain the mate selection process through the calculation of the costs and rewards of the relationship. The authors have based their investment and equity model on the exchange of costs and rewards among couples, they emphasise that individuals try to maximize the rewards they get from the relationship as much as possible after subtracting their costs from it. These costs can be perceived as emotional, financial, or physical, and so forth (Allen, Babin, and McEwan, 2012). This process of coordination relies on two criteria when assessing the potential consequences of relationships. First, "the comparison level (CL)", which is the criterion against which an individual assesses the satisfaction of his\her relationship. Second, "the comparison level for alternatives (CLalt)", which is the criterion an individual depends on when assessing his\her interpersonal gains. Sprecher (2011) attempted to apply this theory to a longitudinal study among romantic partners to investigate the value of equity relative to social exchange factors (i.e., "rewards", "investments", and "alternatives") in expecting successful relationships. Consistent with the investment and equity Model, the study reveals that under-benefiting inequity was correlated with a greater likelihood of breakup.

Edwards (1969) proposes four interrelated assumptions regarding the procedure of mate selection that stem from social exchange theory: "the partner is selected by the rewards he or she brings into the relationship"; "individuals with equivalent resources are likely to maximize their rewards because they are likely to reject those with fewer resources"; "individuals with equivalent resources are likely to have equivalent characteristics", and "thus the relationship is likely to become homogenous". Edwards (1969) states that individuals with equal values do not have to be exactly the same in all positive characteristic because the balance is built on exchange theory, which is based on the equality between positive and negative features in several aspects. This assumption has been confirmed in a study conducted by Skopek, Schulz, and Blossfeld (2011). They collected data from an online German dating site (n = 12,608) to investigate the significance of education in initiating and

responding to online interactions. The findings indicate that educational homophily is the main determinate in online mating selection, as it significantly increases the likelihood of both starting and responding to online interactions. The findings also support social exchange theory's notion that homophily rises with educational qualification. While females are hesitant to contact a partner with lower educational level, males do not mind contacting less educated females.

Based on social exchange theory, the marriage market that determines costs and rewards differs from one culture to the next. For instance, a Russian study conducted by Sahib, Koning, and Witteloostuijn (2006) emphasizes being slim and proficient in English and living in a major city as important rewards sought in females in the Russian marriage market. Their study compares single Russian females who seek mates to females highlighted in a "Success Stories" section among women living in cities and more rural areas (n = 575). The study finds that speaking English well and having a good body shape are positively correlated with success in the marriage market. Such a finding is in line with the assumption of social exchange theory that higher economic resources or the potential to live in a rich developed country could be exchanged for a good body shape and the capacity to speak English. Living in big cities also seems to be desirable. A Swedish study by Jakobsson and Lindholm (2014), on the other hand, reveals that being an Arab is considered a cost that would lower a person's value in the Swedish marriage market. The study applied social exchange theory to a number of Swedish online dating profiles (n=1,490) to determine the significance of ethnicity (Swedish, Greek and Arab) in males' online dating preferences. The results reveal that being Swedish is highly evaluated in the dating market and that Arab daters face ethnic penalties in comparison with Swedes and Greeks. Such a result could be interpreted based on the idea that Arabs are ranked lower than Swedes in the Swedish social hierarchy, and thus going on a date with them could be interpreted as a cost.

Based on costs and rewards principles, Murstein (1970) proposed the concept of "premarital bargaining" in his stimulus-value-role theory to account for the matching process commonly observed among real partners. It argues that physical attractiveness is viewed as a good that individuals invest in a dating market. In the early stages of courtship, individuals attempt to bargain with each other to obtain the most attractive partners possible in exchange for their personal physical attractiveness. Thus, individuals who are equal or similar in their physical attractiveness attempt to select each other. Murstein's matching hypothesis assumes

the same outcome as anticipated by Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, and Rottman (1966) in their original matching hypothesis, which indicates that people who have similar levels of physical attractiveness are more likely to be attracted to select each other in the dating market.

Nevertheless, Murstein's theory is more inclusive than the initial matching hypothesis because his theory elaborately illustrates the circumstances under which having an attractive body is the main determinant of courtship desirability. This theory also clearly describes both behavioural and cognitive bases for the matching trend. The matching hypothesis indicates that in the dating market, each individual assesses his\her values and searches for a partner whose social desirability equals his\her own. Taylor, Fiore, Mendelsohn, and Cheshire (2011) conducted four studies to test this hypothesis, which implies that individuals' assessment of their own worth determines the partners they select. Their findings support that "self-worth", "physical attractiveness", and "popularity" predict mating selection.

Although social exchange theories could be credited for being tested and amplified among different cultures in offline and online settings, they have been criticized because they largely equate relationships with a mechanical process that is free of emotions and reduced to purely mental and logical operations. Critics have argued that individuals differ in their level of repayment and the amount they spend in exchange. Also, people in general are not rational in their relationships and do not calculate their expected rewards, especially in long-term relationships (Stafford, 2008). Duck (1982) also argues that assessments of equity and exchange may happen in the first stages of a relationship and that individuals may not recognize inequalities or become disappointed about them until the relationship becomes disappointing. Some critics even go on to claim that social exchange theories cannot be considered theories at all, rather they are frames of reference within which many theories—some micro and some macro—can support or oppose each other. Critics claim that many types of relationships cannot be explained through these theories (Stafford, 2008). Given that Saudi culture has different values compared to the Western world, it could be argued that investigating the criteria of the Saudi marriage market would yield different results.

4.2.3. The Completion Perspective

The completion perspective has been widely adopted by scholars to explain the process of mate selection. It is based on the fulfilment needs principle, in that people search

for partners who complement them, fulfil their unfulfilled dreams, or resemble their ideal selves in order to obtain a productive relationship. For instance, in his instrumental theory, Centers (1975) argues that males and females have numerous needs that can supplement each other. Such an assumption differs from Winch's classic theory of complementary needs (1958) in stating that some needs are generally more important than others, and adding that sex and affiliation are more important than succour and abasement for both sexes when in love, and couples should show a significant positive correlation for both needs. Also, some needs are more important for one sex than another. In sum, theorists using the completion perspective examine partners' needs from several angles, such as social psychology (e.g., social role theory) or evolution (e.g., sexual strategies theory).

From the social psychological perspective, social role theory argues that males and females are attracted to traits in one another that are assets in a particular society (Eagly, Wood, and Diekman 2002). According to Whitty and Buchanan (2010), social role theory argues that males and females modify their behaviours to resemble gender roles valued by society. Thus, partnering with an attractive woman will raise a man's social status in Western society. On the contrary, as women often have fewer economic resources than men and they are expected to take care of children, women search for men with higher socio-economic statuses. Social role theory argues that when the structure of a society and the social categorization of males' and females' are different, both genders tend to seek mates who complement their characterises.

Whitty and Buchanan (2010) used this theory to investigate whether the screen names chosen by online daters provide advantages in attracting a mate on dating websites. The results reveal that males were more motivated to contact users with attractive screen names than females, while females were more motivated to contact users with neutral names or those whose screen names imply intelligence than males. These results could be interpreted as indicating that these individuals were attracted to qualities that might increase their social status in Western society. Hwang (2013) collected data from 2,123 online dating profiles from four self-reported racial groups (Asian, Black, Latino, and White) to test the applicability of this theory. Results have also indicated that willingness to date intra-racially was generally high and that willingness to date interracially was lower and influenced by racial social status. Because men evidenced an overall high willingness to date interracially, women's willingness to date outside their races provided a more accurate depiction of racial

social status and exchange. Women of higher racial status groups were less willing than those from lower status groups to date interracially. Given the fact that the social roles of both sexes differ in Islamic societies compared to Western culture, it could be argued that cues of attractiveness may also differ, such as mentioning performing the five obligatory prayers daily, having a beard for men, and wearing a *hijab* for women; thus, applying social role theory to the Islamic context would yield different results.

From the evolutionary perspective, Darwin (1859) proposed that random changes in organisms' traits are more or less adaptive to survival in local environments. This perspective is based on the argument that when choosing a mate, individuals attempt to increase the genetic appropriateness of their descendants. They look for mates who have characteristics that enhance the existence of their offspring (Buss, 1989). Based on this notion, Buss and Schmitt (1993) in their sexual strategies theory, proposed that males and females developed distinctive strategies of their mate selections in long-term and short-term relationships. The strategies of males in long-term relationships are based on potential mates' characteristics that reflect their paternity confidence, reproductive value, commitment, good parenting skills and gene quality. On the contrary, the strategies of females in long-term relationships are based on potential mates' characteristics that reflect their ability to invest, willingness to invest, physical protection, commitment, good parenting skills and gene quality.

Although scientists across numerous disciplines like biologists, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists all argue that the physical attractiveness of a romantic mate is more important to men than it is to women (Gustavsson and Johnsson, 2008; March and Bramwell, 2012; Oates, 2002), the view that males and females differ in their mate preferences has recently been challenged by research suggesting that physical attractiveness and economic status may be just as important to both sexes. Nevertheless, a recent meta-analysis study by Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, and Hunt (2014) reveals no support for sex-differentiated desires and relational outcomes in either established relationships or mate selection contexts. As this meta-analysis study has been conducted among western samples, it may not be applicable to generalize its findings on the samples who belong to Islamic traditional cultures. Within these cultures, being responsible for expenses is considered among the main responsibilities of males, even if the females have high economic statuses. Nevertheless, sexual strategies theory provides one of the clearest articulations of both sexes' preferences for finding a partner for long-term relationships, such as marriage. Such

articulations are important given that Saudi culture considers marriage the only acceptable framework for intimate relationships between sexes.

4.3. Impression Formation Theories

Online dating sites provide access to a considerable number of users' profiles, providing a basis for comparison. Unlike in an offline environment, impression formation starts in the online dating setting before the couple physically meets. Daters consider their profiles in online dating sites as résumés through which they constantly attempt to market their "best" selves (Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs, 2005). Therefore, individuals may spend a considerable amount of time forming attractive profiles that would leave a positive impression on their viewers. Aspects like screen name, profile photo, personal information, personal preferences, and description text are therefore heavily edited to provide the best impressions possible. In other words, users tend to put a lot of effort into creating flattering profiles (Whitty, 2010). This section provides an overview of the impression formation theories that are most relevant to the aims of the current research. In particular, it provides a review of offline impression formation theories and their applicability to online settings, the quality of impression formation in online settings from the perspective of computer-mediated communication theories, and impression formation management from individual and collective perspectives.

One of the early scholars to provide an explanation of impression formation in an offline setting is Goffman (1959). Goffman argues that the ways in which an individual engages with another is strategically manipulated "to convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (1959, p. 4). He outlines the basic tenets of this idea in his classic book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, individuals engage in performances to leave a positive impression on others. He also argues that to make positive impressions upon an audience, individuals try to emphasise their positive attributes and conceal any negative ones, thereby editing their self-presentation so as to be perceived in an acceptable way by the audience. Such altering of an individual's image depends mainly on the feedback and judgment received by the audience. Social norms are subsequently formed in the given social and cultural setting through feedback and judgments that help the individual to alter his or her image to be acceptable to others. Several studies have been conducted to determine the applicability of Goffman's (1959) impression formation theory in

offline interaction contexts to the online dating context. They found that impression formation is often the first factor that plays a role in evaluating the success of the profile (e.g. Whitty, 2008; Vasalou and Joinson, 2009; Ellison, Hancock, and Toma, 2011; Kalinowski and Matei, 2011).

In their investigation of the application of Goffman's theory in an online dating setting, Kalinowski and Matei (2011) not only explore the way individuals form impressions through their online profiles, but also whether they modify them according to the feedback of other users. They indicate that online profiles provide a space in which expectations regarding impression formation can be jointly structured. These expectations also support and enhance pre-existing rules within the online community. Further, social norms among users affect the types of behaviours that are considered acceptable. The study by Kalinowski and Matei (2011) revealed that the complex series of interactions among users were in fact governed by the social norms of the online context and the larger offline culture; further, they found that users' interactions influenced how they edited their profiles to form an impression. Although this theory provides substantial insight into impression formation in face-to-face contexts, it would appear to be incomplete with regard to such formation in a computer-mediated context. This is because impression formation in a mediated context occurs through written communication without the visual cues present in face-to-face contexts.

Computer-mediated communication theorists have explored the quality of impression formation in online settings and hold different perspectives. While some scholars argue that it is difficult to form an impression online due to the impersonality of messages (Short, Williams and Christie, 1976; Sproull and Kiesler, 1986), some indicate that it reduces self-definition based on the identity of one's social group (Spears and Lea, 1992; 1994; Reicher, Spears and Postmes, 1995; Postmes, Spears & Lea, 1998). The rest argue that an online setting has an advantage over an offline setting in that it enables users to control the impressions they create online (Walther, 1996; McKenna, 1998; McKenna, Green, and Gleason, 2002; Whitty, 2008, 2010).

Early scholars in the field of computer-mediated communication argue that impression formation is limited in an online setting because the lack of social cues form impersonal messages between users. For instance, Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) argue in their social presence theory that the fewer the channels or codes offered by a medium, the less energy users devote to the existence of other social members in a communication. On a

continuum of social presence, the offline medium is viewed as having the most social presence and online communication the least. In addition, Sproull and Kiesler (1986) argue that computer-mediated communication decreases "social context cues"—features of physical setting, charisma, and nonverbal ordered status cues—the absence of which is considered to prevent interpersonal formation of impressions. Culnan and Markus (1987) called these kinds of approaches the "cues-filtered-out" perspective. Although this perspective received support at that time, it did not last long.

Taking a group perspective as their standpoint, Spears and Lea (1992; 1994) and Reicher, Spears, and Postmes (1995) were the first to empirically discover the practical element of group behaviour roles in forming impressions online. Their social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) was originally proposed to provide an explanation of deindividuation effects that emerged from situational aspects like "group immersion", "anonymity", and "reduced identifiability". They argue that deindividuation manipulations can impact an individual's capability to express identity-relevant behaviour once an identity is prominent. Individuals in computer-mediated communication viewed themselves as part of a predominant social group, and that anonymity can enhance the prevalence of shared social identity instead of individual identity. When writers have a shared social identity, they are more inclined to "group influence", "social attraction", "stereotyping", "gender typing", and "discrimination" in online interaction conducted anonymously (Postmes, Spears, and Lea, 1998). This model distinguishes between two kinds of anonymity in online interaction: anonymity of others to the users and anonymity of the users to others, which is referred to as "identifiability". Although the social identity model of deindividuation impact is in line with collective culture in some of its assumptions, it fails to highlight the role that individual differences may play in forming a positive impression online.

A study by Tanis and Postmes (2003) revealed that social cues affect two characteristics of impression formation: "ambiguity" and "positivity of impressions". These social signs, which can be as limited as a photograph or some biographical background information, significantly impact impression formation. The findings reveal that the disappearance of social cues is correlated with less positive impressions than the presence of one or both. Thus, different from what was expected on the basis of the social identity model of deindividuation effects, group membership does not impact the relationship between social cues and positivity of impression.

On the other hand, Walther (1992, 1993, 1996), in his social information processing (SIP) theory and then hyperpersonal theory, indicated that due to these lack of social cues, users could be quite strategic in lessening potential partners' access to their undesirable attributes because they can design, construct, and manage their impression formation much more intentionally than they would in face-to-face first meetings. This notion has been applied in several studies (e.g., Tidwell, & Walther, 2002; Walther, 2007). It has also been confirmed by Vasalou and Joinson (2009) research on self-presentation through online avatars; their results revealed that participants in the online dating setting emphasised specific aspects of their avatar in order to present a more attractive self. Walther's hyperpersonal theory (1996) helps in demonstrating the communication components of sender, receiver, channel, and feedback in online environment. It also explains how impressions are formed and relationships are initiated and developed. The weakest point of hyperpersonal theory is that it does not investigate whether its numerous assumptions are theoretically interdependent or simply accidental (Walther and Parks, 2002).

When comparing impression formation between offline and online settings among conservative Saudi Islamic cultures, it can be said that the offline setting is the one that lacks social cues between the sexes. Due to the *hijab*, Saudi women are obliged to cover their whole bodies, and the majority of women cover their faces as well. This means that males will not be able to easily form an impression due to the lack of both verbal and non-verbal social cues from females. Thus, it could be argued that for Saudis, an online setting would carry more information than face-to-face meetings, as an online environment would enable users to experience a more intensive interaction in comparison to face-to-face meetings. Given that there is a lack of research regarding online interactions among Saudis, addressing the impact of social cues in online settings will contribute to the body of knowledge.

4.4. Theories of the Courtship Process Initiated Online

The emergence of developing relationships in cyberspace has drawn the attention of computer-mediated communication scholars to investigating the stages that partners go through when developing their relationships online. There are three approaches explaining courtship processes that were initiated online. The first approach based its models on pre-existing offline relationship development theories (e.g. Sprecher, 2009; Whitty, 2010). The second generated new models through the utilisation of grounded theory (e.g. LaBuda, 2012).

The third depends on script theory to provide a precise description of the stages of relationship development in an online context (e.g. Long, 2010). This section provides an overview of these approaches, their strength and weaknesses, and their applicability to the Saudi script of courtship processes initiated in matrimonial websites.

In explaining the initial stages of courtship grounded in offline theories, Sprecher (2009) based her model on Levinger's (1974) three stages of relationship initiation. The first stage is awareness of the other. This stage occurs online when an individual accesses the profile of the potential partner, visits his/her blog or profile, or sends him/her an online message. The second stage, the surface contact stage, starts when online users contact others after they have received a great deal of information about the other from his/her profile, his/her interaction with others and his/her posts, activities and preferences. According to Sprecher (2009), although the first two stages are considered important to forming an online relationship, a "real relationship" cannot be considered to exist unless there is "mutuality" and "interdependence" between the two partners, which is considered the third stage. Characteristics of this final stage are "interdependence", "self-disclosure", "investment in each other", and "a feeling of couple identity". Sprecher (2009) argues that in order to reach full mutuality, an offline contact requires the couples to reach the "mutuality" and "interdependence" levels. However, this model of relationship development is more descriptive than explanatory. It also does not cover when the change in a stage happens and when transitions from one stage to another occur. What is the stimulus for the transfer from one stage to another? What are the situations surrounding that transfer? What are the situations surrounding the transfer that are not identified? In short, Sprecher (2009) relationship development model falls short in terms of theoretical clarity and specificity. It does not receive any support from either Western or Islamic scholars to test its applicability to courtship processes initiated online.

A more sophisticated model that is also based on an offline theory is articulated by Whitty (2010), who based her developing relationships model of online dating sites on Givens' (1979) five-stage theory of the traditional courting process. In stage one (the attention stage), an individual starts trying to catch the attention and attraction of a potential partner by sending non-verbal cues. In online dating, an individual does not have a specific target towards whom to show interest. Therefore, the individual sends attention signals through maintaining an attractive profile and posting a personal photo to introduce

himself/herself. Whitty (2007) suggests in her BAR approach that online daters should maintain a balance between their attractive and real selves when constructing their online profiles. An ideal presentation of the self does not work in the context of online dating sites: if people do not live up to their profiles, they typically do not earn a second date. Presenting a real profile also means avoiding writing anything that appears too clichéd. The second stage (the recognition stage) requires more flirting. In this stage, users replace exchanging emails between the members of the site with sending "pokes" or "kisses", which seems less intrusive than sending a direct email to express interest in a member and disclose information to this member. Stage three (the interaction stage) begins with exchanging emails through the site and often evolves into the exchange of cell phone numbers and text messages. The face-to-face meeting stage, the fourth stage, is very important in determining whether the two individuals will have further dates or not. However, this stage is different from traditional dates because the sexual attraction had already begun online. The purpose of the meeting for the online daters is to test the chemistry between them and the similarities and differences between them and their profiles. The last stage (resolution) occurs when an individual decides after the first date if he/she is sexually attracted to the other person, and then decides whether to go on another date with that person or go back to the dating website to search for other options. Despite its clarity, accuracy, and detail, Whitty's (2010) theory only addresses the development of relationships via online dating websites in Western society, which is totally different from the Islamic culture. The weakest point in this approach, which based its models on offline theories, is that there are no offline theories that could explain Islamic offline courtship processes that could be in turn applied to online settings.

LaBuda (2012) has put forward an online relationship model utilising the grounded theory. His model consists of four distinctive stages: He argues that an online relationship starts when the participants have a desire to find a significant other and they believe that there is no other way to meet them, which leads them to put their profiles on an online dating site. Second, users start to enjoy the control that the online dating site provides them. The third stage states that being open to a new experience leads to a successful relationship development. Finally, the personality trait to take a risk in moving the relationship offline determines whether it will flourish or fail. Although this model provides a description of the conditions that lead to the move from one stage to another, a detailed explanation of the users' behaviour and the interaction between users in each stage is missing.

Utilising script theory, Long (2010) provided a model to explore the processes and scripts for online relationships initiated in dating websites. Long's model consists of 14 stages. These stages are as follows: (A) Love styles: date seekers usually explained that they do not have only one way to relate to others romantically, but rather that they have a mix of styles or "want it all." (B) Deciding to join an online dating site: given a lack of partners offline, their acquaintances had had more success dating online. They want to find a partner or date, and since it is more efficient than initiating dates offline, they decide to join the site. (C) Goals for online dating: individuals use sites for their own purposes, whether for a serious partner, casual dates, or fun. (D) Choosing a dating site: date seekers choose a site based on the perceived members of the site, the culture and features of the site (including cost), their goals for online dating, and how they perceive the site's ability to help them achieve those goals. Daters may join more than one site. (E) Creating a profile: date seekers must create a profile and describe what or who they are looking for in terms of a partner. (F) Matching: users are provided with potentially compatible partners through a list or searching feature. (G) Making decisions about matches: once a list of potential matches or results of a search is available, users make decisions about matches. If the matches are turned down, contact is stopped. (H) The process returns to the matching step (F). (I) Initial contact with matches can take place before and/or after the decisions about the matching step (G). (J) If both parties pass the tests, this establishes a mutual match. A mutual match means that both date seekers want to advance their communication. (K) Engaging in mediated communication: depending on their levels of interest and additional rounds of elimination, the match can move to phone calls and text messages or skip right to meeting offline. (L) Meeting face-to-face: the date seekers discuss moving the relationship offline and meeting in person, as well as discussing when/where/how to meet. If the decision to continue offline contact is made by both parties, (M), it stays offline and the match no longer uses the dating site (N). This model is characterised by being clear, accurate, and detailed. It describes the behaviour and conditions that lead to transitioning from one stage to another. Using script theory as a theoretical framework would provide a more comprehensive and systematic model as it enables the researcher to capture users' actions and the decisions behind them. Being based on Western culture, it would be interesting to know which stages provided by this script model would match the script provided by Saudis regarding their courtship process initiated through matrimonial websites.

4.5. Summary of the Chapter

Reviewing the theories of mate preferences show that these theories fall within three perspectives: homogamy perspective, economic perspective, and completion perspective. While the main strength of the homogamy perspective is that its main principle of similarity among partners has become an essential concept in some of the subsequent theories, there is insufficient support for homogamy perspective in the empirical research. The theories under the economic perspective could be credited for introducing new concepts such as "marriage market", "premarital margining", "self-worth", and "costs and rewards". Nevertheless, these theories have been criticized because they equate relationships with mechanical processes that are free of emotions and reduced them to purely mental and logical operations. Some critics have even claimed that the economic theories cannot be considered theories at all, rather they are frames of reference within which many theories can support or oppose each other. The completion perspective has, on the other hand, been widely adopted by scholars to explain the process of mate selection. In particular, sexual strategies theory provides one of the clearest articulations of both sexes' preferences for finding a partner for long-term relationships, such as marriage. Such articulations are important given that Saudi culture considers marriage the only acceptable framework for intimate relationships between sexes.

Focusing on impression formation theories, while Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory provides a substantial insight into impression formation in face-to-face contexts, it appears to offer an incomplete explanation to such formation in the usage of matrimonial websites' context. Although the social identity model of deindividuation is applied in the online context and it is in line to some extent with the nature of collective culture, it fails to highlight the role that individual differences may play in forming a positive impression online. On the other hand, Walther's hyperpersonal theory (1996) helps in demonstrating the communication components of sender, receiver, channel, and feedback in online environment. It also explains how impressions are formed and relationships are initiated and developed online.

Regarding the courtship theories, there are three approaches explaining courtship processes that are initiated online. The first approach bases its models on pre-existing offline relationship development theories and does not receive any support from either Western or Islamic scholars to test its applicability to courtship processes initiated online. The second

approach generates new models through the utilisation of the grounded theory. Although this approach provides a description of the conditions that lead to the move from one stage to another, a detailed explanation of the users' behaviour and the interaction between users in each stage is missing. The third approach utilises script theory to provide a precise description of the stages of relationship development in an online context. This approach is characterised by being clear, accurate, and detailed. It describes the behaviour and conditions that lead to the transitioning from one stage to another.

From the above review, it could be concluded that the sexual strategy theory, hyper-personal theory and script theory offer an explanation for mate preferences strategies, impression formation, and courtship process that initiated within Muslim matrimonial websites. Therefore, the following chapter provides a robust rationale for the selection of these core theories that underpin the current research as its theoretical framework.

Chapter Five

Theoretical Framework of the Research

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter reviews the theories that investigate mate selection, impression formations, and online courtship process. It also evaluates the weaknesses and strengths of these theories in order to decide the core theories that would underpin the current research. As the sexual strategy theory, hyper-personal theory and script theory could provide an explanation for mate preferences strategies, impression formation, and courtship process that initiated within Muslim matrimonial websites, this chapter reviews in details these three theories and construct them as the theoretical framework of this research. It discusses the rationale for choosing each of these theories, the previous studies that apply them, and their applicability on the Saudi context of using matrimonial websites to find a potential spouse.

5.2. Buss and Schmitt's (1993) Sexual Strategies Theory

This section provides a rationale for choosing sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) as a theoretical framework to investigate Saudis' mate preferences. Unlike previous theories in the field, this theory distinguishes between the strategies utilised by both sexes when searching for a mate for long-term and short-term relationships. Sexual strategies theory provides one of the clearest articulations of both sexes' preferences for finding a partner for long-term relationships, such as marriage. Such articulations are important given that Saudi culture considers marriage the only acceptable framework for intimate relationships between sexes.

According to Buss and Schmitt (1993), men strategically seek the following characteristics for long-term mating: paternity confidence, commitment, female reproductive value, gene quality, and good parenting skill. On the other hand, the authors proposed that women seek the following mate preferences: investment of resources, commitment, physical protection, gene quality, and good parenting skills. While its strategies are considered to be universal and evolutionarily, sexual strategies theory's main strength for this research is that it provides a base for explaining some aspects of Saudis' preferred characteristics in a

potential spouse. In Saudi culture, males are responsible for their spouses' behaviours and any unacceptable behaviour from their wives can negatively affect their family's or tribe's reputation. Therefore, it can be assumed that Saudi males look for a committed and faithful potential spouse. In addition, Islamic religion and Saudi traditions encourage Saudis to maintain their offspring and to have big families. This principle may lead Saudi males to look for a potential spouse who has the reproductive ability to have children and good parenting skills, in line with the proposed strategies utilised by males. As Islamic religion obligates males to be responsible for their family expenses, it is expected that Muslim women in general and Saudi women in particular look for a partner who can offer them a decent life. As Saudi Arabia is a male-dominated culture, it is also expected that Saudi women look for men who will protect them and be good fathers for their children. Such notions are all in line with the proposed strategies utilised by females. Even though sexual strategies theory coincides with Saudi culture's customs and traditions and seems to provide a suitable explanation for Saudis' mate preferences, there is an absence in the literature regarding the extent to which they would utilise these strategies when searching for a mate on matrimonial websites.

Scholars have increasingly become interested in investigating how sexual strategies theory applies to online contexts. The findings of the majority of these studies have confirmed or expanded the assumptions of the theory. For instance, Dawson and McIntosh (2006) analysed 151 Internet personal profiles to investigate the attributes less attractive females and less wealthy males showed. The findings indicated that wealth and attractiveness in males' profiles were both associated with the decreased emphasising of other positive personal attributes, whereas physical attributes in females' profiles were negatively associated with emphasising other positive personal attributes. These findings indicate that users who do not possess expected preferred attributes tend to be strategic in emphasising alternative socially desired attributes to compensate for these acknowledged deficiencies. It is worthwhile to investigate whether these further strategies will be utilised by users from other cultures, such as Islamic Saudi culture, or whether they might emphasise other attributes, such as their religiosity.

Badahdah and Tiemann (2005) conducted a content analysis of 500 online personal advertisements to investigate mate preferences on the Al-Usrah.com website. This website is used by Muslims living in America who are seeking potential mates. Their results confirm sexual strategies theory's assumptions, as men indicated their preferences for younger mates

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more often than women whereas women were more likely than men to seek emotional partners with high socio-economic and religious statuses. Women also indicated their religiosity in their profiles more often than did men. This finding indicates the potential role of the religious factor in altering mate preferences. Nevertheless, this study does not provide a comprehensive picture regarding the strategies related to a potential mate's religious attributes.

Mishra, Monippally, and Jayakar (2013) also examined the sexual strategies of 270 Indian Muslim males and females in online matrimonial ads at Shaadi.com and found that Muslim men and women both prefer light-skinned individuals and the majority claimed they possess this skin tone, which is considered a sign of attractiveness in Muslim culture. Few of the profiles show indicators of markers of Islamic devotion, such as "praying five times a day", "wearing a hijab or burqa", or "observing Ramadan". Although this study reveals the extent to which users indicate external and internal manifestations of Islam, it does not show whether the level of religiosity affects users' interest in their potential partners. The current research attempts to overcome this limitation by investigating this potential role of Islamic religion in Saudis' preferences.

While Buss and Schmitt's sexual strategies theory provides a comprehensive understanding of mate preferences for each gender in long-term relationships, critics have questioned its lack of attention to the sociological and cultural factors that influence sexual preferences (Schulz, 2010) and the similarities between men and women in their preferences (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Therefore, this research will contribute to current knowledge by taking into account the distinctive attributes of Saudi Islamic culture when investigating Saudi mate preferences on matrimonial websites, as well as examining both the similarities and differences between sexes in these preferences.

5.3. Walther's (1996) Hyperpersonal Theory

Unlike previous theories that focused on offline communication, hyperpersonal theory was designed to investigate impression formation in online contexts, which makes it useful for the current study. According to Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock (2010), hyper-personal theory represents a turning point in the history of computer-mediated communication literature. It shifted scholars' attention from the limitations of online interaction, such as the lack of physical cues, to the effectiveness of online communication to promote relationships

utilising the Internet's technological affordances. Walther (1996) suggests that, due to the lack of social cues, users use advanced features of computer-mediated communication to improve the content they generate to manage the impressions they create and enhance preferred relationships.

One of the main strengths of hyperpersonal theory is that it provides an explanation of the role of the four main communication components in forming an impression online: the *sender*, a matrimonial website user in this research; the *receiver*, the potential partner; the *channel*, the website itself, and the *feedback*, users' reactions about what they view in other profiles or what they receive from other users. According to Walther (1996), senders can effectively utilise the text-based features to facilitate selective self-presentation. Through text they can present what they want other users to know about them. Thus, the senders have the choice to generate content that emphasises desired attributes and interact with others in a way that leaves a positive impression. When receiving these messages from other users, hyperpersonal theory argues that a receiver may exaggerate his/her perception of the sender's message. Due to the lack of social cues, the receiver fills in the blanks with regard to missing information to form an impression. Such a process may take the form of idealisation if the first impression formed about the sender is positive.

According to hyperpersonal theory, computer-mediated channels are capable of hosting rich interactions. The theory focuses on two features of computer-mediated channel that offer users the chance for favourable communication: "reduced communication cues" and "potentially asynchronous communication". According to Walther (1996), computer-mediated communication enables users to focus only on the written text through editing, deleting, and rewriting a message in order to make it reflect their intended effects before releasing it to be viewed by other users. Other users focus attention mainly on the text and they are not distracted "by messy hair, lack of makeup, or normal imperfections, much less more pronounced physical distracters or disabilities'' (Walther 1996, p. 20). The asynchronous feature also enables users to communicate in their own time frame, removing the pressure to interact in the exact moment, which helps facilitate a successful communication.

The last component in the theory is the feedback between sender and receiver. The theory argues that the mutual effect of this feedback on each partner reflects the process of "behavioural confirmation". Behavioural confirmation defines how the receiver's impression of a sender leads the sender to behave and how that behaviour in turn modifies the reactions

of the receiver. Thus, when a sender sends a deliberate self-presentation to a receiver, the receiver idealises the sender and replies in a manner that positively enhances this self-presented personae. Such a process may lead the sender to modify his/her response according to that feedback.

Reviewing hyperpersonal theory's explanation of online interaction suggests that this theory could assist in explaining the case of Saudi culture, since the theory bases its assumptions on the use of written text and not physical appearance to form an impression. Focusing on the text provides the researcher an opportunity to deal with data that may not include photos. In addition, hyperpersonal theory focuses on how users can control their messages online to form a favourable impression. In the Saudi case, this advantage may be utilised by Saudis to bring their personae in line with religious and social norms. The current research also argues that online communication for Saudis could carry more information than offline communication due to Saudi women's obligation to wear hijab and limitations on offline cross-gender communication. Scholars have attempted to investigate hyperpersonal theory's applicability in online dating settings. They either focus on the receiver (e.g., Farrer & Gavin, 2009), the sender (e.g., Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2010), the channel utilised by the sender (e.g., Ellison, Hancock, & Toma, 2011), or the feedback (Walther, Liang, DeAndrea, Tong, Carr, Spottswood, and Amichai-Hamburger, 2011).

Focusing on the receiver, Farrer and Gavin (2009) examined previous and current users' experiences of a Japanese online dating site and how they avoid the computer-mediated communication's limitations. Thirty-six of the online survey participants were current users and 27 were previous users of Match.com Japan. While the absence of social context cues in written communication could be problematical in Japanese culture because social context has a significant role in the communication process than in other cultures, the study reveals that these users attempted to obtain social information utilising the signs provided by the online dating website. This result indicates that users found ways to avoid online limitations to address their culture's requirement of high social context. By contrast, the Saudi cultural context discourages social cues such as eye contact in face-to-face relationships with the opposite sex and limits social cues through the barrier of the women's hijab. This brings into question the extent to which the online context might actually carry more social cues for Saudis to form their impressions about members of the opposite sex and whether this context might trigger them as senders to disclose intimate information about

themselves.

In a Western context, Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock (2010) examined whether senders disclose more intimate information in online contexts as compared to offline contexts. The participants (n = 85) were randomly engaged in either offline or online communication with a partner who had high or low-intimacy self-disclosures. They found that online communications had a stronger relationship between disclosure and intimacy in comparison with offline communications. Although this study revealed senders' attitudes towards online dating sites, it was limited in focusing on one component of hyperpersonal theory. Ellison, Hancock, and Toma (2011), on the other hand, investigated the role of both sender and channel through exploring participants' understandings of online impression formation using qualitative data. The authors asked participants how they construct and assess profiles, and how they justify the discrepancies between online profiles and offline impression formation. The results reveal that participants tend to have selective self-presentation with a collection of past, present, and future selves, and that they consider the asynchronous feature of mediated communication channels an advantage that allows them to selectively construct their personae.

To address the lack of studies that focus on the role of the feedback component, Walther, Liang, DeAndrea, Tong, Carr, Spottswood, and Amichai-Hamburger (2011) investigated the influence of feedback effects on identity following a self-presentation which purposely emphasises a definite personality trait Participants (n = 212) were requested to write texts in a blog and submit them only. Some of those participants received feedback about their writing and the rest do not. The results support the hypothesised interaction effects of feedback on individuals. While this study attempted to strengthen the field of hyperpersonal research, criticism of the theory continues to include worries about the associations between the four theoretical components of the theory.

Critiques of hyperpersonal theory have called for further studies to determine if these "elements are theoretically interdependent or merely coincidental" (Walther et al. 2011: 2). While some testing has been done to determine which of the multiple theoretical components are necessary or sufficient to achieve the transformations addressed by this theory (Walther, Slovacek, and Tidwell, 2001), none of these studies have investigated the four components together. In addition, these studies have been conducted among Western and Asian populations and little is known about the applicability of this theory in Arabic or even Islamic contexts. The current research will help in addressing these concerns in that it aims to provide

a model for marital relationships initiated through matrimonial websites and test the relative importance of these theoretical components.

5.4. Simon and Gagnon's (1986) Script Theory

The concept of "scripts" has been proposed by the sociologists Simon and Gagnon (1986). While Gagnon and Simon have proposed several versions of script theory together and separately, the notion central to all of them is that behaviour is understood from culturally presented messages that explain what is considered to be acceptable behaviour in a given situation (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). As the current research attempts to explore the scripts Saudis follow in their courtship process on matrimonial websites, this section aims to provide a rationale for adopting script theory as its theoretical framework.

The main argument of script theory is that human beings use "scripts" as mental maps to guide behaviour in any given situation (Abelson, 1981). Script theory argues that these mental maps, which are akin to stereotypes, provide guidance to individuals regarding considerations about the sequences of events in potential situations. Such sequences are learned and culturally enhanced throughout individuals' lifespans. Individuals depend on symbols and descriptions to comprehend their roles in diverse contexts. Interactions that routinely occur in individuals' daily life are perceived as a determinate sequence of events on which behaviour is predicated. Individuals form expectations of behaviours in a setting prior to entering it. As there is no clear script in the literature regarding Saudi courtship processes initiated through matrimonial websites, adopting script theory in the current research helps in providing a systematic approach to form a model of Saudi courtship process.

Script theory has covered three distinct levels of scripts: cultural, intrapsychic, and interpersonal. Cultural scripts, the broadest of the three levels of script theory, involve social and cultural expectations for what is considered to be culturally/socially appropriate behaviour in a dating context. Largely influenced by the media, cultural scripts provide guidance to men and women about what each gender is "supposed" to do in dating, romantic, or sexual situations. Whereas cultural scripts address what is considered to be socially and culturally expected and appropriate, intrapsychic scripts address personal needs and desires that can form and maintain sexual arousal (Metts and Spitzberg, 1996). Hynie, Lydon, Cote, and Wiene (1998) contend that intrapsychic scripts comprise one's internalisation of socially-shared scripts. An individual's personal sexual desires can conform to the cultural script or

deviate from it. Interpersonal scripts provide a linkage between social and cultural expectations and individual needs and desires (Hynie et al., 1998). Individuals perceive enactments and form attributions for them. Behaviour that aligns with scripted expectations is deemed more acceptable and behaviour that deviates from expectations is typically perceived more negatively (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Giving an explanation for these three distinct levels of scripts may assist in comprehensively explaining the Saudi courtship process. Because script theory is proposed as a way to "define the who, what, where, when, and why of sexual conduct – guiding our sexualities at personal, interactional, and cultural-historical levels" (Gagnon and Simon, 2005, p. xiv) in gendered social roles, marriage and dating processes, it is applicable to the current research to analyse the script of Saudi courtships initiated on matrimonial websites.

A number of Western studies have applied script theory to the realm of courtship and dating (e.g., Bartoli and Clark, 2006; Long, 2010; Serewicz and Gale, 2008). For instance, Bartoli and Clark (2006) conducted two studies focusing on the scripts that people follow on a typical date. The first study was conducted among 80 university students who were provided with a qualitative survey featuring three dating scenarios. Respondents were asked to write down a list of activities that might occur as part of each dating scenario. The study revealed that the participants were similar in their list of activities in all three dating scenarios provided. The results also showed that men had a higher expectation for sexual activities than women on a date. The second study provided quantitative surveys to 182 Greek life students in an American university. The results revealed that both sexual experience and being a member of Greek life played a role in altering the three dating scenarios. However, this study is limited in its results, as it focused on only three defined scenarios and thus cannot be generalised to a dating script in a naturalistic context.

Another investigation of the applicability of script theory to the offline dating process was conducted by Serewicz and Gale (2008). Their study aimed to investigate whether the variables of gender of the date initiator, alcohol availability, and desired relationship type would play a role in changing a first date script. The study was conducted among 209 American university students who were provided with dating scenarios to read, evaluate and list an average of 21 actions that they predicted could occur in each of these scenarios. Their responses indicated that traditional gender roles persist in the first date script. The results also showed that the context in which the date occurred greatly affected the script of the date. This

study provides interesting results regarding the influence of a number of variables on the script of the first date. Nevertheless, it is limited in that it does not go beyond the first date to investigate the whole courtship process.

It should be noted, however, that the studies of both Bartoli and Clark (2006) and Serewicz and Gale (2008) aim to provide scripts of traditional courtships; their results should be treated with caution when discussing courtship processes that are initiated online. According to Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, and Felt (2008), when it comes to online dating, cultural and interpersonal scripts are different from the traditional courtship script. Only a few studies to date have applied script theory to an investigation of the online dating environment, and these were done among Western samples.

Long (2010) used script theory to investigate courtship processes initiated through online dating websites. Long's study examined how the roles undertaken by dating website users affect the scripts of traditional dates through content analysis of three online dating sites and 15 in-depth interviews with online daters. Using this data, she developed a theoretical model for online dating that suggests that different levels of scripts work together to achieve a successful dating experience. This study is useful for the current research in that it utilises content analysis of profiles followed by qualitative interviews with the participants. Nevertheless, the model provided by Long is based on a Western dating script, which may be different from the Saudi courtship process due to a variety of significant cultural differences. As little is known about either traditional or online courtship scripts among Muslims in general and Saudis in particular, script theory is suitable for the current research because it provides an understanding of Saudi expatriates' courtship scripts.

5.5. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presents the rationale behind choosing sexual strategy theory, hyper-personal theory and script theory as the theoretical framework for this research which aims to provide an explanation for mate preferences strategies, impression formation, and courtship process that initiated by Saudi users within Muslim matrimonial websites. Sexual strategy is credited for distinguishing between the strategies utilised by both sexes when searching for a mate for long-term and short-term relationships. It also provides one of the clearest articulations of both sexes' preferences for finding a partner for long-term relationships, such

as marriage. All of this offers a base for explaining some aspects of Saudis' preferred characteristics in a potential spouse.

Unlike previous theories that focused on offline communication, hyperpersonal theory is designed for investigating impression formation in online contexts, which makes it useful for the current study. It shifts scholars' attention from the limitations of online interaction, such as the lack of physical cues, to the effectiveness of online communication to promote relationships utilising the Internet's technological affordances Hyperpersonal theory is credited because it provides an explanation of the role of the four main communication components in forming an impression online: the *sender*, a matrimonial website user in this research; the *receiver*, the potential partner; the *channel*, the website itself, and the *feedback*, users' reactions about what they view in other profiles or what they receive from other users.

Script theory is credited for enabling the research to capture the "scripts" as a mental map to guide the behaviour in any given situation that is akin to stereotypes. It provides guidance to individuals regarding considerations about the sequences of events in potential situations. It also covers three distinct levels of scripts: cultural, intrapsychic, and interpersonal. As there is no clear script in the literature regarding Saudi courtship processes initiated through matrimonial websites, adopting script theory in the current research helps in providing a systematic approach to form a model of Saudi courtship process. The following chapter provides an overall review of the approach taken in the current research to reveal online mate preferences, online impression formation, and courtship processes among Saudis using hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory, and script theory as a theoretical framework.

Chapter Six

Research Methodology

6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overall review of the approach taken to the current research. The present research is designed to reveal online impression formation, online mate preferences and courtship processes among Saudis using hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory, and script theory as a theoretical framework. The research consisted of three sequential phases, starting with a quantitative questionnaire, followed by a quantitative content analysis, and ending with a qualitative semi-structured interview phase. The following sections discuss the rationale for the methodology and the procedures used. This chapter also reviews the research paradigm and design as well as the research questions, the three research phases, methods, samples, data collection procedures, and analysis. It ends with an overview of the ethical considerations of the research.

6.2. Research Paradigm and Design

One of the main strengths of the mixed method approach is that it avoids the weaknesses of applying a single quantitative or qualitative approach alone as it allows the researcher to benefit from the strengths of each approach in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Although this is considered one of the main justifications for applying mixed method approach in a research, the current research has its unique rationale that is stemming from its research questions, theoretical framework, timeframe and its cultural specificity to particularly apply the mixed methods approach.

The type of the current research questions is considered as a dependent form based on Creswell & Plano Clarke (2007) classification. This type of questions requires a multiphase investigation to draw clear image of the phenomenon. In addition, the research questions are highly linked to the theoretical framework which consists of three theories: Hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory, and script theory. While Hyperpersonal theory has been mainly examined qualitatively in the previous literature, studies based on Sexual strategies theory have been mostly conducted quantitatively. The Script theory has been examined by either quantitative or qualitative research. As applying a single approach alone has its

limitations, the current research attempts to adopt the mixed methods approach and it consists of three sequential phases in order to avoid what has been missed in the previous research. For example, research on Hyperpersonal theory, which has mainly adopted qualitative approach, provides detailed and informative data about the phenomena but does not enable the researcher to examine the relationship between Hyperpersonal theory components and the demographic variables of the participants. Therefore, this research starts with a quantitative questionnaire phase. As the qualitative step is particularly important when there is a lack of previous measurements (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2007) and it assists in modifying the measurement to be in line with Saudi culture, the researcher conducted a preliminary qualitative interview in order to construct the questionnaire items. After constructing and modifying the questionnaire's items to be in line with Saudi culture in a pilot study, the questionnaire has been administered to a larger sample.

Following this phase, a quantitative content analysis checklist has been developed to validate and complement the obtained data from the quantitative questionnaire phase. This phase enables the researcher to deal with the actual data that have been presented at matrimonial websites profiles of the users. The last phase of the current research then was to conduct qualitative interviews with users to obtain the Script of Saudi matrimonial websites users of finding a spouse through these websites and to develop the model of their courtship process. The effectiveness of this sequence in obtaining rich and valuable data from the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches leads the researcher to apply the sequential mixed method approach in this research.

The specificity of Saudi culture in applying strict gender segregation between men and women has also been taken into consideration when selecting the research approach and designing its measurements. The cultural, social and religious factors have been consulted in modifying the research items and also have been examined over the three research phases. The online interviews have been conducted with the help of a female colleague who was a PhD student in a British university. The researcher and his female colleague have an adequate experience in this task as they previously applied this collaborative work in her PhD thesis. This is because it is unacceptable to interview participants in the Saudi culture regarding sensitive issues by an opposite sex researcher, even online as in the current research. This was one of the reasons the research tools have been undertaken online, in addition to other

efficacy reasons. These efficacy reasons have been explained in more details later in this chapter (See section 6.4).

The structured data collection technique in the current research of beginning with a questionnaire followed by a quantitative content analysis brings together the strengths of quantification, precision, and reliability. On the other hand, the qualitative data from the interviews in the final phase brings a fuller, more holistic understanding of Saudis' own experience with matrimonial websites. Thus, the quantitative data and analysis offer the primary explanation of the research phenomenon, while the qualitative data and analysis enhance the understanding of the statistical findings by investigating respondents' experiences in greater detail. Such a combination helps in emphasising the strengths and minimising the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative approaches across the whole research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2007).

The sequential mixed method approach with the above structure also enables the researcher to access a considerable number of participants at the quantitative questionnaire phase, which, in turn, increases the chance of examining the phenomenon from a representative sample. This phase also allows the researcher to ask the participants from the main sample to voluntarily participate in the following profile content analysis phase to examine their presented information against what they have stated in their responses to the questionnaire. The first phase also asks the participants to participate in the last phase; the qualitative interviews. This sequence is effective in accessing the relevant sample. It also facilitates obtaining comprehensive data, as each phase validates and complements the previous phase.

The sequential mixed methods approach of the current research leads the researcher to adopt the pragmatism paradigm as the majority of the methodological researchers believe that pragmatism paradigm is the most suitable paradigm for mixed method approach, philosophically and empirically (e.g., Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The pragmatism paradigm accepts both singular and multiple realities and directs itself toward understanding problems in the "real world". It enables the researcher to "be free of mental and practical constraints imposed by the forced choice dichotomy between postpositivism and constructivism" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 27), and of being forced to use a particular research method or technique. In the case of the current research, this paradigm is oriented towards understanding the attitudes and behaviours of Saudis when

using matrimonial websites and the researcher is empowered, as a pragmatist, to use a wide range of tools to comprehensively investigate the participants' use of these websites from multiple perspectives. Consequently, the interpretation of data is necessarily pluralistic, involving both deductive and inductive reasoning through utilising mixed methods design. The following figure shows the relationship between the research questions, theoretical framework and the research methods.

Figure 6. 1 An Overview of the Research Components
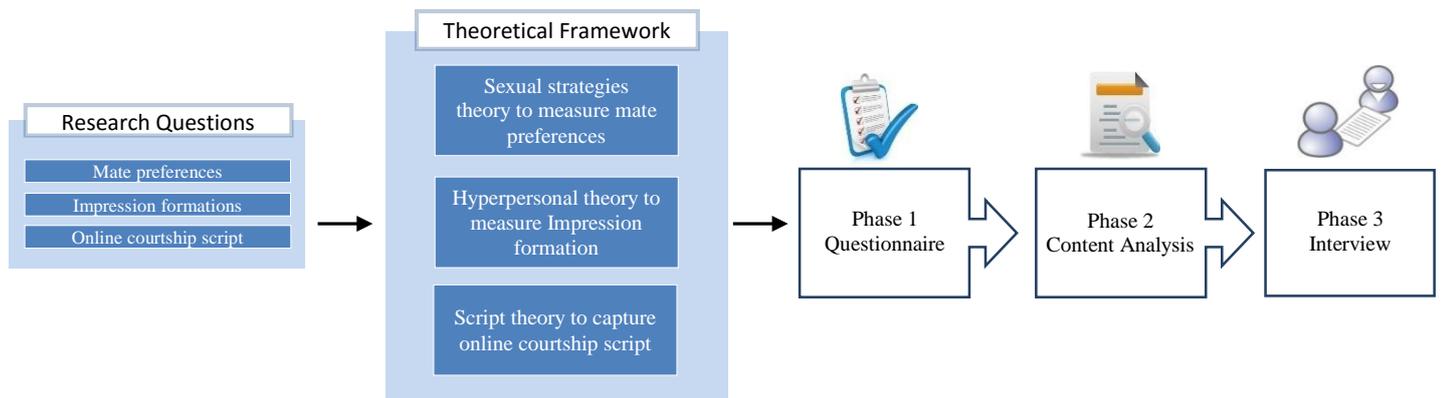
6.3. Rationale for Choosing the Muslim Matrimonial Website

Several steps were followed to determine the most suitable Muslim matrimonial website to conduct research on Saudis' impression formation, mate preferences, and the Saudi courtship script. Previous Internet studies have tended to target the most-visited websites in a field using the Alexa website, which provides up-to-date information regarding the traffic rank of websites worldwide according to category, subcategory, or country. It also analyses the websites' visitors according to their demographic variables (Tetali, Bose, & Arif 2013). Using this approach as a starting point, the researcher searched Alexa's "society" category and "relationships" subcategory for dating websites. The search revealed 536 results, but none was a Muslim matrimonial website. The researcher then searched for matrimonial websites within the "religion" category and "Islam" subcategory. The 25 search results appear to be English-language websites that attract Muslims originally from East Asia, such as Indians and Pakistanis.

Modifying his approach, the researcher searched directly for a number of popular Muslim matrimonial websites to locate the category under which they are classified. He

found that these websites were categorised either under the "family" sub-category or "relationship" sub-category of the "Arabic" category. Using these search terms revealed two Muslim matrimonial websites listed within the "family" category: Mawada.net and Zojah.com. Within the "relationship" category, Zawajj.net was listed. Thus, the total number of the globally most visited Muslim matrimonial websites in Arabic is three.

The researcher searched for the rank of each of these three matrimonial websites in Saudi Arabia and found that people in Saudi Arabia visited Mawada.net the most. On the other hand, Zojah.com had a low rank and very limited visits from Saudi Arabia and people in Saudi Arabia do not visit Zawajj.net at all. Thus, this result could be taken to some extent as an indicator of the websites' popularity among Saudis.

To refine the website selection, the researcher investigated the number of Saudi members on each of the matrimonial websites, using the websites' search bars to locate them. The search engine at Zojah.com does not include the nationality of the members, and thus this site was excluded as a potential website to study because it is difficult to determine whether or not it has Saudis registered as members. There were only 14 registered Saudis on Zawajj.net, and thus this website was also excluded. Investigation of Mawada.net, on the other hand, revealed that a considerable number of Saudis living in Saudi Arabia are using this website. Alexa also indicates that 20% of Mawada.net visitors are from Saudi Arabia. As a result, the researcher decided that this matrimonial website was the most suitable target to study.

The researcher contacted the agency that runs this website to obtain its approval to conduct research on it. The agency showed its willingness and agreement to help the researcher in conducting the three phases of the research: an online survey, a content analysis of profiles, and an online interview. The agency also agreed to recruit members to participate in the three phases of the research and send them the link of the online questionnaire. For the interview phase, the agency preferred that a female assistant instead of the researcher be the one to interview the female members due to cultural considerations. It stated that they do not have any data regarding, for example, the number of messages sent between members, the frequency of usage of the poking feature, or the percentage of each gender initiating interactions.

The agency agreed that the researcher could investigate the time the members have been registered at the website, and their reasons for registering at this website instead of using traditional approaches to finding a spouse. He could also ask them about other online methods they have used to search for a potential spouse, their preferences in their potential spouses, and the importance of both religion and tribe of origin when looking for a spouse. The impressions these members intended to create through their profiles, the strategies they use to attract or interact with others, their perceptions regarding using matrimonial websites as a channel to form an impression, and the role of the feedback received by others in altering the impression they intend to form on the website could also be examined. In addition, the researcher was allowed to investigate members' rationales for their actions within the website, their perceptions regarding the acceptable and non-acceptable actions made on this website, the extent to which they are accurate in their self-description, the extent to which they expect other profiles to be accurate and the issues that attracts them in others' profiles, and the number of the members the users actively contact within the website.

The agency also permitted the researcher to examine the script of the progress of the members' relationships and its difference from offline traditional scripts, the roles of their family members and how they involve them in the process, their evaluation of their experiences on this website, and the positive and negative outcomes of establishing and developing a relationship through matrimonial websites. Members' attitudes towards informing others about finding a spouse through a matrimonial website, the attempts they have made to contact potential spouses, the responses they made to potential spouses, the time they terminate correspondence, the number of contacted members, whether they have failed or succeeded in any of these attempts, and the factors triggered them to initiate or terminate correspondence could be investigated as well. The researcher was also allowed to analyse the profiles' of those who indicate their willingness to participate.

6.4. Research Phases

As a sequential mixed methods research project, the current research starts with a quantitative questionnaire phase, followed by a quantitative content analysis of the profiles, and ends with a qualitative interview phase. The aim of these three sequential phases is to provide a detailed explanation of the research questions. This section provides a detailed

description of each phase in the current research, including its rationale, sample, data collection, and data analysis.

6.4.1. Phase One: The Quantitative Online Questionnaire Phase

Since the target of the current research is Saudis who utilise the chosen Muslim matrimonial website, and they are geographically distributed throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the suitable way to locate, survey, and collect data from a large sample of them is within the matrimonial websites themselves using an online questionnaire. As confirmed by Wright (2006), online questionnaires benefit from the technological advantage of providing access to individuals who would be difficult to recruit through traditional methods. Besides, online instruments can save time for the researcher as it enables him to contact thousands of individuals with shared characteristics in a short period of time, though they might be separated by significant geographic distances. The ability to automatically code the closed-ended questions in the questionnaires also saves the researcher time as it leaves only the open-ended ones to him to code manually (Wright, 2006).

The anonymity of the online questionnaire may also encourage more members to participate and share their experiences in the research, especially given that some participants may consider certain questions sensitive and prefer to answer them anonymously. Distributing the questionnaires through the chosen Muslim matrimonial website enables the researcher to deliver the questionnaires to female members as well, which would be difficult to do offline due to Saudi cultural constraints.

Nevertheless, one of the main limitations of an online questionnaire is that it is difficult to ensure the clarity of the questions in the questionnaire or provide clarification to the participants regarding the meaning of certain items. Thus, a pilot study is conducted at the beginning of this phase to reduce the ambiguity of the questionnaire, the suitability of its length and presentation, and the reliability and validity of its items. A detailed description of the questionnaire items is provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. As generating results mainly through a quantitative self-report instrument would minimise the scope of this study's generalizability (Brannen, 2005), qualitative interviews are conducted with a subsample as the last phase of this research.

One of the disadvantages of online questionnaires is that they tend to have a low response rate in comparison with offline questionnaires. To avoid this limitation, the researcher has to successively remind potential participants to fill them out. Such reminders are automated, which is considered an advantage of this form of questionnaire (Van Selm & Jankowsk, 2006; Wright, 2006). The owner of the matrimonial website under investigation in the current research agreed to use this technique to ensure a high response rate.

6.4.1.1. Informing the Construction of the Online Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed based on a combination of established instrument and original items based on the previous literature on online dating websites' usage, impression formation, and mate preferences. Preliminary online in-depth interviews with participants from the online matrimonial website were also conducted and used to inform the construction of the questionnaire. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth interviews are useful when detailed information about individuals' perceptions and behaviours or an exploration of new issues in depth is needed. They are useful for providing context for other data (such as questionnaire items) and offering a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. They are used in place of focus groups if the potential participants may not be comfortable speaking openly in a group due to the sensitivity of the topic being discussed. In the current research, conducting qualitative interviews provides the researcher with insights regarding Saudis' experiences, perceptions, and purposes in joining Muslim matrimonial websites, which offers a more comprehensive picture regarding the phenomenon and improve the questionnaire items and scale.

Based on the agreement with the matrimonial website's owner, participants are recruited to participate in online interviews by emailing the members asking for Saudi volunteers to participate in an online interview via Skype about their experiences in using these sites. They were mainly asked about their experiences of using the website, their mate preferences and their impression formation. As this phase is intended to improve the questionnaire and is not considered one of the main research phases, it only involves interviewing 10 participants – 5 Saudi males and 5 females – following Morse (1994) and Creswell's (1998) guidelines for optimal interview sample size.

Those willing to participate were asked to email the researcher. The information sheets (see Appendix A) and informed consent forms (see Appendix B) were sent to the

participants via email to read, sign, and email back to the researcher. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the researcher conducted the interviews with the male participants and a female colleague interviewed the female participants due to the cultural constrains (see section 6.2). Based on the data gathered from the pilot in-depth interviews, the questionnaire was divided into five sections as described below (Appendix D).

6.4.1.2. Description of the Online Questionnaire

The questionnaire starts with the background information that is expected to influence both participants' mate preferences strategies and impression formation. This section consists of eight questions (age, gender, tribal origin, current relationship status, level of education, occupation, monthly income, and level of religiosity).

The second section consists of seven questions about participants' experience in using Matrimonial websites (number of the matrimonial websites they register at, the time elapsed since their registration, time of constructing their profiles, other known members of matrimonial websites, the level of activity on matrimonial websites, and the fees they paid for being members at these sites, and their reasons behind using these websites).

Section three is about participants' mate preferences. This section consists of 27 characteristics that the participants will rate on a scale from 1 ("extremely unimportant") to 7 ("extremely important"). Buss and Schmitt (1993) indicated that there are five strategies men utilise in long-term mating context: paternity confidence (items 1, 2, 3, and 4), commitment (measured by items 7 and 8), female reproductive value (items 5, 6, and 14), gene quality (measured by items 13, 15 and 16) and good parenting skill (measured by items 9, 10, 11, and 12). Women utilise six strategies to find the following mate preferences: men who are able to invest (measured by items 17, 18, 19, and 20), men who are willing to invest (item 21), commitment (measured by item 7 and item 8), physical protection (item 22), gene quality (measured by items 13, 15, and 16), and good parenting skills (measured by items 9, 10, 11, and 12). These items are drawn from the scales of mate preferences provided by Buss and Schmitt (1993) and adjusted to the current research scope. As sexual strategies theory has been criticised for ignoring the role of religion and culture, four items were added to measure the preferences for religious characteristics (items 23, 24, 25, and 26) and the preference for tribe of origin (item 27).

The fourth is about participants' impression formation on matrimonial websites. Hyperpersonal theory argues that the sender, receiver, channel, and feedback all play roles in selective self-presentation and positive impression formation; thus, this section has three questions to ask about each of the first three components. The first question attempts to investigate if the senders (in this case profile owners) tend to have selective self-presentation, while the second question investigates if the receivers (in this case profile viewers) tend to idealise the image of the sender. The third question investigates if the asynchronous feature and social cues are considered positive characteristics for the channel (in this case the matrimonial websites). The forth component (feedback) was covered in the following qualitative interview phase.

Section five is about the outcome of using the matrimonial websites, including: attempts the participants have made to contact potential spouses, the responses they have made to potential spouses, their decision to terminate correspondences, the number of contacts they have made, whether they have failed or succeeded in any of these attempts, and if participants are willing to inform the researcher about their stories by participating in the interview phase.

The questionnaire ends by providing details of the second phase of the research and requesting the participants to volunteer for the next phase.

6.4.1.3. Pilot Study of the Online Questionnaire

After constructing the first draft of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study informs the researcher about the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Mooney and Duval (1993) noted that the results of a pilot study are considered to have relatively high reliability when they reach the 30–50 range. The goal of a pilot study is to test a preliminary survey or develop a scale. Thus, the pilot test for the online questionnaire in the current research is administered during February 2015 to 85 volunteer Saudi users (45 males and 40 females) from the chosen matrimonial website, aged between 18 and 65 (Mean = 32.73 years, SD = 7.00). The participants were provided with information sheets (Appendix A) and informed consent forms (Appendix B) to read, sign, and return to the researcher. Conducting this study helps in reducing the ambiguity of the questionnaire's items. For example, based on the gender, the pronouns were changed throughout the questionnaire's items and some of the sub-headings were removed for clarity. In section 4.3 (Impression

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formation section), the items related to the channel (4.3.1 to 4.3.6) were all began with the same phrase (Due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture), the participants suggested that it would be less distracting if this phrase was moved to the end of the sentence. The same was also applied to items 4.3.8. and 4.3.9. Conducting pilot study also aids in confirming the suitability of the questionnaire's length and presentation

Test-retest reliability was also measured to consider the extent to which the questionnaire is completed consistently over time. To estimate the test-retest reliability of the questionnaire, the participants completed the questionnaire on two occasions. The first occasion was called the test and the second occasion was called the retest. The scores awarded by the participants for each item in the questionnaire at the test and retest were computed. The correlations between the items' scores for each section at the test and retest using Pearson's correlation coefficient are presented in Tables 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5.

Table 6. 1 Reliability of the Items in Section 1: Background Information

Items	N	R
Age	85	.97
Gender	85	1.000
Tribe of origin	85	1.000
Relationship status	85	1.000
Educational attainment	85	.98
Job status	85	.99
Monthly income	85	.96
Religious level	85	.98

The test-retest reliability of all the items in the background information section range from (.96) to (1.000) and thus were within the excellent range (i.e., above 0.90).

Table 6. 2 Reliability of the Items in Section 2: Usage of Matrimonial Websites

Items	N	R
Number of registered websites	85	.99
First visit to a matrimonial website	85	.98
First time become a member on a matrimonial website	85	.96
Knowing anyone who used matrimonial websites	85	.87
Asking for help from a known matrimonial website's user	85	.93
The extent to which the member is an active user	85	.99
Membership fees	85	.99
Using the website to find an alternative to family and tribal circle	85	.98
Using the website because no suitable spouse was founded through the traditional method	85	.88
Using the website to self-searching	85	.97
Using the website because of hearing successful stories for those who used matrimonial websites to find a spouse	85	.92
Using the website because it is too late to find a spouse through a traditional way	85	.89
Using the website to have a wider choice of possible spouses	85	.96

65

The test-retest reliability of the items in the usage section was within the good to excellent range. While the majority of the scores of the items (76.9%) in this section were above 0.90 (excellent range), only three items (23.1%) in this section scored between 0.81 and 0.90 (good range).

Table 6. 3 Reliability of the Items in Section 3: Mate Preferences

Items	N	R
Loyal	85	.93
Honest	85	.87
Good moral character	85	.89
Chasity	85	.86
Good looking	85	.92
Physically attractive	85	.93
Wants commitment	85	.92
Wants to have children	85	.84
Likes children	85	.83
Good housekeeper	85	.97
Good cook	85	.87
Home-oriented	85	.95
Healthy	85	.89
In shape	85	.93
Tall	85	.83
Intelligent	85	.98
College graduate	85	.83
Professional degree	85	.92
Good family background	85	.85
Good earning capacity	85	.88
Generous	85	.91
Physically Strong	85	.83
Religious point of view	85	.86
Religious look	85	.91
Praying	85	.95
Highly religious	85	.98
Having a tribal origin	85	.99

The test-retest reliability of the items in the mate preferences section was within the good to excellent range. 13 items (48.2%) in this section were above 0.90 (excellent range) and the rest (14 = 51.8%) scored between 0.81 and 0.90 (good range).

Table 6. 4 Reliability of the Items in Section 4: Impression Formation

Items	N	r
Presenting positive attributes by the sender	85	.97
Minimizing negative attributes by the sender	85	.99
The receiver cares about spelling mistakes in writing sentences	85	.97
The receiver cares about simple expressions	85	.98
The receiver cares about grammar mistakes	85	.99
The receiver cares about awkward sentences	85	.95
The receiver cares if the member has been seen online late at night	85	.91
The receiver cares if the member is added to the favourite list	85	.92
The receiver cares about knowing that the member has visited the profile	85	.87
The receiver cares about the time of receiving the messages	85	.94
The receiver cares about the time the sender update the profile	85	.88

Items	N	r
The receiver cares about sexual indications	85	.91
The receiver cares about receiving Smiley faces	85	.82
The receiver cares about displaying the member's family name	85	.78
The receiver cares about choosing a sexy name for the member	85	.91
The receiver cares about displaying a member's first name	85	.84
The receiver cares about choosing a sexy photo for the member	85	.90
Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse possible	85	.89
Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse comfortable	85	.77
Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse easier	85	.83
Online matrimonial websites enable me to overcome cultural and social restrictions	85	.91
Online matrimonial websites enable me to obtain information directly from the potential spouse	85	.93
Online matrimonial websites enable me to have more time to examine the compatibility of a potential spouse	85	.88
Online matrimonial websites enable to provide more information about oneself	85	.95
Other members' profiles can be viewed or reply to their messages in the own time frame and get rid of the time pressure	85	.88
More time is available through online matrimonial websites to examine the possibility of compatibility with a potential spouse	85	.91

The test-retest reliability of the impression formation items was within the acceptable to excellent range; 15 items (57.7%) were above 0.90 (excellent range), nine items (34.6%) were between 0.81 and 0.90 (good range), and two items (7.7%) were between 0.71 and 0.80 (acceptable range).

Table 6. 5 Reliability of the Items in Section 5: Outcomes of Using Matrimonial Websites

Items	N	R
Initiation of contact	85	.96
Responding to contact	85	.93
Terminate correspondence	85	.96
Unsuccessfully contacted members	85	.94
Successfully movement from online to offline	85	.98

The test-retest reliability of all the items in the outcomes section range from (.93) to (1.000) and thus were within the excellent range (i.e., above 0.90).

Overall, the test-retest reliability of the online matrimonial websites questionnaire items was within the acceptable to excellent range for all items. Of the 79 reliability coefficients calculated, 51 items (64.6%) were above 0.90 (excellent range), 26 items (32.9%) were between 0.81 and 0.90 (good range), and two items (2.6%) were between 0.71 and 0.80 (acceptable range). The summarized results of the reliability analysis indicated that the internal consistency reliability of multiple items in the questionnaire ranged from

acceptable (0.71 to 0.80) to excellent (above 0.90) and thus and was deemed appropriate for more widespread use.

Conducting the pilot study also helps in measuring the validity of the questionnaire. According to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008: 2278), "Validity is often defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure". Besides, validity requires that an instrument must have consistent data (i.e., be reliable) before it is valid. As revealed above, the test-retest reliability of the items on the research's questionnaire was within the acceptable range for reliability coefficients. Dyer (2006) indicates that validity has several kinds such as 'content validity', 'criterion-related validity', and 'concurrent and divergent validity'. Content validity means how well the questionnaire items cover their intended purpose, and are usually determined by the judgment of experts in the field (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). The supervisory team of the researcher acted as the judgment of experts in the field. As indicated earlier (see Section 7.3.1.1), the usage of the in-depth interviews to construct the questionnaire's items also aided in ensuring its content validity. It was hard to test the criterion-related, concurrent, or divergent validity which address how well scores on a new instrument associate with other instruments of the same construct, due to the absence of the questionnaires that test the same area. Nevertheless, convergent validity, which refers to "the agreement between measures of the same construct assessed by different methods" (Guo, Aveyard, Fielding, & Sutton, 2008, 288), was assessed through associating the data in the questionnaires regarding the mate preferences and impression formation and the data gained from the content analysis of the users' profiles (see Chapter Seven: Section Seven).

6.4.1.4. Administration of the Questionnaire

In order to administer the questionnaire and recruit the participants, the revised version has been sent to the matrimonial website's agent. The agent uploaded an online ad on the matrimonial website to attract the attention of the users in April 2015 for a month. The aim of this ad is to inform the website's members about the research and how they can take a part in it. The agent also sent an invitation email to the members in order to recruit more members to participate in the study. They set reminder emails on their system so that it can be sent to the members automatically and systematically. The number of responses in the first day was 76. The responses started to increase gradually and the reminding strategy worked well. The number exceeded 200 participants after 5 days. By the end of this phase, the total number of the respondents was 327. Twenty-five responses were excluded as they included

missing items. Thus, the total number of the participants in this phase was 302 (134 females and 168 males, aged between 18 and 65 (Mean = 33.13 years, SD = 7.01).

All respondents were Saudi–based current subscribers who were active on the website (i.e., had logged in within the prior month). The sample was 55.6% male, 53.3% Hadari, and their age ranged from 18 to 65 but the most frequent age group was 31 to 40 (62.9%). 64.9% percent were singles, and 75.4% are moderately religious. About half of the sample (50.3%) had a Bachelor degree, and the majority (41%) reported incomes between SAR4000 and SAR9999. These demographic characteristics are in line with the population characteristics of website's subscriber base and representative of the target population.

Following Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) method of ensuring the representation of the sample when the true population values were unknown and identifying possible sources of bias among responders, the demographic background variables of the sample were compared to those for which the researcher had information in the sampling frame (N = 2,500), which was randomly selected from the website's subscriber database. The sample to the sampling frame on the characteristics for which response was most likely to vary: age, gender, tribe of origin, relationship status, level of education, income level, and religiosity level. Compared to the sampling frame, there were almost no differences in terms of these variables which in turn confirmed the non-bias among responders that allow for generalizing the findings to the wider population of online matrimonial website's users.

In addition, the inferential statistical analysis was taken into consideration when determining the sample size of the current research. According to Van Voorhis and Morgan (2007), if the sample size is too low then inferential statistical analysis is underpowered, meaning that the test statistics extracted from the sample data could be declared to be not significant at the .05 level when, in fact, it is really significant in the population from which the sample was drawn (Cohen, 1992). Thus, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to determine the minimum sample size for the statistical tests that are expected to be used in this research as stated in the following section. The power analysis indicated that the number of respondents to the questionnaire must approach ($N = 200$) in order to obtain accurate statistical inferences. As the total number of the participants in this phase was 302, it exceeds the required sample size and thus ensures the representation of the sample.

6.4.1.5. Research Questions and Statistical Analysis

The types of statistical analysis that can be conducted on the response data collected using the questionnaire depend on the measurement levels of the variables, as outlined in Table 6.6. All but three of the variables are measured using closed ended questions with variables measured at the nominal level (i.e., two or more qualitative categories) or at the ordinal level (i.e., rated on a scale which can be ranked in a logical order) (Agresti, 2007; 2010).

Table 6. 6 Measurement Levels of Variables in the Questionnaire

Variable	Measurement Levels	Values
1.1 Age	Interval	Years
1.2 Gender	Nominal (2 categories)	1 = Male 2 = Female
1.3 Tribe of origin	Nominal (2 categories)	1 = Qabily 2 = Hadari
1.4 Relationship status	Nominal (4 categories)	1 = Single, 2 = Married, 3 = Divorced; 4 = Widow/Widower
1.5 Highest level of education	Ordinal (6 categories)	From 1 = Uneducated to 6 = Postgraduate degree
1.6 Monthly Income	Ordinal (8 categories)	From 0 = None to 7 > SA 20,000
1.7 Religious level	Ordinal (4 categories)	From 1 = Highly religious to 4 = Not religious
2.1 First visited a matrimonial website	Ordinal (6 categories)	From 1 < 6 months ago to 6 > 10 years ago
2.2 First become a member/construct a profile at a matrimonial website	Ordinal (6 categories)	From 1 < 6 months ago to 6 > 10 years ago
2.3.1 Know anybody who used matrimonial websites	Nominal (2 categories)	1 = Yes 2 = No
2.4 Number of registered matrimonial websites	Ordinal (6 categories)	From 1 = 1 website to 7 = I do not know
2.5 Active member	Ordinal (5 categories)	From 1 = Very active to 5 = Idle
2.6 Payment for membership/user fees	Ordinal (11 categories)	From 1 = SAR 0 to 11 ≥ SAR 1000
2.7 Reason for choosing a matrimonial website	Ordinal (4 categories)	9 items rated from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree
3. Mate preferences	Ordinal (7 categories)	27 items rated from 1 = Extremely unimportant to 7 = Extremely important
4.1 Impression formation (Sender)	Ordinal (4 categories)	2 items rated from 1 = None to 4 = Much
4.2 Impression formation (Receiver)	Ordinal (7 categories)	15 items rated from 1 = Extremely unimportant to 7 = Extremely important
4.3 Impression formation (Channel)	Ordinal (7 categories)	9 items rated from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree
5.1 Initiation of contact with potential spouse	Ordinal (3 categories)	From 1 = Always to 3 = Never
5.2. Respond to contact with potential spouse	Ordinal (3 categories)	From 1 = Always to 3 = Never
5.3 Termination of correspondence	Ordinal (3 categories)	From 1 = after one or two messages to 3 after more than 10 messages
5.4 Number of members currently keeping in contact with	Interval	Number of members
5.5 Number of times made unsuccessful contacts	Interval	Number of times
5.6. Successfully moved relationship from offline to online	Nominal (2 categories)	1 = Yes 2 = No

6.4.1.5.1 Descriptive Statistics Analysis

The variables listed in Table 6.6 were imported into the data editor of IBM SPSS version 20.0 and analysed using the protocols described by Field (2009). The answers to the following research questions do not require the testing of hypotheses and are addressed through simple descriptive statistics:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites?

2. How do Saudis use matrimonial websites?

    2.1 How much time had passed since the Saudi users visited matrimonial websites?

    2.2 When was the first time Saudi users registered at matrimonial websites?

    2.3. Do Saudi users know anyone who used matrimonial websites before? And if yes, do they ask for their help?

    2.4. How many matrimonial websites do Saudi users currently join?

    2.5. To what extent do Saudi users consider themselves active members?

    2.6. How much do Saudi users pay for being members at matrimonial websites?

    2.7 What are the reasons behind joining matrimonial websites by Saudi users?

4. What are the outcomes of using matrimonial websites by Saudi users?

    4.1 To what extent do Saudi users initiate the contact with a suitable potential spouse on matrimonial websites?

    4.2 To what extent do Saudi users respond to the contact with a suitable potential spouse on matrimonial websites?

    4.3 To what extent do Saudi users terminate the contact with a suitable potential spouse on matrimonial websites?

    4.4 How many members do Saudi users currently keep in contact with on matrimonial websites?

    4.5. How many unsuccessfully online contacts did Saudi users make on matrimonial websites?

4.6 How many successful movements of a relationship with a suitable potential spouse from online to offline did Saudi users make? and do these successful movements lead to marriage?

7. To what extent are Saudi users as senders selective in their self-presentation on matrimonial websites?

7.1 To what extent are Saudi users as senders selective in presenting their positive attributes on matrimonial websites?

7.2 To what extent are Saudi users as senders selective in deemphasizing the presentation of their negative attributes on matrimonial websites?

11. What is the perception of Saudi users towards the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse?

6.4.1.5.2 Inferential Statistical Analysis

Inferential statistical analysis is necessary to address research questions that involve the testing of hypotheses rather than summarizing descriptive information. The following research questions require the testing of hypotheses:

3. Do Saudi users differ in their usage of matrimonial websites according to their gender?

5. Do Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender?

8. Do Saudi users differ in their selective self-presentation as senders on matrimonial websites according to their demographic variables?

9. What are the factors that influence the perception of Saudi users of matrimonial websites as receivers regarding their impression?

10. Does the influence of the receivers' factors differ according to their demographic variables?

12. Do Saudi users differ in their perception of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse according to their gender?

13. Do Saudi users of matrimonial websites utilize different strategies of mate preferences from the strategies proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993) to find a spouse?

14. Do Saudi male users of matrimonial websites differ in their strategies of mate preferences according to their demographic variables?

15. Do Saudi female users of matrimonial websites differ in their strategies of mate preferences according to their demographic variables?

The hypotheses associated with these research questions are tested using the listed below inferential statistics and the inferential statistical tests used to examine the relationships between the variables are defined, as the following:

H1: Saudi users differ in their usage of matrimonial websites according to their gender.

H2: Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender.

H3: Saudi users differ by their demographic variables in their selective self-presentation of their positive and negative attributes on matrimonial websites.

H4: Due to the lack of social cues, the receiver utilises several strategies to fill in the blanks with regard to missing information about the sender.

H5: The influence of the receivers' factors differs according to their demographic variables.

H6: Saudi users differ by gender in their perceptions of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse.

H7: Saudi matrimonial websites users have different mate preferences from those described by Buss and Schmitt (1993)

H8: Saudi male users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables.

H9: Saudi female users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables.

6.4.1.5.3 Rationale for the Used Statistical Tests

Descriptive statistics, including maximum, minimum, mean, standard deviation, and the proportions of the participants who responded to the mutually exclusive categorical options within each question are used and summarized to indicate the most highly endorsed answers. The chi-square was used when there were two nominal variables and to determine whether the proportions of one of these variables are different for different values of the other variable. The Chi-square is a non-parametric test in the sense that it does not assume any particular distribution for the data. For cases where the cross tabulation presented cells with expected count less than five a Fisher's exact test was reported instead since it is shown to be more robust. Independent t-test was used to compare the sample mean of two independent groups, for instance, comparing a scale across gender groups. According to the central limit theorem, the sample mean or the difference of sample means from a population with finite variance approaches a normal distribution regardless of the distribution of the population being non-normal. The one-way ANOVA is used to compare means across 3 groups or more such as education level or marital status. When only two groups are compared, the one-way ANOVA and the t-test are equivalent. The one-way ANOVA, it is a robust test against violations of the normality assumption. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was used to diversion reduction and to examine whether one broad category or several more specific categories were required to describe the item set, such as receiver's factors and mate preferences strategies It was used to provide maximal separation of factors. Spearman's rho coefficient was used to measure the correlation between two variables, such as the relationship between age and mate preferences strategies. It has been used rather than Pearson's correlation coefficient, because Spearman's rho operates on ordinal variables and does not entail normally distributed variables measured at the scale/interval level.

6.4.2. Phase Two: Content Analysis Phase

After conducting the online questionnaire, the profiles of the participants who indicated their willingness to continue participating in the second phase of the research were analysed. Since profiles on matrimonial websites are one of the most important elements in the online interaction equation, Saudis can construct and shape their own profiles to create a certain impression about themselves as well as indicating their preferences in future spouses; they can also form impressions about others from their profiles. All of these opportunities are relatively new experiences for most Saudis in comparison with their traditional courtship

processes. Thus, analysing members' profiles provides a better understanding of the characteristics of those who chose this relatively new method to find a spouse. Utilising content analysis to study Saudis' profiles also allow the researcher to deal with the actual displayed and available information in the users' profiles. Thus, capturing and analysing these data complements and validates the data obtained from the self-report questionnaire in the previous phase in order to provide an answer to the research question: To what extent does the information obtained from the content analysis phase validate the collected information from the questionnaire phase?

From the chosen Muslim matrimonial website, it can be seen that profile elements in which users choose from multiple options comprise 18 categories. This type of structured data can ideally be analysed quantitatively. Although there are some available checklists to code matrimonial websites (e.g., Badahdah & Tiemann, 2005; Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Greenlees & McGrew, 1994), the researcher designed his own content analysis checklist to match the exact categories in the profiles, given that these profiles are already made up of structured categories (see the Appendix E). The researcher excluded from the proposed checklist two categories: nationality and country, as the current research targeted Saudis only. The last two parts in the website's profiles inquire about what they write to describe themselves in the "about me" section and what they write to describe the favourable characteristics of a potential spouse in "about the preferred spouse". As these two sections have qualitative content, the coding criteria set by Greenless and McGrew (1994) were adopted. Their criteria focused on measuring indicators of the following items: "Positive physical appearance", "Financial security", "Hobbies/interests", "Marital status", "Willingness to invest or receive investment", "Type of relationship", "Age", and "Religion". The researcher also added the following items to the coding criteria of about the preferred spouse category: tribe of origin, paternity confidence, commitment and good parenting skills.

6.4.2.1. Inter-rater Reliability of the Content Analysis

To confirm the reliability of the findings, the inter-rater reliability was tested among a small sample prior to conducting the main phase. Inter-rater reliability is defined as the extent to which two or more coders are consensus in their measurement of the same data (Creswell 2009). Thus, the researcher and his female colleague tested the inter-rater reliability of the data on a sample of Saudis' profiles. Following Sim and Wright (2005) recommendation, this

randomly selected sample will consist of 30 male profiles and 30 female profiles in order to provide sufficient power (80%).

Cohen's kappa was used to estimate the reliability of the coding of the profile variables for each respondent by the two researchers (gender, age, weight, height, marriage type, marital status, children, skin color, education, monthly income, health condition, smoking, field of occupation, tribe origin, religiosity level, praying, beard, hijab, about me, number of mentioned positive and negative characteristics, and about spouse). The results of the inter-coder reliability analysis presented in Table 7.8 revealed almost perfect agreement between the coding of the two researchers (Cohen's kappa = .931 to 1.000; $p < .001$).

Table 6. 7 Inter-rater Reliability of the Content Analysis

Variable	Cohen's kappa	p
Gender	1.000	<.001
Age	1.000	<.001
Weight	1.000	<.001
Height	1.000	<.001
Marriage type	1.000	<.001
Marital status	1.000	<.001
Children	1.000	<.001
Skin colour	1.000	<.001
Education	1.000	<.001
Monthly Income	1.000	<.001
Health Condition	0.981	<.001
Smoking	1.000	<.001
Field of Occupation	1.000	<.001
Tribe Origin	0.947	<.001
Religiosity	1.000	<.001
Praying	0.955	<.001
Beard	1.000	<.001
Hijab	1.000	<.001
About me (positive physical appearance)	0.963	<.001
About me (Financial security)	0.964	<.001
About me (Hobbies/interests)	1.000	<.001
About me (Marital status)	0.931	<.001
About me (Willingness to invest or receive investment)	1.000	<.001
About me (Type of relationship)	1.000	<.001
About me (Age)	1.000	<.001
About me (Religion)	1.000	<.001
Mentioned Positive Characteristics	0.981	<.001
Mentioned Negative Characteristics	1.000	<.001
About spouse (positive physical appearance)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Financial security)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Hobbies/interests)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Marital status)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Willingness to invest or receive investment)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Type of relationship)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Age)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Religion)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Paternity confidence)	1.000	<.001

Variable	Cohen's kappa	p
About spouse (Commitment)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (Good parenting skills)	1.000	<.001
About spouse (The tribe of origin)	1.000	<.001

In the coding of 40 variables with 60 responses per variable (i.e., at total of 2400 codes) there were only seven slight discrepancies between the first and second coders (7/2400 = 0.29%). Thus, it is concluded that the inter-coder reliability was excellent.

6.4.2.2. Data Collection and Content Analysis

Participant information sheets (Appendix A) and informed consent forms (Appendix A) were sent via email to the participants who agreed to participate in this phase. They were also informed that the data obtained from their profiles will be matched to their corresponding answers from the first phase. As stated earlier, in this phase, the researcher uses a quantitative checklist to quantify and classify the information in the profiles of those Saudis who indicate their willingness to participate, as well as adopting Greenless and McGrew (1994) coding criteria for the qualitative sections. 111 participants (60 males and 51 females) volunteered to participate in this phase during May 2015, aged between 18 and 62 (Mean = 32.66 years, SD = 6.56).

6.4.3. Phase Three: The Interview Phase

After conducting content analysis on the profiles, participants who indicate their willingness to continue participating in the third phase of the research were interviewed during June 2015. The interview phase aids in bridging the gap in the data collected from previous phases and contributes to the overall picture of the phenomenon. It also aims provide further answers about Saudis' script of courtship process; thus, the participants were interviewed about the scripts they followed as they moved towards marriage with a potential spouse.

Since the targeted sample comprises Saudi users of matrimonial websites living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, their geographic dispersion makes it difficult, if not impossible, to interview them offline due to the economical costs and time, especially given that the current research is a PhD study with a fixed timeline and budget. To avoid these limitations, the researcher conducted online interviews with participants utilising the Skype application. This program facilitates conducting the interview with high quality voice and video and makes it possible to conduct online interviews (James & Busher, 2009). The current research benefited

from online interviews in extending access to the participants in comparison with offline interviews.

Online interviews through Skype also offer a safe, comfortable, protected, and familiar environment for both researcher and participants. It could also be argued that online interviews present the opportunity to provide richer information regarding participants' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions than face-to-face interviews, as some research suggests that people feel more confident and have higher levels of self-disclosure in online discussions (Joinson, 2001). It should be noted that most of these studies focused on CMC text discussion in general and anonymous mode in particular; however, online interviews still have a certain degree of anonymity.

The major limitation for online interviews is the absence of social cues (James & Busher, 2009). Where face-to-face communication is not possible, it is essential to determine how this affects participants' knowledge construction and how researchers "can be sure about the authenticity and identity of online contributions beyond what they are told by their participants" (Hammersley, 2006: 8). However, the authenticity and identity of the current sample are assured, as they are members of a matrimonial website that required identity verification prior to joining its online community.

6.4.3.1. Interview Questions

This phase of the current research utilises a semi-structured interview as it enables the researcher to explore the phenomenon under investigation from the research population's perceptions. A major advantage of this method is that it allows the interviewees to clearly communicate with participants and overcome ambiguities during the interview (Wojnar and Swanson 2007). It also allows for collecting in-depth data due to the flexibility in the data collection process (Silvermann, 1993).

Unlike unstructured interviews, a semi-structured interview enables the researcher to use instructions to guide the interview process. It also enables him to obtain reliable and comparable qualitative data that assist in identifying the similarities and differences between participants' responses. This also aids in forming a deep understanding of the phenomena, as the interview questions are prepared in advance and thus the researcher is prepared and appears competent when conducting the interview. It also enables participants to express their views in their own terms.

Given that this is a sequential research study basing its results on combining and linking the findings revealed from each phase to develop a comprehensive understanding, the goal of this final phase is to gain a detailed understanding about the courtship script of Saudi users using matrimonial websites in order to answer the research main question: What is the script Saudi users follow in trying to find a potential spouse through matrimonial websites? Overall, the interview questions in this phase include the questions that have been raised when analysing the previous quantitative data phases. They also cover the stages the Saudi users go through when searching and contacting a potential spouse through matrimonial websites (see Appendix D).

6.4.3.2. Pilot Study of the Interview

A pilot study was conducted with ten volunteer Saudi members of the matrimonial website (five males and five females), aged between 21 and 57 (Mean = 34.30 years, SD = 12.77). The pilot study was conducted prior to the main study to identify any problematic questions that may be ambiguous or make participants uncomfortable. The pilot study also helps in forming operational procedures and discussing emergent problems prior to conducting the main phase. For instance, throughout the pilot interviews, the researcher found that the interview question: "Describe in detail the steps you followed when you moved from the website to other modes of interaction until you got married with a potential spouse" needed to be clarified because it was not clear to the interviewees whether they should also talk about the other communicational methods they used until they meet the potential spouse face-to-face. Thus, the interview question was modified to be: "Describe in detail the steps you followed when you moved from the website to other modes of interaction with a potential spouse, up to the point of getting married".

6.4.3.3. Administration of the Interviews

The criterion to determine the sample size for an analysis of qualitative data is that the number of cases must be large enough to achieve saturation, meaning that after a certain number of cases have been analysed, the data become repetitive, and contain no new categories or emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Most qualitative researchers aim to collect enough qualitative data to achieve saturation, which may require as few as 10 or as many as 60 cases, depending upon the quality and the quantity of the data available for each case (Small, 2009).

Green and Thorogood (2009) recommend that a minimum sample size of 20 is usually necessary to achieve saturation in an interview study. According to Green and Thorogood's (2009: 120) observation that "the experience of most qualitative researchers is that in interview studies, little that is new comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people". To recruit the required number of the participants, those who indicated their willingness to participate in this phase of the research received the participant information sheets and consent forms via email to read, sign, and re-send to the researcher. Out of 47 of those who indicated their willingness to participate, 36 respondents actually participated (19 males and 17 females, aged between 18 and 65 (Mean = 34.20 years, SD = 9.32). Finding a suitable date and time for conducting the interviews were also arranged via email. All the interviews were audio recorded.

6.4.3.4. Analysis of the Interview Transcripts

According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes data set in rich detail". Thematic analysis enables the researcher to work closely with the qualitative data to generate themes that reflect a deep understating of the data that is manifested as a narrative description of the users' experiences. There are six phases in conducting a thematic analysis: "familiarizing [the researcher with] the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87-93). Based on these systematic steps, concepts were established. Then from these concepts, categories were determined which form the basis for creating a model of Saudi courtship scripts.

To sum, the research involves compound phases of data collection in which the project aim and its questions define the order of phases. The first phase in the current research employs a quantitative method using a self-report questionnaire. Following this, the research uses quantitative content analysis of the profiles on matrimonial websites. Finally, a follow-up qualitative interview is employed to provide a more detailed examination of the phenomenon. Figure 6.2. provides an overview of the research design and its three sequential phases.

Figure 6. 2 An Overview of the Research Design

	Phase 1 Questionnaire	Phase 2 Content Analysis	Phase 3 Interview

Mate preferences

Males prefer
- Paternity confidence → Section 3, (1,2,3,4) → Profile 21, (9)
- Female reproductive value → Section 3, (5,6,14) → Profile 21, (1)

Females prefer
- Physical protection → Section 3, (22) → Profile 21
- Willing to invest → Section 3, (17,18,19,20) → Profile 21, (2,5)
- Able to invest → Section 3, (21)

Both prefers
- Commitment → Section 3, (7,8) → Profile 21, (10)
- Good parenting skills → Section 3, (9,10,11,12) → Profile 21, (11)
- Gene quality → Section 3, (13,15,16) → Profile 21
- Religiosity characteristics → Section 3, (23,24,25,26) → Profile 21, (8)
- The tribe of origin → Section 3, (27) → Profile 21, (12)

Impression Formation

Sender
- Selective self-presentation → Section 4.1, ٢ items → Profile 19, 20

Receiver
- Idealization → Section 4.2, 15 items

Channel
- Asynchronous → Section 4.3, (8-9)
- Reduce cues → Section 4.3. (7)
- Cultural limitations → Section 4.3. (1-6)

Feedback

Online courtship script

Personal script → Section 2 / Section 5

Demographic Variables

Gender	Section 1(item 2)
Socio economic factors	Section 1(items 5,6)
Religiosity level	Section 1(item 7)
The tribe of origin	Section 1(item 3)
Other variables	The rest of Section 1questions

Theoretical Framework
- Sexual strategies theory to measure mate preferences
- Hyperpersonal theory to measure Impression formation
- Script theory to capture online courtship script

Q 5

Q 5, 6

Q 1 to 13

81

■ Added by the researcher to the theory assumptions

6.5. Cultural, Linguistic, and Ethical Considerations

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Islamic Saudi culture has distinct features, some of which could potentially act as constraints to this research and thus should be considered. This section discusses the cultural, linguistic, and ethical issues that have been taken into account when conducting the current research.

6.5.1. Cultural Considerations

There are some dimensions related to the Saudi culture that needs to be taken into consideration when conducting a research in this culture. Among these dimensions are gender segregation and communicating with unrelated members from the opposite sex. As indicated earlier, a female colleague who used to be a Ph.D. student in media and communication studies at a British university and is experienced in conducting interviews, was asked to help the researcher in interviewing them. To ensure consistency, both the researcher and his female colleague followed the same steps of interviewing the participants. Besides, the interviewees' answers were electronically recorded in order to reduce the biases that may result due to the interpretation by the colleague.

6.5.2. Linguistic Considerations

As this research was conducted in Saudi Arabia, it was done in Arabic language and its results were translated into English. Thus, it was expected that some errors in translation may arise. According to Shiyab (2006), the vagueness related to the usage of Arabic colloquial jargon, idiomatic expressions, patterns of thought and linguistic devices that mirror the cultural background of Arabs cannot simply be translated from Arabic language to English. To overcome this linguistic challenge and take it into consideration, a back translation approach was used throughout this research. Liamputtong (2010) states that this approach is usually adopted instead of the single translation approach in social science research to lessen the errors resulted from the translation process and maximise the correspondence between the original and the targeted languages. Thus, the researcher collected and analysed the data in Arabic and then the reported results are translated into English and then back to Arabic. This back translation approach is based on the conceptual equivalence notion that emphasises the equivalence of the ideas at the sentence level and discourages the verbatim translation of the linguistic units (Hilton & Skrutkowski, 2002).

6.5.3. Ethical Considerations

The researcher was guided by the British Psychological Association's code of ethics and Leicester University's ethics guideline. Before conducting the research phases, ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Board of Leicester University. The participation in this research was voluntary and the sample was informed that they can freely participate or drop out at any time during the data collection process. As the current research' scope is about using matrimonial websites to search for a spouse, some of the participants may find that some of its research questions to be sensitive. Thus, the researcher informed the sample about the nature of the research and its questions before conducting the phases. He also informed them that their identities were concealed as pseudonyms which were utilised as codes. The data were stored in a protected closet and will be demolished when completing the research.

6.6. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presents a detailed outline of the main justifications for the decision to select the mixed methods approach to investigate online mate preferences, online impression formation, and courtship processes of Saudis who use Muslim matrimonial websites. The researcher has argued that mixing quantitative and qualitative methods is a valuable approach to answering the research questions. The researcher has also pointed out how utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies provide relevant insights into a significantly under-researched field.

The researcher has critically presented the rationale behind choosing the quantitative online-questionnaire to collect the data for addressing the objectives of the current research, arguing that this method is a powerful measurement tool that enables the researcher to systematically access and quantify data from a large-scale sample. Prior to administering the questionnaire to the full sample, the researcher argues that it was useful to conduct exploratory in-depth interviews to develop the questionnaire items and ensure that the topics cover Saudis' usage of matrimonial websites.

The researcher has also stressed in this chapter the relevance of using quantitative content analysis to validate and complement the findings of this sequential mixed methods research. The chapter also critically examines the appropriateness of the semi-structured

interview method to address the objectives of the current research, detailing how it is a rich tool for helping participants reveal their own feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about phenomena they have experienced. This chapter ends by describing the use of descriptive and inferential statistics to address the research questions and test the associated hypotheses.

Chapter Seven

Saudis' Usage of Matrimonial Websites

7.1. Introduction

This chapter answers the research questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites, their usage of matrimonial websites, the impression they formed on these websites, the mate preference strategies they followed to search for a potential spouse, and the outcomes of such usage. It presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected from the first two phases of the research in light of hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory and relevant literature. The last section compares the matrimonial website members' responses in the quantitative questionnaire phase with content analysis phase of their profiles on the website to answer the research question: To what extent does the information obtained from the content analysis phase validate the information collected from the questionnaire phase?

7.2. Background of the Sample

Reviewing online dating literature reveals that one of scholars' main concerns is to discover the types of users who join online dating sites and their demographic variables (Wildermuth, 2004; Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau, 2009; Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan, 2010). Chapter Three shed light on the popular stereotypes and scholarly debates about online dating site users. It also highlighted the lack of Saudi and Muslim research regarding online matrimonial website users. This raised an important question regarding whether there are similarities and differences between the demographic variables of Muslim and non-Muslim users. Therefore, this section answers the research question: What are the characteristics of Saudi users of matrimonial websites? Answering this question contributes to the literature on online dating by revealing the differences and similarities between the characteristics of Saudi users, who belong to a conservative, Islamic culture, and Western users.

In addition, the current study examines the relationship between marriage seekers' characteristics and their mate preferences. According to mate preferences theories, the

characteristics of men and women are associated with their preferences in potential partners. For example, social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959) and sexual strategies theory (Buss and Schmitt, 1993) linked socio-economic status and other variables with male and female preferences. Thus, this research assumes that there is a relationship between these characteristics and the strategies they use in leaving favourable impression. It also investigates the relationship between religious and social factors on one hand and users' mate preferences and impression formation strategies on the other hand.

This section presents the demographic background of the current research sample. Figure 7.1. summarises the characteristics of the sample using frequency distributions (counts and percentages).

Figure 1Demographic Background of the Sample

Age

18-20 Year	3.0%	3.7%	
21-30 Year	29.2%	26.9%	
31-40 Year	62.5%	63.4%	
41-50 Year	2.4%	3.7%	
+50 Year	3.0%	2.2%	

168   134

Tribe of Origin

Bedwen 46.7%   74   67

Hadari 53.3%   94   67

Marital Status

Single
Married (males only)
Divorced
Widow/Widower

4.8%
10.1%
20.8%
64.3%

6.7%
27.6%
65.7%

Religious Level

Highly religious 9.3%
Moderately religious 75.4%
To a small extent 13%
Not religious 2.3%

Highest Level of Education

(0.0%) / (2.2%)	Elementary school
(9.5%) / (13.4%)	Middle school
(20.2%) / (41.8%)	High school
(58.3%) / (40.3%)	Bachelor degree
(11.9%) / (2.2%)	Postgraduate degree

Monthly Income (SAR)

0	(1%)
< 1500	(28.4%)
1501-3999	(7.9%)
4000-6999	(19.8%)
7000-9999	(21.1%)
10000-14999	(11.2%)
15000-20000	(6.9%)

The age of the questionnaire participants ranged from 18 to 65; the largest age group was 31 to 40 (62.9%) among both the women (63.4%) and men (62.5%). Based on the information provided by the matrimonial website agent, the age range of the sample matches the age range of the websites' registered members. According to Salam (2013), the mean age of marriage in Saudi Arab is 24 for women and 30 for men. While the modal age group of Saudi female members is older than the mean age of Saudi marriage for women by more than five years, the modal group of Saudi male members is older than the mean age of Saudi marriage for men by just one year. It seems that one of Saudi women's motivations to pursue matrimony online is that they feel it is too late for them to find a spouse through traditional methods. This motivation will be discussed in the following section (See Section 8.3.6). Saudi men tend to use these sites at around the average marriage age. This result is similar to studies showing that online dating sites are most popular with adults in their 20s and 30s (Gunter, 2013), and that Americans tend to pursue online dating between their mid-20s and mid-40s (Smith and Duggan, 2013).

Approximately half of the sample of the questionnaire participants belonged to the Qabily origin (46.7%) and the other half was Hadari (53.3%) for both women (50% and 50%) and men (44.1% and 55.9%). This classification belongs to Arabic culture in general and Saudi in particular. While Qabily origin's social norms are more conservative than Hadari norms (Samin, 2012), both groups participated in these sites. Given that no previous Arabic study has investigated the origins of matrimonial website members, this result contributes to the literature by revealing the specific tribal origins of site users and their relation to other variables. Further investigation was conducted in the qualitative phase to provide a deep understanding regarding the role of tribal origin in the Saudi users' courtship scripts (See Chapter Eight: Section Three).

While more than half of the sample (64.9%) was single (65.7% of women and 64.3% of men), 20.8% of the men listed their marital status as married. These percentages differ from an American study's findings that the majority of online dating users are divorced (Sautter, Tippett, and Morgan, 2010). According to Wildermuth (2004), it is becoming a stereotype that these sites are full of divorced members. However, the current finding shows that the majority are singles. Regarding married members, Western studies found that married members represented as much as 30% of these sites (Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, and Deveau, 2009; PRWeb, 2005). While it is difficult to justify married members joining these

sites in Western culture to cheat on their spouses, having a second wife is justified in Islamic culture. In the current sample, one-fifth of Saudi matrimonial website users are married.

Most of the sample (75.4%) of both women (73.1%) and men (77.4%) described themselves as moderately religious. Although part of this religiosity is related to the strength of a person's faith, there are common signs among Saudis that indicated their religiosity level. Signs of high devotion include praying five times a day in the mosque (for men) and in the home (for women), having a long beard (for men) and wearing full hijab with a face covering (for women). Such attributes reflect the real daily practices of Saudis life (Aljasir 2015; Moaddel, 2013). However, it cannot be taken for granted that the sample represents the population as a whole on this point, as there is no accurate measure for the religiosity level among Saudis in general.

About half of the sample (50.3%) of both women (40.3%) and men (58.3%) had a bachelor's degree. Saudi Arabia's educational policy stresses the equality of educational opportunities for men and women. According to a Ministry of Higher Education report (2013), while 55% of students enrolled at Saudi universities in 2011 were male, 45% in the same year were female. The participants reported a wide range of incomes from SAR 0 to 20000, with < 1500 the modal income for women (52.2%) and SAR 7000-9999 the modal income for men (32.7%). It seems that the earnings gap between men and women is in line with the Saudi marriage code that obligates men to provide for family expenses and women to take care of house and children (Al-Anzi, 2009).

These results help in answering the main research question: What are the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites? They also help in testing the hypotheses regarding the effect of demographic variables on usage patterns, impression formation, mate preferences, and users' outcomes from using matrimonial websites.

7.3. Saudis' Usage of Matrimonial Websites

This section considers the sample's usage of matrimonial websites in order to build an accurate image of Saudi online courtship scripts. To answer the research question: How do Saudis use matrimonial websites?, the following sub-sections present the results and the discussion of the first time Saudi sample visited and registered at these websites, whether they knew anyone who had previously used matrimonial websites, the number of websites

they have currently joined, the extent to which they consider themselves active members, the fees they pay for being members, and the reasons of joining matrimonial websites by Saudis. These sub-sections also examine the hypothesis that there are gender differences in how Saudis use matrimonial websites.

7.3.1. Visiting and Registering at Matrimonial Websites

To capture the process of deciding to join a matrimonial website for the first time, this section presents and discusses the responses regarding the amount of time that had passed since the members of the Saudi sample first visited matrimonial websites and the first time they had registered at these websites. It also examines the hypothesis about gender differences regarding these two variables. Figure 7.2 presents the responses regarding the first time the Saudi sample visited matrimonial websites and the first time they registered at these websites.

Figure 7. 1 The Time Passed Since the Saudi Sample First Visited and First Registered at Matrimonial Websites
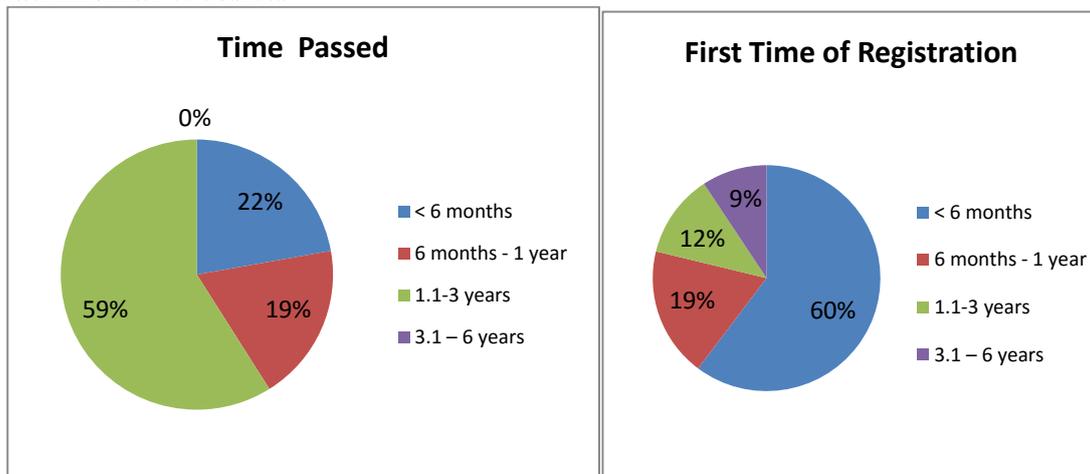
The results show that while the majority of the sample has been visiting matrimonial websites for over a year, about two-thirds of them registered at these websites within the past six months of conducting the research. The first visit provides a sign of the users' intention to investigate online methods. The gap between the first visit and the decision to join the website indicates that users could spend more than six months in making this decision. To explain this attitude, the participants were interviewed about this decision in the qualitative phase (See Chapter Eight: Section Three).

As chi-square is used when there were two nominal variables and to determine whether the proportions of one of these variables are different for different values of the other variable, it was used to show whether there were any gender differences in the time of first visitation and registration (see Table 7.1).

Table 7. 1 Gender Differences in the Gap between First Visit and Registration

Variable		Females	Males	Statistic
		N (%)	N (%)	Chi-square
Time passed since visiting matrimonial websites	< 6 months	32 (23.9%)	35 (20.8%)	χ2 =.880, p = .644
	6 months - 1 year	27 (20.1%)	30 (17.9%)	
	1.1-3 years	75 (56.0%)	103 (61.3%)	
First time of registration at matrimonial websites	< 6 months	81 (60.4%)	101 (60.1%)	χ2 =2.80, p=.974
	6 months - 1 year	26 (19.4%)	30 (17.9%)	
	1.1-3 years	15 (11.2%)	21 (12.5%)	
	3.1 – 6 years	12 (9.0%)	16 (9.5%)	

The results show that there are no significant differences between Saudi women and men either in the time they first visited matrimonial websites (χ2=.880, p=.644) or the time they first registered at these websites (χ2=2.80, p=.974). It seems that the decision to join a matrimonial website is a big decision among Saudis. The amount of time they delayed in registering suggests that they view using the sites as a deviation from the traditional method, and that both men and women see it as serious step that deserves time and consideration.

7.3.2. Acquaintances Who Used Matrimonial Websites

While early Western online dating studies revealed negative attitudes toward forming relationships online (Wildermuth, 2004), recent research shows that this attitude has decreased in the last few years (Smith and Duggan, 2013). There is a gap in the literature regarding Muslims' attitudes towards using these sites to find a potential spouse. Therefore, the questionnaire examined the extent to which Saudi users disclose and exchange their experiences of using matrimonial websites. This section presents the analysis and discussion of whether Saudi users of matrimonial websites had known someone from their offline circles who had used this online method to find a spouse and if they asked for their help in registering at matrimonial websites. It also presents whether Saudi men and women differ in this matter. Figure 7.3 presents the findings regarding users' contact with people who had used matrimonial websites.

Figure 7. 2 Acquaintances who Used Matrimonial Websites
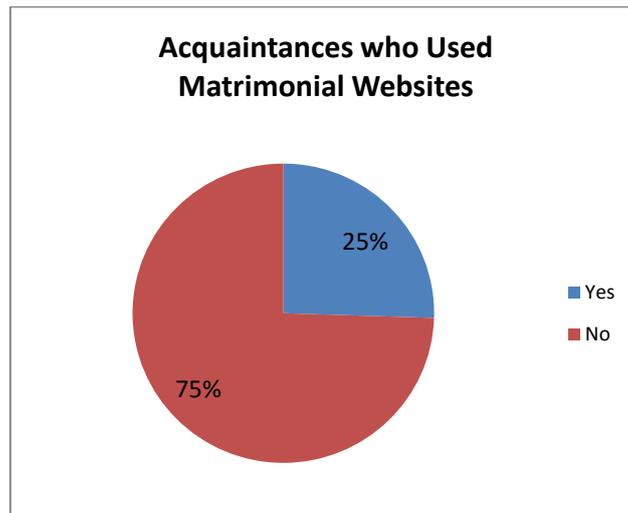
The majority of the participants indicated that they do not know someone who uses matrimonial website. This is a very high percentage, perhaps due to the stigma attached to matrimonial website usage that makes users reluctant to reveal themselves. Therefore, more investigation was conducted in the qualitative phase to cover this issue (see Chapter Eight: Section Three).

A chi-square test of associations was used to show whether there were any gender differences in knowing someone who uses matrimonial websites (see Table 7.2). The results confirm the research hypothesis, as there are significant differences between genders ($\chi2$=7.298, p=.007). In particular, men seem more likely to know someone who used the websites (31.5%) than women (17.9%). It seems that male users are more open to exchanging such information than women. This may reflect the nature of courtship in Saudi culture, in which men search for a partner and women's only role is to either accept or reject the proposal (Al-Anzi, 2009). These norms may discourage women from openly talking about their efforts in posting their profiles or searching for men in matrimonial websites.

Table 7. 2 Gender Differences in Knowing Someone who Uses Matrimonial Websites

Knowing someone	Females (N =134)	Males (N = 168)	Statistic
	N (%)	*N (%)*	*Chi-square*
Yes	24 (17.9%)	53 (31.5%)	$\chi2 = 7.298$, p=.007
No	110 (82.1%)	115 (68.5%)	

Saudi users who indicated that they had known someone who used matrimonial websites (N=77) were asked if they sought the help of this member in registering at matrimonial websites (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7. 3 Asking for Help in Registering at Matrimonial Websites
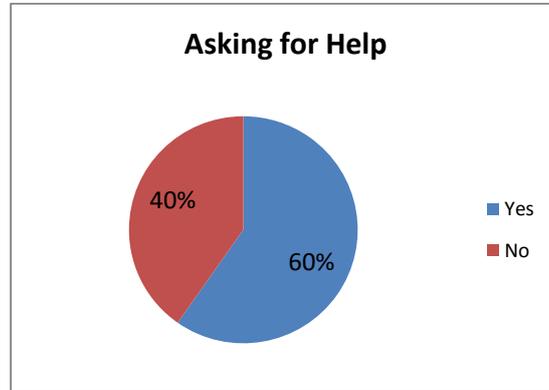
The results reveal that about 60% of Saudi users ask for help in registering at a site from someone who they know who has used these sites. It seems that when Saudis knew someone who has experience in using matrimonial websites, they are willing to ask for help to benefit from their experience.

A chi-square test of associations was used to show whether there were any gender differences in asking for such help (see Table 7.3). The results show that there are no significant differences between women and men in this matter ($\chi2=.376$, p=.540). It seems that when men and women know about someone with experience, they are equally likely to ask for help from them in joining matrimonial websites.

Table 7. 3 Asking for the Help in Registering at Matrimonial Websites

Asking for help	Females (N =24)	Males (N = 53)	Statistic
	N (%)	N (%)	Chi-square
Yes	15 (62.5%)	30 (56.6%)	$\chi2 = .376$, p=.540
No	9 (37.5%)	23 (43.4%)	

7.3.3. Number of Memberships in Matrimonial Websites

According to Long (2010), subscription to many matchmaking websites is considered an indication of the lack of seriousness of the user. This section presents the results regarding the sample's number of memberships in matrimonial websites and whether there were any gender differences in the sample in this respect. As seen in Figure 7.5, about 60% of the sample was registered at two to three matrimonial websites. Based on Long's (2010) study,

this result indicates that the study sample is highly serious. Between two to three websites is a reasonable number for those who are looking for opportunities to find their match. According to Long (2010), people may join more than one website to try to widen their circle of search.

Figure 7. 4 Number of Matrimonial Website Memberships
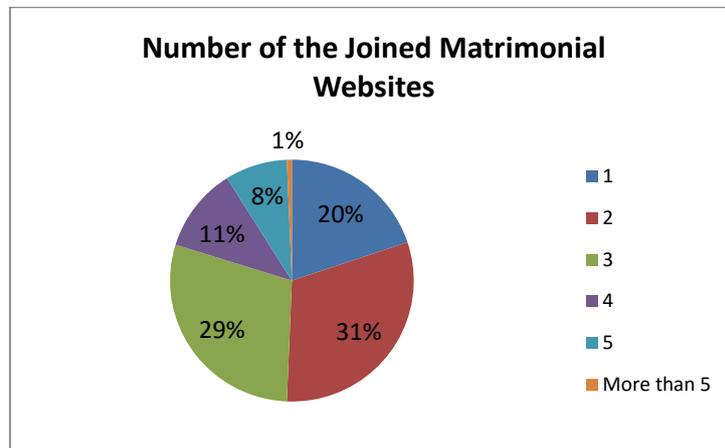
For cases where the cross tabulation presented cells with expected count less than five a Fisher's exact test was reported instead of Chi-square since it is shown to be more robust. Gender differences in the number of matrimonial website memberships were analysed here using the Fisher Exact test. The results of the analysis, presented in Table 7.4, show that there are significant differences between genders (Fisher's Exact Test =84.5, p=.000). Women seem to be registered on fewer websites; for instance, 34% of women were registered on only one website compared to 8% of men. On the other hand, 82.2% of men were registered in two to three websites compared to only 32.1% of women. It seems that, as explained earlier (see section 8.3.1), Saudis consider joining a matrimonial website a major, non-traditional step. From the current result, it also appears that Saudi women are more reserved about joining more than one matrimonial website than men.

Table 7. 4 Gender Differences in the Number of Matrimonial Website Memberships

Number of the joined matrimonial websites	Females (N =134)	Males (N = 168)	Statistic
	N (%)	*N (%)*	*Fisher's Exact Test*
1	46 (34.3%)	14 (8.3%)	
2	23 (17.2%)	70 (41.7%)	
3	20 (14.9%)	68 (40.5%)	EFT = 84.5, p=.000
4	22 (16.4%)	12 (7.1%)	
5	22 (16.4%)	3 (1.8%)	
More than 5	1 (0.7%)	1 0.6%	

7.3.4. Activity Levels on Matrimonial Websites

As the offline Saudi courtship process places men in a more active role than women when searching for a spouse, this section reveals the results regarding the extent to which Saudi sample consider themselves active users of matrimonial websites and whether there is a gender difference in this respect. Figure 7.6 presents the results of the activity levels of Saudi users of matrimonial websites. The results show that Saudi users differ in their activity levels from being very active to idle, with the majority considering themselves average users.

Figure 7. 5 Activity Levels of Saudi Users of Matrimonial Websites
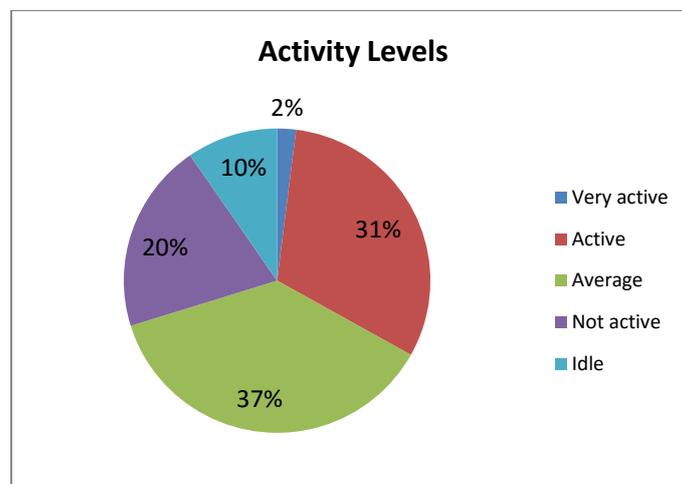
To investigate gender differences in the activity levels of Saudi users of matrimonial websites, the Fisher's Exact test was used. As seen in Table 7.5, the results show that there are significant differences in genders' activity levels (Fisher's Exact Test=58.762, p=.000). Men seem to be more active than women, which is in line with male offline courtship roles and relatively passive female roles. The qualitative part of this research also highlighted the male and female roles in online courtship in more detail (See Chapter Eight: Section Three).

Table 7. 5 Gender Differences in the Activity Levels of Saudi Users of Matrimonial Websites

Activity Levels	Females (N =134)	Males (N = 168)	Statistic
	N (%)	*N (%)*	*Fisher's Exact Test*
Very active	3 (2.2%)	3 (1.8%)	EFT =58.762, p=.000
Active	15 (11.2%)	79 (47.0%)	
Average	75 (56.0%)	37 (22.0%)	
Not active	23 (17.2%)	38 (22.6%)	
Idle	18 (13.4%)	11 (6.5%)	

7.3.5. Fees Paid for Using Matrimonial Websites

Unlike online dating websites, Saudi matrimonial websites do not provide matchmaking tests or allow users who paid fees to access certain profiles. They only enable members to be more visible by posting their profiles on the homepage. According to Long (2010), membership fees for fee-based services in online dating websites range from $25 to $60 per month for one of three packages: basic, total, or special. The online dating websites themselves pressed members to pay more in order to "find that special someone". This section presents the results regarding the amount of money Saudi users paid to become members at matrimonial websites and whether genders differ in paying such fees. Figure 7.7 shows the results of the paid fees.

Figure 7. 6 Fees Paid for Using Matrimonial Websites
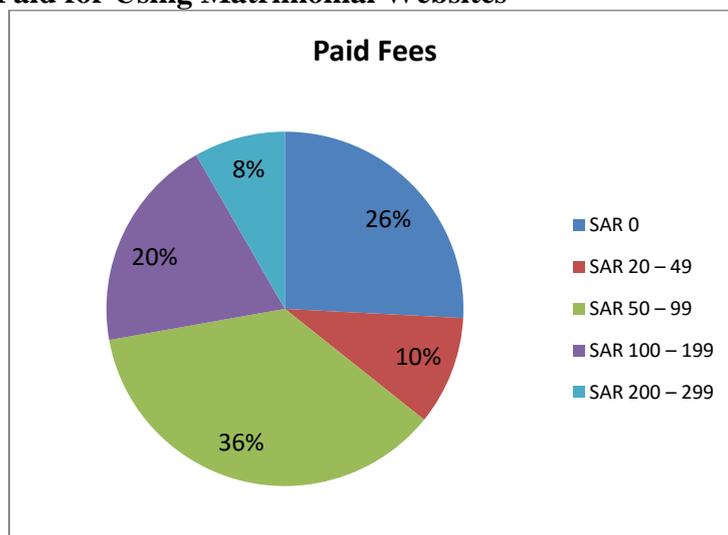
The results show that about a quarter of the sample (25.4%) did not pay any fee to join matrimonial websites, while more than one-third (36.4%) paid between SAR 50–99, about $13–26. Thus, Saudi users of matrimonial websites pay less than Western online dating users.

As seen in Table 7.6, there are significant differences between women and men in the amount of the money paid to join matrimonial websites (Fisher's Exact test = 90.2, p=.000). Women are predominant in the higher categories of expenditure, spending more than men in website memberships: more than half of the women (59%) paid between SAR 100 –299, compared to less than one-third of the men (32.2%). Contrary to the offline Saudi courtship norms that require men to pay for a match maker to search for a suitable spouse, it seems that

Saudi women prefer to use paid services to gain exposure than wait to be discovered by the matrimonial website's users. Such an interesting result requires further investigation (see Chapter Eight: Section Three).

Table 7. 6 Gender Differences in the Fees Paid for Using Matrimonial Websites

Paid Fees	Females (N =134)	Males (N = 168)	Statistic
	N (%)	*N (%)*	*Fisher's Exact Test*
SAR 0	0 (0.0%)	29 (17.3%)	
SAR 20 – 49	25 (18.7%)	0 (0.0%)	EFT = 90.2, p =.000
SAR 50 – 99	30 (22.4%)	85 (50.6%)	
SAR 100 – 199	30 (22.4%)	29 (17.3%)	
SAR 200 – 299	49 (36.6%)	25 (14.9%)	

7.3.6. Reasons for Joining Matrimonial Websites

Gaining clear insight into the Saudi online courtship script requires investigating why users join matrimonial websites. This section addresses that question and examines the gender differences in motivations. As seen in Figure 7.8, almost all participants in the sample agree or strongly agree that they use matrimonial websites because they want a wider choice of possible spouses than the traditional methods provide (87.7%) and more than two-thirds of the sample agree or strongly agree that they use matrimonial websites because they did not find a suitable spouse through the traditional method (67.2%). Such a result could mean that Saudi users are looking for certain qualities in their potential spouses and they wish to find a compatible match who has these attributes. A similar percentage of the sample also agrees or strongly agrees that they use matrimonial websites because they want to search by themselves (69.5%). It seems that Saudi users value this feature because they faced some challenges in the offline courtship social norms and prefer to search without an intermediary (Aljuhani, 2005; Al-Anzi, 2009). Although just a quarter of the sample learned about matrimonial websites from their close circles (see Section 8.3.2), 69.9% of the sample joined these websites because they heard success stories of people using matrimonial websites to find spouses. This means they may have heard these stories from the media or other sources than their own circle of contacts. Though the modal age group of the current sample is 30–40 years old, only half of them agree or strongly agree that it is too late to find a spouse the traditional way (53%). In addition, around half of the sample agrees or strongly agrees that matrimonial websites enable them to find an alternative to their family and tribal circle (51.7%).

Figure 7. 7 Reasons for Joining Matrimonial Websites
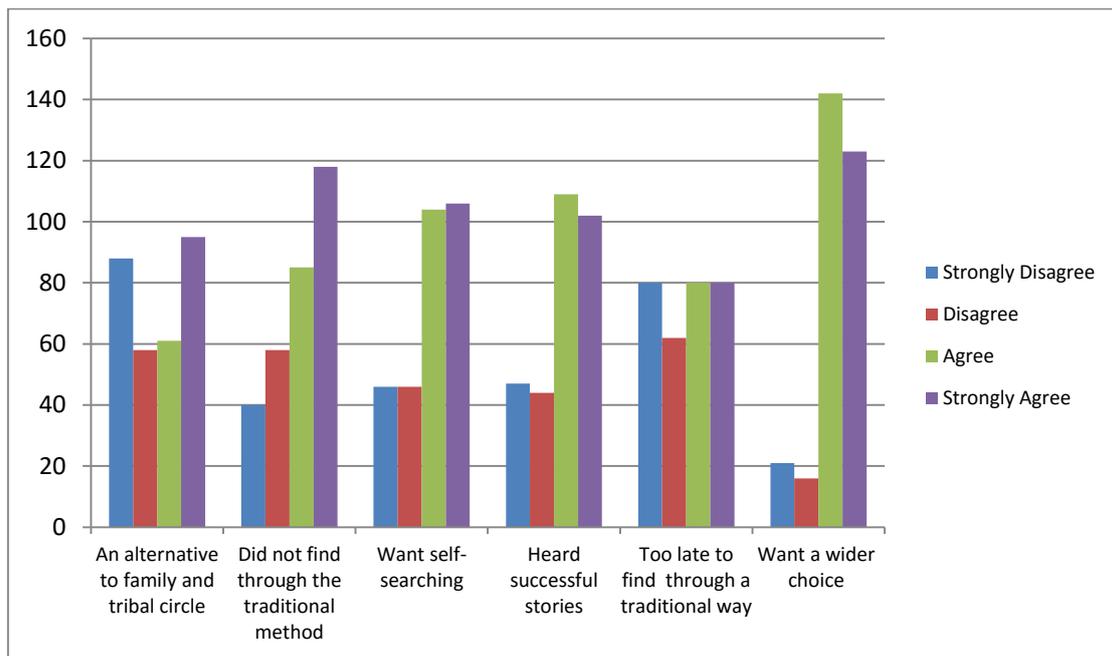
A chi-square test of associations was used to investigate whether Saudi women and men differ in their reasons for using matrimonial websites (see Table 7.7). The results show that there are strong, significant differences between women and men in some of their reasons for joining matrimonial websites. More Saudi men (42.9%) state that they joined these websites to find an alternative to their family and tribal circle than women (17.2%) ($\chi2$=29.2, p=.000). In fact, 41.8% of the women disagree with this statement. On the other hand, more Saudi women than men state that they joined matrimonial websites because they did not find a suitable spouse using the traditional method ($\chi2$=21.04, p=.000) and because it might be too late for them to use the traditional methods to find a suitable spouse ($\chi2$=108.2, p=.000). These results are in line with the fact that most female users of matrimonial websites are more than five years older than the mean Saudi age at marriage (see section 8.2). These reasons were further investigated in the qualitative phase to find out more about the reasons behind such differences (see Chapter Eight: Section Three).

Table 7. 7 Gender Differences in the Reasons for Using Matrimonial Websites

Variable		Females		Males		Statistic
		N	%	N	%	Chi-square
Find an alternative to family and tribal circle	Strongly Disagree	56	41.8	32	19.0	χ2 = 29.2, p=.000
	Disagree	28	20.9	30	17.9	
	Agree	27	20.1	34	20.2	
	Strongly Agree	23	17.2	72	42.9	
Did not find a suitable spouse through the traditional method	Strongly Disagree	8	6.0	32	19.0	χ2 = 21.04, p=.000
	Disagree	28	20.9	30	17.9	
	Agree	51	38.1	34	20.2	
	Strongly Agree	46	34.3	72	42.9	
Want self-searching	Strongly Disagree	21	15.7	25	14.9	χ2 = 1.372, p=.712
	Disagree	17	12.7	29	17.3	
	Agree	49	36.6	55	32.7	
	Strongly Agree	47	35.1	59	35.1	
Heard successful stories	Strongly Disagree	20	14.9	27	16.1	χ2 = 1.143, p=.767
	Disagree	17	12.7	27	16.1	
	Agree	52	38.8	57	33.9	
	Strongly Agree	45	33.6	57	33.9	
Too late to find a spouse through a traditional way	Strongly Disagree	8	6.0	72	42.9	χ2 = 108.2, p=.000
	Disagree	11	8.2	51	30.4	
	Agree	63	47.0	17	10.1	
	Strongly Agree	52	38.8	28	16.7	
Want a wider choice of possible spouses	Strongly Disagree	12	9.0	9	5.4	χ2 = 4.244, p=.236
	Disagree	10	7.5	6	3.6	
	Agree	58	43.3	84	50.0	
	Strongly Agree	54	40.3	69	41.1	

By the end of this section, it seems that the first hypothesis:

H1: Saudi users differ in their usage of matrimonial websites according to their gender.

has been confirmed to high extent as 5 out of 7 usage showed significant gender differences (i.e., knowing someone who uses matrimonial websites, number of matrimonial website memberships, activity levels of Saudi users of matrimonial websites, fees paid for using matrimonial websites) and there is significant differences between women and men in some of their reasons for joining matrimonial websites.

7.4. Saudi Users' Impression Formation

Early theories about communication through sites like the matrimonial websites (Computer Mediated Communication) assumed that online settings facilitate impersonal impressions, given the lack of social cues (e.g., Short, Williams and Christie, 1976; Sproull

and Kiesler, 1986). However, Walther (1996) focused on the positive side of the lack of social cues, proposing that selective impression formation allows users to control the impressions they create online, which he termed "hyperpersonal theory". The current research assumes that in conservative societies that segregate men and women and discourage direct communication between them, online settings provide richer information than offline settings. Therefore, this section examines this assumption and the role of social norms in affecting communication components. One of the main strengths of hyperpersonal theory is that it provides an explanation of the role of the four main communication components in forming an impression online: the *sender*, a matrimonial website user in the current research; the *receiver*, the potential spouse; the *channel*, the matrimonial website itself, and the *feedback*, users' reactions about what they view in other profiles or what they receive in the form of private messages from other users (Walther, 1996). While Walther (1996) model of online communication only considered the *message* features (i.e., asynchronicity and lacking of social cues), the current research considers the *message* itself, by investigating users' profiles, and its features over the three phases. Hence, this means that the current research contributes to the Walther model (1996) by considering the *message* besides the communication components; *sender, channel, receiver and feedback*.

Due to the lack of a pre-existing impression formation survey, the researcher built a scale to measure the role of these components in the impression formation of matrimonial website members, focusing on the first three components. The feedback component is covered in more detail in the qualitative interview phase.

7.4.1. Sender

According to Walther (1996), senders can effectively utilise text-based features to facilitate selective self-presentation. Through text, they can present what they want other users to know about them. Thus, senders have the choice to generate content that emphasises desired attributes and interact with others in a way that leaves a positive impression. This section answers the main research question: To what extent are Saudi users as senders selective in their self-presentation on matrimonial websites? Thus, the current Saudi sample was asked to indicate to what extent they tend to present their positive attributes and deemphasise their negative attributes. It also aims to test the hypothesis that the sample's demographic variables affect this selective self-presentation. Figure 7.9 summarises the frequency distributions of the responses of participants about their strategies as senders.

Figure 7. 8 Presenting Positive Attributes and Deemphasising Negative Attributes
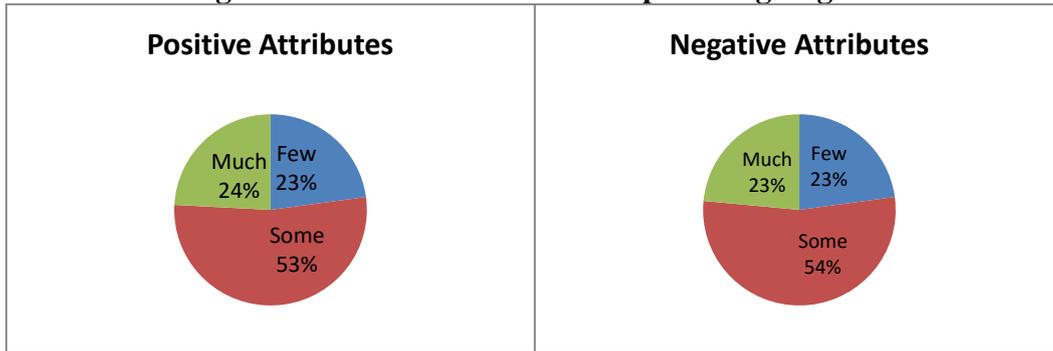
The results reveal that most of the sample (about 77%) care somewhat or a great deal about presenting their positive attributes and deemphasising their negative attributes. Beyond proving that people are selective about presenting themselves and forming positive impressions, this result proves that questionnaire respondents were aware of their behaviour online. It seems that they are strategic in lessening potential partners' access to their undesirable attributes. Such findings correspond to the results of Western studies that reveal that online dating users are strategic when constructing their online dating profiles and communicating with other members (e.g., Vasalou and Joinson, 2009; Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock, 2010; and Ellison, Hancock, & Toma, 2011). Further investigation was conducted in the content analysis phase to determine the extent to which their profiles reflect what they stated about being strategic senders (See Section 7.7.3).

Reviewing the literature reveals that Western scholars have examined the relationship between demographic variables and impression formation, either online or offline. For example, Berinsky (2004) and Boyle and Johnson (2010) link the level of impression formation with age. Studies conducted by Guadagno, Okdie, and Kruse (2012) and Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, and Kruck (2012) investigated the relationship between gender and impression formation. The role of ethnicity and race has also been investigated in the work of Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, and Chen (2009) and Berinsky (2004). Such Western studies on ethnicity could be related to the tribe of origin in Arabic culture. Western scholars have also investigated the role of educational and income levels in shaping impression formation (e.g., Hall, Park, Song, and Cody 2010). Assuming the role of these variables in altering the level of strategic self-presentation, the current research investigates the relationship between the demographic variables and impression formation of Saudi matrimonial website users. Thus, the relationship between seven demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, tribe of origin, relationship status, educational level, income level, and religiosity

level) and Saudi users' strategic self-presentation on matrimonial websites (i.e., presenting positive attributes and deemphasising negative attributes) was examined. The results show the role of educational levels, level of religiosity, and relationship status variables affect how the Saudi sample presents positive attributes and deemphasises negative attributes

Fisher's Exact Test was used to investigate whether Saudis differ in their selective self-presentation according to their educational levels. As seen in Table 7.8, senders differ significantly in how strategic they are in presenting positive attributes (Fisher's exact = 22.861, p=.002) and deemphasising negative attributes (Fisher's exact= 23.883, p=.002) depending on their education level. High levels of selective self-presentation are more associated with higher degrees. This result proves that the level of education affects users' levels of self-presentation. This result aligns with studies by Berinsky (2004) and Hall, Park, Song, and Cody (2010) that found that the educational level correlates positively with some aspects of self-presentation.

Table 7. 8 Educational Levels and Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Bachelor	Post-graduate	Fisher's Exact Test
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
positive attributes	Few	3 (100%)	14 (41.2%)	54 (60.0%)	33 (21.7%)	1 (4.3%)	EFT = 22.861, p=.002
	Some	0 (00.0%)	14 (41.2%)	25 (27.5%)	46 (30.3%)	6 (26.1%)	
	Much	0 (00.0%)	6 (17.6%)	11 (12.2%)	73 (48.0%)	16 (69.6%)	
negative attributes	Few	3 (100%)	14 (41.2%)	56 (62.2%)	33 (21.7%)	6 (26.1%)	EFT= 23.883, p=.002
	Some	0 (00.0%)	14 (41.2%)	23 (25.6%)	46 (30.3%)	16 (69.6%)	
	Much	0 (00.0%)	6 (17.6%)	11 (12.2%)	73 (48.0%)	1 (4.3%)	

Fisher's Exact Test was also used to investigate whether Saudis differ in presenting their positive attributes and deemphasising negative attributes depending on their level of religiosity. Table 7.9 shows that there is a significant association between religious level and selectivity in presenting positive attributes (Fisher's Exact Test=.17.751, p=.004) and deemphasising negative attributes (Fisher's Exact Test=17.819, p=.007). Low levels of selective self-presentation are associated with high levels of religious devotion. This result could be interpreted in light of Islamic religious values, especially when it comes to presenting one's self to potential spouses. Many *Fatwas* have been released by religious clerics emphasising the importance of accuracy in presenting positive and negative attributes to a potential spouse and in the description of the spouse, either by the moderator or on the legitimate look day. This is especially the case when negative attributes could affect the marriage (Al-Munajjid, 2015; The General Presidency of scholarly research and ifta, 2015).

In order to follow these *Fatwas*, highly religious users may feel more responsible to present both sides of their attributes than less religious groups.

Table 7. 9 Religious Level and Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Highly religious	Moderate religious	Religious to a small extent	Not religious	Fisher's Exact Test
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
positive attributes	Few	13 (46.4%)	130 (57.0%)	5 (12.8%)	2 (28.6%)	EFT = 17.751, p=.004
	Some	8 (28.6%)	54 (23.7%)	14 (35.9%)	2 (28.6%)	
	Much	7 (25.0%)	44 (19.3%)	20 (51.3%)	3 (42.9%)	
negative attributes	Few	13 (46.4%)	131 (57.5%)	5 (12.8%)	2 (28.6%)	EFT= 17.819, p=.007
	Some	8 (28.6%)	54 (23.7%)	13 (33.3%)	2 (28.6%)	
	Much	7 (25.0%)	43 (18.9%)	21 (53.8%)	3 (42.9%)	

In order to determine whether relationship status affects how the Saudi sample presents positive attributes and deemphasises negative attributes, Fisher's Exact Test was used (see Table 7.10). The results show Saudis in the sample differ in the presentation of their positive attributes (Fisher's Exact Test=16.406, p=.010) and negative attributes (Fisher's Exact Test= 15.565, p=.016) according to their relationship status. Interestingly, high levels of strategic self-presentation are more associated with being single. Divorced men and women and married men who are looking for second wives are less careful about their self-presentation. It seems that singles are more concerned about their image and how they present themselves. This result could also be linked to the users' experience in relationships. According to Long (2010), users' experiences affects the ways in which they communicate, reply, and present themselves to other website members.

Table 7. 10 Relationship Status and Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Single	Married	Divorced	Widow/Widower	Fisher's Exact Test
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
positive attributes	Few	43 (21.9%)	6 (17.1%)	13 (24.1%)	7 (41.2%)	EFT = 16.406, p=.010
	Some	93 (47.4%)	24 (68.6%)	34 (63.0%)	9 (52.9%)	
	Much	60 (30.6%)	5 (14.3%)	7 (13.0%)	1 (5.9%)	
negative attributes	Few	43 (21.9%)	6 (17.1%)	13 (24.1%)	7 (41.2%)	EFT= 15.565, p=.016
	Some	95 (48.5%)	24 (68.6%)	34 (63%)	9 (52.9%)	
	Much	58 (29.6%)	5 (14.3%)	7 (13%)	1 (5.9%)	

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to evaluate whether or not, significant relationships between age and selectivity in presenting positive attributes and deemphasising negative attributes (see Table 7.11). The results reveal that there are no significant relationships between users' age and their levels of selectivity in presenting positive attributes (F=1.926, p=.148) or deemphasising negative attributes (F = 1.511, p = .222). This result differs from the findings of Strano (2008) and Boyle and Johnson (2010)

that the age variable correlates negatively with online self-presentation. However, it should be noted that these studies investigated online self-presentation in general, whereas the current study investigates online self-presentation to a potential spouse, which could alter users' ways of presenting themselves. In addition, it could be inferred that if age and relationship status are both considered indicators of the user's experience in self-presentation to a potential spouse, relationship status is more influential than age in the current sample's online self-presentation. To test the normality, Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The result shows that the p-value is 0.113 for positive attributes and 0.23 negative and thus it could be concluded that the data comes from a normal distribution. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Table 7. 11 Age and Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Few	Some	Much	ANOVA
positive attributes	Mean	34.13	33.27	31.86	F = 1.926, p =.148
	SD	(7.82)	(6.85)	(6.55)	
negative attributes	Mean	34.13	33.16	32.07	F = 1.511, p = .222
	SD	(7.82)	(6.88)	(06.52)	

A chi-square test of associations was used to investigate whether Saudi women and men differ in presenting their positive attributes and deemphasising negative attributes (see Table 7.12). The results reveal that there are no gender differences in the Saudi sample's presentation of their positive attributes ($\chi2$=.043, p=.979) or minimisation of their negative attributes ($\chi2$= .068, p=.967). While previous studies have found that men are more strategic in presenting their socio-economic status and some personality traits than women and that women are more strategic in presenting their physical attributes than men (e.g. Whitty 2008; Hall, Park, Song, and Cody 2010; Kapidzic and Herring 2011; Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, and Kruck 2012), all studies have confirmed that both genders are strategic in their self-presentation online. Such a finding is in line with the current result that male and female users are equally selective.

Table 7. 12 Gender Differences in Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Females (N =134)	Males (N = 168)	Chi-square
		N (%)	*N (%)*	
positive attributes	Few	30 (22.4%)	39 (23.2%)	
	Some	71 (53.0%)	89 (53.0%)	$\chi2$ = .043, p=.979
	Much	33 (24.6%)	40 (23.8%)	
negative attributes	Few	30 (22.4%)	39 (23.2%)	
	Some	73 (54.5%)	89 (53.0%)	$\chi2$ = .068, p=.967
	Much	31 (23.1%)	40 (23.8%)	

The variable of users' tribe of origin was examined through the usage of the chi-square test of associations and its results are presented in Table 7.13. The results show that Saudis in the sample do not differ in presenting their positive attributes ($\chi2$= 5.217, p=.074), or deemphasising negative attributes ($\chi2$= 4.160, p=.125) according to their tribe of origin. Previous studies suggest that ethnic group identity affects a person's self-presentation. For example, a study by Berinsky (2004) found that being black correlates positively with some aspects of self-presentation. Murry, Berkel, Brody, Miller, and Chen (2009) also found that racial and ethnic socialisations were linked with some aspects of self-presentation. Based on social exchange theory, the demand for some qualities, including ethnic group identity, differs based on the marriage market (Sahib, Koning, and Witteloostuijn, 2006; Jakobsson and Lindholm, 2014) Both tribes of origin seem to be required in the Saudi marriage market, which does not put members of one type under more stress to be strategic in presenting their positive attributes and minimising the negative ones than the other tribe of origin.

Table 7. 13 Tribe of Origin Differences in Selective Self-presentation

Variable		Qabily	Hadari	Chi-square
		N (%)	*N (%)*	
positive attributes	Few	30 (21.3%)	39 (24.2%)	
	Some	84 (59.6%)	76 (47.2)	$\chi2$ = 5.217, p=.074
	Much	27 (19.1%)	46 (28.6%)	
negative attributes	Few	30 (21.3%)	39 (24.2%)	
	Some	84 (59.6%)	78 (48.4%)	$\chi2$ = 4.160, p=.125
	Much	27 (19.1%)	44 (27.4%)	

A chi-square test of associations was used to determine whether Saudis differ in selective self-presentation according to their economic status (see Table 7.14). The results show that there is no significant association between income level and being selective in presenting positive attributes ($\chi2$=9.233, p=.683) and deemphasising negative attributes ($\chi2$= 9.776, p=.680). Reviewing the previous literature shows that few studies have found a relationship between income and self-presentation. For instance, a study conducted by Hall, Park, Song, and Cody (2010) found that income level correlates positively with some aspects of self-presentation. However, Saudi Arabia is one of the wealthiest countries in the world

and the majority of its population is considered middle class (Al-Khateeb, 2008). In addition, Saudi young people are financially dependent on their fathers until they get married. Being raised in such condition could explain why Saudis' focus on self-presentation is not affected by their income levels.

Table 7. 14 Income Level and Selective Self-presentation

Variable		None	<SA 1,500	SA 1,501 – 3,999	SA 4,000 – 6,999	SA 7,000 – 9,999	SA 10,000 – 14,999	SA15, 000 – 20,000	Chi-square
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
positive attributes	Few	16 (18.6%)	8 (33.3%)	9 (15.0%)	16 (25.0%)	10 (29.4%)	5 (23.8%)	5 (38.5%)	χ2 = 9.233, p=.683
	Some	49 (57.0%)	12 (50.0%)	34 (56.7%)	32 (50.0%)	18 (52.9%)	11 (52.4%)	4 (30.8%)	
	Much	21 (24.4%)	4 (16.7%)	17 (28.3%)	16 (25.0%)	6 (17.6%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (30.8%)	
negative attributes	Few	16 (18.6%)	8 (33.3%)	9 (15.0%)	16 (25.0%)	10 (29.4%)	5 (23.8%)	5 (38.5%)	χ2= 9.776, p=.680
	Some	50 (58.1%)	12 (50.0%)	35 (58.3%)	32 (50.0%)	18 (52.9%)	11 (52.4%)	4 (30.8%)	
	Much	20 (23.3%)	4 (16.7%)	16 (26.7%)	16 (25.0%)	6 (17.6%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (30.8%)	

The above findings partially confirm the research hypothesis:

H3: Saudi users differ by their demographic variables in their selective self-presentation of their positive and negative attributes on matrimonial websites.

They reveal that relationship status, educational level, and religious variables affect sender's level of selectiveness. These findings also show the similarities and differences between Saudi and Western samples in these aspects.

7.4.2. Receiver

Hyperpersonal theory argues that the receiver of a message starts to form a perception about the sender from the latter's non-verbal cues. If the first impression formed about the sender is positive, such a process may take the form of idealisation. Therefore, this section answers the research question and tests the hypothesis regarding the factors that influence Saudis' perceptions of other users of matrimonial websites. It also analyses whether the relative influence of these factors varies according to the receivers' demographic variables.

To examine the research hypothesis:

H4: Due to the lack of social cues, the receiver utilises several strategies to fill in the blanks with regard to missing information about the sender.

A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the responses to items regarding the factors that influence the receiver when forming the impression about the sender, to determine whether these items could be considered one or more sub-strategies and provide maximal separation of the revealed factors (Thompson 2004). As seen in Table 7.15, four factors were extracted with eigenvalues > 1, with strong factor loadings (> .5) for each questionnaire item, cumulatively explaining 61.9% of the

variance. Factor 1 included five items concerning the sender's compatibility with social norms, explaining 21.6% of the variance. Factor 2, explaining 15.8% of the variance, included four items concerning the sender's writing style. Factor 3, explaining 14.4% of the variance, included three items concerning the sender's non-verbal cues. Factor 4, with three items concerned with the sender's timing of being online, explained 10.0% of the variance.

Table 7. 15 Factor Analysis (Rotated Component Matrix) of Items Measuring Impression Formation of the Receivers

Item	Factor Loadings (> .5)			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Choosing a sexy photo for the member	.975			
Choosing a sexy name for the member	.975			
Sexual indications	.965			
Displaying the member's real first name	.955			
Displaying the member's family name	.955			
Spelling mistakes in writing sentences		.897		
Simple expressions		.897		
Grammar mistakes		.745		
Awkward sentences		.597		
Adding the member to the favourite list			.975	
Knowing that the member has visited the profile			.975	
Receiving smiley faces			.975	
Sending a private message late at night				.790
Last seen time				.790
Duration of time taken to reply				.534
Eigenvalue	4.76	3.47	3.18	2.20
% of Variance Explained	21.6	15.8	14.4	10.0
Cumulative %	21.6	37.4	51.8	61.9

Beyond constructing a quantitative tool to measure how the factors influence the receiver's perception of the impression formed by sender, the current research contributes to hyperpersonal theory in that it classifies the social cues into four distinct factors. It also provides an understanding of the order of importance of each factor to the Saudi users of matrimonial websites. One of the limitations of previous hyperpersonal studies is that they mainly depended on qualitative data, which does not provide a clear ranking of social cues factors (e.g., Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs, 2005; Whitty, 2008). The current result, on the other hand, reveals that the most important factor that influences Saudi matrimonial website users when forming an impression about senders is the extent to which their online behaviours are in line with Saudi social norms. Although matrimonial website users may be viewed as radical people who escape from the traditional methods of finding a spouse, this result proves that they do not totally challenge their social norms when searching for a future spouse through this online method. On the contrary, these social norms are their main criterion when forming impressions about potential spouses.

The first factor includes first name, family name and sexual indications. For the first name, previous studies indicate that online dating users conceal their real names and use nicknames rather than real names (e.g., Ellison, Hancock, and Toma, 2011; Whitty, 2010). While Saudi users of matrimonial websites also use nicknames rather than their real names, they do not accept the usage of sexy names within online community. As family names are considered an indicator of the user's tribe of origin, users' opinions vary as to whether or not to display the family name, a form of identifiable information (Aljasir, 2015). While users can exchange profile photos within the website, sexy photos are unacceptable among Saudis as sexiness contradicts Saudi social norms. All of this may explain why this is the most important factor that influences Saudi matrimonial website users when forming an impression about senders. Further investigation was conducted regarding these issues in the qualitative phase (See Chapter Eight: Section Three).

The second most significant factor influencing Saudi matrimonial website users' impressions concerns the sender's writing style. As written text is the primary means of communication in an online setting, Saudi users of matrimonial websites seem to be highly concerned about text cues, including the spelling of words, the grammatical construction of sentences, and the complexity of sentences. While some previous studies have mentioned the importance of some of these factors in affecting online daters' impressions (e.g., Whitty, 2008; Farrer and Gavin 2009), no previous study, to the researcher's knowledge, has revealed the detailed items concerning the writing style of the sender. The importance of this factor shows the extent to which Saudis value other members' writing styles in evaluating them.

The third factor relates to senders' non-verbal cues, such as visiting the profile of the receiver, or using the 'favourite' feature and emoticons. Previous studies also show that online users try to seize any information about other members, even the non-verbal ones, to construct an image about them (Long, 2010). The last factor concerns timing, including items related to the time the sender has seen or sent a message to the receiver as well as the time the sender takes to reply to private messages. While Saudi users of matrimonial websites take the timing factor into consideration when forming an impression about a potential spouses, this factor influences them the least. Since previous studies focused on the receiver as being strategic when forming an impression online about the sender and did not cover the factors that might have influenced such an impression (e.g. Whitty, 2008; Vasalou and Joinson, 2009; Ellison, Hancock, and Toma, 2011; Kalinowski and Matei, 2011), this research

contributes to the literature by showing the ranking of four factors in affecting the receiver's impression of the sender.

Given that the current research hypothesizes that the influence of the receivers' factors differs according to their demographic variables, it investigates whether there are relationships between age, gender, tribe of origin, relationship status, level of education, income level, and religiosity and these factors when forming a perception about other members of matrimonial websites. The results reveal that four relationships out of these seven relationships were significant and three relationships were not.

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) confirmed that there were significant relationships between gender and the influence of the receivers' factors in the overall score (F=52.716, p=.000) and in the four factors (see Table 7.16), with men scoring higher than women (68.3. vs. 65.2). There are also significant differences in the Social Norms dimension, with men scoring higher than women (11.6 vs. 8.2; F=220.908, p=.000). However, it should be noted that the differences seen in the overall scores are driven by the differences observed in Social Norms. The restrictions on women' behaviours in offline Saudi life seem to have been transferred to online settings. Men as receivers are more concerned with the extent to which women as senders are following the social norms in their online behaviours. To test the normality, Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The result shows that the p-value is 0.761 for the overall score on receiver scale and thus it could be concluded that the data comes from a normal distribution. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Table 7. 16 Gender and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		Females	Males	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	65.23	68.32	F = 52.716, p =.000
	SD	(3.77)	(3.60)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	19.13	19.35	F = .757, p = .385
	SD	(2.22)	(2.12)	
Non-verbal cues about the sender	Mean	17.94	17.98	F = .059, p = .808
	SD	(1.50)	(1.47)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	19.66	19.67	F = .013, p = .909
	SD	(1.20)	(1.20)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	8.23	11.60	F = 220.908, p = .000
	SD	(2.03)	(1.87)	

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to evaluate whether or not there were significant relationships between the receiver's level of education and the factors that influence their perception in the overall score and in the four factors. As seen in Table 7.17, there are significant differences in the influence of the non-verbal cues factor (F=4.469,

p=.002) and sender's writing style factor (F=6.860, p=.000) on impression formation depending on the receivers' levels of education. Previous studies regarding non-verbal cues in offline settings reveal that people do not differ in forming impressions about others depending on their level of education; however, the current study shows that in online settings, those with higher education are more influenced by the non-verbal cues factor (Kirouac & Dore, 1985). Being able to judge others according to their writing style also requires an adequate level of education. This may explain why users with higher levels of education are more affected by this factor when forming an impression about potential spouses.

Table 7. 17 Level of Education and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Bachelor	Post-graduate	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	67.67	67.18	66.89	66.55	64.87	F = 1.456, p =.216
	SD	(2.89)	(3.56)	(3.67)	(4.30)	(3.31)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	7.78	9.09	10.03	9.89	14.00	F = 6.860, p=.000
	SD	(2.34)	(2.61)	(2.52)	(2.45)	(1.73)	
Non-verbal cues about the sender	Mean	16.00	17.65	17.83	18.04	18.74	F = 4.469, p = .002
	SD	(0.00)	(1.53)	(1.55)	(1.31)	(1.29)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	19.00	20.18	19.62	19.62	19.57	F = 1.571, p = .182
	SD	(0.00)	(0.98)	(1.19)	(1.29)	(0.90)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	18.67	19.24	19.19	19.20	19.87	F = .557, p = .694
	SD	(1.16)	(1.71)	(2.10)	(2.42)	(1.01)	

The relationships between the receivers' levels of religiosity and the factors that influence their perception in the overall score and in the four factors were measured using One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs). As seen in Table 7.18), there is a significant relationship between the receiver's religiosity and the overall scores (F=0.482, p=.001) and the score of caring about the sender's compliance with the social norms factor (F=0.839, p=.000), with respondents in the highly religious groups scoring higher in both. It should be noted that the differences in the overall scores are driven by the differences observed in Social Norms.

According to Al-Lily (2011), religious instructions and social norms overlap in Saudi Arabia and there is continuous debate among Saudi liberals and conservatives about how to distinguish between religious and social issues. However, this debate does not stop religious people from protecting social norms as part of their religious identity. This may explain why highly religious users are affected more by the social norms factor than less religious groups when searching for a future spouse.

Table 7. 18 Religiosity and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		Highly religious	Moderate religious	Religious to a small extent	Not religious	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	66.64	66.50	67.28	66.00	F = .482, p =.001
	SD	(3.26)	(4.02)	(3.85)	(6.00)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	19.43	19.15	19.69	19.14	F = .760, p = .517
	SD	(1.10)	(2.33)	(1.52)	(2.91)	
Non-verbal cues about the sender	Mean	17.86	18.03	17.87	16.86)	F = 1.549, p = .202
	SD	(1.58)	(1.48)	(1.30)	(1.53)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	20.00	19.64	19.69	19.14	F = 1.218, p = .303
	SD	(0.98)	(1.21)	(1.30)	(0.90)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	10.86	10.26	9.68	9.34	F = .839, p = .000
	SD	(2.60)	(2.44)	(2.56)	(2.86)	

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to evaluate whether or not there were significant relationships between the receivers' relationship status and the factors that influence their perception in the overall score and in the four factors (see Table 7.19). The results reveal that relationship status significantly affects receivers' concerns about senders' compliance with social norms (F=7.909, p=.000), with single people showing the highest score. In Saudi traditions, singles are more concerned about their reputation. In particular, women need to protect their honour (*Sharaf*) and (*'ird*) to avoid scandal (*Fadiha*) (Kulwicki, 2002). Therefore, female singles are concerned about how men approach them, to protect their reputation. Single men are also concerned about their reputation, as it is not acceptable for them to be known as playboys (Zoepf, 2008). This may explain why singles are the ones who are most affected by the social norms factor when forming an impression about a potential spouse.

Table 7. 19 Relationship Status and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		Single	Married	Divorced	Widow/Widower	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	66.83	65.46	66.69	66.18	F = 1.271, p =.284
	SD	(3.83)	(4.03)	(4.60)	(3.22)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	19.22	19.40	19.00	20.00	F = .984, p = .401
	SD	(2.03)	(2.78)	(2.48)	(0.79)	
Non-verbal cues about the sender	Mean	18.01	18.26	17.70	17.71	F = 1.242, p = .295
	SD	(1.50)	(1.07)	(1.61)	(1.53)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	19.67	19.83	19.61	19.41	F = .504, p = .680
	SD	(1.28)	(1.01)	(1.07)	(1.12)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	10.37	7.97	9.92	9.00	F = 7.909, p = .000
	SD	(2.31)	(1.81)	(2.64)	(2.42)	

As Spearman's rho coefficient is used to measure the correlation between two variables, it was used to determine if there were significant relationships between the receivers' ages and the factors that influence their perceptions in the overall score and in the

four factors. It has been used rather than Pearson's correlation coefficient, because Spearman's rho operates on ordinal variables and does not entail normally distributed variables measured at the scale/interval level. As seen in Table 7.20, there is no significant relationship between the receiver's age and the overall score (r = -.002, p= .392) and each of the four factors (r = .049, p = .392; r = .086, p = .137; r = 008, p = .883; r = -.052, p = .364). Age does not appear to play a role in affecting the way users perceive senders. This means that age as a variable does affect either sender or receiver.

Table 7. 20 Age and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

	Variable	Spearman's rho	P
Age	Overall Score	-.002	.392
	Writing style of the sender	.049	.392
	Non-variable cues about the sender	.086	.137
	Time of the sender being online	.008	.883
	Sender's compatibility with social norms	-.052	.364

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) revealed that there were no significant relationships between the receivers' tribe of origin and the factors that influence their perception in the overall score (F = .664, p =.416) and in the four factors (F = .137, p = .712; F = 1.553, p = .214; F = .003, p = .953; F = .686, p = .408). The results are presented in Table 7.21. While it is understandable that the tribe of origin may not be affected by the writing style and other cues, it was expected that users from different tribes would be affected differently by the social norms factor, given that previous studies showed that Saudis of Qabily origin are more concerned about following social norms than Hadari (Samin, 2012). However, the result reveals that there were no differences among Qabily and Hadari related to the social norms factor.

Table 7. 21 Tribes of Origin and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		Qabily	Hadari	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	66.32	66.73	F = .664, p =.416
	SD	(4.16)	(3.90)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	19.31	19.22	F = .137, p = .712
	SD	(2.37)	(2.08)	
Non-variable cues about the sender	Mean	17.80	18.03	F = 1.553, p = .214
	SD	(1.51)	(1.47)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	19.66	19.67	F = .003, p = .953
	SD	(1.17)	(1.22)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	9.54	9.81	F = .686, p = .408
	SD	(2.50)	(2.61)	

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) showed that there were no significant relationships between the receiver's income level and the factors that influence their

perception in the overall score (F = 1.456, p =.216) and in the four factors (F = .557, p = .694; F = 4.469, p = .302; F = 1.571, p = .182; F = 6.860, p=.420), as presented in Table 7.22.

Table 7. 22 Level of Income and the Factors that Influence the Receiver's Impression Formation

Variable		None	<SA 1,500	SA 1,501 – 3,999	SA 4,000 – 6,999	SA 7,000 – 9,999	SA 10,000 – 14,999	SA15, 000 – 20,000	ANOVA
Overall Score	Mean	67.94	66.96	66.90	65.92	64.59	65.24	66.54	F = 1.456, p =.216
	SD	(4.04)	(3.46)	(3.96)	(4.15)	(2.77)	(3.94)	(3.57)	
Writing style of the sender	Mean	19.13	19.79	19.03	19.58	18.62	19.71	19.30	F = .557, p = .694
	SD	(2.05)	(1.25)	(2.41)	(2.44)	(2.41)	(1.87)	(0.63)	
Non-variable cues about the sender	Mean	18.13	18.04	17.97	17.97	17.59	17.62	18.23	F = 4.469, p = .302
	SD	(1.36)	(1.55)	(1.46)	(1.53)	(1.52)	(1.69)	(1.54)	
Time of the sender being online	Mean	19.87	19.71	19.62	19.56	19.41	19.43	20.00	F = 1.571, p = .182
	SD	(1.03)	(1.16)	(1.30)	(1.27)	(1.33)	(1.25)	(1.08)	
Sender's compatibility with social norms	Mean	10.81	9.42	10.28	8.81	8.97	8.48	9.00	F = 6.860, p=.420
	SD	(2.45)	(2.26)	(2.46)	(2.47)	(2.76)	(2.27)	(1.63	

Thus, the research hypothesis:

H5: The influence of the receivers' factors differs according to their demographic variables.

has been partially confirmed. The influence of the receivers' factors on Saudi users of matrimonial websites differs according to their gender, level of education, relationship status, and religiosity. They do not, however, differ according to their age, tribe of origin, or income level.

7.4.3. Channel

According to early Computer Mediated Communication studies (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986; Spears and Lea 1992; 1994; Reicher, Spears, and Postmes, 1995), online channels are not capable of conveying as much rich information as face-to-face communication due to their lack of social cues. However, it could be argued that in societies that apply gender segregation in almost all aspects of life and discourage direct eye contact and other cues between sexes, the conditions are different. Therefore, this section answers the research question: What are Saudi users' perceptions of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse? It also examines the gender differences regarding the capability of online channels to convey rich information in comparison with face-to-face communication. Table 7.23 summarises the extent to which the participants view online matrimonial websites as an effective channel for finding a spouse. The results reveal that all scores are very high, ranging from 6 to 7, which means that all of the responses fell in the top

categories of agreement with the effectiveness of using matrimonial websites for finding a spouse.

Table 7. 23 Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Online Matrimonial Websites as a Channel to Find a Spouse

Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Make the interaction with the potential spouse possible	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
Make the interaction with the potential spouse comfortable	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
Make the interaction with the potential spouse easier	6.00	7.00	6.7848	.41167
Enable me to overcome cultural and social restrictions	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
Enable me to obtain information directly from the potential spouse	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
Enable me to have more time to examine the compatibility of a potential spouse	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
Enable me to provide more information about myself	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
I can view other members' profiles or reply to their messages in my own time frame	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935
I have more time to examine the possibility of compatibility with a potential spouse	6.00	7.00	6.7881	.40935

Gender was examined to test the research hypothesis:

H6: Saudi users differ by gender in their perceptions of the effectiveness of using a matrimonial website as a channel to find a spouse.

In order to test this hypothesis, the overall evaluation score was computed by adding all nine channel items and male and female users' scores were compared using independent sample t-tests to reveal any gender differences as this test is usually used to compare the sample mean of two independent groups. As seen in Table 7.24, there are significant differences in how men and women evaluate the matrimonial but only at a 10% significance level, very small as shown by the means of each group (61.4 vs. 60.6, t=-1.831, p=.068). This result contributes to the Computer Meditated Communication debate regarding the richness of online settings in conservative, segregated societies, as it shows that online communities can provide more information for users who belong to such societies than their offline lives.

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That means the nature of the online message (i.e., one of the main elements of the communication process) in segregated societies is entirely different from exchange messages in Western context. The written message is a valuable source of information for Saudis. To test the normality, Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The result shows that the p-value is 0.252 and thus it could be concluded that the data comes from a normal distribution. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Table 7. 24 Gender Differences in the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Online Matrimonial Websites as a Channel to Find a Spouse

Variable	Females	Males	Statistic
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*t-test, p-value*
the effectiveness of online matrimonial websites as a channel to find a spouse	60.65 (3.97)	61.44 (3.41)	t = -1.862, p = .068

7.5. Mate Preference Strategies of Saudi Matrimonial Website Users

According to Buss and Schmitt (1993), men strategically seek the following characteristics for long-term mating relationships: paternity confidence, commitment, female reproductive value, gene quality, and good parenting skill. By contrast, the authors proposed that women seek the following characteristics: investment of resources, commitment, physical protection, gene quality, and good parenting skills (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). However, there are distinctive features of Saudi culture that may affect their strategies of mate preferences when looking for potential spouse (See Chapter Four: Section Two). Therefore, this section answers the research question: What are Saudi men's and women's mate preferences when looking for a spouse? It also examines the research hypotheses regarding the similarities and differences between Saudi men's and women's preferences and the preferences described by Buss and Schmitt (1993). This section also presents the relationship between demographic variables and men's and women's preferences.

7.5.1. Mate Preferences Factors

In sexual strategies theory, Buss and Schmitt (1993) indicate men have five preferences in a long-term mating context: paternity confidence (measured by the Loyal, Honest, Good moral character, and Chastity items), commitment (measured by the Wants

commitment and Wants children items), female reproductive value (the Good looking, Physically attractive, and In shape items), gene quality (measured by the Tall, Intelligent, and Healthy items) and good parenting skill (measured by the Likes children, Good housekeeper, Good cook, and Home-oriented items).

A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the responses regarding mate preferences reported by the male participants in the questionnaire. As seen in Table 7.25, seven factors were extracted with eigenvalues > 1, and strong factor loadings (> .5) for each questionnaire item, cumulatively explaining 75.7% of the variance. Questionnaire items with weak factor loadings <.5 were excluded because they contributed little to the variance in each factor. Factor 1, named 'paternity confidence and commitment', explaining 23.7% of the variance, included Honest, Wants commitment, Good moral character, Loyal, Chasity, and Wants children. Factor 2, named 'good parenting skills', explaining 14.7% of the variance, included Good housekeeper, Good cook, Likes children, and Home-oriented. Factor 3, named 'female reproductive value', explaining 8.6% of the variance, included In shape, Physically attractive, and Good looking. Factor 4, named 'gene quality', explaining 8.4% of the variance, included Intelligent, Healthy and Tall. Factor 5, named 'family background', explaining 7.7% of the variance, included Having a tribal origin and Good family background. Factor 6, named 'religion', explaining 7.1% of the variance included Praying, Religious point of view, and Religious look. Factor 7 named 'profession', explaining 5.1% of the variance, included College graduate and Professional Degree.

Table 7. 25 Factor Analysis Solution (Rotated Component Matrix) of Mate Preferences Reported by Male Participants

Item	Loadings (> .5)						
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
2. Honest	.948						
7. Wants commitment	.943						
3. Good moral character	.938						
1. Loyal	.934						
4. Chastity	.854						
8. Wants children	.819						
10. Good housekeeper		.942					
11. Good cook		.942					
9. Likes children		.935					
12. Home-oriented		.935					
14. In shape			.960				
6. Physically attractive			.960				
5. Good looking			.787				
16. Intelligent				.883			
13. Healthy				.842			
15. Tall				.586	.		
27. Having a tribal origin					.976		
19. Good family background					.969		

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Item	Loadings (> .5)						
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
25. Praying						.759	
23. Religious point of view						.644	
24. Religious look						.536	
17. College graduate							.709
18. Professional Degree							.577
Eigenvalue	6.16	3.83	2.25	2.19	1.99	1.84	1.43
% of Variance Explained	23.7	14.7	8.6	8.4	7.7	7.1	5.1
Cumulative %	23.7	38.4	47.0	55.5	63.2	70.2	75.7

The above table shows that there are differences between Buss and Schmitt's (1993) proposed mate preferences and Saudis' preferences. While Buss and Schmitt's (1993) first factor only includes paternity confidence items, Saudi men treat paternity confidence and commitment as one factor, which means that both of them occupy the top priority rank. This result is compatible with the important norms and values in Saudi culture (see Chapter Four: Section Three). In particular, the values of *Sharaf* and *'ird*, which are associated with men's honour, may lead them to be eager to find a spouse committed to the marriage relationship. The second factor, good parenting skills, includes items related to women's typical role in Saudi society, which may explain why caring for the house and children are at the top of men's priorities in this sample, whereas Buss and Schmitt (1993) ranked this factor last. The gene quality factor and female reproductive value factor, concerned with the attractiveness and fertility of women, occupied the same level of importance for both Saudi men and Buss and Schmitt's (1993) study. The fifth factor for Saudi men relates to family background, an important consideration in Saudi culture as it is considered an indicator of the family's reputation, including its origin and economic status. The Saudi courtship norms literature stresses the importance of women's family backgrounds (See Chapter Four: Section Three). Although religion has a low rank among other factors, it appears as an independent factor in Saudi men' strategies. Such a finding is in line with Islamic values in mate preferences, which stress having a religious bride in order to have a long-standing marriage life (Al-Anzi, 2009). The last factor concerns women's profession. The low rank this factor occupies confirms that women's typical role among Saudi men is to take care of children and the home (Aljuhani, 2005). However, the fact that it is an independent factor means that it is still a priority in men's mate preferences.

Focusing on women' preferences in long-term mating contexts, Buss and Schmitt (1993) proposed that women hold six mate preferences: ability to invest (measured by College graduate and Professional Degree, Good family background, and Good earning capacity items), willingness to invest (Generous item), commitment (measured by Wants

commitment and Wants children items), physical protection (measured by Physically Strong item), gene quality (measured by Tall, Intelligent, and Healthy items), and good parenting skills (measured by Likes children, Good housekeeper, Good cook, and Home-oriented items).

A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the responses regarding mate preferences reported by the female participants in the questionnaire. As seen in Table 7.26, seven factors were extracted with eigenvalues > 1, and strong factor loadings (> .5) cumulatively explaining 86.3% of the variance. Factor 1, named 'able and willing to invest', explaining 27.5% of the variance, included College graduate, Professional Degree, Good earning capacity, Good family background, and Generous. Factor 2, named 'religion', explaining 16.4% of the variance, included Religious look, Praying, Religious point of view, and Highly religious. Factor 3, named 'gene quality', explaining 10.2% of the variance, included Healthy, Intelligent, and Tall. Factor 4, named 'morality', explaining 9.2% of the variance, included Good moral character and Honest. Factor 5, named 'commitment', explaining 8.3% of the variance, included Wants commitment and Wants children. Factor 6, named 'protection', explaining 8.0% of the variance, included Physically strong and Having a tribal origin. Factor 7, named 'good parenting skills', explaining 7.9% of the variance, included Likes children and Home-oriented.

Men's capability and willingness to invest seem to be linked from Saudi women's point of view, which may explain why these two factors have been merged into one factor for them. This first factor also confirms the importance of the typical male role in the Saudi marriage institution of being responsible for the house's expenses (Aljuhani, 2005). Interestingly, religion was the second factor, which indicates that religion has priority in Saudi women's lists. Such a finding is in line with the Islamic instructions regarding mate preferences, which assert that religiosity should have the most priority among the characteristics of a potential spouse (Al-Anzi, 2009). The commitment factor in Buss and Schmitt's (1993) list has been replaced by the religion factor in Saudi women's list of priorities. This could be because Saudi women believe that looking for a religious male will guarantee his commitment, as Islamic instructions do not tolerate deception or infidelity (Aljuhani, 2005). Gene quality ranked third among the emergent factors, which means that this strategy a similar priority in the Saudi women's list as in Buss and Schmitt's (1993) list, where it was ranked fourth. Morality emerged as an independent factor in Saudi women's list and ranked fourth, followed by commitment. Such a finding shows the keenness of Saudi

women to have a stable marriage life. Interestingly, protection, including both physical and psychological protection, appeared as an independent factor. It seems that for women, having a tribal origin provides a kind of protection, as the family reputation and male's family name means a great deal in Saudi society (Samin, 2010). Although good parenting skills ranked last, the existence of this factor means that it has become one of the female mate preferences. It seems that sharing the responsibility at home is starting to be part of the typical role of men in Saudi society and one of the characteristics that women are looking for in their future husbands.

Table 7. 26 Factor Analysis Solution (Rotated Component Matrix) of Mate Preferences Reported by Female Participants

Item	Factor Loadings (> .5)						
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
17. College graduate	.996						
18. Professional Degree	.996						
20. Good earning capacity	.996						
19. Good family background	.996						
21. Generous	.996						
24. Religious look		.885					
25. Praying		.885					
23. Religious point of view		.885					
26. Highly religious		.882					
13. Healthy			.967				
16. Intelligent			.967				
15. Tall			.839				
3. Good moral character				.904			
2. Honest				.904			
7. Wants commitment					.903		
8. Wants children					.897		
22. Physically Strong						.938	
27. Having a tribal origin						.938	
9. Likes children							.968
12. Home-oriented							.968
Eigenvalue	7.14	4.26	2.63	2.38	2.15	2.08	2.04
% of Variance Explained	27.5	16.4	10.2	9.2	8.3	8.0	7.9
Cumulative %	27.5	43.9	53.9	63.1	71.4	79.4	87.3

The factor analysis indicated that Saudi men and women differed in their mate preferences. Although the first four factors (Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4) explained most of the variance (> 50%) in both of their mate preference rankings, the items within each of these four factors were different for men and women. While the most important mate preference

factors for men are paternity confidence and commitment, good parenting skills, female reproductive value and gene quality; the most important factors for women are ability and willingness to invest, religion, gene quality and morality. Whereas family background, religion, and profession were the least important factors for Saudi men, Saudi women were least concerned about commitment, protection, and good parenting.

Thus, examining the research hypothesis:

H7: Saudi matrimonial websites users have different mate preferences from those described by Buss and Schmitt (1993)

reveals that the mate preferences proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993) appear to be partly applicable in the Saudi context and thus this set of hypotheses have been partially confirmed. The five preferences reported by Saudi men in the marriage context (paternity confidence, commitment, female reproductive value, gene quality, and good parenting skill) were all described by Buss and Schmitt. However, it seems that Saudi men also have three further priorities (family background, religion, and profession). In addition, the six preferences defined by Buss and Schmitt (1993) for women in a long-term mating context (ability to invest, willingness to invest, commitment, physical protection, gene quality and good parenting skills) were all expressed by Saudi women. Saudi women also seem to have two further priorities (morality and religion). This finding contributes to the theories on mate preferences in general and sexual strategies theory in particular as it advances the understanding of mate preferences in an Islamic context.

7.5.2. Strategic Mate Preferences and Demographic Variables

To test the hypothesis that Saudi users differ in their strategic mate preferences according to their demographic variables, this section presents the results and discussion of the relationships between the demographic variables and the mate preferences of men and women.

Spearman's rank correlation was used to determine whether there is a relationship between age and preferences. As seen in Table 7.27, there is a strong positive correlation between age and paternity confidence and commitment in men's mate preferences rankings (r=.517, p=.000) and a weak positive correlation between age and reproductive value in men's mate preferences (r=-210, p=.006). There is a positive strong correlation between age and the commitment in women's mate preferences ranking (r=.729, p=.000).

Table 7. 27 Relationship between Age and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies	Spearman's rho	P
Paternity confidence and commitment	.517**	.000
Good parenting skills	.056	.475
Female reproductive value	.210**	.006
Gene quality	.095	.220
Family background	.102	.189
Religion	.123	.112
Profession	.017	.823
Females' mate preferences strategies		
Able and willing to invest	-.120	.168
Religion	.012	.894
Gene quality	.003	.974
Morality	-.073	.402
Commitment	.729**	.000
Protection	-.018	.834
Good parenting skills	-.045	.609

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the above table, it seems that commitment begins to take first priority as people get older, for both men and women. The importance of other qualities starts to diminish in comparison with commitment. Such a finding is in line with the result of an American study conducted by McWilliams and Barrett (2014) among older online daters, which reveals that men seek committed relationships and women desire companionship. Older Saudi men are also concerned with reproductive value, which means that beauty and female fertility maintain their importance for older Saudi men.

An independent sample T-test (see Table 7.28) revealed a significant relationship between tribe of origin and family background and men's mate preferences (t=-5.823, p=.000), with the Qabily scoring higher than Hadari. There are also significant differences in women's preference for protection between tribes (t=-13.3, p=.000), with the Qabily scoring higher in the importance of commitment than the Hadari. To test the normality, Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The result shows that the p-value is 0.874 for the overall score on the males' mate preferences strategies and 0.63 for the overall score on the males' mate preferences strategies. Thus, it could be concluded that the data comes from a normal distribution. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Table 7. 28 Tribes of Origin and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies		Qabily	Hadari	T-test, p-value
Paternity confidence and commitment	Mean	36.07	36.29	t = 1.026, p = .307
	SD	(1.98)	(1.55)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	24.71	24.88	t = -.536, p = .593
	SD	(2.04)	(1.76)	
Female reproductive value	Mean	19.29	19.39	t = -.409, p = .683
	SD	(1.847)	(1.26)	
Gene quality	Mean	17.61	17.47	t = .340, p = .734
	SD	(2.40)	(2.47)	
Family background	Mean	8.12	5.67	t = -5.823, p = .000
	SD	(2.39)	(2.67)	
Religion	Mean	14.27	14.54	t = -1.184, p = .238
	SD	(1.34)	(1.36)	
Profession	Mean	9.122	9.08	t = .154, p = .878
	SD	(2.19)	(1.61)	
Females' mate preferences strategies		Qabily	Hadari	T-test, p-value
Able and willing to invest	Mean	31.26	31.28	t = -.044, p = .965
	SD	(2.60)	(2.50)	
Religion	Mean	17.40	17.14	t = .316, p = .753
	SD	(4.72)	(4.37)	
Gene quality	Mean	16.07	15.84	t = .540, p = .590
	SD	(2.60)	(2.20)	
Morality	Mean	12.45	12.52	t = -.438, p = .662
	SD	(0.97)	(0.79)	
Commitment	Mean	9.53	9.76	t = .547, p = .585
	SD	(2.20)	(2.37)	
Protection	Mean	12.60	9.67	t = -13.279, p = .000
	SD	(1.26)	(1.03)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	9.40	9.47	t = -.354, p = .724
	SD	(0.86)	(0.99)	

This result could be interpreted from two perspectives: the first is to read the result from a Saudi cultural prospective. Saudi tribes vary in their reputation and position in society. While tribes with a high position, based on their density, do not allow their members to get married to Hadari or low-position Qabily, tribes with a low position are more tolerant toward allowing their members to get married to Hadari people. At the same time, Hadari people do not have this kind of restriction (Samin, 2012). *Kafāʾa fī l-nasab* or the compatibility in marriage recently appeared as a debateable case that reached the Saudi Supreme Court by Qabily (The Ministry of Justice, 2013). Secondly, this result could be interpreted in light of the homogamy perspective, which adopts the idea that individuals are attracted to the company of people similar to themselves in characteristics such as race because they believe that deep homogamy in values and beliefs should lead to successful partner selection (e.g., Kerckhoff and Davis, 1962; Reiss, 1960; Lewis, 1973; Levinger, 1983).

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) was used to measure the relationship between the relationship status and the mate preferences of men and women (see Table 7.29), revealing that there is a significant relationship between relationship status and female reproductive value in men's mate preferences (F=3.145, p=.027), with married men scoring the highest in this strategy.

Table 7. 29 Relationship Status and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies		Single	Married	Divorced	Widow/Widower	ANOVA
Paternity confidence and commitment	Mean	36.28	36.45	35.59	35.63	F = 1.561, p = .172
	SD	(2.15)	(3.05)	(2.69)	(1.19)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	24.85	24.34	25.41	25.50	F = 1.760, p = .157
	SD	(1.80)	(2.15)	(1.06)	(1.93)	
Female reproductive value	Mean	19.39	19.74	18.76	18.38	F = 3.145, p = .027
	SD	(1.19)	(1.26)	(2.07)	(2.77)	
Gene quality	Mean	17.39	18.03	16.76	18.38	F = 1.473, p = .224
	SD	(2.49)	(2.51)	(2.22)	(1.30)	
Family background	Mean	6.02	6.28	6.29	6.50	F = .743, p = .528
	SD	(1.13)	(1.36)	(1.53)	(1.77)	
Religion	Mean	14.62	14.17	14.11	14.25	F = 1.466, p =.226
	SD	(1.39)	(1.01)	(1.79)	(0.89)	
Profession	Mean	9.16	8.65	9.18	9.75	F = 1.130, p =.339
	SD	(1.64)	(1.95)	(1.85)	(2.66)	
Females' mate preferences strategies		Single	Married	Divorced	Widow/Widower	ANOVA
Able and willing to invest	Mean	31.52	--	30.97	30.11	F = 1.663, p =.194
	SD	(2.44)	--	(2.63)	(2.67)	
Religion	Mean	17.11	--	17.59	16.78	F = .197, p = .822
	SD	(4.32)	--	(4.99)	(3.93)	
Gene quality	Mean	15.89	--	16.03	15.67	F = .099, p = .905
	SD	(2.16)	--	(2.68)	(2.60)	
Morality	Mean	12.60	--	12.38	12.00	F = 2.653, p = .174
	SD	(.78)	--	(0.98)	(0.71)	
Commitment	Mean	12.82	--	9.68	8.78	F = 1.411, p = .212
	SD	(0.88)	--	(0.75)	(0.97)	
Protection	Mean	9.55	--	9.68	9.89	F = .120, p =.887
	SD	(2.17)	--	(0.75)	(2.42)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	9.52	--	9.38	9.00	F = 1.391, p =.253
	SD	(0.97)	--	(0.89)	(0.87)	

Married men in the current research are those who are looking for a second wife. Thus, the relationship between looking for a second wife and reproductive values could mean that they are either looking to have children in general, as they may not have before with their first wives, or they are looking to have a specific gender of child, such as looking for boys. They may even want to have beautiful children, as beauty is included in this reproductive value factor. These three choices are in line with Saudi men's beliefs when they looking for a second wife. According to Al-Khteeb (2008), having a boy is very important in Saudi culture.

When men feel that they failed to have a boy or to have children in general, most of them resort to a second marriage.

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to evaluate whether or not there were significant relationships between the level of education and the mate preferences of men and women. As seen in Table 7.30, the results show that there are significant relationships between education and men's mate preferences for gene quality (F = 19.529, p = .000), family background (F = 2.828, p = .040) and religion (F = 10.742, p =.000). There are other weaker relationships (10% significance) with the preferences for female reproductive value (F = 2.553, p = .057) and profession (F = 2.420, p =.068). There are significant relationships between education and the following women's mate preferences: ability and willingness to invest (F = 5.073, p =.001), gene quality (F = 6.429, p = .000), morality (F = 3.406, p = .011) and protection (F = 7.351, p =.000).

Table 7. 30 Level of Education and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies		Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Bachelor	Post-graduate	ANOVA
Paternity confidence and commitment	Mean	--	37.28	37.47	37.63	37.75	F = .222, p =.881
	SD	--	(2.42)	(3.15)	(2.66)	(2.47)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	--	24.44	24.81	25.00	25.00	F = .396, p = .756
	SD	--	(2.37)	(1.78)	(1.91)	(1.03)	
Female reproductive value	Mean	--	19.00	19.21	19.35	19.94	F = 2.553, p = .057
	SD	--	(0.82)	(1.04)	(1.53)	(1.79)	
Gene quality	Mean	--	16.47	18.55	19.00	19.44	F = 19.529, p = .000
	SD	--	(1.21)	(1.35)	(2.40)	(2.24)	
Family background	Mean	--	5.31	6.00	6.24	6.26	F = 2.828, p = .040
	SD	--	(0.95)	(1.14)	(1.19)	(1.72)	
Religion	Mean	--	13.60	14.26	15.00	15.63	F = 10.742, p =.000
	SD	--	(1.71)	(1.83)	(0.91)	(1.10)	
Profession	Mean	--	8.80	9.06	9.59	9.65	F = 2.420, p =.068
	SD	--	(2.11)	(1.50)	(1.77)	1.84	
Females' mate preferences strategies		Elementary school	Middle school	High school	Bachelor	Post-graduate	ANOVA
Able and willing to invest	Mean	30.33	30.11	30.58	32.00	32.32	F = 5.073, p =.001
	SD	(2.89)	(2.14)	(2.12)	(2.69)	(2.00)	
Religion	Mean	16.83	17.61	17.16	18.33	22.00	F = 1.046, p = .386
	SD	(4.36)	(5.10)	(3.96)	(4.53)	(8.50)	
Gene quality	Mean	14.67	15.00	15.67	16.27	17.78	F = 6.429, p = .000
	SD	(0.58)	(2.51)	(2.32)	(1.81)	(3.21)	
Morality	Mean	12.00	12.28	12.30	12.33	12.80	F = 3.406, p = .011
	SD	(0.00)	(2.50)	(0.84)	(0.86)	(0.58)	
Commitment	Mean	13.33	10.00	11.11	11.75	11.80	F = 1.850, p = .123
	SD	(0.58)	(2.05)	(1.72)	(1.78)	(2.00)	
Protection	Mean	8.59	9.67	9.95	10.33	11.44	F = 7.351, p =.000
	SD	(2.31)	(2.40)	(2.13)	(1.84)	(2.10)	
good parenting skills	Mean	8.67	9.37	9.50	9.61	9.67	F = 0.813, p =.519
	SD	(0.58)	(1.14)	(0.93)	(0.92)	(0.58)	

Awareness of the importance of each mate preference's value seems to increase when the level of education increases. With higher levels of education, both men and women start to have more mate preferences. This result could also be interpreted in light of social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959): the more education members have, the higher their value in the marriage market, which may lead them to raise the qualifications they are looking for in their potential spouse. Such a finding is consistent with a Russian study conducted by Sahib, Koning, and Witteloostuijn (2006) that found that speaking English well is positively correlated with success in the marriage market.

Spearman's rank correlation was used to determine whether there is a relationship between level of income and mate expectations. As seen in Table 7.31, there is a negative correlation between income level and men's preference for family background (r=-.161, p=.037), although it is a weak, almost negligible correlation since the index is lower than 0.2. There is a significant negative correlation between income level and women's mate preferences for ability and willingness to invest (r=-.222, p=.010) and protection (r=-.294, p=.001). There is a significant positive correlation between income level and women's preference for commitment (r=.179, p=.038).

Table 7. 31 Relationship between Income Level and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies	Spearman's rho	P
Paternity confidence and commitment	.049	.532
Good parenting skills	.072	.357
Female reproductive value	-.030	.698
Gene quality	. -.079	.306
Family background	-.161*	.037
Religion	.052	.499
Profession	.025	.751
Females' mate preferences strategies		
Able and willing to invest	-.222**	.010
Religion	-.106	.224
Gene quality	.006	.944
Morality	.016	.855
Commitment	.179*	.038
Protection	-.294**	.001
Good parenting skills	.019	.830

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A male with a low income looking for women with a good family background could be interpreted in light of a completion perspective. This perspective is based on the fulfilment of needs principle, in that people search for partners who complement them, fulfil their unfulfilled dreams, or resemble their ideal selves in order to obtain a productive relationship (Winch, 1958). As good family background has a high value in Saudi culture, it seems that

Saudi men with low incomes may try to marry women with a higher level of tribe of origin and good economic status. On the other hand, women with low incomes are looking for men who are able and willing to invest, which are considered typical female mate preferences and in line with sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). On the contrary, women with high levels of incomes are concerned with commitment and successful relationships rather than men with high incomes. Such a finding is interesting as it shows that when Saudi women are able to spend money on themselves, they start to alter their typical preferences in potential spouses.

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were used to measure the relationship between religiosity and the mate preferences of men and women (see Table 7.32). The result reveals that there are significant positive relationships between religiosity and men's preferences for religiosity (F=15.937, p=.000). Those highly religious men score higher in religious mate preferences. The non-religious dimension should be disregarded since there is only one subject in that category. As expected, the result reveals that religiosity of women is associated with them seeking religious men (F=32.7, p=.000), with those in the highly religious category scoring the highest in the religion dimension.

Table 7. 32 Religious Level and Mate Preferences

Males' mate preferences strategies		Highly religious	Moderate religious	Religious to a small extent	Not religious	ANOVA
Paternity confidence and commitment	Mean	36.27	37.62	37.00	36.00	F = 1.412, p =.241
	SD	(2.58)	(2.61)	(3.22)	(.)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	24.33	24.92	24.86	21.00	F = 1.929, p = .127
	SD	(2.58)	(1.80)	(1.32)	(.)	
Female reproductive value	Mean	18.80	19.43	19.36	18.00	F = 1.147, p = .332
	SD	(1.15)	(1.47)	(1.47)	(.)	
Gene quality	Mean	17.93	17.63	16.50	18.00	F = 1.536, p = .207
	SD	(1.98)	(2.47)	(2.48)	(.)	
Family background	Mean	15.33	14.36	14.41	15.00	F = 2.421, p =.168
	SD	(2.55)	(1.19)	(1.01)	(.)	
Religion	Mean	6.50	6.29	4.33	4.00	F = 15.937, p = .000
	SD	(1.54)	(1.10)	(0.82)	(.)	
Profession	Mean	9.53	8.99	9.37	9.00	F = .605, p =.612
	SD	(1.92)	(1.79)	(1.73)	(.)	

Females' mate preferences strategies		Highly religious	Moderate religious	Religious to a small extent	Not religious	ANOVA
Able and willing to invest	Mean	30.08	31.47	31.18	31.00	F = 1.209, p =.309
	SD	(2.96)	(2.39)	(2.32)	(3.95)	
Religion	Mean	25.92	18.83	16.28	15.47	F = 32.674, p = .000
	SD	(2.43)	(7.47)	(3.17)	(3.48)	
Gene quality	Mean	15.85	16.01	15.24	16.33	F = .602, p = .615
	SD	(2.38)	(2.33)	(2.41)	(2.07)	
Morality	Mean	12.23	12.53	12.47	12.67	F = .559, p = .643
	SD	(0..83)	(0.84)	(0.80)	(1.21)	
Commitment	Mean	11.46	11.80	11.29	11.33	F = .525, p = .666
	SD	(1.61)	(1.78)	(2.20)	(1.63)	
Protection	Mean	9.69	9.79	8.65	9.17	F = 1.337, p =.265
	SD	(2.29)	(2.22)	(2.21)	(2.48)	
Good parenting skills	Mean	9.46	9.35	9.94	9.67	F = 2.067, p =.108
	SD	(1.13)	(0.94)	(0.83)	(0.52)	

These findings could also be explained in light of the homogamy perspective. As this perspective assumes that deep homogamy in values and beliefs should lead to successful partner selection (Kerckhoff and Davis, 1962), this may drive highly religious male and female members to approach people who have similar levels of religiosity. While the current results were based on and contribute to sexual strategies theory, drawing in relevant literature from other perspectives adds to a better understanding of these findings.

By the end of this section, it appears that the research hypothesis regarding male users:

H8: Saudi male users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables has been confirmed as results showed the role of all six variables (i.e., age, tribe of origin, relationship status, educational level, income level and religiosity level). On the other hand, the research hypothesis regarding female users:

H9: Saudi female users of matrimonial websites differ in their mate preferences according to their demographic variables has been confirmed to high extent as the results showed the role of all variables unless the relationship status.

7.6. Outcomes of Using Matrimonial Websites by Saudi Users

This section answers the research question: What are Saudis' outcomes from using matrimonial websites? It analyses the responses regarding Saudis' outcomes from using matrimonial websites to help construct the Saudi online courtship script. It focuses on the initiation and termination of contact with a suitable potential spouse, the number of members currently contacted and unsuccessful online contacts, and the successful transition of a

relationship from online to offline. It also examines the hypothesis of whether Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender.

7.6.1. Initiation, Response, and Termination of Contact with a Suitable Potential Spouse

This section presents the results of the initiation, response, and termination of contact with a suitable potential spouse and whether genders differ in these matters. As seen in Figure 7.10, more than one-third of the respondents indicated that they always initiate contact with a suitable potential spouse and about one-third of the respondents indicated that they sometimes do so. The results also show that about two-thirds of the sample seems to always respond to contact from a suitable potential spouse and about one-third sometimes do so.

Figure 7. 9 Initiation and Response to Contact
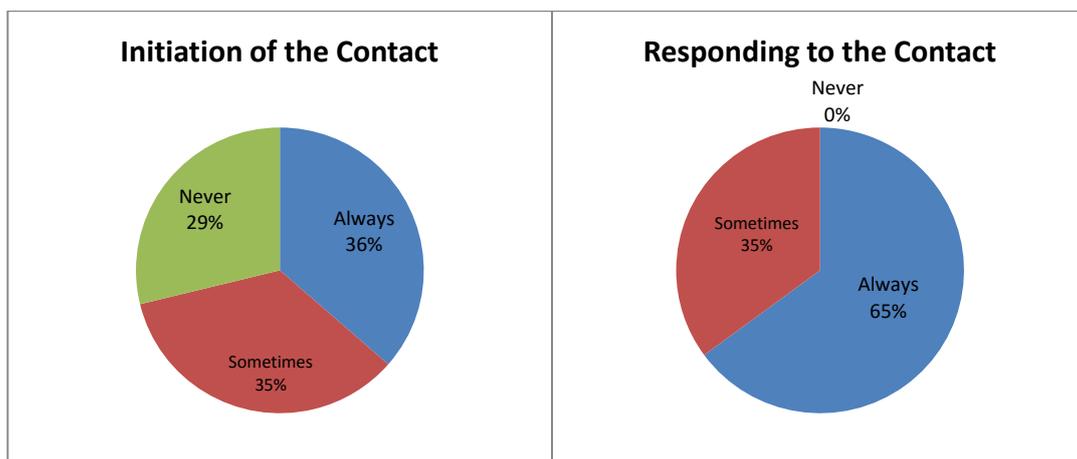
To investigate the differences between Saudi women and men in initiating and responding to contacts, a Fisher's Exact Test was used (see Table 7.33), the results reveal that there are significant differences between women and men (Fisher's Exact Test =189.9, p=.000). Men are the ones who initiate contact with other members, with 64.3% of them reporting 'Always' compared to 1.5% among women. No gender differences were found among Saudi users regarding responding to a suitable potential spouse (Fisher's Exact Test =.000, p=.994).

Table 7. 33 Gender Differences in Initiating and Terminating Contact

Variable		Females		Males		Statistic
		N	%	N	%	Fisher Exact Test
Initiation of the Contact	**Always**	2	1.5	108	64.3	EFT =189.9, p=.000
	Sometimes	45	33.6	60	35.7	
	Never	87	64.9	0	0.0	
Responding to the Contact	**Always**	87	64.9%	109	64.9%	EFT =.000, p=.994
	Sometimes	47	35.1%	59	35.1%	
	Never	0	0.00	0	0.0	

This result reveals the directionality of the messages sent by Saudi members of matrimonial websites and the decisions they make regarding initiating and responding to messages. The typical direction of the established messages seems to be from men to women, which aligns with the findings of Fiore, Taylor, Zhong, Mendelsohn and Cheshire (2010). Their study of American online daters reveals that men are more likely to initiate contact. However, the gap between men and women in establishing communication is broader among Saudis. This result also fits with the nature of offline Saudi courtship rituals, as men are the ones responsible for initiating the process by proposing to the bride's family. Nevertheless, the results show that women members sometimes initiate contact online, which may indicate an emergent attitude that does not exist in offline courtship. Both men and women respond equally to private messages they receive, which may be an indication of seriousness in finding a spouse.

The number of exchanged messages after which the Saudi sample decides to terminate the contact with a suitable potential spouse was also analysed. As seen in Figure 7.11, about two-thirds of the sample terminate the contact after exchanging more than ten messages and about one-third tend to terminate it after exchanging between six and ten messages. This result shows that Saudi matrimonial website members take time in exchanging messages to make the decision to continue or terminate the relationship. They seem to need more time than other dating website users, who quickly switch to other means of communication (Long, 2010; Whitty, 2010). While the matrimonial websites do not allow displaying a profile photo, photos can be shared with other members who show interest in a user by adding them to their favourites list.

Figure 7. 10 Termination of Contact
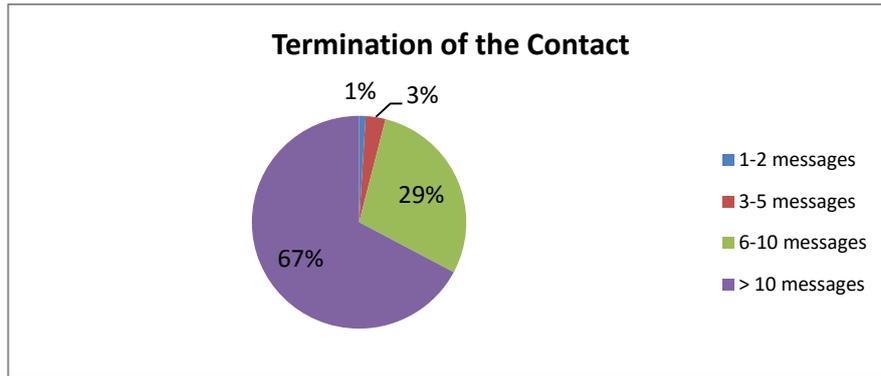
Fisher's Exact Test showed that there are significant differences between women and men (Fisher's Exact Test =17.6, p=.000) in terminating contact (see Table 7.34). Interestingly, about 60% women report that they usually terminate correspondence after more than ten messages compared to 73.2% of men. In addition, about 9% of women report terminating correspondence after exchanging only one or two messages or after three to five compared to 0% among men, which shows that men take more time in making their decision. This is understandable in light of Saudi culture: when women feel that the other party is undesirable, it is unacceptable for them to advance their communication with him, as that could ruin their reputation, unlike men.

Table 7. 34 Gender Differences in Terminating Contact

Variable		Females		Males		Statistic
		N	%	N	%	Fisher Exact Test
Termination of the Contact	**1-2 messages**	3	2.2	0	0.0	EFT = 17.6, p=.000
	3-5 messages	9	6.7	0	0.0	
	6-10 messages	42	31.3	45	26.8	
	> 10 messages	80	59.7	123	73.2	

7.6.2. Number of the Members Currently Contacted and Online Rejections

This section presents the results of the number of members currently contacted, the number of online rejections, and the gender differences in these two variables. As seen in Table 7.35, the average number of current contacts for the sample is about three, and the average number of unsuccessful contacts is two. Contacting a few people at once enables members to increase the possibility of finding a suitable match. It also provides an indication of the seriousness level of the websites' members, who did not engage with a high number of other users. However, this number is higher than the number revealed by an American study

conducted by Fiore, Taylor, Zhong, Mendelsohn, and Cheshire (2010), which reveals that online daters usually keep one to two active contacts with other members.

Table 7. 35 Number of Current Contacts and Online Rejections

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Active Contacts	.00	8.00	2.90	1.10
Online Rejections	.00	5.00	2.45	1.88

Male and female Saudis' scores in these two variables were compared using independent sample t-tests to reveal any gender differences. The results, shown in Table 7.36, reveal no significant gender differences in the average number of members with whom they are currently in contact (t=.801, p=.424). On the other hand, there are significant differences between men and women in the average of 'online rejections' (t=-32.201, p=.000), with an average of less than one rejection for women versus an average of almost four rejections for men. Considering that men are more active than women in initiating contact, this result is not surprising. To test the normality, Shapiro-Wilk test was used. The result shows that the p-value is 0.341 for the overall score of the mate preferences strategies and thus it could be concluded that the data comes from a normal distribution. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been met for this sample.

Table 7. 36 Gender differences in the number of current contacts and online rejections

Variable	Females (N = 134)	Males (N = 168)	Statistic
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t-test, p-value
Active Contacts	2.95 (1.10)	2.85 (1.12)	t=.801, p=.424
online Rejections	0.60 (0.81)	3.93 (0.96)	t=-32.201, p=.000

7.6.3. Successful Transition of a Relationship from Online to Offline

This section presents the results of the questions with the Saudi sample about successfully moving from online relationships to taking an offline step and whether Saudis differ by gender in this. As seen in Figure 7.12, more than half of the sample has successfully moved online relationships to an offline step. It should be noted that successful movement offline does not necessarily mean that they get married: they may simply leave the website and start to use other means of communication or propose officially to the woman's family. This part was covered further in the qualitative phase to gain a clear understanding of Saudi courtship scripts initiated in matrimonial websites (Chapter Eight: Section Three).

Figure 7. 11 Successful Movement from Online to Offline
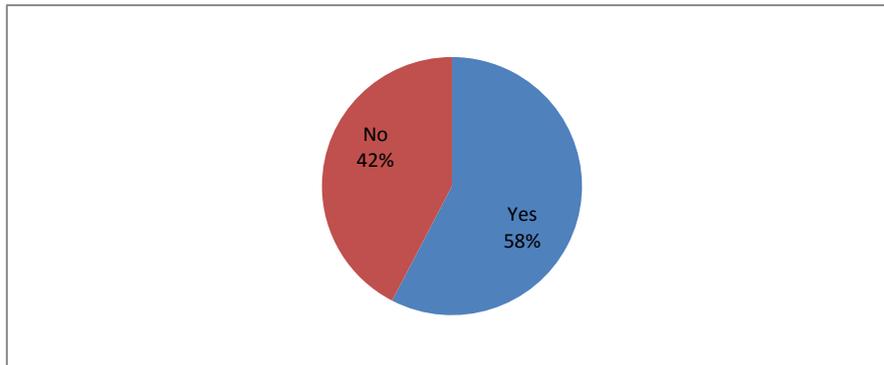
A chi-square test of associations was used to investigate the gender differences among the Saudi sample in successfully moving from online relationships to taking an offline step, (see Table 7.37). The results show that there are significant differences between women and men ($\chi2=18.2$, p=.000). In particular, 44% of women report having successfully moved a relationship from online to offline compared to 69% of men. This finding may indicate that Saudi women are more cautious regarding moving to an offline stage.

Table 7. 37 Gender Differences in Successful Transition from Online to Offline

Variable		Females		Males		Statistic
		N	%	N	%	Chi-square
Successful Movement from online to Offline	**Yes**	59	44.0	115	68.5	$\chi2 = 18.2$, p=.000
	No	75	56.0	53	31.5	

Based on the above results, the research hypothesis:

H2: Saudi users differ in their outcomes of using matrimonial websites according to their gender has been confirmed to high extent as four out of five variables (i.e., initiating and responding to contacts, terminating contact, rejections and successful transition from Online to Offline) showed gender differences.

7.7. Validating the Quantitative Data from the Questionnaire through the Content Analysis Phase

The profile information provided by a sub-sample of female (N=51) and male (N=60) participants on matrimonial websites who indicated their willingness to participate in the second phase was analysed to answer the research question: To what extent does the information obtained from the content analysis phase validate the information collected from the questionnaire phase? This section starts by providing an overview of the matrimonial

website's design and then a description of the sample's profiles. It also presents the results of the comparison between the self-reported information in the questionnaire and collected data from the content analysis regarding three sections: background information, positive and negative attributes mentioned in the profiles, and mate preferences.

7.7.1 Description of the Matrimonial Website's Design

The chosen matrimonial website reflects cultural scripts in its design, the mating culture of the website (e.g., strictly based on monogamy or allowing the potential for polygamy), and the interface through which the members interact. As it involves social and cultural expectations for what is considered to be culturally/socially appropriate in terms of behaviour in a marriage context, the cultural scripts in this matrimonial website appear in the process of creating user profiles, the process of matching, restrictions on displaying photos, and limits on communication between members. While this website has its unique culture, it highly shares with other Muslim matrimonial websites similar scripts for finding a potential spouse online. Muslim Matrimonial websites' interfaces have a variety of features (such as sections for religious advice and fatwas), guidelines (such as advice to female members not to provide their personal contact numbers to potentially deceitful males), registration processes (e.g., users must promise that their only intention of using the site is to find a spouse), and advice (e.g., articles to advise women about potential ways to find a husband).

In particular, the main page of the matrimonial website under investigation is divided into seven sections: a Quran verse about the importance of marriage, a quick search bar for a potential spouse, icons linking to other pages, member log in or registration area, names of members who logged in most recently, and a sample of members' profiles. Figure 7.13. presents a screenshot of the main page of this website.

Figure 7. 12 A Screenshot of Mawada.net's Main Page

The website' interface impresses upon mate seekers that this is an Islamic website, allocating the upper part of the website for the Quran verse that states that God has created a spouse for each individual, people need to resort to each other to find tranquillity in them and God has also placed between them affection and mercy. Following this verse, a note states

that this website is for Muslims only and follows Islamic rules of marriage. It also warns users that its purpose is not to provide any dating services.

As a part of this website's cultural scripts, the homepage has a link contains the website's successful stories to inform the members about what is considered to be culturally/socially acceptable while they look for their mates. This website defines "success" as two members getting married, allocating a section in the website to the names of members who found a spouse through this website. Another section allows users who got married to write about how long it took them to find a spouse and how their courtship proceeded.

This website has also a section with the names of members who have been banned from the website to inform other members about their deception, specifically warning women not to be deceived by them. From reviewing theses sections, it appears that all the names of users in the black list were male.

7.7.2. Description of the Sample's Profiles

This section presents an overview of the sample's profiles. Apart from the demographic variables that have already been investigated in phase one (i.e., age, gender, tribe of origin, relationship status, level of education, income level, and religiosity level), Figure 7.14. summarises the frequency distributions (counts and percentages) of the sample in each item of the profile. The findings in this section assist in answering the main research question: What are the characteristics of Saudi users of matrimonial websites?

Figure 7. 13 Profile Information Provided on Matrimonial Websites
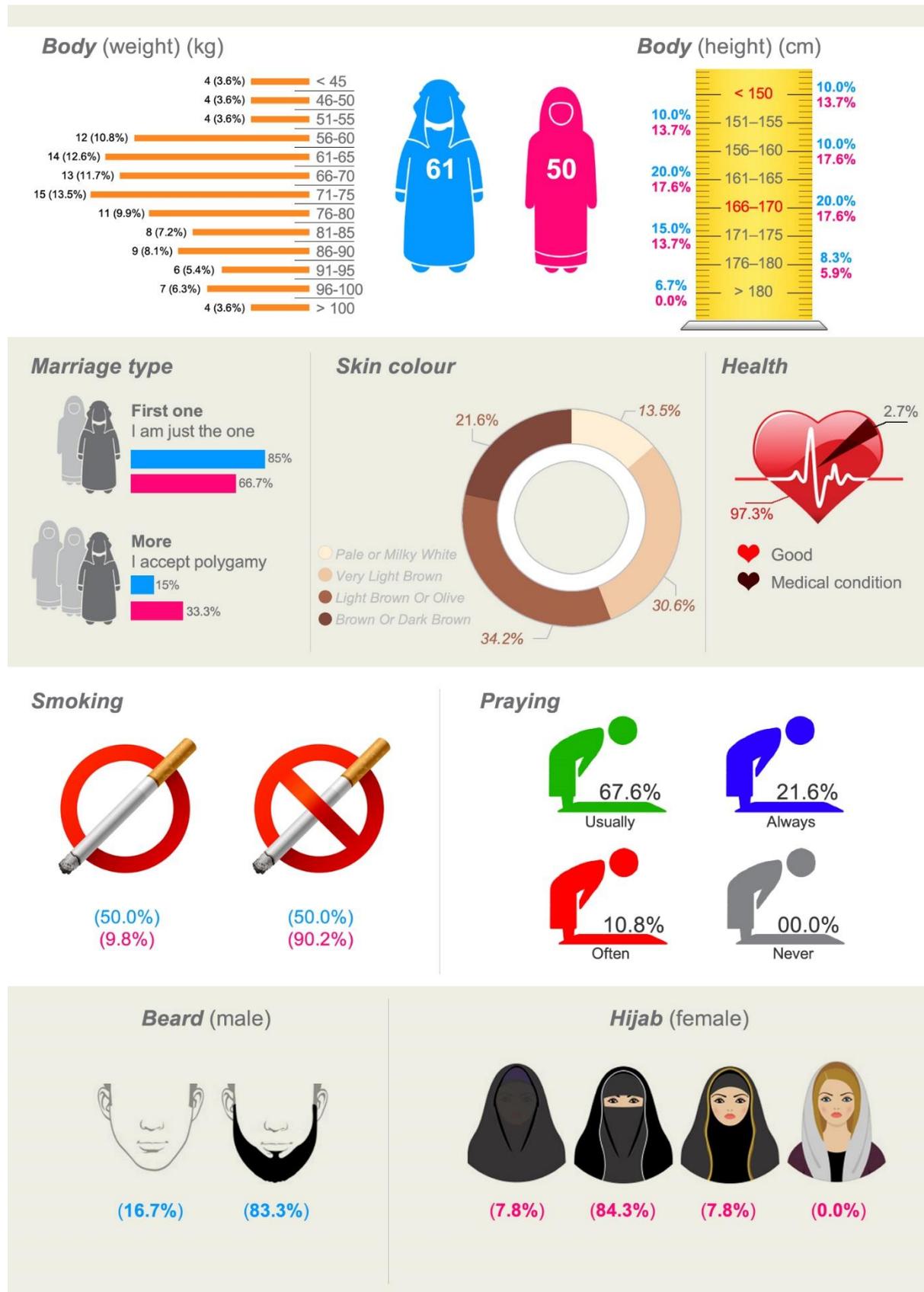
Wide ranges in body weight (< 45 kg to > 100 kg) and height (< 150 cm to > 180 cm) were reported in Saudi matrimonial profiles, with 10.8% users above 176 cm in height, and 40.5% of the users above 76kg in weight. This means that more than one-third of the sample are above average weight or obese, which is considered an undesirable quality according to men's preferences boxes. The most frequent skin colour was described as 'light brown' or 'olive' among both women (n=17, 33.3%) and men (n=21, 35.0%); this skin colour is the most common among Saudis in general. According to men's preferences boxes, the most desirable skin colour is white or light olive. However, only 15.7% of users have a white skin colour, which may mean that the demand for such a characteristic outweighs the supply. Nearly all of the women (n=48, 94.1%) and all of the men (n=60, 100.0%) described their health as good. Over three-quarters of the women (n=40, 78.4%) and men (n=47, 78.3%) usually prayed, which is considered a good level of commitment to religious rituals. While having a beard is considered a signal of religiosity, nearly all of the men (n=50, 83.3%) had no beard. This percentage is in line with the percentage of the sample reporting high religiosity levels. The above table shows that nearly all of the women (n=43, 84.3%) were wearing niqab, which fits with Moddel's (2013) study of Saudi female dress.

7.7.3. Comparison of the Demographic Information in Profiles and Questionnaires

This section presents the results and discussion of the comparison between the demographic information in the self-reported questionnaire and the collected data from the content analysis: age (How old are you? vs. Age), tribe of origin (What is your tribe of origin? vs. Tribe origin), relationship status (What is your current relationship status? vs. Marital status), level of education (What is your highest level of educational attainment? vs. Education), job status (Do you have a job? vs. Field of Occupation), monthly income (Approximately what is your monthly income? vs. Monthly income), and religiosity level (How do you describe your religious level? vs. Religiosity level). Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine whether there is a relationship between the age variable reported by the sample in the questionnaire and the age presented in the profiles. As seen in Table 7.38, there is a strong correspondence between the age reported in the questionnaire and the one presented online (r=0.97).

Table 7. 38 The Relationship between the Age Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Variable		Pearson's correlation
Age (questionnaire)	Age (profile)	0.97**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Measuring the relationship between the tribe of origin, relationship status, level of education, monthly income, and religious status also reveals that there are perfect correspondences between these variables as reported in the questionnaire and as provided in the profiles (see Tables 7.39, 7.40, 7.41, and 7.42, 7.43).

Table 7. 39 The Relationship between the Tribe of Origin Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile		
Tribe of origin	Qabily	Hadari	Total
Qabily	33	0	33
Hadari	0	78	78
Total	33	78	111

Table 7. 40 The Relationship between the Relationship Status Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile				
Relationship status	Single	Married	Divorced	Widow/Widower	Total
Single	76	0	0	0	76
Married	0	9	0	0	9
Divorced	0	0	21	0	21
Widow/Widower	0	0	0	5	5
Total	76	9	21	5	111

Table 7. 41 The Relationship between the Level of Education Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile				
Level of education	Elementary school	High school	Bachelor degree	Post-graduate	Total
Elementary school	2	0	0	0	2
High school	0	24	0	0	24
Bachelor degree	0	0	81	0	81
Post-graduate	0	0	0	4	4
Total	2	24	81	4	111

Table 7. 42 The Relationship between the Level of Income Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile							
Level of income	None	<SA 1,500	SA 1,501 – 3,999	SA 4,000 – 6,999	SA 7,000 – 9,999	SA 10,000 – 14,999	SA15, 000 – 20,000	Total
<SA 1,500	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	28
SA 1,501 – 3,999	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
SA 1,501 – 3,999	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
SA 4,000 – 6,999	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	27
SA 7,000 – 9,999	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	14
SA 10,000 – 14,999	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
SA15, 000 – 20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Total	28	2	28	27	14	8	4	111

Table 7. 43 The Relationship between the Religiosity Level Variable Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile				
Level of education	Highly religious	Moderate religious	Religious to a small extent	Not religious	Total
Highly religious	8	0	0	0	8
Moderate religious	0	76	0	0	76
Religious to a small extent	0	0	22	0	22
Not religious	0	0	0	5	5
Total	8	76	22	5	111

7.7.3. Comparison of Positive and Negative Attributes in Questionnaire and Profiles

This section presents the results and discussion of the comparison between the self-reported information in the questionnaire and collected data from the content analysis regarding impression formation: positive attributes (To what extent do you care about presenting your positive attributes? vs. Mentioned characteristics: Positive), and negative attributes (To what extent do you care about minimizing your negative attributes? vs. Mentioned characteristics: Negative). As seen in Table 7.44, Spearman's rho coefficient indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the extent to which they cared about reporting their positive attributes and the positive attributes they reported (rho = 0.156). There is also a significant negative correlation between the extent to which they care about minimising their negative attributes and the number of negative aspects they reported online (rho = -0.354).

Table 7. 44 The Relationship between the Positive and Negative Attributes Variables Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Questionnaire	Profile	Spearman's rho
Positive attributes	Positive attributes	.156*
Negative attributes	Negative attributes	-.354*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

7.7.4. Mate Preferences in Profiles and Questionnaires

This section presents the results and discussion of comparing the results of the self-reported information in the questionnaire and collected data from the content analysis regarding mate preferences: Positive physical appearance, Ability to invest, Willingness to invest, Paternity confidence, Commitment, Good parenting skills, Tribe of origin, and Religion. As shown in Table 7.45, a t-test was used to compare the scores of the questionnaire mate preferences with the yes/no values reported online. The results reveal that there is a significant association between the scores from the questionnaire and the responses given online for the following characteristics: Positive physical appearance (t=22.59, p=.000), Ability to Invest/Financial Security (t=9.84, p=.000), Willingness to invest (t=18.96, p=.000), Paternity confidence (t=19.82, p=.000), Commitment (t=19.82, p=.000), Good parenting skills (t=27.22, p=.000), Tribe of origin (t=13.41, p=.000), and Religion (t=11.28, p=.000). In other words, those that said 'yes' are the ones with a larger scores in these mate preferences.

Table 7. 45 The Relationship between the Mate Preferences Reported by the Sample in the Questionnaire and Presented in their Profiles

Variable	Yes	No	Statistic
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t-test, p-value
Positive physical appearance	19.05 (1.58)	11.84 (1.78)	t=22.59, p=.000
Able to invest	25.07 (2.94)	17.56 (4.34)	t=9.84, p=.000
Willing to invest	22.56 (3.76)	12.38 (1.48)	t=18.96, p=.000
Paternity confidence	23.69 (3.63)	12.43 (1.52)	t=19.82, p=.000
Commitment	23.26 (4.08)	12.33 (1.49)	t=19.82, p=.000
Good parenting skills	24.10 (2.94)	12.40 (1.50)	t=27.22, p=.000
The tribe of origin	22.67 (4.70)	12.31 (1.42)	t=13.41, p=.000
Religion	22.21 (5.12)	12.39 (1.44)	t=11.28, p=.000

The above findings reveal a close agreement between the scores of Saudi users on the phase one questionnaires and the information displayed in their profiles. These results show a high level of the convergent validity of the both methods used in these two phases as they reveal that the collected data through these distinct methods are aligned and not inconsistent. It should be noted that findings from previous studies have shown that when two variables are measured by the same methodology are likely more correlated than when they are measured by different methods. For example, the results of the meta-analysis study conducted by Glasman and Albarracín (2006) reveal that the mean of the attitude-behaviour correlations in the previous social science studies range .50 to .61. In the current research, the questionnaire as a methodological instrument used in the first phase collected self-reported

data about the perceptions of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites. On the other hand, the content analysis checklist collected the data from their actual profiles. While these methodological tools are totally different, the results obtained from the comparison between their findings is within the acceptable range of attitude-behaviour correlations founded in the previous literature. Thus, it could be said that all of the correlations presented here are more than satisfactory. Each of these tools is corresponded to and were reflected by the measured data in the other one.

7.8. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter answers the research questions and presents the results of the hypotheses regarding the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users of matrimonial websites, their usage of matrimonial websites, the impressions they form on these websites, their mate preferences in searching for a potential spouse, the outcomes of such usage, and the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the users and both their impression formations and mate preferences. The findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the Saudi users and their usage of matrimonial websites contribute to the literature on online dating by revealing the differences and similarities between the characteristics and usage patterns of conservative, Islamic users and Western users.

The current research also contributes to hyperpersonal theory by constructing a quantitative tool to group and rank the factors influencing the receiver's perception when forming an impression about the sender. In addition, it contributes to the Computer Meditated Communication debate regarding the richness of communication in online settings, as it shows that online communities can provide more information for users in conservative and segregated societies than their offline lives.

The revealed mate preferences of both Saudi men and women contribute to the theories on mate preferences in general and sexual strategies theory in particular by advancing the understanding of mate preferences in an Islamic context. In addition to investigating the impression formation and mate preferences of Saudi online marriage seekers, the results also reveal how these impressions and preferences are affected by the sample's demographic variables. Comparing the findings with the scores of Saudi users on the phase one questionnaires and the information displayed in their profiles reveals a close agreement, reflecting convergent validity for both phases.

Chapter Eight

Saudi Courtship Scripts Initiated through Matrimonial Websites

8.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the following research question: What is the script Saudi users follow in trying to find a potential spouse through matrimonial websites? The approach to answering this question combined quantitative and qualitative data in order to complement each other and provide an in-depth description of the actions and stages Saudi marriage seekers follow when looking for spouses through matrimonial websites. Based on the collected data from the interview phase, this chapter illustrates the stages of the Saudi courtship process initiated online. It uses sexual script theory as a base for the main stages and provides an explanation for cultural and intrapsychic scripts when relevant. It also uses both hyperpersonal theory and sexual strategies theory to explain the stages of impression formation and mate preferences. This chapter illustrates in details the model of the Saudi courtship process initiated online.

8.2. Model of Saudi Courtship that Initiated through a Matrimonial Website

Figure 8. 1 Model of Saudi Courtship
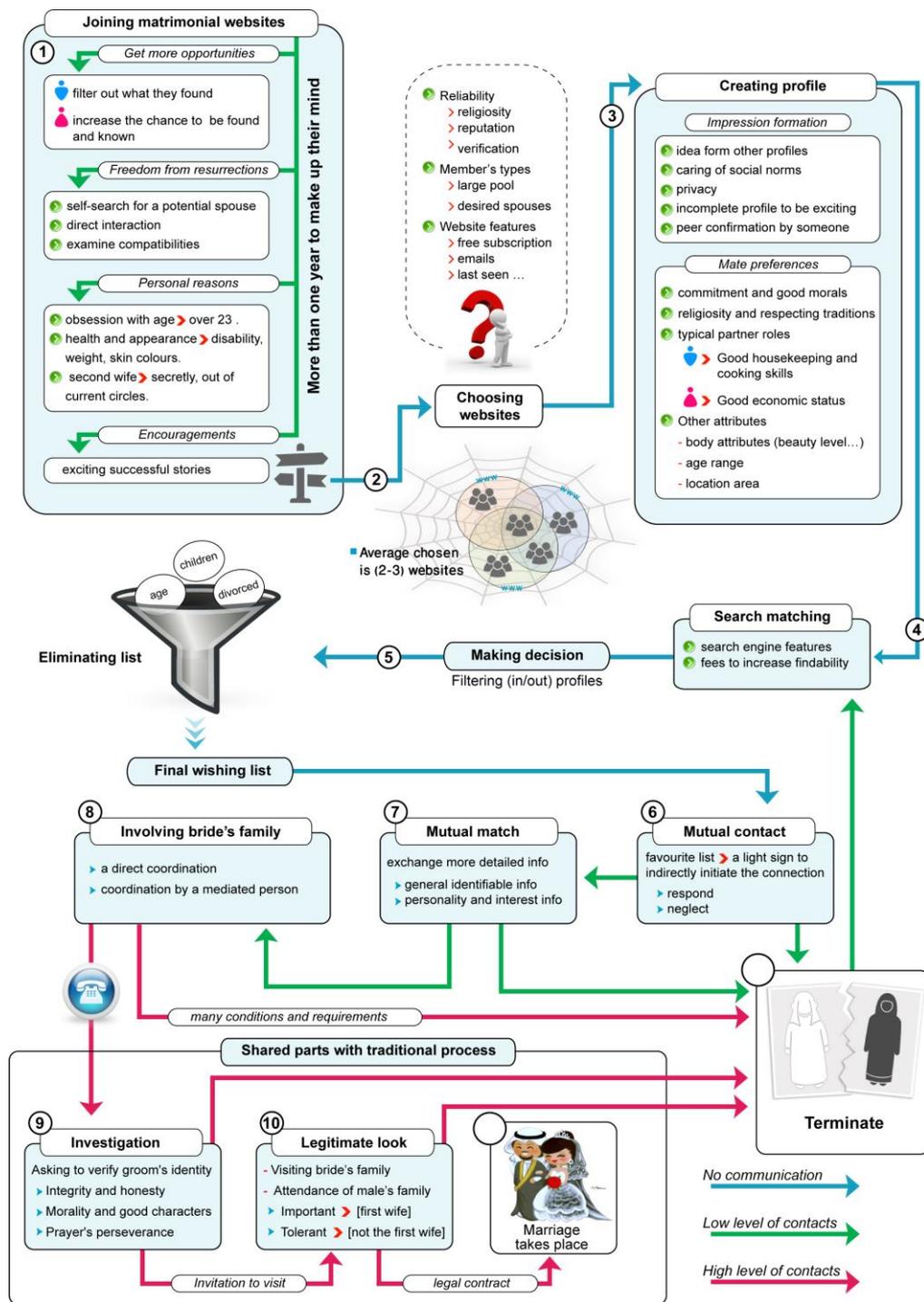
Figure 8.1 illustrates the model of stages of Saudi courtship that involves the use of matrimonial websites. This model comprehensively describes variations the steps towards getting married using one of these sites. The overall process can be divided into ten general stages, discussed in detail in the following sections. Each of these stages comprises a series of decisions on the part of the potential couple.

The first stage, (1) in the upper-left region of the model, indicates that marriage seekers are likely to spend more than a year to make up their mind to join matrimonial websites. They take into consideration a number of factors that differ from one person to another: a. more opportunities, b. freedom from restrictions, c. personal reasons and e. encouragement. Once the decision is made to begin utilising a particular website deemed appropriate using the criteria outlined in stage (2), they register and then create an attractive profile in stage (3).

The model shows that marriage seekers often use more than one website to expand their pool of potential spouses. This is described by the intersections among groups (circles), as each group represents a certain website, while the elements of the groups are the registered marriage seekers. In addition, a brief description of how and what a profile should contain is illustrated in the top-right of the model, which is zoomed in from a profile's element as an example.

In stage (4), a site search engine (basic or advanced) is used to look for serious candidates for marriage. The retrieved search results are usually large and contain many unfavourable profiles, which are filtered using a well-honed list of preferred characteristics in stage (5). With the small group who fits the wish list, the marriage seeker begins the process of communication, which raises subsequent complex decisions.

The process of communication, stages (6-10), heads either to drawing up a legal marriage contract or to terminating the relationship and returning to the search stage (4). The coloured lines, ranging from blue to red in the model, represent the level of communication and to some extent the level of attraction between the likely couple. For example, in stage (6), blue and green lines are a low-level connection, representing the initial request to connect that can be confirmed or denied. Early conflicts here always end the connection.

In the next stage (7), communication between potential partners becomes deeper, as each one begins discovering more traits in the other used to make the crucial decision to continue or terminate the relationship. Communication at this stage is usually carried out using private message feature provided by the matrimonial website.

Arriving at stage (8) a potential couple wants to investigate more satisfying ways of interacting. Therefore, they need to take a major leap of faith to take further actions and to involve the bride's family in the relationship. This stage tends to be the most difficult one

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because an intermediary could bungle the process or an authoritative member of the bride's family might oppose it. This would then lead to terminating the relationship. However, if all previous stages go well, the groom or a representative is expected to make a phone call asking for the bride's hand in marriage.

It is clear that the process up to stage (8) is a relatively new method of finding and contacting a potential spouse. Despite this, the remaining stages are essentially identical with the traditional method of Saudi courtship. The investigation and then legitimate look stages, (9) and (10), become more formal. All of the details regarding the marriage are expected to be discussed and committed to in advance, before the signing of the marriage agreement.

8.3. Saudi Courtship Script Initiated through a Matrimonial Website

According to Simon and Gagnon (1986), a script is a mental map that guides individuals' behaviour in a potential situation. It consists of a set of actions, learned and culturally enhanced throughout individuals' lifespans. Individuals depend on symbols and descriptions to comprehend their roles in diverse contexts. Contacts that routinely occur are conceived as a determinate sequence of events on which behaviour is predicated. Individuals form expectations of behaviours in a setting prior to entering it. To aid in further understanding, grounded theory is also utilised to assist in constructing the emerging model of the Saudi online courtship script.

This section displays the steps Saudi marriage seekers take when they use matrimonial websites: deciding to join a matrimonial website, choosing a specific matrimonial website, creating a profile, matching, making decisions, initial and mutual contact, involving the potential bride's family, traditional investigation and legitimate look, followed by preparing for the marriage. Each step includes the criteria they set and the factors that affect their decision-making. It also recalls the quantitative data from previous phases to confirm and complement the qualitative data in the last phase.

8.3.1. Deciding to Join a Matrimonial Website

The first stage that marriage seekers go through is making the decision to join matrimonial websites or to stick to the traditional methods. In the quantitative questionnaire phase, they were asked about the first time they visited a matrimonial website and the first

time they became a member. The responses revealed that the majority of the sample (58.9%) took more than a year to decide to join a matrimonial website. This means that joining matrimonial websites was not a hasty or sudden decision. The interviewees explained that they spent this duration in observing matrimonial websites and thinking of whether it was worth it to take the next step, weighing the costs and rewards. The rewards that they could gain from joining these sites can be explained in light of the notion of "intrapsychic scripts" that stems from script theory. The intrapsychic script delineates individuals' goals, expectations, and desires, which aids in understanding why Saudis join Islamic matrimonial websites.

Combining the questionnaire responses and interview answers uncovers four main categories that illustrate the reasons behind joining matrimonial websites: looking for more opportunities, overcoming the limitations of offline interactions in Saudi culture, personal reasons, and encouragement.

8.3.1.1. Looking for more Opportunities

More than the two-thirds of the sample confirm that they are straying from traditional methods because they did not find a suitable spouse that way. Digging in-depth to understand these cases, interviewees stated that online matrimonial websites open new horizons that give users more opportunities to find and be exposed to their matches. Men express that they were tired from knocking on the doors of families of potential spouses and they were disappointed not to find a suitable spouse. For example, (M14) said "My mother and I have knocked at more than 25 houses' doors so far. You know this is our tradition. Your mother or your sister starts to search and asks her circles to find you a suitable wife. Everyone has a different opinion about what "suitable" means. Thus, we start our trip by hearing other women's descriptions and when we hear that one girl has characteristics similar to what I am looking for, my mother and I visit her family's house. However, I get tired."

This is not the only (M14) case; most of the men' interviewees have similar stories. (M07), for instance, stated, "When you do not have a young sister in our community, this means that you will struggle to get married. Sisters in their 20s or even 30s make your mission to get married possible and mostly successful. They usually have wide circles of female friends and colleagues, which mean that they have more choices for you. They also can understand your needs more than your mother. I told my mother that I cannot run from one house to another anymore to search for a wife."

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Female interviewees, on the other hand, reveal that their role in Saudi courtship is a reaction to men's actions, which means that they need to be exposed to others as a marriage option. Being in a small community with limited circles of relatives and friends makes it difficult for Saudi women to be found. For example, (F12) stated, "I stayed at home after I graduated from high school. Most of my classmates in high school went to universities. One of them is still in touch with me but really I do not think that I will get married through the traditional method, as maybe I am suitable for someone but he does not know about me". (F08) was more explicit and said, "You need to be exposed and known. Nobody knows about you if you keep yourself within your small circle. You cannot knock on a man's door and propose marriage to him. A matrimonial website keeps you more visible to the opposite sex".

The second reason for joining a matrimonial website in this category is to find an alternative to the family and tribal circle. This reason was highly applicable to male participants. More than 60% of the men agree that matrimonial websites assist them in going beyond their narrow circles. Male interviewees highlight that traditional methods usually come with limited choices. For example, (M16) stated, "Most of women in my family circle are not suitable for me. I am looking for an educated woman who has at least a bachelor's degree. Searching through matrimonial websites give me more options". Looking for more choices and specific characteristics were a concern for some male interviewees. Other participants stress that they want to be free of certain customs and traditions. (M06) indicated that "limited your search within your family circle means that you have to follow some traditions and customs even if you do not believe in them".

On the other hand, most female respondents disagree with the statement that they joined a matrimonial website to find an alternative to their families and tribes. Female interviewees explain why 63% of the female questionnaire participants found this statement to not be applicable to their case: finding someone from their own extended family or tribe makes them feel more secure about the relationship. (F13), for example, said, "Finding more choices through a matrimonial website does not mean that you have to avoid your extended family. I prefer to find someone from my extended family, because we can ask about him and know from relatives about his background. This makes me feel safe and comfortable about my future life".

Some women state that having a partner from your family or tribe means that you have something in common, even if it is only traditions and customs. (F06) stated, "I did not

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join the matrimonial website to find an alternative tribe to my tribe, but to have wider options. I believe that finding a spouse from me tribe increases the compatibility between me and my future husband, as we will have common traditions and customs. Even if some of these traditions are weird, we will have the same weird things to practice".

Few women agreed with the statement that they used matrimonial websites to find alternatives to their tribes, because women traditionally cannot get married to men outside their tribe. (F17) explains, "In Saudi Arabia, some tribes restrict women' marriages to people who have a tribal origin in general, which means that they do not accept men of *Hadari* origin. Other tribes classify people who belong to tribes into two types; *Qabily* with high position or 220 and *Khadiry* or 110. This classification is based on the extent to which a certain tribe has a well-known origin. That means they do not accept men from *Khadiry* origin to marry their women. Some tribes make their women exclusive to the men from their tribe". This quotation explains why some women do not believe that they use matrimonial websites to find alternatives to their tribes and families, as straying from the tribe could lead to divorce.

8.3.1.2. Overcoming the Limitations of Offline Interactions in Saudi Culture

Hyperpersonal theory contributed to the debate in the Computer Mediated Communication literature regarding the lack of information and social cues in online relationships by highlighting the positive side of asynchronous communication with limited social cues (Walther, 1996). However, this research reinvestigates that argument and examines the extent to which it is applicable to conservative, Islamic cultures. The results reveal that Saudi users joined matrimonial websites to circumvent the restrictions on offline interactions between sexes. Almost all of the participants, representing (90%) of the men and (93%) of the women, believe that matrimonial websites enable them to overcome cultural and social restrictions, such as the possibility for both men and women to directly search for a potential spouse, the possibility for direct interaction between sexes, and the possibility to find information about a potential spouse to help determine their compatibility. All of these factors assist in understanding why Saudis choose to use matrimonial websites.

8.3.1.2.1. Searching Directly for a Potential Spouse

The majority of the sample agree or strongly agree that they use matrimonial websites because they want to search for a spouse by themselves (69.5%). Direct search by marriage

seekers is a huge shift in Saudi's courtship process, not only because it removes the mediator role in the searching process but because it empowers both parties in the relationship to direct and manage this vital step by themselves. (M19) stated, "I feel that matrimonial websites provide me something… it is a kind of power that enables men and even women to search by themselves". In addition, matrimonial websites convert women's role from reactive, waiting to accept or reject men's proposals, to active, at least in the searching process. Some participants believe that this feature of matrimonial websites might show how traditional courtship is starting to lose some of its collective attributes. For example, (M09) explained, "It is well known that courtship in our society is a family matter rather than an individual matter. When each relationship party starts searching alone, that means there is a huge transition in Saudis' courtship process".

This transition does not necessarily mean that individuals have complete freedom in this step, as some families even get involved in the online search process for their son or daughter. (F10) stated, "I really appreciate the fact that matrimonial websites' search engines enable me to find potential spouses by myself. However, I prefer to search with my family". (M03) also confirmed this idea: "Although I have the chance to search by myself, I prefer to search with my sisters as I trust their point of views". A few stated that the involvement of their families in their search process is interfering; as (F15) stated, "I have the opportunity to search by myself but my family's questions made me feel that they are watching every single step of my searching process".

8.3.1.2.2. Direct interaction between Sexes

Almost all of the participants in the questionnaire phase agreed that matrimonial websites make interaction with the potential spouse possible, as well as easier and more comfortable. The literature review chapter clarified the difficulty of interacting with the opposite sex in Saudi society. It illustrated in detail the nature of gender segregation and societal restrictions on approaching unrelated women, which make direct interaction difficult or impossible. These constraints led almost all members of the sample to believe that matrimonial websites are an attractive channel with rich information in comparison with offline interaction. (M05) stated, "A matrimonial website provides me with information directly from the main source, my potential spouse. Every single action makes me feel that I am interacting directly with my spouse without a moderator. I value the reaction and silence of the potential spouse and consider them as well as valuable information". (F04) added,

"Assuming that you had a chance to interact directly offline with a potential husband, he could not see any of your facial cues because of the hijab. He also could not make eye contact with you, as this is considered an inappropriate behaviour in our society. Therefore, I do not think that you will have someone who says that offline [interactions] have richer information than online settings".

Almost all of the participants also agree or strongly agree that online matrimonial websites enable them to provide more information about themselves. By combining this response with the previous responses, it can be said that the Saudi participants believe that matrimonial websites enable them to send and receive more messages and information than in an offline setting. This result contributes to the heated debate regarding the (lack of) social cues in online settings. While hyperpersonal theory altered this debate with the idea that a lack of social cues could be considered a positive side of online settings, as users can be selective in their self-presentation (Walther, 1996), the current result reveals that people from conservative cultures believe that in their cases, the offline setting is the one that lacks social cues. This is especially applicable when it comes to the relationships with the opposite sex. The current research also contribute to the hyperpersonal theory by considering the role of the "message" in online setting and highlighting the differences between the exchanged "message" in Saudi context on one hand and the Western context on the other hand.

8.3.1.2.3. Examine the Compatibility between Two Parties

There is no way in Saudi traditional courtship to examine the compatibility of the relationship with a partner unless the marriage contract has been signed. Meeting up or having a cup of coffee in a public place are socially unacceptable (Le Renard, 2008). This might provide an explanation why almost all the participants believe that matrimonial websites enable them to have more time to examine the compatibility of a potential spouse. The chance to have a conversation with a potential spouse before marriage is highly valued by Saudi participants. For example, (M11) said, "In my last marriage, the family of my ex-wife did not allow me to talk to her even after the *Milka* ceremony. They told me you can do whatever you want with her once the marriage celebration has finished. However, in a matrimonial website, I can overcome such obstacles". This is also applicable for women; for example, (F16) stated, "I am an educated female who cannot support going through the very traditional courtship process. You know some may say, 'How can you talk to a stranger and have a chat with him?' 'How does your family accept that?' 'It is really a shame'. I really do

not care as long as I am using a website to know the extent to which we are compatible to be a husband and a wife".

Saudi users are benefitting from the asynchronous features of matrimonial websites, which give them more time to examine the possibility of compatibility with a potential spouse. They also believe that this feature provides them the opportunity to view other members' profiles or reply to their messages in their timeframe. All of this may explain why Saudi users of matrimonial websites perceive this alternative method of finding a spouse to be more effective than the traditional offline method.

8.3.1.3. Personal Reasons

The third main reason for using matrimonial websites is related to personal issues. These issues include: age-related pressure, body image concerns, and potential judgement about looking for a second wife. The questionnaires revealed that age-related fears are a feminine concern. About 75% of the women feel that it is too late for them to find a spouse the traditional way. The interview answers reveal that the dominant reason female participants resort to a matrimonial website is fear of their age, which makes sense with the age range of women in the main sample. According to the participants, a Saudi woman starts fearing being too old when she turns 23. For example, (F02) stated, "The *Aunousah* ghost (an Arabic expression for a spinster*)* is the main fear for a Saudi girl even if she is under 25. The question sticks in her mind whether she will get married or not… You know, in our society, women in their 30s are not as desirable as women in their 20s. If you are getting old from a Saudi perspective, you should lower your expectations when looking for a husband. You may even agree to be a second wife". (F11), a 26-year-old woman added, "In my family, I am the first child. This puts a lot of pressure on me, especially when men started to ask for marrying my young sister. I feel that I am getting old and that I should find a way to be known and visible in our society so potential spouses can find me".

Concerns related to the body are also part of the personal reasons to use the sites, including having a specific concern regarding one's appearance, having dark or black skin, being overweight, or having a disability. Apart from disability, it seems that women with dark skin or weight issues are unlikely to be successful in the Saudi marriage market. This result emerged from both men and women. For example, (F07) stated, "Though Saudi men do not have white skin and they mostly have olive skin, they really do not like women with black skin. They accept olive and bronze colours as well. But, they really do not like black

skin. Maybe you can find someone who likes this colour but they are really rare. One of my reasons to be here is to find someone who likes my skin colour, as the matrimonial website has a wide pool of people, which increases my chances". Reviewing the preferred colour in men's profiles confirms this idea, as more than 60% prefer white skin. Heaviness is another concern; the description boxes of women's profiles included sentences like "While I have some extra kilos, I am a funny girl". (F03) added, "You know in the early days of the Arab people, they liked heavy-weighted girls. They even wrote poems to describe how pretty they were. Nowadays, heavy-weighted girls should follow a diet to be in-shape and, thus, to be more acceptable by men in our society. This does not mean that there is no one who would like a heavy-weighted girl; you may find some but not that much". These findings are in line with a Russian study conducted by Sahib, Koning, and Witteloostuijn (2006) that reveals that being slim is an important trait sought in women in the Russian marriage market.

One of the interviewees had a concern regarding her attractiveness. She stated (F14), "I have a concern about my appearance… especially my nose, as I feel it is a bit big and I really do not know whether men will like my face or not". Another female interviewee (F05) introduced herself as having disability. She stated, "I am here looking for a man who accepts me as a disabled woman, even if he has any type of disability". Such a finding could be explained in light of the concept of "premarital bargaining" proposed by Murstein (1970) in his stimulus-value-role theory to account for the matching process commonly observed among real partners. He indicates that people who have similar levels of physical attractiveness are more likely to select each other in the dating market.

An interesting additional reason emerged among men related to finding a second wife. Some men indicated that they are looking for a second wife from a matrimonial website because they do not want to disclose this matter to their family or friend circles. (M15) explained, "I am looking for a second wife and I do not want that to be known at this stage. Relatives and friends may blame me and discourage me from going ahead with this step. However, I am really planning to do it". Some men justify this step by stating that they are looking for children, as they waited a long time to have children from their first wives.

These reasons correspond with the main sample's responses regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of matrimonial websites in comparison with traditional means (see Chapter Seven: Section Three).

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8.2.1.4. Encouragement

Others' stories were a motivation to join matrimonial websites. Nearly two-thirds of the participants in the main sample agree or strongly agree that they have heard success stories about people who used matrimonial websites to find a spouse. This indicates that there are success stories among Saudis who used matrimonial websites and that they are willing to tell their stories. However, interview answers reveal that those couples who successfully get married using a website often fabricate a story to tell their relatives, following the acceptable norms within their circles. For example, (M13) shared, "One of my friends told me that his invented scenario for his relatives is that his sister met his spouse in one of her friends' marriage celebrations and asked for her family". This scenario was repeated in male and female interviewees' answers, which means that some Saudis feel that finding a spouse through a website is stigmatised. They normally disclose the real story to their close friends. That means that the traditional cultural script still has influence among Saudis and some of them may resort to inventing a meeting scenario in line with that script. Viewing online dating as stigmatised matches the results of American studies that show that early online daters did not inform others that they used these websites to find a mate (e.g., Wildermuth, 2004), though recent studies show that such stigma has decreased (e.g., Smith & Duggan, 2013).

8.3.2. Choosing a Matrimonial Website to Join

After making the decision to join a matrimonial website, users start the process of choosing which matrimonial website to join. The questionnaire phase reveals that Saudi users subscribe to more than one matrimonial website. About 60% of the sample was registered at two to three matrimonial websites. Interviews reveal that the participants compare matrimonial websites based on certain criteria, similar to a checklist process. Each member has his/her own criteria to filter out undesirable websites. Though personal criteria usually vary from person to person based on their intrapsychic scripts, common themes were repeated by interviewees surrounding looking for a reliable site and checking the types of members and site features.

8.3.2.1. Looking for a Reliable Site

Interviewees stated that they compare different matrimonial websites to find reliable sites, based on the religiosity of the site, website reputation, and verification process.

8.3.2.1.1. The Religiosity of the Website

The impression that users get when they visit a matrimonial website for the first time is very important. Participants were looking for signs such as a verse from the Quran or a saying by Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. (M08) stated, "When you first see a quote from Quran or the sayings by Prophet Mohammed, you can say that this is the first sign that makes you start to consider a website as a respectable one. I know it is not enough but it is still an indication". (F09) added, "It is important for me to find a statement from a website's owner that they follow Islamic instructions". Some participants believe that these kinds of signs are superficial and could be abused by some sites. (M17) explained that "swearing by the name of the God in the registration process, or posting a quote from Quran or the sayings by Prophet Mohammed, or even including some Islamic instructions within the terms and conditions are not actual signs of the religiosity of a website. The design of the website is the one that you can judge". While they belong to an Islamic culture, Saudi users of matrimonial websites seem highly aware that some users may abuse the terms and conditions of the websites even when they fit well with Islamic rules.

Many participants agree with (M02) that the availability of women's photos and the facilitation of relationships outside of marriage are the most real indicators of religiosity. (M12) said, "When you visit a matrimonial website and you do not see women's photos, you can say 'yes' this is the right place that follows religious instructions'". (F01) stated, "Many websites claim that they are for Saudis and when you visit them, you can tell from the front page that they cannot be for Saudis, because they display a number of women's photos. I believe it is impossible for Saudi women to display their photos in such a way, because they have to conceal them following our religious instructions and traditions". Previous studies among Saudis online reveal that not only in matrimonial websites but also in social media websites, women tend to use symbolic photos instead of their real ones (Aljasir, 2015).

8.3.2.1.2. Reputation of a Website

Interviewees indicated that the reputation of a website is very important. They were aware that all their disclosed information would be saved and seen by an agent. Therefore,

they are eager to deal with the right place. (M12) stated, "I usually start with Googling a website to see what people say about it. I found rich forums with people's experiences and reviews". Other interviewees confirm that forums are considered an important source to find out about a website's reputation. (F16) added, "You cannot trust what you find in certain matrimonial websites' reviews and success stories. They can easily delete negative reviews. However, many forums provide more reliable information". (F03) said, "I read a newspaper report that sheds light on some foreign matrimonial websites that claimed to be suitable for Saudis and then blackmailed their users. Therefore, I resorted to the forums to see people's reviews".

Another indicator interviewees discussed is the sites' advertisements. They believe that the number and type of ads provide an idea about the extent to which this agent is reliable. (M18) explained, "Sometimes you feel that the agents of a matrimonial websites do not really care about the matchmaking service. They only concern about gathering a huge number of members and offering anything that could attract people to be on their websites. The platforms of these websites are usually crowded by ads and sometimes you find inappropriate ads".

8.3.2.1.3. Verification Process

Even though many Saudi matrimonial websites make users promise that their only intention is to find a partner to marry according to Allah and his prophet's rules, as well as promising to be honest with other users, themselves, and Allah, the interviewees believe that these steps are not enough. Some of them believe that this step is not even appropriate. (F15) said, "Day by day, we find people abusing others through these websites despite the fact that they had sworn that they had no intention to deceive people. I believe that maintaining this part of the registration process is abusive to the Islamic religion itself and to the God's name". (M04) added, "There are new techniques that could be used for verification instead of using the name of God and his Prophet peace be upon him".

The interviewees trust websites with a multiple-step registration process more. (F07) said, "When finding a website with only one or just simple steps, you know that this website does not care about the authenticity of its members. I found one website that does not even send a verification email". (M01) added, "Verification steps are really necessary, such as email verification and mobile phone verification steps. I hope that these websites are

accredited by the government and even require ID verification to activate the registration of their members".

8.3.2.2. Checking a Website's Members

Saudis look for two main points when choosing a matrimonial site. The first is that a site has a large pool of members, which increases the opportunity of finding a potential spouse. The second is that a site has desired spouses from a user prospective. (F08) said, "In order to choose a website, I view users' profiles and also use the search engine to see whether a website has people I like or not. Sometimes, I find just one or two profiles that fit my preferences. This makes me think of other websites which have more profiles". (M06) provided more details: "For example, I am looking for a Saudi girl who has white skin and is in shape. I will check a website using the search engine; if I find many profiles where female users describe themselves as heavy with dark skin then it is better to find another website".

8.3.2.3. The Website Features

Basic features such as emails, last seen notifications, a section for new members and free subscription options were the most important to interviewees, who believe that some advanced features may ruin a site. According to (M02), "I believe that online chat is not a good feature to have in matrimonial websites. From my experience, websites with online chats usually gather people who are looking for having a relationship or friendship. Meanwhile, restricted websites usually gather people looking for getting married only". Many interviewees confirm this idea and believe offering unrestricted connection is inappropriate. (F13) said she preferred "a more simple, basic, and appropriate website". Such a finding is totally different from Western and East Asian online daters, who appreciate features that facilitate the communication between two parties through online chat or other methods (e.g. Farrer and Gavin, 2009; Jha and Adelman, 2009; Lee, 2009). However, some Western online dating websites take a similar approach and restrict users' access to other members. According to Long (2010), "eHarmony does not allow to browse profiles of other members, and it only sent a handful of matches for review at a time".

Interviewees consider websites that provide both free and paid services a good choice as they can benefit from free services, and if they willing to pay, they can benefit from paid services. Paid services include making a profile more visible and having access to offline matchmakers. No Saudi website provides personality tests or auto-matching features. The

questionnaire responses reveal that women are more willing to pay more for matrimonial sites than men (see Chapter Seven: Section Three). Asking interviewees about this result reveals that, because women prefer waiting for men to start the action, paid services offer their profiles more visibility to men than free services.

8.3.3. Creating a Profile and Describing an Ideal Match

The third step of the courtship script is to create a profile on a matrimonial website. While previous studies that investigated creating profiles in online dating websites examined self-presentation (e.g.Whitty, 2008) and the interaction between users and the websites (e.g.Long, 2010), this study is concerned with impression formation and mate preferences. This includes how the sender constructs the profile and how his/her perceptions as a receiver affect his/her intrapsychic script of building an ideal profile. It also includes Saudis' preferences in a potential spouse and the extent to which they resemble or differ from those described by Buss and Schmitt (1993). The study combines quantitative and qualitative data to explore the personal scripts of Saudi users, beginning here with impression formation and mate preferences.

8.3.3.1. Impression Formation

One of the main reasons for using hyperpersonal theory in the current study is that it provides an explanation of impression formation in Saudi matrimonial websites based on the written text in online settings, given that Saudi matrimonial websites restrict displaying photos in users' profiles. It also assists in explaining the role of communication components (i.e. sender, receiver, channel and feedback) in the impression formation process (Walther, 1996).

The quantitative content analysis phase discussed the selectivity of the sender when creating the profile. The questionnaire phase also proved that the online channel conveys more information and rich messages than a traditional courtship setting. As the Saudi matrimonial websites restrict displaying members' photos, the written text and available cues are considered the main source of self-presentation used to form an impression. The questionnaire study also proved the importance of respecting the social norms and common religious values among users. The qualitative study examined the criteria for forming a favourable impression when Saudi users create their profiles.

8.3.3.1.1. Comparison with Other Users' Profiles

Before creating a profile, users start by comparing profiles of their gender, and then the opposite gender. They stated that they examined the impression they obtained from others' profiles and observed the description boxes of profile creators and the boxes describing their preferred attributes in a spouse. (F01) explained, "I went through more than 30 women's profiles to see what they include and how they present themselves. Description boxes are different. Some of them are short and some are long. However, the selection of the words and the presentation of the attributes were my main concerns. I even turned to men's profiles and checked out at least 10 profiles and took some ideas from them". Some participants state that observing and comparing profiles is a very important step. They look for the profiles of people with similar characteristics to see how they present themselves in an effective way. (M11) stated, "Browsing members' profiles that have similar attributes and preferences in their future spouse is very important. When I viewed members' profiles I took notes, as some of them reminded me of further important attributes that I should look for in my spouse. I also learned how to leave a good impression through my own profile".

8.3.3.1.2. Respecting Social Norms

The questionnaire phase reveals that Saudi users, as strategic receivers, believe that respecting social norms is important when filling in the blanks about the profiles of other members in matrimonial websites. The interviews confirm that and clarify the extent to which Saudi users try to remain within traditional social norms. Women were more concerned about being in line with traditions and presenting themselves in an acceptable form to leave a favourable impression. (F04) stated, "As a woman on a matrimonial website, you need to be very careful. The content of the profile includes words, faces and full stops that provide a meaning. This meaning should not cross the lines drawn by our society or provide an unfavourable impression. These issues are part of your reputation and how people see you". Another female, (F06), added, "Explicit family name is considered too much information to provide; even though men like to know more about their potential wives, they do not accept having such information in their profile". It seems that women are concerned with how Saudi men perceive what they present in the profile and what is acceptable and not acceptable. Unlike Western online dating users who look for attractive names when searching for a potential mate (Whitty & Buchanan, 2010), a male participant (M08) clarifies Saudi men's point of view when browsing women's profiles: "You are searching for a wife. She is not a

girlfriend. She is the mother of your future children. You need someone who respects our traditions and norms and someone who takes care of her reputation. Thus, sexy names or sexual indications in the description boxes are highly unacceptable". Most of the interviewees shared this opinion. Such a finding complements the results from the previous quantitative phase that shows that men care more than women about the behaviour of other members being in line with the social norms when searching for a suitable spouse (See Chapter Seven: Section Four).

8.3.3.1.3. Privacy Concerns

Saudi users were aware of the importance of protecting their privacy. Their concerns fell into two types, protecting their privacy from the agent and from other site members. They believe that even though there are some respectable matrimonial websites, there is no clear accreditation process for these websites from government agents. This means that their information could be abused and they do not know who exactly is responsible for their information. Such a concern could also apply to other online settings. Several costs have been identified as the result of disclosing such information. Gross and Acquisti (2005) identify three such costs, involving the hosting site, the user's friends, and third parties. The hosting site, in this case the service providers, can easily access users' information and collect data about them. Members of the website can misuse disclosed information, which could lead to online stalking, bullying, stigmatisation, identity fraud, criminal charges, and sexual predation. Finally, third parties, from hackers to governmental agencies, can access a user's information for their own purposes with or without the hosting site's direct agreement.

(M14) stated, "Even if we agree that a certain website is a respectable one, we cannot grantee that this website will not be hacked. We need to take care of our information when we create our profile. We need to reserve some information for our safety". The second type of privacy is protecting private information from profile viewers. Interviewees' main concern there is being identifiable. For example, some participants working in the educational or military sectors stated that they do not want anyone from their workplaces to identify them. Women fear being identified by one of the members of their family circle.

As Saudi matrimonial sites warn members, especially women, against providing personal contact information in their profiles. Participants respect the need to state this within the terms and conditions of the site but believe not all members adhere to it.

8.3.3.1.4. Missing Information is Tempting

Completing all the required and non-required information in the profile and filling in the blank boxes with long description were not favourable from interviewees' points of view. They believe that it looks boring and nobody would read all of these things. (M04) stated, "Some members fill all the boxes with long descriptions. I really do not like these profiles and I do not even try to read what they have written. I feel tired even from the look of the profile". Interviewees also believe that a member needs to hold some information back for the coming steps. Concealing some information in a way that attracts readers' attention is also a means of leaving a desirable impression. Female interviewees emphasised this more than males. (F09) stated, "You need to conceal some of your background information to attract viewers' attention and make them read your profile. You then make an opportunity for your potential spouse to discover you and your personality gradually". From interviews, it seems that Saudi women compensate for the lack of photos in their written text without defying traditions, emphasising their sexuality or providing too much detail about their body shapes. This finding is to some extent in line with hyperpersonal theory, as it assumes that online receivers fill in missing information with their imaginations (Walther, 1996).

8.3.3.1.5. Peer Confirmation

Combining questionnaires with profile content analysis reveals that there is a high correspondence between the demographic variables revealed in the questionnaire and users' real profiles. However, Saudi users were selective in their presentation of personal attributes. The interviewees stated that they tried to be accurate in their self-descriptions and not deceive profile viewers. (F14) explained, "I understand that if I exaggerate in describing myself, I will disappoint someone who asks for me when he gets to know me in person. Therefore, it is better to be yourself but to provide [information about] yourself in a reasonable way". Most of the participants, men and women, stated that they show someone their profiles or the information they aim to display in the profile to gauge the extent to which these attributes represent themselves. (M18) stated, "I really do not like to disclose that I am on a matrimonial website but I have written my attributes on a paper sheet and showed it to one of my friends to give me his opinion. He made some modifications on what I wrote". (F12) stated that she consulted one of her very close friends to check the accuracy of her profile and get suggestions in presenting herself in a favourable way.

8.3.3.2. Mate Preferences

The quantitative questionnaire reveals that there are similarities and differences between Buss and Schmitt's (1993) mate preferences and Saudi men's and women's strategies when they approach their potential spouses. The qualitative data in this phase clarify and complement the mate preference factors extracted in the previous phases.

8.3.3.2.1. Commitment and Moral Characteristics

One of the important factors that men and women look for in a spouse is morality and commitment. Male interviewees expressed their concerns about potential spouses' previous relationships, which arise from Arabic norms and customs, as discussed in Chapter Four. This may explain why morality and commitment were the most important factors for Saudi men. (M12) explained, "We are in a marriage process. That means we are looking for a spouse that protects our honour. She is our *Ired* and *Sharf*. Therefore, I am keen to state the importance of chastity and loyalty when writing about my spouse's attributes". (M01) added, "I hope that I find a spouse who had not had a previous romantic relationship. We are in a segregated community and I really worry about the girl that had challenged these norms and had a previous relationship with the opposite sex". This statement is in line with what has been explained in the literature review, that the only acceptable romantic relationship between men and women is a marriage (Aljuhani, 2005). On the other hand, women's understandings of morality and commitment were more focused on the extent to which the potential spouse would respect the marriage. They link men's religiosity, willingness to invest, and desire to have children with his level of commitment. Therefore, they state these attributes in their profiles.

8.3.3.2.2. Typical Partner Roles

Male interviewees continue to prefer a spouse willing to carry out the typical Saudi female role, highly valuing home-oriented women with housekeeping skills. (M16) explained, "I would really love to find a spouse that can take the house responsibilities; from taking care of the children to good cooking". Good cooking recurred many times in male interviewees' answers. Some male interviewees showed their tolerance of performing these tasks to show that they can cooperate with their partners in such duties. On the other hand, women preferred partners with high earning capacity who can take care of the family expenses. This is a typical male role in Saudi culture that derives its legitimacy from Islamic

instructions. Men are obligated to take responsibility for family expenses even if wives have their own incomes. Some female interviewees stated that they do not mind sharing family expenses with their husbands. Interviewees' answers indicated that traditional male and female roles remain priorities for Saudis. However, some of them showed their tolerance toward assuming other roles, women more than men. This result confirms and complements the quantitative phase's finding that Saudi men and women are looking for a match to play a typical partner role in Saudi society (See Chapter Seven: Section Five).

8.3.3.2.3. Religiosity and Respecting Traditions

As explained in Chapter Four, the dress code in Saudi Arabia obligates women to wear *hijab*. The most common *hijab* type among Saudis covers the face. However, there is a trend among Saudi women to cover their hair without veiling their faces. Saudi men were more concern than women about potential partners having a religious look and varied in their preferences between covering faces and wearing modern hijab. (M05) stated, "It is very difficult to marry a woman that does not wear *Nigab*. All my family's female members cover their faces. I do not know how I could go out with a woman that does not cover her face. Neither my family nor my friends would accept that". Another man, (M13), stated, "I hope that I can find a wife who is an open-minded and uncovers her face. I do not want her to not wear the hijab at all, no, but to wear it without covering her face. My family do not interfere in such decisions". From participants' answers, it seems that social norms control the type of *hijab* preferred. On the other hand, religiosity from Saudi women's point of view is about behaviour and not only appearance. Many women stated that they wrote in the preferences box in their profiles that they want a husband who fears God and takes care of Islamic obligations. Reviewing the interviewees' profiles confirms that men write about religious appearance and female write about religious behaviour, with both indicating the importance of praying every day. This result fits with the findings of a study by Badahdah and Tiemann (2005), who conducted a content analysis of online personal advertisements for Muslims living in America, and with the results of Mishra, Monippally, and Jayakar's (2013) study examining the sexual strategies of Indian Muslim men and women in online matrimonial advertisements. All confirm that users of Muslim matrimonial websites look for a spouse with religious attributes.

8.3.3.2.4. Other Attributes

Some attributes were mentioned by interviewees, such as body attributes, age range, and geographic area. Men were more likely than women to mention specific body attributes such as body type, skin colour, and beauty. The most repeated skin colour sought by men was either white or light olive, and a slim or medium build were also among their preferences. Reviewing profile description boxes through the content analysis confirms that these are desired attributes among Saudi users. A few women also stated that they want a good-looking partner. Some men indicated that the location of their potential partner is important, justifying that by stating that they are in an online setting and may find someone suitable for them from a distant geographic area. Therefore, they believe it is important that their potential spouses know that they cannot move from a certain city because of their work or extended family.

8.3.4. Matching

As indicted in the profile creation step, users fill out their desires and preferences in a spouse in the specified box. Qualitative data clarified what was obtained from the questionnaire regarding mate preferences. In addition, Buss and Schmitt's (1993) theory was a suitable base to explain the strategies Saudi men and women follow when they write their preferences about a potential spouse. After completing and setting the profile to be viewed by other members, marriage seekers start the process of finding their match. While the matching process in Western websites either entails auto-matching after completing certain steps and tests or manual matching by the members themselves through site features (eHarmony.com, 2015), Saudi matrimonial websites do not have an auto option. They mainly depend on search engine features. According to script theory, each member has an intrapsychic script about the attributes of a potential spouse (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), and in the search process, he/she calls upon a certain image of a desirable partner based on the seeker's shopping list.

Interviewees stated that they either use normal or advanced search engines, or subscribe to a paid package that provide them more chances to find their matches by making their profiles more visible on the site. (M07) stated, "The general search engine is helpful in accessing available profiles that match your own criteria. It consists of the following items: nationality, living country, age range, relationship status, and the order of the results. I always keep the nationality and living country items on the Saudi Arabia setting. I set the range for the age to be between 20 to 25 years old and select single in the relationship status's bar. I also set the order of the results bar to the latest online members". In the general search

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engine, the main criteria among Saudi members are the age range, relationship status, and the order of the results. Based on script theory, the criteria made available by the site are considered within the cultural script, which may affect the search and match process of the members (Simon & Gagnon, 1986).

Interviewees stated that they play with the available options in the general search engine and filter out undesirable results by changing the age range or reordering the results to see new subscribers. When members engage more in searching process they use the advanced search engine. (F10) explained, "The advanced search engine includes more criteria; the city, marriage type (i.e., if a woman accepts to be a second wife or the only one and if a man wants a first wife or a second one), weight, height, skin colour, qualifications, and income". Although some criteria are more important than others, as has been discussed in factor analyses of mate preferences in the questionnaire study, users started with the general search engine at the first stage and then moved on to more details with the advanced search engine.

Men's first two important criteria are within the "spouse attributes box" (i.e. paternity confidence and commitment), which means that they cannot set the advanced search engine based on them. Therefore, the most important criteria they need to set are related the age and the level of attractiveness, and then they move on to profiles to see which ones match their shopping list. On the other hand, women's first criteria are within the advanced search engine options (i.e. ability and willingness to invest), which means that they can search directly for the income criteria and qualifications.

8.3.5. Making Decisions

At this stage, decision-making becomes intertwined with the search process. Marriage seekers either keep the profile for further examination and contact or eliminate it. The decision is based on meeting their criteria and the impression they get from the profile content and self-presentation. Members have their own list of deal breakers that clearly contradict with their intrapsychic script. While filtering mechanisms on Western dating websites start with judging members' photos (Whitty, 2010), members attributes are the available alternative and the first thing to be examined by Saudi users. The list of deal breakers varies from user to user. For example, (M19) states, "The age range and relationship status is very important. I eliminate the profiles that stated that the member is above 28 old. I also eliminate divorced and widowed women from my list". (M10) stated, "I like the white

skin and slim body. These attributes are very important to me. Therefore, I eliminate black and dark skin and the heavy-bodied members". (M09) also said, "One of my deal breakers is to have a low level of education, such as profiles of the members with middle school or even high school degrees". Women's deal breakers have some overlap with men's. For example, (F05) stated, "I am 34 years old and I do not mind if I get married to a divorced man, but one of the important criteria for me is that he does not have children from his previous marriage. Therefore, I eliminate divorced men with children". (F17) said, "I start by eliminating men who are looking for a second wife. I cannot accept being a second wife". Women interviewees stated that they also eliminate profiles that indicate their potential matches do not have a career or are currently unemployed.

The second step in eliminating matches is based on the impression users get when viewing profiles. They creatively judge the personality by filling in the blanks from their own point of view by examining the content, language, and available cues (Walther, 1996). The interviews confirm the questionnaire results of members' impression regarding sexual indications. Interviewees make it clear that they are looking for marriage, which means that respectable members would not put any sexual indications into their profiles. (M15) stated, "It is highly unacceptable to find a profile that contains inappropriate indications, such as providing too many details about sensitive body parts, talking about intercourse, or even joking about these things". Male users perceive some indications of feminine attributes as inappropriate as well and consider them light sexual indications. They do not consider it a way of obtaining attention but an unacceptable violation of traditional norms. Women also see sexual indications as inappropriate and eliminate such profiles. (F02) said, "If you see a profile with sexual indications and select it for further communication, then you have no one to blame but yourself if he starts abusing you". While it seems that, from Saudi men's perspective, sexual indications are related to the match's level of seriousness and readiness for commitment, Saudi women link it with the possibility of abuse. However, both men and women agree that this red flag is enough to eliminate a profile. This result contradicts with the findings of Western online dating research that reveal that sexy photos and names are acceptable as long as they are not exaggerated (e.g., Whitty, 2010).

Users examine word selection and what users sought to convey and make their decisions based on their own criteria to reject or keep the profile for the coming step. (M03) said, "When you read the profile and think of the words and ideas a member uses, you can decide whether to eliminate the profile or keep it. Sometimes you feel confident and you have

a clear decision that you are going to eliminate this profile and sometimes you keep it for further investigation". (F01) added, "I think the structure of the sentences, the choice of words, and the style of delivering the ideas affect your decision. You feel confident either to pass on the profile or keep it". It seems that users perform their own analysis based on their culture, background, and desires to form positive or negative impressions towards certain profile.

8.3.6. Initial Contact and Establishing Mutual Connection

At this stage, users have a number of profiles that they aim to pursue with further contact. The quantitative questionnaire reveals that men initiate the action by contacting their potential spouses more than women do. Interviews complement this finding and reveal that when women are interested in a certain profile, they add it to their favourites list, which shows the man that they are interested in him. This subtle action is a sign women prefer to send rather than directly initiating the connection. Waiting for the man to take action or even pay fees to be seen are in line with the traditional Saudi courtship script (see Chapter Seven: Section Three). As a woman in Saudi traditions should wait for a man to ask for her (Al-Khateeb, 2008), it seems that this norm has been conveyed to online settings as well.

Interviewees agreed that the form of the first contact is important in leaving an impression on the potential partner. Therefore, they prefer gradual and mutual contact. (M17) said, "I prefer to start by adding the profile of a woman that I initially like to my favourites list and wait until she visits my profile or becomes online. Then, I start sending her private messages". Users prefer the timing of first messages to be early; however, when they start mutual communication, interviewees have different opinions regarding the timing of messages. Some of them believe it is asynchronous communication and the receiver can reply in his/her own time. Others believe that the relationship is still in the first stages and so it is better to be careful about timing.

From interviewees' answers, mutual contact starts with a man introducing himself and receiving questions from the woman. If the contact was initiated by one party, the other party has the choice to either respond or neglect the communication based on his/her own criteria. Users indicate that they prefer to check the sender's profile before responding to see the extent to which it meets their criteria. If they decide not to continue with this member, then they either neglect or politely show their rejection. Interviewees showed their concern

regarding how to reject politely. (F08) explained, "If I found the profile of the member to be not suitable for me, I try to neglect it and the other member usually understands that. But in some cases they still wait for my response… then I feel 'Ooh–how to respond to them.' But, finally I find suitable and polite words indicating that they may find a better match than me or something like that". On the other hand, the message's receiver may decide to go forward. Some participants stated that in their first days on the website, they were more cautious and neglected many private messages but slowly they started to be more natural and responded politely.

8.3.7. Mutual Match

After eliminating undesirable profiles, users keep a small number of profiles for further communication to examine the possibilities of a mutual match. In this stage, users exchange more detailed information, after assuring themselves of the seriousness of the other party. Determining the seriousness of the potential partner is the main concern for both men and women before sharing their private information, to avoiding giving it to the wrong person. Members use their own skills to examine the level of seriousness of other members. (M04) stated, "You can distinguish between serious and curious members. Their questions and style of communication lead you to know the difference". (F09) said, "Some members add you to their favourite lists and start sending you messages but you can tell that they are not serious. Serious members are usually straightforward". Mutual match is an advanced step compared with the previous one as it includes more information. According to Sprecher (2009), a "real relationship" cannot be considered to exist unless there is "mutuality" and "interdependence" between the two partners. Characteristics of this stage are "interdependence", "self-disclosure", "investment in each other", and "a feeling of couple identity" in order to reach full mutuality.

Although more information is disclosed in this stage than before, it is not identifiable information. For example, (F12) stated, "I provide some important but general information about myself, such as, 'I belong to a tribe that lives in Al-Tayief city.' Such information is important to have an idea about my origin but other members cannot identify me or my tribe as there are many tribes which live in this city". According to interview answers, members provide two types of information: general identifiable information and information related to their personalities and interests. They feel comfortable when they exchange the same level of information. (F17) explained, "Though I try to provide general information in the early

messages and focus on common things and personality traits, I feel more relaxed when I provide personal information and I receive the same from other members". This strategy of disclosing personal information could be understood in light of social penetration theory which measures the degree of the revealed information according to its breadth and depth. The breadth dimension represents the quantity of the disclosed information and the depth concerns with the sensitivity level of the information. In their social penetration theory, Altman and Taylor (1973) use the 'onion analogy' to explain the process of the self-disclosure. They indicate that people tend to begin with the outer layers as they only disclose basic information about themselves. When they gain rewards from such disclosure, they start to disclose more inner layers of their sensitive personal information. Such a process is a gradual process as people do not disclose sensitive information about themselves from the initial contact. They protect such sensitive information behind outer until they gain rewards that encourage them to disclose more private information about themselves.

The length of the time is also an important factor to decide whether to continue with the users or reject them. Women stress that they feel more confident when they exchange more messages and take more time. Both men and women value the benefit of direct communication with their potential spouse, which is not possible in the traditional courtship script. They assert that they can exchange personal information that enables them to decide whether the other party matches their desires. When exchanging private messages, the participants indicate that they take into consideration the feedback they receive from the other partner to adjust their messages to leave a positive impression. (M10) explained, "When I receive a message, I look to see if the user used smiley faces or has sense of humour. Based on the user's style, I reply". (F11) added, "It is inappropriate to reply to the user who uses serious tone of writing using a humour style. I believe that the elegant user is the one who tries to modify his style of writing based on the sender style". These quotations are in line with Walther's (1996) argument about the mutual effect of this feedback on each partner, which reflects the process of "behavioural confirmation". Behavioural confirmation defines how the receiver's impression of a sender shapes how the sender behaves and how that behaviour in turn modifies the reactions of the receiver. Thus, when a sender sends a deliberate self-presentation to a receiver, the receiver idealises the sender and replies in a manner that positively enhances this self-presented personae. Such a process may lead the sender to modify his/her response according to that feedback.

8.3.8. Involving the Potential Bride's Family

The next phase after establishing a mutual match is to involve a potential brides' family. Female interviewees move to this stage in two ways, with some preferring to coordinate this step by themselves and others preferring to have a mediator from their family or friends coordinate this phase. Interviewees from the first group stated that their families were aware that they were on a matrimonial website and they agreed that it would be appropriate to take the coordination step. On the other hand, some interviewees from the second group indicated that their families were aware of their memberships in the site but not in agreement that they start coordinating process by themselves, preferring a Mahram to coordinate this step. Others stated that their families were not aware of their involvement in a matrimonial site. Therefore, they prefer to disclose this information to one of their close friends or a close member of their family to coordinate this step without informing the family about the site.

Before arranging a meeting, men should provide identifiable information, such as their full real name and the workplace. The next step usually takes place by phone; a man introduces himself to a woman's friend or family member or a potential bride herself. The bride's representatives also introduce themselves after hearing from the groom about his traits and his readiness to take this step, and they exchange their traditional requirements in marriage. The woman's side usually postpones disclosing identifiable information until they are satisfied that the potential groom fulfils their conditions. Therefore, some interviewees stated that they sometimes terminate in this step. Otherwise, when they feel comfortable that everything is going well, they provide the woman's family information and set the time for the traditional investigation process. (M01) said, "I experienced this step several times. The woman's family prefer to first know about you in order to make sure that you are serious and ready for marriage. Some families are also concerned about some traditions, such as the suitability of the tribe of origin or dowry or other issues". (F04) added, "When a potential couple already have concerning answers to the expected questions to be asked by the bride's family before moving toward involving them in the process, the coordination call will then be easy".

Women who coordinate a meeting by themselves stated that they take this step to feel comfortable that the potential spouse meets the family's requirements. After that, they either inform their families by themselves or provide a phone number of one of their family

members to the potential spouse to ask for them and the set the time for investigation. (F14) said, "I had a bad experience, as I found someone that I thought he was suitable for me but when he talked to my brother by phone he was not ready to answer some questions regarding our traditions, which made him feel offended. Therefore, I start to make sure by myself that a potential spouse is suitable and then inform my family". Female interviewees who have not acknowledged that they are on the site usually find a suitable scenario for their family to involve them. Men consider this an important step, as it is the first stage to take place with the potential spouse's family. The outcomes of the coordination call are either to pursue the next step if everything goes well or to terminate. From male interviewees' answers, it seems that the important reasons that led them to terminate are hearing many conditions and requirements from the bride's family, such as a high dowry and expensive requirements for the marriage or the tribe of origin.

8.3.9. Traditional Investigation Process

This stage is almost identical to the investigation process of the traditional courtship script. When the family receives the potential groom's call and agree with him on general issues, they start the investigation process. This tradition allows them to ask his colleagues and neighbours and people who pray in the same mosque about his behaviour, commitment to attending work and praying in the mosque, and whether he smokes. People are obligated by Islamic instructions to answer these questions honestly and they are also encouraged to provide their opinions. Men in this stage do not have any role beyond waiting until they receive the call from the potential bride's family either to allow him to visit their home for the legitimate look or to apologise politely.

One of the male interviewees who successfully moved to the legitimate look (M06) said, "I heard from some of my colleagues that someone came and asked about me. I realised that these the girl's family members had started the investigation process. After ten days, I received a phone call from her big brother. He welcomed me and said 'We hope to see you and your family next week. Is that suitable for you?'". On the other hand, a female interviewee (F16) talked about her experience with this stage and said, "My family started asking about the person after my father spoke with him by phone. Everything was fine. However, when we asked his boss and colleagues about his attitude, they told us that he was absent for a long period of time and that he lacks commitment to his tasks. My Father told me, 'If you want me to go ahead with the marriage process I do not mind, but you may

struggle in the future. Maybe he will be fired from his work.' I prayed 'Istekharah' and then said to my father that it is better to reject him politely". From interviewees' answers, the outcomes of this stage are either to advance and welcome the potential groom with his family or to reject him politely.

8.3.10. Legitimate Look

Male interviewees inform their families either earlier, when they start the coordination process, or after the traditional investigation stage. They need to prepare their family for visiting the potential bride's family. From their answers, it seems that when the man has a concern about his family agreeing, he involves them earlier so he can limit obstacles to the marriage process in the future.

As explained earlier (see Chapter Four: Section Three), coordinating the visit for the legitimate look takes place after the investigation process. The attendance of the man's family is very important when he is looking for a first wife. A woman's family cannot accept excuses for his family's absence that day. If the man comes without his family, they will not allow him to have the legitimate look. (M05) said, "One day, I preferred to go through this stage alone as I found a girl suitable for me and then informing my family about that. However, when I arrived at the potential bride's house, the first question her family asked me was, 'Where is your family?' I explained to them my point of view but they did not accept that. I really started to understand the situation as Saudi families consider the attendance of the family as a sign of seriousness and feel that the family of the potential groom should take part of the responsibility". In the case of a second wife, families are generally more lenient about family attendance. However, women's families prefer that the potential groom attend with someone else, such as a colleague, to share the responsibility with him.

At the day of the legitimate look, the woman prepares herself to be seen by her potential spouse. The man's attendees are not allowed to see the potential bride. Therefore, the legitimate look takes place in a separate room with the attendance of one of her *Mahram* or the man's mother or sister. The potential bride might bring coffee or juice and stay for a short time, generally no longer than half an hour. Traditions vary in the duration and the nature of this meeting. According to interviewees, many families now allow spouses to sit and talk together for a short time. After the legitimate look, both families wait for the spouses' agreement. The next call between families clarifies the spouses' opinion and

whether to start preparing the marriage requirements or go back to the website. The marriage preparation goes through the regular process of traditional marriage. When the couples start this process, they either remove or neglect their profiles. The interviewees said they do not ask their matches to remove the profile. They understand that they as a couple are usually busy at this stage and they will do that when it is convenient. Removing the profile was not an issue for interviewees. Such a finding contradicts the Western dating research that reveals that problems arise between couples if one is discovered to be still actively using the dating website when the other has taken himself or herself off (Whitty, 2010).

8.4. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has combined quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research question regarding the script Saudi users follow when trying to find a potential spouse through matrimonial websites, providing an in-depth description of the actions and steps these marriage seekers follow. The analysis of the data uncovers four main categories that illustrate the reasons behind joining matrimonial websites by Saudi users: looking for more opportunities, overcoming the limitations of offline interactions in Saudi culture, personal reasons, and encouragement. The results also show that Saudi users go through ten distinct stages: deciding to join a matrimonial website, choosing a specific matrimonial website, creating a profile, matching, making decisions, initial and mutual contact, involving the potential bride's family, traditional investigation and legitimate look, followed by preparing for the marriage. Each of these stages includes the criteria they set and the factors that affect their decision-making. Answering this question contributes to the literature as it shows the extent to which this relatively new method of finding and contacting a potential spouse differs from the traditional method of Saudi courtship. It also contributes to the online dating literature by showing the similarities and differences between conservative, Islamic users and Western users in utilising websites to search for a potential mate.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

The current research aimed to contribute to the online dating literature by investigating matrimonial website usage among Saudi users, who belong to an Islamic conservative culture. Hyperpersonal theory, sexual strategies theory, and sexual script theory were employed as a theoretical framework, fitting together like building blocks to construct a more enlightening approach to and thorough interpretation of the present research topic. Using this theoretical framework and a sequential mixed methods approach, the current research successfully answered the research questions and provided a rich picture of the research phenomenon. To this end, this final chapter aims to summarise the main findings and examine them against the research objectives. It also presents the research's primary contributions to both literature and practice, its limitations and recommendations for future research, and some concluding remarks.

9.2. Summary of the Main Findings

The current research found that Saudi matrimonial website users ranged from 18 to 65, with the majority falling in the range from 31 to 40, both of which resemble the numbers for Western online daters (Gunter, 2013). However, the current finding breaks the stereotype of the typical online matchmaking users as divorced: the majority of them are singles. Although matrimonial website users may be viewed as radical people who deviate from the traditional methods of finding a spouse, the research findings prove that they do not totally challenge their social norms when searching for a future spouse through this nonconventional online method. Social norms, traditions, and religion all significantly influenced their self-presentation, mate preferences, and online courtship processes.

Online matrimonial websites open a new space that gives users more opportunities to find matches. Almost all the participants believe that matrimonial websites enable them to overcome cultural and social restrictions. Saudi users join matrimonial websites to be able to search for a potential spouse on their own and potentially interact directly with their potential partner, providing and gaining more information about the potential spouse to determine their compatibility in a way that would be impossible in traditional Saudi courtship. While it is

difficult to justify joining these websites in Western culture, having a second wife is accepted in Islamic culture and not viewed as cheating. In the current sample, one fifth of Saudi matrimonial website users are married.

Due to the lack of an existing impression formation survey, this research built a quantitative scale to measure the relative importance of communication process components based on hyperpersonal theory. Impression formation and self-presentation were also investigated through qualitative methods. The findings show that Saudi matrimonial website users are highly strategic in lessening potential partners' exposure to their undesirable attributes. While singles and educated users were more cautious about maintaining their images and deemphasising their negative attributes, religious users were more accurate about presenting both their positive and negative qualities. The negative association between selective self-presentation and religion could be understood in light of Islamic instructions regarding accuracy in the courtship process.

The research contributes to hyperpersonal theory by running factor analysis, which assists in extracting four factors that influence receivers' perceptions regarding the impression formation on matrimonial websites. These factors classified social cues into four distinct factors: the compatibility with social norms, the writing style, the non-verbal cues, and the timing. This classification indicates the order of importance of each factor to the receivers on matrimonial websites. While one of the limitations of previous hyperpersonal studies is that they mainly depended on qualitative data, which does not provide a clear rank of social cues factors, the results quantitatively reveal that the most important factor influencing Saudi matrimonial website users in forming an impression about the senders is the extent to which their online behaviours are in line with Saudi social norms.

The results show that the restrictions on some of women's behaviours in offline Saudi life have been transferred to online settings. Men as receivers were more concerned with the extent to which women as senders follow social norms in their online behaviours. This concern also appears among religious users; highly religious users are affected more by the social norms factor than the less religious groups when searching for a future spouse. In addition, crossing social norms emerges as a sensitive issue to single users. This is totally in line with Saudi culture, as the reputation of singles could affect the acceptance or rejection of their proposals of marriage. There are specific words that describe those who transgress norms, such as *Sharaf* and *'ird*. Therefore, singles try to stay in line with social norms and protect their reputation to avoid any kind of scandals (*Fadiha*).

The research assumption regarding the effectiveness of online communication in gender-segregated societies has been proved. While early computer mediated communication scholars believed that lack of information limits the effectiveness of online channels, the findings show that the entire sample from a gender-segregated society agrees on the effectiveness of using matrimonial websites as a channel in providing and obtaining more information to find a spouse. Such findings contribute to the computer mediated communication debate in general and hyperpersonal theory in particular.

The research findings reveal that there are similarities and differences between Buss and Schmitt's (1993) proposed strategies of mate preferences and Saudis' preferences. While Buss and Schmitt found that men utilise five strategies and women use six strategies in their mate preferences, the current research found that Saudi men and women employ seven strategies in their mate preferences. Social and religious values were important factors affecting Saudi men's strategies. Paternity confidence and commitment were Saudi men's top priority. Women who have good parenting skills and adhere to Saudi women's typical roles were more desired than others, as were women who maintain a religious look by wearing hijab. Women's family reputations, including origin and economic status, were also important factors for Saudi men. On the other hand, willingness and ability to invest were the highest-ranked preferences for Saudi women, which confirms the importance of the typical male role in Saudi marriage of being responsible for the house's expenses. Religiosity was Saudi women's second priority; it seems that Saudi women believe that a man who cares about the religion instructions will probably have a good attitude. Interestingly, protection emerged as an independent factor. It seems that for women, a man with a tribal origin provides a kind of protection, as family reputation and the man's family name mean a great deal in Saudi society. It is worth noting that men's last set of desirable characteristics concerned women's professions and women's concerned good parenting skills. Although these factors contradict the typical role, the fact that they are independent factors means that Saudis are starting to accept new gender roles in marriage.

Reviewing participants' profiles and interviewing them reveals that some qualities are less desired among men than others in the Saudi marriage market. Regarding body attributes, Saudi men tend not to like dark-skinned or overweight women. They also express their concern regarding their potential spouses' previous relationships and feel uncomfortable with relationships outside of marriage, even friendships. This is in line with Saudi culture, which segregates unrelated men and women and discourages any type of communication between them. Social norms also shape their preferences for the type of their potential spouse's hijab,

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accepting women who unveil their faces when this is common in their small circle and preferring full veils when it is not.

The current research contributes to the literature by elaborating the Saudi online courtship script, including an in-depth description of their actions when seeking a spouse online: deciding to join a matrimonial website, choosing a specific matrimonial website, creating a profile, matching, making decisions, making and responding to initial contact, involving the potential bride's family, and setting up the traditional investigation and legitimate look, followed by preparing for the marriage. Each of these stages includes the criteria they set and the factors that affect their decision-making. The script starts online, which is a huge transition in the Saudi courtship process, as it allows men and women to control the process by themselves and directly interact with their potential spouses, but users found ways to attend to social norms and religious factors in this unconventional space. When moving offline, the courtship script almost exactly matches the traditional courtship script. In addition, although there a number of Saudis use matrimonial websites, using these websites seems to be stigmatised, as some users hide their usage of the websites or invent an offline scenario when they successfully get married through these websites.

9.3. Contributions of the Research

By adopting a synthesised theoretical framework and sequential mixed methods approach, the present research extends the current knowledge and takes an important step towards explaining why Saudis use matrimonial websites to find a potential spouse, as well as their preferences and experiences in the online matchmaking journey. The outcome of the current research makes multiple contributions to the body of literature on matrimonial websites in general and on the Saudi context in particular, including theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions.

9.3.1. Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical point of view, the current research examines the applicability of theories proposed in a Western context, including hyperpersonal theory and sexual strategies theory, to Saudi culture. In particular, an important theoretical contribution derived from the findings of the current research relates to how Saudis, from a conservative, Islamic culture, behave as strategic senders and receivers when using matrimonial websites, how they perceive this channel of communication, message, and the role of the feedback in altering

their behaviour. The unique mate preferences expressed by Saudi users of matrimonial websites, besides the ones defined by Buss and Schmitt (1993), are another theoretical contribution of the current research.

The current research also contributes to the heated theoretical debate regarding the lack of information in online settings. While hyperpersonal theory altered this debate with the idea that a relatively lack of information allows users to be selective in their self-presentation (Walther, 1996), this research reveals that people from conservative cultures believe that in their cases, the offline setting is the one that lacks information. This is especially applicable to relationships with the opposite sex. The current research confirms that, for Saudis, an online message and channel carry more information than face-to-face meetings, as an online environment enables Saudi users to experience more intensive interaction than in face-to-face meetings. The current research also contribute to the hyperpersonal theory by considering the role of "message" in online setting and highlighting the differences between the exchange "message" in Saudi and Western context.

The role of social norms and religion in altering the impressions Saudi users form on matrimonial websites and their mate preferences is a further theoretical contribution of this research. Although matrimonial website users may be viewed as radical people who deviate from the traditional methods of finding a spouse in Saudi Arabia, the research findings prove that they do not completely challenge their social and religious norms when searching for a future spouse online. The dominant role of these factors in Saudis' offline lives has been transferred to online settings, shaping their self-presentation and mate preferences. The online courtship process also showed the power of social norms and religious factors in affecting users' actions.

9.3.2. Methodological Contributions

This current research provided valuable methodological insights that can be incorporated into future research in the same field. First, this research overcomes the methodological limitations of previous studies that used exclusively qualitative data to examine hyperpersonal theory in online settings. These studies missed the opportunity to examine the role of demographic variables in affecting the four communication components proposed by Walther (i.e., sender, receiver, channel, and feedback). Thus, to go beyond traditional investigations of impression formation, the current research quantitatively

determined the extent to which the background characteristics of users influences these components.

Besides constructing a quantitative tool to measure how the factors influence the receiver's perception of the impression formed through matrimonial websites, the current research methodologically contributes to hyperpersonal theory in that it classifies social cues into four distinct factors. It also delineates the order of importance of each factor to Saudi online marriage seekers. While previous hyperpersonal studies mainly depended on qualitative data, which does not provide a clear ranking of social cues factors, the current result reveals that the most important factor that influences Saudi matrimonial website users when forming an impression about senders is the extent to which their online behaviours are in line with Saudi social norms.

Previous studies of mate preferences, besides focusing on Western and East Asian cultures, have mainly adopted quantitative methods. Thus, another methodological advance of this research is that it investigated Saudi users' mate preferences utilising a mixed methods approach, which provided a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind each mate preference.

A further contribution to methodology relates to understanding the script of the Saudi courtship process initiated through matrimonial websites using a mixed method approach. While previous studies utilised only qualitative or quantitative methods exclusively, the current research contributes to the field methodologically by combining the data collected from the interview phase with the responses from the questionnaires. Utilising this method provides an in-depth description of the actions and stages Saudi marriage seekers follow when looking for spouses through matrimonial websites.

9.3.3. Empirical Contributions

Empirical studies in the field of Islamic matrimonial websites represent a gap in the literature. The current research empirically contributes to this field by constructing a model for this new form of Saudi courtship, investigating the usage patterns of matrimonial websites, the impressions Muslim users form on these websites, their preferences in searching for a potential spouse, the outcomes of such usage, and the acceptable script for courtships initiated on these matrimonial websites.

Unlike eHarmony and other popular Western dating websites, the agencies of Islamic matrimonial websites generally do not take into their considerations when building and designing their websites the findings of academic research. The current research could assist these matrimonial websites agencies in that it empirically examines users' behaviour on matrimonial websites and thus provide a basis for them to alter their platforms.

9.4. Limitations of the Research

As the current research dealt with non-conventional topic that has its contextual uniqueness and specificity, the research encountered a set of challenges. The first was the extent to which the vast body of previous theoretical and empirical research is applicable to the Islamic context in general and to the Saudi case in particular. This challenge has begun from the literature review and continued during the theoretical framework, method and data collection process of this research. This led the researcher to identify the similarities and differences between Saudi culture and Western culture regarding the research topic. The researcher also investigated the weakness and strengths of previous theories in providing a comprehensive explanation of the Saudi case. The researcher concluded that there is a need to develop research instruments that take into account the religious, cultural and social factors of Saudi culture.

In addition, an assistant was needed in collecting data from female participants during the interview phase due to the cultural specificity. Although asking for a female assistant was necessary as it is impossible to collect such data directly from the female participants, the researcher was keen to have a high level of agreement in conducting the interviews. In order to maintain the same level of quality, extra effort was required. The researcher and his colleague developed specific techniques in asking questions and in setting prompt questions to encourage the participants to talk about the phenomenon. Besides conducting a pilot study, they also tried to anticipate in advance the participants' conditions and their reactions to each question in order to follow the same techniques.

One of the main challenges encountered during the current research is persuading a Matrimonial agency to conduct the research on it. Emails, several calls and face to face meeting with the agency manager were needed. Although the negotiation sessions ended with the agreement between me and the agent to conduct the research, the agent does not provide the full access to its data such as the number of exchanged messages between members.

These data could add valuable findings to the knowledge as it is more accurate than self-report data. However, the agent agreed on asking the participants regarding these information. They believe that extracting such data would cost them an extra effort and they state that they are too busy to that. I overcame this limitation by obtaining an agreement from them on list of points that I can ask site members about them.

As the current research aimed to investigate matrimonial website usage within conservative Islamic Saudi society during a definite period, a further limitation of this research is that it is restricted to a certain moment in time and to a subgroup of the population that may use matrimonial websites in particular ways. It is expected that samples from other populations and samples from the same population at different times may use these websites in a variety of other ways. While this research applies to the most popular matrimonial website among Saudis to ensure that its findings are generalizable to a wide population, applying the same methods to other matrimonial websites that offer more various features, such as allowing for displaying profile photos or voice chats, would yield different findings.

9.5. Recommendations for Future Research

The current research reveals that Saudi culture has its specificity in applying gender segregation in almost all of the Saudis' life aspects. It also shows that a researcher may encounter challenges when collecting data from Saudi sample, especially from the opposite sex participants. The current research developed an approach to insure a high quality of agreement between the researcher and his colleague that he had to ask for her help to interview the female participants. However, developing a guideline for conducting studies that may utilise other types of methods (e.g. a questionnaire, a focus group, a case study etc,) is needed to set the path for more studies to be conducted within this conservative culture.

The findings revealed in this research clearly show that Saudis utilise matrimonial websites in distinctive ways. Because there are few studies in the area of matrimonial websites, especially among Muslim users, it is recommended that future studies among users from other Islamic countries be conducted to investigate their usage behaviour on these websites. Due to the social and cultural changes that Saudi Arabia has been experiencing, the same Saudi sample (or two different samples drawn in comparable ways) could be examined longitudinally for changes over time regarding the usage of matrimonial websites.

Additionally, the results of the current study show that in long-term mating contexts, traditional marriage in this case, Saudis express different mate preferences from the ones proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993). Thus, a recommended future study would be to investigate the extent to which Saudi men and women utilise the mate preference strategies proposed by Buss and Schmitt (1993) in the short-term mating context, which would be one of the emerging forms of marriages in the Saudi context. However, this kind of research needs comprehensive review to the Islamic literature to examine the validity of this kind of comparison.

Finally, the current research provides an in-depth description of the actions and stages Saudi users follow when looking for spouses through matrimonial websites. It is recommended that future studies look at the actions these users would take when initiating friendships between sexes and romantic relationships not initially intended to lead to marriage, for instance, through social media websites.

9.6. Technical Evolution

The next big wave of web technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), promises to make everything (including services, objects, and people) interconnected and able to communicate in constructive and intelligent ways. The technological concept behind this vision relies on the semantic web as well as the historical behaviour analysis of machine learning. The vision of IoT is to build an information space not only to allow humans to communicate with each other, but also to allow machines to gather data (e.g., deriving meaningful information or making more precise choices).

Over the last decade, a great deal of scientific research from different perspectives has been devoted to figuring out how IoT will play a leading role in the near future, and the advantages and disadvantages of being part of it. Social media, for instance, recently introduced the so-called Social Internet of Things (SIoT). From the point of view of any potential couple, the most apparent effects of this SIoT will be visible and useful from the early stages of the marriage process. While this technology could add verification to the members' identity and personal information, members will lose the secrecy of their personal information as online companies will profile them. However, there are advanced usage of these technology. For example, involving e-health connected services would make sense for inferring a perfect possible match in advance (i.e., before the search stage takes place). This

might include determining compatibility based on the couple's preferences by accurately taking into account medical history, ethnic background, weight and height.

In this context, it is obvious that most of the current early stages of marriage in matrimonial websites may change, perhaps for the better. Accordingly, it is highly recommended to put this new trend under the spotlight for further academic and applied studies. The latter may involve formalising and then implementing our extracted Saudi script as a helping tool or a service component during the courtship stages. For instance, the implemented component could be used as an intelligent adviser to suggest the best choices for a person at the right time. This in turn would save users time by allowing them to avoid those scenarios that are unlikely to terminate in marriage. In addition, any high-quality suggestions would significantly help users avoid disappointment in failed relationships.

9.7. Concluding Remarks

The current research has provided an illustration of Saudis' usage of matrimonial websites by investigating the sample's impression formation, mate preferences, and scripts of the courtship process initiated online. The findings of the research are significant given the scarcity in the literature regarding usage of Muslim matrimonial websites and online courtship scripts. This research shows the impressions that Saudi users intended to create when constructing their profiles on matrimonial websites, the characteristics these users seek in their potential spouses, and the acceptable Saudi script for courtships initiated on matrimonial websites. Investigating these issues allowed for the construction of a model for this new form of Saudi courtship process. Although the findings of this research show that the dominance of social norms and religion has been transferred to relatively new online ways of finding a spouse, the findings also show that Saudis are currently in a transitional stage, as they made decisions and found opportunities that did not previously exist in their traditional courtship process. It seems that the online connectivity may create new challenges in the future for this conservative, gender-segregated culture.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Information Sheets

The Questionnaire Study

Project Title: A Study of Online Courtship Scripts, Sexual Strategies, and Self-Presentations among Saudis

Name of the researcher: Ayman Bajnaid

Introduction: You are being invited to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted to fulfil the doctoral degree requirements at University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to click that you agree to participate.

Purpose: In this study, I aim to measure and provide detailed descriptive information about the uses of Muslim matrimonial websites by Saudis. I am seeking to fill a current knowledge gap by investigating how Saudis, who belong to an Islamic Arabic culture, utilize online matrimonial websites to search for potential spouses, the Saudis' attitudes towards several issues regarding the interactions within matrimonial websites, how Saudis who search for a potential mate present themselves in their online profile and what preferences they look for in their future spouses. It also aims to investigate the courtship process they go through.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer questions about the above mentioned issues. I will use neither your real name nor identifying information in preparing the study or in possible subsequent manuscripts prepared for publication in scholarly journals.

Risks of Participation: Some participants may consider the subject matter to be sensitive.

Benefits: There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. The results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding and a larger research body on how Saudi interact within Muslim matrimonial websites.

Confidentiality: Participants' names will not be used within the research study and all data will remain confidential. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used. The study may result in published articles, a dissertation and/or presentations at professional conferences. Any reporting that arises from this research study will not identify individuals, places, names or specific events.

Contacts: At any time, participants may contact the researcher, Ayman Bajnaid, PhD student, University of Leicester, at anbajnaid@yahoo.com.

Participants Rights: As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know about the nature of the research. You are free to decline participation, and you are free to withdraw from this phase or the whole study at any time. Feel free to ask any question at any time about the nature of this research project or the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

Signatures: Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research by clicking on the agreement button. Your click indicates an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

<p style="text-align:center">Participant Information Sheet</p>

<p style="text-align:center">The Content Analysis Study</p>

Project Title: A Study of Online Courtship Scripts, Sexual Strategies, and Self-Presentations among Saudis

Name of the researcher: Ayman Bajnaid

Introduction: You are being invited to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted to fulfil the doctoral degree requirements at University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to click that you agree to participate.

Purpose: In this study, I aim to measure and provide detailed descriptive information about the uses of Muslim matrimonial websites by Saudi. I am seeking to fill a current knowledge gap by investigating how Saudis, who belong to an Islamic Arabic background, utilize online matrimonial websites to search for potential spouses, the Saudis' attitudes towards several issues regarding the interactions within matrimonial websites, how Saudis who search for a potential mate present themselves in their online profile and what preferences they look for in their future spouses.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, your profile on the site will be analysed. I will use neither your real name nor identifying information in preparing the study or in possible subsequent manuscripts prepared for publication in scholarly journals.

Risks of Participation: Some participants may consider the subject matter to be sensitive.

Benefits: There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. The results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding and a larger research body on how Saudis interact within Muslim matrimonial websites.

Confidentiality: Participants' names will not be used within the research study and all data will remain confidential. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used. The study may result in published articles, a dissertation and/or presentations at professional conferences. Any reporting that arises from this research study will not identify individuals, places, names or specific events.

Contacts: At any time, participants may contact the researcher, Ayman Bajnaid, PhD student, University of Leicester, at anbajnaid@yahoo.com.

Participants Rights: As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know about the nature of the research. You are free to decline participation, and you are free to withdraw from this phase or the whole study at any time. Feel free to ask any question at any time about the nature of this research project or the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

Signatures: Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research by clicking on the agreement button. Your click indicates an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

<h1 style="text-align: center;">Participant Information Sheet</h1>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Interview Study</h2>

Project Title: A Study of Online Courtship Scripts, Sexual Strategies, and Self-Presentations among Saudis

Name of the researcher: Ayman Bajnaid

Introduction: You are being invited to participate in a research study. This study is being conducted to fulfil the doctoral degree requirements at University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to click that you agree to participate.

Purpose: In this study, I aim to measure and provide detailed descriptive information about the uses of Muslim matrimonial websites by Saudis. I am seeking to fill a current knowledge gap by investigating how Saudis, who belong to an Islamic Arabic culture, utilize online matrimonial websites to search for potential spouses, the Saudis' attitudes towards several issues regarding the interactions within matrimonial websites, how Saudis who search for a potential mate present themselves in their online profile and what preferences they look for in their future spouses. It also aims to investigate the courtship process they go through.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will need to answer questions which will last no longer than One hour. You will be asked about your experience in using matrimonial websites about the issues mentioned above. You may refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer. I will use neither your real name nor identifying information in preparing the study or in possible subsequent manuscripts prepared for publication in scholarly journals.

Risks of Participation: Some participants may consider the subject matter to be sensitive.

Benefits: There are no immediate benefits to participating in this study. The results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding and a larger research body on how Saudis interact within Muslim matrimonial websites.

Confidentiality: Participants' names will not be used within the research study and all data will remain confidential. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms will be used. The study may result in published articles, a dissertation and/or presentations at professional conferences. Any reporting that arises from this research study will not identify individuals, places, names or specific events.

Contacts: At any time, participants may contact the researcher, Ayman Bajnaid, PhD student, University of Leicester, at anbajnaid@yahoo.com.

Participants Rights: As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know about the nature of the research. You are free to decline participation, and you are free to withdraw from answering the interview's questions or the study at any time. Feel free to ask any question at any time about the nature of this research project or the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

Signatures: Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research by clicking on the agreement button. Your click indicates an acknowledgment of the terms described above.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

A Study of Online Courtship Scripts, Sexual Strategies, and Self-Presentations

among Saudis

Please initial

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason

3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence

4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded

5. I agree to record my words and I agree to the use of anonymised quotes as part of the research project

6. I agree to take part in the research project

Name of participant: ....

Signature of participant: ....

Date: ....

Name of Researcher:...

Signature of researcher: ....

Date:

Appendix C

Preliminary Interview

Preliminary Interview Questions

1. Which type(s) of marriage are you seeking on the matrimonial websites?

2. How long have you been registered at Muslim matrimonial websites?

3. Is this the first time you have used one of these sites?

4. Why are you using it?

5. How positively or negatively would you evaluate the experience so far? Explain.

6. What positive characteristics do you try to present on your profile?

7. What negative characteristics do you try to avoid on your profile?

8. What positive characteristics do you prefer in your potential spouse?

9. What negative characteristics do you prefer not to see in your potential spouse?

Appendix D

Matrimonial Websites Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire. I would like to ask you a number of questions about your usage of matrimonial websites. Remember that your participation is voluntary. All of the information that you provide will be strictly confidential and for the purpose of research only.

_____

Section 1: Background Information

1.1. How old are you?

(   ) years old.

1.2. What is your gender?

1. Male

2. Female

1.3. What is your tribe of origin?

1. Qabily

2. Hadari

3. Prefer not to say

1.4. What is your current relationship status?

1. Single

2. Married

3. Divorced

4. Widow/Widower

1.5. What is your highest level of educational attainment?

1. Uneducated

2. Elementary school degree

3. Middle school degree

4. High school degree

5. Bachelor degree

6. Post-graduate degree

7. Other (*please specify*):

1.6. Approximately what is your monthly income?

1. None

2. <SA 1,500

٣. SA 1,501 – 3,999

٤. SA 4,000 – 6,999

٥. SA 7,000 – 9,999

٦. SA 10,000 – 14,999

٧. SA15, 000 – 20,000

٨. SA 20,000>

9. Prefer not to say

1.7. How do you describe your religious level?

1. Highly religious

2. Moderate religious

3. Religious to a small extent

4. Not religious

5. Prefer not to say

Section 2: Usage of Matrimonial Websites
2.1. When did you first visit a matrimonial website?

1. Less than 6 months ago

2. 6 months – less than 1 year ago

3. 1 – 3 years ago

4. 3.1 – 6 years ago

5. 6.1 – 10 years ago

6. More than ten years ago

2.2. When did you first become a member or construct a profile on a matrimonial website?

1. Less than 6 months ago

2. 6 months – less than 1 year ago

3. 1 – 3 years ago

4. 3.1 – 6 years ago

5. 6.1 – 10 years ago

6. More than ten years ago

2.3. Before you started using matrimonial websites, did you know anyone who used matrimonial websites?

1. Yes

2. No

    2.3.1 If yes, did you ask for his/her help in being a member on a matrimonial site?

    1. Yes

    2. No

2.4. To what extent do you consider yourself an active member on a matrimonial website?

1. Very active

2. Active

3. Average

4. Not active

5. Idle

2.5. How many matrimonial websites are you currently registered at?

1. 1

2. 2

3. 3

4. 4

5. 5

6. More than 5

7. I do not know

2.6. Altogether, how much have you paid in membership and user fees for matrimonial websites since you first started using them?

1. SAR 0

2. SAR 1 – 19

3. SAR 20 – 49

4. SAR 50 – 99

5. SAR 100 – 199

6. SAR 200 – 299

7. SAR 300 – 399

8. SAR 400 – 499

9. SAR 500 – 750

10. SAR 750 – 999

11. SAR 1000 or more

2.7. Why did you choose to register at matrimonial websites?

Rate on a 4-point scale (1=strongly inapplicable, 2= inapplicable, 3=applicable, 4= strongly applicable)

1. I want to find an alternative to my family and tribal circle

                1O   2O   3O   4O

2. I did not find a suitable spouse through the traditional method

                1O   2O   3O   4O

3. I want to search for myself through matrimonial websites

                1O   2O   3O   4O

4. I heard successful stories for those who used matrimonial websites to find a spouse

                1O   2O   3O   4O

5. I feel that it is too late for me to find a spouse through a traditional way

                1O   2O   3O   4O

6. I want a wider choice of possible spouses than is usually provided through traditional methods

                1O   2O   3O   4O

Section 3: Mate Preferences

What characteristics do you prefer in your spouse?

Rate on a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unimportant) through (4= uncertain) and (7= extremely important)

1. Loyal

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

2. Honest

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

3. Good moral character

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4. Chasity

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

5. Good looking

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

6. Physically attractive

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

7. Wants commitment

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

8. Wants to have children

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

9. Likes children

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

10. Good housekeeper

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

11. Good cook

     1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

12. Home-oriented

	1O	2O	3O	4O	5O	6O	7O

13. Healthy
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

14. In shape
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

15. Tall
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

16. Intelligent
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

17. College graduate
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

18. Professional degree
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

19. Good family background
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

20. Good earning capacity
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

21. Generous
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

22. Physically Strong
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

23. Religious point of view
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

24. Religious look (e.g., having long beard for men and wearing full hijab by women)
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

25. Praying
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

26. Highly religious
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

27. Having a tribal origin
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

Section 4: Impression Formation
4.1. Sender:
When constructing a profile, *Rate on a 4-point scale (1=none, 2= few, 3=some, 4= much)*
4.1.1. To what extent do you care about presenting your positive attributes?
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O |

4.1.2. To what extent do you care about minimizing your negative attributes?
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O |

4.2. Receiver:

What is your impression of the acceptability of providing the following information by other users?

a. *Rate on 7 point scales (1 = extremely unimportant) through (4= uncertain) and (7 = extremely important)*

4.2.1. Spelling mistakes in writing sentences
| | 1O | 2O | 3O | 4O | 5O | 6O | 7O |

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4.2.2. Simple expressions
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.3. Grammar mistakes
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.4. Awkward sentences
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.5. Sending a private message late at night
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.6. Adding you to the member's favourite list
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.7. Knowing that the member has visited your profile
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.8. Last seen time
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.9. Duration of time taken to reply
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.10. Sexual indications
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.11. Receiving Smiley faces
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.12. Displaying the member's family name
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.13. Choosing a sexy name for the member (e.g., hot man, sexy lady)
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.14. Displaying a member's first name
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.2.15. Choosing a sexy photo for the member (e.g., a part of a woman's body)
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3. Channel:

What is your evaluation of online matrimonial websites as a channel to find a spouse in comparison with offline methods?

Rate on 7 point scales (1 = strongly disagree) through (4= uncertain) and (7 = strongly agree)

4.3.1. Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse possible due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.2. Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse comfortable due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.3. Online matrimonial websites make the interaction with the potential spouse easier due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.4. Online matrimonial websites enable me to overcome cultural and social restrictions due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.5. Online matrimonial websites enable me to obtain information directly from the potential spouse due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture
         1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.6. Online matrimonial websites enable me to have more time to examine the compatibility of a potential spouse due to the limitations on offline interaction with the opposite sex in Saudi culture

1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.7. Online matrimonial websites enable me to provide more information about myself due to the availability of cues about the potential spouse

1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.8. I can view other members' profiles or reply to their messages in my own time frame and get rid of the time pressure due to the asynchronous feature

1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

4.3.9. I have more time to examine the possibility of compatibility with a potential spouse due to the asynchronous feature

1O   2O   3O   4O   5O   6O   7O

Section 5: Outcomes of using matrimonial websites

5.1. How often do you initiate the contact with a potential spouse that you find suitable?
1. Never
2. Sometimes
3. Always

5.2. How often do you respond to the contact from a potential spouse that you find suitable?
1. Never
2. Sometimes
3. Always

5.3. How soon you usually terminate correspondence with a potential spouse that you find suitable?
1. After only one or two messages have bene exchanged
2. After three to five
3. After six to 10
4. After more than 10 messages.

5.4. How many members are you actively and currently keeping contact with?
(_____) **members**

5.5. How many times have you unsuccessfully made contact online (rejected, no reply?)
(_____) times.

5.6. Have ever successfully moved a relationship from online to offline?
1. Yes
2. No

   Are you willing to take part in an interview to tell us your story?
      1.Yes
      2. No

_____

The researcher will conduct a content analysis study of the profiles on matrimonial websites.

Would you like to participate in the content analysis study? If yes, could you please write

your username on the website below so that the researcher can analgise it?

_____

Thank you again for your assistance!

Ayman Bajnaid

Appendix E

Content Analysis Checklist

No	Variable name		√
1	Gender	1. Male	
		2. Female	
2	Age	1. Under 20	
		2. Between 21 to 25	
		3. Between 26 to 30	
		4. Between 31 to 35	
		5. Between 36 to 40	
		6. Between 41 to 45	
		7. Between 46 to 50	
		8. Between 51 to 55	
		9. Between 56 to 60	
		10. Between 61 to 65	
		11. Over 66	
3	Weight	1. Less than 45	
		2. Between 46 to 50	
		3. Between 51 to 55	
		4. Between 56 to 60	
		5. Between 61 to 65	
		6. Between 66 to 70	
		7. Between 71 to 75	
		8. Between 76 to 80	
		9. Between 81to 85	
		10. Between 86 to 90	
		11. Between 91 to 95	
		12. Between 96 to 100	
		13. Over 100	
4	Height	1. Less than 150 cm	
		2. Between 151 to 155	
		3. Between 156 to 160	
		4. Between 161 to 165	
		5. Between 166 to 170	
		6. Between 171 to 175	
		7. Between 176 to 180	
		8. Over than 181	
5	Marriage type	1. First one/ I am just the one	
		2. More/ I accept polygamy	
6	Marital status	1. Single	
		2. Married (for males only)	
		3. Divorced	
		4. Widower	
7	Children	1. No children	
		2. With children	
8	Skin colour	1. Pale or Milky White	

No	Variable name		√
		2. Very Light Brown	
		3. Light Brown Or Olive	
		4. Brown Or Dark Brown	
9	Education	1. Uneducated	
		2. Elementary school degree	
		3. Middle school degree	
		4. High school degree	
		5. Bachelor degree	
		6. Post-graduate degree	
		7. Others	
10	Monthly income	1. None	
		2. <SA 1,500	
		3. SA 1,501 – 3,999	
		4. SA 4,000 – 6,999	
		5. SA 7,000 – 9,999	
		6. SA 10,000 – 14,999	
		7. SA15, 000 – 20,000	
		8. SA 20,000>	
		9. Prefer not to say	
11	Health condition	1. Good	
		2. Medical condition	
12	Smoking	1. Yes	
		2. No	
13	Field of Occupation	1. Education	
		2. Computer Science	
		3. Transportation	
		4. Engineering/ Science	
		5. Marketing	
		6. Business man/ woman	
		7. Retired	
		8. Political	
		9. Medicine	
		10. Law	
		11. Constructing Building	
		12. Catering	
		13. Trading	
		14. Managing	
		15. Literature	
		16. Secretary	
		17. Still studying	
		18. Communication	

No	Variable name		√
		19. Military	
		20. Security	
		21. Not working	
14	Tribe origin	1. Qabily	
		2. Hadari	
		3. Prefer not to say	
15	Religiosity level	1. Highly religious	
		2. Moderate religious	
		3. Religious to a small extent	
		4. Not religious	
		5. Prefer not to say	
16	Praying	1. Usually	
		2. Always	
		3. Often	
		4. Never	
		5. Prefer not to say	
17	Beard (for male)	6. With beard	
		7. No beard	
18	Hijab (for females)	1. Covering the whole face	
		2. Wearing niqab	
		3. Covering the hair only	
		4. Not wearing a hijab	
		5. Prefer not to say	
19	About me	1. positive physical appearance	1.Yes 2. No
		2. Financial security	1.Yes 2. No
		3. Hobbies/interests	1.Yes 2. No
		4. Marital status	1.Yes 2. No
		5. Willingness to invest or receive investment.	1.Yes 2. No
		6. Type of relationship	1.Yes 2. No
		7. Age	1.Yes 2. No
		8. Religion	1.Yes 2. No
20	Number of mentioned characteristics	Positive:	Negative:
21	About the preferred spouse	1. positive physical appearance	1.Yes 2. No
		2. Financial security	1.Yes 2. No
		3. Hobbies/interests	1.Yes 2. No
		4. Marital status	1.Yes 2. No
		5. Willingness to invest or receive investment.	1.Yes 2. No
		6. Type of relationship	1.Yes 2. No
		7. Age	1.Yes 2. No
		8. Religion	1.Yes 2. No
		9. Paternity confidence	1.Yes 2. No
		10. Commitment	1.Yes 2. No
		11. Good parenting skills	1.Yes 2. No
		12. The tribe of origin	1.Yes 2. No

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to search for a spouse through matrimonial websites?

2. What are the factors that make you decide to register at a certain website and eliminate the others?

3. Do you pay fees for being a member at this matrimonial website? Why?

4. What did you do during the first time you visited the matrimonial website?

5. What characteristics do you prefer and look for in your potential spouse?

6. Describe in detail the steps you followed when you registered at the matrimonial website, creating a profile and started interacting with a potential spouse on the matrimonial website.

7. Describe in detail the steps you followed when you moved from the website to other modes of interaction with a potential spouse, up to the point of getting married.

8. When did you decide to take a step forward in the progress of your relationship with a potential spouse? Why?

9. When did you decide to take a step backward in the progress of your relationship with a potential spouse? Why?

10. How do these steps differ from the traditional offline courtship?

11. To what extent are you open to telling your story of successfully using a matrimonial website?

12. Did your family play a role in the courtship process that you started online? If so, what was its role? If not, why not?

13. To what extent does your tribe of origin affect the courtship process? Explain.