

Socio-Religious Effects of Online Choosing of Spouse among Nigerian Muslims

Tawaliu Oriowo Adeoye, PhD

Department of Religious Studies
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye
adeoye.tawaliu@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Abstract

Marriage constitutes a fundamental social institution in Islam, serving as the foundation of family life, moral guidance, and societal stability. In Nigeria, Muslim marriage practices traditionally involve family consultation, community oversight, and adherence to Islamic principles, ensuring marital compatibility and ethical compliance. The advent of digital technologies, particularly social media and online matrimonial platforms, has transformed the process of choosing spouses, allowing individuals to interact directly with potential partners. Using a descriptive-analytical design, this study examines the socio-religious effects of online spouse selection among Nigerian Muslims, highlighting both advantages and challenges. Drawing on the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, and contemporary scholarly literature, the study identifies benefits of online platforms, including convenience, broader choice of partners, and efficiency. However, it also reveals risks such as moral compromise, reduced family oversight, potential deception, and conflict with traditional cultural norms. The study emphasises that adherence to Islamic principles such as piety, good character, compatibility, guardian involvement, mutual consent, consultation, avoidance of harm, and honesty remains essential for ensuring ethically and religiously compliant marriages. The research concludes that online spouse selection, if appropriately supervised and guided by Islamic ethics, can contribute positively to marital satisfaction and family stability. Conversely, neglecting these principles may lead to marital discord, social tension, and erosion of ethical standards. Recommendations include religious education, parental supervision, platform regulation, and community awareness programmes.

Keywords: Online Spouse Selection, Nigerian Muslims, Socio-Religious Effects, Islamic Principles, Family Stability.

Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental social institution in every human society, serving as the cornerstone of family life, social stability, and moral development. In Islam, marriage (*Nikāh*) is more than a social contract; it is *mīthāq ghalīz* (a sacred covenant) ordained by Allah, designed to establish *mawaddah* (love), *rahmah* (mercy) and mutual responsibility between spouses. (Al-Zuhaylī, 2007). The Qur'ān emphasises this divine purpose:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you love and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for people who reflect (Qur'ān 30:21).

Traditionally, the process of choosing a spouse among Nigerian Muslims involved family consultation, community engagement, cultural considerations, and religious guidance. Families played a pivotal role in vetting potential partners, ensuring compatibility, and safeguarding moral and religious compliance. With the advancement of information and communication technologies, particularly the internet and social media platforms, the practice of choosing spouses has shifted significantly. Online matrimonial platforms and social media now enable prospective spouses to connect beyond traditional geographic, familial, and social boundaries. While this trend offers convenience and accessibility, it also raises significant socio-religious concerns regarding religious compliance, moral conduct, and marital stability (Al-Jibālī, 2000)

Online spouse selection introduces dynamics that may circumvent traditional safeguards, such as parental supervision, family vetting, and community endorsement. It exposes prospective partners to risks associated with inadequate background verification, moral deviations, and relational misunderstandings, potentially impacting marital satisfaction, family cohesion, and societal moral integrity. The Prophet emphasises the importance of lawful conduct and family involvement in marriage thus:

لَا نِكَاحَ إِلَّا بِوَلِيِّ وَشَاهِدَيْنِ

There is no marriage except with a guardian and two witnesses
(Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1429).

This guidance underscores the necessity of structured oversight in marital arrangements to preserve moral and social harmony. The advent of online platforms for spouse selection has created both opportunities and challenges for Nigerian Muslims. On one hand, it facilitates the meeting of compatible partners who may otherwise never interact due to geographic or social limitations. On the other hand, it presents risks that may compromise Islamic ethical standards, including exposure to prohibited interactions, deception, and emotional exploitation.

Research indicates that marriages contracted through informal online interactions are sometimes associated with higher rates of misunderstanding, distrust, and marital dissatisfaction, due to limited familial involvement and insufficient pre-marital screening. In the Nigerian context, where religion, culture, and family structures are integral to marital decision-making, online spouse selection may clash with socio-religious norms, potentially affecting marital stability and child welfare. Furthermore, there is limited scholarly research examining the socio-religious effects of online spouse selection among Nigerian Muslims. Existing studies primarily focus on Western contexts, leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding how these practices interact with Nigerian Muslim cultural, religious, and social structures.

The Concept of Online Choosing of Spouses: Definition and Overview

Online choosing of spouses refers to the procedure by which individuals identify, interact with, and select potential marital partners through digital platforms such as matrimonial websites, social media, dating apps, or other internet-based communication tools. Unlike traditional methods where families, community elders, and religious leaders play a fundamental role, online spouse selection often allows direct interaction between prospective partners, often mediated only by digital communication channels (Al-Jibālī, 2000). In essence, online spouse selection is an evolution of human courtship influenced by technological advancement, globalisation, and urbanisation. It provides wider access to potential partners, transcending geographic, social, and familial boundaries. For Nigerian Muslims, this trend is particularly significant given the diverse ethnic composition, urban migration patterns, and growing digital literacy, which facilitate cross-regional and cross-cultural marital connections.

Online Spouse Selection Channels

Online spouse selection can take several forms. Some of them include:

1. **Matrimonial Websites:** Platforms designed specifically for this purpose e.g. Muslim Matrimony, Single Muslim.com) where users create profiles and communicate with potential spouses under monitored guidelines.
2. **Social Media Networks:** Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, where interactions may begin informally but develop into marital consideration.
3. **Mobile Messaging Apps:** WhatsApp, Telegram, and similar applications are often used for personal communication before formal introductions.

Each channel offers anecdotal levels of supervision, security, and religious compliance, with traditional family oversight often limited or absent.

Causes of Online Spouse Selection

Several factors motivate Nigerian Muslims to choose spouses online. These include but not limited to:

- (i) Wider pool of potential partners: The internet expands choices beyond local communities;
- (ii) Time and convenience: Busy lifestyles, professional commitments, and urban living limit traditional courtship opportunities;
- (iii) Urbanisation and Social Disconnection: Rapid urban migration has weakened traditional community networks where marriages were previously arranged. Many individuals now live far from extended family systems, making online platforms a practical alternative for meeting potential spouses outside their immediate social environment. This shift encourages reliance on digital spaces for relationship formation.

- (iv) **Changing Gender Roles and Autonomy:** Modern education and economic empowerment especially among women have increased the desire for personal choice in marital decisions. Online platforms provide a space where individuals can exercise independence in selecting partners rather than relying solely on family-arranged processes.
- (v) **Fear of Social Stigma or Rejection:** Some individuals, such as divorcees, widows, older singles, or those with disabilities, may face societal pressure or stigma in traditional marriage settings. Online platforms offer a less judgmental environment where such individuals can seek partners without immediate societal scrutiny.
- (vi) **Exposure to Global Culture and Ideologies:** Globalisation and internet access expose individuals to diverse cultures and relationship models. This exposure shapes preferences and encourages people to explore marriage options beyond their ethnic, cultural, or regional boundaries through online interaction.
- (vii) **Technological Familiarity and Digital Lifestyle:** Younger generations who are highly engaged with digital technology naturally extend their social interactions into online spaces. Since communication, work, and entertainment are already digitised, it becomes logical for relationship-building including spouse selection to occur online as well.
- (viii) **Perceived Efficiency in Screening Partners:** Online platforms often allow users to filter potential partners based on specific criteria such as education, religion, profession, or interests. This structured filtering system creates the perception that online methods are more systematic and goal-oriented than traditional approaches.
- (ix) **Avoidance of Family Pressure and Interference:** Some individuals turn to online spouse selection to temporarily avoid intense family pressure, expectations, or control in the traditional matchmaking process. It allows them to explore options at their own pace before formal family involvement.
- (x) **Economic Considerations:** Traditional marriage processes in some societies can involve significant financial commitments (ceremonies, bride price, extended family obligations). Online interaction may initially reduce these costs by allowing early-stage communication and decision-making before formal engagement.
- (xi) **Second Chances and Remarriage Opportunities:** Individuals seeking remarriage often find online platforms more accommodating than traditional systems, which may prioritise first-time marriages. Online environments provide broader access to people with similar life experiences.
- (xii) **Anonymity and Gradual Self-Disclosure:** The semi-anonymous nature of online interaction allows individuals to reveal personal information gradually. This can make people feel safer

discussing sensitive issues (beliefs, past experiences, expectations) before committing to formal processes.

Advantages of Online Selection of Spouses

Online spouse selection has emerged as a significant development in contemporary marital practices, particularly within digitally connected societies. While it departs from traditional methods, it offers several notable advantages when properly guided and ethically managed. One of the major benefits is the expansion of the pool of potential partners. Unlike conventional systems that are often limited by geography, ethnicity, or family networks, online platforms enable individuals to interact with prospective spouses across different regions and backgrounds. This broader access increases the likelihood of finding a partner who aligns with one's religious values, educational background, and personal aspirations. Scholars argue that widening the scope of selection enhances the possibility of achieving marital compatibility, which remains a central objective in Islamic marriage (Al-Jibālī, 2000).

Closely related to this is the efficiency in identifying compatible matches. Many online platforms allow users to filter potential partners based on specific criteria such as religiosity, education, profession, and life goals. This structured approach reduces the time and uncertainty often associated with traditional matchmaking. In this regard, online selection may serve as a practical tool for achieving the Islamic principle of *kifā'ah* (compatibility), provided that such assessments are conducted truthfully and responsibly (Al-Jibālī, 2000).

Another important advantage is convenience, particularly for individuals in urban environments. Rapid urbanisation, demanding work schedules, and limited opportunities for social interaction have made traditional courtship increasingly difficult. Online platforms provide flexibility, enabling individuals to communicate at convenient times without disrupting their professional or academic responsibilities. This reflects broader socio-economic changes influencing marriage practices in contemporary societies (Al-Qarāḍāwī, 1995).

Furthermore, online spouse selection can facilitate religiously compliant courtship when properly supervised. If interactions are conducted within Islamic guidelines—such as involving guardians, maintaining modesty, and avoiding prohibited intimacy—the digital medium can serve as a permissible avenue for initiating marriage. Islamic scholars maintain that the permissibility of any method of spouse selection depends not on the medium itself but on adherence to Sharī'ah principles such as honesty, modesty, and avoidance of harm (Al-Qarāḍāwī, 1995).

Challenges of Online Selection of Spouses

Despite its advantages, online spouse selection presents several socio-religious and ethical challenges, particularly when it operates outside established Islamic guidelines and cultural safeguards. A primary concern is the reduction of family and religious supervision. In traditional Muslim societies, marriage is not merely an individual decision but a collective responsibility involving family members and guardians. The absence of this structure in many online interactions may lead to inadequate background checks and emotionally driven decisions. Islamic teachings emphasise the necessity of guardian involvement in marriage to ensure legitimacy and protect the interests of both parties (Muslim, n.d.).

Another significant challenge is the increased exposure to unethical practices and misrepresentation. The anonymity of online platforms makes it easier for individuals to present false information regarding their identity, religious commitment, or socio-economic status. Such deception undermines trust, which is fundamental to marital relationships. Honesty is strongly emphasised in Islamic teachings as a core ethical requirement in all social dealings (Al-Jibālī, 2000).

Additionally, there is a risk of moral compromise, especially when communication occurs without proper boundaries. Unregulated interactions between unrelated males and females may lead to behaviours that contradict Islamic teachings on modesty and chastity. The Qur'ān explicitly warns against approaching immoral acts, highlighting the need to avoid even preliminary steps that may lead to wrongdoing (Qur'ān 17:32).

Finally, online spouse selection may create a weak foundation for marital stability due to inadequate pre-marital evaluation. Unlike traditional processes that involve thorough investigation by family members, online interactions often rely on self-reported information and limited virtual communication. This may prevent individuals from gaining a comprehensive understanding of a partner's character, habits, and family background. As a result, such marriages may experience higher levels of misunderstanding, dissatisfaction, and conflict (Al-Qarāḍāwī, 1995, Al-Jibālī, (2000).

In sum, online spouse selection is neither inherently beneficial nor entirely harmful; its outcomes largely depend on how it is practised. When guided by Islamic principles such as honesty, modesty, family involvement, and compatibility, it can serve as a useful modern tool for marriage. However, when these principles are neglected, it poses serious risks to moral integrity, family cohesion, and marital stability. Conceptualisation in the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, online spouse selection represents a hybrid between traditional and modern courtship, often blending Islamic ethical guidance with digital convenience. Scholars argue that, when conducted with proper oversight, online platforms can support marriage formation without violating Islamic injunctions (Al-Qarāḍāwī, 1995). However, without supervision, the practice may

conflict with socio-religious expectations, parental authority, and community values, contributing to marital discord or social tension.

The concept of online choosing of spouses reflects the digital transformation of marital practices among Nigerian Muslims. While it provides opportunities for broader compatibility and efficiency, it raises significant socio-religious concerns. Understanding this phenomenon requires analysing its motivations, processes, and implications, particularly in light of Islamic ethical standards and Nigerian cultural norms. Subsequent sections of this study will explore these effects in detail, highlighting both opportunities for marital success and potential risks for family cohesion.

Islamic Principles of Choosing Spouses

Marriage in Islam is not only a social contract but also a sacred covenant (*mīthāq ghalīz*) that requires careful selection of a spouse based on religious, moral, and personal compatibility. The process of choosing a spouse is guided by clear Islamic principles, which aim to ensure the marriage promotes love, mercy, moral integrity, and family stability. These principles according to (Al-Zuhaylī, 2007) are derived from the Qur’ān, *Sunnah*, and scholarly interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.

The following are the Islamic principles of choosing a spouse:

1. Principle of Piety (*Taqwā*)

The foremost criterion in choosing a spouse in Islam is piety or God-consciousness (*taqwā*). The Qur’ān emphasizes the importance of selecting a partner based on faith rather than material wealth or social status:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعْرِفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has *At-Taqwa* (Piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware (Qur’ān 49:13).

Considering the above verse, Ibn Kathīr (1999) explains:

وَلَا تَخْتَارُوا أَغْنَىٰ أَمْوَالِهِمْ وَلَكِنْ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَخْشَاهُ الْقَلْبُ

And do not select them for their wealth, but select those who are God-conscious... (p.453).

The Prophet says:

تُنكَحُ الْمَرْأَةُ لِأَرْبَعٍ: لِمَالِهَا وَلِحَسَبِهَا وَلِجَمَالِهَا وَلِدِينِهَا فَاظْفَرُ
بِدَاتِ الدِّينِ ...

A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion. Marry the one who is religious,

may your hands be rubbed with dust [i.e., blessed] (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5090; Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1466).

This principle ensures that the spouses' faith guides their behaviour, decision-making, and treatment of family members, fostering a morally upright household.

2. Principle of Good Character (*Husn al-Khuluq*)

Alongside piety, good character is essential. A spouse with excellent moral conduct ensures harmonious interactions, conflict resolution, and mutual respect (Al-Jibālī, 2000). The Qur'ān highlights moral compatibility as a foundation for marital life:

...فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ...

...Therefore the righteous women are Qānitat, and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard... (Qur'ān 4: 34).

الْخَبِيثَاتُ لِلْخَبِيثِينَ وَالْخَبِيثُونَ لِلْخَبِيثَاتِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ
لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَالطَّيِّبُونَ لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ أُولَئِكَ مُبَرَّءُونَ مِمَّا يَقُولُونَ
لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ

Bad statements are for bad people and bad people for bad statements. Good statements are for good people and good people for good statements: such are innocent of (every) bad statement which they say; for them is forgiveness, and honored provision (Qur'ān 24:26).

The Prophet (SAAS) was once asked about the kind of wealth Muslims should keep and he replied thus:

Let each of you keep a heart that is grateful (to Allah), a tongue that remembers and mentions (Allah) and a believing wife who would assist him in regard to the affairs of the Hereafter. (Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi (verified to be authentic by Al-Bānī in As-Sahihah, no 2176).

A similar Hadith reported by Abu Umamah and Ali reads:

A heart that is grateful (to Allah), a tongue that remembers and mentions (Allah) and a righteous wife who would assist you in the affairs of your life and religion: those are the best treasures for the people (al-Bayhaqi, At-Tirmidhi and others (verified to be authentic by Al-Bānī in Sahihul- Jāmi', no 4409).

The above injunctions emphasise the importance of good character in choosing a spouse in Islam. This includes honesty, patience, obedience, humility, respect, kindness, and the ability to fulfill marital obligations, which are vital for long-term marital stability.

3. Principle of Compatibility (*Kifā'*)

Islamic jurisprudence emphasises compatibility (*kifā'*) in religion, morals, education, and social background. Compatibility ensures mutual understanding and reduces the likelihood of

conflict. Scholars argue that disparities in faith, moral outlook, or life goals can lead to marital discord, which is discouraged in Islam. Al-Jibālī, (2000) opines that a man must try to seek a wife who is compatible with him, and a woman should also seek a husband compatible with her. This is in conformity with the narration of ‘Ā’ishah which states that the Prophet says:

Make a (good) choice for your sperm (that is, offspring). Marry those who compatible, and get married to them (Ibn Mājah, authenticated by Albāni-Sahih-Al-Jāmi‘ no 2928).

Al-Jibālī, (2000) is of the opinion that compatibility (kifā’) is of two major requirements: *din* (religion) and character. They are the crucial points for compatibility that must not be compromised. A man or woman lacking in either of them, is a wrong candidate that must not be considered for marriage. Others factors like age, language, financial status, family status, national background e.t.c. are also essential but not obligatory for the two spouses. They are secondary qualities and should not be considered as grounds for discrimination. It must however be noted that age is an important ‘secondary’ factor and it could become a barrier, if the age difference can prevent one of the two spouses from being able to fulfill his or her marital rights.

4. Principle of Guardian’s Consent (*Wilāyah*)

A valid Islamic marriage requires the consent of the guardian (waliyy) for the bride. This principle safeguards her rights and ensures the marriage aligns with Islamic norms:

لَا نِكَاحَ إِلَّا بِوَلِيِّ وَشَاهِدَيْنِ

There is no marriage except with a guardian and two witnesses (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1429).

The guardian ensures that the marriage is not exploitative or harmful and that the spouse is suitable in terms of faith, morals, and social conduct.

5. Principle of Free Consent (*Rida*)

Islam requires mutual consent of both parties. Forced marriages are invalid in Islam. The Prophet says:

مَنْ أَكْرَهَ امْرَأَةً وَنَكَحَهَا عَلَى غَيْرِ رِضَاهَا
فَلَا نِكَاحَ

Whoever forces a woman to marry without her consent, then the marriage is invalid (Sunan Abu Dawood, Hadith 2085).

This principle ensures that both husband and wife enter marriage willingly, preserving harmony and ethical compliance.

6. Principle of Consultation (*Shūrā*)

Islam encourages consultation (shūrā) with family and trusted community members when selecting a spouse. This ensures that emotional decisions are balanced with wisdom, experience, and social insight. Consulting parents or elders aligns with the Qur’ānic guidance on collective decision-making (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). The Qur’ān states:

وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ
And their affairs are [conducted] by mutual
consultation among them (Qur’ān 42:38).

Consultation helps prevent unsuitable matches and reinforces family cohesion.

7. Principle of Avoiding Harm (*La Dharar*)

Islamic law prohibits actions that may cause harm. Choosing a spouse should avoid potential emotional, financial, or social harm. The Prophet says:

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ

There should be neither harming nor
reciprocating harm (Ibn Mājah, Hadith 2341)

This principle ensures that marriage decisions promote welfare, protect rights, and prevent future discord.

8. Principle of Transparency and Honesty

Prospective spouses must be truthful about their background, character, and intentions. Misrepresentation can lead to marital dissatisfaction, disputes, and even annulment. The Qur’ān commands honesty in all contracts and social interactions:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ

O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts (Qur’ān
5:1)

The above is to clearly ensure trust as the foundation of the marital relationship.

Islamic principles of choosing spouses are comprehensive, morally grounded, and socially protective. They emphasise piety, good character, compatibility, guardian’s consent, mutual consent, consultation, avoidance of harm, and honesty. There are some other qualities to be considered in choosing a wife in Islam. These include virginity, ability to bear children, loving attitude, contentment, naivety and beauty. Adhering to these principles ensures that marriage fulfills its spiritual, social, and familial objectives, while reducing the likelihood of discord and broken homes. These principles serve as a guide for both traditional and contemporary methods of spouse selection, including online contexts, where adherence to Islamic ethics is critical (Al-Jibālī, 2000).

Socio-Cultural Implications of Online Spouse Selection

Online spouse selection has significant implications for the socio-cultural structure of Nigerian Muslim society. Traditionally, marriage is a collective institution embedded within family systems, cultural norms, and communal values. However, the emergence of digital platforms has altered these established patterns.

One major implication is the decline in family involvement in spouse selection. In many Nigerian Muslim communities, marriage decisions are guided by parents, guardians, and extended family members who assess compatibility and moral suitability. Online platforms, however, promote individual autonomy, often reducing the role of the family to a secondary stage. This shift may weaken traditional structures of accountability and guidance that historically ensured stable marriages.

Another important implication is the tension between modern digital practices and cultural expectations. Marriage in the Nigerian context is not merely a union between two individuals but a relationship between families. When individuals independently initiate and develop relationships online, it may conflict with cultural norms that prioritise collective decision-making and formal introductions. This tension can lead to intergenerational disagreements and resistance from families.

Furthermore, online spouse selection contributes to the individualisation of marital decision-making. Unlike traditional systems that emphasise communal values, online platforms encourage personal preference, emotional compatibility, and self-expression. While this may empower individuals, it also shifts marriage away from its broader social function, potentially affecting long-term family cohesion.

In addition, there is the issue of changing courtship patterns. Digital communication replaces face-to-face interactions and culturally structured engagement processes, thereby redefining how relationships are initiated and developed. This transformation reflects broader socio-cultural changes associated with globalisation and technological advancement.

Socio-Religious Effects of Online Spouse Selection

While the advantages are evident, online spouse selection also presents serious socio-religious challenges, particularly when it operates outside Islamic guidelines. One major concern is the reduction of guardian and family supervision, which is essential in Islamic marriage. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasised that a valid marriage requires a guardian and witnesses (Muslim, n.d.). The absence of this structure in online interactions increases the risk of poor decision-making and invalid marital arrangements. Another critical issue is the exposure to impermissible (haram) interactions. Unregulated communication between unrelated males and females may lead to behaviours that contradict Islamic teachings on modesty. The Qur'ān explicitly

warns against approaching immoral acts (Qur'ān 17:32), indicating the need to maintain strict ethical boundaries. Additionally, deception and misrepresentation are prevalent risks in online environments. Individuals may present false information about their identity, character, or religious commitment. Such practices undermine trust, which is fundamental to marital stability. Islam strongly condemns deception in all forms of social interaction (Al-Jibālī, 2000).

Online spouse selection also contributes to the weakening of thorough pre-marital investigation, which is traditionally carried out by families. Without proper verification, individuals may enter marriages based on incomplete or misleading information, increasing the likelihood of conflict and dissatisfaction. This accounts for why Allah enjoins that women should be married with the consents of their parents or guardians (Q4:25). Moreover, the phenomenon may lead to moral and social risks, including emotional exploitation, time wastage, and engagement in inappropriate communication. Islamic teachings emphasise accountability for the use of time and moral conduct, highlighting the dangers of excessive and unregulated online interaction.

Finally, there are serious security and safety concerns, particularly in cases involving fraud, exploitation, or criminal activity. The anonymity of the internet makes it possible for malicious individuals to deceive unsuspecting users, posing risks to both emotional well-being and physical safety.

Islamic Principles and Guidelines for safe and sound Online Selection of Spouses

Studies in Nigeria show growing urban use of digital platforms for marriage. Research globally highlights risks of moral compromise and misrepresentation, particularly where family supervision is limited. This is because online spouse selection influences family consistency, ethical norms, and marital fulfillment. It is however noteworthy that Islam as a religion explains every facet of life completely without leaving a gap unfilled. The Qur'ān states:

مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...

We have neglected nothing in the Book... (Qur'ān
6:38)

Ibn Kathīr (1992) opines that the above verse connotes:

The knowledge about all things is with Allah, and He never forgets any of His creatures, nor their sustenance, nor their affairs, whether these creatures live in the sea or on land (p.234).

The above clearly shows that Islam has provisions and solution to every problem, be it social, economic, political or religious. This explains why the issue of exposure to morally

questionable interactions that may result to Zina (Adultery and fornication) is addressed generally.

The Qur'ān states:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّوْجَ إِذْهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse; indeed, it is ever an immorality and evil as a way (Qur'ān 17:32).

An in-depth understanding of this verse serves as a shed for internet courtiers to mend their ways in dealing with each other morally and uprightly for them to have a successful and permanent marital life. Moreover, the online selection of spouses may be successful, if it is strictly monitored and supervised by their guardians or parents. There are cases of couples successfully married after supervised online courtship as there are marriages annulled due to misrepresentation and lack of family involvement. This therefore implies that, if online selection of spouses is adequately monitored, it may be successful. The Qur'ān states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا
النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ
اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families against a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who disobey not the commands they receive from Allah, but do that which they are commanded (Qur'ān : 66:6).

Ibn Kathīr (1992) explains the above verse as having *Taqwa* (piety) of Allah and ordering one's family to have *Taqwa* of Him. Qatadah comments that it commands obedience to Allah and not to disobey Him. It orders one's family to obey Allah's instructions and helps them to act upon His orders. When one sees disobedience, he stops them and forbids them from doing it. Similar was said by Ad-Dahhak and Muqatil that it is an obligation for the Muslim to teach his near family members, and his male and female slaves what Allah has made obligatory for them and what Allah has forbidden for them.

In Islam therefore, it is enjoined that before any relationship whether online or physical could be successful, the following principles must be strictly adhered to:

1. Piety and Character – Choose partners with God-consciousness and high-quality moral conduct.
2. Family/Guardian Oversight – Supervised interactions guarantee ethical compliance.
3. Consultation and *Shūrā* – To seek counsel from elders and religious authorities.
4. Honesty and Transparency – Full disclosure of background, education, and religion.

5. Avoiding Harm – This is to ensure emotional, social, and religious safety.

Conclusion

Online spouse selection among Nigerian Muslims presents opportunities for efficiency, compatibility, and wider access, but also risks of moral conciliation, family exclusion, and cultural conflicts. Adhering to Islamic principles of piety, character, guardian's involvement, consultation, honesty, and avoidance of harm are essential to conserve marital and family stability.

Recommendations

1. Communities should be educated on Sharī'ah-compliant online courtship practices.
2. Families should actively supervise online interactions.
3. Platforms should include religiously aligned safeguards.
4. Prospective spouses should prioritize faith and character.
5. Parents and guardians should sensitise their children on the evils of online selection of spouses and courting as a kind of preventative measure.

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