

CONCEPT OF HALAL MATCHMAKING AND DATING SERVICES FOR MUSLIM MARRIAGE: HALAL CRITERIA FROM FATWA PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, halal matchmaking and dating services, including halal online dating and halal speed dating, have been widely introduced in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. A halal matchmaking and dating service is an emerging concept that addresses the contemporary and unique needs of Muslims seeking to form marital relationships while considering cultural and religious sensitivities. Previous studies have highlighted various Muslim needs regarding halal matchmaking and dating services. However, it remains unclear what criteria these services must meet in order to consider halal. Therefore, this study aims to identify the criteria that would make matchmaking and dating service halal. By doing so, it seeks to propose a framework for certifying halal matchmaking and dating services. The research employed library and online research methods, utilizing the web. It explored independent scholarly sites (journals) and general websites, including official fatwa websites, applying the Boolean Search Model based on logical operators (AND logic). Qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis were used to concisely summarize fatwa explanations and to perform coding and category construction to uncover criteria or themes. The study identified five criteria for matchmaking and dating services to be considered halal: 1) halal spouse, 2) intention for marriage, 3) personally identifiable information kept confidential, 4) meetings attended by a chaperone, such as a wali, mahram, matchmaker, or held in a public place to prevent zina, khalwa, and ikhtilat, 5) moral conduct with respect and honesty. It was also found that halal matchmaking and dating services are synonymous with arranging ta'aruf (introduction to know each other) opportunities for Muslim marriage and play a role in facilitating halal dating opportunities while connecting the ta'aruf stage to the khitbah stage.

Keywords: Halal, Matchmaking, Dating, Fatwa

1. INTRODUCTION

Halal matchmaking and dating services, such as halal online dating and halal speed dating, have recently emerged in various Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Sugimoto et al., 2023). Examples include AlKhattaba in Saudi Arabia, Baituljannah, Halal Wave, Cintaku, TillJannah.my, Soul Seekers, and Halal Speed Dating in Malaysia; Rumah Ta'aruf myQur'an, Mawaddah Indonesia, and Taarul ID in Indonesia; Sunnah Match, Muzz, SingleMuslim, and Islamic Singles in the UK; Salams in the USA; Salaam Swipe in Canada; Muslima in Australia; and Way to Nikah and Nikah Forever in India. Muslims need to use halal (lawful) methods when seeking marriage partners to avoid committing any haram (prohibited) acts such as premarital sex, cohabitation and free dating. Maintaining a halal-compliant lifestyle is required by Islam. The Qur'an states, "And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way" (QuranAl-Isra, 17:32). Halal matchmaking and dating service is an emerging concept that addresses contemporary and unique needs of Muslims seeking to form marital relationships while considering cultural and religious sensitivities (Al-Heeti, 2019).

In the past, Muslim marriage was the responsibility not only of the youth but also of their families, relatives, communities, and workplaces. When young people reached the appropriate age but could not find a marriage life partner, a succession of potential partners was introduced by adults close to them, and family-based "halal matchmaking" took place to ensure they did not engage in forbidden or haram acts. However, today, individualism is widespread, and the institution of communal marriage is weakening. We can observe a rapid decline in family-based arranged marriages in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. For example, Yusuf Abdur Rahman (2019), living in the UK, explicitly says: "The biggest challenge for many people is simply to identify the right person for marriage in the first place. One way to find a person may work for some and not for others. One of the issues we face in our communities is that not many people are arranging marriages anymore. Traditionally, aunts, uncles, and other community elders would be involved in matchmaking, with the ability to synchronize details and make suitable suggestions based on a pool of young people they knew in the locality or through family networks. Now, fewer people are doing it for various reasons. People are increasingly individualized, and communities have become fragmented." In other words, both individualization and the collapse of the collective marriage system are the social realities behind the popular use of halal matchmaking and dating services today.

Previous studies have identified four dimensions of the Muslim needs for halal matchmaking and dating services: religious needs (Muslim identity, privacy,

confidentiality, and hijab), psychological needs (self-determination, personal choice, and freedom), social needs (family involvement), and security needs for Muslim marriage seekers using halal matchmaking and dating services (Al-Saggaf, 2013; De Rooij, 2016; Sotoudeh et al., 2017; Al-Dawood et al., 2018; Rochadiat et al., 2018; Billaud, 2019; Nisa, 2021). However, it remains unclear what conditions a matchmaking and dating service must meet in order to be considered halal. Billaud (2019) noted that even halal matchmaking and dating services can be subject to controversy. The matchmaker in her research reported regularly receiving threats from others who believed his activities were haram. There is currently no halal certification system for matchmaking/dating services. Therefore, from the perspective of fatwa, this study aims to clarify the criteria that would make a matchmaking and dating service halal. By doing so, it seeks to establish a framework for certifying matchmaking and dating services as halal. Additionally, since any action leading to haram is also considered haram, it is important to incorporate preventive measures in the service to ensure it does not lead to haram actions. This would guarantee the halal nature of the matchmaking and dating services. This study clarifies the relationship between the concept of halal matchmaking and dating services and the conventional concepts of *ta'aruf* (introduction), *khitbah* (engagement), and *nikah* (marriage).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employed both library and online research methods, using the internet and the web. It explored independent scholarly sites (journals) and general websites, including official fatwa websites, applying the Boolean Search Model based on logical operators (AND logic). For example, the search terms included “halal,” “matchmaking,” “dating,” and “fatwa” (Mukherjee, 2012). The research followed seven steps in the library and online research process:

- i. Identifying the main concepts or keywords in question.
- ii. Searching for these terms in reference databases (e.g., IIUM Database Library EBSCO Discovery Service) and reviewing definitions of terms while identifying other terms (e.g. *ta'aruf*, *khitbah*, and *nikah*) used to describe the concept of halal matchmaking and dating services.
- iii. Conducting keyword searches, identifying subject headings, and reviewing abstracts and results or conclusions.
- iv. Searching the database to find relevant articles on the topic.
- v. Using internet search engines and subject directories to locate materials on the web (e.g., Google).
- a. Evaluating the authority and quality of the materials purposively on fatwa that were related with halal matchmaking and dating services.

- b. Properly citing the library and online materials (Hooley, T., Marriott, J., and Wellens, J., 2012; Conrad N. Hilton Library, 2024; Kennesaw State University, 2024).

Qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) and thematic analysis (Patton, 2015) were used in this study. Specifically, document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based) materials. Document analysis requires the examination and interpretation of data in order to extract meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The analytic process involves finding, selecting, making sense of, and synthesizing data contained in the documents. In this research, document analysis was used to summarize the explanations of fatwa concisely. Thematic analysis, on the other hand, is a form of pattern recognition within the documents, with emerging themes (criteria) becoming the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This process involves careful, focused re-reading and review of the documents. This research closely examined the selected documents, perform coding, and constructs categories based on the characteristics of the data to uncover themes. In summary, the research used document analysis to summarize the main points of each fatwa and then applied thematic analysis to extract common themes across the various fatwas.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Concept of Halal Matchmaking from Fatwa Perspective*

3.1.1 *Concept of Halal and Haram in Marriage and Gender Relationship*

According to Al-Qaradawi (2018), halal means lawful, and haram means prohibited. The concepts of halal and haram have been known to people since ancient times. However, different cultures and communities have varying definitions and understandings of what is lawful and what is prohibited. The Islamic view of halal and haram is clear and simple because what is lawful and what is prohibited is the right of Allah alone. The Qur'an (Qur'an, An-Nahl 16:116) mentions: "But say not—for any false thing that your tongues may put forth — 'This is lawful, and this is forbidden,' so as to ascribe false things to Allah. For those who ascribe false things to Allah will never prosper." Therefore, "nothing is haram except what is prohibited by a sound and explicit nass from the Law-Giver, Allah" (Al-Qaradawi, 2018). Nass refers to either a verse of the Qur'an or a clear, authentic, and explicit Sunnah (the practice or sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims obey not only Allah but also Prophet Muhammad, as the Qur'an says: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those in

authority among you” (Qur’an, An-Nisa 4:59).

Islam is a way of life, and the concept of halal and haram are not limited to food and drink. For example, it is not only haram to consume alcoholic beverages, but it is also haram to transport, buy, sell, or produce alcoholic beverages or intoxicants. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Wine is cursed from ten angles: the wine itself, the one who squeezes (the grapes, etc.), the one for whom it is squeezed, the one who sells it, the one who buys it, the one who carries it, the one to whom it is carried, the one who consumes its price, the one who drinks it, and the one who pours it” (Sunan Ibn Majah 3380). This means that not only certain things are prohibited, but also certain actions are prohibited. In this way, the concepts of halal and haram encompass a wide range of meanings.

Al-Qaradawi (2018) specifies twelve haram acts in marriage and gender relationships, as follows:

- i. *Zina* (fornication and adultery)
- ii. *Khalwa* (close proximity between a man and a woman being alone in a closed private place)
- iii. *Ikhtilat* (unnecessary intermingling with the opposite sex/gender in such a way that their bodies can come in contact)
- iv. Looking with desire at the opposite sex
- v. Looking at the *awrah* (private parts) of others
- vi. Sexual perversion, such as homosexuality
- vii. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim man
- viii. A Muslim man marrying a non-Muslim woman, except the People of the Book (Jews and Christians)
- ix. Monasticism
- x. Marriage proposal to a divorced or widowed woman during her *iddah* (waiting period during which she is not allowed to remarry)
- xi. Marriage proposal to someone who is already engaged
- xii. Marrying a *mahram* (a person who is prohibited to marry) For example, there are eight types of women that a man is prohibited from marrying: a) the mother, b) the father's wife (whether divorced or widowed), c) the daughter, d) the sister, e) the paternal aunt, f) the maternal aunt, g) the brother's daughter, and h) the sister's daughter.

The first five haram acts mentioned above are connected to the prevention of *zina* and the protection of faith and family lineage. For example, the Qur’an (Qur’an, Al-Isra 17:32) says: “And do not approach *zina* (fornication, adultery, and unlawful sexual intercourse). Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way.” Similarly, *khalwa* is prohibited because it may lead to *zina*. Men and

women should lower their gaze, and women should avoid excessive makeup when meeting other men. They should not reveal their body line or wear clothes that expose their underwear. Women should not attract men in order to prevent *zina*. Al-Qaradawi (2018) also states that “whatever is conducive to or leads toward the haram is itself haram.” *Zina* is prohibited because “it leads to confusion of lineage, child abuse, the breaking-up of families, bitterness in relationships, the spread of venereal diseases, and a general laxity in morals.” In short, it was found that controlling *khalwa*, *ikhtilat*, and one's gaze at the opposite sex is crucial in maintaining halal relationships between men and women. Furthermore, the spouse must be a halal spouse (e.g., Muslim, non-mahram, and iddah-free).

3.1.2 Permissibility of Matchmaking and Dating Services: Fatwa Perspective

As dating is defined as “the activity of having a romantic relationship with somebody, or meeting people who you might in the future have a romantic relationship with” (Oxford Dictionary, 2023), from the perspective of Islamic law, the conventional matchmaking and dating services (online or face-to-face) contain haram elements and therefore require a fatwa on their permissibility.

A) *Fatwa 1: Mufti Federal Territory's Office of Malaysia (2019)*

Question:

“What is the ruling of using dating page to find our partner and uploading and pictures on it?”

Summarized Answer:

- i. Permissibility of Online Marriage Platforms: Using websites to find a marriage partner is permissible in Islam, as long as the intention is pure. These platforms should be used responsibly, avoiding immoral content or actions. It is *haram* to post immodest pictures or images designed to attract unwanted attention. Platform administrators enforce guidelines that protect users' privacy and ensure proper conduct between men and women.
- ii. Ruling on Looking at an *Ajnabi* (Non-Mahram): It is basically forbidden to look at someone of the opposite gender without necessity as stated in the Qur'an Surah al-Nur 24:30-31. This helps keep modesty and prevent harm. However, it is permissible to look at a potential spouse before marriage to assess compatibility. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) allowed looking at a woman one intends to marry, as long as the intention is sincere.
- iii. The Limits of Gazing: While it is permissible to look at a potential

spouse, only the face and hands may be viewed, as these are the parts of a woman that may be seen according to Islamic law. Repeatedly looking at a future spouse is also allowed to prevent regret after marriage.

- iv. *Tabarruj* (Excessive Adornment or Beautifying): Women should avoid excessive adornment or beauty that attracts men. The Qur'an (Sura al-Ahzab 33:33) forbids women from displaying themselves in the manner of the pre-Islamic era of Arabia. Muslim scholars agree that presenting beauty inappropriately is forbidden, except in front of one's husband.
- v. Conclusion: Matchmaking websites only for the purpose of marriage are permissible, provided their use aligns with Islamic principles. However, if used for *haram* purposes to promote sinful behaviors, they become impermissible. The key is to keep modesty, privacy, and proper etiquette in interactions.

B) Fatwa 2: Dar Al-Ifta Egypt (2015)

Question:

"What is the ruling on internet chatting or emails with women?"

Summarized Answer:

In Islamic law, it is permissible for men and women to converse with each other, provided they adhere to certain conditions. They should avoid being alone in a private space where others cannot enter without permission (*khalwa*). This is supported by evidence from the Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly opinions. For instance, the Qur'anic story of Prophet Moses and two women (Qur'an, Al-Qasas 28:23) shows that interaction between men and women is permissible in the presence of others. A hadith about the Prophet and his companion Salman visiting Abu Ad-Darda, where Salman speaks with Abu Ad-Darda's wife, illustrates that conversations between non-related men and women are allowed for legitimate purposes. Another hadith involving the Prophet and a woman from the Ansar indicates that private conversations in public are permissible as long as there is no temptation or inappropriate behavior. Scholars like Ibn Hajar and Al-Qari emphasize that private conversations are permissible as long as there is no risk of immoral behavior or temptation. The Prophet's wives also played a role in spreading knowledge, with women often narrating hadiths and contributing to Islamic scholarship. In conclusion, men and women can converse in Islamic law, provided they respect the boundaries of propriety and avoid improper speech.

C) Fatwa 3: The Fatwa Department of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2010)

Question:

“Dating sites for Islamic marriage function as a link between young men and women who have the intention of marrying. Through these sites, males and females get to know each other and exchange personal information, however, phone numbers and personal emails aren’t exchanged. Personal matters are focused on and in case both accepted each other, the man is given the woman’s family’s phone number where he contacts them to arrange matters related to marriage. Does this method violate the teachings of Sharia?”

Summarized Answer:

There are basically two types of dating or matchmaking websites. First, *shari’ah*-compliant websites follow Islamic rules and ethical guidelines, ensuring that individuals with corrupt intentions are kept out. It is permissible to use and benefit from the websites. However, despite the existence of *shari’ah*-compliant platforms, fatwa advises against relying on online platforms for marriage due to the significant risks involved. Second, non-*shari’ah*-compliant websites do not adhere to Islamic principles, fail to protect personal information, and are often managed by dishonest individuals. Participation in such websites is prohibited.

D) Fatwa 4: Darul Ifta UK (2004)

Question:

“Is marrying via the internet and matrimonial agencies permissible?”

Summarized Answer:

- i. Permissibility of Online Interactions: What is *halal* (lawful) in general remains lawful online, and what is *haram* (unlawful) remains unlawful, whether through the internet or other means such as phones.
- ii. Matrimonial Agencies: Using matrimonial agencies is permissible as long as they adhere to Islamic rules. It is important to avoid unnecessary interactions with the opposite gender, especially without a valid reason, and to remain within the bounds of *shari’ah*.
- iii. Traditional Arrangements: In traditional Islamic societies, finding a marriage partner was typically the responsibility of family, relatives and friends. However, due to migration and the presence of new Muslims without familial support, matrimonial agencies have become necessary and permissible.
- iv. Chat Rooms: It is impermissible to have informal conversations through online chat rooms, messengers, or emails with the opposite gender, as

this would be akin to inappropriate interaction in person or over the phone.

- v. Conclusion: Using matrimonial agency services is allowed if conducted within the boundaries of *shari'ah*, but unnecessary interactions with the opposite gender should be avoided. Informal communication and chat rooms with the opposite gender should be avoided as it is considered unlawful.

E) Fatwa 5: British Fatwa Council (2022)

Question:

"How can I meet a potential partner according to sharia?" "I have proposed to follow four conditions for the Halal dating: presence of family member/members as a chaperone, the meeting is in a public place, agreement to be respectful and courteous, genuine intention to marry. Can we use the term Halal Dating as a strap line?"

Summarized Answer:

Marriage in Islam is a sacred Sunnah that unites a man and a woman in a respectful bond. Islam provides clear guidelines for interactions between men and women before marriage, emphasizing modesty and the avoidance of temptation. A man and a woman may meet for the purpose of getting to know each other, but only in the presence of a *mahram* (relative) or in a public place to ensure they are not alone. The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against private meetings between man and woman, stating that the devil becomes the third party in such situations. The Qur'an advises both men and women to lower their gaze and maintain modesty, prohibiting actions that lead to *zina* as they are considered an evil path. When these conditions are followed according to Islamic law, interactions can be considered "halal dating," meaning they comply with Islamic principles, respect boundaries, and avoid sin.

F) Fatwa 6: Islamweb. net (2002 & 1999)

Question 1:

"Is using Islamic marriage sites to find a husband, Halal?"

Summarized Answer 1:

The internet is a communication tool and using it to find a marriage partner is permissible under Islamic law, provided the websites used are trustworthy and adhere to Islamic rules. Reliable matchmaking and dating websites prioritize confidentiality and do not allow the exchange of photos, as sharing pictures can lead to potential harm and misuse. While it is acceptable to seek a partner online through reliable websites, this method is not the most recommended.

The preferred safest approach is to seek a spouse through traditional means, such as through matchmakers or family connections.

Question 2:

“What is the position of the scholars about the exchange of photos for the purpose of marriage and with Islamic matrimonial agencies?”

Summarized Answer 2:

Matrimonial agencies should only facilitate contact between the man and the woman’s family, ensuring all subsequent actions adhere to Islamic law. The agency’s staff must be reliable, and any activities beyond this would require further religious clarification. In Islam, a man may look at a woman’s face and hands before marriage but only in the presence of her *mahram* (relative). Private meetings or seclusion are prohibited. The exchange of pictures is discouraged, as it may lead to unlawful contact. But, if necessary, a man may view a woman’s picture through her *wali* (legal guardian) under the following conditions: the picture is modest, returned promptly, and viewed with serious intention for marriage.

To summarize the above fatwa, matchmaking and dating services (online or offline) are considered halal based on the following five themes or criteria:

Theme 1: Intention

Service users should only have a genuine intention to find a halal marriage partner and service providers must clearly confirm the user’s intention (Fatwa 1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

Theme 2: Personal Information

Service providers should not disclose any information that could potentially identify a person to users, as this could lead to a person approaching another person of the opposite sex. Protection of personal information is necessary to prevent *khalwa*, *ikhtilat* and *zina* (Fatwa 1, 3, 6).

Theme 3: Talking with Opposite Gender

When a person has a goal of finding a halal spouse, he or she is permitted to speak directly to the opposite sex. However, care must be taken to avoid *khalwa* or *ikhtilat*. As a preventative measure, speaking in a public place or having a chaperon (usually a male relative) for women is necessary (Fatwa 2, 4, 5, 6)

Theme 4: Looking at (Pictures of) Opposite Gender

When a person has a goal of finding a halal spouse, he or she is permitted to look directly to the opposite sex. However, for women, the only parts that may be shown to men are the face and hands, and immodest clothing and *tabarruj*

are not permitted (Fatwa 1, 5, 6).

Theme 5: General Conduct

Men and women are expected to show respect with each other, and immoral behavior, improper speech, and lying are not permitted (Fatwa 1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

Table 1. Fatwa Themes (Criteria) of Permissibility to Use Matchmaking/ Dating Services

Themes	Intention	Personal information	Interaction with the opposite gender	Viewing Pictures of the Opposite Gender	General Conduct
Fatwa 1	Good intention of marriage	Kept private	-	Permissible only with face and hand and do not posting immodest pictures (no <i>tabarruj</i>)	No immoral conduct
Fatwa 2	Legitimate purpose of marriage	-	Permissible but without <i>khalwa</i>	-	No improper speech
Fatwa 3	No corruption intention	Protected	-	-	No dishonesty
Fatwa 4	-	-	Permissible but no <i>ikhtilat</i> (unnecessary interactions) and no private chat room	-	-
Fatwa 5	Purpose of getting to know each other	-	Permissible in the presence of a relative (<i>mahram</i>) or in a public place	Permissible to meet	Modesty
Fatwa 6	Serious intent for marriage	Confidential	No private meetings and seclusion (<i>khalwa</i>)	Permissible only, if necessary, through her legal guardian (<i>wali</i>)	Trustworthy

Ali et al. (2019) studied the attitudes of young British Muslims toward halal dating and identified the minimum requirements for halal dating. According to their findings, dating is permissible under the following conditions:

- i. A chaperone is present to avoid *khalwa* and *ikhtilat*.

- ii. Physical intimacy is avoided.
- iii. The intention is marriage.

The study emphasizes that a chaperone is necessary to avoid *khalwa* (seclusion) and *ikhtilat* (intermingling) between man and woman. Looking at and talking to the opposite gender is generally allowed in seeking a halal spouse, provided the boundaries of modesty and respect are maintained. Additionally, personal information should remain confidential to prevent any potential harm or inappropriate actions, such as *zina*. Good conduct is expected, with respect for one another, and any immoral behavior, inappropriate speech, or dishonesty is prohibited. Thus, halal dating can be defined as an individual and collective process of finding a halal spouse within the limits of Islamic law. It involves matchmaking, which is the activity of arranging dating for marriages between others (Oxford Dictionary, 2023).

To summarize the findings, there are five criteria for matchmaking and dating to be considered halal:

- i. Halal spouse
- ii. Intention for marriage
- iii. Confidentiality of personal information
- iv. A chaperone or public meeting to prevent *khalwa*, *ikhtilat*, and *zina*
- v. Moral conduct with respect and honesty

If any of these conditions are not met, the service will not be considered halal.

3.2 Relating Halal Matchmaking to *Ta'aruf*, *Khitbah*, and *Nikah*

In Muslim tradition, there are three ways to avoid haram of *zina*, that is, *ta'aruf* (introduction), *khitbah* (engagement) and *nikah* (marriage). This research further analyzes how the concept of halal matchmaking and dating services is related to these concepts.

3.2.1 Concept of *Ta'aruf* (Introduction) in Islam

Ta'aruf means “getting acquainted” or “knowing each other” (Fathoni and Hidayah, 2023). It is the process of getting to know someone closely, whether they are a friend or an acquaintance. In the Qur'an, Allah says:

“O people! Indeed, we have created you from a male and a female, then We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another (li ta'arafu). The most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is the most pious. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

(Qur'an, Al-Hujurat 49:13)

This verse clearly explains that Allah created men and women, as well as tribes and nations, so that they may get to know one another.

In the context of marriage, *ta'aruf* is a process of acquaintance that aims to lead to marriage, not just a simple desire to get to know someone. In other words, "*ta'aruf* is a process of exploring and getting to know potential life partners with the help of a person, or through a trusted institution acting as a mediator in choosing a partner according to one's desired criteria. It is an initial step towards marriage." (Fathoni and Hidayah, 2023). Both *khitbah* (engagement) and *ta'aruf* are processes to get to know a potential marriage partner. While in *khitbah*, the marriage partner is fixed to one person, in *ta'aruf*, the marriage partner has not yet been specified. The *ta'aruf* process takes place before *khitbah*, engagement, or proposing marriage.

According to the "Garis Panduan Ta'aruf Menurut Islam (Ta'aruf Guidelines According to Islam)" from the Mufti Federal Territory's Office of Malaysia (2024), the following are the guidelines for *ta'aruf* between men and women:

- i. Meeting with a Guardian or Mahram: A woman should be accompanied by a guardian or mahram when meeting a man.
- ii. Using a Trusted Intermediary: It is recommended to have a trusted intermediary who can help ensure the interaction follows Islamic principles.
- iii. Intention for Marriage: The intention behind the interaction should be for marriage, not just casual conversation.
- iv. Avoiding Being Alone Together: It is forbidden for both a man and a woman to be alone together without a mahram, unless there is a necessary purpose.
- v. Properly Covering the Awrah: Both men and women should dress modestly and cover their awrah (private parts).
- vi. Respecting Manners in Looking and Talking: Both parties should lower their gaze and avoid speaking in a sweet or flirtatious manner that may provoke desire.
- vii. No Physical Contact: There should be no physical contact between men and women who are not mahram.
- viii. Avoiding Meetings Without Necessity: Meetings without a valid reason could lead to suspicion and temptation and should be avoided.

These eight criteria align closely with those for halal matchmaking and dating services.

Ta'aruf is usually carried out over a short period, starting with the introduction of the candidate by a third party and progressing to the meeting stage of the two parties, accompanied by their *mahram* (a family member with whom marriage is considered permanently unlawful), to allow them to see each other. Fathoni and Hidayah (2023) explain four characteristics of the *ta'aruf* process:

- i. *Ta'aruf* must be conducted within the limits permitted by Islam, such as avoiding *khalwa* (being alone together) or *ikhtilat* (unnecessary mixing of genders).
- ii. There must be a clear vision of what constitutes a good man and a good woman according to Islam.
- iii. The involvement of parents or guardians is essential to ensure the right choice is made.
- iv. *Istikharah* (prayer seeking guidance for the best decision) should be performed.

They also identify five characteristics of *ta'aruf*:

- i. *Ta'aruf* matchmakers can come from various parties, such as parents, family members, teachers, friends, or trusted Muslim community leaders.
- ii. *Ta'aruf* should be carried out by mutual consent, without coercion or pressure.
- iii. Both parties must have good intentions before initiating *ta'aruf*, as this is key to ensuring happiness and a positive relationship.
- iv. All information exchanged should be kept confidential. This prevents slander or backbiting if the process needs to be canceled. Confidentiality is prioritized as everyone has the right to maintain their privacy.
- v. Both parties must conduct thorough investigations into each other's background. If both feel confident, marriage may proceed immediately, without a *khitbah* (engagement) period. All processes should be carried out in a halal manner.

Juswandi et al. (2023) outline the procedures of *ta'aruf* in Islam:

- i. Exchanging Biodata: This process involves men and women exchanging biodata including photos through matchmakers. They perform *istikharah* and discuss the potential match with their respective parents.
- ii. Sending Envoys: This involves sending representatives to have better understood a potential partner and their family.
- iii. Visiting Her Parents: If a man is interested in proposing to a woman, it is recommended in Islam that he visits her parents to establish a friendly relationship.

- iv. Facilitating Communication: During *ta'aruf*, both parties ask questions about each other's likes, dislikes, and general background.
- v. Avoiding Being Alone: Once marriage is approved by their parents, bringing the woman together arbitrarily is prohibited in Islam. The man and the woman should not be alone without a *mahram* present.

3.2.2 Concept of *Khitbah* (Engagement) in Islam

According to the Mufti of the Federal Territory's Office of Malaysia (2021), *khitbah* (engagement) is the first step toward a happy marriage. When a man is ready to choose a woman to be his wife, he informs her of his intention and notifies his family. If both parties agree to the proposal, a contract is formed. *Khitbah* refers to the period between when a couple expresses the intention of getting married and when they get to know each other well before actually tying the knot.

According to Salwa Shofiatul Khulqi et al. (2023), *khitbah* refers to the formal request made by a man to a woman, or vice versa, expressing the intention to marry. This can be done directly or indirectly through intermediaries, in accordance with the provisions of *shari'ah*. The legislation surrounding *khitbah* (engagement) in Islam is derived from the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says:

"There is no blame upon you whether you hint at a khitbah to such women or keep the proposal hidden in your hearts. Allah knows that you will think of them in that connection. But do not make any secret engagement with them and speak openly in an honorable manner. Do not resolve the marriage tie until the ordained term has come to its end. Know well that Allah knows even what is in your hearts. So, have fear of Him and know well that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing."

(Al-Baqarah 2:235).

There are at least three benefits and pieces of wisdom associated with *khitbah*:

- i. It gives both the bride and groom the opportunity to get to know each other. Marriage is a firm commitment and not something that can be easily dissolved. Couples need time to think carefully before making this decision, and *khitbah* provides this period in a halal manner.
- ii. It allows female guardians the opportunity to assess the qualities of the prospective son-in-law.
- iii. It gives women enough time to prepare themselves, both physically and mentally, to follow and live with their husband (Salwa Shofiatul Khulqi et al., 2023).

But Aliyu Alhaji Rabi'u et al. (2019) recommend that the *khitbah* period “should be made as brief as reasonably possible to eliminate the chances of illicit relationships.” Abuses and malpractice in the *khitbah* and courting behavior by couples and their families can adversely affect the moral standing of matrimonial homes and the larger society. According to a study of Muslim couples conducted in northern Nigeria, 133 out of 241 participants engaged in several haram acts during the engagement period: 50 were kissing, 26 were hugging, and 24 were massaging one another (Aliyu Alhaji Rabi'u et al., 2019).

Seeing and conversing with a potential marriage partner is permitted under Islamic law. In one hadith narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“When one of you asks a woman for marriage, if he is able to look at what will induce him to marry her, he should do so.” He (Jabir) said: “I asked a girl in marriage, and I used to look at her secretly until I saw what induced me to marry her. I, therefore, married her.” (Abu Dawud 2082).

Abu Hurairah reported: “I was in the company of Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) when a man came and informed him that he had contracted to marry a woman of the Ansar (local residents of Medina known as the helpers). Thereupon, the Messenger of Allah said: ‘Did you cast a glance at her?’ He said: ‘No.’ He said: ‘Go and cast a glance at her, for there is something in the eyes of the Ansar.’ (The Book of Marriage, Chapter: It is recommended for the one who wants to marry a woman to look at her face and hands before proposing marriage to her, Sahih Muslim 1424).

Both the man and the woman who are engaged in a marriage proposal are still considered strangers to each other under Islamic law. Therefore, they are forbidden from having sexual intercourse or engaging in any activity that leads to it. They are only allowed to see each other and get to know each other within the boundaries set by Islamic law. As *khitbah* is made in a commonly known manner, its cancellation usually has social consequences, such as tension and hostility between two families and rumors in society. (Swararahima, 2020). In order to avoid the negative effects of *khitbah* cancellation, some Muslims prefer to take the process of getting to know each other (*ta’aruf*) through courtship, which is claimed to have no social consequences in the event of annulment or separation and take *khitbah* before marriage if they feel that they are suitable for each other, so that the possibility of an annulment is smaller.

3.2.3 Concept of Nikah (Marriage) in Islam

Marriage, as defined by the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him), is the only lawful way for a man and a woman to have an intimate relationship in Islam. Marriage is considered a religious, social, moral, and sacred contract, referred to in the Qur'an (Qur'an, An-Nisa 4:21) as a "strong covenant" (*mithaqan ghalizan*). In Islamic law, it signifies a union or 'aqd. The Arabic word for marriage is nikah, and the Qur'an in Surah al-Baqarah 2:235 refers to it as a "marriage contract" (*uqdatan nikahi*). The objectives of marriage, as stated in the Qur'an, are three:

- i. To increase the population: Allah has ordained: "O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord who created you from a single soul (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Hawwa or Eve), and from them both, He created many men and women." (Qur'an, An-Nisa 4:1). Sharmin and Azad (2018) regard marriage as the union of two souls for affection and two bodies for procreation, which also legalizes children.
- ii. To protect chastity and moral excellence: The Qur'an Surah an-Nisa 4:24 says: "Also (forbidden are) women already married, except those (slaves) whom your right hand possesses. Thus, has Allah ordained for you. All others are lawful, provided you seek them in marriage with mahr (bridal gifts given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage) from your property, desiring chastity, not committing illegal sexual intercourse. So, with those of whom you have enjoyed sexual relations, give them their mahr as prescribed; but if after the mahr is prescribed, you agree mutually to give more, there is no sin on you. Surely, Allah is Ever All-Knowing, All-Wise." Abdullah narrated that "the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said to us: 'O young men, whoever among you can afford it, let him get married (*yankihu*), for it is more effective in lowering the gaze and guarding chastity. And whoever cannot, then let him fast, for it will be a restraint for him.'" (The Book of Marriage, Chapter: Encouragement to Marry, Sunan an-Nasa'i 3209).
- iii. To provide not only sexual pleasure but mutual tranquility, affection, and mercy that can be attained through cooperation and understanding: The Qur'an also says: "And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought." (Qur'an, ar-Rum 30:21).

The purpose of marriage in Islam is not just for physical satisfaction but also for psychological and spiritual fulfillment. This verse highlights tranquility (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*) as divine signs in the creation of spouses for one another. It serves as a reminder that the essence of marriage is not only a legal and religious "contract" but also the peace and contentment that come with it. Tranquility is one of the major purposes of marriage. Love is the bridge that connects hearts, and mercy is the forgiveness that repairs cracks

in this bridge, ensuring its strength and longevity. Marriage is half of the religion of Islam. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, “When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of the religion; so, let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half.” (The Book of Marriage: Mishkat al-Masabih 3096).

Muslim marriage seekers should understand these purposes of marriage when using halal matchmaking and dating services.

The research could relate the concept of halal matchmaking and dating services to *ta’aruf*, *khitbah*, *nikah* as shown in Figure 1. Halal matchmaking and dating services play a specific role in arranging halal dating opportunities, connecting the *ta’aruf* stage to the *khitbah* stage.

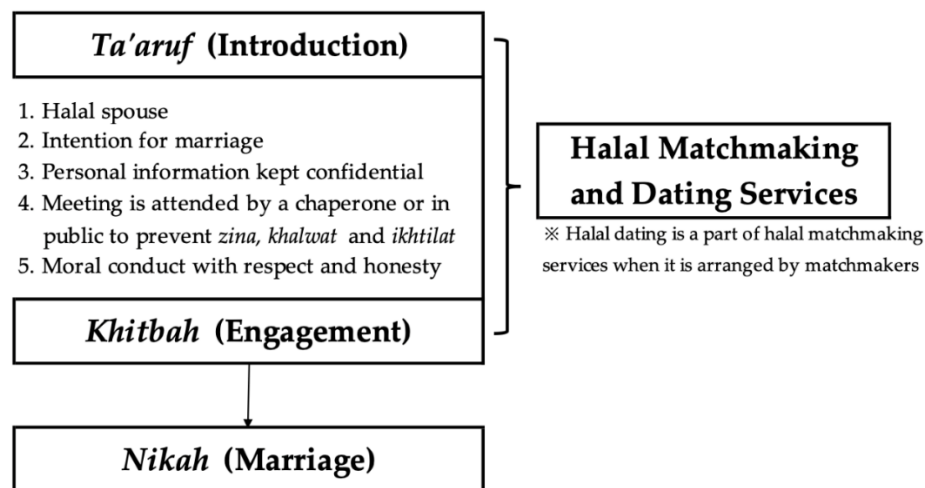


Figure 1. The Concept of Halal Matchmaking and Dating Service and its Relationship with *Ta’aruf*, *Khitbah* and *Nikah*.

The significance and impact of the results are four-fold:

- i. Knowledge contributions: This study is the first to clarify and define the concept of halal matchmaking and dating services for Muslim marriage from a fatwa perspective. It provides clear and authentic knowledge necessary for establishing halal matchmaking and dating services.
- ii. Muslim marriage seekers: The study aims to increase the availability of halal matchmaking and dating services for Muslim marriage in Japan. The research facilitated the development of halal matchmaking and dating services tailored to the needs of Muslim marriage seekers.
- iii. Muslim community leadership: The study offers valuable insights for Muslim community leaders to develop and practice halal matchmaking and dating services for Muslim marriage.
- iv. Conventional marriage matchmaking and dating service providers: Not only Muslim matchmakers but non-Muslim matchmaking companies

can use this research to adapt their services to be halal and offer halal matchmaking and dating services for Muslim marriage.

4. CONCLUSION

The researcher identified the *shari'ah* requirements for matchmaking to be halal, with reference to fatwa, and also related the concept of halal matchmaking to *ta'aruf*, *khitbah*, *nikah*, and halal dating. The requirements are:

- i. A halal spouse
- ii. Intention for marriage
- iii. Personally identifiable information kept confidential
- iv. Meeting (talking and looking) attended by a chaperone (such as a *wali*, *mahram*, or matchmaker) or taking place in a public space to prevent *zina*, *khalwa*, and *ikhtilat*
- v. Moral conduct with respect and honesty

When these conditions are met, matchmaking and dating can also be halal. In fact, halal matchmaking is essentially the same as the traditional *ta'aruf* model, except that halal matchmaking and dating services, such as dating apps, offer a much broader range of potential Muslim marriage partners and a more global selection than traditional *ta'aruf*.

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