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AUTHORS: Acep Muslim, Yessika Nurmasari, Lina Kamila

PAGES: 23-39

ORIGINAL PDF URL: https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/4116775

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Digital Media and Islamic Matchmaking in Indonesia:
The Case of "Kelas Jodoh"

Acep MUSLIM[*]
Yessika NURMASARI[**]
Lina Kamila RAHMASARI[***]

Abstract

The increase of religiosity in Indonesia, which has coincided with the development of digital media, has led to the emergence of various services that incorporate religious values, including in the areas of education and the facilitation of the marriage process. This study examines "Kelas Jodoh" (KJ) or "Matchmaking Class" as a case study to understand the role of digital media-supported Islamic matchmaking organizers within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking practices in Indonesia, particularly against the backdrop of rising personal piety and the use of digital media. It investigates how Islamic values governing pre-marital male-female relationships interact with the technological affordances of digital media, contributing to the evolution of digital religion. The study applies a qualitative case study method, with data collected through interviews with the KJ owner and manager, as well as with members (KJ's participants). The findings indicate that KJ represents a fusion of increasing Islamic piety among urban Muslims and the growth of digital media, thus continuing to shape and expand the horizon of digital religion. The study also demonstrates how KJ's use of digital tools and its mediator role reflect practices akin to those of modern Islamic movements such as the Tarbiyah group.

Keywords: Digital Religion, Islamic Matchmaking, Kelas Jodoh, Indonesia

Endonezya'da Dijital Medya ve İslami Evlilik Uygulamaları:
"Kelas Jodoh" Örneği

Öz

Dindarlığın artışı, dijital medyanın gelişimiyle paralel olarak, dini değerleri içeren çeşitli hizmetlerin ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır; bunlar arasında eğitim ve evlilik sürecinin kolaylaştırılması da bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma Endonezya'daki mevcut İslami tanışma uygulamaları bağlamında, dijital medya destekli İslami tanışma organizatörlerinin rolünü anlamak için "Kelas Jodoh" adlı siteyi bir durum çalışması olarak ele almakta ve özellikle dijital medya kullanımına bağlı olarak artış gösteren dindarlık tutumları ekseninde bu yapıyı analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, evlilik öncesi erkek-kadın ilişkilerini yöneten İslami değerlerin dijital medyanın teknolojik olanaklarıyla nasıl etkileşime girdiğini ve dijital dinin evrimine katkıda bulunduğunu araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, KJ'nin sahibi ve yöneticisi ile yapılan röportajlar ve üyelerle (KJ'nin katılımcıları) toplanan verilerle bir vaka çalışması yöntemi uygulamaktadır. Bulgular, KJ'nin kentsel Müslümanlar arasında artan dindarlık ve dijital medyanın büyümesinin bir birleşimini temsil ettiğini ve böylece dijital dinin şekillendirmeye ve

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* Assist. Prof., M. A., Acep Muslim, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: acepmuslim@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0000-0002-1353-5368, Bandung, Endonezya

** Assist. Prof., M. A., Yessika Nurmasari, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: y.nurmasari@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0000-0002-3349-4786, Bandung, Endonezya

*** Assist. Prof., M. A., Lina Kamila Rahmasari, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: linakamila@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0009-0002-1587-5603, Bandung, Endonezya

genişletmeye devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, KJ'nin dijital araçları kullanma ve arabulucu rolünün Tarbiyah grubu gibi modern İslami hareketlerin uygulamalarına benzediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Keywords: Dijital Din, İslam Evliliği, Kelas Jodoh, Endonezya

Introduction

In the past three decades, there has been a noticeable increase in religiosity and the presence of religion in public spaces across Indonesia and many Southeast Asian countries (Fealy & White, 2008; Hefner, 2010; Qurtuby, 2013; Reuter & Horstmann, 2013). This strengthening of religiosity is, in part, seen as an individual's response to the 'radicalized processes of modernity,' which have pushed them to embed themselves more deeply in or establish closer connections with their religion (Reuter & Horstmann, 2013). This trend is accompanied by a rise in conservatism within religious practices and its manifestations in the political sphere (Bruinessen, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2020). Simultaneously, this increase in religiosity coincides with the growth of information and communication technology, including digital media. The internet penetration rate in Indonesia has reached 79.5% (KataData, 2024), with Indonesians averaging over 7 hours online daily. On a global scale, Indonesia consistently ranks among the top 5 countries in terms of active social media usage (WorldPopulationReview, 2024). The intersection of strengthened religiosity and advancements in digital technology has led to various forms of digital religion (Campbell, 2013; Campbell & Bellar, 2023).

Campbell (2023) defines digital religion as "a term used to describe how religious individuals and groups engage with digital media and emerging technologies" (p. 1). The engagement between religious practices and digital media continues to evolve and shape each other. For instance, it has transformed from the Web 1.0 era, which primarily positioned the religious followers as consumers, to the era of social media, where they actively participate as creators. In addition to its interactive characteristics, the relationship between religion and digital media increasingly reflects a blending of online and offline experiences. To illustrate this phenomenon, Campbell (2013) introduces the concept of digital religion, which emphasizes the integration of online and offline religious practices, where digital media both influences and is influenced by religious activities. Scholars also use terms like Religion 2.0 to describe the merging of real-world and virtual-world religious practices, highlighting how digital technologies mediate and enhance religious experiences (Cheong & Ess, 2012).

In Indonesia, one example of how digital religion has continually evolved through the interplay between technological advancements and religious trends can be observed in the use of messaging apps. In the mid-2000s, there was already innovation in using Short Message Service (SMS) to deliver religious messages (Fakhruroji, 2015). A decade later, as messaging apps evolved to be internet-based with more features, new digital religious practices emerged, such as *One Day One Juz* movement (Muslim, 2017; Nisa, 2018).

Recently, digital communication tools have also become widely used in the process of *taaruf* or Islamic matchmaking (Nisa, 2021). The trend of Islamic matchmaking has gained popularity

alongside the increasing religious awareness in the post New Order era. Since the mid-2000s, campaigns through books and Islamic films have encouraged young Muslims to avoid dating which they consider as a sin. Later, this trend has evolved beyond mere campaigns but also help to facilitate in finding a Muslim mate to marry. Various organizers, both community-based and corporate, now offer comprehensive matchmaking services, ranging from pre-marital classes to introductions. In this process, they utilize a range of digital media tools, from WhatsApp groups to specialized apps. Kelas Jodoh, in this context, is an institution that facilitates the preparation of Muslims in Indonesia for marriage, covering both educational aspects and matchmaking processes.

In Indonesia, research on digital media-based matchmaking remains limited. One study conducted by Nisa (2021) views that the trend of Online Islamic matchmaking as part of a halal (permissible in Islam) lifestyle. By examining cases such as *Rumah Taaruf MyQuran* and *Indonesia tanpa Pacaran in Indonesia*, as well as the *Soul Seekers of Marriage Conference Halal Speed Dating* in Malaysia, Nisa identifies similarities between these online-offline matchmaking movements and the matchmaking practices within Islamic groups, particularly *Tarbiyah* group. Additionally, she concludes that these matchmaking platforms help women exercise their agency, demonstrating how women can overcome their shyness and take control of the process of finding a marriage partner. There are few other studies about Islamic matchmaking, but mostly remain focus on offline method. An example of typical study is one conducted by Rusdi (2019) on the Taaruf practice organized by *Majelis Calon Ayah Amanah (MCAA)*.

Using "Kelas Jodoh" (@kelasjodohfsk) or KJ as a case study, this research aims to examine the relationship or position of KJ within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking traditions in Indonesia, as well as in the context of increasing personal piety and the use of various digital media to facilitate expressions of religious commitment. KJ is an institution that facilitates pre-marital education from both knowledge and spiritual aspects through a series of marriage classes. Additionally, it helps Muslims who wish to find a potential partner through an Islamic matchmaking process *(taaruf)*. KJ was chosen as a case because the pre-marital education and matchmaking facilitation processes at KJ are supported by various digital platforms, including Instagram (for campaigns), a dedicated app (for learning and partner search), and WhatsApp (for more intensive communication with potential partners). In this case, the KJ example will show how these various digital platforms also play a role in the overall process of pre-marital education and Islamic matchmaking that they facilitate. Participants are required to pay a fee to join the marriage classes and matchmaking services. Furthermore, the study also aims to focus on how Islamic values regarding the regulation of male-female relationships before marriage interplay with the technological affordances (Hogan & Wellman, 2012) of digital media and shape a form of digital religion.

Marriage and Islamic Matchmaking in Indonesia

Marriage is considered a significant life stage in Indonesia, including for young people. Several studies on Indonesian youth indicate that one of their personal aspirations is to become more religious and to have a harmonious family (Parker & Nilan, 2013). However, this does not necessarily mean that they view marriage as a requirement for being religious. Historically, the process leading to marriage in Indonesia has undergone considerable transformation, marked notably by an increasing space for agency among young people in determining with whom they form relationships and subsequently marry.

According to Hildred Geertz (1961) as cited by Smith-Hefner (2005), in the 1950s and 1960s, marriages in Indonesia, particularly in Java, were generally arranged by parents and took place when the woman and man were still very young. Women would often become engaged immediately after experiencing menstruation, or even before it occurred. At that time, women in Java were typically married by the age of 16 or 17. During this period, or prior to the Islamic resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s, parental considerations in matchmaking were based not on religious factors, but rather on social status and class. Thus, unlike contemporary early marriages often influenced by religious beliefs, early marriages in the 1950s and 1960s were more driven by cultural and economic norms.

Within the Muslim community, views on marriage vary widely, ranging from love marriage based on mutual affection to arranged marriages determined by parental choice (Rochadiat et al., 2018). In love marriage, compatibility is assessed through pre-marital attraction, whereas in more conservative arranged marriages, partners are evaluated based on qualities such as character, temperament, and religiosity (Rochadiat et al., 2018). Matchmaking practices occur within both traditional and modern Islamic groups. In these groups, marriage arrangements are pursued with different objectives compared to those commonly practiced in Javanese society during the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, matchmaking processes in such Muslim groups typically involve strict limitations on interactions (dating) between men and women.

In some traditional pesantren[1] communities, the process of selecting potential spouses and arranging marriages is predominantly managed by the parents, who are typically the kyai (leaders and owner of the pesantren). In these cases, some kyai prefer to marry their children to the offspring of families from the pesantren they lead or to children of kyai from other pesantren. Matchmaking among the children of kyai is often driven by institutional objectives, such as ensuring the succession of the pesantren (Horikoshi, 1987; Muhadi, 2016) and maintaining the kyai's status (Assulthoni, 2018). In traditional pesantren settings, such marriages frequently exhibit endogamous tendencies, meaning marriages are arranged within close kin to preserve the lineage of the pesantren family and to avoid conflicts (Muhadi, 2016). Within these traditional pesantren communities, lineage (*nasab*) is a crucial factor when parents arrange marriages for their children (Assulthoni, 2018). The desire to maintain the nobility of lineage is also a reason for endogamy marriage among families that claim descent from the Prophet, such as the Alawiyyin group in Indonesia (Kurdi, 2013).

In modern Islamic movements, such as the Tarbiyah movement (Asyari & Abid, 2016), a distinctive feature of Islamic-style matchmaking is both the involvement of a mediator and the ideological motives behind it. According to Asyari and Abid (2016), within the Tarbiyah movement, recommended marriages are those between members of the movement, aimed at preserving the purity of the movement. The marriage process in Tarbiyah is mediated by religious teachers or *Murabbi* (male) and *Murabbiyah* (female).

The phenomenon of self-initiated romance, or the formation of relationships between young men and women, commonly referred to as dating in Indonesian culture, has gained popularity over the past few decades (Smith-Hefner, 2005). This trend coincides with the prolongation, or increasing duration, of the period between adolescence and adulthood (and marriage), as well as

the rising levels of literacy and general education, which provide opportunities for young people to meet individuals of the opposite sex (Smith-Hefner, 2019).

The concept and practice of *pacaran* (dating), which allows for the establishment of relationships and intensive interactions between men and women before marriage, has begun to face criticism alongside a growing religious awareness in 2000s, particularly among urban populations. For example, in the early 2000s, popular books advocating for the rejection of dating and promoting marriage through religious pathways, known as taaruf, began to emerge. This movement has become increasingly widespread with the rise of hijrah[2] communities (Akmaliah, 2020; Triana et al., 2021) and organizations specifically campaigning against dating, such as the *Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran (ITP or Indonesia Wihout Dating)* movement. Additionally, institutions facilitating matchmaking between Muslims through taaruf have also appeared, incuding those of using digital media in their facilitation process such as *Kelas Jodoh*.

"Kelas Jodoh" (KJ) was established in February 2017 by Setia Furqon Kholid, an entrepreneur, motivator, writer, and influencer. In an interview, Kholid stated that he is both the owner and the conceptor of Kelas Jodoh. Transitioning from premarital seminars to an online-based application under the same name, Kelas Jodoh began incorporating a mobile app starting with the second batch. This app includes a matchmaking navigation feature and utilizes WhatsApp for the mediation process.

As of early 2024, KJ has conducted 45 batches, each of which can accommodate up to 100 participants. Its instagram account (@kelasjodohfsk) shows that in arround July 2024 it has a total of over 260,000 followers on Instagram, while its application has been downloaded more than 10,000 times. KJ is a paid and professional service and application designed to ensure participants' commitment and seriousness in the ta'aruf (matchmaking) process. It integrates matchmaking practices with Islamic values, marriage psychology materials, and utilizes various digital platforms across several stages of its activities. This study, however, does not analyze the case from the common "commodification" perspective, which tends to oversimplify the issue by suggesting that the entity operates as a business that profits by exploiting religious beliefs. Instead, this study seeks to understand the detailed process of how this service functions and how it manages to integrate Islamic values throughout the process, including the use of various digital media platforms.

Methods

This research aims to answer the question of how "Kelas Jodoh" (KJ), as a digital media-supported Islamic matchmaking organizer, plays a role within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking practices in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the rise of personal piety and the use of digital media. More specifically, it seeks to explore how KJ maintains Islamic values in the relationship arrangement process, which is largely mediated through digital technologies, and how this process contributes to the shaping of a form of digital religion. This study employs qualitative case study method. According to Yin (2018) case study method is suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena with research questions that are of the "how" and "why" nature. Yin also notes that a distinct feature of case studies is their focus on a contemporary phenomenon within its context. In this research, KJ will be examined within at least two primary contexts: the religious resurgence in Indonesia, particularly since the early 2000s, and the development of digital media, including social media, which has significantly expanded over the past two decades.

Regarding data sources, case study research "relies on multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study employs various data collection methods and sources, including interviews, online observation, and literature review. Interviews are conducted with the administrator, the owner of KJ, and members. The KJ members informants were selected using the convenience sampling method. The criteria applied were: (1) they had participated in the series of programs offered by Kelas Jodoh, whether or not they had reached the marriage stage; (2) specifically, the researcher also selected KJ members who had successfully married with the facilitation of KJ. The number of female KJ members is greater than that of male members, so in this study, there were more female participants interviewed than male participants. Overall, the diversity of informants is crucial for capturing a range of experiences as KJ members.

Interviews with the administrator and owner of KJ aim to explore the context of Kelas Jodoh's emergence or background, as well as the details of how KJ operates. Meanwhile, interviews with informants from the KJ member group focused on their experiences participating in or using the various services provided by KJ. The following is a profile of the 10 informants interviewed for this study.

Table 1. List of informants

(Pseudo)name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Position at KJ
Furqon	n.a	Male	Married	S3	Entreprenuer, Motivator	Owner of KJ
Noya	n.a	Female	Married	S1	Manager	Manager & facilitator at KJ
Tita	24	Female	Single	S1	School teacher	Member
Reni	29	Female	Single	S1	Textile Engineer	Member
Vida	26	Female	Single	S1	Admin staff	Member
Yuli	30	Female	Married	S2	University Lecturer	Member
Nia	29	Female	Married	S1	Trading company worker	Member
Rifa	27	Male	Married	S1	IT Engineer	Member
Robi	29	Male	Married	S1	Laboratorium tech	Member
Lia	27	Female	Married	D4	Housewife, Online shop	Member

In addition to conducting interviews, the research also involved online observation. One of our research team members registered on the KJ app to examine its features and stages of KJ services. Furthermore, online observation was conducted on Kelas Jodoh's Instagram account, analyzing the activity on the platform to gather information that would complement the data from the interviews.

Interviews with the informants were conducted in April and July 2024. Ethically, interviews with informants began with an explanation of the research objectives and an outline of the questions to be asked. The questions cover topics such as how informants decided to participate in Kelas Jodoh, their experiences at each stage of the Kelas Jodoh program, how they found the right partners through KJ, their opinions on how KJ facilitated the overall process, and some additional follow-up questions. At the start of the interviews, the research team informed the participants that they could choose not to answer any questions they found too sensitive. This was particularly emphasized with informants from the KJ member category, as some questions pertained to their experiences in establishing relationships with others, both in the past and present. The interviews commenced only after informants agreed to these terms. All informants in this research are presented in pseudoname to protect their privacy, except for the owner and KJ administrator as there are no sensitive personal information provided by these two informants.

The study has been granted ethical clearance from Research and Community Service Division of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung. The application for ethics clearance was reviewed by LP2M in compliance with the UIN Sunan Gunung Djati policy and Research Ethics. Ethical clearance has been granted.

Kelas Jodoh, Religiosity, and Technological Develoment

Kelas Jodoh, and other similar marriage arrangement organizations, emerge as an intersection between the rising Islamic piety among the urban middle-class Muslim population and the development of digital media, including social media and other internet-based applications. It is specifically can be located within the context of the increase in religious awareness, Islamic piety, and the growing visibility of public Islam since the early 2000s (Fealy & White, 2008; Hefner, 2010; Qurtuby, 2013; Reuter & Horstmann, 2013) that has continued into the present day. Around 2015, this trend began to establish its identity, akin to hijrah groups or communities (Triana et al., 2021), which also appeared and continued to develop across various social media platforms. In Triana's et al. research, the hijrah movement is indeed dominated by millennials, typically individuals in their mid-20s to early 40s.

Such a connection can be observed in the historical context or the reasons behind the founding of KJ. Setia Furqon Khalid, the founder of Kelas Jodoh (KJ), stated that one of the primary motivations for developing KJ was the observed difficulty many newly hijrah individuals faced when trying to implement the concept of taaruf in their search for a partner. He noted that,

In 2017 there was a significant influx of people undergoing hijrah, many of whom, after the process, found themselves uncertain about how to proceed with marriage. Although there were pre-marital programs that included taaruf, such as those offered at Masjid Salman in Bandung, many individuals found these programs insufficient due to their limited availability and time constraints (Interview with Setia Furqon, July 2024)

Rifa (male, 27) and Tita (female, 24) are examples of individuals who recently undertook hijrah and sought to find a spouse through *taaruf*. Rifa has since married a woman who is also a KJ's member, Nia. In contrast, as of the time of the study, Tita had not yet married, despite having participated in *taaruf* with two men through Kelas Jodoh. Before joining KJ, both Rifa and Tita had previously experienced dating, which ultimately ended in breakups. Rifa described dating as exhausting, marked by a cycle of breaking up and reconciling. These experiences led him to reflect

deeply on marriage and life itself. He decided to strengthen his religious practice and commit more diligently to worship (hijrah). Through this personal growth, he concluded that marriage is an act of worship that should align with Islamic values. Rifa noted, *"I intended to marry because it is an act of worship. That was the initial trigger. If marriage is an act of worship, why start with dating?"* Consequently, he sought further information on how to find a partner through taaruf, and eventually, a friend recommended joining KJ.

Before joining Kelas Jodoh, Tita had been in a relationship for six years, from senior high school until her fifth semester of college. They had even started discussing marriage, but the engagement was called off because her parents disapproved of her partner due to his education level, which only reached high school. This breakup was a deeply distressing experience for Tita, but it also prompted her to reflect on how to properly navigate the path to marriage. Throughout the interview, Tita repeatedly expressed, *"I am not really a good girl, but I am trying to be the one."*

In addition to the context of increasing religiosity among urban youth, another crucial context for understanding the emergence of Kelas Jodoh is the development of various social media platforms.

KJ utilizes Instagram (one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia and world wide) to promote their program and share various religious content, particularly related to Islamic approaches to marriage. In our research, Lia (female, 27), Reni (female, 29), and Muthia (female, 24) joined KJ because the content appeared on their timelines by chance, rather than through intentional searching. Lia described her experience: *"I accidentally discovered Kelas Jodoh"*, Lia said, *"I was browsing Instagram when I suddenly saw a post by Kelas Jodoh about marriage knowledge. I became curious and checked their account."* From there, Lia joined Kelas Jodoh, learned extensively about marriage principles, and eventually engaged in taaruf with a male Kelas Jodoh member, leading to marriage.

Instagram is the most widely used social media platform among individuals in their 20s and 30s, the age group that constitutes the primary target audience of KJ. Therefore, the use of Instagram as a medium for promoting KJ's programs is an effective strategy for attracting participants.

Kelas Jodoh, Digital Media, and Islamic Matchmaking

How does KJ maintain Islamic values in the relationship arrangement process, which is predominantly mediated through digital technologies and how it shapes a form of digital religion? Another key question in this aspect is how KJ addresses the technological affordances of digital applications like WhatsApp, which, in the context of interpersonal communication, emphasize privacy and strict Islamic rules that prohibit excessive interaction between men and women (courtship).

Overall, KJ employs both online and offline approaches yet the online process is more dominant. As will be explained in the following section, out of the seven stages in the KJ process, only one stage is purely offline: the face-to-face meeting between the male and female parties for further introduction, following their initial online acquaintance.

In terms of technology, KJ utilizes three types of digital media for its overall operations. Instagram is used to inform about Kelas Jodoh's programs, promotions, job vacancies, and to share knowledge and tips about marriage (e.g., marriage preparation). The website, which includes a learning management system and a navigation app, is used by registered participants to enter personal data, complete personality tests, access pre-marital learning materials, perform pre-wedding class tasks, record daily worship practices (mutabaah), browse other members' profiles (navigation), and track the locations of other participants. Finally, WhatsApp is employed for three types of activities: (1) Personal chats for registration and consultation with a KJ administrator or facilitator; (2) WhatsApp groups to provide access to the application and teaching materials in the form of e-books and videos; and (3) Moderated WhatsApp groups as a means of communication between participants from both sides, facilitated by a moderator, to get to know each other.
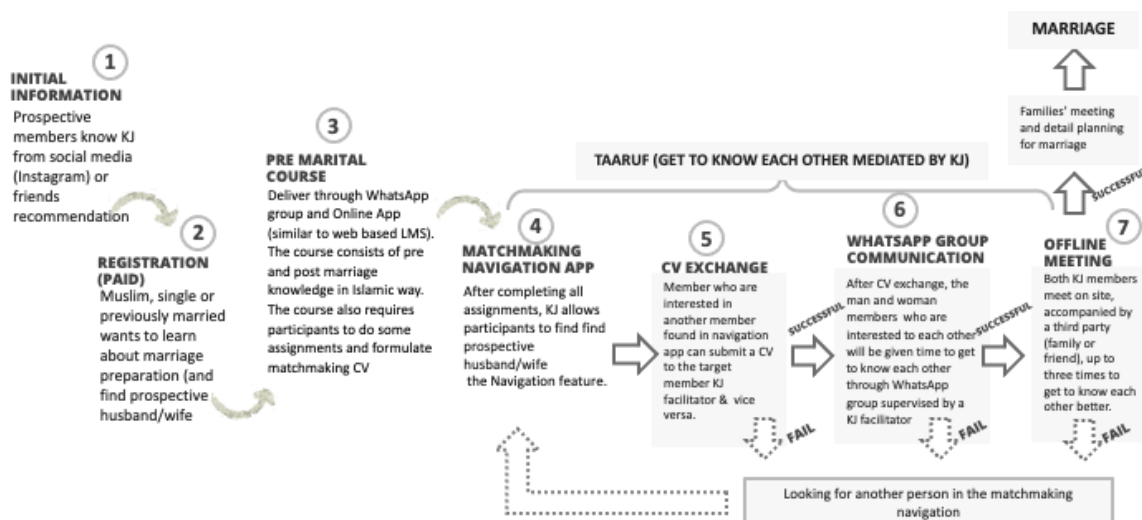

Figure 1. Stages of the Process for Kelas Jodoh Members (Complete Package from Pre-Marital Course to Matchmaking)

Source: Extracted from interview with KJ and members and observation

KJ rejects the label of "matchmaking agency" (*Biro Jodoh*) for their organization. In an interview, Noya, a manager at KJ, stated that

> *From the past until now, Kelas Jodoh (KJ) is labeled as a pre-marital class, not a matchmaking agency. A matchmaking agency often gives the impression of arranging matches without any knowledge. In contrast, KJ has specific steps in place. If someone is only looking for a match through KJ, they won't find it because they need to first participate in the classes. The label has always been pre-marital class, with the additional feature of matchmaking navigation" (Interview with Noya, April 2024)*

Based on interviews with both KJ administrator and members, it can be formulated that the (Islamic) matchmaking process, including pre-marital classes, at KJ is divided into seven stages (see Figure 1). These seven stages do not include the family meeting stage (which can occur without KJ's facilitation) and the wedding itself.

First, Initial Information. This is the preliminary process of how individuals learn about and eventually join KJ as members. Many KJ members discovered KJ through its social media (Instagram at @kelasjodohfsk). KJ's Instagram account is quite active, posting an average of two pieces of content per day related to marriage, including preparation tips, advice for a lasting

marriage, and more. This consistent content production has led to a steady increase in Instagram followers over time. As of early July 2024, the account has approximately 260,000 followers.

Informants such as Reni, Lia, Tita, and Vida first learned about KJ through Instagram and subsequently joined as members. Some members such as Rifa were introduced to KJ through recommendations from friends. Even with a recommendation, prospective members usually review KJ's profile on Instagram, examining both the content and the programs offered before deciding to join. Instagram plays a crucial role in attracting members, who are typically in their mid-20s to 30s—an age group that is very active on social media, particularly Instagram (Dixon, 2024). As Tita recounted, *"Personally, I joined Kelas Jodoh because I am quite active on Instagram. Then, I followed Kelas Jodoh's Instagram account."*

Second, Member Registration. Individuals interested in joining KJ as members can register by filling out a detailed profile (similar to a CV). This information is partially displayed on the navigation app, where KJ members seeking a partner can access initial information about potential matches. The personal data requested is quite detailed, consisting of at least ten categories, each with several more specific questions (See Figure 2, Kelas Jodoh Application). The ten categories of personal information requested include personal profile, general information, self-description, family background, occupation, habits, readiness for marriage, work history, formal education, and non-formal education. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the registration form that must be completed when someone registers as a KJ member.

During registration, applicants can choose between a full package for one year (including the pre-marital course and the matchmaking process) for IDR 500,000, or just the pre-marital course for approximately IDR 300,000. After registering, members are added to a WhatsApp group (with all participants in a given batch) and gain access to the Kelas Jodoh application (web-based). KJ typically opens four to five registration batches per year, with each batch consisting of hundreds of participants.
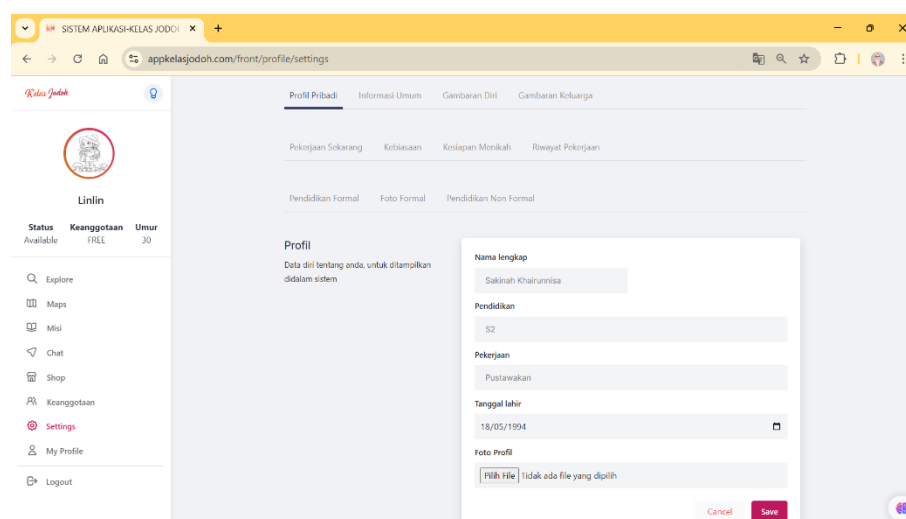

Figure 2. Screenshot of the form format filled out by members when registering with KJ

Third, Premarital Course. This stage involves delivering various materials related to marriage through WhatsApp groups and KJ application (which has a format similar to a learning

management system, LMS). The materials are provided in digital formats such as e-books and videos. Almost all of the content delivered in the premarital course is prepared by KJ's owner, Setia Furqon.

For Vida and Tita, the premarital course is considered the most beneficial aspect. Many participants join KJ solely to learn about marriage, not necessarily to find a partner. Tita noted that the materials provided at KJ are well-suited to her needs:

> The materials are accessible and fit well with me. Usually, there are speakers or owners who use complex language, but here it's not like that. The content is easy to understand. Kang Furqon (owner and main resource person at KJ) adapts to the younger generation. He presents material in a way that we can comprehend without being overly complicated (Interview July 2024)

In addition to being relevant in content, the method of delivering marriage-related material at KJ is quite engaging. This is a particular strength, especially since KJ's target audience is primarily young people. Unlike typical religious lectures, which may tend to be complex, the material they present is made simple and easy to understand. The premarital learning process lasts for two weeks. At the end of this period, participants are required to complete exams and assignments. These assignments are not just knowledge-based tests but also involve reinforcing and building habits for performing obligatory and recommended religious practices, such as prayers and Quran recitation. Besides assessing how well participants understand the material, these exams and assignments are also prerequisites for advancing to the next stage, which is taaruf (finding a suitable fiancé or fiancée) through the navigation app.

As stated by the administrators, the premarital course distinguishes KJ from many other matchmaking platforms. In other words, KJ offers more than just matchmaking services; it also prepares its members by providing them with marriage knowledge before proceeding to the marriage process itself.

Fourth, Finding Prospective Husband/Wife in the Navigation App. The Navigation App resembles a simple social media platform where members can view profiles of other members, including age, residence, occupation, and photos. KJ members are granted access to the Navigation App once they have completed the assignments and exams in the premarital course. At this point, it can be observed that KJ does not want to be labeled as a traditional matchmaking agency. As stated by one of its managers (Noya), KJ aims to ensure that individuals who are seeking marriage are adequately prepared for the marital journey. One of the indicators of this readiness is that they have completed a pre-marital course, including fulfilling the associated assignments (as a requirement for certification).

Fifth, CV (Curriculum Vitae) submission and Exchange. If a member identifies a profile in the Navigation App that they find suitable, they can submit a detailed CV to express their interest. However, CVs can only be sent through a KJ facilitator. Before the CV is forwarded to the intended recipient, KJ administrators first verify the CV. If the data is complete, the administrator will send it to the targeted member. If the target is interested, they can reciprocate by sending their own CV to the initiating member. If not, they can reject it. KJ allows a maximum of 5 days for the targeted member to respond. According to Noya, one of the primary facilitators at KJ, it is rare for a CV to be accepted directly and proceed to the final stage (marriage). Often, members must send their CV multiple times and face numerous rejections before finding a match with reciprocal interest. For

example, Nia (Female) submitted her CV several times but faced rejections before receiving a positive response and advancing to the next stage in the second year of her membership at KJ. Other informants shared similar experiences, though not all were willing to disclose how many times they had submitted their CVs.

Sixth, Introduction/Communication via WhatsApp Group. Pairs of members who find each other suitable at the CV exchange stage move on to the next phase, which involves introduction and communication via a WhatsApp group facilitated by a KJ facilitator. They are given one week to communicate through this group. This stage allows both members to verify information provided in their CVs and to ask detailed questions not covered in the CVs. These questions can range from religious school or *madhab* to detailed plans after marriage. This thorough introduction process is crucial in determining whether both parties agree to proceed to the offline introduction/meeting stage.

According to KJ facilitators, many members discontinue the introduction process at this stage for various reasons, or sometimes without providing any reasons at all. For instance, Robi (male) chose not to continue the process because he disagreed with the woman on a particular issue in Islam. Lia (female), another informant, decided not to proceed because her prospective husband planned to live with his parents after marriage, while Lia herself preferred to live independently.

Each member uses WhatsApp communication not only to assess the thoughts and future plans of their prospective partner but also to evaluate each other's character. One reason Nia (female) decided to move forward to offline communication was her impression of her prospective partner's way of communicating. She mentioned that she appreciated his manner of writing on WhatsApp:

His language was well-organized and structured. More structured than mine. From his well-organized language, I was confident that he was patient. I'm anxious and need someone who can calm me down. (Interview July 2024)

Furthermore, the WhatsApp communication process is regulated by strict rules set by the administrators, such as prohibiting the use of various emoticons and only allowing thumbs up and thank you symbols. KJ places great emphasis on ensuring that the communication process does not display excessive emotional expressions, including any signs of mutual affection. Overall, the communication process is formal, direct, and clear. If any participant violates these communication rules, the KJ moderator will issue a warning.

Additionally, some members choose not to continue because they perceive their prospective partners as not serious about the *taaruf* process, indicated by passive attitudes or delays in responding to communications.

Seventh, offline meetings (nadhor). The offline meeting can be considered the final stage in the ta'aruf process facilitated by KJ. At this stage, couples are allowed to meet a maximum of three times in person, accompanied by family, friends, or KJ facilitators. In short, they are not permitted to meet alone without anyone accompanying them. Couples typically decide to meet in person when they have reached a sufficient level of certainty during the WhatsApp communication stage.

This stage also usually involves communication with each other's parents, though not always comprehensively. Despite being the final stage, some members choose to stop at this point and do not proceed to the next step. For instance, Robi decided not to advance to marriage because he found the female member to be very passive. Instead of her, it was her companion (who was her teacher) who engaged more in the communication.

If both members feel compatible during the offline meetings, they can proceed to a family meeting to plan the wedding. KJ itself limits the maximum duration of the preparation period leading up to marriage to six months, unless there are unavoidable or unforeseen circumstances that extend the process.

Discussion

By closely examining the mechanisms and stages of KJ, this study observes how KJ technically resembles regular online dating services (ODS) in several aspects. According to Finkl et. al. (2012) online dating applications typically consist of nine stages, starting from information search about the ODS and ending with offline relationship establishment (Figure 3). Similarities can be found in the stages where the relationship formation process begins with profile searching, followed by bidirectional online communication, then face-to-face communication, and concluding with relationship establishment. In this regard, Walther's (Walther & Whitty, 2021) hyperpersonal model explains how features present in computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms can enhance intimacy when individuals interacting through these platforms expose themselves to their communication partners.
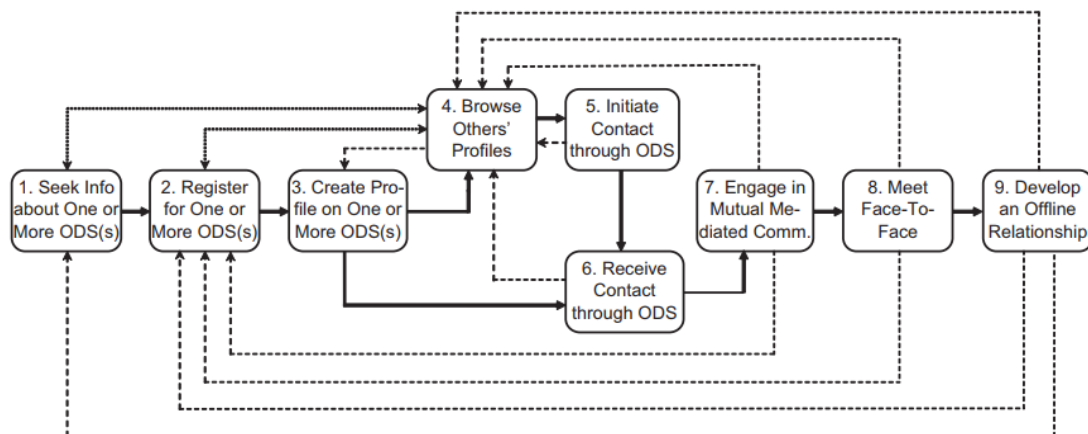

Figure 3. The nine steps in the prototypical, idealized online dating process

Source: Finkel at.al. (2012)

The primary distinctions between KJ and regular online dating services (ODS) are twofold. First, the goal of online dating is not necessarily marriage but rather dating relationships, which may or may not lead to marriage. Second, there is no mediator between the members who register on ODS and those seeking to form a relationship with other members. While this absence might be seen as providing members with the freedom or agency to choose, it can also be argued that a mediator helps keep the communication process on track.

The presence of a mediator is also crucial in how KJ navigates the technological characteristics or affordances with the Islamic values they uphold. For example, WhatsApp, as a technology embedded in smartphones, possesses characteristics such as 'mobile temporality' and 'always-availability' (Green, 2006), which support intensive interpersonal communication models. Additionally, WhatsApp's features maintain privacy. In other words, KJ members could potentially communicate privately without a mediator. However, this rarely occurs because KJ does not tolerate such communication forms, as it would absolve KJ of responsibility for the subsequent process.

This simple process illustrates how digital religion continues to evolve, demonstrating how religious values continuously interact with technological affordances to shape previously non-existent practices. Therefore, when Rainie & Wellman (2012, p. 62) define affordances as "the possible actions a person can perform on an object," in the context of digital religion, these actions can be understood as religiously possible.

Although the owner of KJ states that they do not adhere to a particular religious ideology, their approach resembles that commonly implemented by modern religious groups such as *Tarbiyah* and similar organizations. However, it should be noted that this does not imply that these organizers are structurally part of such groups. This study also confirms Nisa's finding that some Islamic matchmaking organizers in Indonesia and Malaysia are influenced by the approaches typically used by Tarbiyah group (Nisa, 2021). Specifically, the role of the mediator in interactions between individuals in KJ resembles the system employed by *Tarbiyah* group. In *Tarbiyah*, the mediator is often the religious teacher or mentor *(murabbi and murabbiyah)* of those intending to marry (Asyari & Abid, 2016). However, aside from not being ideologically driven, KJ offers greater flexibility compared to the matchmaking practices of Tarbiyah congregations. In KJ, individuals are allowed to choose their own partners, whereas, in Tarbiyah congregations, although not entirely prohibited, it is more encouraged to marry fellow members. Additionally, in Tarbiyah, the match is often selected by the murabbi, though each member has the right to refuse if they feel personally incompatible.

Conclusion

Kelas Jodoh, and other similar marriage arrangement organizations, emerge as an intersection between the rising Islamic piety among the urban middle-class Muslim population and the development of digital media, including social media and other internet-based applications. The increase in religious awareness and the growing visibility of public Islam since the early 2000s has continued into the present day. The steps applied by KJ in facilitating members through a number of digital media highlights how digital religion continue to evolve. It shows how religious values interact with technological affordances to create new practices thus new form of digital religion. Furthermore, in KJ, the role of the mediator and its overall approach in matchmaking mirrors the system commonly used in religious congregations, or contemporary Islamic groups such as the *Tarbiyah* group. The similarities are particularly evident in the values applied, as well as in the role of the moderator and the entire process of building relationships between members until they agree to marry. However, KJ provides greater flexibility than T*arbiyah*, allowing individuals to select

their own partners, unlike in Tarbiyah where matches are often chosen by mentors and marrying within the group is more encouraged, although not strictly enforced.

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Notes

[1] Traditional Islamic boarding school in Indonesia.

[2] In this context, hijrah does not refer to physical relocation from one place to another but is understood culturally as a transformation or hijrah as a change in behavior from previously less desirable to more desirable. This definition is also endorsed by Ustadz Hanan Attaki, a prominent figure in the hijrah movement in Indonesia (Triana et al., 2021).