

Review

Social networks enabling matrimonial information services in India

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Marriage information is an integral part of the knowledge base in any civilized society. In India, several non-government agencies as well as de-institutionalized sources provide a great variety of marriage related information in different domains of the society. Despite various modes in transferring matrimonial information, increasing use of social networks offers new opportunities for newer matrimony services. The purpose of this paper is to present the state-of-the-art of popular matrimony service portals emerged in India for providing SDI (selective dissemination of information) based personalized services to multifarious groups of the nation. Addresses of selective portals provide glimpses of current Indian activities on matrimonial information systems and services. It also examines the potentialities of the four biggest matrimonial players (viz. shaadi, bharatmatrimony, jeevansathi and simplymarry) in the country consistent with the present and anticipated needs of the marriage-information-seekers. Comparison has been carried out based on the web metrics. The paper noticed that online matrimony services would have ever-increasing importance in satisfying the objectivity of social networking practices.

Key words: Social networking, marriage information, matrimony portals, Indian matrimony.

INTRODUCTION

Information is the basic ingredient for all kinds of activities in our society. Any developmental issue to some extent depends on the provision and accessibility of quality information. In developed nations for many sections, information generation and use is considered as indicator to measure the social progress of the country, as per-capita income is determinant factor to measure the economic growth of a country. In developing nation like India, information is being treated as marketable commodity and has become inevitable in every sphere of the society. In fact, phenomenal increase of information sources demands for well-organized systems in different levels to make the information accessible pin-pointedly and expeditiously. Such a provision of access has come into reality with the availability of database and network systems exploiting efficient technologies (Simkins, 1983). Thus, a number of computer-based information systems in different areas have emerged in India for many years (Literature review, 1990). However, the convergence of computer with internet wrote a dramatic change in accessing effective information, thereby offer us a powerful means of managing information based society in

modest way (Cronin, 1986). It has to be mention that a new information society is formed with the further development of these technologies, which have alleviated many ills of information handling activities by means of artificial intelligence, retrieval mechanisms (Baeza-Yates and Ribeiro-Neto, 1999), semantic web (Berners-Lee et al 2001), social networking (Cole and Brooks, 2009), etc. In recent times, growing interest on social networks stimulated matrimony service providers to develop a number of customized service portals in India. These are varied in their scope based on vast diversity (viz. racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural makeup, social practice, etc.) in Indian society. Many such portals have become operative in satisfying the objectivity of social networking practices for the mutual interest of social commons and online service providers.

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND USEFULNESS

The term "social-networking" refers to the formation of a community on the internet, which facilitates the users to

interact or share views for a common purpose. According to Wikipedia, social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. This service provides a variety of new ways for users to interact and share first-hand information, thus gained much popularity on the eve of twenty-first century viz. MySpace which is popular in U.S. and Orkut in India, etc. Early social networking sites focused on bringing people together through chatting and sharing information via personal homepage. Now almost all social networks have their ability to set up and customize a personal 'profile' that enable the members to browse, search, invite, decline, discuss, review, comment, upload along with privacy-control, blog-entry, instant-messaging, mark-favorites and many more within a community of the network. Social networking is perhaps one of the key drivers of internet growth. In India, about 56% internet users perform both social and professional networking on the Web, while 29% performs only social networking (Madhavan, 2007). A recent report (ComScore Inc.) depicts that social networking sites have increased by 51% from the last year and global social networking brands continued to gain prominence in India during the last year. In order to become more popular than the global brands, Indian social networking sites are driving their focus more on creating local image, thereby enabling powerful means for the citizens to get linked and use this service as effectively as possible. However, the impact of social networking on the linguistically and culturally rich India is unique (Mahajan, 2009). People of every sphere of the society have begun to observe its usefulness on various social events, though often criticized for degrading the Indian culture. Increasingly, social networking sites are being used to share scientific knowledge/expertise (peer-to-peer), to learn about new technologies, to initiate legal/criminal investigations, to create business promotions, even to keep connected the social commons for establishing their matrimonial relation. In fact, matrimony service providers are gradually introducing newer matrimony services to reap the benefits of social networking that has become useful to share matrimonial information more comfortably via their web portals.

INDIAN SOCIETY AND MARRIAGE PRACTICES

India, a secular democratic republic consisting of 28 states and 7 union territories, has great diversity to an extent perhaps incomparable to any other civilization of the world. It is the second most populous country having more than 1 billion people, 23 official languages with over a thousand dialects, and rich cultures for much of its long history (India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2009). Racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious differences are remarkable where twenty religions flow

together including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam. Though all these communities speak different languages, practice different cultures and observe different social customs, still they pride themselves on being unlike members of the country (Singer and Cohn, 1968). Vast diversity in socioeconomic status pertaining to educational attainment, social power, gender inequality, urbanity, caste, etc. is also evident in India. Landless laborers to billionaire industrialists, tribal illiterates to high-class intellectuals, slum dwellers to NRI and mediocre peoples have received equal attention towards the formation of multifarious groups of the nation. Several other circumstances comprehend the complexities of Indian social society over many decades (Singh, 1980). Above all, the India is a nation of unity in diversity.

India has a rich tradition of cultural heritages. Since the beginning of fourth century, tradition of arranged marriages are prevalent, that has been practiced mainly to establish a sacred bond between two families (Westermarck, 1894). Still, it is the norm of Indian society. Traditionally caste members are expected to marry within the permissible community and follow the caste rules perhaps to avoid ritual pollutions and to protect many other aspects of life (Gangopadhyay, 1964). Many other marriage trends prevailed in India like child-marriage and sati-daha (self-immolation of the widow), which was started during the mediaeval times (Vidyasagara, 1976). These practices are considered illegal today but were common in conservative society during pre-liberalization period. There are various rituals and social customs. Every religion has a different set of wedding customs and each having unique way of celebration. Therefore, Hindu marriage is different from marriages in other religions in terms of rituals, customs, celebration and cultural makeup. In fact, a variety of marriage is shown in the same religion. As per Manu Smriti, Hindu marriages can be categorized into eight types but four of them are religiously accepted viz. brahma, daiva, arsha and prajapatya marriage. Rests were condemned by early society; these are gandharva, asura, rakshasa and paishacha marriage (India Wedding Planner). However, Bengali weddings are usually accomplished with many rituals (but not always confined to) like ashirbaad, aai-budo-bhaat, holud-kota, dodhi-mongol, bor-jatri, bor-baran, mala-badal, sampradan, sindoor-daan and many others. Apart from serious rituals many etiquettes or fun filled events have been practiced in varying degrees viz. engagement ring (sign of acceptance), changing wife's name (husband's surname), wedding vows or saat-phere (seven rounds around holy fire), etc (Kapadia, 1955). Another common feature of the weddings in India is the excitement and enthusiasm accompanied by huge gathering of relatives and friends.

In recent times, marriage trends in India have undergone tremendous change with the changing trends of Indian society. Eventually, it varies from arranged to

love marriage, arranged-love to love-arranged, inter-caste to inter-religion, court-marriage and sometime living together. Traditions and customs are greatly affected by the attitudes and beliefs of brides/grooms (Henslin, 1985); weddings celebrations offer a lot of gloss and glamour; ceremonies are not as long as they used to be; court marriages are gaining importance, etc. Certain number of rituals performed is also less now with several of them losing their relevance and unusual trend of weddings is evident (Reddy, 1978). Nowadays, global techno-culture persists in India and social networking becomes a routine practice on various societal issues, including matrimony services.

MARRIAGE ACTS IN INDIA

Marriages are made in heaven but solemnized on earth, such a belief of common peoples influenced on socialist India. In early Indian society, marriages are mainly regulated by social practices, thus, beyond the regulation of canonical terms. With the advancement of social structure, it was felt to adopt some marriage regulation by imposing the judicial laws keeping a view to protect our cultural practices in a long run. Therefore, the Marriage Acts have been devised to commensurate with the religious communities exists in India (Lal, 1956). Hindu Marriage Act (enacted in 1955) codifies the law relating to marriage among Hindus. Buddhists, Sikhs and Jainas by religion are supposed to come under the purview of this Marriage Act. By this Act, child-marriage and dowry system is considered illegal, which was largely practiced in conservative society of ancient India. Still, few instances have been reported in some places of modern India. Muslims have their separate law, often called as Muslim Personal Law (Shariat). The Quran and the Hadees are the most authentic sources of the Shariat. Muslim Personal Law Application Act (XXVI of 1937) makes a provision for the application of Shariat to Muslims, includes the regulation of their marriages. This Act perhaps permits four wives for a man if he can equally treat them. The husband is authorized to give divorce to his wife by pronouncing 'talak' three times, but the wife has to fulfill certain terms and conditions before giving divorce to her husband. Worthy to mention that Indian Christian Marriage Act (XV of 1872) is still in force in India and contains comprehensive provisions regulating the solemnization of marriages of Christians in this country. Similarly, the Indian legislature had passed the Marriage and Divorce Act (XV of 1865, replaced by III of 1936) that governs the provision of marriage and divorce among the Parsis. Many other important Acts relating to the marriage of Indians have come into force viz. Hindu Widows Remarriage Act (XV of 1856), Indian Foreign Marriage Act (XIV of 1903), Child Marriage Restraint Act (XIX of 1929), Arya Marriage Validation Act (XIX of 1937), Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act (XIII

of 1939), etc. However, the Special Marriage Act (XXXXIII of 1954) enacted by the Parliament in the fifth year of the Republic of India came into force on first of January 1955 (India, Ministry of Law, 1957). It provides a special form of marriage and extends to the whole of India (except the state of Jammu and Kashmir), and is applicable to the citizens of India domiciled in the territories to which this Act extends who might be outside the said territories. Therefore, this Act does not apply to Hindus alone but equally applicable to all persons, domiciled in India irrespective of their religion, faith and creed. Amendment of these Acts has been made over time to make them more convenient to use for the welfare of the society (Qureshi, 1978).

MODES OF MATRIMONIAL INFORMATION TRANSFER

A large number of people essentially seek for the matrimonial information. Usually such information seekers also disseminate their information to make them visible to others towards receiving desired information. Here, information transfer takes place in both ways. However, individual preference varies in disseminating and/or receiving the matrimonial information. Therefore, different modes of transfer of matrimonial information exist in real practice and seekers are free to choose any of the modes. In fact, one can use a single or multiple modes simultaneously when he/she needs to share the marriage information. For instance, besides conventional means, certain class of peoples preferably uses social networking for faster dissemination to wider audience. So, marriage information seekers follow a different route to make them available to their desired community, either directly or via media; and matrimony service providers mostly follows SDI (selective dissemination of information) based services to their designated members, either using print media or exploiting online matrimony portals. Various modes are being discussed in the following paragraphs.

Consultation to kulacharya

In early centuries, some educated and respected peoples of the society used to take up matchmaking as a profession, called as 'kul-acharya', namely Dhruvananda Mishra and Devivar Ghatak in 15th century and Nulo Panchanan in 18th century. They had special command on establishing the marriage relation and they received a great deal of social prestige. They used to maintain written records of family histories in detail and catered marriage related information consulting those record books (Banglapedia, 2006).

Approaching the ghataks

Literally, it means one who makes things happen or a

middleman who establishes links between two parties in transferring marriage related information. Many of them are purely professional and matchmaking is their source of livelihood. Usually they perform more efficiently through their linkage and experience. Some others are incidental matchmaker. Conventionally, the ghatak used to be acknowledged from both the parties with attractive gifts, money or trips. Use of online matrimony portals and social networking has greatly reduced the need of ghataks in recent times. They have almost disappeared but their existence remains in different forms that is agent or consultant of marriage bureaus, matrimony service portals, etc.

Discussion with associates

It has been observed that close relatives, office colleagues, childhood friends, neighboring natives and other associates reliably transfer matrimonial information for the marriage among their prospective young. Sometimes they fear to communicate such information directly and consider it as a hidden agenda, as they feel their help may turn to be a lifelong embarrassment to them later, if anything happens unlikely. Still it is considered as useful practice in determining the suitable groom/bride in many sections of our society.

Advertising in newspapers

Use of daily newspaper becomes a popular choice for seeking matrimonial information in the form of classified advertisement. Seekers can choose their desired matches silently. Then sharing of information happens to be made through telephonic conversation or by mail investing optimum cost and effort. Almost all leading newspapers (national and regional) in India have their classified matrimonial column. In fact, a common platform for online classified booking service is also available (ReleaseMyAd, 2007-2008).

Enrolment in marriage bureaus

Numbers of formal agencies offer specific kinds of information (viz. travel, marriage, land and property, etc.), as demanded in a particular society. Usually such marriage bureaus are equipped with professional consultants, counselors, legal advisors, agents, etc. They provide SDI based personalized services to their potential members using printed match list (readily available) or online matrimony databases (in-house/subscribed) and other sources, depending on the negotiation made with the seekers of information. Marriage bureaus always hunt for new members to make their business and seldom unreliably cater the information.

Peer-to-peer conversation

Aspiring brides and grooms often interact among themselves and share constructive opinions to arrange their marriage. Usually it happens within certain class of peoples belonging to ultra-liberal society. In certain time, NRI families are objectively gathered at a festive place of the residing country to exchange dialogues among their prospective brides and grooms. Such an exciting arrangement (so called Swayamwar) brought the like-minded individuals closer in finding a perfect soul mate. The conversation leads to quasi-arrange marriage as they get marry without any external aid or agent.

Registration to on-line services

In recent times, matrimony service portals, social networking sites and community specific chat rooms are prevailing on the internet, which caters first hand matrimonial information. Such platforms stimulate information seekers to avail attractive services through online registration. Registered members can post their profiles and search desired matches freely and instantly, but one has to make the payment to enable value added services viz. initiate meaningful contacts, blog-entry, SMS alert, online chat, etc. Information transfer through this mode is instantaneous but quite expensive, often harassing too. Still it is gaining popularity with the increasing use of internet in our country.

MATRIMONY SERVICE PORTALS IN INDIA

Numerous matrimony service portals have become operative in different levels (regional, national and global) to sustain the pressure of marriage information seekers. These portals have their intrinsic capability for providing continuous flow of matrimonial information to a large pool. Table 1 shows almost comprehensive list of Indian matrimony service portals along with their traffic ranks (popularity), amount of links (reputation) and online registration date (age of site). These portals provide interactive platform to their registered members for communicating marriage related information exploiting online databases. Potential users must evaluate these service portals in terms of credibility, content, cost, accessibility, reliability, utility, visibility, presentation, functional tools, etc. to achieve optimum benefits. It has been observed that similar type of portals sometime mislead the peoples and seldom find themselves as sex finder club.

Many other matrimonial sites might also exist in India. In fact, a few sites just cross their infancy viz. saatphereonline.com (launched in 2008), doosravivaha.com (in 2007), bibahabandhani.com (in 2007 at Kolkata), etc. According to a study by the Internet and Online Association, the market size of online

Table 1. Rank wise list of Indian matrimony sites.

Domain name	Global traffic rank [†]	Indian traffic rank [†]	Sites linking [†]	Online since [#]
www.shaadi.com	762	63	1231	1996 July
www.jeevansathi.com	2121	161	532	1998 December
www.bharatmatrimony.com	2277	183	425	1999 December
www.simplymarry.com	11914	704	137	N/A
www.secondshaadi.com	34833	2283	30	N/A
www.matrimonialsindia.com	93615	7445	188	1997 February
www.lifepartnerindia.com	160685	13247	74	2004 August
www.starmatrimonials.com	236604	26045	42	2001 October
www.vivah.com	430775	40389	25	2003 April
www.inmatri.com	506021	66900	78	2004 February
www.merasathi.com	569818	36607	59	2003 August
www.samyakonline.com	577054	58036	62	2002 May
www.makemy marriage.com	686042	77919	15	2006 March
www.hinduvivaha.com	806202	92399	00	N/A
www.shubhlagan.in	1086625	122666	31	N/A
www.imilap.com	1296212	N/A	55	1999 December
www.indiamatrimony.com	1476679	168690	150	2003 January
www.cooljodi.com	1566080	197692	18	N/A
www.vivahabandhan.com	2968156	N/A	01	2003 May
www.greatmatrimonial.com	4438620	N/A	07	N/A
www.nikahhelpline.com	7287431	N/A	02	N/A
www.shubhbarat.com	8010557	N/A	05	2004 September

* Traffic rank is a measure of website's popularity. The rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and page-views over the past 3 months. Traffic rank in a specific country can also be measured. † Sites linking meant for website's reputation. The number of sites on the internet linking to this site and multiple links from the same site only counted once. # The date the domain was first registered. N/A = not available.

matrimonial is estimated to reach Rs 80 crore in 2007-2008, a remarkable jump from the meager Rs 6 crore size four years back. It is worth to mention that Kolkata based media group Ananda Bazar Patrika (ABP), is also exploring possibilities of launching a matrimonial portal (Mukherjee, 2007). This Bengali focused classified site expected to offer extraordinary facilities, as said by Pramath Raj Sinha, managing director and CEO of ABP.





The scalability and integrity of these portals substantially make the difference in their efficiency and use. Most of the developers look for a homogeneous solution in order to address the complex information requirement of heterogeneous people in different degrees. Almost all matrimony service portals have their common attributes viz. free registration, fee-based utilities, time-bound subscription, personalize services, community specific search, online chat, email/SMS alerts, highlighted profile or bold listing facility, horoscope matching, etc. It is worthy to mention that free registration always attract information seekers to be a member of online service portals. But paid members have greater level of access and they can initiate meaningful contacts with other members, successfully use e-matchmaking tools, online chatting, blocking and many other value added services. In fact, service providers are careful to paid members

only. However, structural components pertaining to data fields often vary in matrimonial databases. Useful components and sub-components observed in popular service portals are as follows: a) Basic information: gender, age, country of birth, place of living, marital status, contact address, phone number, email, etc.; b) Vital statistics: height, structure, complexion, photograph, physical disorder, etc.; c) Religion and family: gan, gotra, rashi, time of birth, family history, mother tongue, religion, caste, social status, etc.; d) Education and career: degrees obtained, job opportunities, job location, occupation, economic strength, future plan, etc.; e) Behavior and lifestyle: choice of foods, drinking and smoking habit, hobbies, etc. Some of the popular matrimony portals are highly useful to Indians featured in the Table 2.

Shaadi.Com

Shaadi.com, one of the India's best-known brands and the world's largest matrimonial service was founded by Anupam Mittal in 1996. The Peoples Interactive (I) Pvt Ltd company pioneered this online matrimonial with an objective to provide a superior matchmaking experience

Table 2. Broad-spectrum matrimony service portals in India.

Service Portal	Membership plans and contact	Special features and tools
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free registration 2. Platinum – INR 401 per month 3. Diamond – INR 551 per month 4. Gold – INR 734 per month 1860-500-3456 (Toll free)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISO 9001:2000 compliant • Live on chat and bold listing • Matrimony 2.0 enabled • Shaadi Active service <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. e-Matchmaking tool 2. Shaadi Messenger 3. Free mobile service 4. Astro search facility
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free registration. 2. Classic – INR 1990 for 3M 3. Classic Plus – INR 2590 for 3M 4. Classic Super- INR 2890 for 3M 1800-3000-1234(Toll free)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Matchmaker tool • Fast Track assistance • Accept/ decline interests • Personalized services <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Verified phone no's 2. Horoscope matching
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free registration 2. eRishta – INR 1295 for 2M 3. eValue – INR 1700 for 2M 1800-419-6299 (Toll free)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online chat, Bold listing • Astro compatibility service • Expert profile writers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intelligent matching 2. Album creation, etc.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Free registration 2. Gold – INR 1500 for 3M 3. Diamond – INR 2200 for 6M 4. Platinum – INR 3500 for 12M 1860-500-5500 (Local charge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture/featured profile link • Abuse prevention systems • Print and online combo pack • Highlighted search result <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chat-n-Marry messenger 2. Text link on home page 3. SimplyMarryZine tool

life partners. It has established strong network deploying 400 employees across 250 centers in India and abroad. Shaadi.com has become most preferred matrimonial website for Indians and over 10 million members with 1.3 million matches founds available currently. A recent study has credited shaadi.com for being the most visited (by Ranking.com) and most user-friendly (by JuxtConsult) online matchmaking brand in India. Shaadi seems to be the site where registration is pretty simple, an array of regional options and many other intelligent features (viz. smart search, astro search, shaadi messenger, voice SMS and shaadi ring tones) leads the way of matrimony services to diverse communities in India. However, the superior technologies empowered by Matrimony 2.0 enable rich interface applications, improved algorithms and nice privacy options to configure the user preferences. Superior services can be accomplished by e-Matchmaker, a sophisticated tool that runs automatically for potential compatibility and ensures higher degree of matrimonial success. This flagship brand is now on television (via Dish-TV) with the Shaadi Active service to find the perfect soul mate. It has to be noted that Star-Vivaah is an innovative matrimonial show and first of its kind on Indian Television solely organized by shaadi.com, happened every Monday to Friday at 2 pm only on STAR-Plus. Business Today magazine has recognized shaadi.com as one of the India's top 10 marketers

(Shaadi, 2009) (Figure 1).

BharatMatrimony.Com

It is one of the trusted matrimony portals in India since 1997, founded by Murugavel Janankiraman. This platform brings together all the young Indians living across the globe and provides comprehensive solution for marriage combining tradition and technology. It has setup a consortium of 15 regional portals across 22 states and over 100 major cities in India, thus committed to provide best class services with trust and confidence. BharatMatrimony has occupied a wide marketplace in India perhaps due to its community specific regional services in different fifteen languages viz. Bengali, Assamese, Gujrati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalee, Marathi, Marwadi, Oriya, Parsi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. This successful portal has found a place in the Limca Book of Records for facilitating a record number of marriages and about one core verified profiles found available currently. It has been recognized as the best matrimony website in 2007 (as reported by PC World) and listed in the NASSCOM's top 100 IT innovators. Bharat Matrimony goes beyond matchmaking services by providing matrimony related services like wedding directory, pre-marital counseling, matrimony-xpress

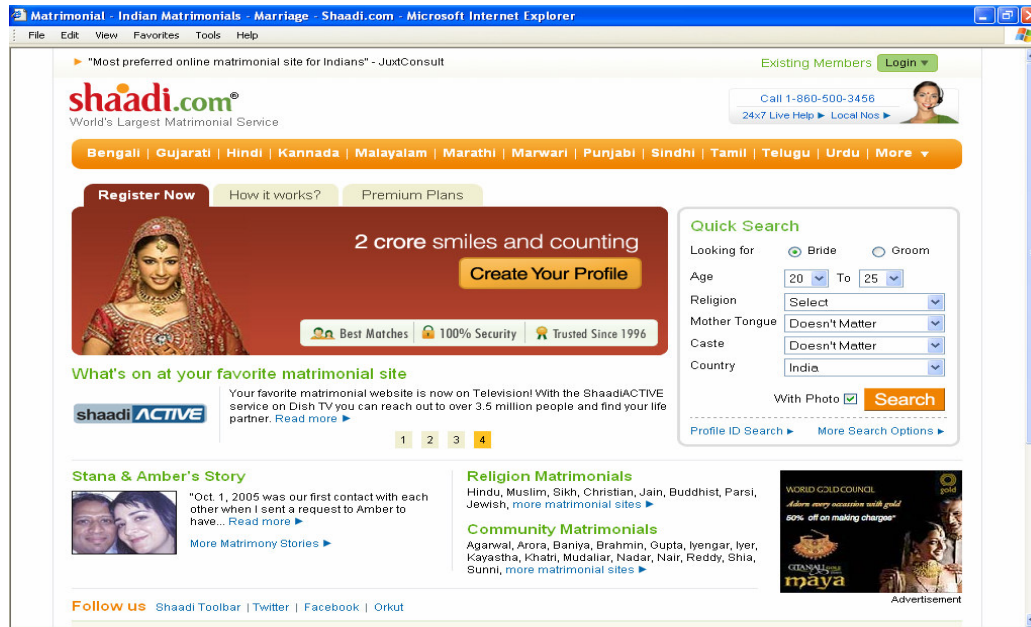


Figure 1. <http://www.shaadi.com>.

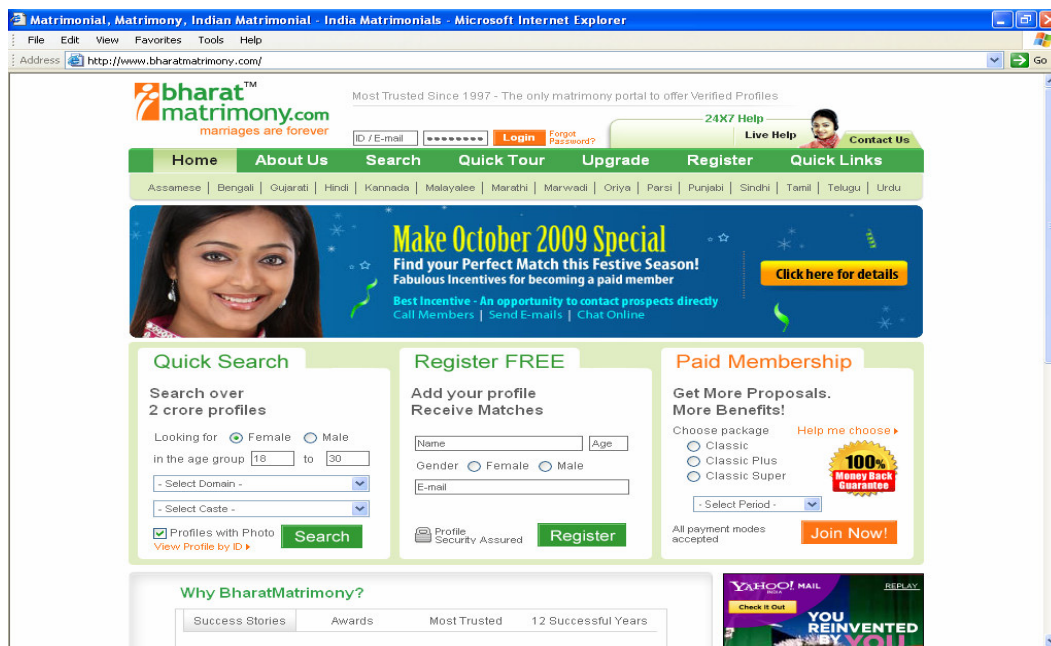


Figure 2. <http://www.bharatmatrimony.com>.

relationship blog as well as social initiatives like bharat eye-bank and blood-bank (Bharatmatrimony, 2009) (Figure 2).

Jeevansathi.Com

It is one of the leading matrimonial websites in India,

which was initiated in September 2004 keeping in view to serve the North and Western Indian communities. Now it provides fairly comprehensive profiles of more than two million potential grooms/brides seeking an alliance in the country. It has advanced search functionalities for intelligent matching specifying various attributes of human life. Jeevansathi membership options include eRishta and eValue with bold listing utility, where the

Figure 3. <http://www.jeevansathi.com>.

members can pay varied amount of fees based on the facilities and duration of service he/she like to avail. Contacts can be made through telephone, e-mail, online chat and SMS. As per India Online 2008 Survey (conducted by JuxtConsult), Jeevansathi has gained 3% share of users to grow to 8% of the total market share. JeevanSathi.com has been doing really well and they get the sound traffic in India. Of course, there is scope for further improvement (Jeevansathi, 2009) (Figure 3).

SimplyMarry.Com

It is India's premier matrimonial service portal, promoted by the Time of India group. SimplyMarry offers one stop platform for online matchmaking that allows prospective Indian brides and grooms to meet and communicate regarding matrimony. It uses the latest and most cutting edge technologies available in online environment to provide members with fast, relevant and best matching results in strict confidence. Despite the user-friendly interface and customer friendly tools, simplymarry has strict abuse prevention and reporting systems for the members accepted via screening system. However, the chat messenger having pop up facility via chat-N-marry that enables contact instantly with online members that are approved for chat. Duration of membership varies

from 3 - 12 months having multiple options via gold, diamond, and platinum or print-online combo packages by means of print advertisement in Times of India newspaper. Benefits can be made through online chat, personal messages, profile links, text link in home page, highlighted profile in search results and many others. This largest media and entertainment conglomerate has received a lot of criticism, but they are in a great position to be eventual leaders if they can utilize the newspaper matrimonial classifieds. (SimplyMarry, 2009) (Figure 4).

COMPARING POPULARITY USING WEB METRICS

Let us have a close look at the traffic rank trend (a measure of website's popularity) of the four biggest matrimonial players in the country over the last six months, as presented in Figure 5. Graph shows that Shaadi leads currently and has been quite consistent. BharatMatrimony and Jeevansathi have almost equal trends. SimplyMarry seems to be the site receiving the least popularity among these four sites. Worthy to mention, the traffic rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and page-views over the past three months (Alexa, 2009). Trend graph shows you the site's daily traffic rank, charted over time. The lesser the rank is of course, the better for a site in terms of

Figure 4. <http://www.simplymarry.com>.

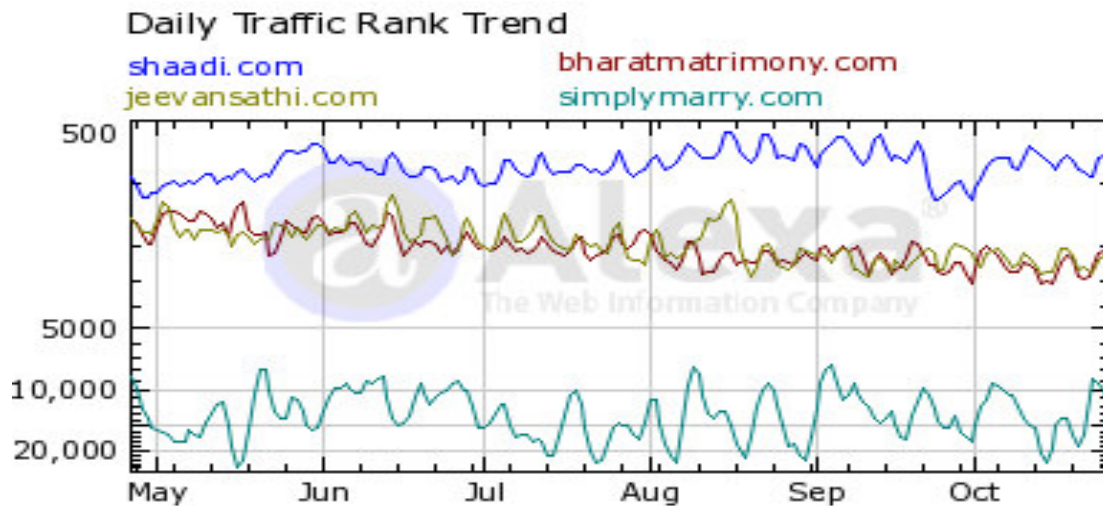


Figure 5. Traffic rank trends comparison (Source: Alexa, October 2009).

popularity.

A comparison has been carried out among popular matrimonial sites in India based on statistical variables of traffic, as shown in Table 3. Alexa traffic rank in a country (India) is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors and page-views from India over the past three months. Percentage-of-user comes from different countries has been stated on the table. The page-views per user are the average numbers of unique pages viewed per user per day by the visitors to the site. Here,

three-month average has taken into account to determine the daily page-views per user. Shaadi seems to be the site receiving the most page-views (8.15 pages) with optimum stay of visitors (5:7 min) on the site. Surprisingly, it has the largest NRI audience (25.5%). Jeevansathi beats Bharatmatrimony in terms of traffic rank (161), page-views, and number of users (89.6%) in the country. However, SimplyMarry site is commending optimum page-views (6.9 pages) having maximum stay (9:5 min) on the site per visit. Therefore, it is obvious

Table 3. Traffic statistics of popular matrimony sites in India.

Matrimony site	Traffic rank		Traffic from Countries* (%)			Daily pageviews per user	Time on site# (minutes)
	India	Global	India	USA	Others		
Shaadi.com	63	762	74.5	8.5	17.0	8.15	5:7
BharatMatrimony.com	183	2277	82.0	5.0	13.0	1.79	1:9
Jeevansathi.com	161	2121	89.6	2.8	7.6	4.93	5:5
SimplyMarry.com	704	11914	94.8	1.3	3.9	6.9	9:5

Source: Alexa, October 30, 2009.

* Percentage of user that comes from the countries to visit the site.

Daily average number of minutes per visit on the site and considered 90 days average.

that online matrimony industry is dominated by four players and shaadi.com is a clear winner followed by jeevansathi.com, bharatmatrimony.com and simplymarry.com.

Areas of further research

Marriage information has always been an integral part of our society. Therefore, more attention has to be taken to develop a comprehensive system of matrimonial information. Believing that, joint initiative of matrimony services will lead to building strong information network that could bring a reasonable solution in providing more effective matrimonial services in India. Further assessment of Indian matrimony sites needs to be done to compare their relative importance, visibility and ranking. So, webometric analysis, link analysis, cluster analysis, web impact factor (WIF) and categorization of matrimonial domains/sub-domains can be the probable areas of research in this direction. Usefulness of popular matrimony sites can be compared with popular social networking sites and/or popular job sites in Indian context. However, the web content analysis of profiles, rich interface applications, improved search algorithms, web 2.0 compatibility, consortia based access mechanism would be a great frontier of matrimony information research in the forcible future.

CONCLUSION

The efficacy of an information system depends on the correct assessment of data requirements based on the demands made by individual users and on the methodologies adopted in the collection of data for dissemination (Nicholas, 1996). Therefore, information accumulation in any matrimonial database should be specified pertaining to the users consisting grooms and brides of complementary nature but not by the choice of service provider alone. Practically there would have some duplication of cost and efforts in creating and accessing such databases unless there is a central coordinating

agency to take care of these initiatives. Obviously, the complexity and vast diversity (viz. racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic.) of Indian society creates a formidable hurdle towards developing a comprehensive platform for accessing the matrimonial information in an integrated manner. Since last decade, matrimony service providers have been striving with stupendous efforts for the sustainable development of online marriage information systems and services in India. Along with few others, four matrimony portals viz. shaadi.com, bharatmatrimony.com, jeevansathi.com and simplymarry.com have been playing a significant role in satisfying the objectivity of marriage information seekers in the country. These services differ in potentialities, but shaadi is understandably popular than others. Hope this paper would help the social commons to get the matrimonial information sources and will promote awareness for using online matrimony services. Expectedly, a cultural shift must occur in fulfilling matrimonial information needs of the Indian society and service providers must find better avenues for reaping the benefits of social networking via matrimony portals.

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