Chapter XIX
Online Matrimonial Sites and the Transformation of Arranged Marriage in India

Nainika Seth
University of Alabama in Huntsville, USA

Ravi Patnayakuni
University of Alabama in Huntsville, USA

ABSTRACT

Online personals have been a remarkably successful in the Western World and have been emulated in other cultural contexts. The introduction of the Internet can have vastly different implications on traditional societies and practices such as arranged marriages in India. This chapter seeks to investigate using an ethnographic approach the role of matrimonial Web sites in the process of arranging marriages in India. It seeks to explore how these Web sites have been appropriated by key stakeholders in arranging marriage and how such appropriation is changing the process and traditions associated with arranged marriage. The key contributions of this study are in that it is an investigation of complex social processes in a societal context different from traditional western research contexts and an exploration of how modern technologies confront societal traditions and long standing ways of doing things. Our investigation suggests that the use of matrimonial Web sites have implications for family disintermediation, cultural convergence, continuous information flows, ease of disengagement, virtual dating and reduced stigma in arranged marriages in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Online personals have been a remarkable success story in the United States, attracting as many as 40 million unique visitors at their peak in 2003 (Mulrine, 2003). At a time when e-commerce ventures were being viewed with suspicion by investors and as the stock market hit new lows subsequent to its run up in 1999-2000, this was a significant phenomenon. Online personals typically cater to singles, providing them an opportunity to find mates or dates beyond their traditional social networks of friends, school, work, neighborhood or place of worship. Adapting to a different societal context, one that is more conservative and traditional, Web sites that assist in brokering marriages have emerged in India. In 2006, some 7.5 million users used their services, increasing from 4 million in 2004 (Lakshman, 2006). As in the case of online personals in U.S., which have the potential to affect how we arrange our social selves, online matrimonial sites can influence the process of arranging marriages with wider implications for family structure and relationships.

Marriage is viewed differently in India as compared to the West where it is largely a matter of individual choice. In India, marriage is viewed not so much as a union between two individuals as the beginning of an enduring relationship between two families. Weddings are usually protracted events that mark the end of lengthy negotiations between two extended families including aunts, uncles, and even cousins once step removed (Seymour, 1999). Referred to as ‘arranged marriage’, they are rarely based purely on individual preference, choice or love. Marriage symbolizes and affirms the collective nature of family and larger kinship units in which the families are embedded. In contrast, the western notion of marriage labeled as ‘love marriage’ is frowned upon by the more traditional family elders (Dion & Dion, 1996).

Globalization of the economy, urbanization and the increased influence of western popular culture from books to movies and television shows, have brought about changes in the society. ‘From joint family to nuclear family’ is an oft repeated phrase that is used to summarize changes in the family in India during modern times. The decline in the influence of extended and joint family ties has resulted in structural holes in family networks, making it difficult for families to find suitable life-partners for their children. This led to the emergence of matchmaking services and classified advertisements (referred to as matrimonials) in newspapers. With the advent of the Internet, a new channel in the form of matrimonial Web sites has emerged as an alternative way to find partners for marriageable members of the family. The introduction of technology in the form of matrimonial Web sites in an otherwise socially-enabled process provides the setting for a fascinating exploration of changing social mores and the interaction of technology and society.

Research on electronic dating, online personals, matchmaking and social networks is limited (Close & Zinkhan, 2003; Fiore & Donath, 2004), more so in the type of societal context provided by India. This chapter investigates the impact of matrimonial Web sites on the process and practices associated with arranged marriage in India. Specifically, it seeks to answer the research questions: (1) how are the affordances provided by matrimonial Web sites appropriated by stakeholders in the process of arranging marriage; (2) what is the impact of such appropriation on the process; and (3) how does the use of such technologies shape traditions and norms associated with marriage. The investigation is informed by the theory of social construction of technology where the central premise is that technology as designed provides users with a range of possibilities which shape usage and are in turn shaped by users. The intent of the study is not to propose and validate hypotheses but to gain a deeper insight into the phenomena and an understanding of the
how technology is shaping and in turn shaped by users in such complex social processes. An ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis is deployed for this purpose in this investigation. The purpose of an ethnographic approach is not so much to show that technology is used but to show how it is socially appropriated. The key contributions of this study thus are an investigation of complex social processes in a societal context different from traditional western research contexts and the introduction of modern technologies where technology confronts with traditions and long standing ways of doing things. It will provide the platform for a wider exploration of the impact of modern computing and communication technologies on traditional societies.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Early research in the adoption and use of IT approached the phenomenon from a technology deterministic perspective (Markus & Robey, 1988) that focused on the impact of IT, treating it as an exogenous, invariant and monolithic artifact. Researchers then argued that IT innovations are not necessarily adopted passively as standard templates of an idea, rather it undergoes a “developmental process in adoption” involving the redefinition of specific sub-components of the new technology and their interaction with local user context (Rice & Rogers, 1980).

Introduction of new technologies invariably exerts pressure on individuals, organizations and society to change, adjust, or adapt to the new technology. However, the effects of new IT are more a function of how they are used by people rather than a function of the technology itself. Actual behavior in the context of new technologies may often differ from intended use (Markus & Robey, 1988). People adapt systems to their particular work needs, or they may resist them or not use them at all.

Structuration theory has been proposed as a theoretical lens for developing a better understanding of the interaction between organizations, technology, and people (Orlikowski & Robey, 1991; Orlikowski, 1992b). Central to structuration theory is the concept of “duality of structure” which is used to theorize that structures that are inherent in new technologies are different from the structures that emerge in human action as people interact with these technologies. Further, theoretical extension of this approach has been put forth in the form of adaptive structuration theory that has been used for studying organizational change that accompanies usage of new technologies (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). Drawing upon structuration (Giddens, 1984) and appropriation (Bijker & Law, 1992), Desanctis and Poole (1994) propose adaptive structuration theory for explaining the process of incorporating new technologies into work practices. Appropriation holds that people actively select how functionality and social structures embedded in the technology are used, and that a given feature may be deployed in different ways depending on how it is appropriated. Thus a key concept that emerges from organizational research in adoption and implementation is that structures, rules and resources provided by technologies and institutions are subject to appropriation by users.

Underlying the notion of social construction of technological systems (Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987) is a similar set of premises, albeit embedded in a larger sociological context. Social constructionist theory argues that just as technology is shaped by political, economic, social and technical factors, its use will be shaped by individual and societal influences (Bijker et al., 1987; Bijker & Law, 1992). Technology-as-designed provides a range of possibilities for appropriation by users. When technology is deployed by users, they appropriate technology in different ways so that technology-in-use is different from technology-in-design (Carroll, Howard, Vetere, Peck, & Murphy, 2002). As a result technol-
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ogy is shaped and reshaped over time and may eventually reach a state of equilibrium where it becomes embedded in users’ lives. Its continued use will depend on recurring reproduction and reinforcement of appropriated use, failing which the technology may be disappropriated by users. Thus, according to social constructionist theory, the way in which a technology is used cannot be understood without understanding the context in which the technology is embedded. Rather than use that is faithful to design, instrumental uses and dominant attitudes influence the incorporation of new technologies by users. Moreover, the manner in which technology is appropriated further influences the design of technology which in turn shapes use and users indicating that there is no linear path between technology adoption, its use and its impact on society.

The advent of matrimonial Web sites represents the introduction of a new technology into the complex social process of arranged marriage. Their design, largely modeled upon the design of online personals in U.S., is likely to have features that mirror the more western societal context of finding dates and partners. The Web sites offer a number of affordances to users such as content rich personal profiles, more choice, ability to search and filter, many-to-many communication, direct communication and disintermediation among others. However, the adoption of such online services would not depend simply on the characteristics and availability of technology, but on how users appropriate and repurpose the technology artifact for their use. In addition, societal factors such as the image of these Web sites, testimonials and references from the close circle of family friends that bear influence in such matters will also play a critical role in the use of matrimonial Web sites. Context-specific technical characteristics associated with arranged marriages in India such as caste, sub-caste and ‘dowry’ will play a role in determining if these services are used and how they are used to accommodate such considerations. The social construction of technology perspective allows us to investigate the adoption and use of matrimonial Web sites for arranging marriages to provide a rich and deep insight into the interplay between technology and complex socially embedded roles, relationships and rituals.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE IN INDIA

A nation of over one billion people, India is a country of many contrasts and contradictions. A visitor may witness signs of a progressive economy in its infrastructure, media and use of mobile communication devices. At the same time, institutions such as marriage and the role of women continue to be dominated by traditions. Sociologists categorize the Indian family structure as ‘patrifocal’ in nature (Seymour, 1999). Prevalent norms and values emphasize the interdependent nature of family relationships in contrast to independence and personal autonomy. From a very young age, children are socialized to identify with the family as a whole and discouraged from developing an autonomous self. They are conditioned to place the interests of the family ahead of their own. Alienating and confronting parents and family is still an anathema to most young people, especially in important decisions such as career selection and marriage. Furthermore, cultural mores frown upon the socialization among men and women in the form of dating and relationships. As a result, arranged marriage is still the dominant way for families and individuals to find partners for marriage. Once married, norms dictate that as a wife, a woman should put the needs of her husband and his extended family above her own needs. In a majority of instances, the newly married couple takes up residence at the bridegroom’s parents’ home.

The typical western view of arranged marriages tends to be biased by its own traditions and values which emphasize individual choice and responsibility. For many in the West, an
arranged marriage represents women being treated as property. Their wishes subordinated to patriarchy’s desire for property and power. They find it difficult to comprehend that women (or even men) could be pushed into marriage, sight unseen. Although some of these views are well-justified for sections of the society that are socially and economically handicapped and vulnerable. For many others, arranged marriages represent a lifetime of commitment to family and mutual goals. Arranged marriages can provide a degree of emotional security and economic stability that most people in the West would not expect from marriage. Even when raised in a western culture, Indians prefer arranged marriages. The practice has left Indians with the lowest rate of intermarriage of any major immigrant group in the United States with fewer than 10% marrying outside their ethnic group (Bellafante, 2005).

The process of arranging marriage can be a long and elaborate process involving the extended family and friends that culminates in elaborate wedding ceremonies that extend over several days. Traditionally, parents start the process when their children are considered to be of marriageable age, which in the case of women tends to be 22 or 23 years of age and for men around 26 years. The process may be put on hold if they are pursuing higher education or hastened when they start drawing a regular paycheck. The need for suitable alliances is broadcast to the extended family as well as friends. Biographic information about potential matches is exchanged using formal (résumé) and/or informal (oral description) communication. The process of selection is layered and nuanced involving many different considerations. Traditionally, the caste of a prospective match would be a major consideration. More recently, anecdotal evidence suggests that even though caste and sub-caste play a role, primacy is often awarded to level of education, profession, economic background (and potential) and the family of the prospective match. Informal background checks are performed to assess nature, character, prior relationships, habits (such as smoking and drinking which are frowned upon) and reputation of the family. These checks are usually conducted through the informal network of friends and relatives. The screening process also involves astrologers (who may also perform the role of a priest for the family) who evaluate the horoscope of the prospective bride or groom for compatibility.

Once suitable matches are screened, the prospective groom and his family visit the prospective bride’s family for a face-to-face meeting to assess compatibility of both the families and the prospective partners. Usually, the prospective partners are allowed to spend a brief amount of time to talk to each other. At this stage the process has progressed closer to a likely successful arrangement and has greater stakes for the families involved. Too many rejections (especially of the prospective bride) can create tension in the family and are considered to be a stigma on the family. More likely, one of a few of the handpicked matches results in satisfactory agreement among the families. What follows the agreement of marriage are complex negotiations about the logistics of marriage—where, when (at an auspicious time determined by astrologers), who will attend, number of guests, dowry if applicable, involvement of priests and rituals to be performed, among other myriad details. In most instances these negotiations exclude the bride and groom. The agreement is formalized with an engagement ceremony which can be relatively simple ceremony marked by an exchange of rings or in other instances as ceremonial as the wedding itself.

The brief description here summarizes the traditional arranged marriage, one that is still largely prevalent in the Indian society. However, over the past several decades, social and geographical mobility have weakened the extended family structure and increasingly replaced it with a more nuclear family structure. As a consequence, social networks provided by the extended family structure are no longer available to parents for finding
suitable partners for their marriageable offspring. The absence of such social networks is felt even more by the large, growing, mobile and educated middle class of India. This led to the emergence of matchmaking services, classified advertisements, and more recently online matrimonial services. Rao and Rao (1982) indicate that such anonymous channels of matchmaking as matrimonial ads are more prevalent in urban India where a majority of the middle class reside. As the nuclear family structure becomes more prevalent, the trend in arranged marriage is to allow greater participation of the prospective bride and groom. Some argue that this is changing arranged marriage to one that is more of an ‘assisted marriage’ (Bel-lafante, 2005). Perhaps the most important change is the granting of ‘veto’ power by parents to their offspring on any marriage proposal introduced by them. Prospective partners often go on ‘arranged’ dates, which may be supervised under the watchful eyes of an elder relative. Sometimes there is an extended period of dating prior to a formal agreement to the marriage.

Earlier studies of arranged marriages in India have looked at role of dowry (Anderson, 2003), status of women (Rao & Rao, 1982) and application of Markov decision making models to the marriage decision making process (Batabyal, 1998). The advent of online matrimonial services introduces a technological artifact into the process of arranged marriages bringing technology to the forefront, amidst changing social practices. At the very least, the technology provides a number of affordances to families seeking partners for marriageable family members. In an otherwise information-sparse environment that consists of either the limited and cryptic information of a newspaper classified or the filtered and often embellished information provided by a brokerage service, online services allows their users to post extensive information about potential partners. No longer dependent on the social network, users have access to a significantly larger pool of prospective partners. The richer information in each profile enables users to perform more complex searches and use a variety of criteria to filter and screen potential partners. Depending on the online service, further communication may be facilitated with online chat and/or e-mail allowing for further exchange of information and interest. Finally, since the technology does not distinguish between parents or prospective partners, it has the potential to completely disintermediate the role of family members and emulate the more western model of individuals finding their own partners for marriage. Thus, the use of matrimonial Web sites in India provides a fascinating setting for examining how these affordances provided by the technology are appropriated. It provides an opportunity to examine changes in power and control structures and the relationship between technology and social institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The objective of this research is to examine the adoption and use of technology in situ in a complex social process involving numerous stakeholders in order to develop a grounded understanding of the phenomena. Our aim here is to observe what people actually do rather than what they say they do or what they say they should be doing. We rely on ethnography to observe, document and interpret the appropriation of technology in arranged marriages in India.

Ethnography as a research method was developed by social and cultural anthropologists where the researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the field observing the phenomenon within its social and cultural context (Myers, 1999). In recent years, an increasing emphasis has been placed by researchers on the social and organizational contexts of information systems and ethnographic research has emerged as an important tool for studying these contexts (Myers, 1999; Schultze & Leidner, 2002). Early IS research that used the ethnographic approach focused on
human-computer communications (Suchman, 1987) and was the basis for the widely known *In the Age of the Smart Machine* by Zuboff (1988). More recently, ethnography has been used to study management of information systems (Davies & Nielsen, 1992), development of information systems (Orlikowski, 1991; Myers & Young, 1997), their implementation (Orlikowski, 1992a), knowledge work (Schultzze & Leidner, 2002), and their impact (Randall et al., 1999).

With its emphasis on participant observation over extended periods of time, ethnography is considered to be one of the most in-depth research methods possible (Myers, 1999). The method places primacy over first-hand observations made by researchers who are immersed in the social and work lives of their subjects (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Myers, 1999). By focusing on socially-situated observations, we develop rich descriptions of the how participants in arranged marriage engage with each other, adopt and appropriate technology and analyze the role of technology in shaping the social context to generate theoretical insights. As ethnographers we adopt a sense-making and learning role as compared to the more conventional scientific approach of formulating and testing hypotheses. The approach deploys a flexible and somewhat unstructured research design where the actual progression of the phenomenon (e.g., an arranged marriage) and study participants drive the data collection process.

As ethnographers, researchers act as their own research instrument; as a result they are driven by their unique identity, knowledge, experience and subjectivity. The researcher has to rely on his/her personal experience in engaging with the research phenomenon to develop an understanding and generate theoretical insights. The ethnographic narrative arising from the study then become experiences of shared subjectivity. In writing ethnography, researchers often engage in writing and rewriting their own identities (Chawla, 2006). Given that ethnography is often associated with observing cultural context as an outsider (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), we as natives of the culture are in some ways 'insiders' to social setting in which we perform our investigation. However, it offers the advantage of being readily accepted, having a shared history, understanding of the context and related experiences. Moreover, participants are less likely to view us as outside observers because we look native, speak the language, and are to some degree (albeit loosely) embedded in the social fabric of their daily lives. Chawla (2006) argues that as an ethnographer, native or otherwise, researchers enter the field entrenched with degrees of outsiderness that instills a certain amount of objectivity and distance into their observation and analysis. Moreover, just like other research that adopts a more scientific approach, ethnographic research is expected to meet standards of objectivity (Schultzze & Leidner, 2002). As scientists, ethnographic researchers have to balance subjectivity and objectivity in a manner that convinces the academic community of the generalizability and reliability of their inferences.

**DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

Data for the study was collected over a span of fifteen months which included two visits, 63 days in 2006 and 49 days in 2007, studying Web sites and follow-up conversations over telephone. During the first visit, the authors spent time talking to people and collecting secondary data about matrimonial Web sites, investigating the sites and the success stories posted on these sites. In the second visit, secondary data was used as a basis for identifying broad issues and research questions for primary data collection. A majority of the time on both visits was spent in Mumbai, and supplemented by data collected from other major metropolitan cities over brief visits. As in studies of this nature, the emphasis is not as much on using a representative sample as it is to develop a deep
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understanding of the phenomenon. At the same time, we did wish to get a sampling of different families and the roles played by different members of the family in using online matrimonial services. The data collection process involved conversations with prospective partners, parents, siblings and close relatives which ranged from informal interviews to just observing conversations as they took place in households.

Since the focus of our investigation was online matrimonial services, a considerable amount of time was spent in understanding the technology itself. This involved two aspects; the first was to understand the nature and type of services provided by different Web sites. We document these using the search, matching, and interaction framework (SMI) proposed by Ahuvia and Adelman (1992) in Table 1. The SMI framework is based on the primary roles performed by any market intermediaries namely, searching, matching and transacting. Ahuvia and Adelman (1992) developed the SMI framework to categorize the processes that are involved in the marriage market and proceeded to describe the marriage market intermediaries in terms of how they performed these processes. As marriages do not happen in a vacuum, the search-matching-interaction framework integrates the context in which the relationships dyads are embedded with the interpersonal processes involved in the formation of the relationship. The second aspect involved observing the ongoing appropriation of the online service by users as reflected in the profiles and success stories documented on these Web sites. These success stories are obviously intended as testimonials by other users for the service, but they provide an additional source of information and details on how the partners decided to adopt the service, how they used the service, and the role of other family members. While these secondary sources of data are not central to this investigation, they helped us in understanding of the context and develop a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

During our visits, we spent a considerable amount of time talking to different families that were actively engaged in the process of finding a suitable partner for a family member. They were in different stages of the process; while some had just begun to test the waters, others were actively evaluating candidates. In one instance, we were able to follow the process right up to the actual wedding ceremony itself, which was attended by one of the authors. Our time in the field was spent initially in identifying families that would be suitable candidates for collecting data from the social network of our relatives in India and introductions made through this network. Conversations about arranged marriage took place in a variety of settings. A considerable amount of time was spent in participating in day-to-day activities of the participants, many of which involved shopping, eating out, or simply sharing a ride with them as they commuted either for work or social engagements. When a search is active, it was not too difficult to get a family talking as it would invariably be at the top of their minds. While families were observed as such, discussions took place over afternoon tea or a meal; there were many opportunities where there were one-to-one conversations. Apart from group settings, the cultural context and topic are such that women are more apt to discuss and share their feelings, emotions and thoughts on the subject in depth in a one on one conversation.

Ethnographic research suffers from unique issues of validity and reliability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982); replication of these studies pose problems of variation in context. Collectively, we spoke to about 39 individuals during our stay and during subsequent follow-up telephone calls. Of these, 23 were women and 16 were men. Of the men, six were fathers of the women, four were brothers of the women, two were uncles of the men and four were the men in the marriage market. Of the women, 12 were the women who were candidates for marriage, six were mothers of the women, four were sisters of the women, and one
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was the mother of a man in the marriage market. About three-fourths of the respondents were from the northern part of India and the remaining were from the southern part of India. All of our study participants were from metropolitan cities and because of the nature of our sampling process, we did not have access to people in small towns and rural India. The average household income of the participants likely ranged from 25,000 rupees per month (about 600 dollars) to about more than 100,000 rupees a month (2,400 dollars). We did not ask direct questions about income because such questions were not appropriate in the social milieu in which we were interacting with the participants. Thus the participants constituted members of the Indian middle and upper middle class. It is also our assumption that many lower-middle class families do not use the Internet for matrimonial matchmaking. Almost all of our participants belonged to the upper three castes in the Indian caste system, and our social network limited our access to lower castes. The first few of the participants were members of the authors’ extended family, friends and larger circle of acquaintances who then directed us to others who were participating in matrimonial Web site-based matchmaking. This limitation in our sampling limits the generalizability of our study. Our study is limited in scope to urban middle class families participating in the Web-based matchmaking and is influenced by the authors’ perceptions of traditional arranged marriages in India, as well as what our study participants, especially the fathers and mothers, recounted about how arranged marriages used to take place in their time.

The nature of our conversations focused on information included in the profiles, how the process of arranged marriage was conducted using the Web sites, the role of the family versus the partners themselves and interactions between families and partners before and during the decision making process. The questions were woven into the conversation, sometimes requiring repeat interactions and were transcribed at the end of the day. Due to the nature of immersion in the field, it is not possible to precisely draw a boundary on how many hours of actual conversation form the pool of field experience. In order to keep track of our conversations, we kept a daily log individually that included both field notes and our own reflections. Once every week during our visits, both authors would spend a couple of hours going over their own and each other’s logs to fill gaps and discuss progress.

Table 1. SMI services offered by matrimonial Web sites in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search (Information Gathering)</th>
<th>Matching (Decision Making)</th>
<th>Interaction (Relationship Formation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Religious</td>
<td>• Horoscope based matching</td>
<td>• Contact through the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social background (caste, sub-caste, Gotra, Manglik)</td>
<td>• Push (results delivered in the mailbox) and pull matching (filtering based on user criteria)</td>
<td>• Phone and e-mail addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• astrological information (horoscopes and signs)</td>
<td>• Can pursue multiple matches simultaneously</td>
<td>• Built-in chat services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lifestyle (smoking, alcohol consumption, vegetarian)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• culture (languages spoken and values-liberal, traditional, modern, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• complexion (fair or ‘wheatish’ rarely dark)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• body type (slim or average never heavy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• living conditions (income, living with parents, nationality, citizenship and work status in different countries such as U.S.)</td>
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</table>
Data coding and categorization was done manually by the each of the authors at the end of the study. The next step was discussion and synthesis of the variations in coding and categorization schemes used by the authors. At this step, where needed, further data was collected through follow-up phone conversations. Our coding and categorization schemes centered around our key research questions, the role of the family in initiation and the decision making process, the degree and length of courtships, the sequence of courtship in the matchmaking process, and the preferences of the participants and family members about the chosen characteristics of the potential partner.

**Changing Roles, Shifting Traditions and Cultural Convergence: Online Matrimonial Services and Arranged Marriage**

There are a growing number of Web sites that are dedicated to providing matrimonial services in India. Major players from U.S. in Internet-related businesses view this as a potential market and have tied up with Indian firms, for example, Yahoo! along with a venture capital firm has taken up a stake in BharatMatrimony.com. Microsoft has ties with Shaadi.com, another popular Web site. The number of users of these services has grown from about 4 million in 2004 to 7.5 million in 2006 according to estimates provided by Internet & Mobile Association of India (Lakshman, 2006). Although the online market in these services is only about 4% of the estimated $500 million spent on off-line matrimonial services, it is expected to continue to grow at the rate of 40%-50% every year. As the bulk of the off-line market consists of print classifieds, if trends in the U.S. newspaper industry are anything to go by, online matrimonial services could soon overtake print media. A growing educated middle-class and sustained economic growth is only likely to further fuel the growth in these services.

Popular beliefs, especially in urban India, indicate that the popularity of these sites reflects the changing face of India. Traditionally, the family plays a very important role in arranged marriages in India. It begins with announcing the entry of the prospective bride or groom into the marriage market. The family influences the matching and selection process to preserve traditional notions of compatibility in terms of age, family culture, caste, community and horoscopes. Like most cultures, the bride is usually given away by the father, but unlike western culture not to the groom but to the groom’s family. Once married, the bride becomes a member of the groom’s family and is expected to have only weak ties to her own family. The fact that most grooms stay in their parents’ homes, which is the norm, further reinforces the symbolic nature of this transition from one family to another for the bride. For this reason, the compatibility of the bride with the groom’s family and not just the groom is considered to be of greater importance than the relationship between the groom and bride’s family. To understand how families are using online matrimonial services for arranging marriages, we look at the matchmaking process in terms of search, matching and interaction. As we look at how technology is appropriated, we address the research questions: how do features presented by matrimonial Web sites used for arranging marriage, how are they changing the nature of the marriage process, and the norms and traditions associated with arranged marriage. We primarily focus on the role of family in the process against the backdrop of social and cultural changes permeating the Indian Diaspora.

**Search**

The decision that a son or daughter should enter the marriage market is usually made by the parents...
and as a consequence the process is initiated by parents or a trusted family elder. For somebody to raise the matter of their own marriage would be considered bold and indicate that they are self-absorbed rather than thinking in terms of the interests of the family. Many young people in fact choose to avoid or postpone discussion of marriage using education or career as excuses because they believe they will be heading off confrontation between their expectations of a partner in marriage with those of the family. Some view it as a battle they will eventually ‘loose’ as the family will eventually ‘force’ them to compromise and make a choice. Others view it just the opposite, using delay as a tactic to wear down their parents as they start worrying about the window of marriageable age slipping away and are then ready to allow the son or daughter to have an upper hand in the selection process. All this suggests the absence of open communication within the family as individual members try to conform to their expected roles while engaging in signaling and power play.

Traditionally, the parents and family elders would start the process by raising the matter when they meet relatives and friends that they have started ‘looking’ for a match for their son or daughter. With the changing family structure and weakening social networks, this increasingly poses a challenge for families. For expatriates, who have been disconnected from these networks in India, the challenges are only greater. Choices may be few, not match the desired profile and the family also opens itself to pressure from the extended family. Before online matrimonial services, families would rely on third-party matchmaking services and classified advertisements. Finding the right matchmaking service presented its own challenge as most would not disclose the demographic nature of their pool of prospects. They might be skewed towards a particular community that the family was not interested in or avoid a community altogether thereby reducing the efficacy of that brokerage service. Family elders indicate that until recently using matrimonial ads in newspapers was stigmatized and considered to be the last resort. Research in different national contexts indicates that till recently the users of matchmaking services were stigmatized (Darden & Koski, 1988). Classifieds were resorted to when families had problems finding matches the traditional way. Anonymous and charged by the word, parents would craft cryptic classifieds in attempt to compress all their myriad criteria in addition to posting basic biographic information into 50 words or less.

On the Web the restrictions posed by classifieds on the amount of information disappears. Whereas photographs would generally be exchanged only after the initial responses to classified were filtered, on the Web, most users post photographs along with the profile. This suggests that the stigma associated with using impersonal and anonymous methods has eroded in most cases. Many families view this as the preferred method because they feel that they have a better chance of finding suitable matches in view of the more detailed information and larger pool of prospects. By browsing the Web site, users can make a quick judgment about the demographics of the pool and its suitability to their selection criteria.

As it is customary in Hindu families for parents to search for their children’s life partner; my parents were doing the same by speaking with relatives and also circulating our ‘bio-data’ via various electronic resources.

Even with online services, parents continue to perform the role of initiating, searching and filtering potential partners. Gender stereotypes persist in the new medium. This is consistent with research on dating ads in other countries which suggest that gender and role stereotypes and expectations likely persist and change very gradually over time (Peres & Meivar, 1986; Koestner & Wheeler, 1988). Women indicate that in the Indian societal context even if they
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were actively involved in the process or actually posted their own profile, they wanted to maintain the appearance that the process was being initiated and managed by their parents. In all of our conversations, we seldom found the roles reversed or even an attempt to convey the appearance that they had been reversed. Women, in most cases, did not post their own profiles because they were afraid of being considered as ‘fast and easy’. They would recount the experience of their friends who posted their own profiles had ended up in situations where the men were exchanging messages with them without any interest in marriage and were just looking to have a good time. Parents also perceived a greater responsibility in having their daughter married at the right time with the right match because they perceived that they were custodians of their daughters until they joined their ‘true’ family. This put greater pressure on parents to initiate and start the search for a suitable partner. Parents also believe they can pre-empt their daughters finding their own partners or avoid the issue especially in the case of career-oriented and ambitious women who were not interested in getting married in their twenties. One 28-year-old woman who is a consultant in a multinational firm explained:

*I have to agree to put up with the ad because my parents keep pressurizing me…. at least this way it appears to them that I am interested in getting married and at the same time I can keep rejecting the matches they get for me.*

Her parents said:

*the girls today want a very specific kind of husband .. he should be liberal and modern* in his thinking .. she does not like anyone we find in our community .. by posting this ad perhaps we can find such a person in our specific caste and subcaste somewhere else.*

Another woman stated:

*My profile was created by my elder brother and every day he checked for a partner for me.*

While parents conceded to their daughters’ desire for a like-minded partner, they also sought to preserve traditional notions of the primacy of caste and community.

Interestingly, a greater proportion of the profiles of grooms were posted by prospective grooms themselves. Traditional gender stereotypes hold that men should be allowed greater independence (as long as they stayed or had their parents live with them). The perception that men are more technologically savvy created the circumstances for unmarried men to play a bigger role in online matchmaking. Parents felt they could deal with the low-tech nature of classifieds, but often felt ill equipped to deal with computers and the World Wide Web.

The shift from classified to online services has created increased opportunity for communication that was otherwise absent or predicated on non-verbal gestures and behavior. Once a classified is published, the action is followed with responses that come in batches and decline rapidly with time. The batched nature resulted in periods of waiting followed by some uncomfortable discussions among parents and their children. With online services, the profile has a greater shelf life yielding a steadier stream of responses. Moreover, there was the opportunity to engage in a more continuous as opposed to episodic search for potential partners. This created increased opportunity for communication within the family and more importantly for a tacit convergence of expectations.
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Caste and sub-caste continue to be major considerations in search. In each of the online matrimonial services, a user could select bride or groom by caste, sub-caste, religion, language, state and age among other criteria. Almost everyone we talked to were very specific about religion and caste as filtering criteria. This was also reflected in the profiles that were posted on the Web sites. For example, a Hindu (religion), Brahmin (caste) female would want a Hindu, Brahmin male for a husband. In another posting, a 24-year-old woman from Mumbai sought a Hindu from the same caste speaking a specific language (Malayalam), but having moderate and liberal attitudes.

The profiles also reflected social taboos associated with suitable partners. Many users specifically mentioned smoking and drinking. Partners who did not smoke or drink are preferred. Social taboos associated with smoking and drinking persisted in the new medium. In talking to women, drinking alcohol was not preferred for men and absolutely taboo for women. Other criteria for search that persist in online profiles are horoscope and skin color. Most men sought partners who had a fair or ‘wheatish’ complexion demonstrating the continued belief in India that fair skin is associated with beauty.

MATCHING

Traditionally, arranged marriages have been brokered by family and friends, an elaborate process laced with social nuances that involves matching candidates on the basis of caste, community, religion and horoscopes. The family plays two important gate-keeping roles; the first is that of controlling the entry of new members into the family, especially the bride, and ensuring that they are compatible with the family’s values and traditions. In its second role, the family perpetuates the caste, community and religious divisions in the society. These societal divisions are viewed as surrogates for compatibility and for ensuring that traditions are carried on from one generation to the next. Our conversations with families showed that parents continued to perform this important gate-keeping role. In most cases, members of the family first screened the responses and made the first contact before allowing the prospective partners to meet each other.

We met in coffee day after our parents talked to each other.

Our parents then arranged a meeting for us. My father showed an interested in his profile and give him contact no. and e-mail ID. He accepted and forward my profile to his parents .... then he talked to my father and said he want to come to my parent’s home in Dehradun. Within a week he came and finalized the matter. Then my sister and Jijaji (Brother-in-law) went to his home at NOIDA and found suitable and said ok from our side. His parents and my parents talked to each other on the phone and after that the marriage was fixed.

After reading my profile and showing it to her father, her second cousin phoned my father (who was the contact listed with my profile) requesting more information about me.

Firstly, both my parents and my partner’s parents contacted each other to make sure that all necessary requirements were suitable in order for the marriage proposal to materialize.

I approached to her and received a response from her father.

With online services, there is potential for disintermediation of the role played by parents and their status as gatekeepers starts to diminish. The process of screening and matching is no longer solely dependent on parents. Family could control information as either they went and met intermediaries or received the responses to
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classifieds. Now the information is always there, only a few clicks away. It is not surprising that sometimes the initiative towards matchmaking is now being taken by the prospective partners themselves. Even if they found their own partner, given the dominant role of parents and the strong bond with family, they would still seek the approval of their families. Whether it was the family that acted as a gatekeeper or a final consenting authority, the family is ever present in the matchmaking process.

My thanks to ... for bringing the two families together.

We interacted about our family details and the kind of partner being sought. We both were satisfied with each others' families, culture, background etc.

With the consent and blessings of our families.

It is interesting that even if partners took initiative, they would mimic the very criteria that would be applied by their families, such as caste, community and religion. It did not matter whether the profiles were posted by family elders or the candidates themselves; religion, language, community, caste and sub-caste were always a consideration. Almost all profiles mentioned their own religion and caste as well as their preferred religion and caste of the partner.

mARRYING a Muslim is out of question. our daughter-in-law is a Hindu ... we still wish our son would have chosen a Muslim girl.

If I marry a Bengali (language) .. it will be easier for her to interact with my grandparents and extended family.

Brahmins (caste group) are very particular about who they marry.

The use of online matrimonial services in fact seems to make it easier to find someone within the sub-caste of your choice. In the absence of these matrimonial services, the ability to find someone within one's caste group depended on the reach of your extended family and the resources available. Families in the past would often compromise by marrying in the community outside the caste group because of limitations in the pool of applicants available. However, with geographical barriers removed by online services, it has become possible to find someone belonging to the exact same caste or sub-caste as that being sought by the family. This same someone (invariably the bride) is also willing to move halfway across the world to live with her newly wedded partner. Thus online services not only perpetuate traditional notions of an acceptable partner, but also provided increased choice. Sometimes, this would also create decision delay, as there was always hope that someone more perfectly matching the filtering criteria could come along in the future.

This is great! The girl of my dreams could be on the other side of the world.

I can't believe that I can find someone who matches my exact profile needs thousands of miles away.

Matching the horoscopes was also an important concern for many families. Some online services even provided this as an additional feature of their services.

the gotras should not be common. We would also ask for your details for purpose of horoscope matching.

Our families met and even the horoscopes matched well.
Sticking with our family tradition, we matched horoscopes and got elders consent. A cursory analysis would suggest that online matrimonial services simply replicate the off-line process of arranging marriages. It is evident that the criteria used for matching partners are largely carried over online. At the same time these services provide greater transparency and access that is loosening the grip of the family over information and eroding their role as gatekeepers. At times, the role is completely disintermediated by the presence of online services. Using online services increases the pool of potential partners and provides greater choice by breaking down geographical barriers and filling the gap created by weakening social networks. The increased choice does come at a cost—that of information overload.

INTERACTION

Perhaps the biggest change that online matrimonial services have introduced to arranged marriage is opportunity for interaction. In the traditional off-line mode, once a potential match was identified, the next step would be for the prospective groom’s family (with or without the groom) to visit the prospective bride’s family at home. In more traditional families this may even be preceded by several visits by other relatives and/or meetings of both families at another relative’s home. Setting up the visit was often a complex negotiation. The prospective partners are usually allowed to spend a brief amount of time alone to talk to each other. Other than that, it was rare for them to get an opportunity to get to know their future partner in marriage better. The bride and groom would also not have much say in any of the decisions about the wedding negotiations and arrangements.

With online services, many of these restrictions are being lifted. Prospective partners are often allowed to interview each other online without parental supervision. This represents an interesting shift in the role of the family in determining the compatibility of both partners. By allowing such communication, the responsibility of assessing compatibility and selection are gradually moving away from the family elders to the prospective candidates. Since the joint family structure is slowly disappearing, the parents often seem content to apply the broad criteria of religion, caste, age, economic background, and so forth, on the choice of a partner and leave the rest (personality, likes, dislikes, etc.) to their children. With the help of online services, a period of online courtship has emerged. Potential partners are allowed to get to know each other by exchanging e-mails, talking to each other over the phone or chatting online. In almost all instances, this was long-distance without any face-to-face meetings. Although most families still do not allow the prospective partners to meet alone or go out on a date, they did not seem to have a problem with electronic interaction. This step of getting to know a potential partner better seems to have emerged with modern communication technologies and precedes any formal meeting between the two families.

*we chatted for 3 months* 

*she sent me an e-mail .. and the next day everything was finalized* 

*We dated ....(electronically) .. for six months.* 

*We chatted and spoke on the phone for hours and found that we are a perfect match for each other.* 

*We chatted on (name of Web site) and thereafter we decided we r going to marry even before our families could meet.*
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Earlier her family was not at all interested in me but slowly with our persistence they were forced to get us married. The norms of matchmaking in India have traditionally been different. After a meeting of the families, the bride’s family would patiently wait for a response from the groom’s family. If the days stretched into weeks and there was no response from the family, it indicated that they are not interested in pursuing the match further. The implicit rejection when a marriage proposal is turned down could also carry a social stigma. There are no such unspoken rules on online interaction. Chatting and dating can go on for a long time before there is any discussion of marriage. Online interaction allows users to disengage easily without any stigma associated with such rejection. This can at times create problems and emotional issues for some users who are not used to having such extended relationships.

we chatted for many months but he never wanted to take it forward.

The traditional way of finding marriage partners through family and friends provides a certain amount of accountability; there is tacit trust which when violated can have social implications. With the search for partners going online, the process is taken out of a social context. While the search can cut across traditional social networks to find potential partners they are otherwise unlikely to reach, it makes judging the credibility of the information online even harder. Many families indicated that conducting a background check was very difficult with online matrimonial services. In some cases, the whole thing seemed to fall apart, after the families met as they did not approve of each other, or the family was different from what they had expected based on the descriptions provided online.

the family did not seem as reputable as they claimed to be...

In many instances, it was still possible to get some background checks done through family and friends. While the Web sites themselves did not provide any easy methods to facilitate a background check, some families went out of their way to do a background check by trying to find mutual contacts in the community who could help them with more information about the family. Also used in lieu of the background check was applying the traditional filters of religion, language, community, caste, and so forth, with the implicit assumption that users similar in background also bore a level of trustworthiness. The inability to validate the information from traditional networks is another reason why families found it useful to allow the potential partners to communicate. Families acquiesced to online and long-distance interaction so that prospective partners could sort out values, norms and beliefs. As long as the potential partner fit the traditional filters, families let the partners do further selection themselves.

In my profile, I had mentioned who happens to be my dad’s uncle and his neighbor in (city name), and a common link between the two families. At that point of time he was in UK and I was in Bangalore. He called me and we had a conversation. We exchanged all the details about us and both the families through uncle...

I received an e-mail stating that she was interested in speaking with me. Soon after we began to chat on the Internet via Yahoo! Messenger. As soon as we started to communicate our sessions lasted well into the wee hours of morning.

Then we started chatting over msn. Which was on for 3 months...
It is evident that online matrimonial services have introduced new elements into the process of arranging marriage that are made possible by technology. The perception of relative anonymity and informal nature of the medium along with the absence of context provided by traditional social networks has allowed potential partners to play a greater role in the process. With the process shielded from the view of the immediate social network of the family and therefore any possibility of social sanction or stigma, new forms of interactions and steps in the process are emerging. Families do not have to engage in elaborate orchestration of the interaction between families prior to settling on a choice for partner. The informal nature of interaction and absence of face-to-face communication make it easier to engage and disengage and as an interesting consequence obviate the need for signaling and the ambiguity associated with signaling (are they interested or not?).

**DISCUSSION**

Our analysis of the use of online matrimonial services for arranged marriages reveals the possibilities created by technology and how they are appropriated by users. To many, the change may appear to be glacial in pace, but against the backdrop of a society that has a history and traditions dating back several millennia, they show shifting roles, changing traditions and convergence with the more modern view of marriage and family held by western culture. Information technology in the form of matrimonial Web sites creates both online and off-line possibilities for users as they go about the traditional process of finding life partners and new members for their families.

Families seeking partners for their marriageable son or daughter typically operate in an information-sparse environment. Reliance on the friends and family network meant that much of the information was subjective, by word of mouth but embedded in the social context. The cryptic nature of information from classifieds and the commercial nature of third-party services created many challenges for families. The digital world, where space is not at a premium, creates a more information rich environment in which the search can be conducted. The relative anonymity and privacy provided by using the service at home or an Internet café reduces concerns about any social stigma that may be associated with having to rely on such services rather than social networks. Moreover, our data suggests that as the institution of joint family recedes from family life, any negative association about the use of such services is disappearing.

With online services, the role of immediate social network, classifieds and third-party brokerage services is disintermediated. Technology allows users to cut across boundaries created by distance and social networks allowing creating a larger pool of potential candidates. To ease the process of selection, all Web sites provide search tools for users to specify their criteria. All Web sites capture and allow search across traditional criteria of religion, caste, community, language in addition to age and economic background. This reflects the influence of social context on the design of Web sites. At the same time, the technology is reducing the need for this information. In an information-sparse environment, the application of these criteria as filters served as surrogate indicators of compatibility, ensuring that the families of the bride and groom had similar values and traditions. In an information-rich environment where all kinds of information about habits, likes and dislikes is available, the need for surrogate indicators diminishes. This allows families and potential partners to express their subjective preferences that are more direct and reflect more rational criteria. As many of the Web sites are modeled after online personals popular in western cultures, these design elements in the form of such content and ability to communicate directly using e-mail and chat ap-
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Some of the Web sites, as an indicator of such cultural convergence, provide dating services in addition to matchmaking services. Video profiles are also becoming an option that is used by some users on these sites.

The roles played by different family members in the process are also adjusting with the use of technology. Parents and/or other family act as gatekeepers to control the information flow from various sources as well as information about prospective matches. In the digital world, the information is (persistent) always available online and easily accessible to all members of the family. This weakens the role of parents as gatekeepers. It also changes the nature of the flow, which is more continuous as compared to the more episodic flow of classified advertisements and meeting with relatives or brokerage services. The continuous flow of information creates more opportunities for interaction among family members over casual conversations. The increased communication surfaces concerns of different family members, bridges role boundaries and generation gap, and helps creates a greater consensus within the family.

Perhaps one of the more significant changes made possible with online services is the ability to have direct communication with potential partners and their family. Online communication does not bear the same credence as face-to-face meeting in formal social settings. The relatively anonymous and informal nature of interaction reduces the perceived risk of adverse social consequences of allowing prospective partners to communicate directly. Furthermore, devoid of the context provided by traditional social networks, families feel the need to allow more extensive communication between prospective partners to assess compatibility. This also allows the prospective partners to play a greater role in assessing compatibility.

Figure 1. Change in SMI processes with the use of matrimonial Web sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search</th>
<th>Matching</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information rich environment Provided anonymity and privacy Distance and geography no bar in finding the perfect match Gender, role and cultural stereotypes persist in matrimonial ads</td>
<td>Matchmaking based on traditional criteria Information access reduced Family role as gatekeeper to merely specify criteria</td>
<td>Email, chat and phone interaction Extended courtship Virtual dating may precede matchmaking Limited parental supervision Interaction brings to the fore credibility issues in online information Background checks may still be performed offline Family interaction reduced Easier to disengage if match does not work out Reduced stigma in disengaging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Disintermediation of Family
- Cultural Convergence
- Information Persistence and Accessibility
- Continuous rather than episodic information flow and communication
- Ease of engagement and disengagement
- Reduced Stigma
- Virtual Dating
and making choices further disintermediating the role of other family members in matching and selection. Figure 1 graphically presents the results of our study.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study investigates the influence of technology and its use on arranged marriage in India with the use of online matrimonial services. The study has several limitations in its present form. The nature of the research method creates limitations on replicability and generalizability of the study. As natives of the culture we were studying, we carried with us a tacit understanding of the social backdrop of our study. While the additional insight allows us to see subtle differences and changes and a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, at the same time, it creates the potential for subjectivity and bias.

Study subjects were Indians residing in India and did not include Indians residing in other countries who represented a significant proportion of users of online matrimonial services. The immersive nature of field study in ethnography made it difficult to study this segment as they visited India only for short periods of time and it was difficult to talk to them and observe them in a natural setting. However, among the families we studied, several had considered potential partners who were non-resident Indians.

Our study was conducted primarily in Mumbai and Delhi, which are large metropolitan cities. Culture, social mores and traditions differ significantly across urban and rural India. As a result, the narrative cannot be considered as reflective of India in general but primarily urban families. However, it should be noted that a majority of users of online matrimonial services reside in larger cities.

In our attempt to focus on the use of online matrimonial services, we did not study families that arranged marriages using more traditional methods. A more insightful comparison and contrast of the two different routes to arranged marriage would have helped to isolate the underlying changes driving the two processes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Online personals, e-dating and matrimonial Web sites are changing the rules of how relationships are formed and maintained in communities all over the world. In societies where dating itself is taboo according to social and religious norms, online matrimonial services are filling the gap left by the absence of social networks in societies transitioning to urban and modern culture. Since there are no established mores about using online media, the online matrimonial services mirror existing social practices. As the technology is used and appropriated by users, both social practices and the technology evolve. The use of online matrimonial services provides an interesting illustration of the social construction of technology.

The use of technology demonstrates a tension created by the affordances provided by technology and entrenched social traditions and practices. The use of online services has diluted the societal norms about socializing among opposite sexes but at the same time preserved traditional notions of compatibility by providing easy access to information about religion, caste and community. Although it is still not acceptable to go out on dates, online relationships are considered acceptable and allowed to continue over extended periods of time without parental supervision. Men and women who are seeking life partners are playing bigger roles in arranged marriage but still consider parents to be the final arbiters. Gender stereotypes continue to persist as women do not wish to give the appearance of driving the process but feel comfortable using the technology to actively participate in the process.
Online matrimonial services are not adopted as an instrument to bring about social change. To be accepted by families, they need to reflect and perpetuate societal and religious traditions and values. As they are recurrently used, the possibilities created by technology and its appropriation by users, creates a new equilibrium that reflects the new social reality created by technology and users. In the case of online matrimonial services, the subtle influence of technology cannot be overlooked as the use of online content, instant messaging and e-mail is expanding the influence of the younger generation over their elders in arranged marriage to create a new social norm that bears closer resemblance to western notions of marriage.

This has implications for the social construction of similar technologies in different societal and cultural contexts. When introducing new technologies with social implications such as cell phones and wireless services, the initial adoption of these technologies is only likely to succeed if on the surface these technologies mirror the traditional norms of behavior and social interaction. However, the appropriation of these technologies by users over a period of time brings about changes in social relationships and interactions. These changes, in their own way, change the structure and features of the technology, further driving social change. For example, India is one of the largest growth markets for the use of mobile phones and the phones were first used in India by affluent families and for business uses; over a period of time as prices came down, they found their way to the lower middle class, the rural areas and the self-employed such as street vendors and maids. In line with the new social classes that have adopted mobile phones, the technologies themselves changed to encourage usage, such as the predominance of pre-paid phone plans, long battery life and the use of am/fm radio as a standard feature, as these phones are used as music players by a majority of the population. This has further fueled the growth in the market of these phones in India.

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**ENDNOTES**

1. Both authors were born and raised in India and have resided in the U.S. for the past 15 years.
2. A list of Web sites is listed in Appendix A
3. A gotra is the lineage or clan assigned to a Hindu at birth based on an astrological condition.
4. Each quote is replicated in Appendix B to translate the colloquial intent in conventional English. The quotes are identified by the number in subscript at the end of the quote.
5. Being liberal and modern for most women in India means that the men do not subscribe to traditional stereotypes of women as homemakers and are subservient to the husband and his family. It has implications for everything from how they can dress to their careers.
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APPENDIX A

List of Matrimonial Web sites:

1. BharatMatrimony.com www.bharatmatrimony.com
2. Hindumatrimony.com www.hindumatrimony.com
4. iMilap.com www.imilap.com
5. Jeevansathi.com www.jeevansathi.com
6. A1 Indian Matrimonials www.a1im.com
7. Shaadi.com www.shaadi.com
8. eMatrimonials www.geocities.com/ematrimonials
10. Matrisearch.com matrisearch.com
11. Falguni Mehta’s Marriage Bureaus www.falgunimehta.com/

APPENDIX B

1. As is customary in Hindu families, parents search for their children’s life partner. My parents are doing the same by speaking to relatives and circulating my ‘bio-data’ using various electronic resources.
2. I have to agree to put up with the ad because my parents keep putting pressure me.... at least this way it appears to them that I am interested in getting married while at the same time I can keep rejecting the matches they propose.
3. The girls today want a very specific kind of person as a husband .. he should be liberal and modern in his thinking .. she does not like anyone we find from our community .. by posting this ad perhaps we can find such a person from our specific caste and subcaste.
4. My elder sister created my profile and every day she searched for a life partner for me.
5. We met for coffee the day after our parents felt positive about taking the next step.
6. Our parents then arranged for us to meet.
7. My father showed an interest in his profile and give him (prospective groom) our contact no. and e-mail ID. He accepted and forwarded my profile (prospective bride) to his parents .... He (prospective groom) then talked to my father and said he wanted to visit my parents at their home in Dehradun. He (prospective groom) visited my parents within a week and expressed his desire to marry me (prospective bride). Then my sister and Jijaji (Brother-in-law) visited his home at NOIDA and found the family acceptable and gave their consent for the proposal. His parents and my parents talked to each other over the phone and finalized the marriage.”
8. After reading my bio-data and showing it to her father, she contacted her cousin, who then phoned my uncle (who happened to be the contact listed with my bio-data) to request more information about me.
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9. First, both my parents and my partner’s parents contacted each other to make sure that all necessary requirements were met in order for the marriage proposal to proceed further.
10. I approached to her and received a response from her father.
11. My thanks to ... for bringing the two families together
12. We talked about the details of our families and the kind of partner we sought. Both of us were satisfied with each others’ families, culture, background etc.
13. With the consent (emphasis mine) and blessings of both our families.
14. marrying a Muslim is out of question
15. our daughter-in-law is a Hindu ... we still wish our son had chosen a Muslim girl (in marriage).
16. If I marry a Bengali (one who speaks Bengali and by implication from the state of West Bengal) .. it will be easier for her to interact with my grandparents and the extended family.
17. Brahmans (caste group) are very particular about who they marry.
18. This is great! The girl of my dreams could be on the other side of the world.
19. I can’t believe that I can find someone who matches my exact needs, who may be thousands of miles away.
20. The gotras should not be the same. We would also ask for your horoscope for the purpose of matching it with ours.
21. Our families met and even our horoscopes matched well.
22. In keeping with our family tradition, we exchanged horoscopes and obtained parental consent.
23. we chatted for 3 months
24. She sent me an e-mail ... and the next day everything was finalized.
25. We dated ....(electronically) .. for six months.
26. We chatted (online) and spoke over the phone for hours. We found that we are a perfect match for each other.
27. We chatted on (name of Web site) and then decided that we are going to get married even before our families met.
28. Earlier her family was not at all interested in me but slowly with our persistence they were forced to let us get married.
29. We chatted for many months but he never wanted to take it forward..
30. The girl was educated and pretty but she turned out to be crazy
31. The family did not seem as reputable as they claimed to be..
32. In my profile, I had mentioned ... who happens to be my dad’s uncle and their neighbor in (city name), and a common link between the two families. At that point in time he was in UK and I was in Bangalore. He called me and we had a conversation ... We exchanged all the information about us and both the families through .. uncle
33. I received an e-mail stating that she was interested in speaking to me. Soon after ... we began to chat on the Internet via Yahoo! Messenger. As soon as we started to communicate ... our sessions lasted well into the wee hours of morning.
34. Then we started chatting over msn. Which went on for 3 months.