

A Study on Digitalization of Matchmaking for Marriages in India

*** Sneha Pingle**

**** Chandrashekhar Kaushik**

ABSTRACT

India being a culturally rich country and a country with traditions, for decades when it comes to prospects for marriages, Indians were solely dependent on contacts within the society, particularly through contacts in their family. Traditionally extended family, friends, marriage brokers and newspaper advertisements helped in finding a potential match for marriage. The selection of matches was governed by factors like caste, sub-caste, economic background, education level, character of an individual, horoscopes, etc.

The adoption of internet, however, revolutionized the matrimony industry giving rise to an entirely new business model of online matrimonial portals. During 1990s the internet penetration was poor in India and even the conservative Indian society was not ready to let go of the traditional arranged marriage process. However, as the internet adoption increased in India, the acceptance of the matrimonial companies increased. Matchmaking companies gained popularity because of their huge database of potential matches and convenient and secured services. Today apart from matchmaking services matrimonial companies also provide services like wedding planning and honeymoon packages.

Matrimonial companies use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) strategies to drive traffic to their websites, thereby increasing visibility. The only difference between these strategies is that SEO is an unpaid strategy whereas SEM is paid advertising strategy (Dalia, 7 Easy Ways to Promote Your Matrimonial Business Online in 2019, 2018). These strategies help in improving the ranking of websites on search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing.

** Student, MMS–Marketing, DSIMS, Mumbai*

*** Adjunct Faculty, DSIMS, Mumbai*

Online matrimonial companies revolutionised the traditional marriage concept and created an amalgamation of traditional and modern marriage concept. The rise of online matrimonial websites gave young Indians the decision making power in choosing their life partners. The development of social media apps made companies to lean towards social media marketing strategies. The matrimonial companies now use various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to acquire new customers.

The authors would like to suggest that matchmaking companies should focus on blog marketing which is a growing trend in the matrimony industry which has potential to increase the user base of the matrimonial websites. Companies with marketing budgets should opt for SEM strategies rather SEO strategies as SEM strategies help to acquire leads instantly. This will prevent deterioration of their ranking in primary search results.

Keywords: Digitalization, Internet, matchmaking, matrimonial companies, SEO & SEM strategies.

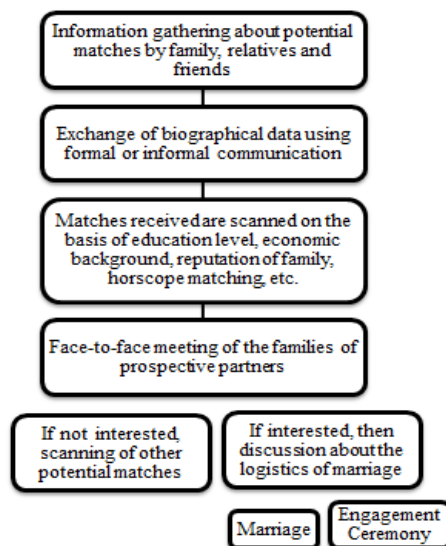
INTRODUCTION

Matrimonial websites primarily begin for non-resident Indians as the internet adoption was poor in India during the 90s. Also, the conservative Indian society was skeptical about the matrimonial companies. The companies identified the gap in the traditional marriage process and the changing mindset of Indian society which gave birth to matrimonial portals in India. By 2000s the matrimonial portals started gaining popularity. The complex process of arranged marriages was simplified by the introduction of these portals. Such websites blended the traditional arranged marriages and love marriages with the help of technology (How matrimony industry is growing with Online Matrimonial, 2017). According to the report by Ken Research Pvt. Ltd., the revenue generated by the industry has increased an average of 2% annually from 2010 to 2015, and is expected to reach Rs. 20.6 billion by 2020 (Upadhyay, 2017).

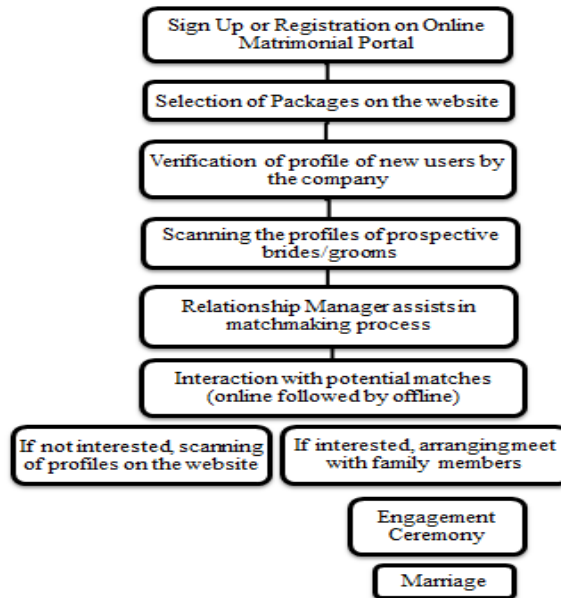
Online matrimonial sites are user friendly and have a huge database of prospective brides and grooms at one click. These websites offer security to the users and hence even elders prefer their children explore such websites. Traditionally matrimonial sites have marketed themselves to the prospective brides and their families only. The advertisements of various portals like JeevanSaathi.com, Shaadi.com and BharatMatrimony.com have targeted females and revolve around the existing fear of marriages and finding a suitable partner. These marketing strategies were stereotypical representation of marriages (Malpani, 2015).

Today, companies are shifting their focus towards digital marketing strategies. Many companies are focusing on social media marketing, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, blog writing, etc. Companies have recognized the increased usage of mobile phones and various apps thereby opting for digital marketing strategies. Thus the boom of the internet not only revolutionized the matrimony industry, but also changed the way the industry marketed itself.

TRADITIONAL PROCESS OF MATCH MAKING:



ONLINE PROCESS OF MATCH MAKING:



TRANSFORMING MATRIMONIAL COMPANIES WITH THE ADVENT OF INTERNET:

For centuries Indians have put emphasis on family relationships instead of personal autonomy. Children from a young age are conditioned to put family interests before their own interests. Marriage being one of the most important social institutions in India is heavily influenced by the traditions. Hence, arranged marriages are still quite common in India. In Indian society, marriages are perceived to have long lasting implications on the families. Therefore, many people opt for arranged marriages as they provide a sense of emotional security and economic stability (Seth & Patnayakuni, 2008).

However, over past few decades, there has been a shift in family structure, from joint families to nuclear families. This led to the absence of social networks that generally helped in the arranged marriage process. Also,

with the boom of the internet, the traditional role of the joint family and marriage brokers was replaced by online matrimonial portals. Introduction of technology in this field has led to a blend of traditional and modern marriages.

Matrimonial websites gained popularity among people with traditional beliefs, but still preferred to find their partners on their own. The online matrimony industry blossomed in huge business opportunity because of its unique features. These portals have huge database with global presence. The higher the prospective profiles, the higher the customer satisfaction (Krishnan, K., A.V., & VishwaVidyapeetham, 2018). These websites have made searching for a life partner more convenient and secure.

Today, many companies provide relationship managers that assist in the matchmaking process. Matrimonial companies are also aiming towards becoming one stop shop solution for their clients by providing services from matchmaking, wedding planning, designing and printing wedding cards to honeymoon packages (Gupta, History Of Matrimonial Sites, 2015). This is becoming a competitive advantage for them, which help them to differentiate themselves from competitors.

MAJOR COMPETITORS IN ONLINE MATRIMONY SECTOR:

The online matrimonial industry is highly competitive and is dominated by following four competitors (Gupta, Amazing Facts About Matrimonial Sites, 2015)

Shaadi.com – Shaadi.com is one of the oldest matrimonial portals in India. It was founded in July, 1996. The company has around 250 centers across India with more than 10 million registered users. Shaadi.com is known to use big data analytics to analyze the user behavior on the website and calculate the compatibility of the couples and provide recommendations to users. The unique features such as regional registration, shaadi live messenger, customized ringtones, smart search option etc. are provided by Shaadi.com.

JeevanSaathi.com – JeevanSaathi.com is popular in Northern and Western India. It was founded in December, 1998. The members can opt for different packages by paying a varying amount of fees with respect to the service they want.

BharatMatrimony.com – BharatMatrimony.com was found in December, 1999. It is well known for its regional portals across India and these portals operate in 15 different languages. The services provided include wedding directory, pre-marriage counseling, blood testing services etc.

SimplyMarry.com – SimplyMarry.com was established in December, 2006. This portal is the most technologically advanced site and users can register on the website for 3 – 12 months. This website provides various interaction options like profile linking, personal chatting, etc. Company has launched TimesSoulmate.com and TimesAssistedMatrimony.com in 2017.

Niche Players

With the success of matrimonial websites that catered to the mass market, various portals catering to niche segments started gaining popularity. SecondShaadi.com is a website that caters to individuals who are divorced or widowed, thus giving to remarriage which still is a social taboo. Ultra Rich Match, Elite Matrimony, VIP Shaadi and many more similar websites are known to cater to the elite class Vows of Eternity is a matrimonial portal with a global presence and caters to the upper class. It is headquartered in New York and has its branches in London, Singapore, Delhi and Mumbai. There are several other websites that cater to specific caste, religion, education level, etc.

ONLINE PROCESS AS A PREFERRED CHOICE

Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process of driving traffic and increasing visibility of a website or a web page from search results on search engines. These are the unpaid results which are often referred as free, natural, organic, editorial or earned results. All major search engines like Google, Yahoo or Bing, which show web pages and other content on the basis of the relevance to users.

Matrimonial companies are known to carry out SEO activity to drive traffic to their websites, thereby increasing visibility. Matrimonial websites are performing a SEO activity to improve their ranking on Google. Companies carry out on On-page SEO wherein five keywords related to companies are searched on Google, which is followed by clicking on company page and spending 30 seconds on the website each time.

Following is the result of SEO activity performed by one of the matrimonial company, Ultra Rich Match during the months, May & June of 2018 which helped to improve the website's ranking on Google.

Keywords	Position in Google Search		
	On 22nd May, 2018	On 30th June, 2018	On 10th February, 2019
Matrimony for Rich	Page 1, 1 st position	Page 1, 1 st position	Page 1, 1 st position
Matrimony for Business Families	Page 4	Page 1, 5 th position	Page 1, 2 nd position
Matrimony for Business Class	Page 1, 7 th position	Page 1, 3 rd position	Page 1, 2 nd position
Match making for Elite Business Class	Page 1, 4 th position	Page 1, 1 st position	Page 1, 1 st position
Matrimony for Elite Class	Page 8	Page 1, 4 th position	Page 1, 1 st position

Source: Researcher's own data

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING:

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is a form of paid advertising wherein websites can be promoted by increasing their visibility in search engine results. The Pay Per Click campaign becomes hit with the right content at the right time. Maharashtra's leading matrimonial website, Anuroop Wiwaha used SEM strategy to enhance brand awareness, generate leads and increase sales (Dalia, 2018).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING:

a) Social Media Platforms

Social Media Marketing (SMM) involves creating and sharing content on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. Today many matrimonial companies use social media platforms to target and attract prospective customers such companies focus on creating engaging content which the people can like, share and comment on. This in turn helps to increase the followers of these companies on various social media platforms.

When using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, companies use various hashtags. This helps to put the content in front of the right audience and drives traffic to the other social media platforms or the main website which in turn increases the traffic. Companies use hashtags like #couple, #wedding, #relationshipgoals, etc. on its social media platforms to drive traffic on its website.

Shaadi.com used SMM to spread awareness against the evils of dowry by launching a game called "Angry Brides" on its social media platforms. Marathi actress, Mrunmayee Deshpande became a face of outdoor campaigns of MarathiMatrimony.com when she found her life partner through the website. This helped to create brand awareness about the company and increased visitors on the website and resulted in lead generation (Dalia, 2018).

YouTube is another social media platform which is popular amongst matrimonial companies. Many companies that don't have massive advertisement budgets opt for YouTube videos. These videos are like TV advertisements for such companies which in attracting the potential clients. With the help of YouTube videos, companies can customised their content as per their target audience with minimal costs. Companies have their own YouTube channel which consists of short videos that focus on unique selling proposition (USP) of the company. There are few companies that feature videos highlighting the CSR activities carried out by the organisations. These videos act as emotional adverts which help in creating a positive image in the minds of customers.

b) Blogs

Bloggging has become a very popular activity among online matrimonial companies. The number of matrimonial companies creating and maintaining blogs has increased exponentially. Many companies publicise their brand and services via the medium of blogs. Generally the matrimonial websites post wedding related blogs like wedding destinations, different types of marriage processes, honeymoon destinations etc.

One of the matrimonial companies, Ultra Rich Match has its own WordPress website where it posts various blogs that are as per the taste of its clientele. URM being a matrimonial site for elite class focus on blogs that feature luxury products and premium services available worldwide. The blogs also cover the lifestyle adopted by the elite class. This helps in attracting the target audience and indirectly drives them towards the main service provided by the company.

Diet Likes Celebs (Blog)

The blog captures the lifestyle of rich people. Elite class people are always under scrutiny of media and the general public and hence care more about their fitness. Due to which, many of them follow strict diet plans. The blog explains the crux of the Zone diet, the science behind it, how it should be

followed, what types of food should be consumed and who have followed this diet till now. The Zone Diet sheds light on the most important fact that Indians consume fewer proteins and majorly consume carbohydrates and fats which causes weight gain. However, this diet focuses on reducing the intake of carbs with high glycemic index like bread, pasta and grains and increasing carbs with low glycemic index. The blog is called Diet like Celebs because this diet was followed by Jennifer Aniston and was famously known as the Jennifer Aniston diet. Also, many other celebrities like Brad Pitt, Demi Moore and Madonna followed it.

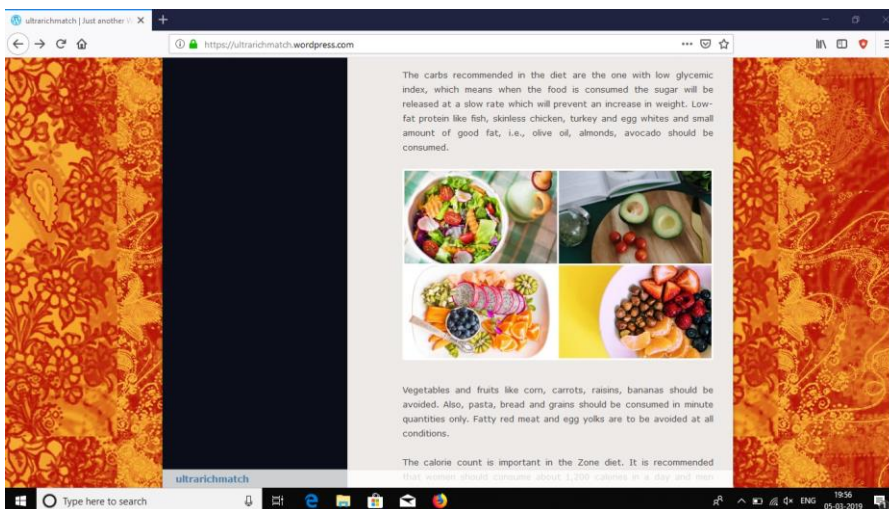


Illustration 1 – Blog on Diet Like Celebs

Source – Researcher's own data

CONCLUSION

- Digitalisation of many industries occurred with the boom of the internet, but the digitalisation of the Indian marriage process was an unexpected outcome.
- Online matrimonial companies revolutionised the traditional marriage concept and created an amalgamation of traditional and modern marriage concept.

- The rise of online matrimonial websites gave young Indians the decision making power in choosing their life partners.
- Earlier companies focused only on providing a perfect match for their clients, but today the companies are aiming towards becoming a one shop stop for wedding solutions.
- The development of social media apps made companies to lean towards social media marketing strategies. The matrimonial companies now use various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to acquire new customers.
- Matrimonial companies use SEO strategy to keep up the ranking on major search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing.
- The higher the rank on primary search results, the more visitors the matrimonial website will have and these visitors may get converted to customers.
- These strategies help in creating a brand name and drive traffic on the matrimonial site which may convert into lead generations.

SUGGESTIONS

- Matchmaking companies should focus on blog marketing which is a growing trend in the matrimony industry, which has potential to increase the user base of the matrimonial websites.
- Companies with marketing budgets should opt for SEM strategies rather SEO strategies as SEM strategies help to acquire leads instantly. This will prevent deterioration of their ranking in primary search results.
- Companies also need to perform a social media audit wherein the companies review on what's working, what's failing and what can be improved to get more target audience.
- Social media analytics tools like Google analytics can be used to perform the audit. Companies can perform an audit quarterly and even in some cases monthly.

- Companies should not rely only on online marketing strategy, but use both, online and offline marketing strategies where offline marketing strategy is complementary to online marketing strategy.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. Adverts – Advertisements
2. Carbs - Carbohydrates
3. CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility
4. FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions
5. SEO – Search Engine Optimization
6. SEM – Search Engine Marketing
7. SMM – Social Media Marketing
8. URM – Ultra Rich Match

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