Offline and Online Mate Selection Preferences for Indonesians: An Initial Study

Mira Ariyani, Lussy Dwiutami Wahyuni, Fildzah Rudyah Putri, Adzkia Zahra Izzati

Department of Psychology, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

mira_ariyani@unj.ac.id

Abstract: Mate selection preference is a selective process of person evaluation, aimed to find a partner who is considered potential for the individual. Partner searching is not only done in person, but also virtually. This initial study provides an empirical description of offline and online mate selection preferences for Indonesians with age 18 years old and above, which is inspired by Buss and Barnes' instrument of mate selection preference. This study was qualitative with a thematic analysis method. Four focus group discussions were conducted, with 47 participants, both males and females, in total. This study found 33 themes for both offline and online mate selection preferences, including: attractive physical appearance, sufficient income, the same religion, educational level consideration, family blessing, ethnicity consideration, socio-economic status consideration, good behaviour consideration, hardworking quality, accepting as the person is, physical health, age consideration, friendly character, wanting children, family background consideration, considerate individual, fertility, and responsibility. The 33 identified themes in this initial study reflects the offline and online mate selection preferences for Indonesians. It suggests more considerations in selecting partners, compared to Buss and Barnes' study which informs only 13 preferences.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Internet, Cyber World, and Human Life

Human's life is transformed by technological advancements. The internet, for example, is the result of technological developments that play a significant role in quickly connecting people all over the world without regard for space or time constraints.

The internet's initial impact on human life occurred long before the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was common for humans to send letters via email, as well as messages via online messages, to seek entertainment on YouTube, and to communicate via video conferencing such as Skype. The pandemic period actually proves the increasing role of the internet in life, because everyone is encouraged to work from home and students must learn from home. For this purpose, various online meeting or video conferencing platforms (such as Zoom, Gmeet, Ms Teams, and others) that existed prior to the pandemic but were not

used as widely as they were during the pandemic, have emerged.

Furthermore, during a pandemic, activities like shopping, shipping food, medicine, and goods rely heavily on the online system. Cyberspace activities to find a partner are not left behind. During the pandemic, the number of people using partner-finding apps has increased (Joshi, et al., 2020). In short, with the assistance of an internet connection, humans can complete their daily affairs and life needs without leaving the house.

The extraordinary growth of social media following the pandemic is made possible by internet access. Humans can interact and communicate with one another in cyberspace via social media by using chat features, direct messages, comments, likes, following, live on Instagram/Tik Tok, and so on.

Nowadays, almost everyone of any age has a smartphone. Smartphones have become an integral part of human life and a vital tool in daily activities. According to We Are Social (2022) data, there are 67.1% of smartphone users, 62.5% of internet users, and 58.4% of social media users worldwide. Furthermore, 91% of users access social media via their respective smartphones. Furthermore, in

January 2022, Indonesia had 204.7 million internet users and 191.4 million social media users. Facebook has 129.9 million users, YouTube has 139 million users, Instagram has 99.15 million users, Tiktok has 92.07 million users, LinkedIn has 20 million users, Snapchat has 3.3 million users, and Twitter has 18.45 million users (Kemp, 2022).

1.2 Transformation of Partner Search

The ability to communicate without boundaries in cyberspace as a result of technological advancements has an impact on the search for a partner. Many online dating sites had sprung up prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, including Tinder, Bumble, Zoosk, OkCupid, eHarmony (Joshi et al., 2020), IndonesianCupid, Setipe, and others. Communication in cyberspace is difficult to avoid, especially during a pandemic, when humans are unable to leave the house and socialize with real friends or colleagues in order to find a partner.

Here are some other changes that have occurred as a result of the shift in the search for a partner from the real world to the virtual world:

1. Partner options become more open and diverse.

Potential partners are available from all over the country in cyberspace; there are no geographical boundaries that impede the search for partners. Furthermore, the backgrounds of available potential partners are more diverse because individuals from various backgrounds are more easily accessed and selected in the search for partners. The resulting pairs are very likely to come from very different backgrounds (heterogamy). This differs from the viewpoint of Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) on the selection of homogamous first-degree pairs. The advantage is that individuals can filter various identities of potential partners who they believe are suitable (Couch and Liamputtong, 2008).

In the real world, the majority of prospective spouses come from the individual's immediate environment, such as the home environment, school environment, organizational environment, worship environment, work environment, and other routine activity environments. The similarity of backgrounds or the lack of variety in the choice of potential partners is one of the consequences of the similarity of the ecological environment.

In the Filter Theory concept, Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) state that individuals will select potential mates at several levels. Individuals filter personal demographics such as geographical distance, religion, ethnicity, education, and so on at the first level. Individuals will seek out people who are geographically close to them, share the same religion, ethnicity, social class, and education levels that are not significantly different. In other words, people look for people who have a lot of similarities with them (homogamy). Individuals filter out common perceptions such as shared values, attitudes, and beliefs at the second level. Couples with similar values, attitudes, and beliefs can foster greater openness and communication than those with significant differences. At the third level, the individual determines whether or not he and his potential partner complement one another. For example, if the individual enjoys making jokes, a suitable partner would be someone who enjoys smiling or laughing.

2. Personal choices take precedence over decisions based on the advice of family and friends.

Personal choices are more facilitated in cyberspace through various sites or applications for finding partners. Interference from other people does not apply to online matchmaking. The benefit is that individuals can tailor the criteria for potential partners to their specific needs. Personal choices in the real world are usually negotiated with family or social circles (MacDonald, et al., 2012).

3. Individuals have the freedom to reveal or conceal their identity (anonymity) as they see fit.

Individuals may keep their identity hidden in cyberspace from the start until they feel comfortable expressing it directly (Couch and Liamputtong, 2008). The benefit is that if the process of finding a partner is deemed difficult, the individual's true identity is concealed. Individuals in the real world are expected to reveal their identity, such as full name, family origin, year of birth, level of education, and so on, from the start of the process of finding a partner. The disclosure of this identity is necessary so that both parties and their families can consider whether or not to continue the search for a partner.

4. The individual is in command of the partner-search process.

There is no one else's interference in determining who is eligible to be a partner in cyberspace. Individuals have the freedom to choose and decide what information to share and what not to share, as well as who they consider to be a potential partner or to be on their contact list. Individuals are free to organize and plan their next steps while the search is ongoing, such as inviting or refusing to meet (Couch and Liamputtong, 2008). In the real world, the family or extended family usually determines the direction

of the partner selection process. Considering the importance of family and culture in finding a partner (MacDonald, et al., 2012).

However, while it seems easy to search for a partner in cyberspace, one should be aware of the threats in it, such as fake accounts, scams, and danger of getting explicitly attacked (Joshi et al., 2020).

1.3 Preferences for Partner Selection in the Virtual Versus Real World

The criteria for a partner that someone seeks are usually the same from person to person. Buss and Barnes (1986) proposed 13 criteria that are commonly sought by both men and women when looking for a partner, namely:

1. Kind and understanding
2. Exciting personality
3. Intelligent
4. Physically attractive
5. Healthy
6. Easygoing
7. Creative
8. Wants children
9. College graduate
10. Good earning capacity
11. Good heredity
12. Good housekeeper
13. Religious

Because Buss and Barnes do not mention that their study is also conducted in the context of cyberspace, the criteria that appear in their study are representative of the criteria in the real world. Buss and Barnes were also successful in developing an instrument that could determine which of the 13 criteria was the most desirable (important).

In terms of partner selection in cyberspace, the next question that arises in light of Buss and Barnes' research, aside from which criteria are most important, is:

1. What are the criteria for selecting a cyberspace partner?
2. Are the criteria for selecting a virtual partner the same as in the real world?
3. Are the criteria for selecting a partner different for men and women?
4. What are the most important factors to consider when looking for a partner in the real world and in cyberspace?
5. Does freedom of choice influence cyberspace criteria? or are they still influenced by family and cultural origins, given that humans and family/culture are inextricably linked?.

The questions raised above are of immediate concern to us, the authors, in order to better understand the phenomenon of looking for a partner in today's virtual world and minimize losses, just as we should look for a partner in the real world.

2 METHODS

This study is qualitative with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that is essentially independent of theory and epistemology. This method can be applied to a variety of theoretical and epistemological approaches. Because of its theoretical flexibility, thematic analysis is considered versatile and is a useful research tool that can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. Thematic analysis is used as a technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting data patterns (themes). It organizes and describes the dataset in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis is suitable for this initial study. By using essentialist/realist epistemology in this study, it can explore participants' experiences, meanings, and realities.

Thematic analysis informs themes or patterns as findings. Themes or patterns within data can be identified in an inductive or bottom up way (Frith & Gleeson, 2004 in Braun and Clarke, 2006), as well as in a theoretical or deductive or top down way (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997 in Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, the themes were identified inductively. The themes which were identified inductively are considered strongly related to the data (Patton, 1990 in Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes generated by an inductive approach would not be motivated by the researcher's theoretical knowledge. In other words, coding in an inductive way does not attempt to fit data into a pre-existing coding frame based on the analytic preconceptions of the researchers. These processes can also be called data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This initial study used focus group discussion for data collection. Four focus group discussions were conducted, with 47 participants in total. The participants must be of Indonesian nationality with age 18 years old and over, without considering their gender.

Phases of thematic analysis carried out in this study as follows:

1. In this first phase data were transcribed, then read and reread to get familiar with it as well as to list initial ideas.

2. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by coding the ideas and compiling relevant data to each code.
3. In the third phase, potential themes were coded, and relevant data were collected to each potential theme.
4. Then the themes were reviewed by checking and mapping the themes.
5. The fifth, the themes were named.
6. The last phase is to write the report.

3 RESULTS

This initial study found 33 themes, namely (not in order): 1) attractive physical appearance, 2) sufficient income, 3) the same interests, 4) the same vision/life goals, 5) one "frequency", 6) the same religion, 7) educational level consideration, 8) family blessing, 9) ethnicity consideration, 10) socio-economic status consideration, 11) marital status consideration, 12) good behavior consideration, 13) loyalty, 14) wisdom, 15) hardworking quality, 16) accepting as the person is, 17) not restraining quality, 18) proximity to place of residence/activity, 19) birth order consideration, 20) similar characters with parent/s, 21) religiosity , 22) physical health, 23) mental health, 24) age consideration, 25) friendly character, 26) wanting children, 27) creative and artistic person, 28) good household management, 29) family background consideration, 30) considerate individual, 31) feminine character (for female) or masculine character (for male), 32) fertility, and 33) responsibility .

4 DISCUSSION

The 33 themes which were found in this initial study were resulted from both offline and online mate selection preferences. These themes generally reflect Indonesian culture such as: family blessing and one religion. The considerations of family and religion are parts of normal mate selection in Indonesia. This is similar with the study of MacDonald, et al. (2012) which informs the importance of family and culture in finding a partner.

In addition, there are some differences in terms of gender. Females are concerned for themes such as socio-economic consideration and responsibility for their partners. These conditions also reflect Indonesia's culture, especially the patriarchy system which puts males as the main provider for the family.

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6 CONCLUSION

The 33 identified themes in this initial study reflects the offline and online mate selection preferences for Indonesians. It suggests more considerations in selecting partners, compared to Buss and Barnes' study which informs only 13 preferences.

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