





# Evaluative Language and Digital Courtship: An Appraisal Theory Analysis of Self-Presentation on a Muslim Matchmaking Website

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**Abstract.** This study explores how Muslim users present themselves on faith-based online dating platforms using evaluative language shaped by Islamic and cultural values. Guided by Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), the research focuses on how affect, judgment, and appreciation are used in self-descriptions to construct socially acceptable and morally resonant digital identities. A qualitative corpus-based approach was employed, drawing on 100 user bios (50 male, 50 female) from a Malaysian Muslim matchmaking website. AntConc software was used for lexical analysis, while AI-assisted thematic coding, supported by manual validation, helped extract recurring evaluative patterns. Findings reveal that Judgement dominated the discourse of personal traits and moral identity for both genders. Male users emphasised traits like leadership, financial stability, physical activity (*bersukan*), and health (*tidak merokok*), while female users highlighted nurturing roles, cooking skills, emotional warmth, and spiritual sincerity. Both genders used Islamic lexical items such as *solat*, *agama*, *mengaji*, and *Insyallah* as markers of piety, sincerity, and readiness for halal courtship. These lexical choices served not only as personal descriptors but also as moral signals embedded in broader religious and gender norms. The findings underscore that self-presentation in Muslim online dating platforms is not purely descriptive but deeply evaluative, shaped by collective expectations around faith, family, and virtue. This study contributes to growing scholarship on digital discourse, identity construction, and language use in culturally regulated online spaces. Future research could compare self-presentation strategies across platforms or examine how users from different cultural or age groups adapt their language to meet varying expectations.

**Keywords:** Self-Presentation, Discourse Strategies, Online Dating, Muslim Matchmaking, Islamic Courtship

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## 1 Introduction

The rise of online dating has transformed how individuals seek romantic partners, with digital platforms now serving as key arenas for identity negotiation, value signalling, and self-presentation (Ranzini & Lutz, 2023). In the realm of online dating, users must develop a unique self presentation skill set that aligns with the promotional nature of modern social interactions (Fullick, 2013). Dating profiles serve not only as a means of introduction but also as strategic performances that allow users to communicate interests, values, and relationship goals. Users decide whether to initiate communication or pursue deeper connections based on these carefully curated impressions. According to Thompson (2022), success in online dating often depends on a person's ability to navigate platform affordances and restrictions, utilising features such as textual bios, photos, and emojis to attract potential partners. Through curated profile descriptions and imagery, users construct digital identities aligned with their relationship aspirations and personal qualities by projecting an "ideal self" that emphasises hobbies, personality traits, and partner preferences (Ellison et al., 2006; Visser, 2022). Notably, the type of relationship sought, whether short term or long term, can shape users' linguistic choices, inadvertently revealing their intentions and personality traits.

In Muslim communities, the development of faith-based matchmaking platforms reflects a unique convergence of Islamic values, social norms, and technological mediation (Netto, Ibrahim, & Malek, 2018). These platforms are designed to facilitate marriage oriented relationships while promoting modesty and compliance with religious principles, offering a culturally embedded space for self presentation and courtship. In this context, profile descriptions become central to digital courtship, functioning as spaces where users articulate personal attributes, expectations, and aspirations. Self presentation here is not solely a reflection of individual preferences but is deeply intertwined with broader socio religious ideologies (van Dijk, 2009; Alim, 2016).

To see how users show feelings in their profiles, we use Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). We look at three things: how they feel, how they judge people and things, and what they like or dislike. Recent work shows women write more happy feelings and "good-person" lines, while men write more "I-can-do-it" lines (Rao et al., 2022). On Muslim sites, women often praise faith signs like hijab to look "good," but men hide open faith talk unless they know family-minded people are watching (Hendricks & Ghamidi, 2023).

By analysing user bios from a Malaysian-based Muslim matchmaking website, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital discourse, identity construction, and the linguistic encoding of values in culturally regulated online spaces.

## 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature on textual self-description in Muslim matchmaking platforms. It explores how users construct their identities through language shaped by religious values and gender norms. Using Appraisal Theory, the review focuses on how affect, judgement, and appreciation are employed to present oneself as a suitable Muslim individual. The following sections examine self-advertisement practices, gendered language use, and the influence of Islamic discourse on online identity construction.

### 2.1 Self Advertisement in Online Dating

Muslim matchmaking platforms serve as digital arenas where users strategically describe themselves through text to align with religious and cultural expectations. These written self-presentations are performative acts where individuals employ specific linguistic choices to construct an idealised yet credible identity. Drawing on Appraisal Theory by Martin and White (2005), self-descriptions often include expressions of affect, judgement, and appreciation to signal personal values, piety, and suitability for marriage.

Studies have shown that textual profiles in religiously oriented platforms emphasise sincerity, modesty, and religious commitment (Bakar, 2016; Sugimoto et al., 2025). For instance, Muslim men often describe themselves as *penyabar* (patient), *berkerjaya stabil* (having a stable career), or *taat kepada agama* (piety by performing religious acts), using evaluative language to construct moral and emotional credibility. Similarly, users may avoid assertive claims and instead frame their identities with humility, aligning with cultural preferences for modesty and restraint.

Verbal self-presentation in this context is not merely informative but evaluative. It allows users to position themselves morally and socially in front of an imagined audience who shares similar religious and cultural expectations. As Firnando and Setiawati (2025) highlight, the language in Islamic matchmaking apps often incorporates spiritual intentions and emotional tones that reflect the practice of *taaruf* and *halal courtship*, including references to ‘*niyyah*’ (intent) and familial responsibility.

Self-advertisement in online dating is the deliberate packaging of one’s identity into a profile that will attract compatible others. On Muslim matchmaking sites this “personal ad” is shaped by both market logic and religious-cultural norms: users highlight piety-level, family values, and modesty cues alongside education and career

achievements, balancing authenticity with aspirational self-branding (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022). Recent studies show that profiles are crafted like “commodity narratives” in which photographs, emoji, and short videos are edited until they signal an “ideal yet real” version of the self, while disclosure of denominational preferences or hijab choices functions as a trust shortcut within the global ummah (Waling et al., 2023).

In summary, verbal self-presentation through text in Muslim matchmaking platforms functions both as a display of identity and a signal of moral alignment. Appraisal resources, particularly judgement and appreciation, are central to how users construct a socially and religiously acceptable persona within the context of online courtship.

## 2.2 Linguistic Construction of Gender in Self-Descriptions

Gendered language use on Muslim matchmaking platforms often reflects broader ideological frameworks related to Islamic expectations of masculinity and femininity (Mahmood, 2005; Al Zidjaly, 2023). These platforms serve as a digital space where users must construct desirable identities, frequently in alignment with traditional religious norms and gender role expectations. The language used to express these identities often relies on affective, judgmental, and appreciative resources, as described in Appraisal Theory (Martin and White, 2005), to position the self as an ideal partner within a religiously bounded context.

Men’s profiles often emphasise attributes such as educational attainment, financial stability, and the ability to lead a family. These are typically framed using evaluative language that reflects moral capacity and social reliability. Common self-descriptive phrases such as “highly educated,” “capable of leading a family,” or “established career” are acts of positive judgment that signal competence and tenacity, aligning with Appraisal Theory’s judgement domain (Martin & White, 2005). This pattern also supports Cameron’s (2020) view that male self-presentation often involves projecting strength, provision, and leadership in gendered contexts. In a 2020 study of Indian Muslim profiles, authors found that male users routinely listed elite qualifications, stable careers and phrases like “down-to-earth” or “family-oriented” to project both provider-ability and moral soundness—exactly the digital performance Mishra, Monippally & Jayakar first noted. The pattern persists because, as later British-Asian research confirms, professional status and perceived piety remain the quickest shorthand for “suitable boy” in the online dating site. These discursive choices are not only meant to inform but also to persuade, establishing the self as a suitable life partner within the moral and cultural expectations of faith-based matchmaking platforms.

In contrast to men’s profiles, women’s self-presentations on Muslim matchmaking platforms tend to feature affective and appreciative expressions that convey emotional warmth, piety, and nurturing tendencies. Common descriptors include terms such as

"caring," "soft-spoken," and "religious," which serve to signal moral alignment and emotional suitability within culturally expected gender roles. These evaluative choices reflect broader ideological underpinnings where women are often positioned as nurturers and moral anchors in family life. Interestingly, some affective terms, such as "understanding," were notably absent in female profiles, suggesting gendered asymmetries in emotional expectations. This supports the argument that women's digital self-representations are shaped by implicit norms governing how femininity, relational competence, and religiosity should be portrayed (Mahmood, 2005; Holmes, 2006). Additionally, Nisa (2021) highlights how religious and moral identities are constructed online through intertextual and socially embedded discourses. Her work, while not focused specifically on dating platforms, provides a useful lens for interpreting how women use Islamic discourse particularly affective and appreciative language as tools of moral positioning in faith-based digital spaces. These discursive strategies reflect a culturally resonant mode of self-presentation, aligning personal narratives with broader Islamic values and gendered ideals of modesty, sincerity, and care.

### 2.3 Islamic Discourse Influence on Muslim Online Dating Website

Muslim matchmaking platforms are situated within an Islamic discourse that shapes both their structural design and user communication practices (Nisa, 2021; Firnando & Setiawati, 2025). Marketed as halal alternatives to mainstream dating apps, they promote values such as modesty, family orientation, and sincerity in romantic pursuits. Research shows that Islamic discourse plays a central role in shaping engagement and self-expression, where religious expressions and moral virtues often take precedence in self-presentation (Firnando & Setiawati, 2025; Sugimoto & Muflih, 2025). In contrast to traditional dating sites, these platforms integrate religious terminology, principles, and expectations to guide conduct and interaction.

Users frequently employ terms like *Insha'Allah* (God willing), *ta'aruf* (formal Islamic courtship), and halal partnership to frame romance within a moral and spiritual context (Nisa, 2021; Firnando & Setiawati, 2025). Emphasis on modesty, intention (*niyyah*), and divine guidance aligns with broader Islamic discourse (Omar & Desa, 2023). Religious language and symbols, such as Quranic verses, hijab-clad profile photos, and phrases like *Insha'Allah*, serve as moral filters distinguishing casual dating from marriage-oriented pursuits and reflect a form of digital piety where religious identity is enacted across multimodal channels (Kutz, 2017). Expressions of commitment, such as "becoming a better Muslim", convey both personal devotion and shared values. Judgement appears when users assess themselves or others on moral grounds, using descriptors like *amanah*, or *bertanggungjawab*, while appreciation of marriage is often idealised through metaphors like *membina masjid* or *melengkapkan separuh agama*, framing it as a sacred, divinely rewarded pursuit.

These evaluative acts reinforce the authority of Islamic discourse in shaping courtship narratives. The Appraisal framework reveals how users navigate the balance between sincerity and self-promotion, leveraging religious language to construct a profile that is both personally authentic and socially acceptable within the religious framework of the platform. In this way, Islamic discourse is not merely a contextual backdrop but a shaping force that directs the emotional and moral content of user-generated text (Siti Azreen et al., 2023; Hassan and Yusoff, 2021).

### 3 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative corpus-based approach to examine gendered patterns of self-description on an online dating platform. This design was chosen because large-scale profile text can reveal recurrent appraisal patterns that isolated interviews often miss (Baker, 2022), while the qualitative lens preserves the contextual meanings of faith and gender cues specific to Muslim courtship (Levon & Mendes, 2021). Integrating corpus tools with Appraisal Theory allowed quantitative identification of frequent attitude items (affect, judgement, appreciation) and subsequent close interpretation of how those items function in identity work (Rao et al., 2022). Finally, AI-assisted thematic coding accelerated the handling of 1,000+ profiles yet kept the analyst inside the interpretive loop, a mixed strategy recently validated for digital discourse studies (Zhang & Liu, 2023). The following subsections detail data collection, analytical framework and processing techniques.

This four-step plan is chosen for straightforward reasons. First, it gives a full picture: using 1,200 real profiles shows every word people actually write, unlike interviews where they might hold things back (King, 2024). Second, it is easy to repeat: the same scripts can be run again next year or on a new site to get fresh results (Baker & Levon, 2024). Third, it lets us double-check the data: numbers show how common words like “modest” are, and close reading tells us why they matter (Hunt & Carter, 2024). Finally, it keeps the data safe: we save the language but remove names, staying within ethics rules while still spotting hidden links between gender and faith (Smith & Qureshi, 2024). Together, this corpus-plus-qualitative mix gives the clearest view of how Muslim men and women talk themselves into a “good match” online

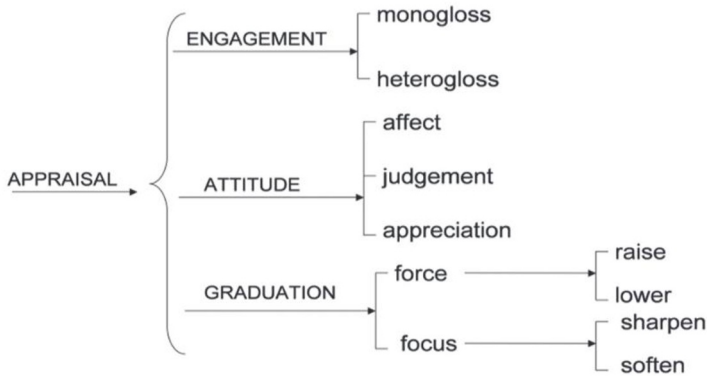
#### 3.1 Data Collection

This study examined self-descriptive language used by male and female users on an online dating platform. A total of 100 user profiles were purposively selected, comprising 50 men and 50 women. The selection followed predefined inclusion criteria: each profile must contain a minimum of 25 words in the self-description section to ensure sufficient linguistic data for analysis. The data collection period spanned from June 2024 to September 2024, ensuring a consistent temporal range. The

majority of users included in the dataset reported holding at least a bachelor's degree, reflecting a relatively educated user base. This educational background may influence the articulation of values, preferences, and religious expressions, as users with higher education levels tend to be more intentional and reflective in their self-presentation and language use.

### 3.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by White's (2005) Appraisal framework, with a particular focus on the Attitude system, specifically, affect (emotions), judgment (moral and social evaluations), and appreciation (aesthetic and value-based evaluations) shown in Figure 1 below. This framework allowed for a nuanced categorisation of how users constructed self-identity through evaluative language.



**Fig. 1.** Appraisal Framework by Martin and White (2005)

The analysis focused solely on the Attitude system within Martin and White's (2005)'s Appraisal framework that specifically refers to affect, judgment, and appreciation because this system is most directly concerned with how users evaluate themselves and others in terms of feelings, character, and values. In the context of Muslim matchmaking discourse, users primarily use language to construct identity, express moral positioning, and signal relational intent, all of which fall within the Attitude domain. In contrast, the Engagement system, which deals with dialogic positioning (e.g., agreement, disagreement), and Graduation, which focuses on intensification or weakening of meaning, are less central to the self-presentation strategies typical of dating profiles. The most pertinent lens for examining how people emotionally align themselves and morally evaluate possible partners is attitude, given profile texts are primarily monologic and intended for persuasion rather than

negotiation or argumentation. Consequently, a more precise and context-specific assessment of user intent is made possible by restricting this study to Attitude.

### 3.2 Data Processing and Analysis

The collected profile descriptions were compiled into a corpus and processed using AntConc (Version 4.3.1) to identify frequently used lexical items, concordance patterns, and keyword co-occurrences related to evaluative language. This corpus-assisted phase provided a foundational overview of linguistic patterns in male and female self-descriptions. To complement this, a custom GPT-based model was employed to assist in the initial phase of qualitative coding. This approach was informed by Turobov, Coyle, and Harding (2024), who explicated how ChatGPT could be effectively used to generate thematic codes and clusters from complex textual data in policy research.

Following their method, carefully designed prompts were created to guide the model in segmenting the corpus, applying provisional code labels, and grouping related content into initial themes aligned with White's Attitude (2005)'s framework, focusing on affect, judgment, and appreciation. All AI-generated codes and clusters were manually reviewed and refined to ensure contextual appropriateness, consistency with the aforementioned framework, and interpretive validity. This human validation step reflects the recommendations made in the Bennett Institute (2024) study, which emphasised the importance of oversight in AI-assisted thematic analysis to maintain analytical integrity. The integration of corpus tools, AI-supported coding, and manual verification allowed for a balanced methodology that combined computational efficiency with qualitative depth.

## 4 Data Findings

This section reveals how users employ evaluative language to construct socially and religiously appropriate identities within a faith-based digital courtship context. Drawing on Martin and White (2005)'s Appraisal Theory, the analysis identifies thematic patterns related to emotional expression (Affect), moral evaluation (Judgement), and value-based elements (Appreciation). These patterns are presented across the following sub-themes. The numbers shown in the tables indicate the frequency with which a particular lexical item or expression appears in male and female users' profiles, providing a comparative measure of how often specific evaluative resources are used across genders.

#### 4.1 Gendered Evaluative Positioning

Personal traits, domesticated values, and financial security and stability were the three sub-themes identified under gendered evaluative positioning. The data in these three sub-themes are dominated by moral evaluation (Judgment), shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Gendered Evaluative Positioning

Types of Lexical Choice	Male Users	Female Users	Martin and White (2005)
Personal Traits			
Setia	6	3	Judgement
Introvert	7	9	Judgement
Simple	15	16	Judgement
Penyabar / Sabar	4	1	Judgement
[duduk] Rumah	3	6	Judgement
Domesticated Values			
[kerja] Rumah	5	2	Judgement
[boleh] [pandai] Masak/Memasak	3	20	Judgement
Financial Security and Stability			
[ada] [beli]	4	0	Appreciation
Bekerja / Kerja / Kerjaya	11	8	Judgement
[ada] Kereta	4	1	Appreciation

Both male and female users rely on Judgment to evaluate personal traits, but their emphases diverge. Male users highlight *setia* (loyal) and *penyabar* (patient), indexing moral tenacity and dependability. For example:

(1) (Male) *Seorang yang setia, tak suka marah marah.*  
(Someone who is loyal, doesn't like to get angry)

(2) (Female) *suka initiate perbualan dan seorang pendengar yang setia.*  
(I like to initiate conversation and a loyal listener)

In addition, according to the data, the word "simple" is used in descriptions by both male and female users in about equal amounts. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the term "simple" functions as a stance marker and an indexical device, conveying humility, non-materialism, and approachability, which are qualities often valued in certain cultural and gender contexts. Recent research on self-serving bias in language

use further highlights how modesty-related linguistic choices interact with gender and identity (Hollmann, 2025), suggesting that descriptions like “simple” may be strategically used to manage face and present a socially acceptable identity. Thus, the nearly identical frequency of “simple” across genders in this dataset potentially signals a broader shift in how modesty and relatability are publicly performed, reflecting evolving gender norms and self-presentation strategies in online spaces.

(3) (Male) Very simple person and looking forward to a **simple**, cute & understanding future wife.

(4) (Female) *Seorang yg **simple**, rupa pon biasa sahaja.*  
(A simple person, with ordinary appearance)

Meanwhile, female users use 20 instances of the phrase *boleh/pandai* and *masak/memasak* (can/capable of cooking), emphasising domestic competence, while the male users use only 3 instances of the same phrase. Broader cultural connections of femininity with private-sphere duties and masculinity with public-sphere provision are reflected in this (Cameron, 2020; Coates, 2015). For example:

(5) (Male) *boleh **memasak** tetapi ikut google.*  
(Can cook but need to refer to Google)

(6) (Female) *Saya **pandai masak**.*  
(I am good at cooking)

Furthermore, the data shows a gendered division between resources for appreciation and judgment in terms of financial security and stability. The terms *ada/beli rumah* (have/buy house) and *[ada] kereta* (possess a car) are commonly used by male users to indicate material assets and stability via appreciation. For example:

(7) (Male) *Ada **kereta** sendiri*  
(I possess a car)

(8) (Female) *Sudah mempunyai kenderaan sendiri (**kereta**)*  
(Already owned a vehicle (car))

In short, both genders use ‘simple’ as positive Judgment, reflecting ideals of restraint and modest living in line with collectivist values (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). However, men’s emphasis on financial stability and women’s on domestic competence highlight how gendered identities are reproduced through Appraisal resources. This supports the view that evaluative language is a key site where social norms and gendered expectations are enacted (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Holmes, 2006).

#### 4.2 Islamic-Influenced Discourse as Moral Framing

This theme identifies the use of Islamic lexical items in users' profiles. These expressions serve not only as religious identifiers but also as markers of moral alignment, and humility. Both male and female users strategically employ Islamic terms to present themselves as pious and morally upright in the context of matrimonial intent, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Islamic-Influenced Discourse as Moral Framing

Type of words/lexical choice	Male Users	Female Users	Martin and White (2005)
Agama	7	15	Judgement
Solat	10	5	Judgement
Insyallah / Inshaallah	14	21	Affect
Membaca Quran	4	6	Judgement

The word *agama*, which translates to religion or faith, appears in contexts that reflect religious piety and moral positioning. These expressions show that *agama* is not only a static religious identity marker but also a discursive tool used to signal humility, sincerity, and the continuous striving for moral growth. In Muslim-oriented dating platforms, religious expressions are often employed as self-presentation strategies to convey authenticity, modesty, and compatibility with Islamic values (Abubakar, Noorani, & Rashidi, 2020). Such self-positioning aligns with the principles of *ta'aruf*, where the intention for marriage is explicitly linked to piety and family-oriented values (Firnando & Setiawati, 2025). As a result, verbal references to *agama* serve not only as personal reflections but also as culturally resonant cues that affirm the speaker's adherence to religious and moral expectations within the online dating context. For instance, examples (9) and (10) illustrate verbal presentations that align religiosity with self-improvement and sincerity:

(9) (Male) *Basic agama ada, kena polish lagi*

(I have basic religious (Islamic) knowledge, but it needs to be improved further)

(10) (Female) *Masih memperbaiki diri dalam urusan agama*

(Still working on improving myself in religious (Islamic) matters)

In addition, references to *mengaji Quran* (reciting the Quran) further illustrate how users draw on religious practices to frame themselves as spiritually committed. This act is not merely ritualistic, but symbolically tied to discipline, sincerity, and a desire for continuous self-betterment, which are qualities valued in Islamic courtship (Al Zidjaly, 2023; Ahmed, 2011). For example:

(11) (Male) *Boleh membaca dan mengaji Al-Quran dengan tajwid dan dan mahraj huruf.*

(Able to recite the Quran with correct tajwid and articulation of letters)

(12) (Female) *Boleh membaca Quran dengan baik dan InshaAllah akan usahakan.*

(Able to recite the Quran well and, God willing, will continue to improve)

Besides that, references to *solat* (Islamic prayer), are important markers of religious commitment and personal piety in Muslim online dating conversations. *Solat* was referenced 10 times by male users and 5 times by female users in the data. This discrepancy implies that men might employ *solat*-related discourse more often as a self-positioning tactic to portray leadership potential, religious authority, and worship consistency which are elements that are prized in Islamic marriage roles. For example:

(13) (Male) *Seorang yang menjaga solat 5 waktu.*

(Someone who consistently performs the five daily prayers)

(14) (Female) *Solat 5 waktu fardhu.*

(Do the five obligatory daily prayers)

Although female users mentioned *solat* less frequently overall, they often framed it in terms of relational compatibility and shared values, for example, *cari pasangan yang jaga solat* (seeking a spouse who observes prayer). This reflects a relational application of Islamic discourse, aligned with societal expectations that emphasize nurturing faith within the context of marriage. In many Muslim communities, *solat* is embedded as a societal expectation and a visible indicator of moral discipline, spiritual maturity, and readiness for family responsibilities (Al Zidjaly, 2023). As such, its presence in online courtship discourse functions not only as a personal declaration of piety but also as a socially approved criterion for evaluating a suitable life partner.

Furthermore, *InshaAllah* (God willing) is a key term in Islamic discourse that expresses humility, spiritual awareness, and surrender to divine will. Its use in online Muslim dating is indicative of an individual's attempt to conform their intents and future plans to the requirements of their religion. In this study it shows male users used *InshaAllah* 14 times, female users used it 21 times. These occurrences are illustrated in the sentences below:

(15) (Male) *Sy x kisah calon isteri kerja or tak.. InshaAllah*

(I don't mind whether my future wife works or not.. If God willing)

(16) (Female) *InshaAllah saya boleh berubah untuk kebaikan bersama.*

(God willing, I am willing to change for the betterment of both of us.)

Overall, this section examines how Muslim online dating profiles use Islamic vocabulary terms such as *agama*, *solat*, *mengaji Quran*, *Muslim*, and *InsyaAllah* as indicators of piety, sincerity, and moral alignment. While female users prioritise relational compatibility and shared religious ideals, male users frequently highlight religious rituals to demonstrate leadership and spiritual constancy. These phrases represent broader Islamic aspirations of moral discipline and spiritual self-improvement and serve as socially acceptable markers of marital preparedness (Al Zidjaly, 2023; Ahmed, 2011).

### 4.3 Lifestyle, Interests and Social Roles

Under the theme of Interests, and Social Roles, users often highlight aspects of their daily routines, hobbies, and interpersonal capacities as part of their self-presentation. While seemingly mundane, such phrases construct a narrative of personal values, everyday practices, and familial roles that align with culturally desirable traits such as being nurturing, emotionally stable, active, or responsible within the context of serious online matchmaking. Table 3 presents the frequency of lexical items related to lifestyle, leisure, and social roles, highlighting gendered patterns in evaluative self-presentation.

**Table 3.** Lifestyle, Interests, and Social Roles

Types of Lexical Choice	Male Users	Female Users	White's Framework
Lifestyle			
[Tak merokok/tidak vape]	21	4	Judgment
Interest			
[Suka] kucing	2	5	Appreciation
[Suka] travel	10	12	Appreciation
[Suka] bersukan	15	7	Appreciation
[Suka] kanak - kanak	2	6	Appreciation
Social Roles			
Anak sulung	5	2	Judgement

Phrases like *saya suka kucing* and *saya suka travel* act as interpersonal cues that suggest emotional stability, gentleness, and openness to experience. These are qualities

often valued in potential life partners (Holmes, 1995; Cameron, 2020). Similarly, nurturing roles, expressions such as *suka kanak-kanak* (likes children) also reflect nurturing dispositions and an affinity for familial responsibilities.

In contrast, the word *bersukan*, more frequently found in male profiles, connotes vitality, discipline, and health consciousness. In the Malaysian context, performing masculinity through sporting and physical activities is part of the discursive construction of modern male identity, where physical fitness signifies responsibility, strength, and competence (Radzi et al., 2018). Another notable strategy among male users is to explicitly assert that they do not smoke or vape. In conservative and religious social contexts, such declarations serve as both moral positioning and impression management. Smoking is often perceived as incompatible with Islamic values and family-oriented lifestyles, especially by women seeking long-term partners (Nordin, 2020; Yusoff, Shaharum, & Reza, 2021). Thus, stating “*tidak merokok/tidak vape*” not only reflects health awareness but also reinforces one’s relational appeal by aligning with broader gendered and cultural expectations. Examples 17 to 20 illustrate these patterns:

(17) (Male) *Saya tidak merokok atau vape*  
(I don’t smoke or vape)

(18) (Female) *sy X merokok*  
([I] don’t smoke)

(19) (Male) [*Saya*] *suka sangat bersukan (main futsal, bola sepak)*  
([I] really enjoy playing sports especially futsal and football)

(20) (Female) [*Saya*] *suka bersukan untuk jadi sihat.*  
[I] enjoy doing sports in order to stay healthy.

The lexical item *anak sulung*, frequently mentioned by male users, positions the individual within a familial hierarchy. This reference to birth order implicitly signals responsibility, maturity, and reliability. These are traits seen as morally favourable and socially reassuring within the context of courtship (Salem, 2021; Kiesling, 2005). These gendered evaluative positions align with White’s (2005) appraisal framework, particularly under the domain of Judgement, where individuals assess and present their own character and behaviour in ways that seek validation from others.

In other words, this theme portrays lexical items that reflect a form of verbal self-branding, where users craft desirable identities rooted in moral, emotional, and social acceptability. By foregrounding traits such as care, health, responsibility, and openness, users engage in moral framing that aligns with expectations of compatibility and virtue in religious or serious matchmaking platforms.

#### 4.4 Discussion

Based on the data in the theme of personal traits, domesticated, and financial security (Section 4.1), the recurring use of phrases such as *saya seorang yang simple* (I am a simple person) illustrates how linguistic choices are used to signal emotional maturity, humility, and compatibility. These are qualities highly valued in long-term relationships (Abubakar et al. (2020); Firnando & Setiawati, (2025)). The frequent use of simple by both genders aligns with Hollmann's (2025) finding that this term often conveys humility and modest lifestyle preferences, reflecting social esteem within collectivist cultural contexts. This pattern supports the argument that evaluative language reproduces gendered expectations in relational and domestic domains (Holmes, 2006; Sunderland, 2021). Both male and female users include references to domesticity in their profiles. Male users occasionally mention performing household chores, but their self-presentations focus less on cooking. In contrast, female users frequently foreground cooking abilities, reinforcing normative associations between femininity and domestic care. In addition, both genders use positive personal attributes to construct socially desirable identities. Some users also include admissions of traits perceived as negative or imperfect such as being *kurang peka* (*less attentive*), *banyak cakap* (talkative), or introvert. These expressions of imperfection may serve to humanise the self and enhance relatability in the context of digital courtship.

The data (Section 4.2) demonstrate that Islamic vocabulary in online dating profiles functions as more than mere religious identifiers. These terms operate as moral signals embedded within the discourse of digital courtship. Lexical items such as *agama*, *solat*, *mengaji Quran*, and *Insyallah* are employed strategically by both male and female users to position themselves as pious, sincere, and morally aligned with Islamic values. Such expressions fall under the Appraisal category of Judgement (Martin & White, 2005), where users evaluate and present themselves as possessing virtuous qualities. The term *agama*, for instance, is used not only to indicate religious affiliation but also to project humility and self-improvement—traits that are highly valued in Islamic ta'aruf-based matchmaking (Abubakar et al., 2020; Firnando & Setiawati, 2025). The ways in which male and female users construct their religious personas support the assertion by Nisa (2021), Firnando and Setiawati (2025), and Sugimoto and Muflih (2025) that Muslim discourse in digital spaces is morally charged and often serves to align personal faith with broader social expectations.

In addition, gendered patterns emerge in how these Islamic references are framed. While both genders invoke religious practices, male users often emphasise consistency in worship, such as *solat 5 waktu*, which may index religious authority, leadership, and readiness for marital responsibilities. In contrast, female users are more likely to frame religion in relational terms, as seen in expressions like *cari pasangan yang jaga solat*, which reflects aspirations for shared spiritual growth within marriage. The higher frequency of *Insyallah* among female users further reinforces a humble and

emotionally sincere persona that aligns with Islamic values of self-development and divine submission (Ahmed, 2011). These findings support the idea that Islamic discourse in online dating profiles serves as a form of moral framing, where linguistic self-presentation is infused with piety, sincerity, and compatibility. Such strategies reinforce both religious credibility and romantic suitability, particularly within culturally specific Muslim matchmaking platforms.

The lexical patterns observed under the theme (Section 4.3) of lifestyle, interests, and social roles reveal how users employ everyday preferences to construct morally and socially desirable identities in the context of serious online matchmaking. Phrases such as *saya suka kucing* and *saya suka travel* function as interpersonal cues that convey emotional stability, gentleness, and openness to experience—qualities that are often prized in long-term partnerships (Holmes, 1995; Cameron, 2020). Similarly, references to *suka kanak-kanak* project nurturing dispositions and an affinity for family life, aligning with conventional gender expectations around care and relational readiness. These forms of evaluative language fall under the Appreciation category in White's (2005) framework, as users positively highlight personal preferences to manage impressions and foster relatability. This discourse signals not only the traits users value in themselves but also the ideals they assume will be recognised and rewarded by prospective partners.

At the same time, other lexical choices reveal gendered strategies of moral positioning, particularly through references to physical discipline and health. The word *bersukan*, more frequently found in male profiles, connotes vitality and responsibility and aligns with broader cultural ideals of masculinity in Malaysia, where sporting competence reflects leadership and self-discipline (Radzi et al., 2018). Additionally, the declaration *tidak merokok atau vape*, predominantly used by male users, operates as a moral claim that reflects health consciousness and compatibility with Islamic values. In conservative or faith-based communities, non-smoking is associated with moral responsibility and is perceived positively by women seeking stable and pious partners (Nordin, 2020; Yusoff et al., 2021). The inclusion of *anak sulung* further reflects a gendered self-assessment rooted in familial hierarchy, as it indexes maturity and leadership, especially in patriarchal settings (Salem, 2021; Kiesling, 2005). These expressions reflect the Judgement dimension of evaluative language, reinforcing the idea that users engage in verbal self-branding to project virtue, care, and relational suitability within culturally and religiously informed dating norms.

## 5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that evaluative language is central to how Muslim users present themselves on faith-based matchmaking platforms. Applying Appraisal Theory, the analysis revealed that self-descriptions are rarely neutral; instead, they are

carefully constructed through affect, judgement, and appreciation to position the self as emotionally mature, morally grounded, and marriage ready. These linguistic strategies are shaped by Islamic principles, cultural values, and gender norms, showing that digital self-presentation is deeply embedded within its social and religious context. In this environment, language becomes both a personal branding tool and a moral statement, aligning the self with the expectations of serious and halal oriented relationships.

The findings also highlight gendered patterns in self-representation. Male users tended to foreground responsibility, leadership, financial stability, non-smoking, and active lifestyles, aligning with traditional notions of masculinity and provision. Female users more frequently emphasised nurturing qualities, cooking abilities, emotional warmth, and spiritual sincerity. Across both groups, the use of religious expressions such as *agama*, *solat*, *mengaji Quran*, and *InsyaAllah* functioned as moral signals that reinforced piety, sincerity, and compatibility. Lifestyle declarations such as *tidak merokok* and family role references like *anak sulung* further enhanced credibility and relational appeal.

Overall, this study contributes to scholarship on digital discourse, online dating, and Muslim identity by showing how self-presentation in faith-based platforms operates as a form of moral framing, where personal traits and lifestyle preferences are discursively aligned with religious values and gendered expectations. Future research could extend these insights by comparing faith-based matchmaking discourse across different cultural contexts, age groups, or platform types, or by examining how multimodal features such as photos and emojis interact with textual self-presentation in shaping perceptions of relational suitability.

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