

# Towards a new relationship: The construction of the marital couple through Facebook groups and its energetic impact on the environment

*Oumaima RGUIBI & Leila BOUASRIA*

<sup>1</sup>Hassan II University of Casablanca, Research center for Socio-anthropological Differentiations and Social Identities (LADSSIS), Casablanca, Morocco.

DOI : <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1751-7879>

**Abstract.** Facebook groups constitute a new area dedicated to marriage, providing a new space for encounters and first contact, in addition to the existing ones. Our approach was based on qualitative semi-structured interviews and virtual ethnography through participatory observation of two Facebook groups. This research allowed us to identify the different ways in which people meet within a Facebook group, and to highlight a key aspect of these groups: the shared intimacy of a couple's life. In addition, it has exposed the increased energy consumption associated with the use of digital social networks. The purpose of this paper is to explore how Facebook groups can be a marriage platform for young people today, at the expense of the high energy consumption associated with intensive use of the platform.

**Keywords:** Facebook group, marital couple, marriage space, shared intimacy, energy consumption.

## 1. Introduction

“Not just anyone marries anyone” [1] was the conclusion Girard Alain drew from his study on the construction of couples. The question, then, is how are couples formed, and what is the Moroccan approach to marriage? According to Moroccan law and the Family Code: “Marriage is a pact based on mutual consent with a legal and lasting union between a man and a woman. The purpose of marriage is to live in mutual fidelity and purity, and to establish a stable family under the management of both spouses, in compliance with the terms of the present Code” [2].

Since the 1960s, marriage, like family, has experienced a number of transformations, and the process of establishing and building a marital couple is no exception to these gradual changes. Regardless of the way and manner in which people meet, the construction of the marital couple is subject to social dynamics that require two individuals to come together who are usually alike [3], whether they have been chosen by like-minded parents (from the same social class, family, tribe, etc.) or met in socially homogeneous environments, or even via the virtual world.

The fundamental building block of the couple is the marital social bond, just as the couple is the basis for the creation of the family. In Morocco, during the 1960s, the most common form of legitimate entry into the marital couple was arranged marriage, either by the family or by the “khataba” (traditional matchmaker), since at the time the family's primary concern was the perpetuation of the family through offspring. Several years later, as daughters became more educated and women joined the workplace, the most frequent mode of encounter was in schools or at work. Over the following years, the same dating pattern was followed by a period of courtship without cohabitation, called the “khouttoubas” (engagement), before the marriage ceremony. Recently, these “traditional” dating modes and spaces have been supplemented by new ones like dating sites, matrimonial agencies and digital social networks.

The construction of a couple in the sixties was marked by the strong involvement of parents and relatives (uncles, aunts) of both parties (the man and the woman) through marriages of convenience and/or arranged or sometimes forced marriages, far from the free choice of two spouses. These marriages were a way of preserving culture and ensuring descendants, while respecting traditions and customs. In fact, for the traditional Moroccan family, marriage was seen as a union between two lineages, involving much more than just the bride and groom, rather than an affair between two individuals, as Irène Théry describes “the link couple” [4]. In the past, “arranged marriage was the rule, love marriage was the exception”, as Verbunt points out [5].

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the evolution of the marital couple in Morocco was tied to the emancipation of women, their education, their inclusion in the employment market and their sharing of the public sphere with men [6]. As a result, endogamy has decreased: “For young, well-educated men, marrying “bent el-'amm” has become archaic and contradicts their individualistic approach to couple-building” [7], as has the feeling of love and choice of spouse. As André Adam pointed out in Casablanca, “Marriage is a private matter - young people no longer allow themselves to be pressured” [8]. However, the mixing and mingling of the sexes in the public sphere changed things a little, giving women more freedom in their choice of spouse. Admittedly, during these years, parental approval was paramount, but equally, young people were given a freedom of choice driven by a feeling of love. In the 1970s and beyond, the pre-marital encounter took the form of the “khouttoubas” (engagement). This was the period of formalizing the relationship: pending the ceremony, the length of this period varied and generally depended on the preparations for the dowry, the celebration and finding the accommodation.

As women left home and entered the job market, a number of changes were introduced, including delayed matrimony. Towards the year 2000, new perceptions of the spouse and the marital couple began to emerge, as the meeting began to take place without the need for an intermediary, with the family sometimes playing the role of blesser, by accepting the future spouse through the imposition of their daughter. During these years, it was the places of study and leisure that played an active part in the construction of couples "... private evenings with friends, as well as the links forged in the school environment, never ceased to fuel the meeting of the spouse, to the point of being representative at the beginning of the 2000s" [9]. So, building a couple took on an increasingly individual dimension, as the primary objective was the couple and the feeling of love.

Throughout the period from the late 2000s to the present day, new technologies like the Internet and computer tools have intruded into everyone's lives, influencing the daily lives of some and altering the destinies of others. Meeting places have become more and more "virtual", with social networks, dating sites and matrimonial agencies. As a result of the changes and mutations our society has undergone, the construction of a marital couple and the choice of spouse is now done on an individual basis, but through a new intermediary. These include dating sites, which are more structured and better organized, matrimonial agencies to ensure compatibility, and Facebook groups as private spaces for sharing news and better expressing the criteria for choosing a spouse, the quest for an "ideal" partner.

In this study, we examine Facebook groups as meeting/marriage spaces and the stages young people go through in building a marital couple. The concept of "being in a relationship" is becoming increasingly important in the construction of marital couples in Morocco. Individuals in search of the ideal partner prefer to look for him or her, sometimes in more discreet, less family-controlled places. Social networks offer more possibilities for selecting the right person to match specific criteria. These Facebook groups usually also offer the opportunity to meet physically, in "real" life, by organizing different events to facilitate the encounter.

Whereas in the past, the traditional matchmaker was responsible for finding the right husband or wife, today it's the Facebook group administrator who acts as intermediary. Similarly, Facebook, as a free and accessible platform, is becoming a very interesting alternative in the formation of a marital couple. Which leads us to ask the following questions: How is the marital couple constructed in today's Facebook groups? How do Facebook groups contribute to marital couple development? Why do young people use this kind of service to get married? What representations do these young people have of marriage via a Facebook group? To what extent does the rise of Facebook as a space for building marital couples promote higher energy consumption by users through intensive digital practices? What digital behaviors does the search for the ideal partner on Facebook entail: lots of time spent on the social network, high frequency of interactions, constant sharing of content, etc.? Ultimately, how does this impact on individuals' energy consumption? These are the questions that will guide this research, and to which we are attempting to provide some answers.

While every piece of research has its own limitations, inherent to its subject, we faced a number of challenges during the course of our research, which we have tried to overcome in order to move forward. These difficulties are not specific to an Internet investigation, as it is an ethnographic study space like any other, but with specificities linked to the virtual dimension. The limitation of this research is its small sample size, due to the unavailability of the people approached. In many cases, this was due to their unwillingness to share their own experiences. Despite the large number of individuals, we have identified on the two Facebook groups who are part of our target population. Our approach was to use intermediaries from our personal network, notably the admins and a few friendly members of the group, and thanks to the snowball effect we were able to carry out our interviews. However, another challenge was added in relation to virtual interviews: the individual is in front of his machine and takes his time to think, which can influence the spontaneity of his reflection and also produce another form of dialogue, usually short-word. This prompted us to make repeated calls for more details. Nevertheless, another obstacle emerged during our interviews with our group friends, under the pretext that we belong to the group and know their stories in advance. The final obstacle was related to our choice of fieldwork method, linked to virtual ethnography. Using this sociological research tool for the first time, we were faced with questions about how we should actually proceed.

This article is divided into three main parts, the first of which presents the methodology adopted for this article. The second part will be devoted to discussing the results, such as the presentation of the Facebook group as a meeting/marital space and the role of the group in the construction of the marital couple, "shared intimacy" in a "virtual" public space and the relationship between the construction of the marital couple via Facebook groups and energy consumption. And the final section will be dedicated to a general conclusion.

## **2. Methodology**

The purpose of this research is to provide descriptive and explanatory knowledge of young people's practices and social representations of the construction of a marital couple via a Facebook group, and to examine the extent to which the latter constitutes a marriage space, as well as to trace the relationship between the construction of a marital couple via a Facebook group and energy consumption.

The Internet offers new opportunities for material and sociological investigation, which need to be tamed and attached to the existing arsenal of tried-and-tested methods [10]. Sociological researchers have gradually begun to integrate the Internet into their investigative practices, both in terms of field exploration and empirical data collection. In this case, the

research is based mainly on a “virtual” field, from exploration, through establishing contact with interviewees, to data collection using semi-structured interviews, observations of the Facebook group and quantitative data collection via questionnaires. For this purpose, and in order to carry out this work properly, we opted for a qualitative study combining the two methods of data collection, the semi-structured interview and the virtual ethnography, thus proving interesting to combine with the quantitative method by questionnaire around the relationship between the construction of the marital couple via Facebook groups and energy consumption.

We decided in favor of semi-structured interviews, as this method enabled us to interrogate young people's experience of building marital couples in Facebook groups. An interview guide was produced and tested during an initial preliminary interview, and feedback on this experience enabled us to revise the structure of our guide to make the transitions between the different questions more fluid.

In light of our work on the role of the Facebook group and its consideration as a marriage space, we favored the virtual ethnography approach. Further to the debate surrounding the study and analysis of data collected on the Internet, this approach appeared to be the most relevant. The virtual space, in this case the Facebook group, is not considered as a place detached from face-to-face interactions, but rather as a site for interaction and connections in the “real world”.

We decided to conduct the questionnaires with the couples formed via Facebook groups, with the intention of understanding and investigating the impact and influence of the use of this platform on energy consumption.

### **3. Discussion**

Facebook group marriages are an opportunity to get to know each other better, and to reach the love level. Choosing a partner is a matter of individual choice in this new meeting place, the Facebook group. Facebook is considered to be a space for communication, generating an open exchange between singles looking for marriage.

The Facebook group facilitates the first phase in the construction of a marital couple: the first meeting. Many virtual relationships are born on Facebook groups. The distinctive feature of this space is that it allows a degree of control and rationalization in the choice of partner. The #Challenge introduction makes it easier to be aware of this information and make the right choice of partner. Unlike in-person selection, on Facebook groups, you choose a person based on their publications, presentations and profile, which can give you a general idea of the person. The selection is based on certain criteria, which may be physical or intellectual. In a Facebook group, dating isn't just limited to a screen relationship, but the group offers activities that encourage physical encounters, such as meetings, events, parties and trips. The newlyweds met on the Facebook group allow themselves to share their intimacies freely, since they are in a reduced space with conditional access.

These young people see the "virtual public space" - in this case, the Facebook group that was the source of their encounter - as an intimate space that offers them opportunities to reveal part of their intimacy, to expose some facets of their private lives, moments that mark their lives as a couple, such as the engagement and the wedding party. These young people share their photos to express a sharing of joy, experience and encouragement for the other members of the group. This sharing also confirms the idea that the group is a space for marriage.

#### **3.1 Facebook group as wedding spaces**

Whether it's a singles group, a wedding group or a travel group, we've all been part of one of these groups at least once since we started using Facebook, bringing together individuals looking to meet new people. Visited by different age groups, Facebook groups dedicated to marriage are a new mediation space for simultaneously engaging a good number of contacts with the aim of meeting your soulmate. As the administrator of one of the two groups states in the group description: “This group is a meeting place for exchanging ideas, opinions and cultural habits between members. Make new friends, meet up, get together, and why not get married?”

A Facebook group is a community gathered around a subject with common interests and objectives, in this case marriage. It's a private space where it's possible to create relationships and share with a group of people, who become like family members. The group administrator puts forward the following idea in the group's “About” section: “Today, this group has become a unified family unlike any other”. In other words, the sense of belonging is much stronger within a group.

A Facebook group constitutes what we call a “virtual community” or “online community”, which are "social spaces in the digital environment that enable groups to form and be maintained primarily through ongoing communication processes" [11]. Spaces that enable individuals to interact, exchange, share experiences and draw inspiration from those of other members in a non-physical world that unites them around a shared interest. It's a territory intensively invested by young people united around a common cause: marriage. These groups are created by an administrator who had the idea either to get married, or to create a respectful group that turned into one to get married.

Moreover, the aim of a Facebook group for marriage is to generate open exchange and dialogue between singles looking for marriage. It is used as a meeting place to start a marriage relationship. These groups are places of communication for singles, offering a special place for members to ask questions, find answers, exchange points of view, share common interests and express their opinions on marriage. They can also publish photos and other related content.

After reviewing Facebook groups as marriage spaces and highlighting their objectives, it is time to present the role these groups play in building the marital couple.

### *Meeting spaces*

Created to facilitate contact and exchange between individuals, Facebook groups are particularly useful for single people looking for love. These groups provide an opportunity for love stories to form and unravel. In other words, these groups offer a space for the creation and reconstruction of conjugal and social relationships, through communication by publication, comment, message, audio and video calls.

The chances of finding love and getting married in a Facebook group are higher, because the group acts as a meeting place, an idea supported by the majority of our interviewees. What's more, the group allows its members to get to know each other better through their activities and interactions with other members within the group. In a "traditional" context, a romantic relationship can take months to develop, whereas in Facebook groups the timeframes are usually very short, around a week or even a few days, which was confirmed by the majority of our participants in this study.

In fact, in a group, you can get to know the person from his or her publications and the group's Challenges, such as "#Challenge introduction". This challenge involves introducing oneself by mentioning personal information, i.e., surname, first name, age, origins, marital status, hobbies, preferred color, professional situation and desired criteria in a partner, and attaching a personal photo to this publication. So private discussions take a direct path towards very personal subjects that go beyond introductions, and quickly lead to real encounters.

### **3.2 Shared intimacy in the Facebook group**

Intimacy is what we don't share, or rather rarely and under very specific circumstances. It is the very opposite of the public space, where everything that appears is there for all to see [12]. Shared intimacy, on the other hand, refers to the process of sharing and exposing a piece of one's private life and intimacy to the outside world by communicating it. It's a process by which newlyweds in Facebook groups share and expose some facets of their private lives, moments that mark their lives as a couple, such as the engagement and the wedding celebration. These young people see the "virtual public space" - in this case, the Facebook group that was the starting point for their meeting - as an intimate space that offers them opportunities to reveal some of their intimacy. This is due to the fact that these marital couples feel that they are addressing a social network of close friends and family, the group members. Since the Facebook group is a space that is difficult to access, young people take the liberty of sharing their intimacies.

Almost all of our interviewees see the sharing of their photos as a way of sharing joy and experience, and also as an encouragement to other group members. This sharing also confirms the idea that the group is a space for marriage. Some members prefer sharing to be done by themselves, while others hand over to the administrator as a form of recognition.

#### *A thank you to the group...*

When you find your better half, your soulmate, the love of your life, you're grateful to the group and the administrator. Usually, this recognition is expressed by a publication, using the famous Thank You and/or by an invitation to the wedding sent to the administrator, accompanied by a photo of the couple.

Finally, we believe that these Facebook groups shed light on the erasure of old boundaries between private and public and rebuild them differently, as Dominique Mehl puts it: "The border between private and public has not disappeared, but it has become subjective and individual" [13].

### **3.3 The relationship between marital couple construction via Facebook groups and energy consumption**

The construction of marital couples via social networks such as Facebook raises a number of social issues. Indeed, these new forms of digital encounters testify to the evolution of relationship and love practices in our hyper-connected society. They are a symptom of growing individualization, with everyone actively seeking to build their own personal and intimate projects via the Internet. However, this quest for love also generates an increase in energy consumption due to the continuous use of our screens and mobile data, thus inducing an ecological impact of these digital practices. There is therefore a growing conflict between, on the one hand, the possibility offered by digital technology to search and find a partner more easily via a large pool of singles, and on the other hand, the environmental harmfulness of these new forms of matchmaking, pointing to the persistent difficulty of articulating technological progress and preservation of the planet.

These developments illustrate profound social changes in sociality, intimacy and family in the digital age, with both positive and negative societal consequences. While the virtual world makes it easier to find partners, it also raises questions about its ecological impact and the quality of the relationships formed. Firstly, the virtual facilitates the search

for partners and provides access to a wider choice of potential affinities [14]. Secondly, it opens up new relational opportunities by breaking down geographical [15] and social barriers. Through social networks, we can create social ties, break isolation and find emotional support [16]. Furthermore, dependence on screens calls into question the quality of face-to-face interactions [17]. Energy consumption raises environmental concerns [18]. All in all, while virtual encounters offer certain advantages, we mustn't forget the major ecological and societal issues they raise [19].

#### **4. Conclusion**

Facebook groups have now been added to the traditional meeting places (work, leisure, friends, school...). While they don't replace existing ways of meeting, Facebook groups do have the distinctive feature of being based on a mediation process in which virtual encounters generally precede face-to-face encounters. Our research has focused on the Facebook group as a new space for marriage and its contribution to the construction of the marital couple. Having retraced the history of couple-building spaces in Morocco and presented the various mutations they have undergone, we showed how a Facebook group can be considered as a space for meeting and marriage, taking the case of two Facebook groups in particular.

The purpose of this research is to gain descriptive and explanatory knowledge of young people's practices and social representations of the construction of a marital couple, based on a Facebook group, to see how the latter constitutes a space for marriage, and to see its influence on the environment and energy consumption.

Methodologically, we opted for the qualitative method of semi-structured interview, which helped us identify young married people's representations of this type of marriage via Facebook groups, and the virtual ethnography of participant observation, which enabled us to retain publications on marriage and the life of the marital couple. We also used quantitative questionnaires to measure the impact and influence on energy consumption.

Similarly, we would have wished to multiply our observations by working on other Facebook groups, and to compare with other online dating and marriage spaces, i.e., dating sites, Tinder... For instance, we consider it interesting to compare with profiles that have had relationships on a Facebook group but without being able to reach the marriage stage. Lastly, following the launch of the "Facebook dating" service at the end of 2019, we believe it is important to study it as much as a marriage space. Facebook, as a platform, has decided to launch a dating service called "Facebook Dating", a service that enables its users to find registered singles who are taking part in events that interest them, or among the Facebook groups to which they are subscribed. This service is not a new program, but a feature directly integrated into the social network. Nevertheless, the "Dating" profile is not the same as that of the Facebook account: the only information transferred is age and name. "Facebook Dating" then generates a profile with photos and information from the Facebook account, such as places of work and study. This profile is fully customizable. To use the dating service, you need to be at least 18 years old. The service has been launched in some countries and will be rolled out worldwide in a few years' time.

This paper is an introduction to the topic of Facebook groups as marriage spaces. To compare meeting spaces for the construction of a marital couple, a further study is both necessary and interesting. The present work opens up new sociological paths and questions: what is the gender dimension of the use of these Facebook groups, and how do each of the sexes use these groups to build a marital couple? Who takes the first step and how? Do selection criteria differ according to gender? What place is given to love in these Facebook groups? Is love a criterion for selection? How are digital social networks used by couples?

#### **4. Acknowledgments**

We express our heartfelt appreciation to all those who made invaluable contributions to the completion of this article. Your assistance and support have been truly remarkable. First and foremost, we extend our sincere gratitude to the participants who willingly took part in our study, generously sharing their insights and taking the time to respond to our inquiries. Your contributions provided us with invaluable information and greatly influenced the development of our findings. Additionally, we would like to express our gratitude to our colleagues who offered their valuable feedback and suggestions, enhancing the quality of this article. We genuinely hope that this work offers valuable insights to those interested in exploring the dynamics of constructing marital relationships through Facebook groups and its implications on energy consumption. May this research stimulate meaningful discussions and inspire future investigations in this field, ultimately fulfilling our aspirations.

## 5. Références

- [1] J. Kaufmann, *Le choix du conjoint : Chapitre I. Dans : Jean-Claude Kaufmann éd., Sociologie du couple* (pp. 5-30), Paris cedex 14, France : Presses Universitaires de France, (2014).
- [2] Code de la famille, ministère de la justice et des libertés ; DAHIR N° 1-04-22 DU 12 HIJA 1424 (3 FEVRIER 2004) portant promulgation de la loi N° 70-03 portant code de la famille.
- [3] A. Girard, *Qui se ressemble s'assemble*, (1959).
- [4] I. Théry, *Le couple occidental et son évolution sociale : du couple "chaînon" au couple "duo"*, Dialogue, no 150, p. 3-12, (2000).
- [5] Lamboley M. (2015), « Le mariage forcé de femmes immigrantes », Québec, Thèse en vue de l'obtention du grade de Philosophie Doctor (Ph.D) en criminologie, Université de Montréal, 410 pp.
- [6] André A. (1968), Casablanca : essai sur la transformation de la société marocaine au contact de l'Occident. Paris, C.N.R.S.
- [7] M. Bozon & W. Rault, *Où rencontre-t-on son premier partenaire sexuel et son premier conjoint ?*, *Population et Sociétés*, n° 496, (2013).
- [8] J-S. Beuscart, E. Dagiral & S. Parasie, *Sociologie d'internet – Introduction*, Armand Colin, pp. 223, (2016).
- [9] P. Bagozzi & M. Dholakia, *Intentional social action in virtual communities*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Volume 16, Issue 2, pp 2-21, (2002).
- [10] É. Gardien, *L'intimité partagée par nécessité : entre respect et liberté*. Dans : Yves Jeanne éd., *Corps à cœur : Intimité, amour, sexualité et handicap*, Toulouse, France: ERES, pp. 37-57, (2014).
- [11] M. Dominique, *la « Vie publique privée »*, C.N.R.S. Editions Hermès, N° 13-14, pp. 95-113, (1994).
- [12] M. J. Rosenfeld & R. J. Thomas, *Searching for a mate: The rise of the Internet as a social intermediary*, *American Sociological Review*, 77(4), 523-547, (2012).
- [13] D. J. Reid & F. J. M. Reid, *Online dating: A critical analysis from a systems perspective*, *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, (2020).
- [14] P. M. Valkenburg & J. Peter, *Social consequences of the Internet for adolescents: A decade of research*, *Current directions in psychological science*, pp 1-5, (2009).
- [15] S. Turkle, *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, Hachette UK, (2012).
- [16] J. A. Bargh, K. Y. McKenna & G. M. Fitzsimons, *Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the "true self" on the Internet*, *Journal of Social Issues*, pp 33-48, (2002).
- [17] E. Zagheni, V. R. K. Garimella & I. Weber, *Inferring international and internal migration patterns from social media data*. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, (2020).