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FINDING LOVE IN THE PAGES OF THE NEWSPAPER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE KOMPAS CONTACT COLUMN IN 1997

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Abstract
"Kontak" is a matchmaking column published through classified ads in the daily newspaper Kompas since 1978. The existence of this column reveals that print media played a significant role in shaping patterns of social interaction and representing cultural values during transition toward modernity. This article employs a historical method by examining "Contact" to uncover how individuals presented their identities, constructed images of the ideal partner, and negotiated between traditional and modern values. The analysis demonstrates that "Kontak" provided a modern medium that enabled a more open matchmaking process but traditional values such as religious faith and ethnicity remain crucial elements in determining compatibility between potential partners. At the same time, new criteria—such as education level, occupation, and economic status—began to emerge. This study affirms that the practice of matchmaking through print media represents an adaptation of traditional values within a modern framework.

Kata Kunci:
Agen Perjodohan; Kontak; Kompas

Abstrak
Kolom "Kontak" merupakan layanan perjodohan melalui iklan baris yang dimuat di harian Kompas sejak tahun 1978. Keberadaan kolom ini menunjukkan bahwa media cetak berperan dalam membentuk pola interaksi sosial dan representasi nilai-nilai budaya selama masa transisi menuju modernitas. Artikel ini menggunakan metode historis dengan mengkaji kolom tersebut untuk mengungkap bagaimana individu menampilkan identitas mereka, membangun citra pasangan ideal, serta menyeimbangkan nilai-nilai tradisional dan modern. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kolom "Contact" menawarkan media modern yang memungkinkan proses perjodohan yang lebih terbuka, nilai-nilai tradisional seperti keyakinan agama dan etnisitas tetap menjadi elemen penting dalam menentukan calon pasangan. Pada saat yang sama, kriteria baru telah muncul, seperti tingkat pendidikan, pekerjaan, dan status ekonomi, yang dipengaruhi oleh kualitas pendidikan. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa praktik perjodohan melalui media cetak merupakan bentuk adaptasi tradisi dalam kerangka modern.

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INTRODUCTION

Matchmaking through print media began appearing in Indonesia in 1978, marking the beginning of a social phenomenon that was quite popular at the time. Their presence represented a form of modernization in the practice of finding a life partner in a society still strongly influenced by family matchmaking traditions. Print media, particularly national newspapers like Kompas, played a crucial role as a new space for individuals to express their personal desires and ideal criteria for a life partner. The "Contact" column in the Kompas daily newspaper is a concrete example of this transformation. Urban communities could use it to expand their social networks and openly search for a partner. This phenomenon marked a shift from the conventional matchmaking system, which was entirely controlled by families, to a more personalized model. Furthermore, the existence of these matchmaking agencies demonstrated that the media could serve as an agent of social change, introducing new patterns of interaction in social relationships by bringing together traditional and emerging modern values in Indonesian society.

The practice of arranged marriages appears to have deep roots in Indonesian society, as is the case with arranged marriages in Madurese society. In Madurese, arranged marriages are considered a cultural practice that is still preserved to this day. It is not uncommon for arranged marriages to begin at an early age, even while the child is still in the womb or has just been born (Birri, 2009). According to parents, arranged marriages are carried out solely for the benefit of the child's future. This custom has become a tradition passed down from generation to generation, so that if someone disagrees with or rejects an arranged marriage, that person is considered to be violating tradition (Sutomo, 1990). Madurese people usually find a partner when their child is still a girl, and arranged marriages certainly occur without the child's consent, only with the knowledge of both families. The strong urge to find a partner for their child is often motivated by a desire to maintain family ties. Still, other factors, such as social and economic incentives, also play a role (Rifai, 2007).

In Javanese Islamic boarding schools, determining their children's life choices is a significant concern for families. This concerns not only idealism in choosing a partner but also responsibility to the family, as the prospective son-in-law is a potential new member of the family (Wahid, 1958). Families, especially parents, view marriage as a means of strengthening social ties. Therefore, families conduct a rigorous selection process for prospective sons-in-law. It is not uncommon for children to be matched with their parents' choice, who are considered more experienced and wise in assessing the suitability of a prospective son-in-law across various aspects. Matchmaking in Islamic boarding schools is a

tradition that continues to this day. The process of selecting a partner is inseparable from various interests, the most common being the conflicting interests of parents and family, which override the child's interests.

Over time, the conventional practice of matchmaking, previously conducted through intermediaries such as family or relatives, has gradually been abandoned. Changes in social structures, increased individual mobility, and the demands of modern life have created a need for new, more efficient, and personalized ways to find a life partner. Matchmaking agencies have emerged as a practical solution to address this need. Through matchmaking agencies, individuals can select potential partners based on criteria that align with their personal preferences, without the need for lengthy processes that typically involve family involvement. This system is also considered more flexible, allowing matchmakers to determine aspects they deem important, such as age, occupation, education, and religious values. The emergence of matchmaking agencies using this modern method reflects a shift in society's perspective on marriage, moving from one based on collectivism and social considerations to one more oriented toward individual autonomy.

The "Contact" section first appeared in the Kompas newspaper's classified ads and has become a popular space for readers looking to find a partner without going through traditional mechanisms like family matchmaking or conventional matchmaking agencies. Urban Indonesians, especially young professionals, are beginning to face the realities of a more individualistic life. High job mobility, social pressures, and limited social space make it difficult for many to establish personal relationships. In such situations, the "Contact" section exists as a platform to expand social networks and find a life partner efficiently.

This article begins with the emergence of matchmaking columns in newspapers as a means of mediating personal needs in the public sphere. The self-image and criteria for desired partners in the "Contact" column reflect the public's courage to express their personal desires in short narratives. However, several sentences still reflect traditional values, such as religious affiliation and gender roles. This is contradictory, as individuals emerge as autonomous subjects in determining their partner preferences, while on the other hand, they remain bound by social norms that emphasize traditional values. This raises the question of whether the "contact" column eliminates traditional values in partner search or creates new preferences. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the extent of the shift in traditional values in partner search.

The phenomenon of matchmaking agencies in Indonesia is an interesting topic for study because it reveals Indonesian urban society in a period of transition to modernity,

seeking to reconcile traditional values with the demands of modern life. The lack of historiographical studies specifically addressing matchmaking in print media underscores the importance of research on the Kompas daily's "Kontak" column in 1997. Until now, studies on matchmaking in Indonesia have focused more on traditional aspects and community-level cultural practices, while transformations driven by modern media have been rare. Yet, the "Kontact" column, as one of the earliest forms of modern matchmaking in Indonesia, offers a new perspective on how urban society interprets relationships, soulmates, and marriage.

METHOD

This paper uses historical research methods that include: topic determination, heuristics or source collection, source criticism, interpretation, and historical writing. The sources used include Kompas Data, the National Library, and the Medayu Agung Library. Because the research topic relates to the Kompas newspaper, the primary source is personal advertisements in the "Contact" column, published every Sunday. Although the "Contact" column has been around since 1978, this article focuses on 1997 because that year saw the highest number of advertisers, namely 1,610 people. The selection of 1997 also allows the author to more clearly observe the patterns, trends, and variations in the advertisement writing that appeared. With a relatively large amount of data, the analysis of self-image and partner criteria becomes more representative in describing the characteristics of the column's users. Literature review is also used to support the analysis. After obtaining the required data, the next stage is source criticism, which assesses the data's credibility. This is done by cross-examining articles in one newspaper with those in another. Cross-checking was also conducted with other sources, including books, journal articles, and previous research. After credibility testing, the interpretation stage followed, then the final stage: writing the history.

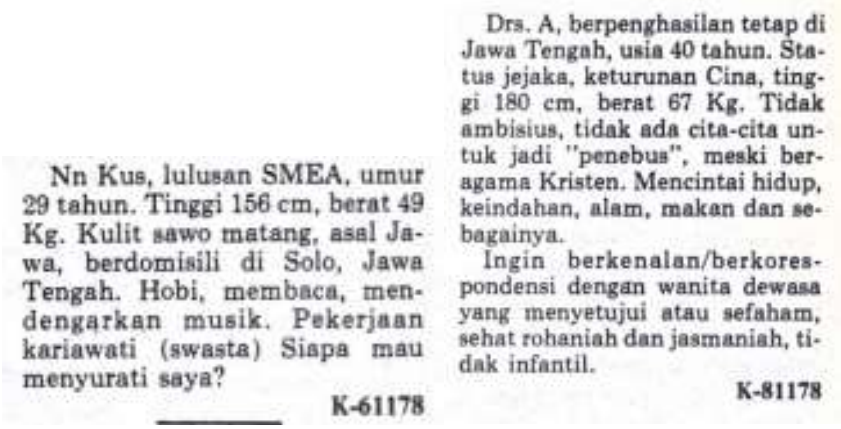
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contact Section

Matchmaking as a solution for finding a life partner is gaining increasing attention in Indonesia, particularly amid the dynamic social change in modern society. Lifestyle changes, increased mobility, and a societal emphasis on careers are leading many individuals, both men and women, to postpone marriage. In such situations, opportunities to meet potential partners through traditional channels such as family, work environments, or community activities are becoming increasingly limited. Therefore, matchmaking agencies have emerged as a new, efficient alternative that meets the needs of today's fast-paced society. This moment presented an opportunity for Kompas to create a similar approach, featuring it in one of its

news columns. On October 29, 1978, Kompas published its first "Contact" column. This free service is published every Sunday in a special column entitled “Contact”.

Figure 1. The “Contact” column published in Kompas, November 5, 1978



Nn Kus, lulusan SMEA, umur 29 tahun. Tinggi 156 cm, berat 49 Kg. Kulit sawo matang, asal Jawa, berdomisili di Solo, Jawa Tengah. Hobi, membaca, mendengarkan musik. Pekerjaan kariawati (swasta) Siapa mau menyurati saya?

K-61178

Drs. A, berpenghasilan tetap di Jawa Tengah, usia 40 tahun. Status jejaka, keturunan Cina, tinggi 180 cm, berat 67 Kg. Tidak ambisius, tidak ada cita-cita untuk jadi "penebus", meski beragama Kristen. Mencintai hidup, keindahan, alam, makan dan sebagainya.

Ingin berkenalan/berkorespondensi dengan wanita dewasa yang menyetujui atau sefaham, sehat rohaniah dan jasmaniah, tidak infantil.

K-81178

Source: Kompas, November 5, 1978

The “Contact” section is intended to provide an opportunity for single men and women to get to know each other or correspond. (Kompas, 29 October 1978). Singles are those who have never been married or are widows/widowers. Kompas sets a minimum age of 27 for women and 30 for men. They are also required to include a photocopy of a valid ID. The age limit and ID requirement are one way Kompas screens those who will correspond in the "Contact" section. The editors also permit those who wish to have their photos displayed.

Readers interested in a particular member can send a letter to Kompas stating their desired member number. To facilitate sorting incoming letters, readers are asked to include a "Contact" coupon on the envelope or in the body of the letter (Kompas, November 5, 1978). The process of sending letters from interested parties to participants takes two weeks. The first week is for selecting letters from interested parties and collecting them according to the participant's "Contact" code number, and the second week is for sending them to participants (Kompas, December 18, 1983).

When first published, the "Contact" column only featured two personal details about people seeking a partner. This was understandable, as the public was unfamiliar with matchmaking, which relied on print media. In its second edition, interest increased, though not significantly. The number of personal details initially included two individuals, and the number of entries increased to six. Interest in the "Contact" column grew year after year, reaching its peak in 1984 with 1,350 members.

Advertisers are generally educated individuals with stable jobs and occupy relatively secure social positions. However, they face limited social space for personal relationships.

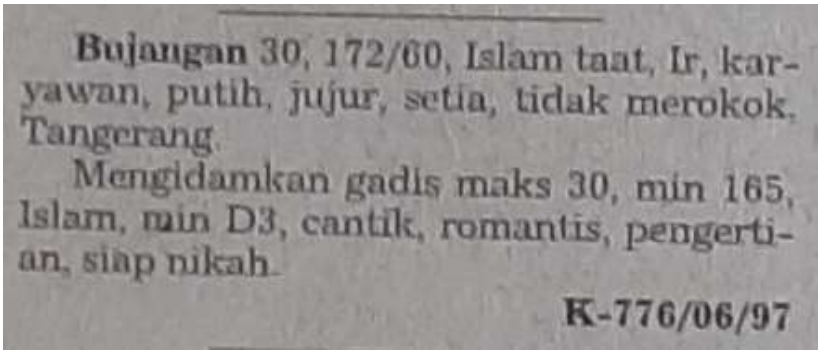
Urbanization and job mobility have led to a decline in intimate social interactions. In such situations, the "Contact" section offers a practical solution.

The Kompas editorial office receives a constant flood of letters, both responses and membership requests. Up to 150 responses and 50 membership requests can be received per day. The limited "Contact" section in the Sunday edition of the Kompas newspaper means prospective members must wait 2 to 3 months. Complaints are not uncommon: many letters have been sent, but no response has been received, even though they include photos and identification (Kompas, May 15, 1994).

Self-Image Representation

An analysis of ad text in the "Contact" section shows that advertisers tend to use a consistent, concise narrative pattern. Although written in a limited space, each word chosen is expected to represent the identity and self-image used to attract potential partners. The first sentence in the "Contact" section always begins with the identity statement.

Figure 2. "Contact" column in Kompas, June 22, 1997


Bujangan 30, 172/60, Islam taat, Ir, karyawan, putih, jujur, setia, tidak merokok, Tangerang.

Mengidamkan gadis maks 30, min 165, Islam, min D3, cantik, romantis, pengertian, siap nikah.

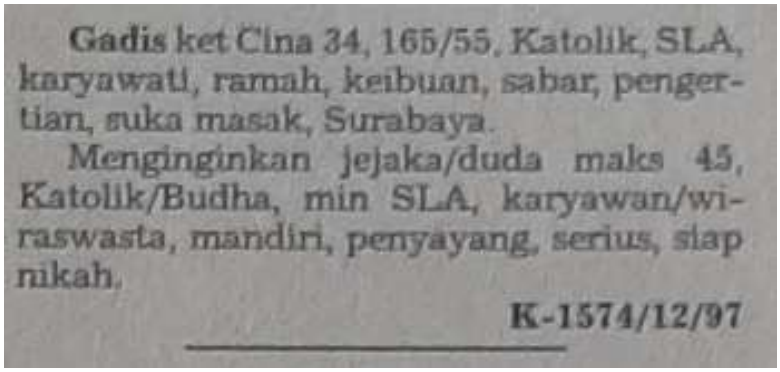
K-776/06/97

Source: Kompas, June 22, 1997

The advertiser begins with physical information (age, height, weight), then moves on to religious identity (devout Muslim), educational and economic status (engineer, employee), and personality traits (honest, loyal). The advertiser begins the sentence with age, height, and weight data, which provide a snapshot of the advertiser's physical condition. This presentation demonstrates that visual aspects remain an important part of social judgment.

The emphasis on the phrase "devout Islam" in dating advertisements demonstrates that religiosity is a crucial factor in shaping one's self-image to attract potential partners. Mentioning religion serves not only to inform one's beliefs but also as a strategy to demonstrate one's moral qualities. In Indonesian society, religiosity is often used as a benchmark in choosing a potential partner, so the phrase "devout religion" serves to increase an individual's confidence and attractiveness to potential partners.

Figure 3. "Contact" column in Kompas, December 21, 1997


Gadis ket Cina 34, 165/55, Katolik, SLA, karyawati, ramah, keibuan, sabar, pengertian, suka masak, Surabaya.

Menginginkan jejaka/duda maks 45, Katolik/Budha, min SLA, karyawan/wiraswasta, mandiri, penyayang, serius, siap nikah.

K-1574/12/97

Source: Kompas, December 21, 1997

The second advertisement exhibits a similar pattern to the first, emphasizing physical appearance and religious identity as elements in building a self-image for potential partners. The mention of "Chinese descent" at the beginning of the description indicates that ethnicity plays a significant role in the identity presented to the public. The mention of ethnicity also emphasizes one's social position (Djati & Darmawanti, 2024).

The difference between the first and second advertisements is written in the description "friendly, motherly, patient, likes to cook," which explicitly emphasizes feminine characteristics closely related to the domestic sphere (Fakih, 1996). The emphasis on these traits suggests that female advertisers tend to shape their self-image in line with the prevailing stereotype of women's roles at the time, namely taking care of the home and children (Tuwu, 2018).

In general, representations of men's self-image tend to emphasize rationality and economic capability. Phrases such as "employee," "civil servant," or "successful entrepreneur" not only describe a job but also imply financial position and stability. Therefore, in men's advertisements, mentioning profession and occupation is a key element that can depict social status and stability. The emphasis on financial stability reflects the social construct of Indonesian society, which views men as breadwinners and household decision-makers. Therefore, as future heads of households, a man's readiness for marriage is measured by his career and economic achievements (Putri & Lestari, 2015).

In contrast, representations of women's self-images tend to portray feminine characteristics associated with the domestic sphere. In advertisements for the "Contact" section, women are often portrayed as "caring," "motherly," "patient," or "able to cook." This suggests that women's self-images are shaped by values that emphasize affection and the ability to manage the home. These phrases demonstrate that women's self-representations are

still framed by social constructs that place them in a secondary position within the household. This view aligns with deeply rooted traditional gender norms in Indonesian society, which define the ideal woman by her ability to perform domestic roles, such as caring for children, serving her husband, and maintaining household well-being. In a patriarchal system, women are valued not for their achievements in the public sphere but for their ability to maintain harmony within the family (Antrobus, 2004).

Analysis of Desired Partner Criteria

The criteria for a desired partner in the Kompas daily's Contact column demonstrate that urban Indonesians remain heavily influenced by traditional values, even though the search for a partner has shifted to modern print media. Generally, the criteria for a desired partner can be categorized as follows:

1. **Religious Similarities**

   One aspect that consistently appears in the "Contact" section is the advertisers' mention of religion. Nearly all advertisers explicitly state their religion, indicating that religion remains an important factor in partner choice in Indonesian society. This phenomenon reflects how religious values continue to shape social preferences, even as individuals use modern means to expand their opportunities for interaction and find a life partner. Interestingly, this practice demonstrates a contradiction in how urban communities interpret modernity. On the one hand, they utilize modern media such as newspaper columns or matchmaking agencies to express autonomy, freedom, and rationality in choosing a partner. On the other hand, their choices are still heavily influenced by entrenched traditional norms, including the importance of religious compatibility as a primary requirement for building a relationship. This contradiction underscores that modernization does not always eradicate traditional values but often blends with existing social practices (Philia et al., 2025).

2. **Education and Social Status**

   Beneath its brief narrative, the "Contact" section harbors a complex representation of social class, particularly the urban middle class. Most advertisers introduce themselves by stating their occupation and education, such as "civil servant," "employee," entrepreneur," "graduate," or "university." In this context, occupation and education are used to determine a person's social status. This impacts the search for a partner of equal status or standing, or, in traditional societies, the concept of "weight." Weight refers to a person's personal qualities, personality, and education. In agrarian societies, weight is typically measured by land area, family status, or proximity to local authorities. However,

in the modern era, weight is no longer determined by family inheritance, but rather by individual achievements, such as education and occupation (Prakoso et al., 2023).

Increased access to education in Indonesia is one tangible impact of national development policies that emphasize equal learning opportunities and efforts to strengthen the nation's intellectual life. Since the development era, the government has encouraged the expansion of formal educational institutions, particularly universities that have begun to emerge in major cities (Surya, 2006). This phenomenon not only increases the number of higher education graduates but also shifts the social paradigm for assessing individual status. Individuals who pursue higher education tend to have access to better jobs and are therefore considered more stable in the economy. A bachelor's degree, previously only available to certain groups, has now become a new social marker, adding to the traditional criteria of bibit, bebet, and bobot (Setiyawati & Sakti, 2014). This change indicates that education serves as a tool for social mobility, opening opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to overcome previously inaccessible economic and social barriers.

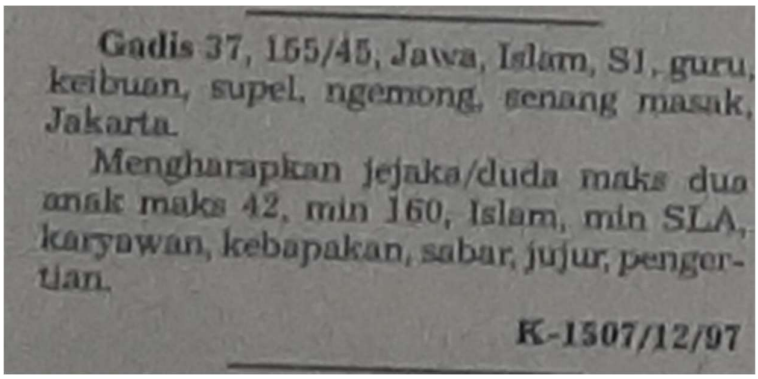
3. Gender Roles

The gender roles depicted in the Kompas Daily's "Contact" column reveal a strong social construction of how men and women... position themselves in the search for a life partner. In general, matchmaking advertisements in the "Contact" section portray men as rational and oriented towards economic achievement, while women are more often depicted as empathetic and domestically oriented (Tuwu, 2018). In the context of Indonesian society in the 1990s, this gender construction is inseparable from the influence of patriarchal culture, which remains strongly embedded in the social structure. Men are positioned as family leaders and primarily responsible for financial matters, while women are idealized as loyal, loving, and responsible wives for household affairs (Korniawati & Rahim, 2024). In the "Contact" section, this is evident in the choice of words used by female advertisers, such as "gentle," "motherly," "like cooking," and "obedient," which reinforce the image of traditional feminine traits. In contrast, male advertisers more often emphasize self-image by mentioning professions and titles, such as "engineer," "doctor," or "civil servant," which symbolize status and economic capacity as social capital to attract partners. show that traditional views on the roles of men and women remain dominant even though the means of finding a partner have changed with modernization.

The emergence of the "Contact" column can be understood as a sign of a shift in gender relations in urban Indonesian society. The presence of this print media opened up opportunities for women to project an image beyond solely emphasizing domestic roles.

This is evidenced by several advertisers combining phrases describing domestic roles with intellectual level.

Figure 4. "Contact" column in Kompas, December 7, 1997


Gadis 37, 155/45, Jawa, Islam, S1, guru, keibuan, supel, ngemong, senang masak, Jakarta.

Mengharapkan jejaka/duda maks dua anak maks 42, min 160, Islam, min SLA, karyawan, kebapakan, sabar, jujur, pengertian.

K-1507/12/97

Source: Kompas, December 7, 1997

This demonstrates a shift in social paradigms. Women are no longer seen as complements to men, but as equal partners in marriage.

Shifting Values in Choosing a Partner

Before the advent of matchmaking agencies, the matchmaking system in Indonesia was entirely under the control of families and local communities. Matchmaking served to strengthen social networks, uphold family honor, and maintain social status. Parents, relatives, or community leaders acted as mediators in determining suitable partners based on family background, shared moral values, and economic equality. In the traditional system, love and personal attraction were not primary considerations. Instead, compliance with family decisions was seen as a form of filial piety (Sulaiman, 2012).

With the advent of matchmaking agencies in print media, such as the "Contact" column, a shift in the way people choose their partners has begun. The "Contact" column opened up new opportunities. Individuals could expand their social networks beyond their family and immediate environment. This transformation became even more evident with the introduction of the "Contact" column in the Kompas newspaper. Through this column, individuals began to have authority over their decisions about choosing a life partner, a right previously controlled by their families. As Bell (1997) points out, modernity has led to a shift in the meaning of marriage from a collective to an individualistic orientation, without completely erasing the moral values still strongly embedded in local cultures.

This shift is inseparable from the influence of modernization, which brings rationality and efficiency to almost all aspects of human life. Modernization encourages society to reorganize its social behavior while remaining grounded in inherited moral values. In the

context of matchmaking, this means maintaining the essence of honesty and loyalty, but in a more practical and efficient form of communication through the media (Apriansyah et al., 2023). Beyond efficiency, changes in perspectives on the ideal partner are also a strong indicator of shifting social values in the modern era. While in the past, the primary criteria for choosing a partner were primarily based on shared religion, politeness, and family background, new, pragmatic dimensions have emerged, such as education, employment, and economics. These new criteria emerge from improvements in educational quality. Formal education plays a crucial role in shaping new perspectives on social relations and marriage. Education enhances an individual's cognitive capacity and confidence in making rational decisions (Daraz et al., 2023). So someone who is highly educated tends to be more selective in choosing a partner, paying attention to intellectual equality, and taking economic capabilities into account as a guarantee of stability in life.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of searching for a life partner through the "Contact" column in the Kompas daily newspaper in 1997 reveals an interesting dynamic in the relationship between tradition and modernity in Indonesian society. An analysis of the content of matchmaking advertisements published in the column reveals that print media is not only a means of communication but also a social space where individuals negotiate their identities, values, and expectations for an ideal partner. In this regard, Kompas acts as a medium that bridges one individual with another. In other words, Kompas has been influential in transforming matchmaking practices from previously closed, family-based systems to more open, individualized mechanisms.

The research results show that modernization has not completely replaced traditional values. Although individuals can choose their own partners, certain values remain primary considerations in selecting potential partners. Values such as shared religious beliefs remain an important foundation in determining compatibility. This means that, despite the openness offered by print media, society still maintains moral and cultural elements that have long served as guidelines for social relations. On the other hand, the emergence of new criteria such as education level, profession, and economic status indicates a shift in values influenced by increased education, leading society to establish new standards regarding love and marriage.

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