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SPEAK NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR RECEIPTS

Sarah Glickstein

My thesis entitled “Speak Now or Forever Hold Your Receipts,” is an economic analysis of the wedding industry, including its impact on consumers as well as the global economy. Through an examination of both the United States and Indian wedding cultures, I seek to understand just how impactful this industry is in different nations. I also look at critical demand factors and how they are influenced in a cultural context, as well as how suppliers are responding to these changes in demand. This industry is growing and is largely untouched by economists, making this thesis an important beginning for future research.

ABSTRACT:

The wedding event has been redefined by global society as an industry, empire, complex and market. These categories, or titles, imply that there are new supply and demand forces composing this event. Simultaneous changes are occurring: the industry is growing, jobs are being created, and tastes, preferences and expectations are shifting. This dynamic time in the wedding industry means that there are significant factors underlying these changes, influenced in part due to the cultural phenomenon of conspicuous consumption. As an economist, this is an exciting field of study, one that is vibrant, fluctuating and reliant on consumer demand and industry supply. The goal of this thesis is therefore to examine this market from an economic point of view, attempting to understand what factors determine the demand for weddings in a particular society, how the demand is influenced by cultural factors and how suppliers are responding to these changes via business and occupational growth. It also serves to challenge traditional economic assumptions that tastes and preferences are held constant by providing anecdotes and comparative statistics from both the United States and India.

MY HISTORY:

I recently returned from a comparative study abroad program that consisted of three, separate five-week tours in India, Senegal and Argentina. At the beginning of the program, I was able to choose my own topic for a comparative analysis project to be completed throughout the semester. I sought to combine my passion for global studies with my interest in economics, and decided that global weddings would be an interesting mode of comparison between the three nations. I was lucky enough to be traveling to three different countries on three different continents, each with a unique colonial

history, religion, language and culture, providing a wide net for comparative studies. Included in this comparison were vastly different wedding traditions: arranged marriage in India, polygamy in Senegal and modern westernization in Argentina.

I was fortunate enough to attend two Indian weddings as well as one wedding in a rural village in Senegal. Knowing that Indian weddings are known for their elaborate nature, I was honored to be a part of two large events. However, the idea of conspicuous consumption only became truly apparent to me during my travel to Senegal, where bride and groom's families spent well beyond their means via the barter system to achieve social mobility through a marriage. Using conspicuous consumption as the basis for my economic analysis, I was able to draft a preliminary paper outlining how wedding patterns could be seen as a microcosm of

larger themes of inequality, class disparity and gender discrimination.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INFORMATION:

The effect that a marriage has on income, educational achievement, social mobility and expenditure patterns has long been the subject of studies in sociology, anthropology and economics. Marital patterns are important because they have major implications for population growth, labor force participation, income, family contributions and resource allocation.¹ Typically, the wedding event was tied into these marital analyses, with the primary focus on a new distribution of resources between a bride and groom. There are many reports on marital statistics available to consumers, but the majority of sources do not discuss the wedding event as separate from marital outcomes. Sifting through

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existing reports, it appears that in recent years wedding specific consumption patterns have begun to be analyzed. As this industry continues to gain global attention, it will most likely become the subject of expanded academic analysis.

In addition to marital information, scholars and academics have studied the role of the media as it has grown and become a globalizing influence. Marketing and advertising strategies, social media outlets and personal electronic devices aid in our mass transmission and sharing of information, which affects various aspects of everyday life. Media usage and influence has major effects on the tastes and preferences of typical consumers. It plays a large role in shaping consumer identities, including those consumers currently planning a wedding. I will expand upon existing studies on the media's sphere of influence over weddings in particular, focusing specifically on the way that tastes and preferences change in response to media stimulation.

The wedding industry is comprised of different sectors, which contribute to the overall execution of the event. These include but are not limited to: photographers,

caterers, entertainment staff, wedding planners, dress makers/designers, printers, travel agents, florists and beauty suppliers. While some more recent businesses within these categories are created to cater exclusively to weddings, many of these sub-industries also cater to a large array of entertainment and event planning. It is relatively easy to access information on these separate players within the industry, which I will be discussing in the industry supply section. The difficulty comes when attempting to analyze how these individual players and broadly defined companies contribute to weddings specifically, and what fraction of their services should be considered in the analysis.

The last piece of existing information is the notion of conspicuous consumption. This term has been used to link the sociological and economic worlds together as a way to describe excessive monetary expenditures in order to display wealth and economic power. The flexibility of this term allows it to be applied in wedding-specific instances. It is evident that many consumers spend beyond their means to achieve higher statuses all over the world, using the

wedding as an event to catapult their social mobility. However, to further expand on the idea of conspicuous consumption, it is important to change the significance based on geographical and historical contexts, as well as locate where the trail of expenditure starts and ends. I will connect conspicuous consumption to the wedding industry using existing evidence and public opinion of this term, while also attempting to challenge its original economic definition.

WEDDING EXPENDITURE

Wedding expenditures relative to income have been increasing dramatically over the last decade. "In a 2011 American wedding study, it was found that the average wedding dress cost \$1,289. Only nine years earlier in 2002, the average wedding dress cost was \$799."² This pattern holds true for the majority of aspects comprising the American wedding event, as there has been a clear spike in consumerism and expenditure patterns in recent years. Though difficult to measure, many wedding magazines and media sites attempt to calculate the average expenditure on weddings as a whole as well as on particular items as to aid in their pricing strategies.

As evident from Figure 1 on the average wedding expenditures as compared to disposable personal income as well as personal consumption expenditures, there have been waves of wedding expenditure increases and decreases from 1999 to 2013. Between 1999 and 2007, the average wedding expenditure increased over a range from \$18,000 to \$27,000. Between 2007 and 2008, wedding expenditures remained somewhat constant at an average of \$27,294. There was again a brief decrease in expenditures in 2009 due to the economic recession, and then a pretty consistent range between \$24,000 and \$28,000, with the highest expenditure period this year in 2013.

**WEDDING EXPENDITURES
RELATIVE TO INCOME HAVE
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OVER THE LAST DECADE.**

Source	Average Expenditure on Weddings	Disposable Personal Income - per capita (dollars)	Wedding Expenditure as a Percentage of Disposable Income	Year	Personal Consumption Expenditures - per capita (dollars)	Wedding Expenditure as a Percentage of Personal Consumption Expenditures
Parrish	\$18,000	\$24,356	74%	1999	22,707.00	79%
Sandusky	\$20,000	\$25,946	77%	2000	24,187.00	83%
Torpey	\$27,000	\$34,550	78%	2007	32,391.00	83%
Lesonsky	\$28,750	\$34,550	83%	2007	32,391.00	89%
Grant	\$28,750	\$34,550	83%	2007	32,391.00	89%
Ingraham	\$27,852	\$36,200	77%	2008	32,953.00	85%
Lesonsky	\$21,810	\$36,200	60%	2008	32,953.00	66%
Badgett	\$29,624	\$36,200	82%	2008	32,953.00	90%
Lenonsky	\$19,580	\$35,115	56%	2009	32,112.00	61%
Grant	\$19,581	\$35,115	56%	2009	32,112.00	61%
Lesonsky	\$24,066	\$36,090	67%	2010	33,074.00	73%
Jaeger	\$26,984	\$36,090	75%	2010	33,074.00	82%
Grant	\$25,631	\$37,035	69%	2011	34,363.00	75%
Jaeger	\$27,021	\$37,035	73%	2011	34,363.00	79%
Grant	\$25,656	Unknown	Unknown	2012	Unknown	Unknown
Jaeger	\$26,984	Unknown	Unknown	2012	Unknown	Unknown
Mohammad	\$27,000	Unknown	Unknown	2012	Unknown	Unknown
The Week Staff	\$28,427	Unknown	Unknown	2013	Unknown	Unknown

Figure 1. Average Expenditure on Weddings from 1999-2013, Compared with Disposable Personal Income and Personal Consumption Expenditures ³

The average wedding expenditure appears to be between 56% and 83% of average disposable income per capita, and between 61% and 90% of personal consumption expenditure. Wedding expenditure is on average 72% of average disposable income and roughly 78% of personal consumption expenditure. Wedding expenditures, though occurring less often than other personal expenditures on goods and services, are still significant majorities of disposable income, and are therefore important to consider in economic demand analyses.

Many aspects of the wedding event itself are separated by media companies in terms of average expenditure. For example, the small business section of Fox News reported the average cost of a wedding from 2007 to 2010 to demonstrate the impact of the recession on the market.⁴ In another example, The Knot, as part of the Wedding Channel, disclosed an advertisement with a price tag for each aspect of the wedding: \$12,116 for the reception venue, \$1,078 for the rehearsal dinner, and \$3,122 for the reception band, for example.⁵

On a more national scale, the United States Bridal Industry as a whole estimates

consumer expenditure aggregates in the billions of dollars. Though Figure 2 presents a variable range from \$38 to \$86 billion, it does suggest the size and scale of the US industry as a whole, implying that the industry has the capacity to grow as the number of marriages performed each year increases. According to the Wedding Report, a site devoted to statistical analyses and market research of the wedding industry, the US industry's total sale in weddings was \$54,339,300 and is expected to climb to \$56,340,700 in 2014.⁶ Though this site is unattainable to the public without a hefty membership fee, it does provide statistics

that fall within our predicted range. If we take this estimate, roughly \$55 million dollars, and divide it by the current US GDP, we find that the wedding industry only comprises 0.00035% of GDP. To understand the significance of this, we can compare the wedding industry to other industries that generate a national income. For example, in 2000 the US mining industry estimated an average national income without capital consumption adjustment of \$84,400,000,000. That is 0.538% of GDP.⁷ Another comparison can be made to the restaurant industry. The National Restaurant Association estimated that the US restaurant industry made \$660,000,000,000 in sales in 2013, or roughly 4.2% of GDP.⁸

As a contrast, India's bridal industry shows excessive wedding expenditure, and academics and scholars have begun to study its impact on economic growth and class differentiation. In 2005, Dr. Jyotsna Kapur, a Professor at Northwestern University reported that "the minimum budget for a middle class wedding is now 34,000 rupees while the upper middle and rich classes are known to spend upward of 2 million rupees, not including cash and valuables given as part of a dowry."⁹ Excessive spending, as defined as spending beyond available liquid income, continues to increase as the wedding industry grows and gains a popular following. The rate of growth for Indian wedding expenditure is estimated at 25 percent per year, with banks now offering wedding loans to many families.¹⁰ Many in Indian families feel that a daughter's marriage is one of the most costly events in their life cycle, "often driving parents into severe debt at interest rates of over 200 percent."¹¹ In many instances, marriage and wedding expenses in India are measured as a percentage of annual income, indicating its severe influence on expenditure patterns and decisions.¹² According to Bloch's study, "marriage expenses average over

5,000 rupees, which is about a third of the annual income of an average family."¹³ The dowry payment is around half of total wedding expenses, financially indicating its importance in the overall wedding consumption event.

As a global phenomenon, the average expenditure on weddings is in the hundreds of billions. In 2007, global aggregate wedding expenditures were estimated to be \$161 billion.¹⁴ In 2011, that number grew to \$321 billion.¹⁵ The demand for weddings is growing across the world, not just in the United States and India. As it continues to grow, economists need to identify trends in this industry that are often underreported and grouped together with other personal consumer expenditures. These trends may give way to a greater understanding of class inequality, debt and consumer behavior as well as provide a rich ground

for international comparative studies in the field of economics.

There are two patterns that are evident in wedding expenditures that need to be considered throughout this analysis. The first is that in recent years, wedding expenditures have been increasing in both the United States and India. This is caused by a major shift in the demand for weddings. The other important trend has to do with the income elasticity of demand. An analysis on wedding websites and bridal magazines claimed, "Spending on weddings is consistent no matter the condition of the economy," and later enforced, "Wedding ceremonies seem to be a consistent ritual in our culture regardless of the recent economic recession."¹⁶ It is clear that there has been a big increase in demand relative to income with respect to the wedding industry. Though income has a large effect

<i>Aggregate Expenditure on Weddings</i>	<i>Number of Marriages Performed Each Year</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Year</i>
Unknown	2,450,000	Ingraham	1994
\$38 to \$42 billion	Unknown	Parrish	1999
\$45 billion	2,400,000	Sandusky	2000
\$50 billion	5,000,000	"Wedding & Honeymoon Statistics"	2005
\$86 billion	2,160,000	Terrell	2006
\$86 billion	2,197,000	Terrell	2007
Unknown	2,300,000	Ingraham	2008
\$86 billion	2,077,000	Terrell	2008
\$50 to \$70 billion	2,400,000	Engstrom	2011
\$40 billion	2,500,000	Mohammad	2012

Figure 2. *United States Bridal Industry*

on the demand, there are many other factors that must be considered. If the demand increases relative to income, we would have to look for other truths.

DEMAND: CRITICAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

There are many factors that are critical to consider in evaluating the demand for weddings. In general, these factors typically fall into the category of determinants of tastes and preferences. Usually, when economists talk about a market for a product, tastes and preferences are assumed to be given and held constant in economic models. However, the wedding industry appears to be a market where changes over time and across geographic and cultural space make it difficult to maintain this assumption.

THE MEDIA IN THE UNITED STATES

Wedding-specific media has taken on the interesting role of shaping consumer identity and consumption patterns in the United States. At the same time, the desire to plan a perfect wedding creates demand for this type of media to continue to grow. Many of these sites, tools, magazines and television shows document previous wedding experiences, hoping to inspire audiences to achieve similar ideals. Bridal and women's magazines, for example "condition women to the popular representations of femininity and shape common sense about the consumption needed to imitate this imagery."¹⁷ The media works in this way to influence consumer wants and anticipations for their wedding day. Over the years, this has developed into "popular wedding consumer culture," which emphasizes the role of consumption as a part of the wedding event.¹⁸

Creative marketing tactics are often employed and play a role in influencing these consumer decisions. Celebrity

weddings as featured in popular media sources, for example, demonstrate an ideal that is widely accessible to fans and the general public via global communication and networking. Bridal magazines use a number of "inclusion strategies," such as displaying photos of working brides and mixed families, to "generate the sense of a shared commonality among those currently planning their wedding."¹⁹ The media seeks to make brides feel that they are a part of a larger community, and can therefore take control over their wedding event with support from the hundreds of other brides going through the same process. The media has the ability to make brides feel that they have control over their wedding image and experience, while ironically shaping their demand through displays of seemingly perfect photos and décor. This tactic influences expenditure, and that expenditure leads to a booming business.

There is money to be made in the wedding-media market. TheManRegistry.com, for example, "is an online resource for a grooms and is the Internet leader in

wedding tips and wedding advice for grooms."²⁰ Chris Easer, the CEO and founder of TheManRegistry.com, reported that his company experienced a profit growth of 300% in 2009, with new registrants growing at about 75% a year.²¹ Pinterest, another popular site, received more than 30 million visitors in one month, with two out of the ten most popular boards as wedding-related.²² Wedding pages on this site have millions of followers and represent 4.9% of popular pins. The social media explosion in general has changed consumption patterns: 78% more brides and grooms have used social media to communicate wedding details since 2008, 40% more sent out invitations online and 23% more set up personal wedding websites.²³ Beyond individual social media and consumer sites, companies within the wedding industry have been reporting findings and statistics to the general public to stir up consumer behavior. The Knot, a branch of The Wedding Channel, has a large consumer ad with each aspect of the 'typical' wedding defined by the average

WEDDING-SPECIFIC MEDIA HAS TAKEN ON THE INTERESTING ROLE OF SHAPING CONSUMER IDENTITY AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN THE UNITED STATES.

price, placing emphasis on the quantitative value of wedding components.²⁴ For example, invitations are cited as costing \$331, a videographer \$1486 and catering at an average of \$61 per head.²⁵ The wedding media market that is catered to consumers has grown with an increased use of accessible technology.

The wedding event itself has become a “mainstay of American popular and consumer culture,” largely due to the media’s display of wealth that encourages conspicuous consumption.²⁶ There is a mass emphasis to customize weddings, from gowns to design halls to jewelry. While the media wants couples to feel a part of a larger net of newlyweds, they also encourage individualized attention to detail – an example of the media’s ability to display two opposing trends. A similar mixed message is that the media promotes both saving and spending money: overstating the importance of certain wedding items as obligatory, regardless of income or class.²⁷

CONSUMER IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Consumer consumption patterns, which are heavily influenced by the mass media, have changed over time and are different based on cultural and geographic context. It is evident that there is a “new way of looking at a wedding” by a specific “study of consumption [and] commodification.”²⁸ The focus has shifted toward viewing ‘the wedding’ as an entity that is produced and consumed as a whole.²⁹ Defining an event, or product, as such indicates that there is a newly associated consumer identity.

The media publicizes new terms to describe these “wedding-consumers” that have become mainstream labels. There is a concept of a “superbride,” indicating that the bride is both a rational project manager as well as a seemingly childish fantasizer.³⁰ Media industries, and television specifically, have also coined the term “Bridezilla,” encouraging irrational spending behavior as to increase wedding-related companies’ profits.³¹ The media’s use of these labels creates self-identifying consumers

who have new pressures to consume. Brides are spending more, and in areas that they save, they may “create the appearance of having spent more money, no matter what their social class,” relating again to the discussion of conspicuous consumption.³²

Consumers in the United States are not just spending excessively on weddings. The typical funeral in the US costs around \$10,000.³³ Bar and Bat Mitzvahs run around \$100 - \$200 dollars per guest, and are estimated around \$10,000 as well.³⁴ For events and holidays that occur more frequently than these, with Christmas as an example, American consumers are expected to spend around \$700 on gifts, of course dependent on family size and income.³⁵ Weddings as a life-event tend to be more expenditure-heavy than funerals and bar/bat mitzvahs, which serve as examples of two important life-events. In fact, weddings are more than double the average \$10,000 spending for these two events. While all major events influence some level of conspicuous consumption, the wedding event seems to require the most excessive type of expenditure.

Many would argue that this type of excessive expenditure for a one-time event and reshaping of the wedding-consumer identity is ruining the true and traditional meaning of the wedding. Why “are Americans willing to spend seven and [a] half months’ salary for a wedding day that lasts roughly five and a half hours?”³⁶ Perhaps consumers give in to this marketing pull because the wedding industry is selling fantasy to a large and growing audience. The pressure to conform to elite ideals while also asserting independence remains a profitable strategy for the media, but may dramatically shift consumer confidence and could create excess expenditure.³⁷

**INDIAN WEDDING CULTURE
HAS BEEN HEAVILY INFLUENCED
WITH THE RECENT INFLUX OF
WEDDING CULTURE ON THE
BOLLYWOOD CINEMA INDUSTRY.**

GENDER AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN THE UNITED STATES

In shaping consumer identity, gender norms are experienced and formalized. The focus of most wedding media analysis is on brides, who must conform to the media's ideals of femininity and societal pressures. Economist Robert H. Frank poses an interesting question: "why do brides spend so much money on wedding dresses, whereas grooms often rent cheap tuxedos?"³⁸ While there is no concrete answer to this question, it may hold true that appearance is more important for women than for men, as defined by their new consumer identities and influenced by popular media. Traditional gender roles as well as demographic changes are important to consider when analyzing the wedding industry, as they are specific to historical time period as well as cultural history.

The media plays a part in influencing traditional gender roles, where the man is the depicted financial provider and the women as the spender. This could change, however, as the average age when the American couple gets married is climbing: it was around 20 in the 1950s, but now averages about 26.³⁹ There is also a trend of second marriages later in the life cycle. In 2002, couples who were 55 and older made up only 8% of the wedding business and appeared to double by 2011.⁴⁰ Older couples tend to be more financially stable, and therefore more able and willing to spend money on wedding-related events. Older couples have been reported to spend about 10 to 15% more on their wedding than their younger counterparts.⁴¹ David's Bridal, a bridal dress store, reports similarly that business from older couples doubled in the past two years, and expects that trend to continue to grow.⁴² Kleinfelds, another popular and recently televised dress store, concurred that older clients' expenditure rates were on average \$3,000 more per dress

than younger couples.⁴³ As demographics continue to change gender norms and expectations associated with wedding day expenditures, consumer expenditure patterns and demands will continue to change as a result. These changes can have major implications for the demand for weddings and wedding components.

CONTRAST WITH DEMAND IN INDIA

Indian wedding culture has been heavily influenced with the recent influx of wedding culture on the Bollywood cinema industry. The media has capitalized on celebrity weddings and upper caste weddings as showcasing the ideal Indian image. As the media's influence circulates with more ease around the world, members of lower castes are more eager to appear like their upper caste counterparts, many times spending beyond their means to achieve or appear to have a higher status. More so than in the United States, this excess expenditure has a large impact on future debt and poverty for many Indian residents. The role that gender norms play in India is also an important consideration, as the role of the dowry influences familial expenditure and increases the financial burden on families with daughters to become brides. As a more global picture, the association of a financial burden with females throughout the long history of Indian culture may change the gender expectations, relations and treatment of Indian women.

MEDIA IN INDIA

"In the last decade of the 20th century, coinciding with India's economic deregulation, the Hindu wedding became a core attraction in popular Indian cinema."⁴⁴ As a result of India's neoliberal turn, weddings in India have become more elaborate, with once informal economic workings becoming professional and commodified. Indian media has transformed

the wedding industry from the informal economy to the mainstream economy. Coining the term 'Bollywoodized' in recent years, the Indian media is able to invent rituals that are mediated by advertising and popular cinema.⁴⁵

Like the United States, India has had an increase in various social media outlets in the wedding industry. One popular site, IndianWeddingSite.com, encourages clients to view Bollywood films for inspiration as future wedding packages include Bollywood-like elements.⁴⁶ This has allowed a Bollywood influence to enter into the world of Indian weddings. Though the wedding industry in India is still largely unorganized due to this new media and recent technological leap forward, Diivya Gurwaara, CEO of Bridal Asia, believes "there's going to be a big boom in the wedding industry in the sub-continent," and that the media is ready to capture the trend.⁴⁷ In my experience, it was easy to observe advertisements and billboards on every major highway in Delhi advertising different wedding services. The media's observable impact in Delhi was greater than its marketing in Ahmedabad, for example, which is a much smaller city. The more condensed the city, the greater the influx of advertisements and marketing strategies, most likely due to the overflow of wedding-related resources in heavily urbanized areas.

In Senegal, I had the opportunity to go to my host brother's house who worked at the US Embassy. He lived a very lavish lifestyle due to his connections with the wealthy elite of the country in Dakar, the capital. Because of his lifestyle, he was able to afford a large screen television and many cable channels, including more than one station for international news and advertisements. While sitting on his couch in downtown Dakar and flipping through television stations, I came across an Indian bridal services advertisement. The commercial

was advertising beauty services for brides in Dakar with an Indian influence, as portrayed through various images of Indian weddings. At this moment, I was able to experience the impact of the global wedding consumer industry in India from a different continent, and how that industry is spreading to influence similar wedding consumption in other countries. In both the United States as well as India, wedding-related media is beginning to spread globally, increasing the demand for similar services in other countries.

CONSUMER IDENTITY IN INDIA

One of the ways that Indian consumer identity is different than the United States is the way that it is shaped through interaction. In India, the tradition of arranged marriages as set up through the parents of eligible brides and grooms is very much alive, even in dynamic and more modern cities. In the United States, young adults can interact in many different types of environments, as many people move out of their parents' house after their academic careers. In India, the majority of similarly aged young adults stay in their parent's house until they are married, and many times move in with the parents of the groom thereafter. Amongst Indian relationships, those who are breaking traditional norms are the ones who partake in love marriages over arranged marriages. One of the only ways that young people can meet each other in Delhi is in an occupational setting, away from family and caste influence over traditional interaction. However according to Chandeshkhar, my Indian host brother, the inequality that exists in India's workforce means that people of a similar socioeconomic status will be working in particular environments, thus limiting who has the potential to be in a love marriage.⁴⁸

Familiar pressures within the Indian caste system dictate how many people should be

invited to a wedding, what type of clothing and accessories must be purchased, and how extravagant the event should be. The wedding as a life event is a direct reflection of a family's power and wealth as seen by others, creating pressure on the bride and groom to maintain their respective family's image. In many instances, love through a marriage is seen as a "political deal" between different families to ensure social mobility, caste maintenance and economic success.⁴⁹ The consumer identity, therefore, is largely shaped through familial, cultural and caste influence. The media's role is therefore not only to influence the individual consumer as many times the individual consumer is not the only one making the financial decision of a wedding. The media must work to create a culture and mindset of expenditure for an entire family, impacting the ideal images of all members of Indian society that must be lived up to.

GENDER NORMS IN INDIA

Beyond the sphere of familial influence over wedding-related choices is the important and changing role that women have in their expenditure and marital decisions. There is a constant pressure to maintain a traditional Indian image while also creating a lavish affair. Part of this tradition is the maintenance of women's beauty standards as well as the use of the dowry to secure a financially stable partner.

According to Mrs. Armit Dastoor who owns a beauty salon in India, the advertising side of the wedding industry plays into the fact that people "want what they cannot have," creating beauty trends to be desired.⁵⁰ The beauty industry in Delhi capitalizes on this desire, marketing and catering their services to consumers who wish to enhance their personal image. Many traditional Hindu women spend the equivalent of hundreds of dollars to achieve a bridal look, many times coming in for treatments

months before the actual wedding event.⁵¹

It is expected that the bride wear a certain amount of makeup, jewelry and attire at the event. In some instances, women fast for the entire wedding day out of respect for their husbands and families, and those who do not have pierced noses feel compelled to pierce them on their wedding day as a sign of good fortune. The Indian beauty and familial expectations put in place for brides on their wedding day are important to consider as shaping gender norms and therefore shaping gendered-consumer identities.

Another important piece of female Indian gender norms is the concept of the dowry. The dowry is a transfer payment that families of the bride must pay to families of the groom before the wedding is to take place. "A daughter's marriage is the most costly event in the life of an Indian family, often driving parents into severe debt at interest rates of over 200 percent."⁵² This economic burden is a potential cause of gender discrimination and domestic violence in India.⁵³ Traditionally, dowries were "driven by competition for scarce men and by the quality of grooms," but are many times more symbolic in nature.⁵⁴ The existence of such an expense is largely engrained in the Indian culture and caste systems, and creates demand expectations for families and brides that are not present in the United States.

On a more optimistic note, the Bollywood culture not only redefines consumption patterns, but also produces a "re-enactment of patriarchal and caste-based identities."⁵⁵ The media is changing and challenging traditional gender roles and social statuses in Indian society. In many urban centers in India, especially the overpopulated capital Delhi, women are experiencing a new role as consumers. Given the increased presence of "love marriages" in Delhi, women are given a new role in choosing their partner and being

involved in wedding-related decisions. The challenge is to “package and present oneself as a globalized Indian who flamboyantly embraces ‘tradition’ as a matter of choice.”⁵⁶ Given this new role and opportunity for women to act as consumers, new patterns of expenditure may result due to a new market of consumer demand.

DEMAND SUMMARY:

THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA

The Bollywood cinema market in India has transformed the previously informal Indian wedding into a spectacular consumption event. The majority of changes in the demand for Indian weddings stems from the Bollywood industry, while the changes in the United States stem from a variety of social media outlets: television, the Internet, and wedding magazines. Regardless of the origins of media’s influence, both hemispheres of the world have experienced a dramatic change in tastes and preferences with regards to the demand for wedding consumption. As the media’s sphere of influence becomes more global in nature, the interplay of social media, advertisements and cinema will intertwine to influence a wider net of consumers.

The role of the bride in the United States and India is an important component of demand to consider as influenced by larger societal gender norms and expectations. In the United States, brides for the most part are very much in control of wedding expenditure decisions, making them huge players in the demand side of the wedding industry. In India, women are often under the umbrella of familial influence and must abide by traditional caste values and high standards of beauty. Though Indian women are gaining influence over their roles as wedding consumers, they are still largely sheltered from many more decisions than American brides.

**BEYOND THE SPHERE OF
FAMILIAL INFLUENCE OVER
WEDDING-RELATED CHOICES IS
THE IMPORTANT AND CHANGING
ROLE THAT WOMEN HAVE IN
THEIR EXPENDITURE AND
MARITAL DECISIONS.**

Consumer identities have been largely shaped by the media as well as gender norms in both the United States and Indian wedding markets. The media has worked to promote new definitions of consumer and gender-specific identities that influence expenditure patterns on wedding events. These factors are important components of the demand side for weddings as they explain the various players and influences affecting important monetary decisions.