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Abstract: Weddings have evolved from modest festivities to lavish exhibitions. Families now compete to host the biggest event at these venues. These days, it's commonplace to have guest lists that could fill a stadium, helicopters transporting grooms, and imported floral arrangements valued at more than the average family's annual expenses. It appears that Pakistani soil is not considered glamorous enough, thus weddings frequently relocate to far-off places like Thailand or Dubai. The study aims to analyze the prevalence of conspicuous consumption in wedding ceremonies in Mardan. The aim of choosing qualitative methodology is to know the experiences of newly married couple regarding wedding and conspicuous consumption in Mardan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The study chose purposive sampling technique in order to select the newly married couples who meet the study criteria. The sampling remained continue till the saturation point. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 respondents. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data. The collected data indicates that wedding ceremonies have become an arena for ostentation and fierce competition; participants have noted that lavish wedding halls, designer attire, the quality of food, photography services, and gold jewelry have all become symbols of an individual's social status. Social pressure, traditional customs, class differences, and social media were identified as major factors encouraging excessive wedding expenditure, often placing financial burdens on low-income families and contributing to debt. The findings also show that some families use religiously oriented and simple weddings as a way to resist these pressures, although maintaining social standing often makes such resistance difficult. Social pressure, traditional customs, class distinctions, and social media have been identified as key factors driving families to incur excessive wedding expenses and subsequently fall under a burden of debt. The research also reveals that families opt for simple, religiously grounded weddings to avoid these social pressures, although doing so can be challenging due to considerations of social status or standing.

Introduction

The term conspicuous consumption is familiar to most economists, marketers, sociologists and psychologists and it has also become part of everyday language. Developing countries may have a relatively higher level of conspicuous consumption, because of extreme inequalities in income (Memushi, 2013).

Material or immaterial conspicuousness is communicated through individual acts and behavior, and the adoption of practices like showy display of commodities and status consumption maintains a leading role in social connections. Diachronic and cross-cultural phenomena that define and characterize consumer behavior include conspicuous consumption, public displays of commodities, or the desire for social membership and uniqueness through the possession of status symbols (Patsiaouras & Fitchett, 2012). Conspicuous consumption has been considered as an honest signal that may carry the quality of the signaler to potential receivers, which is positively associated with sexual selection and men's mate attraction goals (Liu, 2020).

The trend of ostentation at weddings in Pakistan is currently at its peak, and there could be no better example of this than the present situation. Although the institution of marriage holds significance across all cultures, weddings in Pakistan have evolved into a major socio-economic activity that often plunges families into severe financial crisis. Weddings are no longer merely a means of conveying a message; instead, they are utilized to enhance social prestige and solidify one's status within society. People, especially those in the middle class, are forced to spend more than they can afford in order to maintain a façade of wealth due to the pressure of cultural expectations and limited resources. Families try to outdo each other and gain an advantage over their social counterparts by planning some of the costliest weddings in Pakistan. Wedding celebrations in particular are occasions when people spend extravagantly for the sake of appearances. It is reported that the average monthly expenditure of Pakistani families on their marriage ceremonies is between 40-60% of their total income, earned annually, with a large amount secured from loans (Naz & Ahmad, 2026).

In modern Western civilization, the wedding seems to be the most noticeable of the few rites that people still gather around. Furthermore, in recent decades, weddings have, if anything, increased in popularity. In particular, brides want to design their own "perfect day," one that is distinct, personal, and uniquely their own, but still adhering to traditional wedding customs. At the same time, the popularity of weddings has increased dramatically; the royal wedding in 2011 was a national event, wedding shows occupy prime TV time, and celebrity weddings are a regular feature of popular magazines (Carter & Duncan, 2017).

According to Albers (2023), 2.23 million couples in the USA tie the knot annually. The average wedding cost in the USA is still \$38,700, despite the fact that extravagant and extravagant weddings have been less prevalent since the turn of the century. Depending on the location of the marriage, the typical cost of a wedding varies greatly. The average might range from \$17 584 in New Mexico to \$76 944 in the Manhattan borough of New York City. American consumers spend about \$72 billion annually on weddings, not including the honeymoon. Consumers spent almost \$2 billion for the busiest wedding day in 2018, which was 8/18/18. At least one elaborate international wedding cost more than \$66 million. All over the world, there are massive pressures on couples and families to avoid looking cheap for example, one online planning site discourages brides from buying discounted items, and American couples, on average, invite 167 guests to their wedding with 10.7 men and women as part of the wedding party.

Barnes, (2014) found that, the United States is one of the few countries where women with higher

incomes and education levels are more likely to marry than those with lower incomes and less education (Cherlin 2010). Although marriage rates are generally lower among low-income women, this should not be interpreted as evidence that individuals with limited resources do not value wedding ceremonies or the institution of marriage itself. They often state that they are simply waiting for the right circumstances—such as a suitable partner, employment, or sufficient savings—or are trying to accumulate enough money to marry in the traditional manner.

In Europe, most couples take between 13 and 24 months to plan their weddings. More than half of the couples invite between 60 and 100 guests, with budgets ranging from €5,000 to €10,000. Many couples prefer to hold a traditional church ceremony. The wedding budget appears to be the primary concern for couples during the planning process; additionally, many also worry about finer details such as the guest list, the choice of venue, and decorations (Lahtinen, 2017).

Shamu et al. (2024) investigated contemporary Chinese wedding customs. The results imply that conspicuous consumption is influenced by the social visibility of consumption in a digital society with social media integration. Social media's ubiquitous use has had a big impact on spending patterns and lifestyles. By influencing people's brand awareness, wedding consumption visibility increases conspicuous behavior and presentation. The most direct and efficient way for consumers to convey how they see themselves is through products and brands. Wedding consumption becomes a way to showcase these qualities, which are indicative of financial strength, social standing, and family reputation. Friends are reminded of users' nuptials through their social media photos, videos, and blogs. Apart from that, Estes (2023) found that rising inequality, unstable agricultural livelihoods, and precarious employment make it difficult for many rural Cambodians to save significant sums of money. Yet, the amount required for marriage is increasing. In recent decades, weddings have become more elaborate as families seek to establish or maintain their status through these ceremonies. The high cost of weddings places immense pressure on many rural Cambodian families. In an economic climate where securing a stable and profitable livelihood is challenging, young people often struggle to accumulate enough funds for the bride price, which can result in delays to marriage and the transition to adulthood. Until the 1970s, weddings were celebrated with simplicity. Couples would tie the knot during Sunday mass and then proceed to the bride's family home. If there was bridewealth, it consisted of one cow, the abba gomas. A goat or sheep used to be slaughtered on the wedding day. Nowadays, the cost of a wedding can easily equal to one or two years' income of a police officer or a teacher. Almost all modern weddings begin with a lavish, three-day engagement ceremony. The day before the wedding ceremony at the local Protestant church, livestock is driven and slaughtered in the traditional manner. Following the church ceremony, the newlyweds head to a rented hall for the wedding reception. There, the couple and their bridesmaids and groomsmen celebrate with dozens, sometimes even hundreds of invite guests. This part of the wedding is inspired by "Western" middle class weddings, including a white gown, tuxedos, bridesmaids, groomsmen, a wedding cake, European type food and the wedding waltz. Concurrently, many of the bride's and groom's kin stay at their respective family houses and celebrate with local brews, meat and Damara music (Pauli & Dawids, 2017)

Teame et al., (2019) carried out household survey; its data shows that on the average, households spend more than twice of their annual income on the wedding ceremony. When we come the nature of conspicuous consumption spending on wedding ceremonies in India. Indians have a conspicuous nature; where the poor households spend relatively much on weddings and dowries to signal status. India is one of the hottest markets for the majority of luxury brands, with an anticipated market value of US\$30 billion in 2018 and a growing middle class with higher disposable incomes. Weddings are one occasion

where the Indian community spends a lot of money and doesn't hesitate to go on debt. This is an occasion where two people and their families come together. In addition to expressing their affection for the newlyweds, some families use the public consumption of pricey goods and performances as a way to demonstrate their wealth and social standing (Bhardwaj, 2020).

Rastegar et al., (2014) focused on the positive aspects of consumptions over wedding ceremonies. He found it a great sensitivity to aesthetic details such as style, color, design and elegance of the ceremony. Thus, successful observation of the rituals depends on the fulfillment of their aesthetic desires.

Haroon (2026) conducted a study in which he examined that inversion-popularly captured in the phrase *zina asan, nikah mushkil* (adultery made easy, marriage made difficult)-through two complementary lenses. The first is empirical and sociological which examines how wedding expenses have soared to hundreds of thousands of rupees, viewed through the lens of documentaries and media coverage regarding Pakistan's wedding-driven economy. It covers the role of peer pressure and the validation sought on social media in driving this escalation, the emerging trend of taking out high-interest loans for weddings, and the resulting measurable social consequences—including food waste and mental or psychological stress. The second is doctrinal: this position argues in the light of Prophetic Sunnah's clear preference for low cost weddings, contemporary Pakistani religious teaching against the practice of *jahez* (dowry extraction), and the classical allocation of spousal rights and responsibilities under *qawwamah*, *nafqah*, and *Sakeenah*. The paper argues that cultural practices driving up expenses are not only inappropriate but also blatantly contrary to the *Sunnah*—a tradition they are generally, and often sincerely, claimed to reflect. It then examines the legal dimension, presenting Pakistan's 'Dowry and Marriage Gifts (Restriction) Act, 1976' (including the 1993 amendments) as a rare instance of state legislation directly upholding the position of the Sunnah; simultaneously, it questions why, despite having been on the statute books for nearly five decades, the Act has had a negligible practical impact on wedding-related expenses. It concludes with recommendations regarding implementation, The Commercialization of Nikah in Pakistan religious education, and the specific legal exposure faced by family law practitioners as delayed marriage, dowry disputes, and debt-driven marital breakdown make their way into Pakistani family courts

Although numerous studies have identified the prevalence of conspicuous consumptions in the weddings around the world. Although some studies positively associate it with aesthetic gratification. Other studies are given less attention to the expensive aspect of gold culture. Furthermore, some studies exhibit a contextual gap due to the differences in wedding ceremonies and associated expenditure patterns across various cultures. The aim of this study is to analyze the prevalence of conspicuous consumption in wedding ceremonies in Mardan.

Theoretical Framework

According to Veblen there is another group among the servants or workers whose job is to display the wealth of their masters. The most prominent form of this type of 'conspicuous consumption' is the use of uniforms for employees and the provision of spacious quarters for their accommodation. According to Veblen, "conspicuous consumption" originated long ago; goods produced by the weaker segment of society such as women were consumed exclusively by powerful men of the upper class, while women were provided only with the basic necessities required for survival. Later, those very things themselves became symbols of honor and power even if they were not meant to fulfill a basic need. The display of wealth later began to take the form of lavish feasts and ceremonies for example ball or potlach (Veblen, 2017). Wedding celebrations in Pakistan have turned into a competition; displaying one's wealth has become a priority for people. These have become societal norms that exert immense pressure on

individuals.

Research Objectives

- To know the Youth perceptions regarding wedding practices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- To Analyze the social and cultural factors influencing conspicuous consumption among youth during weddings.
- To examine how social status, peer pressure, and social media influence youth's wedding-related consumption practices.

Research Questions

1. How do youth perceive wedding practices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What social factors influence the Conspicuous consumption among youth during weddings?
3. how do social status, peer pressure, and social media influence youth's wedding-related consumption practices?

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. The aim of choosing qualitative methodology is to know the experiences of newly married couple regarding wedding and conspicuous consumption in Mardan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The study chose purposive sampling technique in order to select the newly married couples who meet the study criteria. The sampling remained continue till the saturation point. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 respondents. Furthermore, thematic analysis was used for analyzing the data. Ethical consideration is considered as the significant piece of the research. In this regard; I strictly followed all the rules and regulations in the area of my research and followed all the guiding principles about ethical consideration.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Wedding and traditional customs

The wedding industry has expanded dramatically, with lavish spending on venues, designers, catering, and entertainment becoming status symbols. This growing trend carries economic consequences, typically inflating budgets and, in some instances, leading to unmanageable debt. Critics argue that such commercialization detracts from the true meaning and social significance of marriage, turning the occasion into a spectacle of consumerism that reflects the broader neoliberal shift in culture (Iqbal et al., 2025). Regarding the wedding expenses one of the respondents said that;

Spending vast sums on photography, holding a three-day Walima featuring a wide array of dishes, and investing heavily in clothing and jewelry have, in the recent past, become part of our culture

Wedding ceremonies are divided into two categories based on social class: one is for the elite, and the other is for the common people. In this regard one of the respondents added

One day, the Walima is held for the general public, featuring a relatively modest spread.

Another day, the event is hosted for VIPs—the very individuals who will ultimately step into the competitive arena. For this occasion, excessive spending and the wastage of a wide variety of dishes are deemed essential for upward social mobility.

Some people who lack the financial means hold simple, religiously-oriented weddings, and they also justify this choice in various gatherings; they invite only very close relatives to such weddings

Some people use religion as a pretext to free themselves from these rituals

People have grown weary of wedding rituals, viewing them as a burden, yet they still succumb to social pressure. Some turn to religion as a way to opt out of this competitive display; however, even if someone wishes to have a simple wedding, they often find themselves compelled to inform a large

number of people just to uphold their social standing. On the other hand, big spenders reinforce social stratification and flaunt their wealth before the affluent. While the upper class initiated these expensive rituals, the poor, too, are not free from this trap.

Wedding as a Site of Social Competition

Marriage is a sacred act, yet nowadays it has been turned into a gamble, where thousands of people squander their wealth just to impress others. In this regard one of the respondents added that

Marriage has now turned into a competition, which is becoming increasingly alarming day by day. Society views those who spend lavishly on weddings with a positive attitude

Another respondent added that

Marriage has become extremely difficult. People lose their assets and sink into heavy debt because of it

Ever-evolving wedding rituals are spreading like a contagion; it is the less affluent—those who mingle with the wealthy who are the first to mimic these practices and propagate these costly customs, while the media, particularly through television dramas, plays a distinct role in this trend.

Wedding and Brand consciousness

Brands are considered significant for consumers in terms of identity, a sense of achievement, and self-definition, as they possess the ability to convey messages and shape the impression consumers make on others (Assimos et al., 2019) on the other hand, Shafaat (2020) found that young fashion consumers are more brand-conscious, as they are more inclined to purchase garments that feature brand names or logos. In this regard one of the respondents added that

In this digital era, online shops and brand ambassadors frequently showcase wedding related items on plate forms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok etc.

Another respondent added that

People have become such keen observers when it comes to brand they will size you up from head to toe to gauge your value and determine just how important you are

The younger generation takes brand consciousness very seriously; through it, they gauge the social status of others. Social media frequently highlights the importance of branded products and demonstrates their use across various occasions.

Wedding Halls

People sacrificed their happiness and simplicity solely because of what others might say. This happiness is considered fleeting compared to the joy derived from age-old traditions. Behind the concept of the wedding hall lies the malignant scourge of conspicuous consumption. One of the respondents added that

My mother says that your cousins' weddings took place in wedding halls, so we will have your wedding there too. She tells me to save as much of my salary as possible. This deprived me of my small, simple desires.

Another respondent added that

My in-laws tell me not to book a wedding hall, saying it would be an unnecessary expense but my father say "you are my only daughter, I will bear this caste for you"

People justify using wedding halls by citing the mess created in their homes and the dirtying of dishes. The spirit of mutual cooperation and teamwork has vanished among people.

Weddings and Gold jewelries

Gold jewelry has traditionally been an integral part of weddings in Pakistan. Gold may be purchased for the bride, gifted by relatives, or simply form part of the customary expectations associated with the

wedding. However, for low-income families, these traditions can impose an additional financial burden. A family already has to manage expenses for the wedding hall, food, attire, furniture, and other arrangements; the added cost of expensive gold jewelry can further inflate the total wedding expenditure. A respondent added that;

These days, many young women on Facebook claim they will have a simple wedding, yet they still succumb to societal pressure. The most significant downside of this pressure is the sheer amount of gold involved, an expense that leaves most men impoverished.

Some people consider jewelry beneficial for couple's future. In this regard one of the respondents added that;

I have reservations about the gold, but I believe that, in the long run, it will be used for the benefit of the husband and wife

The downsides of expensive weddings are not limited to financial problems but it also fosters other issues as one of the respondents added

Making wedding so expensive gives rise to other crimes and immoral behaviors

As of September 22, 2026, depending on market sources and the time of the update, the rate for 24-karat gold ranges from approximately Rs. 453,300 to Rs. 457,536 per tola. The rate for 22-karat gold is approximately Rs. 415,500 per tola. Daily rates are subject to change due to fluctuations in international gold prices, currency values, and local market conditions. Gold has now become an unaffordable luxury for the average Pakistani citizen. Furthermore, expensive wedding is considering the cause of crimes and immoral behaviors for example some people associate none-marriageability to the growing rape cases.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the prevalence of conspicuous consumption in wedding ceremonies in Mardan. After thoroughly reviewing the literature and analyzing the data, it has been concluded that guests may offer a few words of praise to the hosts of their lavish wedding arrangements. The findings of the study reveal that People have grown weary of ostentatious displays of wealth and conspicuous consumption, yet they see no alternative; failing to follow this path causes their social standing to plummet, leading them to be viewed as inferior and stripped of any significant status. While some argue that individuals turn to religion to avoid such performative spending, adopting this approach requires either belonging to a religious family or constantly justifying the choice, explaining that one possesses the wealth for extravagance but is opting for a religious lifestyle instead. Social media has significantly raised people's expectations and further fueled the scourge of competitiveness. People have now become brand-conscious; they gauge your worth based on the brands associated with you. Ever-evolving wedding rituals are spreading like a contagion; it is the less affluent—those who mingle with the wealthy who are the first to mimic these practices and propagate these costly customs, while the media, particularly through television dramas, plays a distinct role in this trend. If we talk only about gold, even that is beyond the reach of the average citizen. These rising wedding expenses fuel promote serious crimes for example some people associate none-marriageability to the growing rape cases.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there is a need to encourage people to adopt simple and affordable wedding practices and to avoid unnecessary spending just to maintain social status or satisfy the expectations of others. In addition, religious leaders and other social welfare organizations should conduct awareness campaigns regarding this matter. The government should also set a specific limit on

such expenses and ban extravagant spending at weddings.

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