

Exploring the Socio-economic Factors of the Modern Society that Encourage Wedding Ceremonies in Foreign Countries

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to explore the socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage wedding ceremonies in foreign countries. The objective of this research is to answer the research question: what are the influencing factors for decision makers when they choose foreign destinations for wedding venues? Semi structured in-depth interviews (a qualitative research method) are conducted, where the researcher interviewed each respondent face-to-face to briefly discuss the topic. Modern urban Egyptians are the target population under study because prior studies have indicated that currently this population segment has been greatly influenced by western traditions when it comes to marriage celebrations. The interviewees are selected based on purposive sampling. The selected participants are decision makers for wedding venues; they include wedding couples, parents, relatives, and friends who are involved in the decision making process and who were at least 18 years of age. The researcher conducts twenty semi-structured interviews, which were all recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Thematic Analysis is conducted in this study. From the interview analysis, the socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage Egyptians to have wedding ceremonies in foreign countries are respectively: packages offered, fulfilling prestige, distinctive atmosphere, and escaping from daily routine to relax.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Destinations Selections, Event Planning, Travel Motivation, Wedding Tourism

1. Introduction

Weddings are significant life events for many people around the world [1]. It is the: “celebration of a lifetime, and whether that celebration is a grand fete for hundreds or an intimate gathering of family and friends, it is a day when dreams come true” [2]. Hence, most people turn to popular trends to create an unforgettable event [3]. Currently, destination weddings are booming in the market [1]. Couples are having weddings held in locations that they do not live in, often in an exotic, new, or popular foreign destination [4].

Wedding tourism is a prosperous sector within the tourism industry [4]. It is a trend that has taken off universally [1]. Due to this trend, weddings have become a commodity, providing opportunities for each foreign destination to market itself as a place where a “special life-event” can be celebrated in a memorable manner [5]. Thus, it is important to grasp and have adequate knowledge about consumers’ aspirations when choosing a wedding destination [6].

It is necessary to identify the factors that are involved in consumers’ motivations for choosing wedding venues [6]. There are different factors that impact people’s decision-making, especially when it comes to selecting wedding tourism destinations [4]. “Motivation as a variable is a major issue for specialists in the field, and it was considered for a long period of time the only one that intervenes between stimulus and response to consumer behavior” [7]. Thus, researching travel motivation has always been an important factor for tourism management [8]. Understanding motivations for choosing a destination can help practitioners to develop strategies and policies to increase the demand for tourism and assist tourists in decision-making [4].

Extensive research on tourism motivation factors has been documented in literature [9]. However, it was found that little research has been done, which focus on wedding tourism, despite the significance of the wedding business in the tourism industry [4]. Few studies have been conducted regarding the selection of wedding venues and destination

options [6]. In particular, very little is known about the motivational factors that encourage destination weddings [5]. To fill this academic gap, this study explores the socio-economic factors that impact foreign wedding destinations selections.

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons (related to the socio-economic factors) in consumers' decisions in choosing wedding destinations. More specifically, this study plans on answering the research question: what are the influencing factors for decision makers when they choose foreign destinations for wedding venues? Thus, the objective of this study is to identify influencing factors for decision makers when they choose foreign destinations for wedding venues. This study expects to enrich the body of tourism and wedding research and provide industry practitioners with insights regarding the inner motives and reasons for people to desire and choose destination weddings. The insights that emerge will help practitioners' planning and marketing strategies of wedding tourism and destination selection process.

2. Literature Review

Studying consumer behavior is an essential to understanding why people tend to choose a certain destination and what sort of factors influences them [8], especially when it comes to desiring foreign destination weddings [4]. The decision development of selecting a destination (tourism products and services) for a wedding venue takes time, because they are mostly intangible and there are many possibilities involved in the buying process [1].

Wedding tourism involves psychological determinants [4]. Some studies indicated that: *"demographics and lifestyles among others that are prestige, escape, sexual opportunity, education, social interaction, family bonding, relaxation, and self-discovery"* are vital psychological determinants [10]. Thus, in order to understand comprehensively behavior in tourism, research is needed to show the important and different elements affecting the decision making process [8], especially when it comes to wedding tourism [4]. This section contains a review of some factors that influence wedding venues decisions in foreign countries.

According to various researchers [4] [8] [9], motivation initiates the decision-making process. Travel motivations are important psychological influences of tourist behavior [8]. Motivations appear when people want to satisfy a need or want [11]. Maslow's theory is popular in explaining the foundation of motivation - physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization [12]. When linking the Maslow's theory in the context of wedding tourism, people may be motivated to travel for the need to: *"escape from an everyday environment, discovery and evaluation of oneself, relaxing or participation in recreational activities, gaining a certain level of prestige, for the purpose of regression, strengthening family ties, and facilitating their level of social interaction"* [13]. Thus,

people travel because they are steered by their own internal forces (socio-psychological needs or intrinsic desires of the individual).

Some researchers indicated that people's decision is influenced by personal factors as well, such as: *age and life-cycle stage, occupation, economic situation, lifestyle, and personality and self-concept* [8]. With time (age and life-cycle), the goods and services people consume change - needs come and go and new ones arise. Currently, destination weddings are the new event style and wedding trends [1]. Changing norms and consumer preferences have contributed to the growth of wedding tourism, such as the desire to have a memorable wedding in a unique location [14].

A person's economic situation has a considerable influence on what a consumer buys. Financial restrictions play a major role in consumers' decision in wedding planning [8]. Wedding tourism has increased in popularity over the years because it provides lower costs than domestic weddings. Furthermore, the increasing frequency of cheap international flights has been a factor in escalating demands for wedding tourism around the world [14].

Even if people have the same cultural and social background they may have very different lifestyles [15]. A lifestyle is a person's pattern of living, which includes their activities, interests and opinions [4]. According to the research by World Wedding Traditions [16], weddings globally have been greatly influenced by Western traditions. Research indicates that in 2016 couples are seeking ways to incorporate unique elements into their weddings and tie the knot in "new-to-them" settings [17]. Hence, trendy and well-travelled couples are traveling across the globe for their dream wedding [4].

Correspondingly, people's behavior is altered by social factors [8]. Throughout life, a person belongs to many groups, everything from family to work groups. People usually behave in a manner to grandstand others. Thus, each role an individual acts out does influence his or her buying behavior and also defines their social status [15]. Based on research, Research indicated that fulfilling prestige is a motivational drive in which people are inspired to pursue [15]. People travel to different and exceptional places to impress their friends and family and to increase their social status [6]. When a couple selects a wedding venue, they might select a place that reflects status and will amaze their guests [1].

Tourism destination consists of many elements, which are used to attract people [8], such as tourism facilities (hotels, transport, attractions, etc.) and the substantial aspects of a region (the people, the other industries, the climate, the landscape, etc.) [4]. In the case of wedding tourism, the exoticism of the destination itself plays a role in influencing the decision to plan wedding venues in foreign countries [6]. According to research, people are appealed by destinations based on elements, such as: *"architectural style, natural setting, cultural diversity, societal values and public environments"* [18]. Destinations are also perceived according to the regions' physical and socio-cultural entity –

the regions' history, its people, and traditions [8]. Therefore, tourism destinations contain a bundle of offerings to the travelers [9].

The topic of travel motivations is considered essential in tourism research literature [9]. The knowledge regarding the prediction of travel motivation and behavior is important in tourism marketing, in order to create demand and assist in people's decision-making process [8]. Accordingly, by having adequate knowledge of people's reasons for traveling to a foreign country, strategies and policies can be developed and implemented to increase the demand in the wedding tourism field [4]. Based on the literature review, research has been conducted on travel motives; however, very little research, if any, has been done on peoples' motives for desiring destination weddings. Thus, this study plans on filling this academic gap and develop preliminary insights and understandings regarding this matter.

3. Research Methodology

This study used the *interpretivist approach* in order to develop information that is based on socially constructed interpretations. Throughout the data collection, the researcher remained interdependent and interactive with the participants of the study. The purpose was to unravel and understand the motives, meanings, reasons, and other subjective experiences regarding the studied human behaviors.

Semi structured in-depth interviews (a qualitative research method) were conducted, where the researcher interviewed each respondent face-to-face to discuss the topic of the research: *identifying the socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage couples to plan wedding venues in foreign countries*. This type of interview allowed the respondents to converse in a free flow approach rather than in a structured manner. The interview was controlled using an interview guide (outline with ready prepared questions). However, follow up questions were developed in order for the researcher to gain further underlying explanations. For example, when the interviewee is not informative enough, then the researcher asked following question, such as "*please specify more*" that urged the interviewee to give a more in depth answer.

The Interview contained an introduction section, a section that explored the socio-economic factors that motivate destination weddings, and a conclusion section. Based on the theoretical framework and the main research question, eight questions were drawn up and also a few follow up questions came up during the interviews. These questions focused on the factors related to: *psychological determinants, age and life-cycle stage, economic situation, lifestyle, personality, and self-concept, social influence, and attractive touristic destinations*.

Research indicates that couples nowadays are tying the knot in "new-to-them" settings [17]. Generally, urban Egyptian weddings have been greatly influenced by this western tradition [16]. Thus, *modern urban Egyptians* are the target population under study. The interviewees were selected based on purposive sampling. The selected participants were decision makers for wedding venues; they include couples, parents, relatives, and friends who are involved in the decision making process and who were at least 18 years of age.

The interviews were conducted in the Arabic language since the native language in Egypt is Arabic. Before beginning the actual interviews, the researcher conducted a pilot involving a sample of 3 interviewees to adjust any mistakes that might have existed in the grammar, word arrangements, sequence of questions, etc. Once the interview guide was adjusted, the actual interviews began. The interviews took place in locations most comfortable and convenient for the participants, as such in the home of the interviewees and in restaurants. Before beginning the interviews the participants signed a consent form that explains the research purpose and what is expected from them as a participant. Furthermore, the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

4. Research Analysis

Twenty decision-makers for wedding venues (couples, parents, relatives, and friends who are involved in the selection of wedding venue) were interviewed in this study. Table One shows their socio-demographic traits.

Table 1. Interviewees' Socio-demographic Characteristics.

Socio-Demographic Traits	N	%	Socio-Demographic Traits	N	%
Gender			Age		
Female	6	30	18-25	6	30
			26-30	5	25
			31-35	3	15
			36-45	1	5
Male	14	70	46-55	3	13
			56 and above	2	10
Wedding banquet budget (L.E.)			Relationship to the new couple		
50,000 or less	1	5	Bride or groom	5	25
50,001- 100,000	6	30	Parents	5	25
100,001-150,000	9	45	Family members	4	20
150,001- 200,000	3	15	Friends	5	25
200,001 or more	1	5	Colleagues	1	5

Thematic analysis was used in this study to examine the themes within the collected qualitative data provided by the interviewees. The researcher began the analysis by transcribing the recordings of the interviews. Succeeding, the researcher organized the data set and coded the data (identifying topic frequencies) by recognizing important moments in the data and encoding it prior to interpretation. The considered phrases in a text helped identify the implicit and explicit ideas within the data. The following paragraphs illustrate the themes and patterns found across the data sets that are important to the description of the studied phenomenon and are associated to the research question.

During the introduction section of the interviews, the participants all agree that destination weddings are an attractive idea. Every couple and or decision maker in a wedding venue in this study has been tempted by the thought of exchanging vows and celebrating a wedding in an exotic or idyllic city near the sea, in a venue with a garden view, or inside a romantic castle. The participants believed that though other parts of the world are attractive for wedding destinations (Bali, Malaysia, Seychelles, Maldives, Hawaii, Bahamas, Phuket, Mauritius, etc.), Europe is still the classic and rational choice for Egyptians. The respondents indicated that the European continent: (1) seems accessible for most travelers - time distance shorter and travel costs relatively cheaper than other locations around the world; (2) there are plenty of romantic settings to choose from – like beaches, rivers, landscape, etc.; (3) a huge number of venues exist that will make hosting a wedding simple - facilities provision that embrace the necessary services and amenities required so as to satisfy people's travel and wedding experience. Based on these remarks, the researcher concluded that destination location and its attributes influence traveller's choice and can encourage a destination wedding.

Data gathered from the open-ended questions as to why couples choose foreign destination wedding venue to say, "*I do*" revealed various socio-economic factors that impact the decision process. Various themes emerged during this section in the interviews. Table 2 summarizes the emerged themes in the study. The following paragraphs explain the inquiry and evaluation of the interviews and the themes.

Some respondents believed that choosing destination weddings depends on the *packages offered* in the market (package elements include: venue location, cost satisfaction, quality services, and good accommodation). Special offers triggers people to think of destination weddings. They indicated that sometimes the price of a trip when organized as a package is generally less, providing a lower and more competitive rate. This is an instant cost saving benefit for the couples. Furthermore they indicated that packages are a convenient way to arranging a wedding getaway. All arrangements regarding airlines, hotels, banquets, event entertainment, etc. are directly through the tour provider. This saves people the effort and the time of contacting each company and or service individually. Based on these remarks, the researcher concluded that people were attracted

to wedding destinations that provide a wide range of tour packages at very competitive prices (the reasonable cost associated with the wedding venue) and with friendly and convenient services (availability of services as wedding destination, ease of formalities for wedding).

The participants rated the factor, *fulfilling prestige* as a vital factor when planning a wedding event in a foreign destination. They indicated that weddings are used as an indicator to show off the wealth of the bride, groom, and their respective families. Participants suggested that distinctive extravagant weddings are a way that people can display their social connections and prestige. Not everyone can afford to have a wedding that is held abroad in a lavishing venue. Thus, they stated that anyone who can do so automatically displays his or her social status. The interviewees indicated that: "*travel has become today's social currency*". The researcher concluded that people believed that wedding ceremonies are means for displaying wealth and prestige. Preferences for wedding arrangements are driven by the desire to display high social status of the families of the couples. Accordingly, they choose wedding locations that catch attention and impress people. Motives for well-off community to choose foreign destination are: curated content, showing off, and going beyond social influencers.

Moreover, another factor that was determined in this study is *atmosphere*. The participants believe that warm destinations that have promising beaches and sunshine can be a desirable choice for destination weddings. The participants suggested that the "*Greek Islands*" have been very popular due to their combinations of climate and nature. Furthermore, the participants indicated that the western atmosphere is amusing as a theme of an event held abroad. Based on these remarks, the researcher concluded that the tropical settings together with the exotic landscapes, which are usually impossible to find in the host country, are important determinant that encourages wedding tourism. Westernized and trendy couples jet off across the globe for their dream wedding.

The participants suggested another basic motivational factor for seeking destination wedding is to *escaping from daily routine and relax*. The participants implied that a wedding ceremony is a significant life event, which calls for hosting a memorable event in order to celebrate love and unity in a special and lasting way. Thus, they suggested that people choose destination weddings because it will be a different occurrence not experienced before or not held in a manner found back home. It will be an exceptional and unforgettable experience to hold a party in a foreign location. Overseas wedding venues allow couples to escape from their personal environment (to be away from home) and to pursue physical and psychological benefits (to rest spiritually and physically). Based on these remarks, the researcher concluded that couples select a new place that they can experience for the first time together with their loved ones. The couples appreciate tying the knot in "*new-to-them*" settings. They usually prefer a place that will ensure physical

and emotional comfort of themselves and their guests.

In conclusion, the researcher discovered the majority of the decision makers for wedding venues (wedding couples, parents, relatives, and friends who are involved in the decision making process) chose destination weddings, as it is an outlandish destination, which brings everlasting memories to the wedding experience. The decision behind getting married in foreign countries is based on several factors. From the interviews, the socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage Egyptians to have wedding ceremonies in foreign countries are respectively: packages offered, fulfilling prestige, distinctive atmosphere, and escaping from daily routine to relax. Decision makers for wedding venues seek special wedding offers/packages. They want sensible wedding venue, facilitating their decision to tie the knot in sun and in style. Further, they believe that destination weddings are well coordinated and that these locations provide tailor-made weddings, which matches their psychological, social and economical needs.

Table 2. The Emerged Themes from the Interview.

Themes Identified in the Interview	
Theme 1	Destination weddings are an attractive idea.
Theme 2	Egyptians chose destination weddings, as it is an outlandish destination, which brings everlasting memories to the wedding experience.
Theme 3	Well-off westernized and trendy Egyptian couples are jetting off across the globe for their dream wedding.
Theme 4	Europe is the classic and rational choice for destination weddings among Egyptians.
Theme 5	Couples are attracted to wedding destinations that provide competitive prices (reasonable cost associated with the wedding venue) and with friendly and convenient services (ease of formalities for wedding).
Theme 6	Couples choose locations of venues that can catch attention and impress the people they know.
Theme 7	Tropical settings together with the exotic landscapes, which are usually impossible to find in the host country, are important factors that encourage overseas wedding.
Theme 8	Nowadays, Egyptian couples appreciate tying the knot in "new-to-them" settings.

5. Research Conclusions

Destination weddings are a growing new tourism segment that has impacted destinations all over the globe. New opportunities for glamorous cities and service providers are emerging, as the industry develops and progresses. According to the literature review the researcher established that wedding tourism is an area that should be further researched, with more data being gathered on a global level. The researcher aimed to explore the socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage wedding ceremonies in foreign countries. A review of the literature surrounding the motivational factors in determining consumers' decision-making process to travel and embrace wedding venues led to the development of the research question: *what are the influencing factors for decision makers when they choose foreign destinations for wedding venues?* Thus, the objective of this study is to identify influencing factors for decision

makers when they choose foreign destinations for wedding venues. The researcher went about the investigation using the qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews. Based on the thematic analysis, the results revealed that the motives of couples travelling to foreign destinations to have a wedding are based on: package offerings, fulfilling prestige, seeking unique atmosphere, and escaping from daily routine and relax. Thus, the researcher developed a proposed research model (shown in figure one) based on the Interviewees' quotations and paradigms during the Qualitative Analysis for future researchers to investigate.

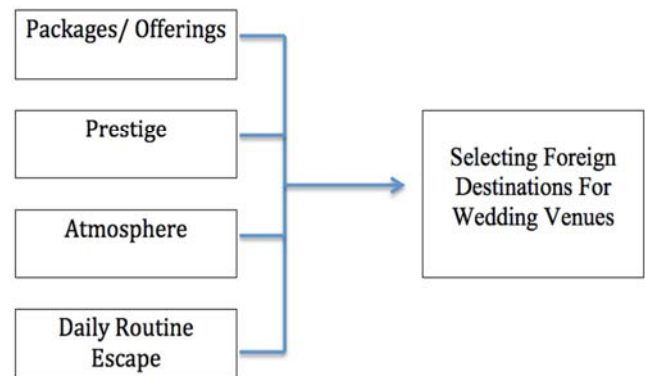


Figure 1. The Proposed Research Model based on Qualitative Analysis.

6. Research Discussions

The interviewees, the decision makers for wedding venues, in this study regarded "*packaging offerings*" as an important factor to consider when planning a destination wedding. This finding is similar to the findings of prior studies [1] [6]. This finding implies that couples, their families and their friends might be budget minded or confused about the wedding planning process abroad. Thus, package tours typically find the top attractions and most efficient routes. Conveniently, tourism and wedding industries put all this information regarding the needed facilities for a wedding together for people to use and arrange their own event with some personal tweaks. Some package offerings usually provide deals that include lower and moderately priced options to meet the needs of people. Based on this implication, the researcher advises that wedding services and tourism practitioners should provide a variety of venue plans - primarily related to availability, location, atmosphere, and facilities.

The decision makers for wedding venues in this study regarded "*fulfilling prestige*" as another important factor to consider when planning a destination wedding. This outcome is consistent with prior research papers [1] [9]. This finding implies that when couples hold exotic wedding destinations (on a stunning ocean sunset, a impressive resort pool or garden area, or a view from a mountain top) and talk about the event or post about it on social media, in society this can indicate that they have the discretionary income and the time to live a life of leisure and prestige. Therefore, practitioners are advised to market destinations, showing its lavish aspects. The promotional offers along with the impressive

destination image can certainly influence wedding couples' purchasing behaviors.

The interviewees additionally commented that "atmosphere" as a significant factor to consider when planning a destination wedding. This outcome is similar to some studies in the existing literature [4] [8]. This finding implies that couples are now seeking to celebrate their weddings abroad. Warm destinations, which assure beaches and sunshine, have been a desirable choice for destination weddings. Locations in Europe, such as Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, and the Greek Islands have been popular due to their combinations of climate and nature. Not only is climate a factor in making these destinations attractive for wedding tourism, but also the availability of well-organized wedding services (hotels, transportations, video recording services, wedding photography services, wedding banquets, etc.). Thus, based on the implication, the researcher recommends that wedding services practitioners should make their services more appealing to decision makers. Professional wedding service agencies can cooperate with tourism industries to develop mutually beneficial collaborations that encourage the purchase of wedding services overseas. Also, the destination-wedding trend creates potential for cities to recognize their unique feature and market it to wedding tourists.

Finally, the decision makers in this study regarded "escaping from daily routine" as a final factor encouraging the selection of foreign destinations as wedding venues. This discovery is consistent with the results of previous tourism studies about travel destinations [1] [4]. This finding implies that couples desire a beautiful memory of a truly exceptional day – a memory that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Couples often seek something distinctive when it comes to creating the "perfect" wedding. They consider a destination wedding because they want a day that is different than any other event that they had experienced before. When having a wedding in a foreign location, they create a truly unforgettable event for themselves and their loved ones. Based on this implication, the researcher recommends that wedding venue industry practitioners should seek to create distinct experiences for consumers and offer exceptionally unique venues.

7. Research Limitations and Future Study

Although this study offers academic and practical contribution by investigating factors that encourage couples to choose foreign wedding venues, it nonetheless poses some limitations to be addressed. First, the sample size was relatively small compared to the cities' population (twenty interviews). Hence, the findings were difficult to generalize. The population for this research consisted of middle/upper class consumers who participated in the decision-making process for choosing destination weddings (not all wedding couples). Therefore, the outcomes were based on a specific people, making the findings not generalizable to the whole population. Future research can focus on the practitioners'

(wedding planners). Practitioners in wedding organization usually stay on top of these changing trends. They have knowledge in the topic based on their experience in the industry and their dealings with different couples and their family and friends who chose either traditional or non-traditional weddings. This study focused on Egyptian couples and decision makers for choosing destination weddings in various cities around the globe. Thus, motives might vary depending on the city or country. Thus, further studies should be conducted on the future wedding trend predictions for each specific region as to obtain more specifics and see how the regions actually compare.

This study used only qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews. The researcher encouraged the interviewees to talk openly about their opinions regarding the research topic. While respondents obtained incentives for their participation, some participants nonetheless may not have reported entirely accurate information during the interviews because of privacy concerns. The presence of the researcher might have affected the interviewees' responses. Thus, future research can use quantitative methods to confirm the findings of this qualitative study. Future studies should survey a larger number of consumers, and researchers may consider additional motivation factors to include for analysis. Based on the qualitative outcomes, this study emerged four main socio-economic factors of the modern society that encourage couples to have wedding ceremonies in foreign countries. Since these categories cannot comprehensively describe all customer motivations for choosing wedding venues, the explanations and implications of the results may be too limited to be generalized. Thus, future studies should consider additional motivation factors to include for analysis besides the socio-economic factors.

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