The Impact of Covid-19 on Weddings: An Indian Context

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Abstract

India is a diverse country and its diversity is reflected in its people, culture, and religion. A wedding is a significant event in an individual's life because it is not only a celebration of the union of two persons but also of two families, maybe cultures and religions too. During the past decade, the Indian wedding industry has flourished immensely and contributed a lot to the overall economy. But during the Covid-19 outbreak, it has gone through a significant change. The pandemic has resulted in the slowdown and stagnation of the overall wedding industry. The government-imposed lockdown has resulted in the cancellation of many pre-planned weddings. Those who conducted the weddings had to cut short their guest lists and undertake the ceremonies and rituals with utmost safety and security measures. The government has kept on issuing Covid-19 SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) from time to time for the conduct of weddings. This paper is an attempt to analyze and examine the impact of Covid-19 on the wedding industry in India. The study has been undertaken by using secondary data for the collection of information.

Keywords

Indian wedding industry, Weddings, Covid-19, Pandemic, and Covid-19 SOPs.
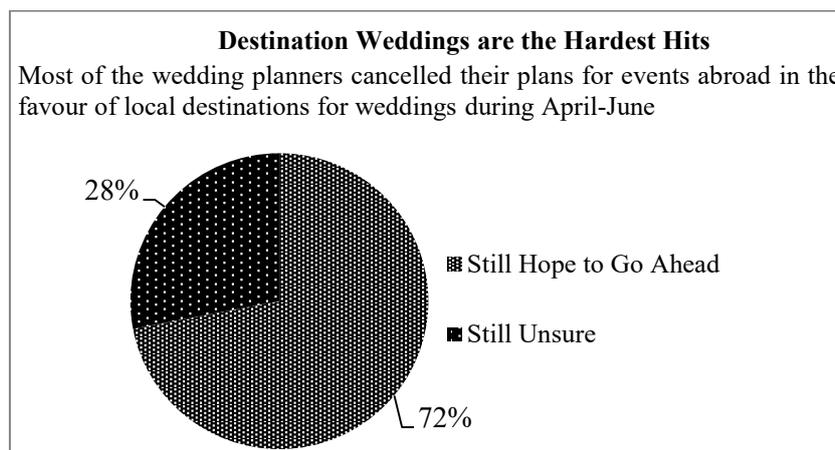
1. Introduction

Weddings in India has historically been an opportunity to flaunt one's riches and social standing. Everything about a wedding must be fine, from the venue to the food, decor, clothing, and guest entertainment. Such big fat weddings are the product of careful planning and management. The growing popularity of event organizers, wedding planners, videographers other wedding professionals have made it all

easy. All these professional services are proved to be an aid for the effective planning and execution of a wedding function.

Depending upon the rituals and ceremonies, an Indian wedding lasts up to 5-6 days. From the beginning till the end of the planning process, an Indian wedding is meticulously planned in terms of demands, current trends, budget, and all of the specifications of both families. An Indian wedding, in my opinion, includes joy and enthusiasm throughout, and the individual's happiness knows no bounds. There is an atmosphere in which presents are exchanged, and elaborate preparations are made with an emphasis on food, fun, decorations, clothing, floral arrangements and so on.

Traditionally, wedding planning does not necessitate a comprehensive administrative experience. With the recent growth of large-scale wedding celebrations, modern weddings, with their many complexities, often necessitate professionals with technical expertise and adequate managerial abilities. Wedding planners, a group of experts who can think beyond basic wedding arrangements such as theme weddings, designing imaginative and innovative invitations, entertaining guests, photography, sourcing the best of regional and foreign cuisines, and so on, could fill the void today. In recent years, the growth and development of the Indian wedding industry have made a great contribution to the overall Indian economy.

The world economy has been devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in one of the worst global recessions in history. The Indian wedding industry has observed a significant drift due to the widespread disease and the resulting lockdown. Some weddings were cancelled, some were postponed and some were conducted with the minimum number of guests and a wide number of safety and security measures.

Destination Weddings are the Hardest Hits

Most of the wedding planners cancelled their plans for events abroad in the favour of local destinations for weddings during April-June

Source: *The Economic Times*

Figure 1: The Impact of Covid-19 on Destination Weddings in India

The outbreak of Covid-19 has resulted in a downfall of the overall economy. This paper is an attempt to study the effects and the impact of Covid-19, the global pandemic, on the Indian wedding industry. The study is based on the use of secondary data for the collection of information.

2. Review of Literature

The Indian wedding industry is a great contributor to the nation's economy. The range of products and services, as well as the number of personnel involved in putting together the grandest of festivities, is only to be expected by giving the size and scope of the average gathering. Weddings are an irreplaceable part of our culture and many families are willing to do anything to ensure that every detail of the wedding is perfect. Weddings are usually arranged to correspond with auspicious dates on the calendar and are prepared in advance. Parents start saving for their children's wedding as early as they are born and allocate a significant portion of their life savings to the event. Some of the estimates show that up to one-fifth of an individual's total lifetime wealth is invested into this occasion. **(Vohra, 2020)**

The wedding market of India is estimated to be at $50 Billion, the world's second-largest, after the $70 billion US market, and is growing at an approximate rate of 20 percent a year. According to other over-the-top estimates, though the wedding market of India was worth 1,00,000 Crores in 2015, it is growing at a rate of 25-30 percent a year. Indian

weddings have a budget range from 5 Lakhs to 5 Crores. An average Indian spends an estimated one-fifth of his/her wealth saved in a lifetime on weddings **(Pandit, 2018).**

The big fat Indian wedding may have derived its title from the extensive planning that it involves. While everyone wants a wedding to be easy, but it is a great investment of not only time but money too. To get rid of the tension of planning a suitable venue, plan the menu, chalk in various traditional ceremonies, guests' stay, the priest, music and decorations, the rise of Wedding Planners made it all easy (at a cost, of course). Destination weddings are on the rise in India, thanks to them, and more and more Indian couples and families are opting for them. **(Tiwari, 2018)**

The current SARSCoV2 (coronavirus disease 2019; previously 2019nCoV) outbreak, which began in Hubei Province of the People's Republic of China, has spread to a number of other countries. The WHO Emergency Committee declared a global health emergency on January 30, 2020, citing rising case reporting rates in Chinese and foreign locations. The case detection rate fluctuates everyday and it can be monitored in near real-time on Johns Hopkins University's website and other forums. China continues to bear a substantial burden of mortality as of the middle of February 2020, while the incidence in other Asian nations, Europe, and North America have remained low thus far. **(Meyer, 2020)**

SARS-CoV-2 is the official name for the current coronavirus, which stands for extreme acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. This virus will cause coronavirus disease 19, or COVID-19 if it is infected. SARS-CoV-2 is similar to SARS-CoV, a coronavirus that caused a different type of coronavirus disease in 2002 and 2003. According to the facts, SARS-CoV-2 is more easily transmitted and can cause life-threatening illnesses in some people. It, like other coronaviruses, can live long enough in the air and on surfaces to infect anyone. If you come into contact with SARS-CoV-2, you could become infected. However, this isn't considered to be the virus's primary mode of transmission. SARS-CoV-2, on the other side, multiplies quicker in the body even though there are no signs. Furthermore, you will spread the virus even though you never show any signs. Some people only have mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms while others have more severe symptoms. (Iftekhar, 2020)

The respiratory ailment known as coronavirus disease (Covid-19) was recognized in December 2019. It is known to be caused by a virus that is similar to a virus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). As in two earlier cases of the occurrence of the coronavirus disease in the last 18 years — SARS (2002 and 2003) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) (2012 to the present) — the Covid-19 outbreak has posed critical challenges for the public health, research, and medical communities. **(Anthony S. Fauci, 2020)**

After the COVID-19 spread, the people's mindset has changed too as everyone is treating each other as a source of virus because of their own safety. This mindset is also followed in weddings. Recently, there is frequent news of virus spread in wedding functions. In one of the wedding, the groom died just after two days of the wedding by COVID-19 and 95 guests also got COVID-19 positive, further creating phobia for people that the weddings are spreading coronavirus and can be deadly to attend. **(Ravi Kumar Arya, 2021)**

3. The Indian Wedding Industry

Weddings are one of the most significant occasions in most people's lives, and their friends and families will not want to miss out on making it unique, stunning, and perfect. The preparation and performance of such weddings would require a lot of time, money, and effort. Weddings in the modern period fit well with the subjective understanding of today's culture. The people of India are dedicated to their culture and religion for living every aspect of their lives.

Traditionally, the entire family would participate and engage in wedding planning and management, while today most couples and families will employ a professional or skilled wedding planner. The Indian wedding industry has emerged as the fastest-growing sector contributing significantly to the economic growth and development of the country. In the past decade, the industry underwent a dramatic change. A recent report of KPMG estimated that India's wedding market was at $50 Billion, with a rapid annual growth rate. Currently, India is having 28 states and 8 union territories. Each state or union territory in India has its own demography, language, history, culture, dress, festivals, and so on. The country's diverse religions and cultures have always shaped the way of how people live

Following the rituals and traditions, religion has had a heavy impact on the choice of marital partner. However, the increasing middle class, the impact of urbanization, and the country's demographic changes are reforming social inclusivity and acceptance beyond caste, culture, and religious and conventional boundaries. Due to the evolving environment, traditional Indian marriages are likely to undergo a transition as the urban, middle-class marriage market continues to rise to the occasion and welcome this change with open arms. People in cities are becoming less dependent on their cast identities because of increased urbanization, and are, therefore, less regulated or affected by associated customs and traditions. Also, such audiences are more exposed to modern living standards, technology, social media, and a larger marriage market through online matrimonials.

The Indian wedding industry comprises a number of sub-industries that are responsible for the continuous up-gradation and development of the overall economy. These sub-industries include the following:-

3.1 **Online Matrimonial Sites:** There are various online matrimonial sites that aid to the finding of partners online. They are also known as marriage websites. Users can register on matrimonial websites and make their personal profile on a database that is maintained by the respective website. Users searching for suitors conduct customized searches in the database, which usually includes nationality, age, gender, photo availability, caste, religion, and geographic location.

3.2 **Event Management Industry:** The word "event management" refers to the use of business management and organizational expertise to plan and organize large-scale activities such as festivals, gatherings, wedding functions, formal parties, or concerts. In relation to the wedding, this industry includes the various professional services which are required to organize a wedding; like food, venue, photography, hospitality, and decor. The event management industry among the fastest-growing industries is one and it contributes significantly to the economic growth and development of the country.

3.3 **Textiles and Apparel Industry:** This industry is concerned with the manufacture of clothing. India's textile and apparel industry is strong across the value chain, from fibre to yarn to cloth to apparel.

Spinning, weaving, drying and apparel manufacturing are all part of the well-organized textile industry, which is defined by the use of capital-intensive technology for the production and manufacturing of textile goods. It has a wide variety of segments, ranging from traditional handloom products, handicrafts, wool, and silk products, to the integrated textile industry.

3.4 Jewellery Industry: The jewellery industry of India is the most promising industry in the country. Indian women and Indian jewellery are the two terms that are related to each other inextricably. It comprises gold, silver, stones, gems, and so on. The design and variety of the jewellery varies in accordance with the regions and religions of our country. The jewellery industry of India contributes significantly to the GDP of the country's economy.

4. Covid-19: The Global Pandemic

Covid-19 is an infectious disease that is caused by a virus, known as the coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak as a health emergency on 30th January 2020 and listed it as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. A pandemic is a disease that affects several countries or continents at the same time. It has a larger impact and kills more people than an epidemic.

Coronaviruses are found in animals but humans are rarely infected by these animals. Coronaviruses are of different forms. Colds and other respiratory (nose, mouth, and lung) illnesses may be caused by some of them. Other coronaviruses, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), may cause more serious illnesses. Coronaviruses have got their name from their presence under the microscope, which resembles a corona or crown, with pointed structures surrounding them.

Most people who are infected with the coronavirus suffer from mild to moderate respiratory sickness and can recover with some care and treatment. Older people and those who are suffering from some medical illnesses like heart diseases, diabetes, respiratory diseases, cancer, and so on are more seriously affected by the virus. It is a communicable disease and can be spread through saliva or nasal discharge when an infected patient coughs or sneezes and it transmits to the other person through his/her hands, eyes, nose, and mouth.

Again in February, 2021 a second wave of the covid-19 came in India with a high rise in the intensity and number of cases. The second wave proved to be more dangerous as it resulted in more number of cases and deaths this time. The infection proved to be more serious and more people lost their lives. There also incurred a shortage of oxygen cylinders. The Scientists and researchers have found out that there are more waves to come in the near future. However, the Government of India has started the process of vaccination after which India will be able to reduce the spread and severity of the disease.

5. SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures)

A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a collection of steps that are needed to be followed by an employee to properly function in an organization. In relation to Covid-19, the Government has listed various SOPs for the continuance of different activities undertaken in the economy. The SOPs were developed according to the number of cases and the respective states.

On November 23, 2020, the UP Government laid down various SOPs for conducting a wedding and other functions in the State in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. Outside the containment areas, these functions are permitted, but at a reduced capacity. According to the guidelines, the total number of guests attending a wedding function should be 50 percent of the wedding hall's capacity, but the number should not exceed 100. Face masks, sanitizers, and thermal scanners will be needed at the venue by the organizers. Guests will also be required to maintain social distancing. There will be no further restrictions on DJs and wedding music bands. However, in the containment zones, such functions and gatherings are not allowed.

Further on November 27, 2020, the Government stated that holding wedding ceremonies would not require written approval from local authorities. It also stated that the members of wedding bands and DJs would not be counted among the guests permitted to attend a wedding. It is not mandatory to notify the police or district administration of the location prior to carrying out marriage activities. If any police brutality is reported, however, strict measures will be taken. Officers will have to face the consequences. In addition, it clarified that the UP Government would not tolerate any kind of harassment in the name of the Covid-19 guidelines. "Instead, citizens should remain vigilant and inspire others to

obey the Covid-19 guidelines", it said. The government also stated that strict actions will be taken and FIR will be lodged against the people who are violating the SOPs and guidelines in relation to Covid-19.

After the occurrence of the second wave, on May 18, 2021, the UP Government revised the existing guidelines due to the rise in the cases. According to the new guidelines, the total number of people who can attend the wedding and other functions shall not exceed 25, in both open and closed places. In addition to this, there has to be strict social distancing prevailing in such functions and gatherings.

6. The Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Weddings

Couples who had expected to marry in 2020 were among those who were disappointed after the Covid-19 hit our lives hard. The lavish weddings have become an important part of Indian culture, and if there was anything that could put a damper on it, it was the Covid-19 pandemic. On March 24, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation to declare Covid-19 as a national emergency that has claimed and changed the lives of many people since then. On account of the outbreak being considered a national emergency, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown. The Indian wedding industry, which was among the first ones to be affected by the virus, came to a halt overnight, with many weddings scheduled for the first half of 2020 being postponed or cancelled.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forever altered our lives. 'Big Fat Indian Weddings' are no longer the same. Weddings have become much more smaller and intimate as social distancing has become the 'buzzword'. Wedding planners, caterers, decorators, musicians, artists, photographers, artisans, freelancers, dancers, and choreographers, are all affected by the global pandemic. There are clearly no tasks, and wedding planners are scrambling to stay afloat while adjusting to changing times through new technologies. The wedding professionals are combining technology to enable couples to connect with loved ones all around the world through the virtual platform, without being physically present.

According to industry estimates, India hosts 10-12 million weddings each year. Thousands of cancellations have now occurred. In November, Kanika Subbiah, proprietor of Wedding Wishlist, a wedding organizer firm, was planning approximately 30 weddings. In March, the number slid to four and in April just one. "The industry is feeling the pinch.

Weddings have just stopped. Most people have postponed their plans and the few, who are going ahead, have made it a smaller event. The industry is seeing a big blip in terms of revenue. Thankfully, the weddings are only getting postponed, not cancelled," she said. **(Narsimhan, 2020)**

The Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on businesses that rely on weddings and events. In March 2020, the Federal Government introduced strict social distancing rules that restricted wedding ceremonies to only five people; the couple, the celebrator, and two witnesses. In addition, social distancing should be followed, with a limit of one person per four square meters. According to IBIS World Senior Industry Analyst Yin Yeoh, these temporary restrictions are expected to constrain demand for industries that rely on weddings, including the Bridal Stores, Flower Retailing, Event Catering Services, Taxi, and Limousine Transport, and Professional Photography Services industries. IBISWorld estimates that downsizing, postponements and cancellations due to Covid-19 are estimated to cost wedding and events businesses over $670 million in 2019-2020. **(Yeoh, 2020)**

Table 1: Revenue Loss from Covid-19

Revenue Loss from Covid-19 (in $M)	
Bridal Stores Industry	108.6
Flower Retailing Industry	68.5
Event Catering Services Industry	329.7
Professional Photographic Services Industry	107.5
Taxi and Limousine Transport Industry	58
Total Estimated Loss	**672.2**

Source: IBIS World

One can say that 'marriages are made in heaven', but the grandeur and extravaganza of weddings are definitely made in India. While COVID-19 achieved the unexpected situation in India, with intimate and small weddings on Zoom becoming the go-to option. While many people have postponed their big large Indian wedding plans as we approach the end of the year, weddings have shrunk in size but they are back in business for the $50 billion industry – a recovery is on the cards. **(Dash, 2020)**

7. The Pandemic's Effect on the Indian Weddings

- **Pandemic wedding:** With the pandemic apparently never-ending, most people have taken to dealing with the spectre of Covid-19 around, and although prohibitions remain in place, many have worked within the rules to marry.

- **Eco-friendly:** Weddings are becoming more effective, with people opting to reduce waste and also cull large invitation lists, which is necessary now more than ever – in this age of social-isolation.

- **Hyperlocal:** Planners are turning their attention to sourcing supplies from nearby sites, such as flowers and food, in order to reduce the event's carbon footprint while also addressing Covid-19 transportation concerns.

- **Efficiency:** Brides and grooms are increasingly adopting the idea of a wedding registry, which allows them to list things they would like as presents, reducing the amount of waste created by gifts.

- **Tech-savvy:** After the pandemic, everybody was working from home, including wedding planners. With many families being able to conveniently shop and select from online or digital catalogues, professionals may use technology to work for them, including sending out digital invitations. **(The Economic Times, 2020)**

8. Conclusion

Indian wedding has undergone a major change during the Covid-19 pandemic. The wedding industry has faced unfavorable horizons due to this pandemic and as a result, it has affected the overall economy. A whole lot of wedding professionals including wedding planners, artisans, musicians, decorators, caterers, videographers, choreographers, freelancers, and so on, are all affected by this global pandemic. Some weddings were cancelled, some were postponed and some were conducted with the minimum guest list. Initially, the wedding professionals had no tasks, but now they are trying to get their foot back in the industry. They are integrating technology to enable couples and families to get connected virtually throughout the wedding. The priorities of the consumers have changed all over. The couples are now getting married in accordance with the guidelines of the government. The planners are trying to organize the marriage from food to decor to everything through local sources. The couples, along with their families

are becoming tech-savvy and conducting weddings through virtual platforms. Although the Indian wedding industry has witnessed a slowdown, but there is scope for the industry now to function better and recover its position in the global economy.

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