An exploratory study into the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in Ireland in the lead up to their wedding day.

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Abstract:

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An exploratory study into the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in Ireland in the lead up to their wedding day.

This research looked at the different platforms in which a bride can be reached whilst planning for a wedding. Generally, purchases for a wedding are significant and require a considerable amount of research and planning. This thesis aimed to investigate the main motivations behind the purchase decisions that a bride makes in the lead up to her wedding. Three main areas were investigated: 1) online wedding forums and the emphasis brides place on advice and opinions shared there, 2) rituals and the role they play in bridal consumption and 3) other influences on decision making such as the values placed on the opinions of the bride's family and friends and the role they play in consumption habits. This was a quantitative study, where 202 brides were contacted via an online forum and asked to complete a questionnaire on their decision making habits whilst wedding planning. Findings revealed that participants place much emphasis on online wedding platforms. Rituals and traditional weddings remain important aspects of wedding planning, with particular importance placed on the ritual of wearing a wedding dress. The opinions of others was discovered to be of less importance within this study than the opinions of the bride and the fiancé, which is interesting as it disagrees with some of the notable literature available. These findings have implications for marketers as they determine the importance of online wedding forums as a means for contacting brides, and also reiterate the importance of the marketing of wedding goods as part of a ritual.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION:

1.1: Overview:

For most brides, the planning of a wedding is something that is only undertaken once (Choy & Loker, 2004), and as the majority of brides do not have a lot of experience when it comes to this, they often rely on others for advice (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Despite brides traditionally being seen as the ones who have adequate knowledge to plan a wedding, it is generally perceived as being a new and daunting experience for them (Wiley, 2011). It is noted that the groom can play a part in wedding planning, however, planning a wedding is often seen as being stereotypical and for the bride, and hence they are seen as the main consumer (Humble et al, 2008). The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in the lead up to their wedding day. This research will investigate what influences brides whilst making the important purchase decisions that contribute to their wedding day, and also what sources they turn to in order to get advice.

During the planning of a wedding, brides generally become consumers for products and services that they generally would not consume on a day to day basis (Kalmijn, 2004). They are often tasked with making purchase decisions of a much grander scale than they would generally be used to, and potentially ever will be exposed to again (Wiley, 2011). They are therefore susceptible to marketing ploys from all avenues, and their purchase habits can be influenced in many ways, and from many angles (Kalmijn, 2004). The bridal industry must take into account the different influences and influencers that play a role in the purchase decisions that are made by the bride, and in order to be successful, they should focus their marketing with these influences in mind. In the current thesis, the influence of online communities on wedding planning will be investigated, as well as the importance placed on the ritualistic aspects of wedding planning, and the role that others play in the decisions made by a bride in the lead up to the wedding day.

1.2: Online Communities:

There are many avenues that marketers within the bridal industry can take in order to reach their target audience. In recent years, there has been a major growth in the popularity of online discussion boards (Fong & Burton, 2010). The emergence of these online discussion boards have played a role in the purchase decisions that a bride makes whilst planning a wedding, with customers now being able to share their opinions and recommendations online, impacting the success that goods and services may have (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). Given the ease that a bride can search for suppliers and reviews on products or services relating to their wedding online, and the emergence of wedding forums, obtaining information that may have previously been more difficult to find has become substantially easier (Nelson & Otnes, 2005). However, due to the ease that information can be obtained online, there is a lot more competition for suppliers as they are now competing with a much larger market than they would have previously. The information obtained on these online discussion websites are often seen as being more credible than any information released by a firm (Brown, 2007 - Fong & Burton, 2010). Wedding forums become all the more relevant to marketers within the bridal industry as a result, with feedback and suggestions provided by other brides who have experience with different suppliers being important here (Fong & Burton, 2010). The research conducted within this study aims to discover the importance that brides place on online communities and the advice that they receive within them, and in turn the effect that this advice plays in their purchase decisions whilst planning for their wedding within an Irish context.

1.3: Rituals:

Online communities are not the only means that marketers within the bridal industry have of reaching brides who are in the process of planning for their wedding. Despite the wider variation in approaches and structures of weddings in today's society, there are certain components which are universally perceived as important to maintain. The wedding ceremony is seen by many as a rite of passage, or an entrance into adulthood (Otnes & Lowry, 1993). Rituals can be of the utmost importance to some brides and can have a deep significance within the confines of a wedding (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Throughout this study, the importance of rituals and the role that rituals play in the wedding day will be examined. The desire to follow traditions plays a role in the consumption behavior of a bride planning a wedding. Otnes and Lowry (1993) define the wedding dress as being the most

sacred artefact within the ritual of a wedding, but other rituals include the importance of having a Church wedding, and the importance of the wedding cake. This research aims to establish if tradition plays a key role within the purchase of goods and services for a wedding, as well as investigating if there are any individual differences in the importance placed on these ritualistic elements.

The type of wedding ceremony is a key factor within this research. Some brides choose to get married in a church for religious reasons, however, a lot of couples who choose to get married in a church do so for ritualistic reasons (Wiley, 2011). This study will ascertain if a relationship exists between those who are planning a religious ceremony and those who believe in the importance of a traditional wedding in an attempt to see if religious weddings are held for ritualistic reasons rather than religious ones.

1.4: Other influences of decision making:

Although online wedding communities and rituals are seen as being the most important motivators and influences with regard to the consumption habits of brides, there are other influencers that are also considered to be of importance. It has been stated that in many cases, it is the parents of the bride and groom who decide on the type of wedding to be held (Kalmijn, 2004). The literature suggests that friends also play a significant role in directing the consumption habits of brides (Fairchild, 2013). The current study will investigate the importance that brides place on the opinions of others who are close to them within the lead up to the wedding day. It will investigate if the opinions of family and friends play a role in the motivation of the consumption habits of a bride, and the other areas that marketers within the bridal industry need to be aware of whilst marketing to their target consumer. It will also investigate if brides place importance on bridal magazines to ensure that they are "doing the right thing" (Currie, 1993, p 410).

1.5: Purpose of study:

There has been some research carried out on the consumption habits of brides and the motivations behind their purchase decisions (Otnes & Lowry, 1993 - Thomas & Peters, 2011). However, given the vast amounts of money that is spent on weddings each year worldwide, and that each bride finds themselves in a situation where a large amount of

purchase decisions need to be made, it is rather surprising that there is not a significant amount of literature available, with few focused specifically in the Irish context. The average spend on a wedding in Ireland was €19,625.00 in 2013, not including a honeymoon (Mrs2Be.ie, 2014). Given that the average household income in Ireland in 2013 was just under €46,000 (CSO, 2014), this is a vast proportion of income that is spent on what appears to be a rather under researched area. There appears to be a need for research into understanding the consumption habits of brides whilst planning their weddings, and what drives them to consume what they do. By understanding how and why a bride makes purchase decisions regarding their wedding, those within the bridal industry have the opportunity to better satisfy the needs of their consumer and in turn, increase their profitability and market share.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the main motivations behind bridal consumption. Specifically, this study aims to examine:

(1) The role that online communities play in the consumption habits of brides during the planning of a wedding, and the level of importance that a bride places on the opinions expressed by others within these communities. Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) state that opinions and advice put forward within online communities can play a major role in the success or failure of goods and services. Literature suggests that consumers often view online recommendations as having greater credibility than any market initiated communication (Fong & Burton, 2010). This study aims to observe if the availability and accessibility of these online recommendations play an important role in the purchase decisions that a bride makes whilst planning for a wedding.

(2) The role that long standing wedding rituals play in the consumption habits of a bride during the planning of a wedding. Rituals have played a role in weddings for centuries, and many goods and services are purchased specifically to enhance these rituals (Wiley 2011). Wedding customs and traditions are often passed through generations (Kalmijn, 2004), and according to literature, play a significant role in the consumption habits of a bride. This study aims to discover if brides feel tradition is important within their wedding and whether this impacts the motivations behind the key purchases such as the wedding dress.

(3) The role that family and friends play in the wedding consumption of a bride in the lead up to the wedding day. The literature is contradictory here. It has been stated that parents and family and friends play a role in the purchase decisions that brides make (Fairchild, 2013 - Kalmijn, 2004). However, Wiley (2008) stated that brides are becoming more independent and do not require the opinions of others when making important consumption decisions. This study aims to discover the level of importance that brides place on others whilst planning for a wedding.

Chapter 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in the lead up to the wedding day. A review of available literature has been conducted in order to provide justification for the development of the research objectives. A synopsis of the literature reviewed will be discussed in this chapter.

2.2: Online Communities:

Within the bridal industry, there are many different ways to communicate with and to target consumers. With the rise of the internet, online mediums are becoming an increasingly popular and are a powerful means of reaching out to brides. Social media has grown dramatically in popularity and is often used as a platform for advertising whilst allowing consumers to connect with one another and to engage with brands that they are interested in (Chu & Kim, 2013). It is possible for consumers to get word of mouth information from other consumers via the Internet. There has been a significant growth in the use of and in the popularity of electronic discussion boards (Fong & Burton, 2010), which has led to a new means for the recommendation of products and services between people who have generally never met one another. Customer comments that are put forward on the Internet can have a significant impact on the success of goods and services (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). Perhaps this is due to the fact that through the Internet, consumers can obtain information from a huge variety of people with whom they could generally not receive information and feedback from, people who have experience with products which are relevant to the consumer. Due to this, online communities are considered to be a more credible and a more reliable source of information than firm initiated communications (Brown, 2007). Fong and Burton (2010) echo this, stating that consumers often view online word of mouth as having greater credibility than any information that has been generated by the marketers, as the recommendation has come from a personal experience and is viewed as being trustworthy.

Online communities form when enough people participate in non-private discussions on a computer for long periods of time and they develop what are considered to be "social relationships" with other online participants (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007). There are consumption related online communities to be found everywhere on the internet, covering every type of subject matter. These consumption related online communities are networks of

12

people whose online interactions are based on shared knowledge, shared enthusiasm and interest in specific consumption activities.

The role that these online communities play in the consumption habits of brides has drastically risen over the past number of years, and marketers need to bear this in mind. According to Nelson and Otnes (2005), "Many brides use the internet as a resource because it enables them to easily access information and communicate with widely dispersed providers of wedding resources" (p. 148). In 2009 in the USA, 77% of brides used the internet to help aid their wedding planning and to help them decide which purchases to make (Peters, 2011). However, the growth in online communities is not limited to the United States, it can be seen worldwide. A recent survey carried out by popular Irish bridal website Mrs2Be.ie (2014) found that less than 10% of brides did not spend any time researching their wedding online, meaning over 90% of brides used online communities as a means of research at one stage during the planning of their wedding. This research was conducted online, however, it was not conducted within an online forum. One of the most used resources on wedding websites is the online forum (Nelson & Otnes, 2005). Research has shown that consumers visit these online forums to seek advice on goods and services they are considering purchasing, or to seek advice when they are unsure of what item or service to purchase (Nelson & Otnes, 2005). Brides who use online discussion boards often do so to recommend suppliers and websites, to put forward ideas, and to exchange marketing-related information. They are generally utilised by those who share similar interests with one another (Fong & Burton, 2010). Online communities are frequently utilised by those who wish to post queries and refer other consumers to useful suppliers or websites (Rettig, 2009). Brides use online communities in order to seek out advice from other brides who are experiencing some of the same emotions as them and also to seek meaning to brands that are primarily, and in some cases, solely focused on the wedding industry. According to Thomas (2011), brides would rather seek advice online from fellow brides, than to contact the retailer directly. This is due to the perception that there is trust within these online communities. Brides who participate in online communities feel that they are sharing in common experiences with other brides. Participants of these online communities believe that they are becoming better informed consumers, sharing in the knowledge of others who have been or are in a similar situation (Rettig, 2009).

In the quest to find the perfect wedding dress, brides consult magazines, wedding fairs, family, friends and television shows such as *Say Yes to the Dress* (Thomas & Peters, 2011).

Say Yes to the Dress is an American television show that is shown worldwide, documenting brides on their search for the perfect wedding dress in Kleinfields, a large bridal store in New York. Say Yes to the Dress averages at 1.7 million viewers per episode, not taking into account those who watch reruns on Netflix (Jacobs, 2012). According to Thomas and Peters (2011), since the ever increasing rise of the internet, brides are moving toward this platform in order to obtain information on searching for and purchasing the perfect dress. Wedding dress shopping is something that many brides would not have much experience with, and they often rely on others who have been through the process for advice and helpful tips. Brides who participate in these online communities consider other brides to be impartial participants in the planning of what is often considered to be the most important day of their lives. They feel a sense of duty to help one another in the planning of their special day according to Thomas and Peters (2011). In a study carried out by Weiss (2008), it was found that brides look at online ratings of bridal shops before they visit the shop in question. Within this study, it was discovered that the information found by the bride on the bridal shop influences the brides' attitude toward the shop without a visit ever being paid. The wedding industry take advantage of the fact that to most brides, planning a wedding is an event which will only occur once, and they provide as much information as possible for brides to plan their wedding, and to dream about type of wedding that they could have (Choy & Loker, 2004). Marketers need to bear in mind that these online communities are consumer dominated and are considered marketing communications to participants, where the seller of the product or service is independent of the company.

2.3: Weddings as Rituals:

Although online communities illustrate how aspects of wedding planning may have changed dramatically in recent years, other factors relating to the planning of a wedding remain constant. Since weddings are generally regarded as rituals, they come with a number of constraints which impact on the decisions which consumers feel they can make. According to Wiley (2011), rituals can be defined as "*a type of expressive, symbolic activity, constructed of multiple behaviours that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence*" (p. 1). Rituals have been celebrated as an important part of weddings for centuries, with many goods and services purchased specifically to enhance these rituals (Wiley, 2011). According to Corrado (2002), a wedding is an important ritual which has elaborate social codes and these social codes can

serve a powerful purpose of group integration. Weddings are seen to be one of the few rites of passage left in Western culture in which ritualistic beliefs and practices may be performed (Otnes & Lowry, 1993). The wedding ceremony is often seen as a rite of passage into adult life (Currie, 1993). Weddings are highly ritualised, expensive and significant occasions in most brides' lives. Wedding rituals have deep significance, including fantasy and social prowess (Thomas & Peters, 2011).

There are many parts of the wedding day that are associated with rituals. Some of the main rituals are the rings, the cake and the white wedding dress. Wedding rituals are very similar in many parts of the Western world, with wedding customs often being passed down between generations (Kalmijn, 2004). Literature available indicates that a wedding is seen as and marketed as a ritual (Otnes & Scott, 1996). These rituals can direct consumption.

The idea of what an ideal wedding should be can come from bridal magazines, film, the Internet, and even children's toys (Fairchild, 2013). Otnes (1996) believes that advertising plays an important role in forming, moulding and influencing brides to be to purchase products and / or services for their wedding by selling the concept of a ritual or tradition to them. There is intense pressure from all aspects for brides to play the role of the consumer correctly (Boden, 2003). However, there are contrasting views on this. According to Currie (1993), brides should feel free to do away with any tradition that they wish, or with all traditions if they wish. Brides may wish to have a modern twist on what is seen to be traditional. This is not always an easy option to follow however, with Rettig (2009) stating that from research conducted within online bridal communities, that it can seem like a bride is being pushed aside or viewed differently if they are seen to be doing something that is considered to be different from the norm.

There is a growing influence from the media over brides according to Riley (2011). An argument that can be made for this theory is the age old marketing campaign set out by De Beers diamond cartel, where they successfully, through the use of advertising, made the engagement ring "an inseparable part of courtship and married life" (Otnes & Scott, 1996, p35). Previous to this advertising campaign, the process of giving ones' loved one an engagement ring as a promise to be married was on the decline. However, due to the success of the advertising slogan from the above mentioned campaign, "A Diamond is Forever", De

Beers successfully ensured that the diamond engagement ring was to be forever seen as a ritual in the wedding process. Not only were De Beers successful in marketing the diamond ring successfully as part of the wedding ritual, but they were also successful in creating a myth for the "correct" amount of money that should be spent on the ring, attempting to control the high values of diamond engagement rings. According to Otnes and Scott (1996), De Beers ultimate hope was that the notion that a man should spend two months' salary on an engagement ring would become part of what is seen as the "norm" as much as, in the past, it would traditionally have been seen that the bride's father paid for the wedding. This is an example of wedding rituals play such an important role in the lives of people worldwide, throughout generations, from the moment a couple becomes engaged.

The wedding dress is one of the most important rituals in the wedding planning process. It is the most mentioned sacred artefact within the ritual of a wedding (Otnes & Lowry 1993). The quest to find the right dress is steeped in tradition, and is seen to be one of the most important decisions that a bride makes. The dress that is chosen by a bride reflects the taste and the value of the bride and is tied to her identity (Otnes & Lowry 1993). In a study carried out by Thomas (2011), it was found that it was every woman's dream to be seen as the most beautiful version of themselves on their wedding day and agreeing with this, Otnes and Scott (1996) state that ritual dictates that a woman is most beautiful on her wedding day. Marketers use this ideology to shape the thought process of a bride to be on her wedding day. Otnes and Scott (1996) states that the traditional way in which a bride is presented on her wedding day is "radiant, decorous and picture-perfect" (p43). According to Otnes and Lowry (1993), in order for a wedding to be seen as a proper wedding, the white dress must be featured. The selection of their wedding dress, for most brides, is viewed as an intense experience, in which the perfect dress is magically revealed to them. The purchase of the wedding dress is steeped in tradition and cultural significance (Thomas & Peters, 2011). A long white or ivory dress is considered to be the norm for what a wedding dress should look like (Fairchild, 2013 - Thomas & Peters, 2011 – Otnes & Scott, 1996).

In the search for the perfect dress, brides often communicate deep emotions related to the rituals associated with weddings, in particular with the search of the perfect dress (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Online communities play a role in this search. If a bride is considering moving

away from the traditional idea of a wedding dress, the idea may be put out to other brides within these online communities and seek their advice and opinions on veering away from what would be considered the norm (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Brides who use online communities appear to be substituting opinions that would previously have been sought from their mothers or their friends, for the opinions of strangers who they have met on these websites (Thomas & Peters, 2011). They use this medium to gauge what is considered to be an acceptable cultural norm in the modern times that they are in. Bonding can occur between strangers online when they are sharing experiences about the rituals that they are hoping to follow on their wedding day.

Another important aspect of the wedding ritual is where the ceremony will be held. 7 out of 10 couples who are getting married choose to do so in a church (Wiley, 2011). In Ireland, a survey conducted by popular Irish bridal website Mrs2Be.ie in June 2014 found that 3 out of 4 weddings conducted in Ireland in 2013 were conducted in a church. For some, this is down to their religious beliefs. However, according to Wiley (2011), a large percentage of couples choose to marry in a church for ritualistic reasons, in order to follow traditions rather than due to their religious beliefs. Brides can be strongly motivated by superstition and cultural values. In research carried out by Otnes and Lowry (1993) couples who expressed a desire to have their wedding ceremony take place in a church stated that they did so as they believe this legitimised their marriage. According to Kalmijn (2004), rituals during the marriage process can help reduce uncertainties that may build up during the planning process, and this can be a factor in the decision to marry in a church.

Traditional family rituals can be a decider on all factors relating to the planning of a wedding. Humble et al (2008) believes that planning a wedding can influence people to act in stereotypical ways. In the past, weddings have been seen as being for the bride rather than for both the bride and groom, and brides are traditionally seen as being the ones who have the most knowledge of planning a wedding, despite it generally being a new experience for the bride in as much as it is for the groom (Wiley, 2011). Humble et al (2008) believe that couples who defer to these traditional roles tend to not challenge any "rituals" which have come to be associated with weddings. It was found that these couples tend to purchase for their wedding based on what others have previously purchased, as they see different aspects

as rituals rather than what could be a personalised, individualistic experience (Humble et al, 2008).

2.4: Other Influences on decision making:

There are factors outside of online communities and rituals or customs that influence brides whilst planning their weddings. The parents of the bride and groom often play a large part in the planning of weddings. Research conducted by Kalmijn (2004) found that in many cases, it is not the bride and the groom who may decide to have a large wedding, it is their parents. Friends can also play a role in how a wedding is planned (Kalmijn, 2004). Couples take example from what their family and friends view a wedding to be (Fairchild, 2013). Kalmijn (2004) believes that couples are more likely to have a large wedding if their family and friends are in favour of this. However, a study carried out by Weiss (2008) contradicts these views. Results of a survey carried out amongst brides in wedding shops found that participants did not view the opinions of their friends and families as being important. Weiss (2008) suggests that perhaps this is due to brides becoming more modern and more independent, and putting less emphasis and value on the opinions of others.

Bridal magazines also play a role in influencing brides whilst in the planning process. According to the Mrs2Be.ie survey (2014), approximately 62% of brides spent between one and fifteen hours in an average week reading bridal magazines. This is a surprisingly large number when one takes into account that bridal magazines are published only quarterly in Ireland. According to Weiss (2008), it was found that the average bride in the United States reads 3.5 bridal magazines whilst engaged and spends twice as much time online researching in comparison to a single female.

Wedding rituals and customs can often be found and communicated to brides in popular magazines, at wedding fairs and in bridal magazines (Kalmijn, 2004). Most brides do not have experience at planning a wedding, and many rely on bridal magazines to ensure that they are "doing the right thing" (Currie, 1993, p 410). However, it has been noted by Currie (1993), that these bridal magazines do not necessarily make the planning of a wedding easier, as women often want their wedding to match the weddings that are shown in these magazines, and in order to follow these weddings, huge expense can be added. When planning a wedding, it appears that one thing can lead to another, the basic items are purchased such as the cake, the dress, the flowers and the cars, and then all of a sudden there

are so many more things added to the list (Currie, 1993). Currie (1993) also stated that almost every couple who were interviewed after their wedding had spent more than they anticipated and they were frequently critical about the level of consumption carried out before they got married.

2.5: Conclusion:

A study of literature available has noted some of the most important influencers with regards to brides who are planning weddings. Within the bridal industry, there are various ways in which marketers can communicate with and target consumers. With 77% of brides using the internet whilst wedding planning (Thomas & Peters, 2011), it is evident that the growth of online communities is significant and is an important tool which can be utilised by marketers who are hoping to influence brides consumption habits and purchase decisions in the lead up to their wedding day. Brides often use online wedding forums to recommend suppliers, to share ideas and to exchange market related information (Fong & Burton, 2010). Those who participate in these online communities often believe that they are better informed, as they are getting first hand recommendations, advice and reviews from others who are in a similar situation to their own (Rettig, 2009). According to the literature, brides feel a sense of duty to inform fellow brides of their experiences (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Literature suggests that brides place a great emphasis on the opinions and advice of other brides when they are shopping for their wedding dress (Thomas & Peters, 2011). This study aims to discover the importance that brides in Ireland place on these online wedding forums whilst wedding planning. It will investigate if online wedding forums have replaced the advice previously received from family and friends when shopping for a wedding dress, and how significant the opinions of other brides whilst shopping for a wedding dress are.

Online communities are often used by brides who are looking for advice regarding the ritualistic aspect of a wedding (Thomas & Peters, 2011). Brides who are considering moving away from a traditional aspect of a wedding often consult with other brides on these online wedding forums, in the search for advice and opinions. Rituals play an important role in the wedding day (Wiley, 2011), and many goods and services exist solely to enhance these wedding rituals. The current research aims to establish the importance that brides in Ireland place on having a traditional wedding. It will investigate if Irish brides believe that a wedding has to be traditional in order to be legitimate, if a bride has to wear a wedding dress in order

to be seen to have a proper wedding, as stated by Otnes and Lowry (1993). This research will also investigate if rituals play a part in the purchase decisions made by brides who are planning weddings, or if they are no longer viewed as important.

According to the literature, another factor that contributes to the consumption habits of brides planning weddings is the parents of the bride and groom. A study conducted by Kalmijn (2004) found that couples will decide on their wedding size depending on the desires of their parents. Friends are also seen to play an important role in influencing brides with regard to their wedding plans (Fairchild, 2013). However, some literature available is contradictory to this, stating that brides no longer place a big importance on the opinions and desires of their family and friends, and now focus on what they alone want (Weiss, 2008). Within this study, the researcher aims to establish the importance that brides place on the opinions of their family and friends whilst wedding planning, and discover if their opinions play a role in the decisions that are made in the lead up to the wedding day.

Chapter 3:

METHODOLOGY:

3.1: Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in the lead up to their wedding day. Specifically, there are three main motivations that the researcher intends to investigate, and the levels of importance that brides place on them.

Objective 1: To investigate the importance of online communities to Irish brides. The researcher intends to investigate the role that online wedding forums play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. In doing this, a number of sub objectives are also outlined:

Sub-Objective 1.1: To what extent Irish brides use online wedding forums.

Sub-Objective 1.2: The level of importance that brides place on the advice and opinions received on online wedding forums.

Sub-Objective 1.3: The relationship that exists between brides who use online wedding forums and those who find wedding forums useful.

Objective 2: To investigate the importance placed on weddings as rituals. The researcher intends to investigate the role that rituals play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. Wiley (2011) stated that many goods and services are often purchased for weddings specifically to enhance specific rituals. Wedding rituals are often passed down between generations, playing an important role in the day (Kalmijn, 2004). In doing this, a number of sub-objectives are outlined:

Sub-objective 2.1: The importance that Irish brides place on traditional weddings.

Sub-Objective 2.2: The importance of the wedding dress and other aspects of rituals to brides.

Sub-objective 2.3: The relationship that exists between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and those who choose to have a religious ceremony.

Objective 3: To investigate the values placed on the opinions of others whilst wedding planning. The researcher intends to investigate the role that family and friends play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland.

Sub-Objective 3.1: Who the main influencer on the bride is whilst wedding planning.

Sub-Objective 3.2: The importance placed on the opinions of others whilst organising important aspects of the wedding.

3.2: Overview of methodology:

Saunders et al (2009) defines research methodology as "the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods applied" (p 595).

As outlined in the objectives above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the consumption habits of brides whilst planning for their weddings. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the main driving factors behind the reasoning for the choice of suppliers and products that brides purchase for the wedding day. To assess the consumption habits of brides, objectives were tested based on the data that was collected through an online survey completed by brides who were currently engaged and participating in some form of consumer behaviour relating directly to the wedding day. The specific methods used by the researcher for this study are explained fully within this chapter.

3.3: The Research Design:

This study employs a quantitative cross sectional design. Online surveys were used to assess the consumption behaviour of brides who were planning their wedding. This survey was designed to discover the relationships between various aspects of the decision making by brides. There are two approaches to research, deduction and induction. The researcher selected the deduction approach whilst conducting the research as the deductive approach allows the researcher to test a hypotheses and to answer questions relating to research.

3.4: Sampling / Sample selection:

As with all research questions, it was impractical to collect data from each bride who was engaged to be married. Time constraints and budget constraints also played a factor here. Therefore a sample was selected from the population of people preparing to be married. It has been argued that sampling can give a higher overall accuracy to the results than a census may (Henry (1990) as cited in Saunders et all, 2009).

Non-probability sampling was chosen as the sampling method. Purposive and snowball sampling were chosen as the means of selecting respondents, both of which are non-probability. With non-probability sampling, the probability of each case being chosen from the population available is not known, therefore caution should be drawn when generalising using statistical analysis. Brides were given a web link to follow to complete the survey. They were also asked to recruit other subjects amongst their acquaintances.

3.5: Research instrument

The survey measured brides' attitudes towards the selection of their wedding venue and their wedding dress, their attitudes towards online communities, the importance that they place on rituals within their wedding as a whole and specific popular wedding traditions, and the importance that they place on the opinions of others that they would be in contact with whilst planning for their wedding.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, Questions 1 through 5 categorised the demographic of the participant, in terms of age, gender, relationship status, level of education and current employment. The survey was created in such a way that those who answered "single", "married", "divorced" or "other" were directed to the end of the survey, as the survey was solely aimed at those who are currently engaged and in the process of planning a wedding. Questions 6 through 10 were questions which were developed to establish the level of planning that has been carried out to date by the bride. These questions were measured on a 7 point Likert scale (very likely up to not at all likely / extremely important to not at all important).

The questionnaire was formatted in such a way that the participant could not proceed to the next question until the current question was answered, which greatly reduced the number of omissions within the questionnaires. Saunders et al (2009) stated that all forms of primary

research should be coded, regardless of it being quantitative or qualitative research. SPSS was used to statistically analyse the data provided by the participants.

A series of Likert scale questions were developed to determine the importance placed on various aspects of wedding planning. A study of the literature suggested that with the growing popularity of the internet, online forums are becoming an increasingly popular means of reaching consumers (Chu & Kim, 2013). Thomas and Peters (2011) suggest that many brides use the internet in order to access advice and reviews on providers of wedding resources. A series of questions were developed within this survey in order to ascertain 1) If Irish brides frequent online wedding forums, 2) How often Irish brides frequent online wedding forums and 3) If the advice and opinions obtained here played a role in the purchase decisions made by brides.

Literature suggests that rituals are of major importance within the context of a wedding (Kalmijn, 2004). A Likert scale question was developed to determine if traditional weddings are important to Irish brides. Thomas and Peters (2011) stated that the most important aspect of wedding planning is the purchase of the wedding dress. Further Likert scale questions were developed to determine the importance placed on the wedding dress within the context of a wedding, as well as the wedding cake within the ritual of a wedding, as Currie (1993) stated that the cake was a basic item always purchased for a wedding. Respondents were asked what type of wedding ceremony they were having, in order to determine any relationships between traditional weddings and the type of wedding ceremony.

A study of the literature suggested that family and friends play an important role in the decisions that a bride makes whilst planning for her wedding (Fairchild, 2013 - Kalmijn, 2004). A series of questions were developed in order to ascertain who the main influences are whilst planning a wedding. These questions were developed on a 7 point Likert scale, rating from Not at all important to Extremely Important.

Weiss (2008) stated that the average bride in the United States reads 3.5 bridal magazines whilst engaged. A further question was developed in order to discover if wedding magazines are an important influencer on brides who are planning their wedding.

3.6: Procedure

A questionnaire was created on the website www.qualtrics.com (Appendix). A cover note was attached to the questionnaire, explaining the nature of the study. As non-probability sampling was being used, there was no means for calculating the response rate. The respondents were asked a series of questions in an attempt to understand the levels of importance that they placed on various factors within the wedding planning process.

In order to find participants to complete the survey, a sample size had to be decided upon. It was decided to use the self-selection sampling and the need for participants was publicised and data collected from all who responded. Contact was made with popular wedding website, shop and forum, www.weddingsonline.ie and www.mrs2be.ie. www.weddingsonline.ie. Weddingsonline.ie and Mrs2be.ie are popular, predominately Irish, websites which focus on all things wedding, with real wedding information, dress inspiration, vendor locators, weekly wedding theme / colour inspirations, an online shop and a wedding forum. The customer services manager from weddingsonline.ie agreed to post links to the survey, and the administrative manager of Mrs2be.ie allowed the researcher to post a new topic in the forum asking others to complete the survey, and all who agreed were directed to the survey through a link. The users of these websites are predominately female, preparing to be married.

Participants did not receive compensation for completing the survey. Each participant had to be engaged in order to qualify for the survey, and in order to complete the survey. Should someone who attempted to complete the survey choose to select that they had any relationship status other than "engaged", then they would be directed to the end of the survey as they did not meet the requirements decided on by the researcher. By surveying brides who are actively researching their own wedding, the researcher was able to reach the target audience promptly and also able to draw on current responses to current situations, rather than relying on post humus memories of their time planning their wedding, and also running the risk of brides having different memories of the factors influencing their decisions once their wedding day had come and gone.

3.7: Ethics:

All ethical implications have to be considered when conducting research. There are four main ethical issues to consider when conducting business research as cited by Diener and Crandwell (Bryman and Bell 2009)

- Whether there is harm to participants
- Whether there is a lack of informed consent
- Whether deception is involved
- Whether there is an invasion of privacy

Bryman and Bell (2009) state that the researcher should communicate the benefits of the research to everyone involved in it. The researcher notified the participants of the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement in the research and informed them that their participation was completely voluntary and that if they choose to withdraw from the research, they could do so at any stage. The privacy of each participant was upheld, and they were informed that no personal data would be given to anyone without their prior consent.

Chapter 4:

FINDINGS AND RESULTS:

<u>4.1: Characteristics of sample:</u>

A total of 202 participants conducted the survey by following the links posted on Mrs2Be.ie and weddingsonline.ie. It was the intention of the researcher to only collect data from those currently engaged to be married. Question 1 of the survey was to determine the relationship status of each individual who participated. This enabled the filtering out of any participant who was not at that time engaged to be married. All participants who chose "single", "married" or "other" were directed to the end of the survey, as they were not compatible with the desired target audience. Due to this filter, a total of 60 participants did not answer any further questions. A total of 142 participants progressed to the remainder of the survey.

<u>4.2: Descriptive statistics:</u>

3 of the participants who completed the survey were male. It should be noted that there are several questions within the survey that are about choosing wedding dresses. In order for accurate results to be achieved with all questions, the respondents who were male did not see these questions. 83% of respondents were aged between 25 and 35, with 8% aged between 18 and 24 and 9% aged between 36 and 45. None of the respondents were aged 46 or above. This could be due to the accessibility of the survey, as it was only available to those who are online, and perhaps this suggests that older brides do not frequent online forums as often as their younger counterparts. 85% of participants had a third level degree or higher, with 94% of those surveyed being in full or part time employment (87.1% in full time employment / 7.2% in part time employment).

30% of respondents were to be married within the next 3 months, 14% within 6 months, 31% within the next year and the remaining 25% were planning on getting married in more than one year. Of all surveyed, only 7% had not yet began making concrete wedding plans. 93% of all participants had chosen and booked their wedding venue, which, within the confines of this study, places an emphasis on the importance of the wedding venue to Irish brides. This can be seen in Figure 1. 56% of brides had chosen and paid a deposit on their wedding dress.
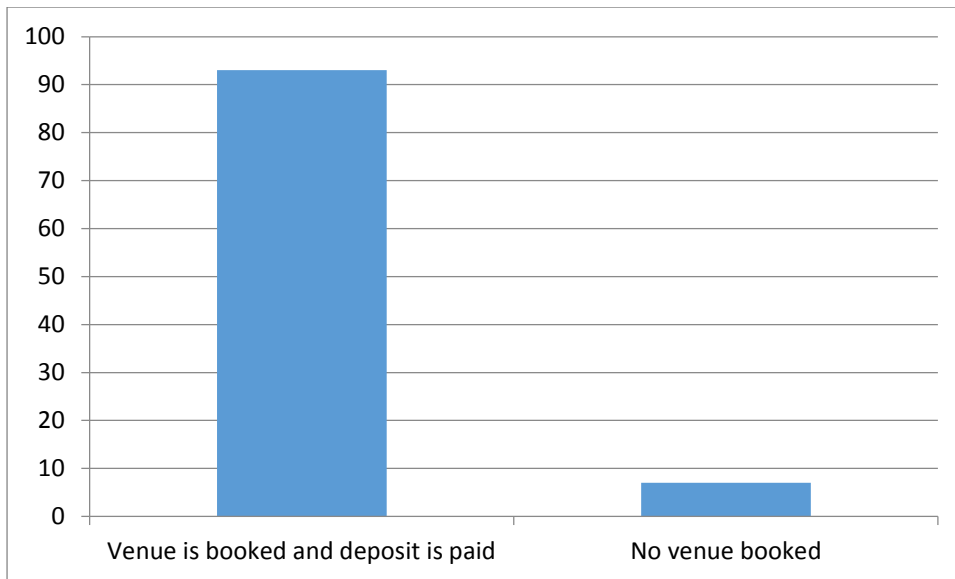
Figure 1: Percentage of Irish brides who have booked their wedding venue

4.3: Objective 1: The importance of Online Communities:

Based on the results found in this study, it was found that 87% of brides use online wedding forums when researching for their wedding, however this statistic is unsurprising given that participants were recruited from wedding forums.

Correlational analysis:

To address objective 1, a series of Spearman's rho correlations were conducted to establish the relationship between participants' responses to various Likert scale questions in the survey. The first correlation aimed to determine the relationship between those who use these online wedding forums and those who find these forums useful. This analysis showed a weak positive correlation between the two (r = .348, p = .000). A Spearman's rho correlation also shows a moderate relationship between those who use online wedding forums often with those who find the forums useful (r - .433, p = .000). A Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to establish the importance that the brides who completed this survey placed on online wedding forums. This Spearman's rho revealed a statistically significant relationship between the percent who find wedding forums useful, and the percent using online wedding forums to get opinions and advice for their weddings. (r = .751, p = .000) This statistic, though very strong, is of little surprise as those who use online wedding forums do so in order to get advice and opinions for the most part.

A moderate relationship was also evident between those who use online wedding forums often with those who are likely to purchase a product or book a supplier based on reviews and recommendations they read on these online wedding forums (Spearman's rho correlation, r = .450, p = .000). It is interesting to note that there is a weak correlation between those who go to online wedding forums to seek advice and opinions, and those who book suppliers or purchase products based on reviews and advice received on these websites (Spearman's rho, r = .337, p = .000). This can be seen from Figure 2.

			Use online forums to get advice for wedding	I find online forums useful	How often would you use online forums	Likelihood of booking supplier based on online reviews
Finished	Pearson Correlation	1	0.023	-0.048	-0.024	-0.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.793	0.578	0.785	0.652
	N	202	135	135	135	134
Use online forums to get advice for wedding	Pearson Correlation	0.023	1	.725**	.368**	.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.793		0	0	0
	N	135	135	135	135	134
I find online forums useful	Pearson Correlation	-0.048	.725**	1	.433**	.450**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.578	0		0	0
How often would you use online forums	N	135	.368**	.433**	1	.309**
	Pearson Correlation	-0.024	0	0		0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.785	135	135	135	134
Likelihood of booking supplier based on online reviews	N	135				
	Pearson Correlation	-0.039	.337**	.450**	.309**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.652	0	0	0	
	N	134	134	134	134	134

Figure 2: Spearman's rho correlations investigating relationships between perceived benefits of online forums.

Within the confines of this study, only 7% of brides' credit advice and reviews read on online wedding forums as the primary reason for their choice of wedding venue, with 81% of brides choosing their wedding venue due to personal preference. It is even more interesting to note that within the confines of this study, none of those surveyed credited advice and reviews from online wedding forums as the reason for their choice of wedding dress, with 91% of brides choosing their dress because of personal preference. 5% of respondents stated that the main thing that influenced them when they were planning their wedding was online wedding forums.

A Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to establish whether there was a relationship between brides who find online wedding forums useful and brides who believes it was important to have a traditional wedding. The data suggests that there is a weak relationship between the two (r = .218, p = .011).

4.4: Objective 2: The importance of Wedding Rituals:

To address objective 2, participants of this study were asked if it was important for them to have a traditional wedding. 29% of respondents did not think that a traditional wedding was important. This can be seen in Figure 3.
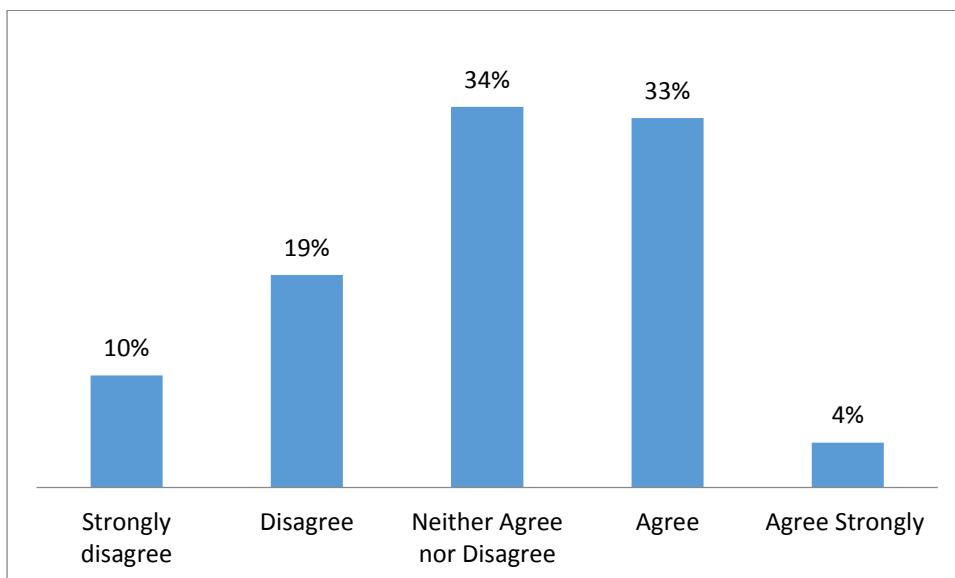

Figure 3: The importance of having a traditional wedding

A Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to see if there was a relationship between the age of the bride and the importance of a traditional wedding, There was no correlation between the two (r = .076, p = .381).

A series of questions were put to the participants of this study in order to ascertain their views of the importance of the wedding dress in an Irish wedding. 87% of brides surveyed stated that it was important for them to wear a wedding dress on their wedding day. A Spearman's rho correlation was conducted to establish if there was a relationship between brides who believed in the importance of having a traditional wedding and those who believed that it is important to wear a wedding dress on their wedding day. The results of this test showed that there was a moderate positive relationship between the two (r = .410, p = .000).
A Spearman's rho test was carried out to see if there was a relationship between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and those who believed it is important to have a wedding cake on their wedding day. This test showed only a weak correlation between the two (r = .274, p = .001). These results can be seen in Figure 4.
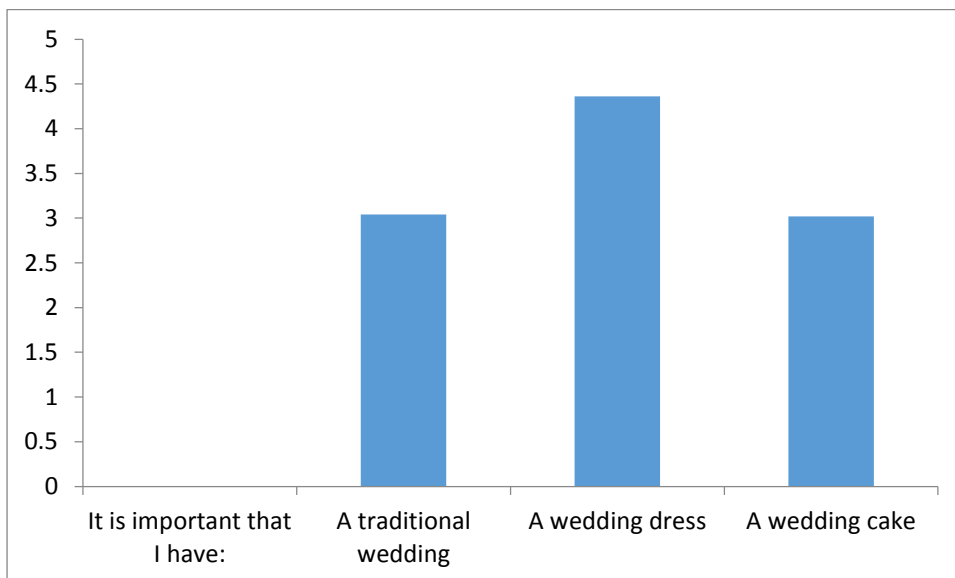
Figure 4: Importance placed on core aspects of a wedding (1-5 refers to mean level of importance)

A further Spearman's rho correlation was carried out to discover if there was a relationship between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and brides who value the opinion of other brides. This test showed a weak relationship between the two (r = .228, p = .008). Although this is only a weak correlation, it does support the literature in a

31

sense as a series of Spearman's rho tests conducted to establish a relationship between brides who believe in the importance of traditional weddings and brides who value the opinions of their fiancé, family, fiancés family and their friends all showed no relationship at all (fiancé - r = .050, p = .566; family – r = .127, p = .145; fiancés family – r = .113, p = .194; friends – r = .163, p = .059).

74% of brides surveyed within this study stated they were having a religious ceremony. This can be seen in Figure 5.
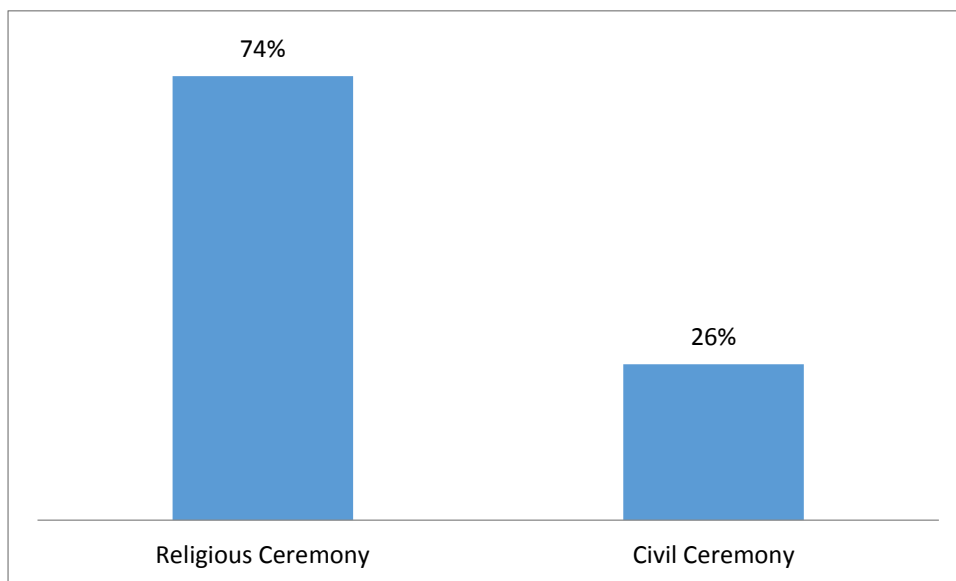

Figure 5: Percentage of brides who are having a religious ceremony vs percentage of brides who are having a civil ceremony

A series of independent t-tests were conducted to establish whether there were any differences between brides who were planning a religious ceremony compared to those who were not. It was found that those planning a religious ceremony placed more importance on having a traditional wedding, t (132) = 8.540; p = .000, with these brides giving a mean rating of 3.42 (SD = .771), compared to those who were planning a civil ceremony (mean = 2.03; SD = .985). These t-tests also established that brides who were planning a religious ceremony placed more importance on wearing a wedding dress, t (129) = 3.497; p = .001, with these brides giving a mean rating of 4.54 (SD = .737), compared to those who were planning a civil ceremony (mean = 3.94; SD = 1.127).

The independent t-tests that were conducted to establish if there were any differences between brides who were planning a religious ceremony compared to those who were not established that brides who were planning a religious ceremony placed more importance on

the opinions of other brides, t (132) = 2.184; p = .031 with these brides giving a mean rating of 3.80 (SD = 1.414), compared to brides who were planning a civil ceremony (mean = 3.17; SD = 1.581). This can be seen in Figure 6.

Religious ceremony		Mean
It is important that I have a traditional wedding	Yes (religious)	3.42
	No (civil or blessing)	2.03
It is important I wear a wedding dress on my wedding day	Yes (religious)	4.54
	No (civil or blessing)	3.94
If I didn't have a wedding cake, it would feel like something was missing	Yes (religious)	3.14
	No (civil or blessing)	2.71
I have managed to stick to my budget so far	Yes (religious)	3.46
	No (civil or blessing)	3.29
I use online wedding forums to get advice / opinions for my wedding	Yes (religious)	4.40
	No (civil or blessing)	4.20
I find online wedding forums useful	Yes (religious)	4.35
	No (civil or blessing)	4.20
How often would you use online forums when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	5.88
	No (civil or blessing)	5.66
How likely are you to book a supplier or purchase wedding supplies based on reviews you read on t...	Yes (religious)	5.34
	No (civil or blessing)	5.37
How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	6.23
	No (civil or blessing)	6.40
How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	5.00
	No (civil or blessing)	4.71
How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	4.46
	No (civil or blessing)	4.34
How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	4.33
	No (civil or blessing)	3.94
How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding	Yes (religious)	3.80
	No (civil or blessing)	3.17

Figure 6: Differences between brides planning Religious Ceremony vs brides planning Civil Ceremony (mean average 0-7)

4.5: Objective 3: The importance of the opinions of others:

In order to address objective 3, a series of questions were put to the participants in order to establish the importance that Irish brides place on the opinions of others whilst planning their wedding. When asked what the main things that influence the purchase decisions that the respondent makes whilst purchasing goods and services for their wedding are, only 3% of participants chose their family to be the most important, with 2% choosing their friends, and 32.1% stating that their fiancés opinion was the most important. However, 53.7% of those who participated in this study stated that their own opinion was the most important when it came to making these purchase decisions. This can be seen in Figure 7.
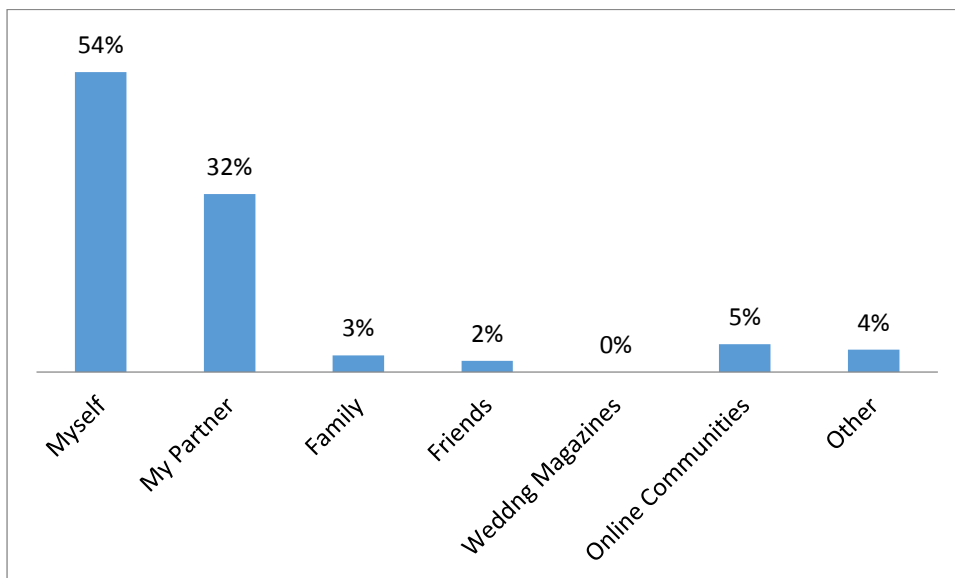
Figure 7: The main influencer when planning a wedding

The participants were then asked to individually rate the importance that they place on the opinions of their fiancé, their family, their fiancés family, their friends and other brides. A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to establish whether there was any difference in the value placed on various opinions of friends and family members. This ANOVA was significant, $F_{(1, 133)} = 272.733$; $p = .000$. Based on this analysis, the opinion of the fiancé was most highly valued (mean = 6.276; .826) compared to other sources. This can be seen in Figure 8.

		Mean
Pair 1	How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding	6.28
	How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding	4.93
Pair 2	How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding	6.28
	How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding	4.43
Pair 3	How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding	6.28
	How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding	4.23
Pair 4	How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding	6.28
	How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding	3.63
Pair 5	How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding	4.93
	How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding	4.43
Pair 6	How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding	4.93
	How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding	4.23
Pair 7	How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding	4.93
	How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding	3.63
Pair 8	How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding	4.43
	How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding	4.23
Pair 9	How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding	4.43
	How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding	3.63
Pair 10	How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding	4.23
	How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding	3.63

Figure 8: Repeated measures ANOVA: differences in the value placed on various opinions of friends and family members

When asked what / who were the main things that influenced participants whilst planning their weddings, none of the respondents chose wedding magazines, with themselves or their partner generating the highest results (Myself = 54%; My Partner = 32%).

In conclusion, the results of the survey addressed the objectives set out in the Methodology chapter, by assessing the importance that Irish brides place on online wedding forums, the importance of that they place on traditional weddings and also by establishing the levels of importance placed on the opinions of others whilst wedding planning.

Chapter 5:

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides in the lead up to their wedding day. There were three main motivations that the researcher intended to investigate.

1. The importance of online communities and the role that online wedding forums play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. To what extent Irish brides use online wedding forums. The level of importance that brides place on the advice and opinions received on online wedding forums. The relationship between brides who use online wedding forums and those who find wedding forums useful.

2. The importance of wedding rituals and the role that rituals play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. The importance that Irish brides place on traditional weddings. The importance of the wedding dress and other aspects of rituals to brides. The relationship that exists between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and those who choose to have a religious ceremony.

3. The importance of the opinions of others and the role that family and friends play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. Who the main influencer on the bride is whilst wedding planning. The importance placed on the opinions of others whilst organising important aspects of the wedding.

5.1: Objective 1: The importance of online communities and the role that online wedding forums play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland:

Fong and Burton (2010) stated that there has been significant growth in the popularity of online discussion boards. According to Thomas and Peters (2011), many brides who are planning weddings use the internet in order to access information and reviews that they are interested in.

In addressing sub-objective 1.1, to analyse what extent Irish brides use online wedding forums, an analysis of the results of this study revealed that online wedding forums were considered to be of importance, with 87% of participants having carried out some form of research on them. This is above the 77% average American brides who use online wedding

forums for the same (Thomas & Peters, 2011). However, it should be noted that this result may be higher than the American counterpart as online forums have grown significantly in popularity since 2011 and are more widely available in 2014. Also, this survey was advertised on online forums, therefore it was very likely that a high percentage would use online forums.

Whilst analysing sub-objective 1.2, the level of importance that Irish brides place on the advice and opinions received on these online wedding forums, it was found that only 5% stated that these forums were the main influencer whilst planning for their wedding. This contradicts the literature. Nelson and Otnes (2005) stated that brides use online wedding forums in order to read reviews left by other brides regarding services and products that they are considering purchasing. Though the literature suggests that there has been a significant growth in the use of and in the popularity of electronic discussion boards (Fong and Burton 2010), and this is most definitely true given that 83% of brides in this study have visited an online wedding forum at one stage, it should be noted that, based on the data received in this study, online wedding forums are not the most important influencer when it comes to planning weddings in Ireland. It is interesting to note that, within the confines of this study, only 7% of brides' credit advice and reviews read on online wedding forums as the reason for their choice of wedding venue, with 81% of brides choosing their wedding venue due to personal preference. It is even more interesting to note that within the confines of this study, none of those surveyed credit advice and reviews from online wedding forums as the reason for their choice of wedding dress, with 91% of brides choosing their dress because of personal taste. However, there are limitations attached to the construction of the survey, which are addressed later in this study.

In addressing sub-objective 1.3, to determine if there was a relationship between brides who use online wedding forums and brides who find wedding forums useful, it was found that there were relationships between those who use online wedding forums and those who book suppliers based on reviews that they have read online, however, when asked, only 7% of respondents stated that they choose their wedding venue due to online reviews, with none of the respondents claiming that these online forums were the reason that they chose their wedding dress. However, many brides have noted that they do find wedding forums useful, and use them to obtain advice from others. Given that 97% of brides surveyed stated they visited online forums more than once a month, their importance is still significant. Thomas

and Peters (2011) stated that 77% of brides used the internet to help with their wedding planning and to get advice on which purchases to make. The results achieved within this study suggest that brides are valuing their own judgements and opinions over the advice and recommendations of others online. Although the Internet can have a significant impact on the success of goods and services (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003), and despite online communities being considered to be a more credible and a more reliable source of information than firm initiated communications (Brown, 2007), it seems that the brides own judgments and opinions are the deciding factor when it comes to purchasing the dress and booking the wedding venue. However, it should be noted that the brides own judgments and opinions could have been influenced by reviews read on these online communities. This is something that could be looked into further in future research.

A study of the literature found that the importance of rituals can be seen on online wedding forums, which links with the next research objective. Thomas and Peters (2011) have stated that brides are moving toward online wedding forums to get opinions from other brides as a substitute to the opinions they would have sought from their mothers and their friends in the past. However, a study of the results found that the opinions of family and friends is still seen to be of more importance to brides in Ireland than the importance of the opinions found on online wedding forums. It would be interesting to carry out further research into this area, and to establish if there are any cultural reasons as to why this may be the case. A study into the relationships of families in Ireland compared to the relationships of families within other cultures, and the influences that these relationships play on a bride whilst wedding planning would be of particular interest here.

5.2: Objective 2: The importance of rituals within wedding consumption:
An in-depth study of the literature available to the researcher found that wedding rituals are and have been celebrated as an important part of weddings for centuries, with many goods and services purchased specifically to enhance these rituals (Wiley, 2011). This study aimed to discover if rituals were as significant to Irish brides as the literature suggests.
In addressing sub-objective 2.1, the importance that Irish brides place on traditional weddings, the findings from this study are consistent with the literature with regards to the importance that brides place on rituals within the wedding day. 71% of all participants agreed that traditional weddings are important. Literature suggests that brides are fed the idea of what an ideal wedding should be from they are a child (Fairchild, 2013), and wedding

customs are often passed through generations of families (Kalmijn, 2004), which could be a contributing factor to the importance that is still placed upon wedding rituals and the idea that one should have a traditional wedding.

Sub-objective 2.2 was to investigate the importance of the wedding dress and other aspects of rituals to brides. Literature has shown that the wedding dress has been seen as one of the most important rituals within a traditional wedding, (Thomas & Peters, 2011) and the results of this study correspond with this statement. 87% of brides surveyed stated that it was important for them to wear a wedding dress on their wedding day. The wedding dress is the most mentioned "sacred artefact" within the ritual of a wedding (Otnes & Lowry, 1993). According to Otnes and Lowry (1993), in order for a wedding to be seen as a "proper" wedding, the bride must wear a wedding dress. There was a relationship to be seen between those who believed in having a traditional wedding and wearing a wedding dress. The literature also suggests that the wedding cake is an important ritual within a wedding (Otnes & Scott, 1996). The results generated within this study showed only a weak correlation between the two, which suggests that brides do not necessarily associate a wedding cake with tradition, or perhaps they do not see the wedding cake as an important a tradition as the wedding dress. This would further suggest that the wedding dress plays a significant, if not the most significant, part in the traditional wedding day. It should be noted that these are only some of the ritualistic aspects of a wedding, there are others which were not focused on within the confines of this study, such as the bridal party, the wedding ceremony, and the wedding reception, so the importance that is placed by Irish brides on these rituals remains to be seen.

It was interesting to note that brides who believed it to be important to have a traditional wedding were more likely to place importance on the opinions of other brides than brides who do not place importance on traditional weddings. This would agree with the literature wherein brides use online wedding forums to ensure that what they are planning for their wedding day is correct and agrees with what is considered to be a cultural norm (Thomas & Peters, 2011).

In addressing sub-objective 2.3, the relationship that exists between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and those who choose to have a religious ceremony, the results found within the study have been compared with the literature available. Wiley (2011) stated that 7 out of 10 couples who marry do so in a church. A survey

carried out by Mrs2be.ie in 2014 stated that within Ireland 3 out of 4 couples choose to get married in a church. According to Wiley (2011), a large percentage of couples choose to marry in a church for ritualistic reasons, in order to follow traditions. The information gathered within this study corresponds with the existing literature with 74% of respondents planning a religious ceremony. This information could be used to argue that brides who believe in traditional weddings believe that church weddings are the means of achieving this. This study is consistent with this expectation. Those who are planning a religious wedding appear to place more emphasis on the importance of having a traditional wedding, within the confines of this study. However, it should be noted that although a high percentage of couples choose to marry in a Church, this figure is slowly declining. Until the 1970's, less than 1% of marriages in Ireland were civil ceremonies. This figure rose to 6% in 1995 (CSO, 2000), and has now risen to 26% in 2014. The decline in the popularity and also the ease of availability and access to civil wedding venues play a significant role in this increase in civil marriage ceremonies.

Literature suggests that those who have Church weddings do so as they believe it to be more traditional (Otnes & Lowrey, 1993), and this research supports this. This study established that there is a relationship, although weak, between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and brides who value the opinion of other brides. A review of the literature suggested that there was a significant relationship between these two factors, with Thomas and Peters (2011) stating that if a bride is considering moving away from the traditional idea of a wedding, they often put the idea to other brides within these online communities and seek their advice and opinions on veering away from what would be considered the norm. According to Thomas and Peters (2011), they use this medium to gauge what is considered to be an acceptable cultural norm in the modern times that they are in. Although this is only a weak relationship, it is significant as there is no relationship evident between brides who favour a traditional wedding and other family members and friends. This survey suggests that brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding place more importance on the opinion of other brides than on the opinions of their fiancé, their family, their fiancés family and their friends. This could be due to brides believing that other brides are more aware of the requirements of correctly fulfilling these traditions, as they are currently in the process of planning their own weddings also. This links in with objective 3, the main influencers to the bride whilst planning for a wedding, which is discussed in the next section.

5.3: Objective 3: The importance of the opinions of others and the role that family and friends play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland:

The main influencers to the bride whilst planning for a wedding were investigated. Sub-objective 3.1 investigated who the main influencer on the bride is whilst wedding planning. The literature was contradictory on one aspect of what influences brides whilst planning for their wedding, whether the opinions of family and friends were important. The literature suggested that in many cases, it is not the bride and the groom who decide on having a large wedding, but actually the decision of their parents (Kalmijn, 2004). Friends can also play a role in how a wedding is planned (Kalmijn, 2004). The literature also suggests that couples take what their family and friends view a wedding to be as an important measure for what their wedding should be like (Fairchild, 2013). 32.1% of respondents stated that the opinion of their fiancé was the most important influencer to them whilst making important wedding decisions, with 53.7% stating that their own opinion was the most important. The opinions of family and friends were placed very low on a scale of importance, with only 3% stating that the opinions of their family being the most important influencer, and only 2% stating their friends to be so. However, Weiss (2008) disagreed with this, suggesting that brides are becoming more independent and valuing their own opinion more, following a survey carried out amongst brides to be in wedding shops found that participants did not view the opinions of their friends and families as being important.

Sub-objective 3.2 analysed the importance placed on the opinions of others whilst organising aspects of the wedding. 53.7% of those who participated in this study stated that their own opinion was the most important when it came to making these purchase decisions. This is consistent with the study that was carried out by Weiss (2008) which found that the opinions of friends and family do not appear important. The opinion of the fiancé was the most important external influencer; however, more than half of the respondents stated that they valued their own opinion more than the opinion of anyone else when it came to making purchase decisions for their weddings. Weiss (2008) suggests that perhaps this was due to brides becoming more modern and more independent, and putting less emphasis and value on the opinions of others.

Currie (1993) stated that most brides do not have experience at planning a wedding, and as a result, many rely on bridal magazines to ensure that they are "doing the right thing" (p 410).

Kalmijn (2004) agreed with this, stating that wedding rituals and customs are communicated to brides through wedding magazines. This study suggests that bridal magazines do not have a major influence over brides who are planning for their wedding, as no participant stated that bridal magazines were a main influence to them.

5.4: Strengths and Limitations:

This research entailed several limitations which may have influenced the findings. The fact that the survey was online and accessed through online wedding forums creates potential inconsistencies in the data, as the majority of the participants accessed online wedding forums at least once to complete the data. This biases the sample as there is a strong probability that as the survey was accessible only through an online forum, the majority of respondents were going to state that they used online forums. Unless, that is, the survey was forwarded by participants who do not use online forums, to acquaintances who were also getting married. 202 people participated in this survey (142 of those were engaged), which was quite high, and this increases the reliability of the results.

While the majority of the questions involved Likert scale responses, there were some exceptions. Several of the questions put to the participants could have been alternatively phrased, which could have resulted in a finer discrimination of respondents. For example, although 91% of brides stated that they chose their wedding dress because of personal preference, it must be noted that the question was put to them in a way that they could not choose more than one reason for their choice of wedding dress. It has been noted that there could be several reasons as to why a bride chooses the wedding dress that she does, and the advice and reviews received on online forums may have influenced this, however, this could not have been established based on the question posed. The same applies to the rationale behind their choice of venue. Future research might allow participants to rate each motivation behind their purchase decisions separately, which would give a more comprehensive insight into the motivations behind these purchase decisions.

It is also interesting to note that there were no participants over the age of 45 in this study. This was not intentional and it is acknowledged that the results do not represent an accurate demographic picture of brides who are planning a wedding in Ireland today. There was also little uptake of the survey from males, due to the nature of the platform where the survey was

available. It would be interesting to gain a perspective from the groom's point of view, with regards to what factors influence the groom whilst planning a wedding, rather than just the bride, which is primarily what this study focuses on.

5.5: Recommendations for future research:

As previously noted, this study was conducted online, giving a larger probability that the participants would be familiar to and would frequent online wedding forums. It would be interesting to access the results of a survey similar to this that is carried out offline, in order to get a more accurate interpretation of the percentage of brides who use online wedding forums versus those who do not. Furthermore, it would be interesting to assess if the online wedding forum popularity is limited solely to a younger generation. As stated, no bride over the age of 45 completed this survey, therefore it is impossible to draw an assumption from this study, unless it was to state that this is due to the lack of brides over the age of 45 who use online wedding forums, or who used online wedding forums during the time that the survey was live.

A study of the literature (Fairchild, 2013 - Otnes 1996 & Thomas & Peters, 2011) found that brides use online communities to gauge what is acceptable within the confines of a traditional wedding. The results of this study found that there was a weak relationship between brides who use online wedding forums and brides who believe it is important to have a traditional wedding. This does not support the literature as strongly as previously assumed. It would be interesting to observe the opinions of brides regarding online communities and rituals in a more personal level, perhaps in one – to – one interviews or a focus group, where more time could be spent getting in depth insights from the brides to further analyze the relationship between the two.

There has been a huge growth in popularity in Pinterest, a social network that allows users to visually share, and discover new interests by posting (known as 'pinning' on Pinterest) images or videos to their own or others' boards (Pinterest, 2014). Boards are made up of a collection of pins and generally follow a theme, and users also get to browse what other users have pinned. Pinterest has recently become extremely popular for weddings, with brides searching for and pinning images associated with all aspects of the wedding. An article in USA Today discusses the effect Pinterest is beginning to have on weddings in America, with interviewee Trish Smith stating that 90% of her wedding ideas coming from Pinterest. The writer of this

article states that Pinterest and brides go together like love and marriage (Barker, 2012. However, there was no academic literature available to the researcher on the effects that Pinterest is having on the consumption habits of brides and this has not been discussed in any detail in this study. Exploratory research into the value of Pinterest would be of great value and interest to all involved in the wedding industry.

Given that 26% of brides in this survey were planning non-religious wedding ceremonies, another area that would be noteworthy would be further research into civil weddings and the motivations behind them. As previously mentioned, civil weddings appear to be becoming more popular in recent times, having gone from less than 1% in the 1970's (CS0, 2000), to 26% in 2014. It would be of interest to marketers to understand the differences in perceptions to weddings that brides who are planning a civil wedding have in comparison to brides who are planning a religious wedding.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion:

The aim of this study was to investigate the motivations behind the consumption habits of brides to be in the lead up to their wedding day, and to discover what influences brides whilst making the important purchase decisions that contribute to their wedding day, and who they turn to in order to get advice and opinions. With the literature suggesting that there were three main influencers driving the purchase decisions made by brides, the purpose of this exploratory study was to decipher the levels of importance attributed to each influencer.

A study of the literature suggested that there has been a significant rise in the popularity of online discussion boards, leading to a new platform for brides to receive recommendations of products and services (Fong & Burton, 2010). Information obtained on these online forums are considered to be more credible and more reliable than any information initiated by a company (Brown, 2007). One of the aims of this study was to investigate the importance of online communities and the role that these online forums play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland. Firstly, it was important to discover if Irish brides used online wedding forums. 87% of those surveyed stated that they used online wedding forums at one stage or another whilst planning for their wedding, which is above the average found in the literature of 77% (Thomas & Peters, 2011). The level of importance that brides place on the advice and opinions received on these wedding forums was then studied. The results of this discovered that only 5% of brides surveyed stated that online wedding forums were the main motivation behind their purchase decisions, which contradicts the literature. Nelson and Otnes (2005) stated that brides use online wedding forums in order to read reviews and recommendations left by other brides in order to gain insight into the product or service they are considering purchasing. The results of the survey were analyzed to discover if there was a relationship between brides who use online wedding forums and brides who find online wedding forums useful. As only 7% of those surveyed stated that they chose their wedding venue due to advice and recommendations received online, it is apparent that although brides may find wedding forums useful, they are not the main motivators behind their consumption decisions whilst planning for their wedding. 56% of brides surveyed had chosen and placed a deposit on their wedding dress, with a further 44% still to do so. As the majority of the brides used online forums to plan for their wedding, marketers could use this forum to communicate with brides who are in search of their wedding dress.

Wedding rituals play a significant role in the consumption habits of brides who are planning their wedding this study has found. Rituals have played an important part of weddings for centuries, with many goods and services being purchased specifically to enhance these rituals (Wiley, 2011). The results found through this study agree with Wiley (2011), with 71% of participants believing that traditional weddings are important. Thomas and Peters (2011) state that the wedding dress is the most important ritual within the wedding, and Irish brides agree with that according to this study, with 87% of brides stating that it is important to them to wear a wedding dress on their wedding day. There is a weak relationship between brides who believe in the importance of having a traditional wedding and brides who believe that their wedding would be incomplete without a wedding cake. This shows that the wedding cake is seen as an important ritual in Ireland, however, it is not perceived as being the most important. This is a further example of the wedding dress being the most important ritual within a wedding. This study established a relationship between brides who value a traditional wedding and brides who place importance on the opinions of other brides. This agrees with the literature in that brides who use online communities appear to be substituting opinions their friends and family with the opinions of strangers who they have met on these online forums, as they are sharing similar feelings and experiences (Thomas & Peters, 2011). This study found that 74% of brides are planning a religious ceremony, which agrees with the literature (Wiley, 2011). According to Wiley (2011), a significant percentage of brides who choose to get married in a church choose to do so for traditional reasons. This study suggested that those who are planning a religious wedding place more emphasis on having a traditional wedding, which agrees with the literature.

The opinions of others and the role that family and friends play in the purchase decisions made by brides in Ireland were analyzed within this study. Some of the literature available to the researcher stated that family and friends played a significant role in the purchase decisions of a bride whilst planning for their wedding (Fairchild, 2013 - Kalmijn, 2004). Other literature available contradicts this, stating that brides did not view the opinions of their friends and family as being important (Weiss, 2008). This study agreed with Weiss (2008), with 53.7% of respondents stating that their own opinion was of the most value to them whilst wedding planning. It has been suggested that this is due to brides becoming more independent and placing less emphasis on the opinions of others (Weiss, 2008).

This study also found that brides do not rate bridal magazines as being a main influencer on their purchase decisions when planning a wedding, with none of those surveyed stating that bridal magazines have been the main influence on decisions they have made for their wedding.

It has therefore been deduced that despite the literature claiming otherwise, online forums are not the main motivations behind the consumption habits of brides. Although this platform is important, it is not the most important factor to brides who are planning their weddings. However, marketers within the bridal industry must realize that although this platform is not the most significant, it is still utilized by a significant proportion of brides who are conducting wedding research, and must be monitored closely. Rituals play a much more significant role in the purchase decisions that a bride makes whilst planning for her wedding day. Marketers within the bridal industry should bear this in mind whilst planning the avenue they wish to pursue when communicating with brides. It is important to a significant percentage of Irish brides that they participate in the most popular wedding rituals, such as the wedding dress and the cake.

In the past, the opinion of the brides' family would have been seen as being a significant influence on decision making. However, they should take note that this study and other existing studies are contradicting some of the previous literature by stating that the opinions of friends and family are no longer as important to the bride as they may have been in the past, with the bride placing a significant emphasis on her own opinion, or the opinion of the fiancé.

The research conducted within this study has important implications for marketers within the bridal industry. The value and the importance being placed on online wedding forums are increasing and marketers need to take heed of this. Resources should be made available to companies within this industry to ensure that they are available to monitor relevant activity within these online forums, and to ensure that their presence is felt online, be it to answer questions asked by brides, or to simply be available to provide advice to those who ask for it on these online forums.

The importance that is placed on that the role of rituals is significant to marketers within this industry also, and should be noted. Whilst conducting marketing campaigns, marketers should bear in mind the levels of importance brides appear to place on the ritualistic aspects

of the wedding day. If goods and services were to be marketed in such a way that these rituals are addressed, this could place higher in the mind of a bride than the goods and services of an alternative supplier who do not address these rituals.

It should also be noted that although the opinions of others are not seen as being the most important, they are still sought by brides, therefore marketing campaigns should be directed toward others, and not just toward the bride. The opinion of the fiancé appeared to be the most important after the opinion of the bride, and this should be noted for future campaigns and communications with couples. Traditionally, the majority of goods and services aimed at weddings are marketed with the bride in mind. However, perhaps a marketing campaign that is aimed at both the bride and the groom could be successful, or separate campaigns, with one aimed toward the bride and one aimed toward the groom, to ensure his interest and in turn, his support, which could significantly influence the choice made by the bride.

In sum this research has revealed that there are many diverse influences on decision making in brides-to-be and their fiancés in the lead up to their weddings. Given the considerable expenditure that goes on this, it is of great importance that marketers are aware of these influences so that marketing strategies can be targeted accordingly.

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APPENDIX:

Survey which was completed by all participants

Q1: What is your relationship status

- ○ Single (1)
- ○ Engaged (2)
- ○ Married (3)
- ○ Divorced (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q2: What is your gender

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)

Q3: Which age bracket do you fall into

- ○ 18 - 24 (1)
- ○ 25 - 35 (2)
- ○ 36 - 45 (3)
- ○ 46 - 60 (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q4: What is the highest level of education you have completed to date

- ○ Junior Certificate (or equivalent) (1)
- ○ Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) (2)
- ○ Third level Degree (3)
- ○ Postgraduate Degree (4)
- ○ Professional Qualification (5)
- ○ Other (6)

Q5: What is your employment status

- ○ Full time employment (30+ hours per week) (1)
- ○ Part time employment (2)
- ○ Unemployed (3)
- ○ Student (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q6: What country are you getting married in:

…………………………………………………………

Q7: How long until you get married

- ○ Less than 3 months (1)
- ○ More than 3 months but less than 6 months (2)
- ○ Between 6 months & 1 year (3)
- ○ Between 1 year & 18 months (4)
- ○ Over 18 months away (5)

Q8: How far into the planning process are you

- ○ Newly engaged - no plans yet (1)
- ○ Nothing booked yet but have chosen suppliers (2)
- ○ Have venue / band / photographer booked (3)
- ○ Down to the last few details (4)
- ○ Finished planning (5)

Q9: Have you chosen your venue

- ○ No (1)
- ○ Narrowed my choices down to a few (2)
- ○ Venue is chosen, but not officially booked yet (3)
- ○ Venue is booked & deposit is paid (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q10: Have you chosen your dress

- ○ No (1)
- ○ No, but I have a few I want to try (2)
- ○ Have the dress chosen, but it is not ordered yet (3)
- ○ Dress is chosen & deposit is paid (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q11: I chose my wedding venue because..... (if you have not yet chosen a venue, please answer what you think will be the deciding factor)

- ○ I / We loved it (1)
- ○ Online Reviews / recommendations (2)
- ○ Family loved it (3)
- ○ Friends loved it (4)
- ○ Budget (5)
- ○ Other (6)

Q12: I chose my wedding dress because.........(if you have not yet chosen a dress, please answer what you think will be the deciding factor)

- ○ style suited me (1)
- ○ Family loved it (2)
- ○ Friends loved it (3)
- ○ Online reviews (4)
- ○ Other (5)

Q13: It is important that I have a traditional wedding

- ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ○ Disagree (2)
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- ○ Agree (4)
- ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q14: It is important I wear a wedding dress on my wedding day

- ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ○ Disagree (2)
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- ○ Agree (4)
- ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q15: If I didn't have a wedding cake, it would feel like something was missing

- ○ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ○ Disagree (2)
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- ○ Agree (4)
- ○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q16: I have set a budget for my wedding

○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

Q17: I have managed to stick to my budget so far

○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q18: I use online wedding forums to get advice / opinions for my wedding

○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q19: I find online wedding forums useful

○ Strongly Disagree (1)
○ Disagree (2)
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
○ Agree (4)
○ Strongly Agree (5)

Q20: How often would you use online forums when planning your wedding

○ Never (1)
○ Less than Once a Month (2)
○ Once a Month (3)
○ 2-3 Times a Month (4)
○ Once a Week (5)
○ 2-3 Times a Week (6)
○ Daily (7)

Q21: How likely are you to book a supplier or purchase wedding supplies based on reviews you read on these online forums

○ Very Unlikely (1)
○ Unlikely (2)
○ Somewhat Unlikely (3)
○ Undecided (4)
○ Somewhat Likely (5)
○ Likely (6)
○ Very Likely (7)

Q22: How important is your fiancé's opinions to you when planning your wedding

○ Not at all Important (1)
○ Very Unimportant (2)
○ Somewhat Unimportant (3)
○ Neither Important nor Unimportant (4)
○ Somewhat Important (5)
○ Very Important (6)
○ Extremely Important (7)

Q23: How important are the opinions of your family to you when planning your wedding

○ Not at all Important (1)
○ Very Unimportant (2)
○ Somewhat Unimportant (3)
○ Neither Important nor Unimportant (4)
○ Somewhat Important (5)
○ Very Important (6)
○ Extremely Important (7)

Q24: How important are the opinions of your fiancé's family to you when planning your wedding

○ Not at all Important (1)
○ Very Unimportant (2)
○ Somewhat Unimportant (3)
○ Neither Important nor Unimportant (4)
○ Somewhat Important (5)
○ Very Important (6)
○ Extremely Important (7)

Q25: How important are the opinions of your friends' to you when planning your wedding

○ Not at all Important (1)
○ Very Unimportant (2)
○ Somewhat Unimportant (3)
○ Neither Important nor Unimportant (4)
○ Somewhat Important (5)
○ Very Important (6)
○ Extremely Important (7)

Q26: How important are the opinions of other brides to you when planning your wedding

○ Not at all Important (1)
○ Very Unimportant (2)
○ Somewhat Unimportant (3)
○ Neither Important nor Unimportant (4)
○ Somewhat Important (5)
○ Very Important (6)
○ Extremely Important (7)

Q27: Who / what are the main things that influence you when you are planning your wedding

○ Myself (1)
○ My partner (2)
○ Family (3)
○ Friends (4)
○ Wedding Magazines (5)
○ Online Communities (6)
○ Other (7)

Q28: What type of wedding ceremony are you having

○ Religious (1)
○ Civil ceremony (2)
○ Blessing (3)
○ Other (4)

Q29: Further information may be required from some participants. If you consent to the researcher contacting you directly to discuss your answers, please leave your name & email address or telephone number in the box below. All information will remain confidential. Thank you.

Q30: Finally, did you encounter any problems when completing this survey

❍ Yes (1)
❍ No (2)