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BRIDES AND BRIDAL STORES: ONLINE OR BRICK-AND-MORTAR

Libby C. Jones
Missouri State University, libby6@live.missouristate.edu

Ismet Anitsal
Missouri State University, ianitsal@missouristate.edu

Melek Meral Anitsal
Tennessee Tech University, manitsal@tntech.edu

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Libby Jones, *Missouri State University*
Ismet Anitsal, M*issouri State University, ianitsal@missouristate.edu*
Melek Meral Anitsal, *Tennessee Tech University, manitsal@tntech.edu*

Abstract - This paper explores the growing global bridal industry and the different trends, traditions, and aspects of specific countries' bridal industries. It outlines western and eastern traditions and how globalization contributes to their spread. A deeper focus is dedicated to the United States' bridal industry and the issues brick-and-mortar bridal boutiques face as more brides have started shopping at online bridal stores. The relationship between brick-and-mortar and online bridal stores is explored based on various propositions about the bridal industry's emerging challenges. These propositions include trust issues in the retail environment, convenience, selection of bridal gowns in different formats, incorporating a social experience into brick-and-mortar and online bridal stores, and spreading cultural traditions. Each proposition is evaluated according to each retail format's reaction. This conceptual paper addresses the gaps in bridal research, provides managerial implications, and addresses the challenges faced by brick-and-mortar and online retailers specific to the bridal context.

Keywords: bridal industry, online bridal retail stores, brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores, bridal shopping experience, bridal trends

Relevance to marketing Educators, Researchers and/or practitioners – This study investigates bridal preferences and the growing bridal industry despite the challenges introduced by pandemics. The literature review revealed strong trends in this industry. Brides are no longer restricted to the US young, traditional western style segment. They come from all age groups, sizes, multiple ethnic origins, and cultural preferences. They communicate with their entourage and obtain information through social media rather than through traditional wedding venues. They seek a balance of experience in choosing their wedding gown and price and variety. All those trends significantly impact managers of online and brick-and-mortar stores.

Introduction

The female consumer's role is unmatched in today's global market. "The ability to understand their brain structures, priorities, worldviews, and demographic patterns can provide a company with one of the most genuine competitive advantages it may ever know" (Brennan, 2011, p. 5). A wedding day is one of the most important days in a woman's life. Her consumerism contributes to the bridal industry and a global industry estimated to be worth $59.1 billion in 2020 (Bridal Wear, 2021). The industry is expected to grow by 6 percent annually until 2023 (Gaille, 2018). Brides in countries like the United States, Great Britain, China, South Africa, and Mexico have different consumption behaviors, retail formats, and bridal traditions. As the internet connects other parts

of the world, countries' bridal industry trends merge. Cultural practices and famous brides influence trends for mainstream brides. Bridal style has evolved as designers adapt to these cultural changes and balance trends between different countries.

The United States bridal industry generated almost $26 billion in revenue in 2020 (Bridal Wear, 2021). The United States population only represents just over 4 percent of the world's population, and its gross domestic product is approximately 24 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP by Country, 2017). It accounts for almost 44 percent of the total revenue generated by the global bridal industry (US Census Bureau, 2021). The average cost for a wedding in 2019 was $28,000, including the cost of the bride's gown (Pohle, 2021). The industry employs close to 885,000 people (IBISWorld, 2021). A national chain, David's Bridal employs over 10,000 stylists (David's Bridal Glassdoor, 2021). Their stores hold 28 percent of the US market share in sales revenue (Gaille, 2018). The chain operates over 300 stores and sells one in three wedding dresses purchased in the United States (Bomey, 2018). Another large independent bridal store is Kleinfeld Bridal, which has a selection of 1500 designer dresses and services 17,000 brides per year (The History of Kleinfeld, 2021). Typical boutiques are usually smaller and locally owned.

The region of the United States where the bride marries can determine which traditions are incorporated into the wedding. In northeastern states, more than 75% of weddings in 2019 were held at a non-church venue (Harmon, 2021). Outdoor weddings have become more prominent, especially in the Midwest. Midwest brides usually wear an ivory dress and are more conservative than brides on the east and west coasts (Top Wedding Gown Styles for the Midwest Bride, 2016). Many brides hold outdoor ceremonies and receptions in Idaho and other scenic states or have nature themes (Harmon, 2021). An east coast tradition for brides is to capture a bridal portrait before the wedding (Harmon, 2021). The bride can take individual pictures in her bridal attire and get a preview before the actual wedding day. Hawaiian brides also incorporate a traditional flower petal toss to allow family and friends to participate in the ceremony (Harmon, 2021). Brides from different states incorporate their traditions into their weddings, making United States wedding traditions differ depending on the region.

Brides in developed countries demand access to bridal magazines and websites (Engstrom, 2008). Bridal Media in the United States predominantly features heterosexual couples and traditional white weddings (Winch and Webster, 2012). "The Knot" website is the most visited source for bridal media and sees about 2.1 million visitors per month (Engstrom, 2008). The website features real western brides and wedding inspiration, which creates the desire for lavish, more expensive weddings. Unique weddings highlighted in bridal media, like the royal weddings of Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle, are even more influential for industry trends. The spread of bridal media in Asia caused Taiwan's brides to show signs of recreating western bridal images from media sources in the 1990s, which placed more emphasis on customized and individualized weddings (Wei, 2021).

Current bridal media does not represent the real diversity present in the United States, and African American women feel they do not see themselves reflected in mainstream bridal media (Park and Hooker, 2019). Twenty-one million of the 108 million adult females in the United States are African American, so they represent over 19 percent of the United States bridal industry's target market (US Census Bureau, 2020). Eight percent of these women are aged 20 to 29, the prime marriage age for African American women (U.S. Black Population Age Pyramid, 2021), while 13 percent of the US population in that age category is African American. Black-focused bridal websites like Black Bridal Bliss, Malachi Bride, and Black Bride were created to highlight black

wedding traditions (Hargrove, 2018). Increased awareness for racial representation in the bridal industry media has caused popular websites and magazines to be more conscious of the content they provide. "Segmenting African-American weddings as a separate section, rather than integrating Black brides into general-interest content, is a faux-diversity tactic that's thankfully being abandoned by mainstream media" (Hargrove, 2018, p. 1). The industry could see increased revenue from more representation as African Americans often spend twice the average bride and have weddings lasting several days (Hargrove, 2018).

Western bridal trends have inspired more expensive weddings to become larger and more lavish (Stanley, 2014). India hosts many of these extravagant weddings that contradict the extreme poverty of rural Indian life (Bloch, Rao, and Desai, 2004). Seventy percent of marriages occur in a church in Western culture, and white weddings signify Christian tradition (Currie, 1993). Eastern bridal trends are beginning to incorporate the traditional white wedding dress as it gains popularity in China. Chinese magazines increasingly showcase the modern bride in western attire instead of the traditional red, wrapped dress (Wei, 2021). Brazilian brides also prefer a white wedding dress to symbolize purity and embellish it with classic lace, embroidery, and pearls (Fonseca and Mezabarba, 2019). Brides from the United States have begun experimenting with non-traditional wedding gowns. Many women take this risk by choosing new styles, prints, silhouettes, and colors.

European and African bridal industries are also changing as wedding dress trends globalize. Great Britain's industry is now moving towards modern and minimal silhouettes, and brides prefer gowns that reflect their personal style rather than what is most popular. Royal brides like Queen Victoria, Princess Diana, and Kate Middleton popularized new looks and played a prominent role in the evolution of bridal style worldwide (Broekhuizen and Evans, 2016). German brides also adopted the white dress and veil. The bride wears her veil until the veil-dance at midnight, where it is said that the single woman who tears the largest piece will be married next (Getting Married Wedding Customs). In Africa, Namibia still upholds its cultural values as brides wear a wedding dress called the oshikutu sheenhulo, which is worn for events that are culturally and nationally significant (Ndakalako-Bannikov, 2020). Brides usually borrow the oshikutu sheenhulos from friends or pass them through generations, so the typical dress shopping experience is not prevalent in Namibia.

The different bridal traditions and norms in each country significantly impact that country's bridal industry. The bridal industry is experiencing a rise in profitability and success. Still, the increased number of brides shopping for wedding dresses online has caused a problem for brick-and-mortar boutiques. It changes the typical shopping experience for brides who do not value physically shopping for a wedding dress. This problem is addressed in the purpose of this paper, which is to investigate emerging bridal trends in countries around the world and explore how brick-and-mortar bridal stores can identify and understand these trends to survive against online bridal stores known as e-tailers or online retailers. An emphasis will be placed on the United States' bridal industry and specific issues experienced across demographics in this country. These issues will be addressed by propositions based on the literature review that outlines how traditional bridal boutiques and online retail stores react to changing bridal trends. Bridal trends change and spread because of recent technological advances and the internet's influence on globalization in this context, which these propositions address. These emerging trends in technology, experience and cultural adherence are changing the steps bridal retail stores need to take to survive.

Retail Store Formats

There are numerous retail institutions worldwide, and the United States utilizes a diverse range to sell products to its consumers. Many stores in the United States are considered specialty stores that sell a large assortment of a single product line (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011). Department stores are also prevalent, where the stores sell "several product lines with each operated separately" (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011, p. 2). A small selection of bridal gowns can be found in department stores, but these dresses are usually mass-produced and not customizable. Discount stores that offer "lower prices with lower margins and higher volumes" are popular in the United States and sell many necessary items (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011, p. 2). Industries cannot thrive under just any retail format, and most brides expect the personalized service and attention that accompanies a specialty store.

Franchising is another retail store format that has become popular for owners who want to operate under an existing name and business model. A franchisor sells the rights of the business to the franchisee, who can pay the franchisor a fee to sell their products (Aguiar, Luppe, and Nascimento, 2021). The most popular franchise in the bridal industry is David's Bridal, which sells its dresses directly to customers at affordable prices because of its ability to sell a large volume (Dalrymple-Williams, 2004).

Bridal retail boutiques are classified as specialty stores with a deep assortment of narrow product lines (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011). Specialty stores have higher costs and margins but provide more product selection, expertise, and personal service (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, and Kleiser, 2020). Brides in Taiwan take advantage of these specialty stores as "consumption of bridal salon services is nearly universal, regardless of social class, ethnicity, or urban or rural residence" (Adrian, 1999, p. 6). Bridal gowns are considered specialty products that brides will pay a higher price and spend more effort to obtain (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, and Kleiser, 2020). These retail stores should adapt their business style based on industry changes and customer expectations. According to the Natural Selection Model, those that successfully adapt to market and consumption changes survive (Bolat, Anitsal, and Jolly, 2004, p. 83). Today's customers have more diverse needs and expectations, so retailers need to understand the customer and retail format changes regarding demographics and values (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011).

Online retail stores have also gained popularity since the internet has become more widespread and easier to navigate. These stores are a revolutionary innovation because they disrupt the typical brick-and-mortar market (Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic made online wedding dress shopping even more popular, and Great Britain's online sales increased to 90 percent of all wedding dress sales as brides valued convenience over experience (Baldock, 2021). Internet shopping is proliferating because it meets the needs of customers who do not have time to shop in-store (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, and Kleiser, 2020), creating an advantage that brick-and-mortar stores are struggling to match. Some brick-and-mortar retail stores have adapted to this change in consumer preference by expanding to online retail and serving as both online and brick-and-mortar retail stores.

The COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 has severely impacted the bridal industry and how brides shop for their wedding gowns. The typical bridal boutique shopping experience was altered as many boutiques started requiring reservations, masks, social distancing, and limited guest numbers (Sposamia Bride, 2021). These restrictions were implemented to keep both

customers and employees safe from COVID-19 but do not guarantee protection against the virus and may deter customers from shopping in-store (Sulaiman, Ahmed, and Shabbir, 2020). The implication of these policies may reduce the number of people who enter a brick-and-mortar retail store, which could severely affect overall profitability during this already uncertain time.

An increasing number of brides began shopping online due to COVID-19-related restrictions. Baldock (2021) cites that online sales increased from 75% to 90% in 2020. Brick-and-mortar retail stores have tried to combat this advantage by taking part in online sales, which was becoming necessary for some brick-and-mortar stores even before the pandemic began (Sulaiman, Ahmed, and Shabbir, 2020). Kim (2020) supports the view that COVID-19 has changed the retail industry but adds that the pandemic will have a lasting effect on consumer culture. People experienced the convenience and competitive prices of online shopping, and those who saw the benefits of online shopping were unlikely to return to their traditional ways (Kim, 2020). As the pandemic acts as a catalyst for consumer preferences switching from in-person to online shopping, brick-and-mortar retail stores need to adapt to changing customer behavior to survive and grow. This preference is not likely to change without brick-and-mortar retailers identifying what consumers enjoy online shopping and how they can compete.

The pandemic also created financial stress for brides, and many couples are forgoing a large wedding and using that money to pay off loans or buy homes (Pohle, 2021). The trend toward more lavish and expensive weddings is being replaced by more intimate and private ceremonies for the time being, and "bridal stores are not seeing much growth" as brides opt for less expensive options (Fitzpatrick, 2021, p. 1). Many brides also postponed their weddings, hoping that the world would be free of restrictions soon, leading to a sharp increase in demand for bridal gowns. It is estimated that around 41.5 percent of weddings were postponed from 2020 until 2021 (The Wedding Report, 2021). Once the pandemic subsides, the surge in bridal dress demand will likely improve sales for both brick-and-mortar and online bridal stores, but it may be difficult for vendors and suppliers to match the demand. These issues have yet to be solved as the pandemic has not ended, but their effects could have a lasting impact on how the bridal industry functions

The global bridal industry faces changing customer desires, differing style preferences, and competition with online bridal stores that it should address to continue success. First, the industry needs to monitor frequent changes in customer tastes. If the retail bridal sector fails to adapt or understand current trends, brides may turn to alternative routes, such as hiring seamstresses or buying less elaborate dresses. Second, brides around the country seek different styles depending on demographic, cultural, and subcultural characteristics. The bridal industry needs to consider these different styles and design dresses that meet every bride's expectations. It should create a wide selection to address the differing needs of brides worldwide. Third, brick-and-mortar bridal stores have to compete with the convenience and selection of online bridal retailers. Physical retail stores have an advantage in customer service and appointment experience. Brick-and-mortar stores need to capitalize on these factors to differentiate themselves from online retail and promote the appeal of physical stores.

Changing Bridal Trends and Their Effects on Traditional and Online Bridal Stores

This section assesses facets of the global bridal industry using relevant information about different countries, cultures, and traditions. It includes reviews of bridal industry literature and incorporates common themes from these sources. This information is used to develop several propositions about the global and United States bridal industries and make predictions about future trends. Each proposition is supported by published literature and background knowledge on the subject.

People become less focused on the potential risks and realize the benefits as they continue to shop through online bridal stores and build trust in the online shopping process. The ease and simplicity that internet use provides for people "leads to more online information search and online purchasing" (Liu and Forsythe, 2010). Trust in the online shopping process is vital for the success of this retail format (Lee, Park, and Han, 2011). After consumers reduce their anxiety about online shopping risks by purchasing relatively insignificant products, they may continue to buy items with higher involvement, like wedding dresses, through online bridal stores. Anitsal and Schumann (2007) state that people can even form a relationship-like attachment towards technological possessions, increasing their likelihood of using them while shopping.

Online shopping also helps customers feel more in control of their purchases and less influenced by retail personnel, which aids in building trust and the customer's belief that they are making decisions that are absent of deception from others (Moran, 2020). When online websites display signs that their associates are heavily involved in sales, customers become more concerned about being persuaded to make a particular purchase decision (Moran, 2020). Internet access and reliability are not the same in all countries, and their effects differ depending on a nation's "technological, sociocultural, environmental, political, and economical" factors (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009, p. 87). Each country reacts to internet usage and spread, and some parts of the population have adopted the internet as its shopping medium. In contrast, others have been hesitant to change their traditional perspective on retail.

Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier (2009) surveyed preferences for shopping modes in numerous product categories. The results imply that consumers in India, the United States, and Korea still prefer traditional retail stores over online shopping (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009). Indian consumers had the strongest preference for conventional retail shopping and valued the ability to interact with the seller (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009). Consumers in Korea preferred online shopping more than consumers in the other two countries, but the study suggested that the United States spent the most online (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009). As online shopping becomes more prevalent and trustworthy in the eyes of consumers worldwide, more consumers will begin making more necessary online purchases.

The spread of Internet access to more developed countries has created an economic boom that fostered the growth of bridal industries worldwide. China's bridal sector is forecasted to reach a market size of $7.7 billion by 2027, with bridal gowns consuming 2.5 percent of gross domestic product (Bridal Wear, 2021; Tao, 2019). Alonso (2018) explains that 72 percent of dresses produced in China are exported to other countries. These dresses show signs of knock-off designs and lower quality, so it is difficult for Chinese producers to compete in the high-end market of couture bridal gowns. Brazil's bridal industry is expected to grow by 15 percent in the coming years (Barcelona Bridal Fashion Week, 2020). Its brides support a six-billion-dollar industry where western bridal trends were made popular as the world became more connected with widespread internet and television access (Fonseca and Mezabarba, 2019). Mexico's bridal industry has the highest growth forecast in Latin America, with a compound growth rate of 6.2 percent (Barcelona Bridal Fashion Week, 2020). The primary manufacturers of dresses in Latin America produce

600,000 dresses a year (Barcelona Bridal Fashion Week, 2020). Mexico exports dresses to surrounding countries with lower production rates. Its designers are world-renowned, but Mexican brides seek dresses from international designers (Barcelona Bridal Fashion Week, 2020). The United States is experiencing an increase in the Hispanic population, which may also partly lead to Mexico's bridal trends becoming more popular. The 60 million Hispanic Americans in the United States make up over 18 percent of the total population, and 4.6 million, or almost 8%, are females aged 20 to 29 (Buchholz, 2021). Bridal industry growth in countries around the world suggests that:

> **Proposition 1:** The traditional bridal experience in developing countries such as China, Brazil, and Mexico will be altered as increased Internet access aids the spread of information and globalizes western bridal trends.

>> **1a:** The physical bridal shopping experience will become less common as brides in developing countries start to trust more in purchasing high-involvement products online.

>> **1b:** The online bridal shopping experience will become more common as brides in developing countries start to trust purchasing high-involvement products online.

A country's target bridal market is primarily influenced by the typical age and the average lifespan of people living there. The average age of brides in countries like China and India is younger than in most developed countries (Buchholz, 2021). In South Asia, 48 percent of women are married before they turn 18 (Smith, Paulson Stone, and Kahando, 2012), while the typical age for a United States bride is between 25 and 30 years. (Buchholz, 2021). Brides in developed European countries are more likely to get married in their early 30s and have a higher life expectancy (Life Expectancy for Men and Women, 2019). These trends suggest that life expectancy directly correlates with the age of marriage, and people living in countries with lower life expectancies marry earlier than those with higher life expectancies.

An overall decline in the marriage rate accompanies the increase in marriage age in the United States. Martin, Astone, and Peters (2014) forecast that the percentage of women married by 40 will decline by almost 13 percent from 2010 to 2030. In 2011, only 51% of adults were married compared to 72% in 1960 (Fry, 2012). Fry (2012, p.1) believes that "marriage increasingly is being replaced by cohabitation, single-person households, and other adult living arrangements." For less than high school-educated United States citizens, the marriage rate declined by 14% from 2008 to 2011 (Fry, 2012). In Japan, adults choose to marry later in life or not marry at all. Matsuda and Saskai (2020) explained that the mean age of first marriage was 26.9 for men and 24.2 for women in 1970. The numbers jumped to 31.1 for men and 29.4 for women in 2015. The pressure to marry is becoming less prevalent worldwide, and increasing opportunities for women in the job market contribute to prolonging marriage. Women can choose to marry later in life once they have established a stable career and lifestyle. These older brides may not be marrying for the first time and desire simpler designs that include variations of sleeves, modest necklines, and soft shapes (Read-Dominguez, 2021). The typical lavish, expensive dress is not as high of a priority for younger brides anymore.

The ease of online shopping appeals to brides who marry later in life because they are more established and have busier schedules. Online bridal shopping is convenient, user-friendly, and offers a wider variety, a better selection, and usually lower prices (Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009). Brides of previous centuries did not have the economic and occupational opportunities that women in more developed countries experience. The desire for quicker and easier access to consumer products increases as women are more involved in modern society. Working women do not have the time or energy to shop extensively and appreciate online retailers' ability to sell products "not easily accessible in physical retail" (Macik, Macik, and Nalewajek, 2014, p. 33). Anitsal and Schumann (2007) point out that saved time was the most prominent reason people had a satisfying experience with a technology-based self-service item and primarily determined the customer's perception of service quality. Girard, Anitsal, and Anitsal (2008) also support that the most successful online retailers gain customers' trust by making easy-to-navigate and straightforward websites.

Brides marrying for their second or third time may be especially likely to shop online because many have already had the bridal experience at a boutique. Focus group participants believe the benefits of online shopping are countered by the risks of shipping delays and potential issues with the product (Macik, Macik, and Nalewajek, 2014). The bride's dress can be one of the most important details of her wedding day, and the uncertainty of shopping online does not outweigh its advantages in some situations. Brick-and-mortar retailers can compete with online bridal stores by promoting time management for busy brides and incorporating changing technology to appointments (Macik, Macik, and Nalewajek, 2014; Lee, Paswan, Ganesh, and Xavier, 2009). Moeller, Fassnacht, and Ettinger (2009) hypothesize that brick-and-mortar stores can also increase convenience by considering a more central store location and appropriate operating hours for their target market. Greater selection and convenience will encourage brides of all ages to shop at bridal boutiques. Based on this information about changing desires of aging brides, the following proposition is offered:

> **Proposition 2:** As women in more developed countries choose to marry later in life, the type of retail experience desired by brides will change.
>
> > **2a.** The desire for the physical bridal boutique shopping experience will decline due to a lack of convenience.
> >
> > **2b.** The desire for the online bridal shopping experience will increase due to the simplicity of online shopping.

A customer's social experience while shopping both in-person and online will influence the purchase decision. A study performed by Hassanein and Head (2007) suggests that a customer sometimes desires a pleasant experience more than acquiring the product. Customer enjoyment while shopping is an influential part of any retail format, and companies need to create a positive emotional connection with their shoppers to survive against similar retailers. Roozen and Katidis (2019) support the importance of customer enjoyment by conveying that customers justify paying a higher price for a product when they enjoy their shopping experience. The customer-employee relationship is an essential part of a customer's social experience. Research indicates that "employees and the customer-employee relationship are vital factors in customers' positive or negative response to the service and shopping experience" (Roozen and Katidis, 2019, p. 270).

Customer experience also includes the overall store atmosphere, encouraging desired purchasing decisions. A store's ambiance and atmosphere seem to create the strongest customer reactions compared to other store characteristics (Williams, Hubbard, Clark, and Berkeley, 2001). Dobscha and Foxman (2012) state that the combination of "atmospherics and personnel positivity" directly affects their perception of the retailer (p. 303). Their experience with a company's physical atmosphere, employees, products, and customer policies contributes to their comfort and enjoyment levels (Roozen and Katidis, 2019). Belk (1975) further supports the importance of physical and social surroundings and indicates that factors such as geographical location, decorations, lighting, and the roles of other people present during the purchase are influential.

A buyer's social surroundings and entourage's ability to change the buyer's opinion of the product or its price can influence purchase decisions (Zhuang, Tsang, Zhou, Li, and Nicholls, 2006). They also explain that a tough buying decision can be made easier when friends or family support the purchase (Zhuang, Tsang, Zhou, Li, and Nicholls, 2006). As a result, many brides invite close family and friends to their bridal appointments to give their opinions and help them choose the perfect dress. However, Thomas and Peters (2011) note that since geographical distance may keep family from attending the appointment, more brides are relying on online communities for purchase advice and support. Lee, Park, and Han (2011) further support this trend and argue that online customer reviews are influential and online shoppers rely on information from other customers before purchasing products. Online bridal stores have more difficulty replicating the experience of shopping for a product in a brick-and-mortar store but create atmospherics through website design. The rise in purchases made online has lessened the social experience for customers and decreased human interaction (Hassanein and Head, 2007), creating a gap in the presence of social interactions in traditional stores compared to online retailers.

Bridal boutiques and other specialty stores have an advantage in providing a positive social experience for customers. They can use their in-person interactions as leverage in ways that online bridal stores cannot. In-person interactions with employees create a sense of human warmth that is difficult to replicate while online shopping (Hassanein and Head, 2007). Boutiques also frequently display dresses on mannequins and show pictures of real brides who purchased their dresses at that store, further establishing the sense of care and service unique to the physical bridalwear shopping experience. Online retailers have attempted to compensate for the lack of personalization by introducing virtual fitting rooms. These virtual fitting rooms create three-dimensional avatars with the shopper's body dimensions to show how clothes will fit on that person (Pachoulakis and Kapetanakis, 2012). This feature makes the online shopping experience more realistic and reduces the fit and style uncertainty of not trying garments. Misfitting garments can promote negative feelings toward online shopping and certain stores, so adding these simulations can improve customer experience and emotion towards shopping online (Noordin, Ashaari, and Wook, 2017). David's Bridal is introducing virtual fitting rooms in the bridal industry by creating three-dimensional imaging that shows how a dress will look on a bride to persuade her to try the dress in-store (Verdon, 2020).

The day a bride shops for her dress may be the day she envisioned for years and is an emotional experience for her and her entourage. Most brides heavily research wedding dresses and plan when to purchase them because it is a highly involved process (Moe, 2003). Still, her social and emotional experience at the store will largely determine her purchasing behavior. Hassanein and Head (2007) suggest that customers spend more time in a store, spend more money, and are more likely to make unplanned purchases when they have a positive emotional experience. Some

brides may not plan to purchase their dress during their first appointment, but a positive atmosphere that creates strong emotions can outweigh a previous logical decision to prolong purchasing. Female consumers appreciate a store's service and entertainment features (Roozen and Katidis, 2019), so bridal appointments that serve alcohol or hors d'oeuvres may influence a bride to purchase. These experiences come with a higher price, and a study of Polish consumers by Macik, Macik, and Nalewajek (2014) addresses this concern by explaining how some customers will shop at a specialty retail store to consult a professional and gain knowledge but will purchase the product online for a more cost-effective alternative. The following proposition is offered to address the importance of a customer's social experience while bridalwear shopping:

> **Proposition 3:** If bridal retail stores tailor their services to the customer's desire for a unique and personal social experience, the bride will be more satisfied and likely to purchase a dress.

>> **3a.** Brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores will acquire more customers by promoting the unique, in-person social experience that brides cannot experience when shopping online.

>> **3b.** Online bridal retail stores will lose customers if they do not personalize the online shopping experience for brides who desire personal contact with sales associates.

Brides shopping at boutiques can purchase a dress in four ways: bespoke, made-to-measure, made-to-order, or off-the-rack (JoSaBi Mariees, 2020). Bespoke means a bride designs a custom-made gown with a seamstress based on her bridal vision, which allows for a more personalized and creative dress. These custom-made wedding dresses are estimated to cost 20 percent more than a made-to-order wedding gown and can be a six-to-eight-month process (Real Bride, 2021). For a made-to-measure dress, measurements will be taken so the dress can be "tailored to size, shape, and proportions, rather than design preferences" (JoSaBi Mariees, 2020, p.1). The JoSabi Mariees website (2020) indicates the most common wedding dress is made-to-order, where a boutique orders the bride's chosen dress in size nearest to her measured size. The bride then hires a seamstress to alter the dress to her exact measurements. A popular choice for brides on a budget is to buy a sample dress off-the-rack, often an option at franchise bridal stores like David's Bridal, where dresses can be sold at a competitive price (JoSaBi Mariees, 2020). Although these four options are enough for some brides, brick-and-mortar, bridal boutiques lack the variety in purchase options and wedding dress styles that online bridal stores can more easily provide. Online shoppers can exert less effort and gain the same results, so physical retail stores must decide how to offer these same benefits. Anitsal and Schumann (2007) support this by suggesting that "retailers need to consider new ways of providing effort, time, and money savings" (p. 359).

The concept of renting a wedding dress for half its cost is also an emerging trend as brides become more budget conscious and do-it-yourself focused. "The Lyst Wedding Trends 2020 report found that search for wedding dresses including the words' vintage,' 'second hand' and pre-owned' are collectively up 38% year-on-year" (Soo Hoo, 2021, p.1). The rental market satisfies the needs of customers that do not see the value in spending money on a gown that will be worn for one day (Lang, 2018). Concerns about a gown's performance risk are prevalent because many brides will wear the same gown, and renters encounter psychological and social risks because of their egos

and desire for social approval (Lang, 2018). Brides experience these risks because although renting a wedding dress may be the best economic and financial decision, it is the societal norm to save money and purchase a wedding dress that the bride will cherish for years. Tao (2019) counters this perspective and underlines that many brides still buy new, increasing demand for new dresses. Chinese women who previously rented a wedding dress now buy their own because of its perceived permanent value (Tao, 2019).

Bridal companies experience difficulties with the rental because of the demand for a wide selection of current styles in all sizes (Soo Hoo, 2021). Unlike traditional bridal retail, wedding dresses for rent are worn by multiple brides and can be continuously profitable until sold or retired (Lang, 2018). These dresses are not considered samples for the bride to try before ordering the dress in her size. The inventory turnover for fashion rental is lower than traditional retail. Each dress should appeal to many brides interested in renting their wedding dresses and cannot be too niche or unusual. Brides who decide to rent their wedding dresses have a more limited budget for the wedding but still want to wear high-quality dresses (Thomas and Peters, 2011). Dobscha and Foxman (2012) reveal a bride's perspective on the cost of a new wedding dress in an interview with a bride who said that "the $2,000 price tags were out of the question" (p. 295). As rental stores perfect their inventory and learn their customers' preferences for trends, colors, styles, and fit, they can be more profitable with a smaller inventory of dresses. For example, if a bridal store purchases 100 dresses for $800 each and rents each dress for $400, the store will spend $80,000 on inventory and need to rent 200 dresses before it makes a profit. The typical cost of a new wedding dress for a customer in the United States is $1,631, so both the customer and company are experiencing financial benefits (Varina, 2021). To address brides' increasing desire for variety while wedding dress shopping, it is suggested that:

>**Proposition 4:** If bridal retail stores give brides a variety of purchase options while wedding dress shopping, including custom-make, order, rent, or purchase their dresses off-the-rack, they will satisfy the needs of more brides and increase revenue.

>>**4a**. Brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores will have lower customer appeal if they do not give brides multiple options to acquire a wedding dress.

>>**4b**. Online bridal retail stores will have higher customer appeal if they give various purchase options to meet brides' needs.

Traditions have developed from western culture that modern brides continue to practice. For example, a typical western wedding includes the tossing of the bouquet. The single woman who catches the flowers is said to be the next woman to find her husband (Shannon M., 2021). Another tradition is for couples to have a post-reception shower. Wedding guests would originally throw rice on the couple but now include bubbles, sparklers, flower petals, or candy (Shannon M., 2021). It is also custom for western brides to buy their wedding dress from a designer or retail establishment instead of making it herself. Shannon M (2021) further states that it is considered bad luck for the bride to wear the final bridal outfit before the wedding day or for her husband to see her in her gown before the ceremony.

The idea of incorporating something old, new, borrowed, and blue is an upcoming trend in western culture (The Knot, 2020). The bride usually receives a sentimental piece of jewelry or

family heirloom that acts as something old on her wedding day. Something new represents optimism for the bride and groom's future together. In western culture, something borrowed is intended to be from a married relative for good fortune. "A popular western tradition is for a bride to incorporate a family heirloom or gift" (The Knot, 2020, p.1). Lastly, the bride is encouraged to include something blue in her wedding, whether in her bouquet, dress, or decorations. Blue represents love, purity, and fidelity, three characteristics of a successful marriage. Wedding dresses have strong cultural significance, and many brides in western culture have taken advantage of their widespread Internet access to create online wedding message boards and communities (Thomas and Peters, 2011). They point out that brides use these communities to ask for opinions on what kind of dress is appropriate for their location, time, and culture and how to "veer from traditional cultural norms" if she desires (p. 153). These online communities have made it easier for brides of different cultures to share their traditions and opinions that influence brides' decisions about their wedding dresses. Ozekin and Arioz (2014) address the popularization of western traditions through globalization and argue that western culture has had a more significant influence as cultural traditions merge. Some theories support that cultural globalization has become a one-way spread of Westernization or Americanization that has overtaken other cultures (Ozekin and Arioz, 2014). Although these western bridal traditions are prominent, eastern countries continue to practice their unique bridal traditions and even share qualities with western brides.

Eastern countries have prevalent traditions that brides incorporate into their weddings. Monger (2013) talks about how many eastern countries give gifts of good wishes to the newlyweds. Pink Chalk representing marital bliss is common in Vietnamese culture, and scarves symbolizing "kindness and purity" are prevalent in Tibet (Monger, 2013, p. 676). Monger (2013) also describes how Indian brides often decorate their hands and feet with elaborate hennas. "It is said that the longer the henna stays on the girl's hands, the longer her husband will love her" (Monger, 2013, p. 52). Like in western cultures, Muslim brides wear veils during their wedding nuptials. However, these brides wear the veil to represent the shift from childhood to womanhood, and the husband's first sighting of his bride without her veil is after the wedding (Monger, 2013). This tradition is unlike Western brides who wear the veil over the face only during the ceremony or as a headpiece for decoration. Continued exposure to typical western and eastern bridal traditions may lead to the following:

Based on the discussion above: the following proposition is offered:

Proposition 5: Western and eastern bridal trends will begin to merge as brides incorporate new trends realized through globalization and increasing knowledge about other cultures' traditions.

5a: Brick-and-mortar bridal retailers will experience decreased purchases as brides use Internet sources to reference bridal fashion and traditions in different cultures.

5b: Online bridal retailers will experience increased purchases as brides use Internet sources to reference bridal fashion and traditions in different cultures.

Managerial Implications

Managers need to consider the emerging bridal trends to appeal to brides and survive in the bridal industry. Bridal retail store managers who fail to adapt their business model to changing customer desires may lose their appeal and be surpassed by managers who understand the importance of these changes. Business strategies that consider convenience, emotional experience, and shopping method variety for brides will aid both brick-and-mortar and online bridal retail stores in better meeting brides' needs. The retail format that best adjusts to these emerging trends will have a better chance of survival.

Demographic Implications

The bridal industry overwhelmingly serves female consumers, so each step of the product supply chain should focus specifically on female desires, shopping patterns, and purchase behavior. Women outshop men online and in brick-and-mortar retail stores, so tailoring a store or website's atmosphere and layout to what women expect is critical (Brennan, 2011). Bridal retail store managers should understand the importance of atmospherics in the physical retail environment and ensure that the ambiance, décor, and visual displays match what brides expect. This is a factor that brick-and-mortar managers can manipulate more quickly than online managers because customers physically enter the store. It is crucial in influencing consumers' thoughts and judgments about the store's quality (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, and Bardi, 2020). Roozen and Katidis (2019) support this finding and explain that female consumers value in-store benefits like store design and service ambiance more than male consumers. Female and male consumers value different qualities of a retail store when shopping, and the acts of bonding while shopping and human interaction are more prevalent for female shoppers (Brennan, 2011). Women naturally have higher levels of oxytocin, triggered by intimacy and personal experiences (Brennan, 2011), so the traditional bridal appointment is typically valued by females who desire a memorable and emotional experience.

Managers working in the bridal industry also need to consider that they will continue to see a more significant gap in the age of the brides they service. A bride's age largely depends on her home country and culture, so bridal retail stores in every country must cater to a specific aged bride and her preferences. United States brides marrying in their forties or fifties tend to prefer wedding dresses with subtle necklines, sleeves, and softer shapes (Read-Dominguez, 2021). For brides in their twenties or thirties, slimmer silhouettes, like mermaid-style dresses, and non-traditional dresses, like jumpsuits and cocktail-length dresses, are on the rise (Gaille, 2018). Suppose a country's bridal industry or bridal retail stores do not consider the desires of their target demographic. In that case, they will purchase dresses that their customer base is unsatisfied with, causing sales revenue to decline. Managers in the United States will continue to see brides above the age of thirty as the marriage age increases, so dresses that meet the style preferences of brides in each age range should be purchased. Brides of different countries also seek different bridal gown styles, so managers need to understand the desired fit, color, and style unique to their geographic region despite age and purchase dresses according to this style.

Media Implications

Bridal industry managers could also benefit their retail stores by taking advantage of interactions with real brides through magazines, social media, and website advertisements. Modern brides seek information and inspiration through media platforms, and the Bridal Association of America reported in 2009 that 77% of brides used Internet sources while planning their wedding (Thomas and Peters, 2011). Bridal retail stores can establish an online presence by taking advantage of the exposure that media can provide.

Engaged women rely on messages from the media to determine their wedding vision. Bridal media persuades brides to emulate the types of weddings and bridal looks showcased in advertisements (Broekhuizen, 2016). Pictures and advertisements in magazines and websites showcase the image of the perfect bride and mobilize traditional configurations of womanhood and how a bride should look on her wedding day (Winch and Webster, 2012). Although using media for this purpose can create unrealistic expectations of how brides should look on their wedding day, bridal retail managers can take advantage of the popularity of these formats to attract brides to their stores. Numerous brides view magazine advertisements, and an ad for a particular store or dress may persuade that bride to book an appointment at the advertised store.

Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook are also high-traffic areas for brides looking for inspiration. Posting company social media pages about products or sales could increase word-of-mouth advertising and exposure. It may also benefit bridal retail stores to research online communities with discussion forums where real brides post their opinions and experiences. These online communities include Reddit, The Knot Community, WeddingWire, and similar discussion platforms where brides can post questions, and other brides can comment with advice (Agarwal, 2021). Topics about bridal gowns, flowers, wedding invitations, and budget are only a few of the popular discussion boards on social media websites. It may be beneficial for managers of bridal retail stores to collect data on real brides, understand their issues, and consider how to solve customer problems.

Bridal retail stores could also benefit from publishing and supporting advertisements with different ethnicities and body types models. Although modern advertisements are becoming increasingly diverse, most still show pictures of a thin model in the traditional white dress (Engstrom, 2008). Brides of all races in the United States deserve representation in bridal media. Some magazines specifically cater to African American brides but "do not provide enough experienced services for consumers to trust or reach out to" (Dalrymple-Williams, 2004, p. 22). These brides are made to gather information from media that they are not equally represented in for the best sources. Brides of all body types are also not represented proportionately in bridal media. The average dress size in the United States is between 16 and 18, but the average model is 4 (Nunes, 2021). David's Bridal has begun to cater to the average bride by selling dresses sized 14 to 26 (Dalrymple-Williams, 2004). Managers at other bridal retail stores, both brick-and-mortar and online, could also reap the benefits of inclusion by expanding sizing options and availability for brides.

Brick-and-Mortar Store Implications

Some recommendations apply specifically to brick-and-mortar bridal retail store managers and outline how a retail format can survive during the rise of online shopping. Brick-and-mortar bridal retail store managers must adapt to the desire for a more straightforward shopping process while searching for a wedding dress. Customers value only having to put forth minimal effort for

satisfactory results, and online retailers can provide this convenience through speed and a wide selection (Baldock, 2021). Anitsal and Schumann (2007) suggest that a study by Meuter found saving time to be the most significant determinant of a satisfactory shopping experience. A different study by Pine and Gilmore (1999) also shows the importance of convenience and found that customers are willing to pay more for a product if they enjoy their shopping experience (Roozen and Katidis, 2019). Suppose brick-and-mortar managers can match this convenience with better operating hours, more personalized service, or services that save the customer time. In that case, they may lessen the gap between the effort required to shop in-person versus online (Moeller, Fassnacht, and Ettinger, 2009). One method that may increase convenience is for brick-and-mortar stores to experiment with the franchise retail format. Franchises would help create more boutique locations for brides to visit and help grow smaller bridal businesses. The franchising method has helped David's Bridal sell more dresses than any other retailer, so other bridal retail stores may experience the same success (Gaille, 2018).

The transition between operating a brick-and-mortar retail store versus an online retail store can create difficulties in logistics, marketing, and customer satisfaction. Customer demands will shift as a business switches from one retail store format to another, and its employees need to learn how to distribute, purchase, and sell to customers in a new way (Forbes, 2021). Forbes (2021) also reports that 86% of people plan to continue online shopping more frequently once the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted, so many brick-and-mortar stores are finding ways to enter the online retail sector. Website design and digital marketing have become more important to online consumers. Managers of previously brick-and-mortar stores may experience difficulties learning how to help shoppers find the products they need and sell to customers without in-person interaction (Forbes, 2021). A nationwide survey found that 65% of customers are less likely to shop at a store's physical location if they have an unsatisfactory experience shopping on their website (Girard, Anitsal, and Anitsal, 2008). Managers attempting this transition should focus on converting loyal customers of one format to customers of the other (Big Commerce, 2021).

Managers of brick-and-mortar stores should capitalize on the uniqueness of the bridal appointment experience to differentiate themselves from online bridal retailers. Because the COVID-19 pandemic made people more likely to shop online, managers of brick-and-mortar stores need to create interest in physical stores by capitalizing on the bridal appointment experience that is not available when ordering a dress from a website. Buyers are willing to spend more money on a product that requires professional selling (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins, and Bardi, 2020), and many brides are also willing to pay extra for the experience of shopping for a bridal gown in a boutique accompanied by their entourage. They value the experience of trying on the perfect dress and feeling the emotions that come with this experience, and some brides are not willing to forgo that feeling by shopping online. This experience is unique to brick-and-mortar stores. Most brides may only want to experience one time in their lives, so brick-and-mortar bridal retail store managers need to understand how to capitalize on this experience and make it one they need to make a purchase decision.

Managers should also build trust through the employee-customer relationship, another advantage over online bridal retail stores. Women are more likely than men to desire human interaction during a transaction, and this human touch and sensory experience are unmatched online (Brennan, 2011). Trust is more difficult for online retail stores to establish due to minimal customer-employee interaction, so employees of brick-and-mortar stores should build relationships with customers that persuade the bride to purchase her dress from that store instead

of from a website. Managers can build these relationships through customer service, texts, emails, calls, and follow-up conversations that show the effort, care, and attention dedicated to that bride. Established relationships can help brick-and-mortar stores survive against online bridal retailers, who may have more difficulty establishing meaningful, personal relationships with customers they have never interacted with in person. Online retailers attempt to establish trust and a more personalized experience by introducing digital chat rooms. 54% of online retail stores have added this feature, allowing customers to ask questions about the product and talk to an employee representative (Rae, 2017). These digital chat rooms provide consultations for customers who desire it and more value for customers who enjoy shopping online but still need advisement (Parkkinen, 2017). Managers of online bridal retail stores should include this feature because purchasing a wedding dress is a high-involvement process with many emotions and questions, so brides may seek extra attention from experts in the field.

Strategy Implications

Managers of brick-and-mortar and online bridal retail stores may also want to adopt business strategies that address inventory and the retail environment according to emerging bridal trends. According to consumers, bridal retail stores may benefit from a business model that houses a smaller inventory of only the most popular dresses. A small yet popular inventory can be less costly and more profitable than a more extensive one. The balance between a smaller inventory of popular gowns and enough to satisfy brides of all sizes with differing tastes and styles is difficult to maintain (Soo Hoo, 2021). If managers understand their target market's desires, they can save time, money, and effort by reducing unnecessary dresses in the store. Each dress would appeal to a specific bridal style, and customers may be less overwhelmed while shopping. This business model could also aid in forming employee-customer relationships as the bride spends less time searching through the racks of dresses and more time trying on dresses with the employee.

Managers should also make strategic business decisions with the customer's emotional experience in mind because a positive emotional experience makes the bride more likely to buy (Brennan, 2011). If customers do not have a positive emotional experience within an industry, they shop with the retailer that offers the lowest price (Brennan, 2011). In the bridal industry, online retail stores usually have the advantage of selling dresses for lower prices, so brides have negative emotional experiences. In contrast, dress shopping makes it more difficult for brick-and-mortar stores to survive. When a bride has a positive emotional experience instead, it is difficult for online retail stores to compete.

Future Research Avenues

The global bridal industry has been reviewed according to how emerging trends will affect brick-and-mortar and online bridal retail stores. However, further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand the modern bride better. Information was limited due to research gaps, including the lack of data collected through qualitative research such as case studies, surveys, and interviews with brides to learn their preferences. Little research focuses on differences in bridal consumption patterns based on style, fit, and color depending on demographic groups in the United States. More information about the European bridal industry, particularly details about France, was desired, but few sources were found.

Retail Format

Most bridal stores are specialty boutiques that sell only bridal gowns and accessories, but some department and discount stores sell their bridal product lines. Research on how personnel at different store formats should sell to brides depending on the characteristics of that format's typical bride may be helpful for new stores in the bridal industry. Brides who shop at specialty stores are typically willing to pay more for the dress, service, and experience (Roozen and Katidis, 2019). Still, brides who shop at a department store may be satisfied with purchasing a more generic, lower-quality dress. The company could save money in that department if research found that these brides do not value service and extra amenities. Brides shopping at discount stores may be most interested in the price of the dress instead of its quality or appearance. Employees at each store would benefit from surveys and case studies about the preferences of brides with various backgrounds. Anitsal and Anitsal (2011) support this view and believe that understanding the changes in retail customers is essential because they are more diverse and have differing demographics and values. This is true of any industry, but researching how store format affects bridal customers would benefit sales employees.

Franchising is another retail store format becoming more appealing in the bridal industry because of the success stories of companies like David's Bridal. David's Bridal is the leading bridal retail store in dollar sales, the number of dresses sold, and technological advancements like three-dimensional fitting rooms (Gaille, 2018; Verdon, 2020). Most other bridal retail boutiques are smaller and independently owned. Still, larger retail stores that can create demand for specific trends and sell to many brides can exert significant pressure on the smaller ones (Gaille, 2018). Case Studies and interviews with personnel from smaller bridal boutiques could share insight on how influential David's Bridal is for other players in the bridal industry. Information on how smaller stores compete with prices and selection would be helpful for other bridal retailers to understand how retail format affects business strategy.

Bridal Experience

Research of real brides that asks questions about preferred experience, trends, traditions, and opinions should also be conducted to have reliable information from industrial customers. One-on-one interviews and case studies of brides and their shopping experience through different retail formats would clarify how brides perceive the industry. Focus groups of real brides, both currently engaged and married for several years, would also create conversation about how bridal retail stores can better serve brides' needs. Qualitative research may be more beneficial than quantitative research in addressing these issues because a bride's personal experience and opinion can be more easily analyzed through interviews, case studies, and focus groups. Research about brick-and-mortar and online retail store characteristics, in general, has been conducted (Roozen and Katidis, 2019; Anitsal and Anitsal, 2011), but information about retail store atmospherics, social experience, and emotional experience has not been analyzed through the bridal industry lens.

Information on differing bridal gown preferences based on race and ethnicity is also challenging to find, so more research on this topic would provide insights on how the bridal industry can better appeal to brides of every background. Brides who are Caucasian, Hispanic, African, or Asian American may experience the United States bridal industry differently. Some

face challenges finding a dress that meets their cultural needs (Hargrove, 2018). Brides looking for gowns that reflect their cultural trends, like Chinese brides searching for a Cheongsam, seem to have difficulties satisfying that desire through typical bridal retail stores in the United States (Steinford, 2020). Interviews and surveys with real brides of different races and ethnicities to answer questions about if that bride found the kind of dress that she was searching for is needed. This research can determine how the United States bridal industry, specifically brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores, can become more diverse and provide gowns for brides of different backgrounds. Brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores have a better chance at survival if they attract the business of these brides.

Emerging Trends

There is also a lack of academic research about the emergence of online retail as a dominant store format and how this change in shopping will affect the bridal industry specifically. Wedding gowns were trending towards more luxurious fabrics and expensive styles before the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting many customers to shop online more frequently (Baldock, 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2013). Online retail stores offer a wider variety and greater convenience, so increasing online customers may affect the bridal industry. Research investigating if shopping on online bridal retail stores has begun to reverse the trend toward more expensive dresses would be helpful for bridal industry workers to recognize. Suppose shopping online makes more simple and affordable wedding gowns attractive to brides. In that case, brick-and-mortar bridal retail stores will need to understand this change and rely on the unique experiences they provide for brides to survive. It may be too early to tell where the data is trending, but this change may be influential enough to change how the bridal industry operates in the future.

Brides over the age of forty are another emerging trend in the United States' bridal industry, so these brides' style preferences and needs should be better understood by personnel working with these customers. The average age for brides is increasing in the United States, and over forty are no longer rare (Matsuda and Sasaki, 2020). Information about how brides over forty will change the bridal industry with their style preferences and shopping habits would help understand the trajectory of the bridal industry. Brides over forty will be assumed to have larger budgets for their wedding dresses because they are more established in their lifestyle and careers. On the contrary, they may have lower budgets because they are not focused on luxurious dresses and the bridal experience. These two assumptions could be answered through further research.

Country-Specific Trends

Bridal industry information for some of the world's most fashion-forward countries, particularly France, was not found, which leaves a gap in research that could clarify their influence on the world's bridal trends if filled by qualitative data. Many bridal gowns are produced in countries like China and the United States, but French designers created or custom-made many higher-end or couture wedding gowns. France is home to many bridal designers and manufacturers of wedding dresses, especially couture gowns (Louise, 2021). This specific sector of the bridal industry also deserves more research and attention as brides begin to lean towards more luxury goods (IBIS World, 2020). French bridal designers have an "unparalleled attention to detail" that produces precise and unmatched quality (Kreienberg, 2019, p. 1). The effects of these design techniques on

the United States bridal industry and designers could be beneficial to understand how leading bridal industries affect the global bridal sector overall. Chenal (2021) describes French bridal fashion as chic and effortless and considers a bride's comfort in providing delicate fabrics. France is regarded as the "birthplace of couture," but information about France's bridal industry and its products and trends was almost nonexistent (Louise, 2021). Paris is one of the world's fashion capitals and is one of the leading innovators in the fashion world (Fashion Schools, 2016). Brides researching French bridal designers have an array of options and websites to educate them on the qualities and characteristics of each designer (Lajiness, 2021), but information on how France's bridal industry influences other countries' bridal industries is not found.

Observational trials, interviews, surveys, or other qualitative research methods to collect data from real brides in France would be helpful to explain its influence on the industry and how a bridal sector in one of the world's fashion capitals compares to other bridal industries. France is the eleventh highest importing country for the United States, with $17.2 billion in imports in 1995 (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1997), so information from their consumers and business methods could indict the United States. France's high-context culture and its effects on the bridal industry may also be a fruitful research avenue. A high-context culture values nonverbal messages and cues while paying more attention to the context of situations and conversations (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1997). The United States is a low-context culture that values explicit messages, so brides in each country may experience the bridal industry differently and appreciate different levels of social and emotional experience.

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Author Information

Ms. Libby Jones was an undergraduate Marketing student at Missouri State University. Her research interests include consumer behavior, fashion trends, the bridal industry, and retail marketing. She has accepted a position working in the bridal industry upon graduation and will be attending the University of Missouri's Crosby MBA Program starting in Fall 2022.

Ismet Anitsal is the Department Head, Professor of Marketing, and Dean's Leadership Professor in Business at Missouri State University. His research interests emphasize customer productivity, customer value, service quality in services marketing and retailing, entrepreneurship, business ethics, and online education. He also serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals.

M. Meral Anitsal is a Professor of Marketing at the Tennessee Tech University. Her research interests include services marketing, consumer behavior, new product development, business ethics, and online education. She serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals. She enjoys teaching marketing research, services marketing, design thinking, and entrepreneurship.