

LAVISH WEDDING AMONG MUSLIMS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Spending huge amount of money during wedding ceremony among Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups who are predominantly Muslims in Northern Nigeria is a new phenomenon. There is a change in the trend at which potential husband and wife spend ostentatiously at pre and post wedding events to impress the friends, relatives and the general public. The study adopted a Theory of Conspicuous consumption by Thorsten Veblen to explain the behaviour of some bride and groom in spending money to impress others. Methodologically, qualitative data were elicited from ten IDI with some newly wedded couples in Kano and Katsina metropolises. The study found that in an attempt to demonstrate one's social and economic class in the society, some people spend money uncontrollably during their wedding or that of their children or relatives. The result further showed that the essence of the wedding spending is not to impress the couples but it is targeted at the audience, spectators or guests at the wedding which contravenes the teachings of Islam which admonish Muslims to be modest in all their social interactions and activities. The paper concluded that spending huge amount of money during wedding deter young people from getting married which leads to delay marriage among people of child bearing age in Kano and Katsina. This is rampant because the neglect of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Benediction of Allah be upon him) in wedding rites.*

Keyword: *Islam Spending, Money, Marriage, Wedding Events, Conspicuous Consumption*

A. Introduction

Wedding events or ceremony is one of the social rituals in the rite of passage practised in virtually all human society. However, the manner and pattern of celebration of this important



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rite of passage, marriage, differs from culture to culture and society to society. The venue of the wedding ceremonies in traditional African society was usually at the worshipping centres, Mosque for Muslims and Church premises for Christians or at the residents of the bride or groom. However, the introduction of pre-wedding events in the series of celebrations has brought the invention of modern venues for some of the pre-wedding events in Muslim weddings in Northern Nigeria, marriage has become expensive and an avenue for showcasing social class, status and wealth. In one of the culturally diverse countries like Nigeria, India. Bloch, Rao and Desai observed that marriage of a daughter is the most expensive event in an Indian family's life, often forcing parents into serious debt with interest rates of over 200 percent. These costs, which can amount to more than six times a family's annual income, might push a family into poverty and bonded labor, particularly if there are multiple daughters to marry. Similarly, Farooqi, Ahmed and Yaseem found that huge amount of money are spent on food during the wedding ceremonies of Muslim in Karachi, Pakistan.¹

Teame, Andoma, Tekleabb, Arayac, Ghebreaabd stated as an attempt to demonstrate an economic class status in Adi-Keih town, Eritrea, the head of the household are compelled by the cultural norms to spend on exorbitantly during wedding ceremonies. Household's head age, level of education, religion and income were the major determinant of the amount of money spent during the wedding refer to conspicuous consumption.²

Nigeria's wedding industry has seen a huge transition, with multimillion-dollar sales and a favorable impact on the country's economy. According to industry participants' observations and opinions, more than a million weddings are held in Africa each year, as metropolitan cities continue to "spice up," especially on weekends. Weddings are still the most expensive and important event for many Nigerian families, and the business continues to draw many companies, given that weddings have now become a method for couples to impress their friends and families. The internet of things has also aided in propelling the sector to new heights, particularly through social media platforms.³

Nigerians, without a doubt, spend millions on weddings each year, creating numerous opportunities for wedding entrepreneurs who are eager to invest resources to ensure that individuals have the financial means required to see their dreams/fantasies realized. Weddings' popularity in Nigeria has spawned new vocations, which have resulted in a slew of new

¹ Bloch, F., Rao, V. & Desai, S. (2002). *Wedding celebrations as conspicuous consumption: signaling social status in rural India*. Development Research Group, the World Bank, University of Maryland

² ibid

³ Shitta-Bey, T. (2019). Weddings: Understanding the main event heralding a lifetime journey. *Personal Finance*, 1(209), 1-44.

occupations and business prospects. Wedding planners, cake-makers, florists, photographers, music bands, DJs, and beauticians have all benefited from the increase in the wedding-related industry. Previously, brides had to go to another country to purchase their wedding gowns.⁴

Statement of the Research Problem

The influence of Western culture has influenced marriage of both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. In All regions of Nigeria, South, West and East as well as North, there is an evident changes in the pattern of wedding events which compelled both the bride and groom families to spend huge amount of money to impress the audience. Nwoko has identified three key factors that contributed to the changing pattern and nature of traditional marriage among the Igbo people in Nigeria. These occupation of the people, that is, people tend to spend money during marriage based on their occupation which determines their income. Additionally, the mixture of religious tenets with cultural rites, particularly among Igbo Christians has influenced the change in the marriage events in Igbo land and the third factor, is the cultural interaction between Igbo and other ethnic groups has led the Igbo people to adopt and practice some culture of other ethnic groups they intermingled with them.⁵ Bride price has made marriage expensive and in Zimbabwe, people pay high bride price that commensurate with their social and economic class. Ostentatious spending on marriage has been attributed to the marital problems and dissolution in Benue State. Husbands who spent flamboyantly during the wedding tend to dehumanize their wives after the events hence beating and divorce (Sambe, Avanger, Agba, & Solomon, 2013).⁶ Therefore, the objectives of this study is to assess the spending during wedding in some selected States and to explain the reasons why people spend huge amount of money on wedding events in Northern Nigeria.

Sketch of Literature Review

A qualitative research conducted in Niger State has examined the changes experienced in the marriages of three dominant ethnic groups in the State. The dominant ethnic groups found in the State are Nupe, Gbagyi and Hausa/Fulani. Before the interaction between the

⁴ ibid

⁵ Nwoko, K. C. (2020). The Changing nature and patterns of traditional marriage practices among the Owerre-Igbo, a subgroup of the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 33,681–692.

⁶ Mubaiwa, O. (2019). *The dynamics of bride price in Zimbabwe and the diaspora*. An Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of International Development, University of Portsmouth School of Area Studies, History, Politics and Literature (SASHPL). See Sambe, N., Avanger, M., & Agba, S.A. (2013). The effects of high bride-price on marital stability. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 17(5), 65-70.

African culture and Western education, marriages in these ethnic groups were less elaborate, less flamboyant and less expensive. However, with the coming of Western education and assimilation of some culture into the marriages of these three ethnic groups, the wedding ceremonies among these ethnic groups in Niger State is beyond the financial reach of low and middle income earners. Both groom and bride's families are expected to spend huge amount of money throughout the wedding events to demonstrate their social and economic status.⁷

In his study of changes forms of weddings in Nigeria, Fagbola (2019) found that weddings in Nigeria, among Muslims and Christians has been affected by the influence of Western culture where groom and bride spend an exorbitant amount of money in the wedding processes. The researcher adopted a Netnographic approach in his study which concluded that the groom are expected to spend money in organizing lavish wedding parties as a mark of his social status and economic class. Therefore, the work of Fagbola explained that wedding has been transformed from cultural rituals or rites of passage where the bride and groom were expected to follow the longstanding cultural rite to the adoption of Western style of wedding events that is accompanied by expensive spending to organize.⁸

Similarly, in their study on traditional marriage customs and marital stability among married people in Yoruba ethnic group, Odunayo and Oyewole found that couples right from the processes of wedding, they tend to neglect the inherited cultural rites of marriage in the Yorubaland. Marriages are contracted now not based on agreement between families as it were before in the Yoruba culture but based on material possessions. The high rate of marital instability among the Yoruba people of the Southwestern Nigeria is explained by the inability of the husbands to continue taking care of the financial responsibilities of the wife as he displayed during courtship and wedding events. That is, conflict ensued between husband and wife when the husband failed to display affluent life he displayed during the wedding.⁹

Igodo conducted a study in Southeastern Nigeria among the Igbo people where he found that in Onicha, there was introduction of novel rites into the marital rites which made it extremely and beyond the financial reach of the youth of marriageable age. The study concluded that the introduction of unnecessary expenditure which is borrowed from Western

⁷ Ali, H.K., Al-Yasa'U, M., & Wushishi, A.A. (2018). An Investigation on the Forgotten Aspects of Cultures and Influence of Western Education among Communities in Niger State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 6(3), 32-36.

⁸ Fagbola, L. O. (2019). *Consumer identity & Nigerian wedding rituals: A blended netnography approach*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Salford Business School, the University of Salford, United Kingdom.

⁹ Odunayo, A. O. & Oyewole, O. O. (2019). Traditional marriage customs and marital stability among married people in Yoruba ethnic group. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 24(5), 23-27.

culture has financial implications on marriage and deter many from getting married in Onicha and parts of Southeastern Nigeria.¹⁰

In the same vein, a comparative study of the cultural rites between Tiv people of Central Nigeria and Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria was carried out by Waya and Okanume.¹¹ The researchers evaluated the Tiv and Igbo marriage systems and found that there is similarity of marriage rites between the two ethnic groups. Similarly, the study found that the entire system of marriage from the onset of courtship to marriage has been influenced by globalization where elaborate wedding from foreign culture. Some aspects of foreign weddings such as expensive dress, food and renting of events centre had made marriage expensive to handle by the potential grooms among Igbo and Tiv people in Nigeria.

Nnagbo examined the expensive nature of marriage in Southeast Nigeria. The researcher adopted a qualitative method and elicited from the research participants for two months. Marriage in Southeast among the Igbo is characterized by spray of money during the wedding ceremony, wearing of expensive dress in a uniform form called Aso-Ebi which is compulsory for the bride and groom as well as their friends and family members. The study revealed that traditional marriage in Igboland is now expensive as a result of irresponsible spray currency at the wedding events because it is an opportunity for the relatives, friends and well-wishers to celebrate. The bride and grooms takes advantage of such gathering to display their social and economic status to the audience hence make marriage costly in Igboland.¹²

It could be deduced from the above studies reviewed that there is paucity of study in Northern Nigeria on the changing patterns of marriage and the expenses during wedding events which made marriages very expensive in the Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this study intends to fill the vacuum in the existing literature by conducting a study in Northern Nigeria to examine the influence of western culture on marriage and the extravagant spending during the wedding events in some selected States in Northern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper has adopted a theory of Conspicuous Consumption developed by an American Social Theorist, Thorstein Veblen 1857-1929. The theory is appropriate in explaining the

¹⁰ Igodo, E. O. (2020). An appraisal of traditional marriage rites in Onicha sub culture area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions*, 2(1), 18-27

¹¹ Waya, D. T. & Okanume A. C. (2017). Evaluation of the Tiv and Igbo marriage systems. *Journal of Culture, Society and Development*, 29, 16-25.

¹² Nnagbo, E.C. (2020). *Ethnography of traditional marriages in Southeast Nigeria*. Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of Business Administration (DBA) California Southern University.

extravagant spending during wedding ceremony in Kano and Katsina metropolis. The theory stated that people buy goods or services for the express goal of demonstrating one's affluence is known as conspicuous spending. Conspicuous consumption is a way to demonstrate one's social position, particularly when the publicly displayed products and services are out of reach for other members of one's class. This style of spending is usually associated with the wealthy, but it can apply to people of any income class. Relating to the excessive spending of money on wedding events, especially in renting event centre to indicate one's social and economic status in the society, the explanation offered by Veblen on conspicuous consumption best explained the changing trend in wedding spending among people of Northern Nigeria.

B. Methodology

The researchers adopted a phenomenological research design which is suitable for a study of this nature that requires in-depth understanding of the rationale behind spending huge amount of money with the aim of impressing the audience or guest at a wedding ceremony. Also, the paper adopted an exploratory research type to elicit qualitative data using non-participant observations and interviews in Kano and Katsina metropolises. The researchers adopted non-probability sampling technique to sample research participants who were bride and grooms for the interview who during the wedding, they spent substantial amount of money. This has enabled the researchers to elicit first-hand data through In-Depth Interviews (IDI). Ten IDI were conducted in both Katsina and Kano States, five each of the States. The researchers visited some of the latest or newly built and expensive events in both Kano and Katsina metropolises between December 2020 and March 2022. The audio of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, together with the data from the observation checklist, presented based on the themes of the study.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Data Presentation

The data elicited from the field survey are presented below based on the objectives of the study. The objectives of this study is to assess excessive spending of money during wedding and to explain the reasons why people spend huge amount of money on wedding events in Northern Nigeria.

a. Excessive Spending Marriage Items

Results from Kano State which shares land boundary with Katsina State, showed the existence of similarity in their marital rites. This is because the predominant population of their inhabitants are Muslims and belong to the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. The people interviewed revealed a groom is expected to purchase expensive Boxes, at least five, each is filled with wrappers, underwear, apparel, cosmetics and shoes. These boxes as the culture of Hausa and Fulani people dictates, are displayed before the guests on the wedding day at the residence of the bride. The aim is to show relatives, friends and other invited guests, usually women, elderly and young what the husband bought for his wife. After this presentation of Boxes, female relatives from both father and mother's sides of the bride, often the maternal aunts will pass a verdict on the Boxes and its content, whether it has satisfied their taste and reach the level of the bride's social class. If the verdict is negative, the groom family will be informed immediately to bring additional items that are necessary before the wedding ceremony can take place.

Applying the theory of Conspicuous Consumption by Veblen, the Boxes and items contained therein, the essence of the spending huge amount of money is to impress the guests, relatives and parents of the bride. Newly wedded husbands explained that the spending on what is not enshrined in the Islamic law that without, there will be no marriage is just to display wealth and a showoff to the friends and relatives that their wedding will not be recorded as a wedding if the husband did not buy expensive items. In this part of Northern Nigeria (Kano and Katsina), it amounts to ridiculing and scolding in the society to the new bride if her husband did not buy expensive items for her and display them on the wedding day. This shows that husbands are by changing trends in the tradition of Hausa and Fulani people spend money on marriage items to impress the audience not necessarily that the items are useful in the matrimonial home.

Additionally, some of the participants in Kano and Katsina who got married in December 2021 stated that they had collected loans from some commercial banks to take care of the marriage expenditures. Unlike one of the tenets of Veblen's theory of Conspicuous Consumption by the wealthy to demonstrate their class. In some instances in Northern Nigeria, people who are not financially buoyant tend to borrow money from banks and rely on support from the relatives to organize an elaborate wedding event to appease the audience. On average, a husband spends not less than Two Million Naira (Nigerian Currency) on marriage items, excluding spending

on other events, food, drinks and other souvenirs that are distributed to the guests for the wedding.

b. Culture of Renting Event Centre

There is growing interest in the building of a Hall-like event centre in some major cities in Northern Nigeria. The events are for pre-wedding events or activities; which in most instance, are organized in a Hall which is a novel tradition in Hausaland. What is known in Islam and in the culture of Hausa people is to invite friends and relatives for a send forth gathering where Islamic religious preachers will attend and preach, call the attention of the bride and groom regarding the etiquette of marriage and how to build a peaceful home. However, during the IDI sessions with the some new couples in Kano and Katsina, they narrated how the bride’s family compelled the groom to rent expensive event centre and hire costly event planner for the wedding of their daughter. One of the newly married husband in Katsina city expressed that during his wedding, the family of the wife had intervened and sponsored some of the pre-wedding events they scheduled to organize for their daughter because he refused to provide money for it.

During an observational visit to the event centres in Kano and Katsina cities, the lowest amount an event centre can charge per night is Three Hundred Thousand Naira (Nigerian Currency), excluding food and refreshment that will be eaten during the event. For a standard or expensive event centre, the rate per night including refreshment and event planner’s charges, it is One Million Naira and above, depending on the decoration and refreshment chosen by the customer.

Table 1: Sampled Event Centres in Kano and Katsina Metropolis

EVENT CENTRES					
S/N	KANO	Rate (Amount)	KATSINA	Rate (Amount)	
1	Meena Events Centre	300,000 Per Night	Paramount Event Centre	200,000	Per Night
2	Amneef Event Centre	500,000 Per Night	Executive Munaj Event Centre	300,000	Per Night
3	Redbarn Event Centre	1 Million Per Night	Green View Resort	150,000	Per Night
4	Afficent Events Centre	1 Million Per Night	Local Government Conference Hall	100,000	Per Night
5	Fatimah Event Centre	700,000 Per Night	Axe Alliance Event Centre	500,000	Per Night
6	The Avenue Event Centre	1.5 Million Per Night	Mooh Event Centre	600,000	Per Night

7.	Laila Event Centre	1 Million Per Night	El-Rago Event Planners Centre	700,000 Per Night	Per
8.	Petals Event Centre	2 Million Per Night	Scorpion Arena Viewing Centre	300,000 Per Night	Per
9.	Manitas Event Centre	600,000 Per Night	STAR Event Arena	800,000 Per Night	Per
10.	Leanah Event Centre	400,000 Per Night	Kahal Park & Event Center	800,000 Per Night	Per

Source: Field Observation (2021)

From the above table, from the price of the event Centre per night it indicated the low income earners whose monthly below Fifty Thousand Naira cannot afford it. Despite being expensive, one of the Manager of an Event Centre in Kano revealed that because of the number of customers who want to use their facility, a client must book for the event centre for a least one month before the day of the event. A Manager of an Event Centre in Katsina stated that every day, they have to turn-down the booking from the clients or customers who want to organize an event in their centre. This implied that in spite of the high price to rent an event centre, in both Kano and Katsina metropolis people who want to get married have continue to patronize the event centres and spend exorbitant amount of money for the purpose of satisfying the bride and the public if the event is sponsored by the groom or vice versa if it is sponsored by the bride's family.

2. Discussion of the Major Findings

The findings showed that there is an increase in the number of Event Centres and Planners in Kano and Katsina metropolis. This is because of the existence of educated and business persons with high income who have developed the culture of holding their pre-wedding events at the Event Centre unlike the tradition in a predominantly Hausa and Fulani society where previously, all pre-wedding events are organized at the residence of the bride or groom, often at the front of the residence where invited guests are seated on provided seats and served the refreshment. In explaining the expensive nature of wedding among Hausa and Fulani people in Northern Nigeria, Kumo, Shah and Zakariyah concluded that the way Muslims in Northern Nigeria spend money during wedding is against the teachings of Islam who wedding simple so that interested persons can afford financially.¹³

¹³ Kumo, A.A., Shah, S.S. & Zakariyah, L. (2018). Wedding expenses and its customary application among Muslims in Gombe metropolis: An analysis from the Maliki juristic perspective. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURLS)*, 8(2), 51-66.

Also, the findings revealed that majority of the couples, either bride or groom spent money on pre-wedding events such as hiring expensive Event Centre and items for the bride to show the world that their social and economic class. This implies that social and economic class in Northern Nigerian cities of Katsina and Kano is demonstrated during the wedding events. What either the bride or the groom's family spend is to show to the guests who comprise of relatives and friends that they are wealthy and for the wedding to be classified as one of the expensive weddings in the area. This findings is supported by the submission by Deezia (2020) which submitted that the intrusion of white wedding into the marriage culture of Ogoni culture has made marriage every expensive and reduced the rate at which young people got married.¹⁴

Additionally, the findings portrayed how culturally in Hausa and Fulani society, the groom or husband is expected to buy clothes, shoes and other apparels required by women before the wedding takes place. Both wife and husband's side in some instances had borrow money to settle some wedding expenses in an attempt not to be ridiculed or mocked by the relatives and friends. This agrees with the findings of Ogbechie and Anetor (2015) who found that wearing of clothes during wedding ceremony in Nigeria before, it was for culturally identity whose aim was to make either husband or wife's side unique on the wedding day. However, things have changed and now the wearing of uniformed clothes during a wedding called *aso-ebi* in Yoruba language, is for the parade of wealth to the guests at the wedding ceremony.¹⁵

D. Conclusion

Pre-wedding events and buying of items for the wife in Kano and Katsina have been influenced by European modernization and the culture of other people within and outside Nigeria which is against the teachings of Islam. Islam teaches Muslims to be modest in aspects of their life. Regarding marriage, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Benediction of Allah be upon him) declared that the best wedding is one without extravagant spending. People who are relatively wealthy are often forced or compelled to organize or arrange wedding events where they will spend substantial amounts of money for the satisfaction of the guests, relatives and friends. The essence of the spending is not wholly to impress the wife but her relatives, parents and those who are present at the ceremony. The conspicuous consumption of Thorsten Veblen can be situated in this context which maintained that people consume, in this study, people

¹⁴ Deezia, B. S. (2020). II-II Wa (Traditional Marriage): Towards the typologies of marriage in Ogoni traditional philosophy. *UJAH*, 21(1), 102-137.

¹⁵ Ogbechie and Anetor (2015)

spend money on event centre and wedding items that they are not in need of it but to show to others their social and economic class in the family or among friends. Therefore, the application of a sociological theory developed by Veblen in explaining contemporary spending on marriage in some States in Northern Nigeria has shown the vitality of the theory which is not only applicable to lifestyle spending but also to marriage which is central to human culture. The implication of spending a huge amount of money on pre-wedding events is that young people who are not wealthy are deterred from getting married. This will further have effects on both males and females because it leads to delay marriage and hence the ageing population.

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