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THE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE WEDDING PLANNING WEBSITE
DUGUN.COM
IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

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GÖSTERİŞÇİ TÜKETİM BAĞLAMINDA EVLİLİK PLANLAMA WEBSİTESİ
OLAN DUGUN.COM'UN ANALİZİ

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at examining the changes and current trends in the wedding sector in Turkey and, accordingly, how consumption practices in the wedding process are shaped. Current trends and consumption tendencies are evaluated by investigating Turkey's largest wedding planning website *dugun.com*. Wedding ceremonies, an area that has not been studied in the context of the wedding planning sector in Turkey, are examined within the framework of Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption. First, the transformation of marriage forms and wedding practices from past to present and the performance of conspicuous consumption in weddings will be examined. In addition, the development of the wedding industry in Turkey and the impact of the digital transformation which fuels the wedding industry on consumption forms are analyzed. Then, *dugun.com*'s impact on soon-to-wed couples and its recommendations for conspicuous consumption are analyzed through blog posts, articles, and slogans on the website. The empirical data of this analysis are obtained with an in-depth analysis of the research sample *dugun.com*, using the virtual ethnography method. The study shows that *dugun.com* contributes to the increase in conspicuous consumption through the discourse of the "perfect wedding" by encouraging couples to exceed the budget and time allocated to wedding planning. It is also concluded that *dugun.com* initiates a day-to-day and detailed wedding process with the help of professional support by suggesting compromising tradition to make weddings extravagant and flashy, sharing celebrity weddings to be imitated and latest fashions to be followed in order to impress invitees and emphasizing the importance of achieving the "ideal" bride or groom body.

Keywords: wedding industry, wedding planning, wedding media, wedding ceremonies, conspicuous consumption, new media

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı dünyadaki ve Türkiye’deki düğün sektöründe yaşanan değişim, güncel trendler ve buna bağlı olarak düğün sürecinde yaşanan tüketim pratiklerinin nasıl şekillendiğini incelemektir. Güncel trendler ve tüketim eğilimleri Türkiye’nin en büyük düğün planlama web sitesi olan *dugun.com* üzerinden incelenecektir. Türkiye’de düğün planlama sektörü bağlamıyla incelenmemiş bir alan olan düğün seremonileri Thorstein Veblen’in gösterişçi tüketim kavramı çerçevesinde ele alınacaktır. Öncelikle Düğün planlama sektörünün uluslararası literatürde hangi konu başlıklarında çalışıldığı ve bu çalışmaların bu teze katkısına değinilecektir. İlk bölümde evlilik formlarının ve düğün pratiklerinin geçmişten günümüze değişimi ve gösterişçi tüketimin düğünlerdeki varlığı irdelenecektir. Ek olarak Türkiye’de düğün endüstrisinin gelişimi ve düğün endüstrisini besleyen dijital dönüşümün tüketim biçimlerine olan etkisine değinilecektir. İkinci bölümde ise *dugun.com*’un evlenecek çiftler üzerindeki etkisi ve gösterişçi tüketime yönelik tavsiyeleri sitedeki blog yazıları, makaleler, sloganlar üzerinden analiz edilecektir. Bu incelemenin ampirik verileri araştırma örneklemini olan *dugun.com*’un sanal etnografi yöntemiyle derinlemesine irdelenmesi sonucunda elde edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda *dugun.com*’un “kusursuz düğün” söylemiyle düğün planlamaya ayrılan zaman maliyetini arttırmaya teşvik ederek gösterişçi tüketimi yaygınlaştırdığı tespit edilmiştir. *dugun.com*, düğünleri gösterişli ve abartılı göstermek için gelenekten taviz verildiği, ünlüleri taklit ederek son modanın takip edildiği, davetlileri etkileyebilmek amacıyla “ideal” gelin ve damat bedenlerine ulaşmanın önemsendiği ve profesyonel destek yardımıyla gün gün ve detaylı bir şekilde planlanan bir düğün süreci yarattığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Düğün endüstrisi, düğün planlama, düğün medyası, gösterişçi tüketim, evlilik seremonileri, geleneksel törenler, yeni medya

INTRODUCTION

An average of 550 thousand to 600 thousand people officially get married every year in Turkey (TUIK, 2020). According to the claim of the wedding planning website *dugun.com*, two-thirds of the individuals who are getting married in Turkey are planning their wedding with *dugun.com*¹. Although this information is not based on official statistics, various studies also confirm that the popularity of wedding planning is increasing day to day (Blakely, 2008; Nelson & Otnes, 2005; Currie, 1993). The idea that weddings happen once in a lifetime, and that they are one of the rare moments in which the couple takes the leading role in their daily life, leads couples to strive for a flawless wedding. It is observed that especially women play a more active role in the wedding planning process (Otnes & Pleck, 2003; Currie, 1993, Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2008).

Although women and family studies are common in the literature, few studies are present on weddings despite the large place they constitute in the entertainment sector of Turkey and their connection to a wide variety of consumer items, considering women and family play a major role in weddings. In this respect, this thesis aims to contribute to Turkish literature.

This study aims at examining wedding ceremonies in Turkey, a subject not previously studied in terms of the wedding planning sector, with the concept of Thorstein Veblen's "conspicuous consumption". Conspicuous consumption is the consumption of luxurious products by individuals to prove their wealth and status (Veblen, 2015). According to Veblen, ceremonies are suitable places for displaying many different consumables at one time and hence considered by the conspicuous leisure class as events to show status. Weddings, on the other hand, are good opportunities to create the most striking impression in a short time, considering the scarcity and brevity of time the metropolitan people come together (Bocock, 2014). Thus, weddings are an advantageous ceremony for individuals to prove their economic existence and status.

¹ <https://dugun.com/>

Although conspicuous consumption existed before in the wedding planning sector, thanks to traditions (Durutürk, 2007), the commodification of culture and traditions that resulted from capitalism and spread to large masses with new media tools has also transformed the wedding sector. It can be stated that as a result of the quick spread of information in post-industrial societies, a new form of the wedding ceremony has emerged in Turkey, which alters constantly depending on the developments in the world and promotes conspicuous consumption.

Today, the various ceremonies that take part in wedding processes no longer have a focus of announcing the union of two people, pleasing the families or obey the tradition. Marriage can be performed with a simple ceremony held in the city hall and some families do not even observe the traditions. However, in today's world where people who don't consume are considered flawed consumers and so also social outcasts (Bauman, 2009; 149), individuals are practicing ceremonies to consume more and show off to others. In this process, the soon-to-wed couples perform traditional or new trend ceremonies, or both types in their weddings. Consumer lifestyles produced by capitalism express themselves even through traditional sources.

The study consists of two sections titled "Construction of Marriage Institution And Wedding Ceremonies "and "Analysis of The Wedding Planning Website: *dugun.com*." Within the scope of the study, the following a research question is established to be responded to: "How does *dugun.com*, an important pillar of the wedding media, dominate the transformation of the wedding process, and how does it affect the expense items of weddings?"

The first chapter will briefly try to address how the marriage industry and wedding ceremonies have changed historically. By examining the forms of marriage that provide the basis for changing wedding practices, the continuous evolution of the position of marriage in society will be analyzed. In the past, marriage was an institution that expressed the union of two people and also served economic and political institutions. The spouses were determined not by the

preference of individuals, but by the decision of families. Towards the end of the 20th century, marriages began to be based on the sense of “love”. In Turkey, on the other hand, modern approaches to European style of love and marriage, which were only observed in the elite essentially, also spread to the middle and lower-middle classes after the First World War. (Duben & Behar, 1996; 115). Although arranged marriages still exist in Turkey due to norms, education level, and wage inequality, today the general tendency is to marriages based on love (Şendil & Korkut, 2008; 30).

Despite the presence of this general tendency to emotional togetherness, peer-to-peer social and economic status transitions still continue. The place where the form of marriage and individuals' social and economic status, which is transforming with marriage, is first visible is undoubtedly the ceremonies held during the wedding process, where couples stay on the stage for a long time under the spotlight. Within the scope of this thesis, the forms of weddings, ceremonies, and rituals in Turkey and consumption trends in the wedding preparation process will be discussed.

In Turkey, the wedding ceremony practices of couples varies depending on the family and couple's commitment to cultural values, their social and economic status, the cities in which they live, and their use of the internet. Concordantly, the consumption trends of the couple during the wedding process may differ. Consumption in the process of marriage has always been considered innocent and necessary. For instance, although excessive consumption was not welcome in the Ottoman Empire, consumption was considered necessary on special days such as weddings, circumcision, and holidays (Filiz, 2009). Hosting a wedding dinner was deemed crucial, and people of every age were invited to weddings. In addition, during the wedding preparation process, individuals over-consumed beyond their daily needs in order to prioritize the bride's wishes so that she would not feel regretful about it in the future (içinde ukde kalmak), and to show the status of the couple and the couple's family by holding a “canonical” wedding, colloquially.

In the second chapter, the biggest wedding planning website in Turkey *dugun.com*'s impact on weddings and soon-to-wed couples will be analyzed. Founded by Emek Kırbıyık in 2007, *dugun.com* is a wedding planning website that brings together companies and couples on an online platform and guides couples in their wedding processes. The website states that it works with wedding companies of thirty-six different categories in thirty-five cities in Turkey and makes wedding planning simultaneously easy, fast, and flawless for couples.

dugun.com follows some methods to guide couples regarding their wedding. First, it brings married couples together with wedding companies online. This is a technical service that facilitates consumption and at the same time provides services in a rational manner, implemented in line with the financial contract made with companies. It then offers informative articles under the name of consultancy. In this thesis, *dugun.com*'s influence on soon-to-wed couples and its advice on conspicuous consumption will be analyzed through texts, articles and slogans on the website.

dugun.com defines the wedding preparation process it promotes with two discourses aimed at soon-to-wed couples. The first is the argument that all couples dream to achieve a “perfect wedding.” *dugun.com* claims that in order to realize this dream, the wedding process should be planned carefully and thoroughly. Thus it correlates the ideal wedding profile with "planned" and "flawless" notions.

dugun.com offers informative articles under the name of “consultancy” for soon-to-wed couples within the framework of this wedding imagination. It promises couples that they can access all kinds of information and options related to the wedding on the website. It then provides the couples information on many areas, such as the traditions concerning ceremonies, types of relationships between the couples' families, and what the couple should wear on their honeymoon. These articles are created according to a certain plan in order to impress the couples, therefore repetitive sentences are frequently included through stereotypical adjectives describing weddings as “romantic, fairy tale, and festive”.

It can be said that the articles focus on several topics in general. They inform couples on the latest wedding trends and fashion, romanticizes weddings with personal wedding stories and recommend imitating celebrity weddings. *dugun.com* also provides a day-to-day wedding planning agenda. All of these recommendations demonstrate that the couples are persuaded to practice conspicuous consumption actively during the wedding process.

It is observed that the couples who visit the website encounter individual wedding stories included on the website which fictionalizes a simultaneously rational and romantic wedding process. In the section titled “real wedding stories”, the couples who planned their wedding preparations with *dugun.com* narrate their own stories with a romantic tone. In this section, brides describe a “romantic” wedding process with their rhetoric and express how much they love their husbands. On the other hand, they speak about the “rational” sides of weddings and praise the wedding companies they worked with which made their wedding perfect. These "real wedding stories" also influence couples to consume through the word-of-mouth effect (Thomas, 2011; Brown, 2007; Jepsen, 2014).

Second, *dugun.com*'s recommendations on following the latest wedding fashion and imitating famous weddings will be examined within the scope of this thesis. *dugun.com* states that by following the latest fashion in weddings, which are a good opportunity to show economic wealth and social class, the couples can achieve their goal of having a "fashionable, perfect, dreamy, extraordinary and unforgettable wedding", which are frequently mentioned in the articles of *dugun.com*. Hence, imitating celebrities and thus becoming fashionable differentiates these soon-to-wed couples from others and places them in a higher social class.

Finally, *dugun.com* 's aim at building the ideal body of the bride and groom and its recommendations in this direction will be discussed. Like every product the bride and groom use in rituals during the wedding process, their bodies are also displayed as materials. Therefore, the couples are recommended care practices such as following various methods to lose weight before the

wedding, skin care, manicure and pedicure and convinced that they can affect the guests with their physical appearance. In addition, *dugun.com* does not only offer physical advice to couples but also psychological advice. It recommends couples to be friendly throughout the wedding, to take care of the guests, and to ensure that they leave the wedding happy. Hence, the perfect wedding will be performed materially and spiritually.

METHOD

This qualitative study presents one main research question: “how does *dugun.com* manage the wedding process in the context of conspicuous consumption?” To answer this question, I use virtual ethnography research methodology as my approach and participant observation, sampling texts from the website, and thematic analysis as my techniques.

Virtual Ethnography

Virtual ethnography is “to use ethnography as a method for analyzing interactions in cyberspace” (Flick, 2009; 236). This technique can comprehensively help to understand structural patterns of the social phenomenon under study. Virtual ethnography is partial, and it is not used to reveal a holistic picture of culture (Flick, 2009 & Hine, 2004). I used virtual ethnography because the change in the culture of weddings in Turkey is revealed through the scope of *dugun.com*. The present study is limited to *dugun.com* and therefore it should use a technique of research that is precise, detailed, and focused.

I have selected virtual space as my field because the internet can represent all strata of society. Flick (2009) notes that the Internet has become a tool to study people you could not otherwise reach. “The Internet is an open context for social interactions where practices, meanings and identities are intermingled” (Domínguez, D., Beaulieu, A., Estalella, A., Gómez, E., Schnettler, B., & Read, R., 2007). At the same time, online wedding planning as a social phenomenon has not been reflected in Turkish literature even though I believe it is a very important topic for understanding family dynamics today.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

To better understand the processes of the website, I took the initiative to become a member of the website and went through all registration stages for a hypothetical wedding. I also used the section for questions and answers, planning assistant, and other means of communication to collect data. Below is the list of all communication forms between *dugun.com* and an actual user:

- Registration process.
- Question and Answer.
- Wedding Planning Assistance.
- Calls from the company and website, follow-up calls, and feedback calls.
- Series of frequent emails.
- The Wedding Tool.
- Wedding Calendar for a hypothetical date.

Sampling Texts from *dugun.com*

To find relatable data, I looked at all parts of the website such as *dugun.com*'s menu, home page design, slogans, photos, podcasts, interviews, and also wedding tools and articles from main headlines. I analyzed two podcasts by “Emek Kırbyık”, the founder of the website, and two interviews. Among articles – my main source of data- I focused on the texts that *dugun.com* advised couples and the stories that newlywed couples wrote about planning their wedding with *dugun.com*. Due to the importance of this website reaching large masses, all articles on *dugun.com* from 2007 to February 2021 were examined, but due to lack of enough time and resources, I sampled most related texts.

A sampling of the texts continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Theoretical saturation means that the researcher reached a point that sampling more data did not lead to more information related to their research questions. Theoretical saturation is “the point at which gathering more data about

a theoretical construct reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory.” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 611)

Data Analysis

I used thematic analysis to categorize and analyze the texts from articles and other types of data helped enrich the analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Using Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules (2017) version, my stages of the thematic coding and analysis consisted of the following:

Phase 1: Familiarizing with Data

Description Qualitative data come in various forms and the researcher needs to gather different forms of data and get to know the field. In this research, I gathered data in the form of articles, interviews, podcasts, and participation in the process.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes Description

After familiarization with data initial coding process begins in which meaningful bits of data are considered as codes. Codes in this phase are small concepts that might help with analysis later. In this phase I found twenty-six small concepts that are reported in the table 1.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes Description

In This phase, all the codes that previously emerged from data were listed and compared for any similarities, regularities, and differences. This is the beginning of emerging themes.

Similarities, regularities, and differences in the data lead to forming categories. The categories that are formed are our themes. In this phase, I refined my categories and shaped my final themes for analysis. These themes accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes that emerged from the data are as follows:

1. *dugun.com*'s rational consultancy in wedding planning
2. Effort and concession to tradition to make weddings perfect
3. The construction of marriage through the dichotomy of rationality and sensuality
4. Word of mouth effect through personal stories
5. Celebrities and weddings
6. The presentation of the bride and groom's body
7. *dugun.com*'s professional service: day-to-day wedding planning

Final Phase: Producing the Report

Finally, I reported my categories (themes) concerning my research question and about one another to better make meaning of my data. In the next chapter where I report my findings and discuss my analysis, these themes are the blocks of meaning that I use to present my conclusion.

Table 1.1
Codes and Categories

Themes	Code	Frequency
<i>dugun.com</i> 's consultancy role for <i>dugun.com</i> 's rational consultancy in wedding planning	Rational	246
	Perfect Wedding	345
	Guide	59
	Tradition	45
	Psychological Support	23

Effort and concession to tradition to make weddings perfect	Unique	102
	Perfect	383
	Wedding dress	362
	Budget	87
The construction of marriage through the dichotomy of rationality and sensuality	Romantic	276
	Detailed planning	496
	Wedding vendors	182
	Wedding dress	306
Word of mouth effect through personal stories	Word of mouth	202
	Personal stories	202
	Consumption	324
	Professionalism	89
Celebrities and weddings	Imitation	16
	Celebrity	54
	Fashionable	138
The presentation of the bride and groom's body	Unique	65
	Perfection	298
	Tips	329
	Make up	47

<i>dugun.com</i> 's professional service: day-to-day wedding planning	Wedding day	16
	Duty	43

LITERATURE REVIEW

Veblen's *Theory of Leisure Class* (1899) and the articles analyzing wedding planning websites are the main references for this study which explores *dugun.com*, a Turkey-based wedding planning website through the "conspicuous consumption" perspective. Furthermore, the concepts of wedding, marriage, and consumption were examined and the cult works of the field were exploited (Bocock, 2014; Otnes & Pleck, 2003). Firstly, I would like to define the reason why I chose Veblen's theoretical framework. Thereafter I will clarify the main term originated by Veblen that will be discussed in this study.

Secondly, the studies that approach wedding and consumption together will be examined and the relationship between these two concepts in the context of traditions and patriarchy will be included. Otnes and Pleck write: "In fact, given its importance, the wedding has been surprisingly overlooked by social scientists, historians and even scholars of contemporary consumer culture" (Otnes & Pleck, 2003; 5). Most of the literature in Turkey examines the wedding based on the following concepts; marital adjustment, traditional marriage types, marrying at a young age, gender roles, dating sites for getting married, marriage programs on TV, and divorce. Only a few pieces of research by now have found a relevant relationship between consumption and wedding (Durutürk, 2007; Özkan, 2016; Ger & Friends, 2000). These studies will be briefly discussed to reveal the meaningful relationship between weddings and consumption.

Finally, I will work on the articles that examine the wedding planning industry around the world such as *dugun.com*. Although there is a lot of literature on marriage and the studies which examine marriage in the context of consumption are expanding, researchers have not studied wedding planning sites in the last five years in Turkey. While in the rest of the world, there are many

studies on wedding planning sites, in Turkey, only one study has examined some online wedding planning sites, *mutlugelin.com* and *gelinlik.org* which are currently not active (Çatalcalı, 2015). Also, studies that analyze wedding planning websites in international literature will be included.

In this respect, this study intends to fill this gap, examining the most visited wedding planning website in Turkey called *dugun.com*, using the concept of conspicuous consumption.

I will refer to Veblen's theoretical framework to relate the wedding planning website to consumption. The concept of conspicuous consumption is important to understand how newlywed couples may use weddings, among other things, to reveal their economic status and how *dugun.com* directs them toward more consumption misusing traditional and global wedding ceremony trends. The present study determines conspicuous consumption as its central concept and detects that the stages of conspicuous consumption in Veblen's Theory of Leisure Class are similar to the arguments of the thesis.

The concept of conspicuous consumption in Turkey was mostly examined by the Economic and Administrative departments such as Economics and Business schools. Researches show that the concept of conspicuous consumption is generally addressed with 'status' in the articles in Turkey (Hız, 2011; Güllülü & Sevtap & Bilgili, 2010; Koçak, 2017; Özlem & Başçı, 2016; Çelik, 2013; Aydın, 2018; Tokmak, 2019; Becan & Eaghanioskoui, 2019). However, in recent years, researchers began to study conspicuous consumption concerning new media. Here I briefly introduce some of the conspicuous consumption studies in the field of economics to benefit from their theoretical and empirical outcomes.

First, I would like to define the concept of conspicuous consumption, and next, I will briefly examine its stages in Veblen's work and theory. Thorstein Veblen contributed to the literature in economics in 1899 by observing non-producing, upper leisure class. As an American economist and sociologist and the founder of institutional economics (Turan & Nakiboğlu & Bozkaya, 2015; 164) he wrote his celebrated *Theory of the Leisure Class* (Dorfman, 1934; 529) and

founded the theory of conspicuous consumption, while he was an academician in Chicago University.

Conspicuous consumption is the consumption of unnecessary products by individuals to prove their wealth and status. According to Veblen, for individuals to prove their economic status they have to move towards consumption habits in food, clothing, residence, and furniture that are more than necessary. He also states that women usually do more conspicuous consumption compared to men. He states that in the early stages of barbarism the rule that “women are the property of men and men consume what is produced by women” changed, however the principle of women being the property of men changed into “women being the ceremonial consumers of the products produced by men” (Veblen, 2015; 79).

Today, although the findings of Veblen are still valid, it can be said that they have transformed to some extent. Women’s consumption displays an image of a free and consuming female figure rather than a perception that enslaves women. Since most women are associated with consumption, they are the real target audience of advertisers and marketers, especially in the wedding sector (Otnes, 2003). It is possible to say that the statement by Veblen that suggests that women are the representative consumers is still valid to some extent and it should be added that the conspicuous consumption of women increases the status of not only men but also women themselves. Therefore I would say that even though a lot has changed today- that is neoliberalism does not spare anyone – the target subject when it comes to wedding organizations is still women (for more information see O’cass& Hmily, 2004).

According to Veblen, to purchase more expensive things becomes a trend and the next generation accepts this as “decorum”, meaning as a rule of the tradition. When these unnecessary consuming habits are transformed into “tradition” for the next generation, consumption patterns face new tendencies. In the future, consuming will not only be a desire for respectability, but it will also carry the aspects of following the rules of generation and paying respect. Veblen

also adds that no class of the society gives up conspicuous consumption rooted in the tradition (Veblen, 2015; 80).

Lastly, Veblen also states that the best way to show conspicuous consumption is by organizing ceremonies that bring individuals together:

“Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. The aid of friends and competitors is therefore brought in by resorting to the giving of valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments. (Veblen, 2015; 53)”

Since the ceremonies are the places where conspicuous consumption can be the most visible they are inevitable opportunities for conspicuous leisure. The ceremonies aim to bring conspicuous consumption to the top level to prove wealth and therefore to increase their respectability. For Veblen conspicuous consumption as a “tool” facilitates the final aim to gain respect (Veblen, 2015; 72).

I believe that conspicuous consumption as my central concept can explain consumption patterns in the wedding industry today. *dugun.com* -as my sample- prominently uses the female figure as the subject responsible for ceremonial consumption during the wedding process, and in addition, tries to show weddings as flawless and perfect and while doing so benefits from traditional consumption, which in turn transforms into new traditions. Thus it carries similar symbols with conspicuous consumption stages by Veblen.

J.K. Galbraith (1989) who is influenced by Veblen’s theory says that Veblen did something very important that no one in his period did, that is, while all the researches were predominantly focused on the poor, Veblen shifted the attention from the poor to the rich, in times when the power of the rich was at its peak. By asserting Veblen's emphasis on conspicuous consumption, Galbraith points out that the basic pursuit of the rich is to display their wealth conscientiously. He claims that they think the amount of money spent is important, not the functionality of what is bought (Galbraith, 1989; 59).

Veblen's research on conspicuous consumption has marked the era so much so that the concept of the "Veblen effect" has emerged in economics (Leibenstein, 1950). Bargwell and Berheim (1996) clarified that in contrast with the economic law (supply and demand equilibrium), consumers are willing to pay a higher price to a functionally identical product. This is called the "Veblen effect". According to them, each individual's status depends on the perception of his wealth among social relationships. For this reason, the individual has the desire to reach a social status by signaling wealth through conspicuous consumption.

So far I have discussed Veblen in international literature. Here, I will briefly explain conspicuous consumption within the scope of some studies in Turkey. According to Mübeccel Kıray (1999), who is one of the first scholars to refer to Veblen and his theory in Turkey, the economists had not studied the concept of conspicuous consumption in its functional relation to the concept of social stratification. Conspicuous consumption was considered to be an economically irrational activity concerning only one's self and not the society. However, new consumption theories developed between 1947-55 note that it was not possible to explain conspicuous consumption as a function of income alone (Kıray, 1999; 79), and it should be defined based on cultural elements of status, and prestige too.

Kıray argues that it is an honor to belong to the leisure class and to have the wealth assign to it. It also allows you not to work and to consume more. The leisure class shows their existence and their power as a result of wealth in a different way of consumption, in Veblen's term: "conspicuous consumption" (Kıray, 2005). According to Kıray, conspicuous consumption affects social stratification in societies whose stratification systems are vertical. In other words, in societies in which it is possible to change status, individuals try to join a higher status with competition, imitation, and conspicuous consumption. When the status is hereditary and there is no possibility of vertical movement, conspicuous consumption acts as a status index and is not competitive (Kıray, 1999; 87).

After a brief exploration of conspicuous consumption to understand the theoretical framework of the subject, I will discuss the studies that associate marriage ceremonies with conspicuous consumption. Many studies show that conspicuous consumption appears in daily life, especially on special occasions like wedding ceremonies. In Turkish literature, the studies that examine the relationship between marriage and consumption show that individuals sustain some old pedestals such as patriarchy or conformity while getting married. (Durutürk, 2007; Holt, Ger and Ustuner, 2000).

Ceyda Durutürk (2007) examined the relationship between traditional wedding ceremonies and consumption in Turkey through detailed interviews with forty newly married couples. According to Durutürk (2007), the procedure of practicing the ceremonies which arise from tradition determines the social status of individuals, emphasizes intra-family relations, and also re-emergences of the patriarchal system during the wedding process. This study makes an important contribution to the field literature in terms of in-depth analysis of the conspicuous consumption caused by tradition-based ceremonies in marriage. Moreover, the fact that there are no other studies examining the relationship between consumption, wedding, and tradition in this field so far makes Durutürk's study more important.

Contrary to Durutürk, Ger, et al. (2000) convey that the Turkish identity reflects the internal tensions of the urban and modern middle class, rather than the tradition-based ceremonies conveying traditional symbols. They examine henna nights as a new urban ritual in their study, which associates weddings with consumption but shows the practice of traditions not as a consumption tool but for identifying identification among various identity dichotomies in Turkey today, dichotomies such as rural vs urban, or religious vs secular. It has been explored how consumer lifestyles can be expressed through traditional sources.

Another study Gül Özkan (2016), who examines the relationship between consumption and weddings in the field of Public Relations, explains that consumption culture takes part within the marital rituals with the spread of mass communication tools and globalization. She emphasizes this through examining

wedding magazines published in 2016 and communicating with the popular event organizers in Turkey. Weddings in Turkey include rituals that belong to local culture, they also produce new consumption fields and steer individuals with ideas about conversion and having social status. This study, which examines wedding magazines as the most popular publications of wedding media before wedding planning websites, is important in terms of showing that conspicuous consumption existed in weddings before wedding websites.

Present studies have so far focused on consumption and weddings in the Turkish literature. From now on, the study examines “*Cinderella Dreams*” (2003), which is one of the cult works in the international literature in this field and associates weddings in the context of consumption. The debates that C. Otnes and E. Pleck indicate, investigating the lavish wedding in North America, had great contributions to the arguments of this thesis. Otnes and Pleck who study conspicuous weddings from the sociocultural environment and socio-economy perspective, state several reasons for lavish weddings being widespread in practice. I will examine those reasons for the increasing popularity of lavish weddings in my thesis.

Firstly, according to them, since lavish weddings are something that can not be organized by ordinary individuals due to financial reasons, it is a ceremony that separates the wealthy from the rest. At the same time, it is one of the important tools with which individuals can show their social connections and can improve their environments (Otnes and Pleck, 2003; 5). Secondly, they state that lavish weddings are a good way to make social prestige visible and they offer detailed information about this:

“The idea behind conspicuous consumption is that because one’s bank balances are typically hidden from view, visible spending becomes the best way to communicate wealth. Thus, the conspicuous consumption that characterizes many wedding ceremonies today provides families with an efficient but extravagant way to illustrate not only that they can afford to give the bride and groom the send-off they deserve but also that they have arrived socially themselves and enjoy comparable status with, or even higher status than, their new in-laws (Otnes and Pleck, 2003; 6).”

However, they report that as consumption becomes more accessible, with rising incomes and increased access to credit cards and loans from banks, lavish weddings have become a standard for the middle class and working class as well. This finding can be related to the financial recommendations of the wedding planning site *dugun.com* to couples, when calculating the budget for weddings, to get marriage loans from banks.

The third argument for the popularity of conspicuous consumption in the wedding is that because marriage changes the status of women more and even their names change into a different name, and therefore women need more ritual recognition for the event. The historian Ellen Rothman says that in the Victorian era, the grand wedding was a reward for the bride for having remained a virgin and was a great moment in her life. Women are expected to sacrifice their whole life and identity for their husbands and kids and weddings are a form of reward for their future of unpaid labor (Otnes and Pleck, 2003).

Otnes and Pleck believe that there are four additional reasons for weddings to have this much impact on contemporary Western culture:

“These are that the lavish wedding—more than any other event— has the ability to (1) “marry” the tenets of both consumer culture and romantic love; (2) offer magical transformation; (3) provide memories of a sacred and singular event; and (4) legitimate lavish consumption through the “ethic of perfection”—or the standard that includes the desire for both flawless beauty and a perfect performance—as well as an appreciation and recognition of the occasion by both participants and guests” (Otnes and Pleck, 2003; 8).

The idea that marriage is a result of romantic love (rather than ordinary political and economical aspects of human life), is associated with a magical transformation in life similar to fairy tales. Weddings are special days that happen only one time, and finally, the couple’s desire to make the wedding perfect to win the appreciation of the guests are the reasons for the formation of a lavish wedding. Finally, while a lot of studies conducted on lavish weddings mostly relate this notion with consumption, Otnes and Pleck point out many socio-cultural factors for lavish weddings that enrich the literature.

As the internet becomes an inevitable part of life, the wedding sector shifted to the online world and expanded its area of impact. Previously wedding plannings were made through magazines and therefore there are studies in the literature that investigate wedding magazines (Okur, 2007; Çatalcalı, 2015; Reşitoğlu, 2017). Today we see that wedding planning moved more towards digital and online platforms. Although many studies investigate the wedding planning sector in the international literature there are not many studies that focus on this topic in Turkey. There is only one study that is adapted with the new media tools and that investigates online wedding planning sites (Çatalcalı, 2015). This study will be briefly mentioned in the following parts.

Weddings are the occasions in which consumption is legitimized throughout history. Even so, the wedding industry in today's world is trying to increasingly legitimize conspicuous consumption for weddings even more than before. Of course, conspicuous consumption at weddings had a significant presence even before wedding planning sites. However, the fact that wedding sites are free and easily accessible and that they can reach every segment of society with social media tools have caused conspicuous consumption to influence individuals of all classes. In addition, within the framework of the perfect wedding image created in conjunction with wedding sites, conspicuous consumption began to be applied more systematically.

With the transformation of wedding media, it is possible to see how websites are changing and transforming the conspicuous consumption dimensions of weddings. For this reason, firstly, articles that examine wedding planners and magazines (Currie, 1993; Goldstein, 1997; Boden, 2001) and then articles that examine wedding planning sites and finally how consumption is marketed in the wedding planning sector will be analyzed in the following.

Researches have shown that most of the brides have been affected by wedding planning media on purchase decisions (Boden, 2001; Alison Winch & Anna Webste 2012; Jane Boyd Thomas & Cara O. Peters 2011, Ayşe Çatalcalı 2015; Erika Engstrom 2008; Currie, 1993). The brides read articles and follow photos and videos published by the wedding planning media, and dream of the

perfect wedding and they prepare their wedding in detail to fulfill these dreams, using the budget at hand.

“Here comes the bride” article written by Currie in 1993 is important since it aligns with the topics of the thesis such as “detailed planning, perfect wedding, and modernism, and ceremonies based on tradition”. Currie explains the impact of wedding planning on weddings in two ways. First, he emphasizes that since wedding planning is a process that includes women more, it recreates the patriarchal wedding relations. The second idea claims that with the wedding planning, which is included in the wedding magazines in detail, “modern traditional” weddings emerge. In the interview conducted with thirteen brides and three grooms, it has been found that all of the participants read bridal magazines during the wedding planning process. According to Currie, the participants declare themselves to be in a modern and egalitarian relationship, while at the same time determining that women are unequally more labored in wedding planning, but men have the final say, indicating that couples have conflict (1993; p 415).

Currie’s findings that state women play the most active role during wedding planning are confirmed by other researchers as well (Boden 2001; Engstrom, 2008; Otnes and Pleck, 2003). While Currie (1993) interprets women being more involved in the wedding planning process as unequal labor, Boden (2001) states that women are more involved in the process because of the role imposed on women by bridal magazines. Engstrom (2008), on the other hand, states that bridal media gives the message to women that they need a huge, expensive wedding for the transition from single life to married life with a cultural hegemonic message and therefore women play a more active role in wedding planning. Similarly, Otnes and Pleck (2003) stated that as marriage affects the status of women more than men, women give more importance to ritual ceremonies, and thus they are the main characters of weddings.

The findings of this study suggest similar results and at the same time explores these themes concerning the field. In the wedding sector, the female figure is at the forefront in *dugun.com* images, and *dugun.com*'s articles mostly

appeal to the bride. In addition, *dugun.com* includes articles for the ideal groom's body in recommendation articles that design the ideal bride's body. At this point, it has been found that although the bride has the most active role in wedding planning in the wedding media's *dugun.com*, the grooms are not completely excluded from the process.

Currie (1993) found as a result of the interviews conducted with the couples that wedding planners and magazines significantly increased the amount of work in the wedding process. Attention to detail was emphasized in wedding magazines, with an almost military-like sensitivity, and couples reported that more time and money was spent on details that they did not deem necessary. Although they do not find it necessary to plan for a long time and spend a lot of money, it is seen that more time and money are required as you pay attention to the details. Currie states that the couple ends up doing all the ceremonies with reasons like “going all the way” and “one thing just led to the next” (Currie, 1993; 408).

Goldstein (1997) researched through working as a part-time employee in a new style comprehensive wedding parlor named the “Kobe Princess Palace” in Japan which supplies every service and product related to weddings. According to Goldstein's observation made in 1988, most of the middle-class Japanese brides gradually transformed into Western brides with white bridal gowns and sometimes avantgarde ball gowns. According to Goldstein, wedding parlors invite cultural products to mix traditional and Western notions and create modern commercial weddings.

At the same time, Goldstein (1997) states that commercial weddings are always an opportunity for the middle class to show off their vanity. These findings are important for our study as they show that *dugun.com* applies both traditional and Western elements. However, Goldstein claims that this dichotomy -traditional VS. modern- was brought up by wedding companies. Although *dugun.com* is not a wedding company directly, it is a wedding planning platform that gathers wedding companies around. Therefore, Goldstein's claims

concerning transformation of wedding industry, strongly supports my argument in present study.

Sharon Boden (2001), discusses the influence of the wedding industry on the marriage process. She examined depictions of celebrities or unconventional weddings in the popular presses and found that these presses encourage the desires of ordinary consumers to emulate these weddings. Secondly, Boden analyzed six different wedding magazines in Britain and found that a “Superbride” was created as a result of their tendency to focus on the bride as the heroin of the wedding. Bridal magazines constitute a consumer identity with two characters called “super bride”; the rational project manager of her wedding and the emotional childish fantasizer. Thus, it makes the wedding a fantastic cultural event depending on consumption (Boden, 2001). In the following parts of the thesis, we will see that the identity of the bride created by *dugun.com* is similar to Boden’s important findings, that is, it is built through the dichotomies of the rational and the emotional.

In her examination of the content of two bridal magazines in Turkey and the content of the websites *mutlugelin.com* and *gelinlik.org*, while using the theoretical concepts of Boden, Ayşe Çatalcalı (2015) comes up with a similar observation as to that of Boden’s. She found that marriage sites and bridal magazines have commodified the marriage institution and bridal identity through elements of romanticism, fantasy, and rationality. After creating a simulation of a perfect bride with romantic imaginations, the wedding media offers various consumption suggestions to reach a perfect bride with perfect body. Thus, this article concludes that the wedding media constitutes a new consumer culture of marriage. This study is breakthrough since it is the first study to examine marriage planning sites in Turkey. However, since the wedding websites that Çatalcalı has examined are not very active today, they will be insufficient to understand today's marriage planning sector. I hope that this thesis examining *dugun.com*, the most visited marriage planning website in Turkey, will make a significant contribution to current literature.

The wedding media creates the dream of a perfect wedding, according to Çatalcalı and Boden, while directing it toward romantic, fantasy oriented, and rational consumption. Erika Engstrom (2008) says that cultural hegemony in wedding media pushes individuals to consume. Engstrom claims that a cultural hegemony was created by The Knot² and its media alliances (TV programs etc.) as “marriage in modern society”. This cultural hegemony creates the image of the perfect marriage that reinforces femininity and consumerism. Since there are no legal obligations for how to celebrate a wedding, wedding media including The Knot (or *dugun.com*) take up the task to dictate how weddings should be celebrated (Engstrom, 2008).

So far, I have studied how the wedding media constructs the marriage process and the ceremonial consumption of couples. Studies show that the wedding planning sites build a jargon from "the perfect wedding" and "romantic couple", determining the roles of the couples and impose conspicuous weddings. Furthermore, I introduce research that study the strategies used by wedding media to attract more couples.

Jane Thomas and Cara Peters (2011) examined the effect of the online community's word of mouth on the bridal choice of brides on brides.com. The brides recreate the cultural norms of the modern era by sharing the answers to questions such as how much to spend, where to shop and, whom to shop with. Furthermore, by emphasizing that these posts affect the brides' purchase decision to buy a wedding dress, they underline the impact of brides.com on wedding consumption. Michelle R. Nelsona and Cele C. Otnes (2005), in a study, examined how brides with different cultures coped with intercultural instability during wedding planning for virtual wedding communities. And they demonstrated that brides support each other emotionally by taking into account the consumption recommendations from virtual friends on wedding sites.

These two studies (Thomas & Peters, 2011; Otnes & Nelsona, 2005) are important since they state that brides direct and shape each other's consumption patterns. Because *dugun.com*, which uses this method as a marketing strategy,

² *theknot.com*, a popular wedding planning website in USA.

makes a series of articles called “True Wedding Stories” and enables brides to offer consumption advice. This will be discussed briefly with the help of the above-mentioned studies (see Chapter two below).

On the other hand, Kristin Blakely (2008) deals with wedding planning differently. She describes the formation process of the wedding planning industry and evaluates wedding planning as a profession. According to her, the “busy bride” identity makes wedding planners a necessity. Blakely interviewed six wedding planners and examined the online advertising of 280 planning businesses to understand how the wedding planner profession is offered as a service to brides who are busy in between housework and jobs, and the relation of commercialization patterns of household life with “liberal feminism”. Blakely states that wedding planners are commodified domestic workers similar to maids and nannies, that help with the household work of busy women.

Blakely writes: “The roles of wedding planners are to save time, look after details, make dreams come true, stay on budget and save money, have events run smoothly, and so on” (Blakely, 2016; 643). However, according to Blakely, the main reason for hiring a planner is that the bride is too busy and stressed and unable to do the necessary research. The result of this according to the wedding industry is “The solution for busy career women is to outsource their wedding planning” (Blakely, 2016). Thus, the wedding industry shifts the luxury position of hiring wedding planners into “necessary” and “standard practice”.

So far, I have explained Veblen’s thoughts and theories around the idea of the conspicuous consumption. Veblen helps to understand why the wedding industry is formed in the way that it is, today. Then, I have introduced the studies that investigated weddings as a means of consumption, and other different related concepts such as liberal feminism, romanticism, rationality, word of mouth, the dichotomy between the modern vs. the traditional, and cultural hegemony.

These studies contribute greatly to the existing body of literature. They emphasise the role of women as brides, and explain wedding media and their influence over wedding ceremonies, and how they increase consumerism through commercialization.

Despite their contribution, these studies fail to investigate wedding websites thoroughly and their focus is much too general on wedding media as a whole. There is also a serious lack of focus on website articles even though these articles are one of the main means of transferring the message to couples. These studies also lack appropriate focus on the role of the groom. The commercialization of the role of the groom is one of the concerns of the present study. If we move from the international literature on the subject to the literature concerning the consumption habits in weddings in Turkey, we find far fewer studies about wedding media, and realise that research about wedding websites are practically nonexistent except for one example that is reviewed earlier.

To address such shortcomings, I try to conduct a study on how wedding forms have changed from arranged marriage to romantic love, and on how wedding ceremonies have changed accordingly. I want to fill the gap in the studies regarding wedding planning websites in Turkey and show how new liberal values of the modern era had changed wedding ceremonies from celebration of traditional values to celebration of consumption. I also want to emphasize that even though *dugun.com* is now very popular among couples, there is no research investigating its role in wedding culture in Turkey so far.

CHAPTER ONE: CONSTRUCTION OF MARRIAGE INSTITUTION AND WEDDING CEREMONIES

1. MARRIAGE IN VARIOUS FORMS

In this chapter, the change of meaning of marriage in societies will be briefly discussed. Following this, motivations from past till present to build a relationship through marriage in Turkey, types of weddings, ceremonies, and rituals, and consumption habits during the preparation process of marriage will be handled.

Marriage is a ceremonial process of a relationship between two people as they get together and become partners of one another, as well as a legal process

through which the couple receives state approval of their union and thereby obtains family status. In its simplest form, marriage can be defined as a socially approved sexual relationship between two individuals. Hence, the family grows and their social connections in society expand.

Marriage is more than a regulated sexual relation (Westermack, 2007; 26). It does not affect only the family union between the two people but also the general society, even if indirectly. Gary S. Becker (1973; 814) points to two different features of marriage that affect the individual and society. While marriage is effective on the allocation of one's free time and the resources of the household it affects the general population and the society on the number of births and population growth and labor- force participation of women. As such, family and marriage are rich topics for research as they are related with other social fields, including economy, religion, culture, and politics.

Until the late eighteenth century, most societies around the world saw marriage as far too vital a crucially important economic and political institution that could not be left entirely to the free choice of the two individuals involved (Coontz, 2006; 17). Many sociologists believe that, it is not the individuals but indeed it is families that united thorough marriage before the twentieth century (Bourdieu, 2010; Coontz, 2006; Giddens, 2009).

Marriage was assigned great power as it led to political and economic sanctions such as determining the division of land among royal families, or with the bride price, increasing one side's property, or ending wars and declaring peace. To put it differently, marriage was not a simple personal act, but one that was embodied in larger social, economic, political consequences. In this respect both individuals in higher status, the elites of the society, as well those in lower status, "ordinary" people, had almost no authority to choose to whom they were going to get married, and they had to have the approval of the family elders to be married. However, with the transition from traditional society to modern society, by the end of the twentieth century, the idea that love should be a basic reason to get married emerged (Coontz, 2006; 18). In this way, individuals had the opportunity to choose whom they would marry. According to Niklas Luhmann

(1995; 219), having a love marriage revealed a marriage profile that overcomes the pressures of society and family with the given liberty to choose one's spouse. Once the marriage was freed from economic and political tensions, institutions of marriage and family gained a different dimension over time.

In this study, I will be discussing the motivations from past till present to build a relationship through marriage in Turkey, types of weddings, ceremonies and rituals, and consumption habits. I will also be discussing the tendency to build marriages on romantic love in today's Turkey.

1.1. Marriage Practices in Turkey

Lütfi Sezen (2005; 186) states that while in the big cities in Turkey where cultural changes are intense, getting married through being acquainted is increasingly common, there are many different types of marriage in the regions where traditionalism is dominant. Sezen (2005) determined thirty-three different types of marriage styles. Since the focus point of this research is not marriage styles only two different traditional styles of marriage that are still present in Turkey will be discussed and following that the process of marriages evolving from arranged marriages into love marriages will be explained.

It is important to mention arranged marriages still exist in Turkey today. A research conducted about marriage and family formation in 2016 in Turkey reveals facts about spouse choices, showing that 47.8% of marriages are arranged marriages and with the consent of the parties, 12.1% of them are arranged marriages and without the consent of the parties with the decision of the families (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2017). Many conditions affect women's enrollment in the workforce as well as marriage choices. In the case of Turkey, similar to other countries that go through rapid urbanization, a lot of women are excluded from the business world due to different factors, such as the transfer of traditional values and norms into urban life (Adak, 2007; 141), lack of education, pressure from family and society, payment inequality, or for being the prime caregivers in the family. According to Turkish Statistical Institute data from 2018 out of all people in employment, only 27% of them are women in Turkey (Turkish

Statistical Institute, 2020). Under these circumstances, it can be asserted that when they have no other means to support their livelihood women are more prone to get married out of necessity even though it is not always in accordance with their personal choices.

Young women in Turkey who are raised in patriarchal families and whose freedom are limited especially when they are also prevented from receiving education tend to think marriage as an escape from family oppression and a chance to change their life. Accordingly, they are likely to run away from their families and get married (Doğancı, 2017). Eloping means young women running away to get married with the person they love without the consent of their parents. The percentage of people getting married by eloping in Turkey in the year 2016 is 7% (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2017). It is assumed that in the past this percentage was much higher due to expensive bride prices (Tezcan, 2003; 4), wedding expenses, the blood feud between families, or difficulties between the changes in socio-economic classes.

Marriage in Turkey still preserves its religious and societal importance however practices of the marital bond and its continuity have changed together with the cultural changes happening all around the world. Individuals with appropriate conditions to marry each other are advised to get married to one another or get married with an arranged marriage. However, with modernization, marriages started to be founded on love with their bases on individual choice and taste (Aydın&Baran, 2010; 118). The basic dynamic of the societal changes during the modern era is women gaining their economic independence by stepping into the business world. At the same time, men being able to purchase housework products and personal care products changed the approaches towards marriage and increased the expectations out of marriage. Individuals who do not need marriage for survival and who are capable of living on their own are usually inclined to get married for pleasure, for their likings, and love in this period.

Alan Duben and Cem Behar (1996) in their book *İstanbul Haneleri* state that the modern European approach to love and marriage which was only limited

to a group of elite people started dispersing into middle and lower-middle classes after WWI with the increase of women's magazines that have a feminist approach, foundation of associations to support the improvement of women's rights, developments in education for women and with women entering into the business world towards the end of the 19th century (1996; 115). Duben and Behar also state that love marriage which they call "revolution of love" was also a subject of novels of the time. For example, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's popular novel sets in a middle-class neighborhood of İstanbul *Kadın Erkekleşince* was written in 1916 and is about a failed attempt of a mother to marry his son with a wealthy woman. The son is in love with someone else and tells his mother that "people don't marry for fortune but marry for whoever is fit for their heart" and the novel focuses on love marriage (1996; 116).

While these data about the social status of women and their family formation tendencies are valid, it should also be underlined that love marriages, marrying based on love relation with people getting to know each other, represents an increasing tendency in Turkey. While it might be hard to provide statistical data in this regard, it can be claimed that love marriages are being presented as an ideal, carrying symbolic value, reflecting the socio-cultural shift.

In this chapter, where the meaning of marriage and its structural differences in the world and its process of change in Turkey is investigated, though there is an emphasis on the change of reasons for marriage there is a single factor that seems not to change in practice. While the general tendency is in favor of love and emotional togetherness now, social and economic outcomes of family unions continue. Individuals still gain the financial sources of the person they marry, as well as are influenced by the social status of their partners. With the bond of marriage, spouses can move between different socio-economic classes. So, it is possible to say that family is still an important marker of social status and stratification.

The first place where the style of marriage and the social and economic change that comes with marriage is visible is without a doubt the wedding

ceremonies when the couples are in front of everyone and are on stage for a long time. In the next chapter wedding ceremonies that make up the backbone of the research will be examined and wedding styles that changed in Turkey and the changes that the wedding ceremonies went through will be explained in detail.

1.1.1. Wedding Ceremonies And Consumption In Turkey

Although marriages seem like personal experiences that are special to couples they are social activities that reflect the structure of the time and the dynamics of the geography; cultural products of the society, its oral literature, old and new forms of traditions, moral norms, beliefs, culinary tastes, music, games and shortly its folkloric features. Weddings while including two people officializing their relationship before the state are also festivities where family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances get together at the center of the newly forming family bond and celebrate the joyful event according to the region's culture. Weddings are a major rite of passage whose beginning, announcement, celebration, and even ending are culturally and socially confirmed.

In most cultures, wedding celebrations hold an important role, even though the location, clothing, organization, and ritualistic ceremonies take different forms in different geographies, religions, and societies, and across human time. In Turkey, in Anatolian weddings where the traditional form is dominant, the celebrations take place as families, relatives and guests meet each other and socialize (Berber, 2009;1). Guests congratulate the new family and wish them a happy and joyful beginning as they also offer their gifts to the couple. Today, weddings that especially involved items of popular culture and last fashion attract attention.

It is often observed that even individuals that do not integrate the traditional into their day-to-day life tend to apply traditions in their wedding processes. Individuals might engage in one or multiple traditional ceremonies during their wedding processes. While Dawn Currie was investigating why couples turn towards the traditional wedding, he concluded as a result of the interviews conducted that the individuals tend to be inclined towards the

traditional as an impulse or because they attribute it as “proper”. However, most of the participants stated that following the tradition was not as simple as they thought and that they had to devote more time and effort to their wedding preparations than they had originally planned. This result brought Currie (1993) to the conclusion that applying traditional ceremonies is not only about obeying archaic practices that belong to historic times or that are related to culture but it also brings modernization with itself and expands the fields of consumption.

In the marriage process, the notion of tradition is changeable and mobile. Since there are no definite lines and written rules when applying the traditions and since they are practiced optionally the method of practicing the tradition and its amount is changeable from person to person. Some people choose to follow the traditions completely during the wedding process and some people tend to blend the traditions with new trends. Some people, on the other hand, modify the traditions with the inspirations from different cultures in Anatolia or some trends and integrate those into the wedding process.

Today, we see that new type of wedding emerging through ceremonies and practices that are not part of Turkey’s above-mentioned typical cultural norms and traditions. There are many reasons for this change, such as globalization, cultural industrialization, and the commercialization of marriage. With the effect of the wedding industry such as wedding magazines, social media, and wedding planning sites, the focus of weddings turned to "consumption" rather than the union of two people. The wedding industry has an attitude that prioritizes consumption rather than satisfying wedding needs. According to Bauman (2009; 147), the prime purpose and the flywheel of consumerist prosperity are bolstering of the demand, rather than satisfying of needs. Likewise, the wedding industry creates the demand with the image of the perfect wedding, many different ceremony concepts, fancy titles, and flashy wedding photos, thus emphasizes that they will have a happy and fulfilling wedding.

It would be impossible not to mention consumption in weddings where both the couple and their families and the participants have special attire to attend

the occasion, where there is food served especially for the wedding, where the couple is gifted with jewelry, and with wedding venues that are updated according to trends, ornaments, lightings, live orchestra and where there are many different activities for entertainment. Consumption for weddings is deemed innocent and necessary in every age. For example, in a Muslim state, Ottoman Empire austerity was accepted as a virtue, and overconsumption was not taken kindly, however; weddings, circumcision feasts, and religious festivities were thought to be special moments when consumption was necessary (Aydođan, 2009).

During the wedding process, individuals went beyond their daily consumption due to reasons such as thinking that weddings are an experience that couples can only experience once in their lives, the effort to fulfill the wishes of the bride with the concern of “regretting not doing something”, and the desire to show the status of the couple and their family by making the wedding "duly", as the people call it. Perhaps it can be said that the highest consumption in their lives is at this time.

Sadi Yaver Ataman (1992) explains this situation in his book on Turkish weddings in the past as follows: “Weddings would be initiated with loads of expenses and in the end, it would usually result in wedding owners’ being buried under debt. Whether the family was wealthy or not it didn’t matter as what was at stake was for the parents to see their children get married. And if the families’ honor and reputation required a luxurious, shiny, and expensive wedding they did not abstain from getting in debt.” Indeed, there are many idiomatic expressions in Turkish, reflecting this cultural perspective: “Allah favors the debt of the wedding and the fee of the Ramadan” (Düğünün borcu ile ramazanın harcını Allah kayırır.), “The house of the wedding is the house of abundance” (Düğün kapısı bereket kapısıdır.), “Allah helps those who build a house and hold a wedding” (Ev yapanla, düğün kurana Allah yardım eder.) (Ataman, 1992; 15). These idioms express that the expenses and debt of weddings do not create any long-term financial difficulties and that they would be overcome with the help of the divine power since the formation of a family is believed to be sacred.

In the following chapter the consumption patterns of weddings in Turkey will be examined in order under being betrothed, engagement, bundle, henna night, and wedding ceremony.

1.1.2. Consumption Patterns in Wedding Practices

In the wedding process of a couple in traditional wedding culture in Turkey, after the families meet, the ritual of “asking for the girl’s hand for one’s son” takes place with the participation of only the elders of the family, couples are betrothed to each other and they wear the rings. The groom is expected to arrive with a gift to the ceremony and this gift is usually a bouquet and a box of chocolate (Alyakut&Küçükömürler, 2017; 85). The quality, elegance, and vanity of the bouquet and the chocolate show that the groom gives importance to the bride and her family (Durutürk, 2007; 156). Following the gift-giving, the bride serves Turkish coffee to the guests. The groom is served a salted coffee and him drinking the salted coffee is accepted as him being patient or that he wants to marry the bride (Alyakut& Küçükömürler, 2017; 85). Following that comes asking for the daughter’s hand in marriage and usually elder males talk in the name of the bride and groom and ask for the daughter’s hand in marriage after that they exchange their rings.

Sometimes asking for the daughter’s hand, betrothal, and engagement ceremonies are done all on the same day but engagement ceremonies can also be held as separate ceremonies. Although betrothal and engagement ceremonies seem similar due to the customs they involve in Turkey these two ceremonies are mentioned separately among wedding styles. The difference between engagement and betrothal is: more guests are hosted at the engagement ceremony and the jewelry ceremony takes place as well. In the engagement ceremony families have already met therefore there is a more intimate environment. While betrothal usually takes place in the bride's home, an engagement ceremony is preferably held in a venue. Ceyda Durutürk, while investigating the engagement ceremonies via the interviews conducted with individuals from different social classes,

observed that the rings are usually put on by an elderly person since they are respected because of their age and/or the people that are deemed more respected due to their social status. She also states that it can be interpreted as, by being close to the person who puts the rings on there is a chance of getting some share of that person's reputation (Durutürk, 2007; 167).

Another tradition that is seen during the wedding process is the bride and groom taking bundles to each other's families. This is a ceremony that contains gift-giving and quality, the quantity of the gifts and packaging is important. While gifts are presented, a close circle of people also invited and one of the close relatives of the bride presents the gifts to the crowd. Durutürk states that bundle tradition is not only a ceremonial consumption but also belongs to the conspicuous ceremonial consumption class with its "announcement" aspect (Durutürk, 2007; 168). This statement is thought to be important within the scope of the study. Because, as much as the notion of need is open to discussion, the action of purchase by the individuals to meet each other's need is part of consumption, and the effort to showcase the purchased product is defined as conspicuous consumption. In the wedding process, showing and declaring the consumption need that arises while performing ceremonies makes it inevitable that traditions lead to conspicuous consumption and even encourages conspicuous consumption.

Before the wedding, the ceremony of the henna night is held which usually takes place with the attendance of women-only, and later at night, the groom and the male family relatives join the celebration. The henna night, which is a traditional ceremony, takes place in the bride's house or a venue rented by the bride. In Durutürk's research, it was determined that the brides mostly wore an evening dress and a traditional dress "bindallı" when henna was applied on henna nights (Durutürk, 2007; 181). The main event of this ceremony is the application of henna to the bride's hands. During the application, the person who applies the henna calls the bride's mother-in-law and it is expected from her to place gold inside the bride's hand before the henna is applied. The weight of the gold is

important to impress the bride and guests. It is also possible to say that the mother-in-law giving gold to the bride while everyone's attention is focused on her is a way for the groom to prove his financial power. There is a henna folk song that is sung in every traditional Turkish henna night while the henna is applied into the bride's hand. It is expected of the bride to cry during the song since she will be separated from family. According to Çetin Cengiz, there is a belief in Anatolia that the bride's tears bring fruitfulness with themselves. Therefore, there is a big effort to make the bride cry (Cengiz, 2017; 116). Following this people usually dance and they dance the halay. Dried fruits and nuts are offered to guests alongside small bags of henna.

Finally, with the decision of the couple and their family elders, the wedding, which is the biggest organization of the process, takes place, and all guests are invited. In Turkey, Anatolian traditional practices show themselves in a middle-class family in several ways: a celebration with shawm and drums when leaving the bride's family house, tying a red ribbon symbolize her virginity (Turhan, 2006; 154) around her waist during this, gifting jewelry and dancing the halay, pouring sugar down bride's head in front of the door for a blessed life (Cengiz, 2017; 119), smashing an earthenware pot and distributing rice with meat in the village square. In traditional weddings, the food is prepared abundantly and is served abundantly independent from the number of guests. The food is served not only for the guests but also to individuals in the community, neighborhood, or the small district. Wedding feasts can be qualified as a message for unity in Turkey's history especially in terms of serving the poor (Berber, 2009; 8). Eating wedding meals representing abundance and fruitfulness aims to bless the marriage of the bride and groom and to distribute and spread the blessing they have to the guests (Cengiz, 2017; 120). To this day, meals are distributed in the village square or wedding halls in many parts of Anatolia, and meals are offered to everyone, adults or children invited.

Today, weddings in Turkey can be held in two different ways. The first is to perform a jewelry ceremony with a short and simple ceremony after the

wedding, which is a legal obligation in the municipality building. Weddings are held in municipality buildings at weekends every fifteen minutes. A certain limitation has been imposed on wedding ceremonies in order not to exceed the limited time allowed for couples. Therefore, there is no time and permission required for a "different or remarkable" application. Only "wedding candy" is distributed to the guests as gifts. The second form of the marriage ceremony is to hold a wedding in a predetermined place that also includes the compulsory wedding ceremony. While each couple is given a maximum of one hour in wedding ceremonies, it can take an average of four or five hours to hold a wedding in a venue. The longer the duration of the ceremony, the more applications that can be made during the ceremony.

Weddings are the most comprehensive ceremony of the marriage process in terms of duration, content, and the importance given to the couple, their family, and the participants. One of the most important elements of weddings is the type of venue chosen. In the study conducted by Oktay Berber in 2009, it is seen that the number of country weddings in various parts of Anatolia and weddings held in the streets far from the center in cities is high. On the other hand, Berber (2009; 10) states that weddings are moved to indoor spaces, which are called halls, and that this is a reflection of the changing living conditions brought about by settling down or urbanization, as well as continuing the tradition. Ceyda Durutürk (2007), on the other hand, found that only three of the thirty-three couples she met in 2007 had a wedding on the street, while the remaining couples had their wedding in a closed venue. Although it is not possible to give specific statistics due to the low number of studies on this subject in recent years, it can be said that today, most of the wedding venues have been moved indoors as a result of the researcher's observation and Durutürk's research.

The music played during the wedding, dances, food and all other practices are arranged in accordance with the cultural and religious values of the couple and their family. Food served at wedding ceremonies may vary depending on the family income level. At some weddings, only wedding cake and drinks are served,

while meat and rice-based meals are served at some weddings. While the level of income determines the type of catering, couples and peoples determine whether alcohol will be served or danced according to the sensitivity of families to religious values. In some traditional weddings in Turkey, men and women sit separately and only Quran is read while in others, entertainment is performed with local dances such as halay, Çiftetelli, and horon. These entertainments are held separately for men and women in some regions and together in others.

Although the expenses made at weddings are much more and conspicuous than those made in normal times, they are generally shaped according to a person's budget. In lavish weddings, a wide variety of consumption items promoted by media tools convince people that they are obliged to make these expenses, even if they are well over their budgets. Therefore, it can be said that much more unnecessary spending and conspicuous consumption is made in lavish weddings before the booming of the wedding industry.

1.1.3. Consumption Patterns in Lavish Weddings

Today we see that while traditional ceremonies still go on there is also a new type of wedding emerging through ceremonies and practices that are not part of Turkey's above-mentioned typical cultural norms and traditions. According to Gül Baştok Özkan (2018; 13), cultural notions in marriage rituals such as henna night and bridal bath have been transmitted from past to present and now are used as a tool of popular culture by being surrounded with differences that are produced from the system and have become the new tools of mass media for consumption culture. There are many differences added for before and after the ceremony in new wedding styles such as the venues for the ceremony, number of guests, method of organization, number of attires for the bride, professional video shooting, and hiring a photographer. For example, while henna nights are still practiced, it is becoming increasingly common for urban cities to think it is an obligation to hire an organization company for the henna night.

Weddings in the past decades used to take place in the families' house gardens or village squares but they currently take place in wedding halls or hotels, especially those of high-income families. In the past, people were served a plain dinner, mostly rice and meat or chicken, or simply just some cookies and juice. However, now a wedding without a menu is almost unthinkable, especially among the affluent classes. In the wedding menu, food choices and options have also increased.

In comparison to the past traditional weddings to which everyone in the community and the whole family were invited to new type of wedding the number of guests is limited. Furthermore, especially in weddings where dinner is served guests are often expected not to bring their children but only their partner. Not just the number or structure of guests changed but also the invitation system: The RSVP system is used in invitations and guests are asked to give notice in advance to whether they will be attending the wedding or not. In this way, the guests are determined and a seating plan is arranged. In these new forms of wedding merging traditional and modern, one can observe "excessive" practices such as the hiring of a music band while getting the bride from her own house, giving huge amounts of tips, exploding fireworks, renting a vintage car as the bridal car.

In addition to the fact that the ceremonies coming from the tradition continue to exist and turn into objects of consumption, the relationship of some ceremonies in our country that have not existed before in Turkish traditions and became a part of ceremonies through popular trends with consumption will be discussed. Products of popular culture "bachelor/ette party", "trash the dress", "after party" and "save the date" became a part of our lives because of new media and these practices, some of which are not even translated into Turkish, are being implemented by the couples who follow the wedding trends. The first practice that will be discussed in detail is the bachelor/ette party.

The bachelor/ette party, which later joined the wedding process, is the most common event in Turkey among the above-mentioned global trend practices. The bachelor/ette party is a practice where the bride and groom separately have

fun with their friends before the wedding. The bride and her friends wear special clothes for this day, and the bride's friends usually wear the same dress and take on the role of the bride's "bridesmaids". In this way, another trend is fulfilled; being the bridesmaid of the bride.

dugun.com which is the main website that I am investigating often mentions bachelorette parties and offers various ideas to couples about the party. *dugun.com* separates ideas for the bachelor/ette into two, for the brides and the grooms. While their offers for the bachelorette party for the bride is made up of “crazy” suggestions as the website puts it and are obscene bachelorette treats, male belly dancers, pole dance (Özkök, 2021a); their offers for the bachelor party of the grooms are made up of suggestions for a barbecue party, fasıl (musical entertainment) and bachelors party on a boat. While there is a long list offered for the brides it can be seen that the list for the grooms is shorter and does not contain “crazy” ideas. The fact that the consumption potential of women, which is the main character of planning in the wedding process, is higher than that of men causes the wedding sector to direct its main target to women. Thus, the wedding sector focuses more on the information provided for women.

The photoshoot of trash the dress, another pillar of consumption based on the ceremony, will be explained with the narrations of *dugun.com*. It was determined that there is not much information about Trash the dress (TTD) in Turkish sources. However, it is noteworthy that *dugun.com* includes TTD in detail. According to *dugun.com*'s definition “trash the dress” means “throwing the dress away”. In this photoshoot, you do not worry whether your dress will get dirty or whether your hair will get messy. If you wish you can throw your dress away after the photoshoot and if you wish you can keep it as a memory with all of its stains!” (Özkök, 2021b). This shoot ends on a different day from the wedding day and usually ends with actions that the couples are not afraid of getting dirty, such as swimming in the sea, lying on the sand, etc. (Özkök, 2021b). A separate outfit is purchased for the trash dress photoshoot and a special agreement is made with the photographer who will make the photoshoot. Clothes that the bride and

groom wore for only a few hours are not reusable, according to *dugun.com*. For this reason, it is either thrown away or kept as a memory without being worn.

dugun.com believes that situations such as the couple getting into mud or getting wet will let couples to act freely so that more beautiful frames will be captured (Özkök, 2021b). Although it is a common belief that brides represent purity in whites in the language of the wedding industry, there is a contrary claim in the trash the dress photo shoot. According to Michele White (2012; 113), who examined the trash the dress photoshoots in detail, trash the dress activity is associated with resistance. Because according to photographers, heterosexual brides, and news reporters, TTD changes cultural conceptions of weddings and the visual position of married women.

Figure 2.1 : *dugun.com* Website- Trash The Dress



This photoshoot which is only organized to capture a few frames by paying an amount to the photographer and that ends up with clothes thrown away is an important indicator of the consumption age. The fact that the couple devotes their time, effort, and money to trash the dress brings up the idleness and conspicuous consumption notions that Veblen talks about. Idleness is about the waste of time and effort and conspicuous consumption is about the waste of

property (Veblen, 80). The effort of couples to get into the sea and be covered in mud which they would abstain from in their day to day life for a photo shoot that is the product of global trend, trash the dress can be defined as idleness; whereas throwing away their clothes after the shoot can be defined as conspicuous consumption.

Here again, we encounter the idea that the main focus of weddings is consumption. As Bauman says: "The consuming life is not about acquiring and possessing. The true economic cycle, the one that truly keeps the economy going, is the cycle of "buy it, use it, chuck it out" (Bauman, 2009; 147). Although these practices are not necessary for the official approval or acceptance of marriage by society, it is in line with Bauman's thought as it is consumption-oriented in many ways. As Bauman (2009) points out, these events have no gain for tomorrow, but with encouragement by the wedding media, it shows that the consumer society keeps up with the cycle for a few hours of pleasure.

Another trend that is a favorite nowadays is the "save the date" photoshoot. This photoshoot, unlike TTD, is done before the wedding when the date is set for the wedding. According to *dugun.com* save the date is explained as follows:

"You have applied to the necessary authorities to get a date for your wedding, you prepared your documents and finally you have the date! It is in the past now to take a picture of the paper where your wedding date is written and share it on social media. This is something that especially the couples who want to follow the trends should not do. Instead of this, you agree with a photographer and you get your Save the Date photoshoot. Save the Date is a way to announce your wedding day to the guests and your loved ones (Doğan, 2021a)."

With this activity, couples get special attire for this day and hire a photographer to get their photos taken with an eye-catching theme. The main purpose of the shoot is to announce the wedding or the official marriage date on social media with the photos. In this way, couples can announce their wedding in a different, unusual way and in line with the trends. *Dugun.com* also suggests that these photos can be

sent to the guest via e-mail or can be texted via Whatsapp (Doğan, 2021a). To summarize it can be said spending money, effort, and time for photos that are not even bothered to be published can be defined as conspicuous consumption and idleness as mentioned in the example above. These new trends that are added to weddings can be said are not done because of traditions or so that the bride might regret not doing some things. These trends today can be interpreted as not only showing the economic existence of the couple by doing unique activities but also giving importance to the “memory” dimension of the photographs.

In addition to being a tool for couples to remember that moment in the future, wedding photos are also signs that prove that the wedding was perfect in the period after the wedding. Veblen examines the concept of "memory" in terms of property. According to him, the property, equipment, and women obtained in wars in the feudal period passed into the property of men and were thought to be "memories of victory". Displaying this wealth in the group was a sign of honor. In terms of souvenirs, it is possible to adapt the wedding photographs to the present day based on the determination of Veblen. Like the trophies obtained during the wedding process, the photographs are memories that remind a couple of the perfect wedding after the wedding. The couples' sharing of these photos from their social media accounts intermittently is an effort to show the consumption made during the wedding process over and over again.

The last event, “the after-party” is the transition to another place where older people or children leave the wedding, where the couple can have fun and dance with their friends for hours. The bride changes her clothes for this event as well and chooses a different wedding gown that would not tire her while she is dancing. It can be seen that there is a common point in all the wedding activities mentioned above. Brides buy a different wedding gown for each activity. The importance given to bridal gowns, which are thought to represent the childhood dreams of all women, is always seen in the wedding sector. In addition, *dugun.com*, which will be examined in detail below, opens the main

page under the name of "Wedding Dress", which again shows the importance given to bridal gowns.

Another point of change which is the wedding planning practice that emerged in the West also showed its effect in Turkey. Twenty years ago just a couple of months were thought to be enough for wedding planning however currently it is thought that the wedding planning should begin at least a year before the wedding (Iovan and friends, 2011; 34). Weddings are currently planned out more elaborately and in great detail when compared to the past with the help of bridal magazines, TV shows about weddings, and wedding planning sites.

Finally, of course, the budget and spending types allocated to weddings have increased compared to the past in order to plan weddings, to make weddings more glamorous, and to apply global ceremonial trends. In this way, consumption in weddings not only shows itself through traditional-based activities but also through newly emerged wedding practices. As a result of having more extravagant weddings and practicing the ceremonies that transferred here with the Western influence the budget that is spared for weddings have of course increased when compared to the past. It will be useful to mention which expense items are in the mentioned budget and who or what determines these expenses in order to understand the relationship between wedding and consumption of the study.

1.1.4. Cost of the Wedding

Nowadays, it is not possible to talk about a standard wedding budget because every couple plans their weddings according to their budget, tastes, and cultural capital. Weddings are such events where class distinctions become easily observable and social strata are visible. The lavishness of weddings or the amount of money and effort that will be spent is not just depend on the wealth of the couple but also related to the distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital within the factions that Bourdieu defines. Individual's cultural capital can be summarized in three groups: Embodied (in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body), objectified (in the form of cultural goods), institutionalized

(like educational qualifications state. Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group (Bourdieu, 1997; 17).

What are the ceremonies that will be performed by individuals and the way that they will practice those ceremonies are directly interrelated to all these types of capital. For example, a couple with sufficient financial capability may not be holding their wedding ceremony with a musical group. In the cultural commodity of the couple, that, in the long-term predisposition of their body and mind (Bourdieu, 2010:49) there may not be any place to the tendency for dancing with drum and zurna instruments at front deck of the bride's house. Or his existing relational connections in his social capital may find that “banal”. Based on the type of capital that constitutes the principle of the privileges and the methods of differentiation from the common (Bourdieu, 2015; 382) the amount of the money spent on the wedding varies.

As in all areas of consumption, it is difficult to talk about an average number of wedding expenditures, as the class differences in weddings affect many issues from the way weddings are held to the clothes of the guests. While a wedding in Turkey can cost five hundred thousand TL or even more with luxury expenses, it is also possible to hold a wedding that can be considered as an average of twenty thousand TL. For this reason, the figures to be spent by couples who are in the process of getting married in Turkey for their weddings will be given over their minimum values, and especially what the expense items are will be emphasized.

While organizing a wedding there are expenses such as the wedding venue, organization, engagement party venue, engagement attires, wedding dress, groom’s suit and gifts given to guests, and other activities like these. Although it is not possible to give a certain number when class differences are also taken into account with the increasing expense items, the minimum budget for the

engagement party, henna night and wedding in 2020 without including the dowry and setting up a house might be expected to reach 30 thousand TRY.

dugun.com which is the main website that I am investigating in this part of the MA thesis provides like yearly expense range for the weddings and the numbers of the figures updating every year as for 2021 they gave a number around “170 thousand liras including dowry and expenses for setting up a house (Doğan,2021b).” This number was 150 thousand in 2020 and it was 130 thousand Turkish liras in 2019³. *dugun.com* hasn’t mentioned the cost of gold gifted to the bride in the engagement ceremony and the wedding, but still prepared a longer “bare necessities” list.

dugun.com, as they list all the wedding expenses they offer alternative payments in order not to worry their readers about being able to pay the expenses.

“You should be ready to pay at least 170 thousand TL for an average wedding. Do not be afraid! If you have the correct planning or if you benefit from the state’s dowry support it is not very hard to make your dreams into reality. You may also consider the option of a wedding loan offered by banks” (Doğan,2021b).

With this statement, *dugun.com* gives detailed information to couples on which options they can use to have the wedding of their dreams. While the consumption trends of traditional weddings were mentioned above, Sadi Yaver Ataman's book, published in 1992, put forward the idea of "God will help those who are getting married" despite the high cost of weddings, and it was mentioned that the statement encouraged a wedding process in which there is no hesitation to make expenses. However, it is seen that *dugun.com* holds a different view about wedding expenses.

dugun.com instills the idea to realize their dream wedding and emphasizes that covering the wedding expenses takes good planning thus they advertise

³ This information was obtained by commenting on an article on *dugun.com*. <https://dugun.com/planlama-rehberi/a-dan-z-ye-dugun-masraflari-1704>

themselves as a wedding planning site. In addition to this, it is also seen that *dugun.com* suggests to its users to get dowry support from the state or to get a loan from the bank. So it can be said that Ataman's and *dugun.com*'s suggestions bear a similar outcome. In both cases, there is no way but to start their lives in debt for the married couples. However, there is a point where these two views differ. While Ataman's view "God helps those in need" is something that only the family elders spoke of, *dugun.com* defends that weddings should not be shaped according to suggestions of the elderly but should be shaped completely according to couples' wishes and dreams (Özkök, 2021c). In this way, it targets young couples who adapt more easily to consumption trends. For this reason, it is seen that it makes the services that can be bought in the market more attractive by giving more concrete advice in order to convince their couples.

Not only the wedding ceremony but the expenditures for wedding ceremonies include pre-wedding ceremonies as well. In Turkey, there are different ceremonies conducted or performed before the wedding. There are two types of pre-wedding ceremonies which are defined as "söz" and "nişan". "Söz" can be translated as being betrothed; the other is "nişan" which can be translated as getting engaged. Although it has the same symbols in terms of ring-wearing ceremony, as explained above, due to some differences, the traditional marriage model in Turkey continues to exist as two separate ceremonies of betrothal and engagement. However, in recent years these two ceremonies have been joined and are not done separately by some couples. Then *dugun.com* also makes this pre-wedding ceremony include them as part of the wedding expenditures as well. *dugun.com* designed the wedding expenses in accordance with this detail:

"If you are going to organize the betrothal and the engagement at the same time, you can consider the expenses for asking for the daughter's hand in marriage among the expenses for the engagement. If you wish after asking for their hand in marriage you may organize the engagement ceremony on a different date. Depending on this expense items differ and you have to shop separately for these two ceremonies (Doğan, 2021b)."

In this way, *dugun.com* did not make suggestions on whether to hold these two ceremonies together or separately but they listed all the options. They underlined that the expense items will differ according to chosen options and on the following lines they gave detailed information to the couples about the pricings.

“If you wish you can only organize a henna night and a bachelorette party in addition to that. There should be separate budgets for both of them. The reason for this is that there are common expense items for both celebrations such as the attires, the organization venue, henna, and music (Doğan, 2021b).”

By placing henna night and bachelorette party under the same category *dugun.com* suggests that couples prepare their budgets in the event that they choose these two parties. As it can be seen *dugun.com* does not direct couples openly to practice these ceremonies. But they take on kind of a counseling role and offer all of the options for a wedding process.

The fact that *dugun.com* added the cost of practices like honeymoon and bachelorette party to the bare necessities of a wedding list, which are practices that are not part of the traditions of Turkey but have been practiced in recent years with the influence of the new media; shows that they are blending the traditional and the Western ceremonies together and present this to their readers. It can be argued that *dugun.com* has created a new wedding process where they hold the traditional in their hands by preserving its original form or by giving the traditional different forms and by including new ceremonies that are not part of the national culture to the weddings.

1.2. Post Industrial Society: Wedding Industry And Turkey

Wedding industry that refers to the independent and local vendors is a marketplace that is made up of various enterprises that deal with wedding venues, wedding photography, bridal hair and make up, bouquet, souvenirs and invitation (Iovan and friends, 2011; 31). Wedding planning industry is made up of practices that help planning the perfect wedding in detail such as bridal magazines, wedding counsellors and online wedding planning sites. Kristin Blakely (2008)

explains how the wedding planning industry emerged in the U.S as follows:

“Beginning in the mid- to late 19th century, the elite began to hire masters of ceremonies, who assisted in the day-of coordination of the wedding. In the 1920s, some bridal salons began adding bridal secretaries to their employee registry. These women specialized in giving advice to brides about etiquette, protocol, and the services and merchandise available in their local areas. In the 1970s, the wedding consulting industry began to really take off (Blakely, 2008; 644).”

Wedding industry enabled the emergence of occupations that were not existent before the 90’s and commoditized the things that were once part of an unofficial economy or daily ethics (Kapur, 2009; 225). Advice from the family, relatives and close ones about the wedding process is no longer a necessity thanks to wedding planners. Because wedding planners are ready to prepare and think about all the details of the wedding to design just as the couple wants, without abandoning the traditions while at the same time preserving the modern style. All jobs have become professionalized and specialized - photography, catering, wedding cards, decorations, beauticians and henna artists, and entertainers (Kapur, 2009; 225). This industry is the industry that brought practices such as indian dance shows, bridal spa therapies with special aromatic masks that are produced from fresh fruits (Doğan, 2021c), offering crab leg (Yetiş, 2020b) at beach weddings to Turkey.⁴

Considering the high amount of expenditure for weddings and the fact that it affects at least 20 different business lines it can be said that the wedding industry is a big market. According to Didem Cılga, President of Patika Fair Organization, who organizes a fair for the wedding industry, the wedding industry has been growing steadily in the last 10 years. Some economic reports confirm Cılga’s observation as the size of the wedding industry is said to have reached 13 billion dollars with a growth of 15% in 2019, and is expected to grow by 20 percent in 2020 (Pehlivan, 2020). While the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic deserves a separate investigation, it is still reasonable to presume that the wedding

⁴ Inspired by Jyotsna Kapur 's (2009) article and modified with an adaptation of *dugun.com*.

industry, despite fluctuations, will hold a major place in the economic sector and social scenery.

1.2.1. Wedding Planning

The reason why wedding planning has become so important for couples is not only cultural but also contains the impact of the wedding industry. In this chapter the reasons to show wedding planning as a “need” will be briefly explained.

Weddings in the twentieth century have become the major ritual of the entire life span (Otnes&Pleck, 2003; 4). Weddings are not merely ceremonies that enables the bride and groom to come together; it is more of a process that includes sub meanings within itself. Wedding practices that in one way emphasized societal values also gives information about the financial situation of the couple’s families and their personal choices.

The scarcity and briefness of the times of coming together in the lives of the people of metropolis also makes it necessary to leave the most striking impression in the shortest time possible (Bocock, 2014; 26). In this context, it can be said that weddings, which take three to four hours and to which the whole close relatives and friends are invited, are the most convenient time for the metropolitan people to show their wealth. The couple and the family that want to use this opportunity prepare their wedding ceremonies in great detail, considering every stage to make the wedding perfect.

Most individuals, especially women, attribute a lot of meaning to their wedding since due to gender roles in most cultures, they are emotionally involved in becoming a bride and the wedding is considered to be a unique moment experienced once in a lifetime. Accordingly, wedding ceremonies are uttered with great significance; the bride-to-be is supposed to be enjoying every moment and not feel regretful about any part of the ceremony. Today, it is possible to say that there are ceremonies or practices that are made only to make the bride-to-be happy. As a result, the amount of time, effort and budget allocated to weddings may increase with wedding planning.

According to Boden (2001), two different characters of brides who carefully plan their weddings emerge; the 'rational' project manager existing alongside the 'emotional' childish fantasies. For example, in an article on *dugun.com* where the true wedding story is told, the bride says the following words: “I was so enthusiastic about bachelorette, henna, wedding, all of them, I used to say "there is no need for a wedding", I had to do it one by one, they all had to be mine. I had a three page long to-do-list, it was my project and it had to be good (Yetiş, 2021).” With this statement, the bride tells us that once you enter the wedding process even though preparing all the ceremonies in the best way is quite an intense process, eventually she wants to accomplish something for herself. Achieving this perfect day also demands considerable time and effort; commonly couples spend up to a year organizing their wedding (Carter & Duncan, 2017; 2).

It is remarkable to note that the couple who found weddings unnecessary before initiating the wedding planning process wanted to plan the whole ceremony in detail after getting into the process. Currie, in her research, conveys that the couples lost control with the wedding planning and were surprised by this. Based on the statements of the individuals he interviewed, he revealed that with the idea of "going all the way" and “one thing just leading to the next” the couples thus include even the details they deem unnecessary in their wedding processes. Currie found that all of the sixteen people interviewed used wedding planners or wedding magazines to plan their wedding (Currie, 1993; 410). It is possible to say that the "needs" lists and "bare necessities" details imposed by the wedding planning sector on the couples affect the ceremony implementation practices of the couples. In this case, Currie clearly reveals that one of the reasons for the implementation of unnecessary ceremonies during the wedding process is the wedding planning sector.

As the website *dugun.com* itself also emphasizes wedding planning might even take a whole year so the website encourages the couples to start planning one year before the event (Doğan, 2020b). Because in addition to the meanings attributed to the wedding mentioned above, it takes time, effort and budget to

implement the ceremonies fed by tradition and modernism to organize the perfect wedding. Kristin Blakely defines the women of our era who take on most of the burden of wedding planning and at the same time spend energy for their careers and education as “busy brides”. When these trends were coupled with the expanding consumer society, which includes the modern bridal industry, the stage became set for the outsourcing of wedding planning (Blakely, 2008; 644). Professional wedding planning service, which is marketed for busy brides, has become a rapidly growing sector and has become a service that many couples to marry resort to today.

Blakely (2008) lists the role of the online or face-to-face wedding planners’ role in the weddings as; “to save time, look after details, make dreams come true, stay on budget and save money, and have the event run smoothly (p.643).” These duties are done by wedding counselors, bridal magazines and online wedding planning sites.

In previous years when the mass media was not in high use in Turkey, weddings were planned by family elders in Turkey, mostly in light of the patriarchal norms. Ceremonies were organized within the context of the traditions and religious rituals of the geographical region; the quality, content and treats of the ceremonies were equated with glory and honor, and ceremonies found incomplete or faulty were not welcomed by the rest of the society.

1.2.2. Wedding Media in Turkey and Related Academic Studies

Following the emergence and wide-spread of mass media, printed publications and TV shows have begun to be included in the marriage process. Couples to marry started getting influence from the publication sector and wedding trends while planning their weddings. There are bridal magazines in Turkey that publish annually or seasonally such as *Gelin Damat*, *Cosmopolitan Bride*, *Style Wedding*, *Gelin Bride & Wedding*. Bridal magazines usually offer advice to couples under wedding preparation guidance. Bridal magazines which are an important source of the wedding industry are according to Sharon Boden thoroughly intertextual ve polysemous texts and these magazines always make

attributions to other sites of cultural meaning: “Women's magazines, for example, condition women to the popular representations of femininity and shape common senses about the consumption needed to imitate this imagery” (Boden, 2001). Boden's idea is also valid for the articles published by *dugun.com*, another pier of the wedding media. For example, *dugun.com* instills the perception that weddings should be perfect and affect the guests, and introduces the products to make the necessary consumption for this and directs them to the manufacturer.

On television in Turkey there is an intense streaming of shows related to marriage. There were nine wedding shows broadcasted in Turkey on different channels between the years 2007-2017 and they had record-breaking ratings on daytime television. Basically, they are programs that fictionalize male and female relationships that are expected to end in marriage through love and focus on marriage rituals (Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012; 28).

When the studies in Turkey are examined, it has been determined that the broadcasting sectors related to marriage are generally discussed in the context of gender (Nüfusçu, 2012; Özsoy, 2012; Yıldırım, 2018). While these studies, which will be discussed in detail below, examine the TV programs about marriage, it is seen that they mostly examine them within the scope of gender. In addition to this being an important contribution, as this thesis study tries to show, marriage and media programs and their broadcasting are not only related to gender roles and patriarchy. At the same time, it can be examined with different sociocultural dimensions such as consumption, changing family structure and new marriage types.

Despite the love discourse of marriage programs based on the free choice of partner, Gözde Nüfusçu and Ayça Yılmaz (2012) emphasized the inequality of gender roles by stating that these programs reproduced the arranged marriage concept. While the TV host assumes the role of the matchmaker, researching the social and economic capital of the woman, the man's social and economic capital and the beauty of the woman, the woman's household skills, including parenting skills indicate that marriage programs contain the basic dynamics of the arranged marriage procedure (Nüfusçu & Yılmaz, 2012; 28).

Fatma Yeşil and Arif Yıldırım (2019) examined three different TV marriage programs and, found discourses reflecting the domination of men in life in general, and their limited role in the wedding in particular. Women's role, on the other hand, was obedience, permission, defense, being elected and, doing domestic chores. They concluded that marriage programs have contributed to the inequality between gender roles through male domination. These kinds of programs are thought to affect the family and social values. These three programs were removed from the air in 2017 despite their high ratings by a decision published on Official Gazette by the Radio and Television Supreme Council because "they are against the national and moral values of the society, general morality and the principle of protecting the family" (Özgenç, 2017). There is a contradiction between these programs supporting the normative patriarchal gender roles and the government banning them from the air, which shows that how the government is against the idea of liberal feminism. Therefore feminism in any form and women's active participation in any shape is taken to be an offense against national and social values.

It can also be because it is against the traditional way of 'choosing' the wife or the husband, any diversion from the normative paths of society is condemned.

Another program with a different format, *Gelin Evi* (the Bride House), which aired in 2015, examining the homes, dowries and wedding processes of newlywed brides, had a very high rating record and continued its broadcast life for four years. In this program, where tradition is glorified, the consumption made during the wedding process is presented to the evaluation of other brides. They express that the Bride House program, which Sevim Kebeli and Murat İnan examined in the context of gender roles, remained silent about women's education and career goals, encouraged women to do housework, decorate their homes according to the latest trends and thus gaining the appreciation and approval of the society. After an analysis of the content of thirty episodes of the program, it was emphasized that the Bride House contest also highlights the values that emphasize consumption, shopping and image (Kebeli & İnan, 2020). As a result, the

wedding shopping, handcrafted dowry and ceremonies exhibited in the Bridal House program are likely to serve as an example for the audience who are preparing for the wedding.

1.2.3. New Media and Weddings

Couples to be married receive advice from married couples or industry employees who are on the screen or on the magazine page with a non-face-to-face communication while planning their wedding thanks to marriage programs and magazines. Nowadays, with the widespread use of the internet and the emergence of new media, learning about the traditions of marriage ceremonies, following trends and conducting price research have mostly shifted to online marriage planning sites. Unlike the traditional media (books, TV and radio) the term “new media” includes the digital media especially interactive media, internet networks and social communication media (Binark, 2018; 19).

Today, the number of brides that use the internet while planning their weddings are on the rise. According to Nelson and Otnes brides use the internet as a resource because it enables them to easily access information and communicate with widely dispersed providers of wedding resource (Nelson& Otnes, 2005; 90). Brides used to have to search on multiple websites to access different companies while planning their wedding. Those websites recently have started to have merged together and by this way dispersed companies about different dimensions of wedding organization come together under one roof. The websites offer advice to brides and lead them to have meetings with the company officials. With the help of the websites, wedding planning through the internet became one of the easiest and most efficient ways to plan a wedding, especially for the urban “busy brides,” as mentioned above.

As these kinds of online wedding planning web sites such as *Weddingchannel.com*, *TheKnot.com* and *Brides.com* (Thomas & Peters, 2011; 148) became popular, similar websites appeared all over the world. *dugun.com*, *dugunmaster.com*, *dugunyalim.com*, *dugunbuketi.com*, *duguntrendy.com* are active wedding planning sites in Turkey. *dugun.com* is a commonly used wedding

planning website in Turkey and constitutes the main subject of investigation of this M.A. thesis.

In the following section of this study, , the perfect wedding picture drawn by *dugun.com* for the couples and the various services it provides to reach this wedding will be investigated. *dugun.com* will be examined in detail and then the roles *dugun.com* plays in the wedding planning sector will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF WEDDING PLANNING WEBSITE: *DUGUN.COM*

1. *DUGUN.COM*

1.1. Founder of *dugun.com*

The founder of *dugun.com*, Emek Kırbyık is an entrepreneur who is a well-educated person with a bachelor's degree from Istanbul Technical University Department of Architecture and an MBA degree in Bogazici University. He designed *partyspace.com* as a rival of *theknot.com* by designing the website in the exact same form with *theknot.com*'s during his year in the U.S (Kırbyık, 2020a). Emek Kırbyık worked in the wedding planning industry in the U.S for six years. Following his return to Turkey in 2007, he founded *dugun.com* (Kırbyık, 2020b).

Emek Kırbyık was running a hostel together with his cousin and a friend in Galata, Istanbul and with his earnings from the hostel he founded *dugun.com* from scratch and expanded it. Kırbyık states that with this aspect, *dugun.com* is a start-up⁵ company (Kırbyık, 2020b). He has experience on the field thanks to the website, *partyspace.com* he founded in the U.S and keeps improving *dugun.com* day by day. Yearly turnover of *dugun.com* has reached ninety million Turkish Lira and is growing approximately 80-100% each year (Kırbyık, 2020c).

1.2. What does *dugun.com* do?

⁵ Start-up means "a small business that has just been started". Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s%C3%B6z%C3%BCk/ingilizce/start-up>

Kırbıyık states that he started to create the content of the website by researching the photographs, e-mail addresses, promotional articles, capacity and price information of all wedding venues in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir. The web portal *dugun.com* grew in line with the demands of the companies (Kırbıyık, 2015). As confirmed on the website, today, with a team of one hundred and sixty employees, *dugun.com* is one of the fastest growing digital companies in Turkey.⁶ As the company owner Kırbıyık confirms the website serves in thirty-five cities and under thirty-six different categories related to weddings. Each year five hundred thousand couples get married and out of those couples around four hundred thousand of them use *dugun.com*. *dugun.com* transfers over two million offers from couples to the companies subscribed to the website and plays an important role in the digitalization and marketing activities of those companies (Kırbıyık, 2020a).

Kırbıyık states that the manner of operation is similar to *booking.com* (Kırbıyık, 2020a). He also states that they practice the same features with *booking.com* as how they digitalized and enabled hotels and customers to meet online on *dugun.com*. *dugun.com* attracts wedding companies to move towards the online market and enables couples to communicate with the companies in accordance with their needs, financial situation and taste with the feature of filtering the options.

Kırbıyık explains how *dugun.com* fills a void in today's world to plan a wedding. According to him before wedding planning websites made their way in the Turkish market, companies met with the customers through references however in a fastly digitalizing world, wedding market staying out of the online market made it difficult for couples to reach to current trends and many other different options (Kırbıyık, 2020a). Even though wedding trends could be followed from magazines with paid subscription, Kırbıyık emphasizes that with the emergence of online wedding planning sites such as *dugun.com* it became way faster, practical and free to be informed on the latest trends and reaching various options. Though it will be examined in detail later on, it is beneficial to

⁶ <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>

mention at this stage as well that *dugun.com* does not charge the couples for its services. By this way it is more appealing for couples to visit the website *dugun.com* then to buy a magazine. Although the website is free of charge, as stated above they enable huge numbers of sales through the companies that serve under the website. In this respect, it can be stated that this first free service is a good marketing and product sales strategy.

dugun.com declares that it is the leader wedding planning website in Turkey and the second largest one in the world.⁷ Since 2014, two out of three couples have been visiting *dugun.com* during their wedding planning process. *dugun.com* has approximately 35-40 thousand users per day and more than 40.000 companies under its roof.⁸ In line with the increasing demands and the growth of the wedding sector, *dugun.com* did not limit its wedding planning service to only Turkey and Turkish. They established *zafaf.net*, which serves in three different languages in North Africa and the Middle East and has the same working style as *dugun.com*, which helps individuals from many different nations to plan their weddings and I will be examining this part in detail (see in the section “Emek Kırbyık’s Other Portals” 4.1). *zafaf.net*, which will be studied in detail in the upcoming chapters is an indicator of how common online wedding planning has become.

Emek Kırbyık explains *dugun.com*’s objective as a company in these words:

“On the one hand there are couples who have decided to get married and on the other hand there are wedding companies. First of all you need to get the wedding companies to use your platform. You need to enable companies to update the information about their firms and finally you have to make the platform available to the couples. We solved a great problem faced by the wedding companies. Most of the wedding companies, about 60-70% of them earn their money through *dugun.com*. 600 thousand people get married every year, 500 thousand of them hold weddings and around 400 thousand of them sign in to the website as our members. What we do is we

⁷ *dugun.com*, last access 16 June 2020 : <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>.

⁸ *Ibid*, hakkımızda

digitalize the process. We determine the needs of the couples, we understand them and we match them with the correct firms (Kırbıyık, 2020b).”

Kırbıyık states that by turning *dugun.com* into a marketplace, he has closed an important gap for the wedding sector. It brings together consumers and producers online by digitizing wedding companies that were not previously available on a single platform, determining the needs of couples and enabling them to use *dugun.com*. Thus, he attributes to *dugun.com* the role of a bridge and points out that it is an indispensable part of the wedding sector. However, it should be emphasized that *dugun.com*'s role as a bridge is not only matching the company and its customers, but also being an intermediary seller in the sales of companies. It is not a direct seller, but it is a good marketing strategy for *dugun.com*. It will be examined in detail below, but it is worth mentioning here: consumers rely more on advertising made by intermediaries than the information provided by the company itself (Jepsen, 2006; 248). Thus, *dugun.com* uses the benefits of being a tool or a bridge while giving advice to consumers and makes its own sales to companies.

In offering countless options to couples for their wedding, *dugun.com* uses a filtering method which enables couples to determine the companies in accordance with their needs.. For example a couple that is searching for a wedding venue in Istanbul, can type into *dugun.com*'s main page that they are looking for a wedding venue and which city they prefer. Website asks the couples to choose a wedding venue first and offers ten different types of wedding venues: Hotel wedding, countryside wedding, historical wedding venue, social facilities, restaurant weddings, clubs and invitation venues, boat weddings, venues that offers food after the wedding ceremony, wedding-ceremony halls, and venues for engagement and being betrothed.

There are eight different filters suggested after choosing the wedding venue: minimum priced meals (weekend), capacity for dinner party, invitation

venues, features of the venue, scenery, promotions, flexible contracts, region and county.⁹ By using all these filters, couples to marry can find the most suitable places for them, quickly and practically, as *dugun.com* promises, by eliminating many options from "their sit"¹⁰. Behind this very fast and easy-looking process, there is a very large and comprehensive imagination of the wedding ceremony and event and a large consumption chain that will begin afterwards implicitly.

dugun.com emphasizes that individuals of all social classes can meet their needs during the wedding process with its wide company network and many options it offers to couples. It states that it offers double services of all budgets, not just for high sums, luxury-spending couples. Thus, by convincing the couples that it is not that expensive to hold a wedding according to their tastes, it also encourages consumption by offering a special wedding alternative to the couple's budget against the possibility of a wedding that can be given up because it is impossible to reach. For example, a bachelorette party might be considered too luxurious or unnecessary for a couple having a wedding on an average budget. However, *dugun.com* stated in their article titled "Affordable Henna Night and Bachelorette Party Venues" (Doğan, 2020a), which explains the weekday/weekend prices given per person and the services offered by the companies, that the bachelorette party can also be held at affordable prices. Thus, a bride-to-be who thinks that the bachelorette party is unnecessary, can consider the option of adding a difference to the wedding process by making an agreement with a company that is considered to offer an affordable price. Even if there is no heavy spending, organizing a bachelor party can be proof that the wedding of the couple is "ostentatious", as *dugun.com* itself has stated (Tunç, 2020).

In conclusion it can be said that *dugun.com* web portal does two basic things. First of these is bringing the couples together with the companies and being an intermediary in their exchange. Second is that they offer various options to couples to perfect their weddings and in addition to that offers counseling during consumption and psychological stages. Couples who visit the website can

⁹ <https://dugun.com/dugun-mekanlari/istanbul>

¹⁰ <https://dugun.com/makaleler>

get information about the wedding industry and follow the trends even though they do not contact the companies that *dugun.com* has an agreement with. Detailed information on what direction *dugun.com* follows while offering the services technically will be given in the following part of the study.

1.3. Applications and Terms of Use of *dugun.com*

There are two different login options to use *dugun.com*; member login and vendor login. To become a member, *dugun.com* demands personal information such as the name and the surname of the bride and the groom, an email address, a phone number, certain wedding date or if it's not certain yet, the month and year that you think to hold your wedding. Any user can reach the contact number and address of the companies, but to get a price quote, the user should first be subscribed and give some information like their name, e-mail address, phone number, the wedding day, name of the wedding venue and the topic you want to be informed about.

dugun.com offers to vendors a different member login page and a mobile application service. It is also emphasized that by guiding the companies from sales to customer communication *dugun.com* helps companies to keep up with the digital World (Kırbıyık, 2020a). By making beneficial suggestions to companies to make more sales, it encourages companies to invest in the website. According to Kırbıyık, wedding companies that see the ideas of the website work for them start investing in *dugun.com* (Kırbıyık, 2020a). Companies that make an agreement with *dugun.com* pay an annual price and by paying this fee they can keep working with the website. The fee is not clearly stated on *dugun.com*'s website.

'*dugun.com* İş Ortağım' (business partner) mobile application enables companies to upload photos and videos to the page viewed by the customers and update their information, and thanks to this they can communicate with the couples easily, while they can access all these services whenever and wherever they wish.

dugun.com launched a mobile app towards the end of 2020 for the couples as well. In the *dugun.com* application, which provides a similar service to the website, couples can manage the wedding planning process by getting services such as finding companies according to their needs, getting offers from companies easily with a free wedding assistant. *dugun.com* sends regular notifications to its users with its application and sends reminders to the couples who are in the wedding planning stage. By this way, *dugun.com* asks couples to plan their wedding without any intervals. Dawn Currie (1993; 416) emphasizes that the wedding media has an almost military sensibility implied in wedding planning. *dugun.com* also encourages the couples to plan their wedding with e-mails, mobile application and phone calls without leaving an open door, and in this respect, it can be stated that it contains the military discipline emphasized by Currie.

dugun.com uses the virtual world in a professional manner to promote their brand. For example, they use Google Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to appear on the top results in Google. By this way when a person types in “düğün(wedding)” to Google the top three results belong to *dugun.com*. Couples have a very low chance of not coming across with *dugun.com* when they are making research online for weddings. For this reason it is stated that every two couple out of three¹¹ in Turkey visit the website *dugun.com* during their wedding process.

1.4.Name Analysis of *dugun.com*

dugun.com web portal takes its name from the word "düğün", which means wedding in Turkish. Choosing the most frequently searched keyword, wedding, as the site name while preparing for a wedding, makes *dugun.com* practical, easy and accessible. At the same time, this name was chosen in accordance with the target of *dugun.com*. It answers the question “What does *dugun.com* do?” as “It makes wedding preparations easier for couples.”¹² Using

¹¹ <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>

¹² <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>

such a basic word as the website name makes it easier for couples to reach *dugun.com* and increases the number of clicks, as well as providing information about the way this web portal works. For example, on the page of the website titled "Articles", "Plan a perfect wedding from your sit with one click!" statement is included. With this expression, *dugun.com* promises its customers an easy and perfect wedding process with plenty of options.

1.5. Photo Analysis of *dugun.com*

On *dugun.com*, it is seen that the images representing the bride and groom are generally stock images. These photos have some symbolic meanings. *dugun.com* uses photos professionally to make an impact on its users. It can be said that the photographs are chosen economically by paying attention to the photo venue, the couple's clothing preference, appearance and stance because the photographs contain some common representations. In the images representing the groom, it is seen that the man is mostly slim, fit, taller than the bride and in a tuxedo, while in the images representing the bride, the woman is usually seen in a long-haired, fit and low-cut wedding dress. Without exception, the bride and groom are in contact in all the couple images, they have a happy, romantic and perfect appearance.

In these photos brides and grooms who have an ideal body type, young, white and are deprived from any religious symbols. Although *dugun.com* uses photos of couples, photos with only the bride are in majority. The reasons for this can be listed as brides being the main characters in a wedding planning process, the fact that there are more options for women and that the consumption potential of women is more than men (Otnes & Nelsona, 2003). For example, the groom's suit worn by men is in a sub-category on *dugun.com*, while the bridal gown section is among the most visible main headings on the homepage. In addition to this while eight categories in the section "wedding companies" are directly related to the brides only one category is directed towards the grooms. In conclusion since wedding planning is a process that mostly the brides are engaged in it can be

said that the figure of women is more on the forefront of the website. It is possible to say that the marriage process is constructed through the female figure on the *dugun.com* portal, just as gender is predominantly based on women on the TV programs about marriage, as revealed in other researches above.

All wedding planning sites have a picture of a good looking couple on the home page. Heterosexual couple is featured in the home page photos of all sites in Turkey, while heterosexual and homosexual couple photos can be found together on the homepages of the highly clicked wedding planning sites such as *Theknot.com* and *Brides.com*. Since homosexual marriage is not legal in Turkey and is not accepted by the majority of the society all the wedding websites in Turkey feature only pictures of heterosexual couples. While photographs of black and Asian couples are frequently used in American-origin wedding planning websites, photographs of individuals who visually resemble Turkish people have been used since there are fewer individuals of different races in Turkey.

The title photograph of the website is taken in Nevşehir, Kapadokya, a historical region, and it is a location often preferred by the couples for their wedding photoshoots and honeymoons; in the photo we see a heterosexual couple looking at each other in a loving manner and smiling. With this photograph it is aimed to create a perception among users that all the couples using *dugun.com* to plan their weddings will be able to achieve their perfect dream wedding. In addition to this, using this type of imagery might also encourage couples to have big expectations or dreams about their wedding and to plan a better wedding.

Figure 2.2 : *dugun.com* Website – Cover Page



2. DUGUN.COM'S ADVERTISING OF VENDORS AND PARTNERING UP VENDORS AND COUPLES ONLINE

When the *dugun.com* website is visited, the slogan “Start planning your wedding immediately”, which encourages couples to hurry and start the planning process immediately, shows up. The following promise is written in a smaller font below: “Two out of every three couples have had their dream wedding with *dugun.com*.” *dugun.com* presents a fair argument to its users, stating that there are many couples who benefit from its services and that the said couples have achieved their dream wedding, and aims at demonstrating that the website is reliable and practical. The website recommends the wedding planning process to be flawless and fast, as it is long and challenging. In this regard, it offers its visitors many auxiliary services that will be analyzed in the study.

dugun.com offers six main topics to brides and grooms: wedding venue, local vendors, explore, campaigns, wedding dresses, planning tools, and free wedding assistant. “Explore” and “Planning tool” titles are discussed comprehensively in this thesis, as they are more related with the concepts of this thesis. In this section, I will briefly cover the profiles of the vendors that *dugun.com* provides with and also how it brings vendors and couples together via their online platforms.

The first topic, “Wedding Venue”, is the main title on the home page as it makes up a large part of the expenditures and is a significant element that will affect the invitees and the clothing choice of the couple and the invitees.¹³ Wedding Venue has eleven categories such as countryside wedding, hotels, historical places, social facilities, restaurants, clubs, wedding in a vessel, dinner after "nikah", wedding saloon and "söz" and engagement venues. After the Covid-19 pandemic, however, one more category called outdoor venues was added to the list. Because of the epidemic and the prohibitions imposed by the state, couples have started to prefer outdoor places rather than indoor places. Offering many options for determining the wedding venue, *dugun.com* describes these options one by one under the main title “Wedding Venue”.

dugun.com aims at enabling couples to find companies easily and get quotes.¹⁴ In this regard, it includes detailed descriptions of the vendors on the homepage. In the second topic, Local Vendors, there are twenty-six topic titles which include wedding saloon, wedding organization, alternative ideas, honeymoon, groom’s suit, wedding cake, bridal car, light, sound and regulation, wedding candy and gift, wedding photographer, wedding ring and gift of jewelry, catering, dance course, wedding video, shoes and accessory, henna night and a hen night, engagement saloon, wedding dress, dressy for engagement, hair, and make-up for the bride, florist, wedding invitation, registry office, beauty salon, and music. With the help of filters available in all categories, couples can find the most suitable vendor among numerous options. For instance, the dance courses page contains seven filters: Minimum price, course type, average course duration, offers, region, district. After the Covid-19 pandemic, a “flexible contract” filter was included to all categories which lists the firms according to their flexibility policy regarding postponements caused by Covid-19 measures.

In Local Vendors topic, the following statement is present: "You are very close to achieving this unique wedding that you have been dreaming of for years. With the help of your partner and the wedding companies you will work with, you

¹³ <https://dugun.com/dugun-mekanlari>

¹⁴ <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>

can have the perfect wedding. *dugun.com* delivers you your dream wedding by bringing together the best companies in your city.”¹⁵ It is argued here that holding a wedding is the childhood dream of every person and that they have been waiting for the wedding day for years. Besides, the brides are promised that with the help of their partners, companies, and *dugun.com*, they will manage their wedding in the best manner. This proves that Sharon Boden's (2001) description of brides as “rational project managers” is very convenient.

Another main topic, Offers, presents the campaigns of vendors contracted with *dugun.com*. It is not necessary to register to the *dugun.com* website to benefit from these campaigns. However, it is necessary to contact the vendor through *dugun.com* for making deals.¹⁶ "Do not miss the discounts on wedding prices, and other wedding opportunities, plan the perfect occasion with a suitable budget!"¹⁷ declaration promises the couples that if they benefit from these campaigns, it is possible for them to achieve their dream wedding with more affordable prices. Therefore, while *dugun.com* offers discounts to help couples, it also acts in accordance with its agreement with local vendors by initiating couples to make offers to firms.

“Wedding Dresses”, which was included on the home page at the beginning of 2021, provides information in regard to the companies in the wedding dress sector and their price range. Although the introductions of wedding dress vendors are included in the local vendors topic, it is also found on the home page as a main title in order to draw more attention to wedding dresses. Unlike the information on "Local Vendors" topic, this title includes filters for details such as the skirt and arm type of the wedding dress, thus enabling the bride to find the most suitable vendor.

For most brides, arguably the most critical issue is finding the right wedding dress. As the data Thomas and Peters (2011; 153) collected from online wedding planning websites demonstrates finding the dream dress is the most

¹⁵ <https://dugun.com/dugun-firmalari>

¹⁶ This data was acquired when the researcher asked for a quote from a local vendor in order to obtain detailed information.

¹⁷ <https://dugun.com/indirim>

discussed topic of all. Likewise, it can be argued that *dugun.com* added “wedding dresses” topic as a main title on the home page after noticing that wedding dresses have a high click rate.

Next to the "Wedding Dresses"¹⁸, the main title “Free Wedding Assistant” is placed. A wedding consultant or assistant is the person who is responsible for all the planning in the wedding process for a certain fee and helps the couple with everything related to the wedding. The wedding assistants, which were hired only by elite couples of high-income before, have lost their popularity, although still existing today. The wedding planning website *dugun.com* also provides a virtual wedding assistant service to couples. It is often emphasized that this service is “free”, by defining it as "free wedding assistant” even in the main title.

This section enables couples to find vendors by typing any consumption object they will need for their wedding in the search box. By saying "Receive five offers for free in just 30 seconds!", *dugun.com* emphasizes that more than one firm is needed to be contacted quickly in the wedding planning process. The similarity of wedding planning, which will be explained in detail below, to project management is also noteworthy.

So far the topics in which *dugun.com* provides contracted vendor profiles to the couples and as a result enables the couples to send their quotes to companies were examined. In the following section, *dugun.com's* assistance to couples on wedding processes will be assessed. "Explore" and "Wedding Tools" topics on the home page of *dugun.com* are very convenient for evaluating the conspicuous consumption aspects of *dugun.com* in terms with their contents, which is the main study of this thesis.

2.1. *dugun.com's* Consultancy Role for Couples

dugun.com promises couples that they can access all kinds of information and options related to the wedding in the website. In doing so, it offers couples advice regarding many subjects, from the ceremony traditions to the way the bride

¹⁸ <https://dugun.com/>

should treat her mother-in-law. "Explore", which is a main title on the home page, is the main section that couples receive consultancy services for the wedding process. In accordance with the promise *dugun.com* makes to couples concerning helping them have their dream wedding, advice articles are also included in this section.

There, the users can find articles, videos, and photo galleries of wedding planning categories such as wedding venues, wedding dresses, hair and make-up, photos, and organization. It contains over one thousand five hundred articles from fifteen different categories: Planning guide, start here, real wedding stories, fashion and trends, compilations, top reads, *dugun.com's* recommendations, advice and tips corner, bridal guide, grooming guide, *dugun.com* reviews, legal issues, expert opinions, what do they say, and home decoration.¹⁹

Within the scope of this thesis, which examines the conspicuous consumption aspects of *dugun.com*, some selected articles will be examined in detail by focusing on related topics. First, the articles that deal with the legal requirements of wedding planning, shopping suggestions, and wedding planning in detail will be assessed. Second, *dugun.com's* attempt at fictionalizing a simultaneously rational and romantic wedding process with individual stories will be discussed. Third, another issue deemed substantial in accordance with the theme of this study, encouraging couples to consume by using the word of mouth effect in articles in which *dugun.com* compiles the advice given by married couples will be evaluated. Thereafter, the articles that suggest the following the latest wedding fashions, narrate celebrity weddings and advice imitating these will be criticized in terms of steering couples to conspicuous consumption. Finally, the section in which *dugun.com* aims at constructing the ideal bride and groom body will be reviewed.

2.1.1. *dugun.com's* Rational Consultancy in Wedding Planning

dugun.com penned many articles regarding detailed descriptions of the trends of the year to plan a perfect wedding fed by tradition and modernism, tips

¹⁹ <https://dugun.com/makaleler>

for making the right choice at each stage of the wedding, the budget to be allocated to each item, the points to pay attention when negotiating with vendors, where to start planning a wedding, and the legal procedures²⁰ that need to be known in marriage proceedings. In the sections to be detailed below, I will concentrate on the necessary information for logical and budget-friendly planning that *dugun.com* provides.

As mentioned above, *dugun.com* has included articles on the traditions in the wedding process and how they should be implemented, as well as recommending the ceremonies adopted from the West to the couples. How to use "*dugun.com*", which includes the "start here" ²¹category that helps the couples when they begin to plan a wedding? The "Yes!" section covers one hundred and fifty-eight articles, one named "What to do next?", which includes the information needed at the beginning. This section consists of articles that explain in detail the official documents required for marriage, examine all wedding dress models in detail, and also explain the traditional aspect of the entire wedding process after receiving a marriage proposal thoroughly.

"All you need to know about engagement and 'söz'"(Doğan, 2021d) article provides many details such as the side who should host the "söz" ceremony in their house, the side paying for the "söz" dressy, and what to wear at the engagement, as required by tradition. Traditions and customs transferred from family elders in the past have become information that can be accessed on *dugun.com* today. As mentioned above, *dugun.com* advocates that the elders of the family should only remain in a position to provide "support" and that all decisions regarding the process should be decided by the bride. Thus, *dugun.com* eliminates the need to learn rituals and customs from family elders by providing said traditions to couples. As a result, it ensures that the elders of the family are excluded from the decision-making process.

It is also remarkable that while explaining the traditions in detail, the said article also possibly increases the expectations of the brides due to the mentioned

²⁰ <https://dugun.com/planlama-rehberi>

²¹ <https://dugun.com/buradan-baslayin>

quantities. For example, the "What to gift to the bride in the engagement?" question is answered as follows: "The groom side gifts the bride a jewelry set consisting of a necklace and earrings. Other than this set, she can also be gifted 2 or 3 bracelets (Dođan, 2021d)." These expressions may lead to increased or lowered expectations from the groom and their family for brides who learn the traditions through *dugun.com* during the wedding process. It can be said that *dugun.com*, which is known to have high click rates, has a real impact on determining the traditions of the wedding process today.

Collecting the most read articles out of all under a single heading in the subtitle "Most Read", *dugun.com* narrates as follows: "The couples planning their wedding read these articles the most. In order to not miss any detail you need to know, follow now!".²² It is noteworthy of this section that compared to the ones regarding marriage planning issues, there are more articles related to the emotional relationships between couples like "Before or after marriage?", "How do grooms want to see their brides?" and "How to build a husband?"²³ The fact that the most read articles mostly appeal to brides is an indication that the majority of *dugun.com* users are women. Another notable point of this section is that it includes articles that aim at providing support not only for physical needs but also for psychological needs of couples. Thus, *dugun.com* shows that it cherishes the couples and is there for their every issue.

So far, it has been revealed that *dugun.com* explains the traditions of the wedding process to the couples in order to create a "suitable" wedding process, lists their physical needs, and gives the couple psychological support in the meantime. These indicate the consultant role *dugun.com* plays regarding the rational side of weddings. It does not receive a direct commission fee for the vendor advertisements included in the articles in accordance with the general agreement it has with the vendors. In the following section, it is observed that the website offers some product and company suggestions to couples, again under the guise of a consultant. However, in this section, *dugun.com* receives an extra

²² <https://dugun.com/en-cok-okunanlar>

²³ <https://dugun.com/en-cok-okunanlar>

payment for these suggestions as it acts as an extra advertisement in addition to the contracted payment it receives from the vendors. It also includes advertisements for which it receives commission fees.

Alongside advertising wedding vendors, which is its basic function, *dugun.com* also contains a separate article subtitle called "Vendors recommended by *dugun.com*" (*dugun.com* 'un Onerdikleri, n.d.). It is presumed that it cooperates with vendors and publishes these articles for an extra payment. Besides, it is determined that it is in cooperation with Trendyol, an e-commerce website of Turkey. "Here are the vendors that *dugun.com* recommends working with! With one click, you can get detailed information about the products and services offered by the vendors." It provides vendor names directly in this section and explains vendors in detail with exclusive articles dedicated to them.

A wedding planning website, *dugun.com*, defines itself as "a tool to make dreams come true"²⁴. Moreover, emphasizing this identity enables it to not occur as encouraging consumption apparently. *dugun.com* always appears under the guise of assistant and consultant for shopping. However, it is an inevitable fact that it clearly directs the couples to consume in this section. Eight out of the seventeen articles available in this section include links to the e-commerce company Trendyol by mentioning products related to wedding and home accessories. Today, Trendyol, which is known for its anticipated offer days, is one of the most clicked online shopping platforms in Turkey, which is encountered in many different places on the internet thanks to both the social media accounts of influencers and Google SEO advertisements (Papucciyan, 2020). Creating a favorable environment for consumption, Trendyol.com invites soon-to-wed couples to its platform by collaborating with *dugun.com*. *dugun.com*, which recommends various traditions, practices, and ceremonies in order to make weddings perfect and unique, directs couples to brand or shopping websites with the posts under the title "Suggested by *dugun.com*", therefore clearly encouraging them to consume.

²⁴ <https://dugun.com/makaleler>

2.1.2. Effort and Concession to Tradition to Make Weddings Perfect

The wedding industry contributes to consumption in various ways. First, it tries to create a marriage tale by emphasizing that weddings are “one and only special days”. In addition, adjectives such as perfect, dreamy, extraordinary, and unique are consciously used when defining weddings. Hence, the idea that weddings should be perfect becomes instilled in soon-to-wed couples. It constantly encourages brides to plan the wedding by saying that detailed planning is required to achieve this perfect wedding imagination. Detailed planning also alters the forms of ceremony.

In the "Planning Guide" subtitle under the "Articles" title, there are one hundred and seventy-four articles published generally dedicated to the stages of the wedding process. One of these articles, "Don't spend a fortune for your wedding!" will be evaluated in detail. In this article, *dugun.com* promises couples that they can have their dream wedding with less money by providing some tips. Here, we see that *dugun.com* also involves individuals who don't have high economic resources. He claims that every couple can be user to *dugun.com* and it appeals to every class as reproduced in this way.

dugun.com recommends that couples follow the wedding vendors that they want to work with, and follow the offers in order to hold the weddings with a lower budget. Because weekend weddings are preferred more, wedding venues charge cheaper prices for weddings held on weekdays. For this reason, couples who plan a modest wedding (*dugun.com*, 2020b) are advised to hold their wedding on weekdays. Finally, it recommends that couples devote a day to the wedding dress on their overseas travels during the preparation process, browse affordable designer wedding dresses in the countries they visit, or attend bridal fairs (*dugun.com*, 2020b). These can lead the couple to believe that they should make more effort in wedding preparation, that they have to provide every opportunity for the wedding to be perfect, and that their own preparations are inadequate, and reevaluate the previously deemed unimportant details.

It is also relevant to mention that weddings meet a certain standard. Because, although weddings differ in terms of regions, it is observed today that the

wedding preparations lead to similar or the same ceremonies. Hence, it can be mentioned that while advertising unique, singular, and personalized weddings, standardization occurs since the preparation processes include many similar applications. Otnes and Nelson (2003; 132) interpret this as contradiction. According to them, there is a huge discrepancy between the reality of standardization and the ideology of the wedding industry, that is each wedding is unique and different. Within the scope of this study, it was determined that the standardization in the wedding sector in the world as a result of globalization and modernization caused the traditions to be partially forgotten or devalued. In the rest of this section, the concessions made to traditions for the sake of making weddings look more elegant will be briefly touched.

"Don't spend a fortune for your wedding! (*dugun.com*, 2020b)" article provides tips on how to alter or completely eliminate traditions and create a more affordable and simultaneously elegant and flawless wedding. As mentioned in detail before, serving meals to guests at wedding ceremonies has a substantial place in Islamic religion and Turkish culture (Berber, 2009; 8). Contrary to this common tradition, it is found that *dugun.com* recommends eye-catching but not satisfying cocktail menus instead of offering meals, and hiring a bar catering firm and make the invitees pay if they want to have more than one drink, instead of offering unlimited drinks (*dugun.com*, 2020b). While the couple and their family preferred the widest square of the village or district as the wedding venue and made sure that the wedding meals are abundant and satisfying in the past, offering snacks in stylish and posh wedding venues has become fashionable nowadays. Thus *dugun.com* advises that couples can compromise on traditions in order to have their dream wedding.

"Let's say there's only one wedding venue that you dream of, but the wedding dinner costs exceed your budget. Don't let this discourage you. Find out if there are cocktail menus that fit your budget, rather than giving up the place you really want because of its price. (*dugun.com*, 2020b)"

It is evident that although *dugun.com* prefers a headline that contradicts conspicuous consumption for the article, "Don't spend a fortune for your

wedding!", the content motivates the couples to go to any lengths for a glamorous wedding. In summary, *dugun.com* profiles the couples who want to have their dream wedding with an average budget as of a couple who starts planning the wedding a year before, follows the wedding vendors regularly for a year, wishes to have a designer bridal gown, absolutely prefers a spectacular venue and can afford a trip abroad and neglect the traditional rituals when necessary to have a lavish wedding.

In addition, *dugun.com* seems to be close to creating a cultural hegemony (Engstrom, 2008) in terms of the information it provides concerning traditions, global trends, or other issues regarding the wedding process. However, it also aims at creating the illusion of the "right to choose" in parallel with liberalism and capitalism by offering advice suitable to the couples' budget and presenting cheap and expensive vendor options in one place.

2.1.3. The Construction of Marriage Through the Dichotomy of Rationality and Sensuality

The wedding industry commodifies the wedding by using romantic and emotional concepts. *dugun.com* makes brides have romantic dreams with the style and content of its articles. It then provides a key to unlock all those romantic dreams: rational wedding planning. By saying "Time to put your dreams on the table! (*dugun.com*, 2020a)", *dugun.com* then reveals the necessity of many ceremonies and shopping lists, transforming the marriage process from a dream with romantic elements to a consumption-oriented, planned, and calculated process.

The "Real Wedding Stories"²⁵ section, in which the rational and emotional dichotomy is clearly observed, will be examined in detail under this title. Instead of wedding planning, which is rationalized and calculated at each stage in other sections, weddings are described by attributing the romanticized and idealized aspects of marriage under this section. "Real wedding stories" is a category that narrates the experiences of married couples who have completed their wedding

²⁵ <https://dugun.com/gercek-dugun-hikayeleri>

preparation with *dugun.com*. Its explanation is as follows: “Who can guide you best in wedding preparations? Of course, a young, loving couple like you who recently got married and has gone through all this. Benefit from the experience of married couples with “Real Wedding Stories”, read their stories, get inspired!”²⁶ The experience one hundred ninety-eight couples gained during the marriage process is recited on the website in order to inspire new married couples. Instead of planning a wedding that proceeded with the advice of family elders in the previous cultural ritual mentioned above, the couples are encouraged to organize weddings on *dugun.com* by taking the advice of their loving and young peers.

The articles consist of the beginning of the relationship, marriage proposal, the vendors that provide services to the married couple for essential practices such as "söz" and engagement, wedding venue, hairdresser, wedding photoshoot, and wedding candy, and the preparation process are presented to the readers in a romantic, dreamy, and emotional language. Thus, while the vendors are advertised, the romantic fantasy phenomenon is kept alive. With titles like "A wedding that everyone admired", "A festive love story", "Magical marriage in Mauritius!"²⁷ a customer profile that is envied in all real wedding stories which have a fun and loving wedding process is created. Romantic article titles are also accompanied by impressive photos of the couple, thereby increasing the impact and perception of “reality” on the reader.

Real wedding stories are often shared in a question-and-answer form. When the majority of the articles are examined, it is found that the questions are generally answered by the bride. *Dugun.com* asks the problems experienced in real wedding stories with the question "Have you ever forgotten anything on the wedding day? (*Dugun.com*, 2020c)" and generally is responded with an answer like "Something negative happens for sure, but the important thing is not to lose your smile at that moment and to enjoy it despite everything". It is determined that the advice given by the married couples to the soon-to-wed couples are similar: “Aim at spending the wedding day with the least stress with the help of good and detailed planning and

²⁶ <https://dugun.com/gercek-dugun-hikayeleri>

²⁷ <https://dugun.com/gercek-dugun-hikayeleri>

whatever happens, smile all the time to keep the wedding day as a special and beautiful memory (Yetiş, 2020a) with a happy ending." Despite this very romantic narrative style, it seems that the stories also contain a serious touch that expresses the necessity of planning a wedding. Here, we encounter the romantic love and rational planning dichotomy, which *dugun.com* emphasizes in wedding planning, intertwined again. The idea that logical, rational, and detailed planning is necessary to have the perfect festive wedding full of love and taste is manifested clearly.

According to *dugun.com*, a rational wedding planning process is directly linked to the vendors the couples work with. Saying "With the help of your partner and the wedding companies you will work with, you can have the perfect wedding."²⁸ *dugun.com* emphasizes that wedding vendors can realize the bride's dream wedding. In line with this argument, *dugun.com* brings the subject to the vendors with the questions it asks the brides in the real wedding stories articles. Along with the "What is your advice to soon-to-wed couples?" question, the whole article is a piece of advice for couples who are in the process of planning a marriage.

Married couples mention and recommend all the companies they work with in terms of satisfaction. For instance, a bride describes the firm she contracted for hair and makeup in the following words: "I trusted for my bridal hair and makeup the credible and expert Mali Kuaför in Yeşilköy. My hair was done by Mali Bey, and my make-up artist was Ebru Şahin, who fascinated me with her professionalism (Tunç, 2020b)." In addition, the right side of the article pages includes all wedding vendors that the married couple contacted and worked with through *dugun.com* with the title "Vendors in the article". Herewith, *dugun.com* increases the accessibility of brides to companies. Soon-to-wed couples can contact firms that married couples are satisfied with, get a price quote, and as a result, the transaction expected by firms occurs. In addition, brides praising the firms they have experienced brings out another level to the advertisement. The recommending of the firms not only by *dugun.com*, but also by satisfied people who have worked with these companies affects the sale numbers positively. This fact, which will be detailed in the next title,

²⁸ <https://dugun.com/dugun-firmalari>

indicates that *dugun.com* meets the expectations of both brides and firms at the same time.

2.1.4. Word of Mouth Effect Through Personal Stories

In addition to being unique for each individual, weddings also host many common ceremonies for people from similar cultures and geographies. Couples can learn from each other rituals, norms, and consumption activities in a suitable environment. According to *dugun.com*, weddings can be optimized by evaluating the experiences of married couples, which are stated as positive/negative or doable/avoidable. *dugun.com* uses the word of mouth effect by including real wedding stories.

True wedding stories can be regarded as the online community's word of mouth because they are direct phrases and advice of the brides or grooms (Thomas & Peters, 2011; 148). The word of mouth is a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market (Brown and friends, 2007; 3). According to various studies (Thomas& Peters, 2011; Brown, 2007; Jepsen, 2014) word of mouth communication is perceived as more reliable by consumers compared to communications initiated by companies. Anna Jepsen (2006; 248) states that there are three reasons why consumers seek advice from virtual communities. First of all, virtual communities can cover a wide geographic area, therefore the information repository is larger. Besides, they are trustworthy because they do not act in the interests of marketers. Finally, visiting virtual communities costs less than meeting face-to-face or visiting stores. Using these advantages by sharing real wedding stories is a good marketing strategy for *dugun.com*. Hence, not only the couples are assured, but also the trust in firms is increased. *dugun.com* encourages the firms in this regard with the following statement in the "About Us" section: "Be a part of *dugun.com* with your company to gain the trust of the couples"²⁹ With true wedding stories *dugun.com* fulfills its promise.

²⁹ <https://dugun.com/kurumsal/hakkimizda>

dugun.com prompts the married couples to commentate in a romantic manner the traditional ceremonies they had during the wedding process, other parties, and the vendors they worked with. In all true wedding stories, married couples are thrilled to talk about their henna nights, marriage proposal organizations, engagements, wedding days, and the vendors they worked with.

Using the influence of word of mouth, the advice provided by brides affects the decisions of couples on practicing ceremonies and consumption. For example, in the "They celebrated their 11th month with their wedding! (Tunç, 2020c)" article, a bride paints her true wedding story as romantic, entertaining and flawless. A comment below the post read: "The wedding dress is great! I'm getting married in August in Bursa. I hope everything goes well for me. I will pay attention to the suggestions, as the bride is very tasteful :) (Tunç, 2020c)" As can be understood with this statement, the recommendations included in the real wedding stories and the bride's consumptions in the wedding process may influence the consumption decisions of the couples.

2.1.5. Celebrities and Weddings

dugun.com repeatedly emphasizes that it is important to follow fashion during the wedding process and since fashion is a constantly changing phenomenon, it requires constant follow-up. It is a well-known fact of the consumer society that the fashion industry's emphasis on being unique and going beyond the ordinary in fact standardizes individuals (Carter & Duncan, 2016; 4). In addition, *dugun.com* claims that keeping up with fashion can be realised by imitating celebrity weddings as well, thus showing that the effort to be unique by following fashion can result in imitation.

In the Fashion and Trends title, *dugun.com* suggests that couples learn the trends and fashion in detail for their wedding, with articles such as "The veil trends of this year", "The most trendy wedding dances of 2014", "Three suggestions for trendoid brides".³⁰ The explanation is as follows "Wedding dresses, engagement suits, solitaire models, and much more... Follow the wedding trends and fashion

³⁰ <https://dugun.com/moda-ve-trendler?page=3>

with *dugun.com*, don't let your wedding fall behind the time!"³¹ It is observed that *dugun.com* includes news about celebrity marriages under this title. By providing information on different subjects such as the different wedding dresses the brides wear, the luxury places the weddings are held and the photographer and hairdresser, the readers are informed about the weddings of the wealthy people and thus the trends and the wedding fashion of the day.

George Simmel (1957) deals with fashion by associating it with class segregation and duality in human personality. According to him, fashion is primarily a form of imitation and therefore social synchronization. However, paradoxically, it separates one period from another and one social layer from another, as fashion is constantly changing. It unites social classes and functions to distinguish them from others.

Using the terms stealing, imitating, and getting inspired in articles such as "Get inspired by the Oscar award ceremony!", and "Steal your solitaire idea from Johnny Deep"³², *dugun.com* underlines that in order to keep up with fashion it is necessary to pattern the wedding of celebrities, supporting Simmel's claim. The following of the latest fashion in weddings, which are a good opportunity to show economic wealth and social class demonstrates that the claim that the couples can achieve the goals of having a "fashionable, perfect, dreamy, extraordinary and unforgettable wedding", which are frequently mentioned in the articles of *dugun.com*, is supported. Hence, soon-to-wed couples imitating celebrities and thus becoming fashionable differentiates these couples from others and places them in a higher social class. In this way, *dugun.com* also offers couples the opportunity to become pioneers who apply new rituals in their social circles.

dugun.com includes celebrity weddings in the real wedding stories category as well. It conveys to its readers the venues where the celebrities held their weddings (Doğan, 2021e), their bridal and groom dresses, interesting events that occurred in their weddings (Doğan, 2020c), and further details from the weddings. These articles contain the advertisements of the companies that *dugun.com* works with. According

³¹ Ibid.

³²Ibid

to Boden (2001), wedding media share celebrities' weddings as an example of successful weddings, and with these successful examples, the consumption culture of weddings develops. In accordance with Boden's argument, *dugun.com* advertises vendors to its readers and guides them to spend more on wedding consumption by presenting celebrity weddings, magnificent wedding gowns, expensive wedding venues, and the conspicuous consumption of celebrities during the wedding process such as abroad honeymoon holidays as examples.

2.1.6. The Presentation of the Bride and Groom's Body

dugun.com provides suggestions to the couples such as "crucial" tips to be followed, hiding the imperfections from the guests, and hints on having the best appearance for anything from the bridal flower to the groom's bow tie. It introduces the articles in this section with the following words: "All recommendations that will make your wedding extraordinary, flawless and unforgettable are on *dugun.com*! To avoid saying, 'Never would've thought that' be sure to read the advice that will inspire you and the tips that will save your life!"

With these expressions, *dugun.com* creates a profile of a couple who values the wedding, plans it in detail, and analyzes it deeply that wants to impress their invitees. In addition to this, *dugun.com* provides couples lots of advice to make them achieve the ideal body standards. According to *dugun.com*, brides should have a smooth face, should look well-groomed in general, and should have a slim and fit appearance by fasting before the wedding. "The ideal bride body" is built with statements such as "healthy nutrition, personal care tips, healthy brides, keep fit".³³

In the "Become beautiful before the wedding!" article, *dugun.com* claims that brides need to care for skin, hair, hands, and feet and remembers to include a link to contact with companies that provide skincare services. "Find out what you can do to freshen yourself up before your upcoming wedding day! So, with your flawless beauty, your guests will only talk about how smooth your skin is and

³³ <https://dugun.com/tavsiye-ve-ipucu-kosesi?page=2>

your hairstyle. (*dugun.com*, 2020d) ” With this sentence, *dugun.com* recommends that the bride should take care of the “body she will exhibit” on the wedding day and make her entire body beautiful. Thus, it is hoped that the guests will be impressed by the appearance of the bride.

According to various studies, the wedding sector focuses on the brides' body and brides look flawless, perfect, and extraordinary in the weddings as a result of the patriarchal system which is still alive today (Boden, 2001; Engstrom, 2008). However, contrary to this opinion, although mostly targeting brides, *dugun.com* gives advice to grooms to have a handsome, fit and cool appearance as well. For example, in the article "Suggestions for grooms who want to cover up their imperfections (Baykara, 2020)", it is stated that grooms can be a perfect groom despite their flaws:

"Nobody is perfect. Of course, you may also have problems such as short height, sparse hair, and weight. Believe me, this is extraordinarily normal. However, you can hide your flaws like this with little tricks. Now listen carefully to the suggestions I'm going to give you. Thanks to them, you will be the perfect groom at your wedding (Baykara, 2020).”

It is seen that being short, overweight, and having sparse hair is considered a flaw by *dugun.com* and deemed far from perfect. In the rest of the article, *dugun.com* gives a lot of advice and tips to create the perfect groom body. It is explained that grooms can cover up their imperfections with recommendations such as inner heels that are not visible from the outside to show the height, a groom belt to hide the belly, hair transplantation to avoid looking bald or near bald, laser epilation to get rid of excess hair, and a light make-up on the wedding day to hide pimples.

In order to ensure that the grooms follow these recommendations and to convince them, it is attempted to prove that celebrities also use these tricks to cover up their imperfections, and that the recommendations really work. For instance, in the paragraph where the grooms are recommended to wear make-up, the following statement is encountered:

“I can hear you say: "Make-up?" Yeah, make-up. Many famous men, from Hollywood stars to local artists, get make-up at special invitations and shoots. This is the secret of those flawless photographs. You can hide acne and skin blemishes at

your wedding by wearing make-up to cover up skin imperfections (Baykara, 2020)."

As it can be observed, besides the construction of the bride's body mentioned above, there is a standardized body form determined by *dugun.com* for grooms. Since it is not possible to examine hundreds of articles under the title of "Articles" within the scope of the master's thesis, this research is limited to the articles examined above. In the continuation of the research, the main title of "Tools", which prepares the couples for the wedding process day by day, presents the wedding preparations and ceremonies to the couples in an agenda and makes detailed budget calculations will be discussed.

3. DUGUN.COM'S PROFESSIONAL SERVICE: DAY-TO-DAY WEDDING PLANNING

Until this section, it was observed in the articles published by *dugun.com* on the importance of wedding planning and the suggestions to make the weddings perfect that *dugun.com* instills in the couples that weddings should be managed like a project. In this section, it is detected that *dugun.com* provides professional service by technically helping couples for wedding planning with the services of the Tools section. In addition, couples encounter a requirement list compiled by *dugun.com*.

There are five sections in the "Wedding Tools" category: my website, my planner, my budget, my seating plan, weather condition. Although the tools category is a free application, there is a membership requirement in order to use it. In order to examine *dugun.com's* professional wedding planning service, the five topics listed above will be briefly mentioned.

'My Planner' is presented as follows: 'What will you do till the wedding and in which order? Applying to the registry office for the wedding day, finding the wedding venue, and many more details... With *dugun.com's* "My Planner", each to-do from each month is under your eyes." With this application, the necessary steps that should be followed in the wedding preparation process till the wedding day are specified in detail month by month. Couples prepare for the wedding day by completing each step, like a white-collar worker preparing their

presentation for work. As mentioned above, in this section, *dugun.com*'s military precision towards wedding planning emerges again.

In “My Planner” tool, there is a schedule with different dates for the period until the wedding date like 10-12 months before the wedding and 1 week before the wedding etc. Every date has 23 categories: venue, wedding dress, organization, photo, invitation, henna/bachelorette, engagement dressy, wedding ring/jewelry, catering, florists, wedding suit, dance course, cake, bridal car, hair and makeup, honeymoon, music, bridal shoes, and accessories, beauty, "söz"³⁴ and engagement venue, wedding candy and gift, registry office and do not forget.

According to date, *dugun.com* adds subtitles called "Tasks" to these categories and gives specific directions to the bride and the groom. For example, 7-9 months before the wedding, *dugun.com* adds a task to the beauty category: “Start to keep fit”. One week before the wedding, another task shows up in the beauty category: “Get skincare.” *dugun.com* provides a professional schedule not only for holding ceremonies but also for brides to achieve the ideal body until the wedding day.

In “My Planner” tool, the verbs are conjugated in the second-person-singular, signifying that only one person is addressed with the duties such as "Confirm with companies again.", "Create seating plan." Therefore although it is not possible to determine clear data in this respect, it can be considered that *dugun.com* is devoted only to brides. In addition, there are thirty different tasks on the checklist that directly appeal to brides, while there is only one for grooms: “Do the bridegroom shopping”. On the list for brides, there are details regarding the need to buy bridal shoes and accessories 4-6 months in advance, while for grooms, it is recommended to shop for suits 2-3 months in advance, without providing any details related to the process. In this respect, it is evident that weddings are more structured around women and women undertake planning more.

³⁴ "Söz" is a special ceremony of Turkish people. In this ceremony, the groom's family asks the bride's family to give their blessing for the marriage of their son and the bride. If accepted, the couple betroths and wears a ring. This is not the engagement since it occurs before engagement.

Eventually, the tasks listed in the "My Planner" section are also the requirements determined by *dugun.com*. It conveys what is necessary for the wedding process to its couples in this way. Despite the fact that tasks like "Save the Date photoshoot" or "Find a course for the wedding dance" showing 2-3 months in advance and "Decide your bridesmaids" 4-6 months in advance are not common practices for Turkish weddings, *dugun.com* includes them to the planning tool with military precision as well. Thus, *dugun.com* categorizes these extra ceremonies as practices that make the weddings perfect and presents additional affairs as tasks accordingly.

The list in this section includes not only tasks for physical needs, but also tasks for psychological needs. *dugun.com* aims at relieving stress for the couple while wedding planning. It provides psychological support to increase the motivation of brides with tasks such as "Smile", "Start the day with breakfast", "Enjoy the wedding"³⁵ on the wedding day.

The second title of the Tools category, "My Budget" tool, is explained as follows: "Finding out what to purchase while getting married and setting a budget is one of the hardest parts of the job. My budget tool does these for you, making the planning process easier."³⁶ With this budget tool, couples can see their expenditure items while planning their wedding, create estimated budgets and find out if they overspent or not.

It can be argued that *dugun.com*'s budget calculation tool does not promote conspicuous consumption. Because Veblen's conspicuous consumption concept suggests that elites do not make manual labor and do not arrange finances when spending money (Veblen, 2015). In this case, it can be assessed that the budget calculation category of *dugun.com* appeals to middle or low-class couples. The only way to move the lower class to the upper class is to display the wedding in the most glamorous way, even with a "low budget". Therefore, in addition to the articles published in this regard, *dugun.com* wishes to prove to the couples that it

³⁵ <https://araclar.dugun.com/yapacaklarim>

³⁶ <https://araclar.dugun.com/butcem>

is possible to make the wedding look flawless with budget planning done with fine calculations.

4. OTHER VERSIONS OF *DUGUN.COM*

In addition to *dugun.com* Emek Kırbıyık founded international versions of *dugun.com* in different languages and countries he also founded a mother-baby platform in Turkey. Below is a brief analysis of the wedding planning websites according to the information given by Kırbıyık and a comparison of those with *dugun.com*. *anneysen.com* which is the social media site of Emek Kırbıyık that contains posts about mother-baby related topics.

4.1. International Versions of *dugun.com*

Following *dugun.com*'s huge success in Turkey, Emre Kırbıyık has launched another similar website in 2015 called *zafaf.net* in the Middle East and the North Africa (Kırbıyık, 2015). In the section called "About Us", they introduce themselves as "the Arabic version of the first Turkish site in the world of wedding planning Dügün.com. The first guide to wedding services in the Arab world and the only one that allows visitors to browse through the web and mobile as well."³⁷ In order to use this website based in the Middle East, you are supposed to choose one of the Middle Eastern countries from the list given on the homepage of the website. The website has three language options; Arabic for 10 Arab countries, English for seven Arab countries and French for two Arab countries (Tunisia and Morocco). Just as the system in *dugun.com*, couples can access traditional trends in addition to new trends and they are able to meet with the service providers.

According to Kırbıyık's statement, the most important success of *zafaf.net* was realized in Saudi Arabia. One third of weddings in Saudi Arabia are planned with *zafaf.net* and it is by far the market leader in that region (Kırbıyık, 2020a). Kırbıyık states that studies are carried out in every Arabic-speaking country, but Saudi Arabia is the country with the fastest reaction(Kırbıyık, 2020a). It can be

³⁷ <https://zafaf.net/about-us>

said that the *dugun.com* team provides more services to the countries where they are followed and demanded more. A short comparison of the *zafaf.net* sites will be included to show that the Saudi Arabia site and other Arab versions differ in terms of design and service.

The homepage design of other Arab countries except Saudi Arabia on *zafaf.net* is very similar to the old design of *dugun.com* and there is no free wedding assistant that helps to get offers from companies. Saudi Arabia's website design is similar to the current homepage of *dugun.com* and there is also a free wedding assistant service. Other than the Saudi Arabia site, *zafaf.net* sites focus on companies and their promotions, and articles that give advice or convey the latest fashion wedding ideas, such as *dugun.com*'s articles, are very limited. For example, while there are over a thousand articles on *dugun.com*, there are only eleven articles on *zafaf.net*'s active wedding planning site in the United Arab Emirates. In addition, the "Discover" section, which is the main heading of the articles on *dugun.com*, is not available on other sites except Saudi Arabia. Since the language of the Saudi Arabian site is entirely Arabic, a comprehensive review is not entirely possible, but as far as possible, some of the main features are discussed.

zafaf.net, which is an active marriage planning site in Arab countries, has some similar features with *dugun.com*. For example, the above-mentioned idea of *dugun.com* "determining the needs of couples to marry and creating a wedding company list accordingly" has also been implemented in *zafaf.net*. Website design is done according to the language spoken in these countries, the commonly practiced religion and to the culture. Website content of Saudi Arabia where sharia laws are implemented is chosen according to the country's religious values.

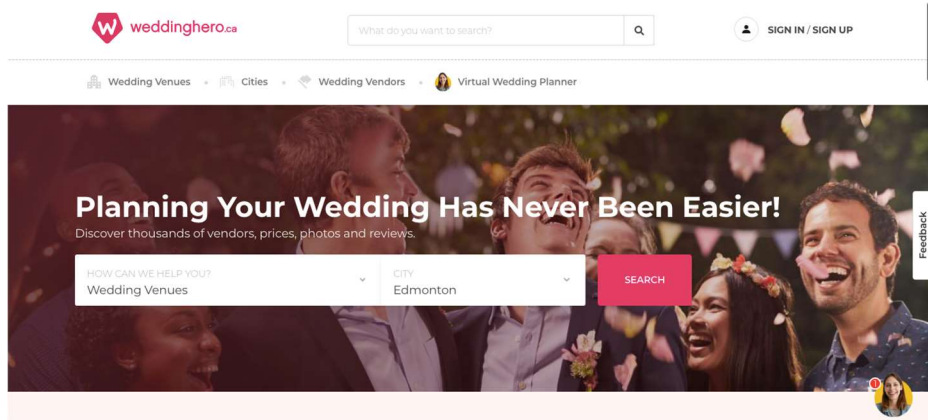
Although the homepage design and operation are similar to *dugun.com*, there are no couple or bride photos used on the company introduction sections on the homepage. For example, on the home page cover photo, only the bride and groom's hands appear to meet. Unlike the Turkish site, neither the details of the wedding dress nor the faces of the couple are visible. The perfect and complete image of the couple, who are looking at each other with love in a chic or historical

place given by *dugun.com*'s cover photo, and dressed in stylish and expensive clothes, is not included in the Saudi Arabian homepage. Because, in the background image, the whole of the wedding dress and groom suit and the look or stance of the couple, symbolizing that they are in love, are not shown (see Figure 2.4.).

It can also be understood with this example that *dugun.com* gives importance to religious and cultural values of the countries they serve in and design their websites accordingly: while there is a young woman named Selin in the photo representing the free wedding assistant on *dugun.com*, who is dressed casually and has brown hair; in the Saudi Arabia website of *zafaf.net*, there is a woman named Sarah wearing a black headscarf and smiling. With this comparison, it can be said that wedding sites make use of symbols suitable for the general consumer audience in particular for the society they serve.

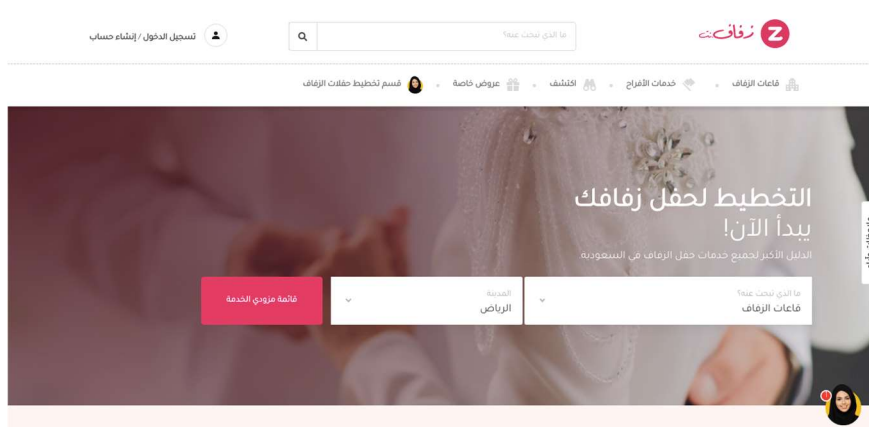
In 2021, *dugun.com* continues to expand by launching the Australian, Canadian and German versions of the online wedding planning site under the name *weddinghero.com* using a similar interface. *dugun.com* has placed the links of Australia, Canada, Germany and KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) sites in the lower left corner of its home page. It can be said that the visuals used in *weddinghero.com*, which is still under development, are different from *dugun.com* Turkey and *zafaf.net* Saudi Arabia sites. While white heterosexual couples are featured in the homepage backgrounds of Australia and Canada sites, similar to *dugun.com*, photographs of black, Asian and homosexual couples are also used, unlike *dugun.com*.

Figure 2.3 : weddinghero.ca Website- Cover Page



It can be argued that the *dugun.com* team takes into consideration the demographic, religious and cultural structures of the region they operate in and make their website designs accordingly. The most visible difference between the homepage designs of Saudi Arabian wedding site *zafaf.net* and Canadian and Australian wedding site *weddinghero.com* is the female figure of the couples and the sexual orientation of the couples. In the Saudia Arabian site, *zafaf.net* which uses only the hands of the couple on their homepage the wedding gowns are always long sleeved and although not visible it can be understood that the bride wears a headscarf and a heterosexual couple is seen in each photo. On the other hand in Canadian and Australian website the bride does not wear a headscarfs and in some photos homosexual couples are seen.

Figure 2.4 : zafaf.net Website- Cover Page



4.2.Mother-Baby Portal, *anneysen.com*

Kırbyık has another platform that is successful and has a high number of clicks just as *dugun.com*, that is *anneysen.com*. *anneysen.com* claims that one out of every two pregnant women benefits from *anneysen.com* and that they are Turkey's largest mother-baby portal with an average monthly traffic of five million.³⁸ Several services are provided on the website. The former, in the Q&A section, users get answers from experts and other mothers by asking questions about their children.

The latter one publishes articles on products related to children's need ages 0-6 and on many other topics related to children's development and many other things that a mother needs to know. Here, while determining the needs of children and offering many advice articles, articles have been written on questions such as how parents should treat their children, how they can regulate the relationship between husband and wife in this process and what kind of parents they will be. For example, *anneysen.com*, which includes articles such as "Books that modern mothers should read" and "New generation modern fathers", tries to build the "modern profile" of parent identities. In the article "How can we prevent family elders from interfering with the life of the mother and baby after birth? (Varol Şen, 2019)", it is recommended that old methods may also be useful, but in the new generation method, everything related to the child should be applied in consultation with doctors.

As seen on here the suggestion to throw family elders' recommendations to the back plan is also seen on *dugun.com*. It interprets the desire of families to apply their own tastes to the couple's wedding as "selfish" in the marriage planning process and recommends that couples should put limits on their families (Özkök, 2021c). By this statement *dugun.com* and its team emphasize that just as in the marriage process while taking care of a baby, couples should not prefer traditional methods of family elders and should apply to modern methods. They

³⁸ <https://www.anneysen.com/hakkimizda>

guide the “modern bride and groom” on their journey towards being “modern parents”.

Finally, *anneysen.com* brings parents together with companies that sell products for children, toddlers and babies aged 0-6. In this respect, *anneysen.com* works very similar to *dugun.com*'s services. While couples and wedding companies meet only on *dugun.com*, parents and companies meet on *anneysen.com*. Similar to *dugun.com*, *anneysen.com* determines the needs and enables parents to get information and prices from companies online. It contains many companies that serve for various parties held during pregnancy, at the time of birth and after the baby is born. For example, under the title of “0-1 Age Needs”, seven needs are listed as follows: Newborn and baby photographer, one-year-old birthday boutique cake, babysitter service, tooth wheat and one-year-old birthday venue, nutritionist / dietician during breastfeeding, one year old birthday organization and decorations, gym”.³⁹ *anneysen.com* offers lists for parents so that they can receive offers from dozens of companies that can meet these needs. So it is possible to say t *anneysen.com* has an aspect that facilitates the consumption of parents and in addition, it has an aspect that increases consumption as a result of presenting traditional or newly implemented parties as needed.

In 2018, it has been found out that *anneysen.com* offers a new service: *Anneysen Pazar*. It is an online shopping website designed for the purchase and selling of second-hand mother-baby products. *anneysen.com* that introduces themselves with the statement “Sell the products you do not use, buy the new ones easily. From mother to mother, no commissions, budget shopping!”⁴⁰ points to “budget shop” here. *dugun.com* team recommends companies that sell first-hand products for parties that are not included under the basic needs at *anneysen.com*, and supports second-hand shopping, which supports reuse in the *Pazar* application and leads to less consumption. *Anneysen Pazar* tries to appeal to different socio-economic classes by offering second-hand alternatives to those who cannot consume because of their limited budget.

³⁹ <https://www.anneysen.com/carsi>

⁴⁰ <https://pazar.anneysen.com/message/help?details=anneysen-pazar-hakk-nda>

CONCLUSION

In this section I conclude present study in three sections: first, I try to answer my research question; second, I reflect on my findings, and last but not least, I make recommendations for future research.

In this thesis, I first examined cult works about marriage, and secondly, investigated how marriage practices change in time using TUIK data. According to my findings, traditional marriages were usually arranged for economic and political reasons in the pre-urbanization period, whereas today's marriages are mostly romantic based. Even though, "arranged marriages" still exist in Turkey because of social norms, education level and income inequality, the general trend is love marriage.

Finding indicate that traditional wedding ceremonies continue to exist and turn into objects of consumption. Analysis of new style Turkish wedding shows that new traditions have risen that never existed before in order to follow global trends of consumption. Neoliberal forces of the new world order in recent times have affected society in many ways and spread western values throughout the world. They have changed the purpose of weddings from family unions with political and economic agendas, to a ceremony to celebrate with individual preferences such as romantic love.

"How does *dugun.com*, an important pillar of the wedding media, dominate the transformation of the wedding process, and how does it affect the expense items of weddings?"

Few studies available on wedding media research provide answers to this question, however, these answers prove to be insufficient because they study passive (not-interactive) wedding websites or analyze wedding magazines. It is possible to say that the present literature in Turkey had ignored (or neglected) the current position, actions and interactions of the wedding sector. In order to explore this research gap, I have examined *dugun.com* wedding planning website, within theoretical framework of the concept of "conspicuous consumption".

Using virtual ethnography methodology, *dugun.com*'s design, photos, slogans, articles for the soon-to-wed couples, interviews of the website's founder Emek Kırbyık and other forms of data available, were gathered and analyzed through participant observation, text sampling and thematic analysis technique.

According to the assumption of the study, a new wedding process emerges in Turkey by neoliberal forces as a result of globalization and cultural industrialization. Weddings have changed in the last ten years in Turkey and the couples follow the trend by changing the form of the wedding, follow popular fashion instead of taking advice from elders and, practice the ceremonies based on global trends.

This thesis claims that wedding media is a factor in this change. I discuss this through the statements of *dugun.com*, which is the most important pillar of wedding media in Turkey today. This study found four general answers to the question of how *dugun.com* manages the wedding process and directs the couples to conspicuous consumption:

1. **Planning:** *dugun.com* assumes the role of a consultant – that is how it defines itself- during the wedding process. Due to this role, it reminds the couples of the time left to the wedding day and the dozens of things they need to do, through e-mails, phone calls, and notifications via its application. These data were obtained as a result of the researcher becoming a member of *dugun.com* and observing the actions of *dugun.com* during this experience. It also says, "Start planning your wedding now!" in many parts of the website. With this motto, it manages wedding planning with military precision (Currie, 1993). In addition, it categorizes wedding planning as an agenda under the title of "Planning Tools" and presents wedding planning to couples in a professional way. As a result, the first finding is that *dugun.com* recommends that soon-to-wed couple should plan their wedding acutely.

2. **Professionalism:** It is useful to emphasize here that there have been changes in the way of planning the wedding. Before the emergence of the wedding media, it was possible to learn the "propriety and traditions" of weddings from family elders. However, individuals can learn almost everything from wedding websites today. And wedding planning is mostly done with the professional help of *dugun.com*, not with family members. So much so that this guide enables couples to learn even some information that cannot be learned in traditional families. For example, *dugun.com* reshapes traditions like this article "What is a gift to the bride in the engagement?"; provides psychological support on relationships between couples with articles such as "How to Cook a Husband?"; gives information about choosing the wedding dress according to "conservatism" rate of families, in the articles such as "How sexy should your wedding dress be?" and giving tips to show the economic status of the couples in the articles such as "Five ways to show your wedding is expensive".
3. **Perfection:** *dugun.com* teaches couples the traditions of the wedding process and global trends to make weddings "unique" and "perfect" under its consultancy role. *dugun.com* sets a goal for couples to marry with the discourse of "Perfect wedding" and gives some advice in line with this goal. As a result of the research, it gives recommendations that change weddings structurally, such as "compromising tradition" and "applying global trends", so that weddings can be flawless and look glamorous. Thus, with the concessions made from traditions, the number of guests was reduced, the participation of children was banned, cocktails were served instead of wedding dinner, and as a result, much more conspicuous weddings emerged.
4. **Strategizing new ways to draw consumers:** *dugun.com* assumes the task of conveying the advice of the married couples to soon-to-wed couple, by publishing "real wedding stories". Consumption practices recommended by married couples are cited as examples for soon-to-

wed-couples. "True wedding stories" can have a "word of mouth" effect and can influence purchasing decisions. In addition, while it describes the togetherness of two people with adjectives such as "love-filled, harmonious, romantic" in these articles, it identifies the weddings of these couples with the adjectives "festival-like, fairy tale and dreamlike". It has been observed that an important message was given under these sentences. It constructs a link between the couple's love and the perfect wedding. In order for the couple to prove that they are in love, their wedding must be perfect. According to the statements on the website, a rational planning is required to make the wedding perfect. As a result, it constructed of marriage through the dichotomy of rationality and sensuality.

In addition, this section includes the wedding of celebrities in "The real wedding story" category. *dugun.com* repeatedly recommends imitating celebrities. Analysis with the contributions of Boden (2001) shows that the wedding media presents celebrities' weddings as "successful weddings" and thus, it develops consumption culture of weddings. While *dugun.com* recommends imitating celebrities, it does not only direct couples to follow "fashion", as Boden states, it also shows that it is a good opportunity to climb the social ladder.

5. **Body Image:** *dugun.com* constructed the ideal body profile of the bride and groom. In an article, it uses the adjectives "tall, flat belled, thick-haired" for grooms and "well-groomed, beautiful, smooth skin, glowing bride" for brides. In order to impress the guests at the wedding and have the perfect wedding, it is explained in the articles that make-up and hair should be attentive, the clothes should be elegant, the bride should be stress-free and put on a "smile" no matter what.

It is important to mention that present study has also reached other forms of data to enrich and deepen the analysis. I analyzed the day-to-day growth of wedding planning industry by examining the interviews of the founder of

dugun.com. In addition, this information has been confirmed by the recent launch of new wedding planning websites in the Middle East, America and Australia by *dugun.com*. Analysis of photographs and texts indicate that the website contents are shaped according to the populations' structure, cultural and religious values of the countries. This finding is important because while *dugun.com* recommends variation in weddings, it doesn't ignore varied societies' cultural and religious roots. But it also leads to a reconstruction of cultural and traditional practices.

Discussion with Theory and Literature

Nowadays, couples prefer free and easily accessible online wedding planning platforms more than paid wedding planning tools such as hiring a wedding planner or buying a bridal magazine. It has been determined that the new production and consumption forms after the 19th century have shaped the entertainment industry, and accordingly, weddings have changed and gave room for new mean of consumption. This study demonstrates that digital media tools are very effective in spreading expenditures throughout the society. Although the context has changed in relation to new media, but theoretical roots of the concept of conspicuous consumption are still valid and can be applied to My data.

As discussed in the literature review, “conspicuous consumption” is the consumption of unnecessary products by individuals to prove their wealth and status. According to Veblen, for individuals to prove their economic status they have to move towards consumption habits in foods, clothing, residence and furniture that are more than necessary. I can explain my data using Veblen's concept in the sense that *dugun.com* is exactly promoting the kind of consumption that is absolutely not necessary and exhibits wealth and individuality. Similar to what Veblen says, weddings have become a platform to display and reconstruct class and social and economic status.

Findings of present research are validated by other works of literature as well. As Otnes and Pleck (2003) put it, weddings are ceremonies that separate the

wealthy from the rest, they are one of the important tools with which individuals can show their social connections and can improve their environments (Otnes and Pleck, 2003; 5). They state, and my research confirms, that lavish weddings are a good way to make social prestige visible and more people are able to use weddings for show off as it is more accessible through new media.

Both my study and Ceyda Durutürk (2007) explore wedding ceremonies and their progression from tradition. While Durutürk focuses on reconstruction of patriarchal structure through new wedding ceremonies, I focus on the ways in which digital media transforms tradition and increases consumption. My findings are also confirmed by Özkan (2016) who states that wedding produce new consumption fields.

For Future Researches

When I started this study, I thought that Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption would be sufficient to examine the wedding planning website *dugun.com*. However, during the study, I realized that a concept belonging to the 19th century is lacking to analyze today's "virtual world". As I have emphasized in some of my analyses, I needed a few more concepts. For this reason, I think that studying this subject with other concepts will be needed in future researches.

While conducting the research, after COVID-19 pandemic break out in 2020, the wedding sector was negatively affected because weddings are collective events. Many couples had to postpone their wedding because it was not allowed to invite many guests and to serve wedding dinner. In other words, the couples cannot have their dream wedding.

dugun.com was also negatively affected by pandemic and therefore started a small-scale protest with the hashtag "Let weddings begin now" in response to limitations. Due to limitation in time and resources, recent events have not been included in the scope of the study. But it is recommended that the impact of the Covid-19 process on weddings should be studied in detail in future research.

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