



**FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEMAND
FOR THEMED WEDDING PACKAGES**

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Declaration

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master in Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

This dissertation represents my own work;

The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.

Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

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Abstract

This research study explores the factors that are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages. The research focuses on the Auckland market, specifically on the factors affecting the buying motivation of New Zealanders for themed weddings.

Globalisation today has brought about the extension of trends in most developed countries: one of these is the themed wedding. Trends in themed weddings are being exported globally. There is an endless market opportunity for themed weddings in New Zealand just as there is in other developed countries like the U.S. and the U.K. The New Zealand market is making use of ideas for wedding themes from overseas markets. There is a need to keep abreast of the trends for themed packages and related services in order to be successful in New Zealand wedding market.

Qualitative methodology has been used as the primary data collection. Thirteen semi-structured interviews with wedding planners were tape-recorded and transcribed, and analysed by thematic content analysis.

This research found that, based on the statements made by the interviewees during the interview, themed weddings are not currently in -demand: most couples still adhere to a 'traditional' setting. However, this does not necessarily mean that themed weddings will not be well-liked in the market, as there are already some wedding planners who are marketing themed weddings through their websites.

This study also found that popularisation seems far from happening because most wedding planners are not focusing on themed weddings but on their primary service - the standard wedding event. During the interview process most of the wedding planners thought that this concept of themed weddings would be a useful tool to develop their existing business. This research concludes that the wedding planners are gifted to create a market in Auckland or perhaps nationwide for themed wedding packages.

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CHAPTER 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Chapter outline

This research explores the factor that influences the demand for themed wedding packages. This chapter introduces the background to the study, the aims and objectives of this research and then describes the market for themed weddings. Further, it continues to give importance for this research on theme wedding and concludes by describing the possible impacts of themed weddings in New Zealand. Given the nature of this research, there are some articles taken from various websites which are not dated, however, very valuable for this research. The researcher has used those articles in several sections throughout this research to support and substantiate any arguments.

1.2 Introduction

A wedding is one of the most important event in a couple's life. It is not only for people who want to share their lives together for the first time but also it can be a celebration of the renewal of vows and anniversaries. In addition, this is one way of expressing one's passion and values. The purpose of weddings varies, it is essential for the couple to have a pleasant, enduring, memory of that occasion. In view of this, themes of the celebration must be customary in accordance to the preference of the couples as customised wedding themes can ensure a more affluent experience not only for the couple but for the wedding guests as well.

Further, the rationale for the themes is that many couples know what they want in terms of a particular kind of wedding, but do not know where to start, or how to incorporate those ideas into their wedding. Therefore the presence of a themed wedding requires lots of planning. As Markby (2006) pointed out, themed weddings require a wedding planner, be it a paid planner, a knowledgeable relative or a friend who will work things out.,



starting from the time of distributing the invitations, arranging the style of cake, ceremony, table setting, and settings for banquet, with respect on how the couple want it to be. All of that is linked into the theme that the couple has chosen” (Markby, 2006). In other words, a theme provides the structure of the ceremony, and is the basis of every activity.

The presence of a themed wedding means a new share in the wedding market, Therefore this research project intends to explore the factors that influence the demand for themed wedding packages in New Zealand. It is also essential to identify the most popular wedding theme preferences in a given market in order to determine ahead of time the requirements of these themes before these packages are introduced.

1.2.1 Market for Themed Wedding

Themed weddings have been considered as one of the hottest trends in the wedding industry (McNeil, 2004). According to The Bride’s Magazine, weddings with themes cost an average of \$22,360, a usually consists of around 168 guests (McNeil, 2004). However, in response for couples and families demanding economic themed weddings, Toh (2007), mentioned that budgeted weddings are already available.

Some wedding providers are developing “within-reach” themed wedding packages because they believe that there are some couples who wish for a fancy wedding but cannot afford a ‘once-in-a-lifetime investment’, (Toh 2007). To be more specific, one of the features of the marketability of wedding themes is that wedding setups can be customised by the clients, and this could be done by wide-ranging theme choices that can suit various needs and interests of the clients. Furthermore, themed weddings are whispered to be contributing quite a big share in the wedding market because, aside from being quite expensive, the number of couples preferring a themed wedding continues to increase, which is said to be one of the causes of financial problems among couples (Burgoyne, 2007).



Substantial changes had been evident in the wedding industry, due to the emergence of modern weddings' primary role of exhibiting and stabilising the social identity of both the couple and their respective families (Eric, 2006). Accordingly, themed weddings have emerged because of society's visual competency, urban experience, and economic capital (Eric 2006) and they want to be reflected in the ceremony. With reference to Porter (2007), wealth and prestige can be reflected in extraordinary settings like:

- i) expensive jewels in wedding bouquets that can catch attention
- ii) Friday night weddings, which require higher expenses as it is most likely a weekend event and
- iii) 'Donations to charity' themes, which may require the guests to donate money in lieu of gifts to the couple.

Not all themed weddings are designed for wealthy couples. Porter (2007) revealed that latest trends in the wedding industry are also consumable by "ordinary couples" as well. For instance, themes which include a style like cupcake trees or Eiffel towers are said to be a more affordable alternative. Consequently, there is some extend proof that themes, as a new trend in the wedding industry, can no longer be viewed as disadvantageous, or more expensive, and can only be afforded by wealthy couples. It can now be within reach for all couples regardless of their societal status. In other words, couples with a limited budget can now enjoy a themed wedding, and have a "once-in-a-lifetime" experience.

Similarly, an article published by Ezilon (2007) indicated that there are several ways in order to save couples money without sacrificing the quality of the themed wedding. Specifically, the reception is one particular aspect of the wedding that may suffer if a couple have a tight budget. As a result, guests may not enjoy the event or the food but keep this to themselves in order to respect and spare embarrassment to the couple who invited them. In response to this, wedding planners have offered up with better procedures in order to ensure that the couple would be able to save money without sacrificing the quality of the wedding reception. These procedures include:



- i) Scheduling the wedding ceremony to an off-season time like a weekday or during the middle of winter rather than spring, because these are not peak seasons;
- ii) keeping the wedding celebration personal by inviting only intimate friends and family;
- iii) planning to hold the reception at home or outside in a park;
- iv) have a morning wedding with a breakfast reception instead of an afternoon wedding followed by an elaborate dinner reception; and
- v) Create personalised wedding invitations. This will save money and could also be a certified souvenir for the guests and families, as the hands that made them belong to the couples-to-be (Ezilon, 2007).

A wedding business can be very lucrative because it is all-encompassing. The wedding planner can profit from arranging the venue, props and food. The researcher has decided to select only wedding planners to be interviewed, because they have the most experience of the tastes of New Zealand couples in terms of weddings. Moreover, they have first-hand experience in organising weddings and are also knowledgeable about the market for themed weddings. Similarly, wedding businesses are also a lucrative market for hotel industries because their involvement is always highly considered, especially when most of the hotels offer an all-inclusive facility for the ceremony, reception and rooms for out-of-town family and friends. According to Adler & Chien (n.d.), hotels hold more wedding events per year. Consequently, their profitability is improving, due to the popularity of being a wedding venue.

1.2.2 Themed Wedding Preferences

According to Chadiha, Leber, & Veroff (1998), the concept of “themes” has already adopted by many anthropologists in identifying recurring ideas, beliefs, and values that forms a meaning in each cultural groups. Applying this to an important event like weddings, things might be more exciting and memorable for the couple, the family, and the guests. In addition, having a theme can also be a way of honouring one’s roots, which in turn adds immense emotional weight to the ceremony.



According to Otnes & Pleck (2003), a wedding ceremony ought to contain each of the following elements: romance, magic, memorability, and perfection. These elements are what couples would want to emphasise on the occasion, which is why some would rather try themed weddings instead of traditional style. The concept of making a wedding theme evidently comes from unique preferences of couples. As stated earlier, a wedding is probably the most important conjoint life-event for two strongly committed individuals. It is imperative to plan ahead and decide how the wedding would be executed.

In order to make the wedding as perfect as possible, wedding planners just give a twist on these preferences to couples with an assurance that their wedding will be one of their best moments together. According to Dee (2006), wedding couples are not in fact after a theme and whatever themes the planner designs for them are acceptable: the only thing that they want is to ensure is that the wedding will reflect the personalities of both bride and groom. Due to the obvious growth in popularity of themed weddings in other countries, wedding planners started to acquire an important role, focusing primarily on planning wedding ceremonies and achieving the perfect wedding. To substantiate this, a survey conducted in the United Kingdom indicated that there were approximately a quarter of weddings which had been set up by wedding planners (Levy, 2006) to ensure a memorable and perfect wedding day. In addition, the services of wedding planners had also been in demand because they may save couples a huge amount of time, money, and effort (Otnes et. al, 2003).

As the wedding industry becomes more modernised, wedding couples are getting even more imaginative. Consequently, wedding planners are very eager to be more creative in order to satisfy the demands of their customers and stand out against rival wedding planners. For instance, some wedding planners are developing a wider understanding on drama metaphor and how it can be integrated in to romance that can eventually led to a theme development that is consumable for a wedding experience (Pearson & Syson, 2006).



Cross-cultural ambivalence was said to be one of the most influential factors among brides-to-be, especially when planning a cross-cultural wedding. Because of associated difficulties brought by this factor, brides-to-be usually end up consulting wedding planners. By this time, they are using a ‘virtual community¹’ for their planning in order to bridge the gap caused by cross-cultural ambivalence, reconciling two or more sets of traditions and norms (Nelson & Otnes 2005).

Due to the rapid evolution of society brought about by modernity, a wedding is no longer viewed just as a ceremony for a couple who want to share their lives together lawfully. Weddings are now also used as an indicator for wealth and prestige of bride, groom, and their respective families or, at least, either one of their families (Adrian 2003, p.51). Such changes in marriage and family dynamics had been condemned by the sociologist of the family (Currie, 1993) since a sacramental ceremony should be the priority in planning the

¹ Virtual community’ is the gathering of people, in an online “space” where they come, communicate and have a topical conversation for information and discussion (Boetcher, Duggan & White, 2002)



wedding and not displays of wealth and prestige. But, since modern settings have already taken place, a wedding, most of the time, appears to be a tool for competitive consumption in which preferences for the wedding arrangements are driven by the desire to display the high social status of the families of the couples. This may range from the decoration of the wedding banquet entrances, to wedding photography, bridal salons, fashion designs, and several others, as described by Adrian (2003).

Themed weddings may appear to be optional and just an additional expense, but according to Chadiha, Leber, & Veroff (1998), a wedding is a ceremony surrounded by beliefs and ideas. Therefore, considering these in planning the wedding ceremony or celebration will surely bring more memories that can be cherished not only by the couple, but by everyone who witnessed the moment of their oneness.

1.3 Aims and objectives

This research is to understand if there is a demand for themed wedding packages in New Zealand. As stated in chapter two of the literature review, according to Sheryl Mungall, a well-known celebrant of wedding ceremonies in New Zealand, there is a thirst for more depth and culture in the way ceremonies are conducted in New Zealand, especially weddings. Mungall also added that Kiwi couples are more engaged today in planning their wedding than in any other time in history. This conclusively demonstrates the economic opportunity of the market trends pertaining to wedding themes in New Zealand. A set of wedding theme choices could be developed to match the various needs and interests of potential couples. It is essential to identify the most popular wedding theme preferences in New Zealand (NZ) in order to realise the marketability of themes for couples before these themed packages are introduced. Therefore, the aim and objective of this research is to explore the following questions in order to answer the main research question:



i) The interest for New Zealanders in themed wedding.

- What are the opinions of the wedding planners about New Zealanders' interest in themed wedding?
- Is there a demand for themed wedding for New Zealand market?

ii) Buying motivation; and

- What are the major motivations for couples to choose themed weddings?

iii) Factors influencing choice of themed weddings.

A themed wedding usually refers to a concept that guides the overall ceremony.

- What factors influence couple to choose themed wedding?
- What are the common types of theme packages preferred by the couples? (i.e. Medieval, Victorian, etc.)
- How does the cost of themed weddings, compare to non-themed weddings?
- Do themed wedding present a big challenge for wedding planners?



1.4 Summary

Evidently, research continues to emerge in response to the growing innovation in the field of fashion and lifestyles. However, only few of these have managed to totally focus on the presence of themed wedding. Therefore, this study touches the nature of themed weddings, especially factors that are influencing couples admiring the concept.

Investigating the presence of themed weddings can be somewhat difficult because only a few researchers have a direct interest in wedding planning. However, this does not necessarily mean that this study will not be able to gather necessary information to perform its objectives. This study can ensure quality information that anyone can use as a reference for similar research.

Overall, this study possesses information that can expose the readers to the nature and possible impacts of themed weddings in the New Zealand. Finally, this study also aims to explore the research question:

What factors are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages in Auckland?



CHAPTER 2

2 Literature Review

2.1 Chapter outline

This chapter focuses on the studies by various scholars in the area of wedding ceremony, themed weddings, consumer behaviour and the challenge of theme for wedding planners. This chapter then reveals the reason for having a themed wedding followed by benefits for having them.

2.2 The wedding ceremony

Wedding usually symbolises the outcome of romantic love, and are a display of a serious lifetime commitment and devotion. Additionally, weddings mark the beginning of marriage (Leeds, 2002). Therefore, weddings represent a rite of passage for two individuals who want to make their relationship legally established in the eyes of the law and of everyone around them (Appadurai, 1997). Leeds (2002) summarised the underlying elements of a wedding to be; a tightly-bound, naturally-occurring, publicly celebrated and widely-documented event.

On a deeper delineation, a wedding is the manifestation of a couple's emotions, and therefore a type of consumer behaviour and the inner process of emotion about the product (Johnson & Mullen, 1990). The emotions of the couple lead them to plan a wedding and then make the wedding memorable. The socio-cultural context also influences the couple to have a wedding (Baron & Byrne, 1987). Therefore, in my opinion, both the influence of emotions and of the social context may lead consumers towards themed wedding packages.

However, as the wedding industry continues to evolve, gigantic differences are starting to be seen in most wedding ceremonies conducted. Basically, weddings have already been



considered as one class of ritual that symbolises the transition of a couple from one social status to another, and with reference to Edwards (1987), this class of rite has different features that can be seen through typical ideal images of social status:

- i) explicit verbalisations such as wedding vows and speeches; and
- ii) Symbolic acts which can be found in ritual proceedings.

Due to a substantial focus provided on the social details of the wedding, it is conclusive that most weddings are now becoming more commercialised. The reason there are “commercialised wedding” is that they have changed from being simple, yet event-changing actions like focusing more on the details of the reception rather than the purpose of the wedding (“Cultural Wedding Custom and Traditions”, n.d.). The commercialisation or simplification of weddings depends on the couple planning for the wedding event, because they are the ones who know what they would like their marriage to represent: a celebration of love unity or social status unity.

According to World Wedding Traditions (n.d.) one of the most respected wedding traditions is holding the event in a church where the bride is required to wear a white gown for symbolic purposes, and to be attended with bridesmaids. As for the groom, it is required by tradition that he wears a gray or a black suit with shirt and tie, and to be accompanied by a best man and groomsmen. It is imperative that the emergence of themed weddings today should not eliminate important customs enclosed in the event, such as not letting the groom see his bride before the wedding, as this is seen as bad luck. Therefore, for the sake of the sacredness and fortune of the couple’s lifetime commitment, wedding styles wherein the bride and groom arrive together at the venue should be refused.

New Zealand has its own tradition when it comes to weddings. With reference to the information provided in the Formal Bride (2002) website, New Zealand weddings can be heavily influenced by their traditional culture. In Maori custom; this involves a ceremonial welcome for the bride and groom followed by a traditional warrior challenge.



The Maori wedding ceremony is conducted by the tribal elder who stands as the tribe leader, who will in turn bless the couple speaking the native Maori tongue (Formal Bride, 2002). From this, it is evident that the New Zealand Maori wedding is the traditional wedding style or theme. However, due to social shifts, the emergence of a simple, yet elegant wedding is fast becoming the preferred genre for kiwi weddings.

Weddings are just one of the few events surrounded by different traditions and beliefs. Therefore, elements such as the cake, the throwing of the bouquet, the freeing of doves or butterflies, and the positioning of the bride to the groom's left, have their role in securing the wellness of the couple's life together. To elaborate further in the tradition which pertains to the positioning of the bride, Sadaraka (n.d.) stated that it was made that way as it is believed that after the groom has captured his bride, he will keep her to his left to protect her by using his right hand which would be holding a sword.

Generally, the average wedding for New Zealanders costs \$30,000 (New Zealand Wedding, n.d.). Needless to say that New Zealanders are limiting the quality of their wedding for the sake of their budget, as most still aspire to have the perfect wedding. Therefore, money is a key factor in the New Zealand. Having a budget sets a standard for the wedding planner and the couple, allowing them to afford the prospect of their ideal wedding.

2.3 Themed weddings

Ever since the idea of the themed wedding was popularised in other countries, different meanings emerge in order to delineate the term and differentiate it with the setting of the traditional wedding. Practically, 'themed weddings' refers to the application of a certain pattern or concept that guides the overall ceremony. Moreover, what makes the theme a theme is the arrangement of certain colours, historical symbols, and whatever else the couple wants to be a part of the ceremony, be it additional objects, a much-loved pet, music or even activities that are acceptable for a sacramental ceremony. For example, a medieval theme may involve couples wearing medieval clothing while the venue for the



ceremony has been designed in the style of the period, complete with medieval entertainment and a medieval banquet. In order to add more glow to the chosen theme, all other objects or props, as they are termed, will be based on a medieval pattern. This would include the wedding invitations, wedding cake, wedding souvenirs, and so on.

It is imperative to remember that themed weddings do not have to evolve as a costume party because, no matter what happens, the centre of the ceremony is sacramental and is filled with cultural beliefs and values. Therefore, it is not necessary of the guests to match the medieval theme but only for those who will be the part of the entourage. Thus, guests are free to wear any style even it does not correspond to a medieval design. After all, themed weddings are conceptualised and utilised not to make limitations on the event but rather to add more life and memories to be cherished by the couple and their guests.

Themed weddings are becoming increasingly popular today, especially among couples who can afford to have an outlandish themed wedding. According to Currie (1993), themes in weddings can serve as the core of the wedding ceremony or a trunk from which all of the ceremony's branches or activities grow. Because of this one-of-a-kind feature, themed wedding are granted a crucial role, starting from wedding preparations, to the actual wedding celebration. In addition (Pollit, 2001), wedding themes keep the wedding celebration from looking disjointed or as if it has been planned arbitrarily. In other words, wedding themes can already be considered as an essential ingredient in creating a perfect and memorable wedding event.

In addition, themed weddings do not have to create conflict with the traditional wedding because they are just a mere enhancement for the mood of the event. It has no hidden intention to replace the cultural or religious context of the wedding. According to Myerhooff (1992, cited in Leeds, 2002), a wedding is an event where different types of signs or symbols are usually present, since for most, a wedding is a kind of ritual that will bless the lifetime commitment of couples. Following this tradition, the conceptualisation and utilisation of themed weddings aims to improve the presentation or recognition of these symbols in the overall celebration, for example, by allowing the couple to



customise their wedding in which they would be able to completely emphasise their cultural beliefs through the use of a colour motif.

With reference to the elaboration of Leeds (2002, p.88), countries have different symbolisations. In the United States, the colour white represents a bride's virginity or relative innocence, while in China, white represents a funeral or death, which is why, for weddings, Chinese people use the colour red because it symbolises happiness. Such beliefs are very important because most believe that this will have an impact to the lifetime commitment of the couple. Therefore, there is no reason why these symbols would negatively link into themed wedding when they should indicate enhancement and not change or elimination of the traditional setting.

2.4 Themed wedding in New Zealand

New Zealanders have already demonstrated simplicity in important events like weddings because they want to preserve the important link of tradition to the event. However, the emergence of luxurious weddings in the Pacific Rim was due to the influence of Great Britain and the United States of America during the period of Imperialism (Otnes et.al, 2003). As a result, ordinary weddings gradually made a presence in the wedding industry in New Zealand. With reference to Otnes et.al (2003), "the British influence on Australia and New Zealand established the luxurious wedding as the prevailing one, a set of rituals to be taught to native people".

Penkava (2002) stated that "many couples are choosing the road less travelled down the wedding aisle", and that especially themed, exotic forms of transportation and unusual locations are some of the ways that couples are putting a personal imprint on their wedding. Therefore, the historical wedding is also a new and exciting wedding theme that could tickle the fancy of modern couples.

Certainly, themed wedding can expect market opportunities since globalisation today start to bring extensions on trends in most developed countries. An instance was the



boom in the wedding industry in the U.S which has accounted for the huge availability of themed wedding packages. With reference to Parrish (1999), in the U.S alone, weddings have accrued almost \$38 billion to \$42 billion in annual sales. Therefore, as was expected, trends in themed weddings have been exported globally, influencing tradition-based countries like New Zealand.

However, the opportunity for popularity in themed weddings has been somewhat contrasted by Wilding (2006) that only few people are subscribing to wedding magazines, which means that only a few people are interested in knowing what themed weddings are all about, and how they can enrich the quality of celebration. In other words, no matter how wedding businesses today attempt to extend the reach of themed weddings to the client, challenges might be encountered along the way because people, specifically New Zealanders, may not even pay enough attention to the vast majority of advertisements which can be found in editorial pages in magazines. This is because New Zealanders do not want to be included in the so-called “countries of globalisation” or westernisation, evident in the concept that New Zealanders do not want to associate their wedding style as a themed wedding because it is so “Americanised” (Wilding, 2006). Therefore, it is a challenge for the wedding industry in New Zealand to break the barrier between New Zealanders and proposals for themed weddings.

According to Gita (1992), the prevalence of wedding-related businesses in the U.S. has been paralleled in New Zealand because there is an endless market opportunity for themed weddings in the latter country just as there is in other developed countries like the U.S and the U.K. Johnston (2006) claimed that the wedding industry in New Zealand has gone international, as the industry has been set to conquer the world through advertising New Zealand as a wedding destination.

The opportunities of themed wedding packages in New Zealand are evident in the proliferation of wedding magazines and websites that specifically target New Zealanders (i.e. Kiwi weddings, NZ Bride, etc.). According to Sheryl Mungall (as cited in Kotze, 2007), a well-known celebrant of wedding ceremonies in New Zealand, there is a thirst



for more depth and culture in the way ceremonies are conducted in New Zealand, especially weddings. Mungall (as cited in Kotze, 2007) added that New Zealanders today have more control over the way they would want to execute their union, and this includes the option of wedding themes that can symbolise family culture. Moreover, Mungall (as cited in Kotze, 2007) states, Kiwi couples are more engaged today in planning their wedding than in any other time in history. This conclusively demonstrates the economic opportunity of the market trends pertaining to wedding themes in New Zealand.

It is also perceived that themed weddings in New Zealand will have a bright future in the market because the said country was already considered as one of the countries with demonstrated success in wedding tourism, due to its so-called 'romantic geography' (Johnston, 2006). Firstly, with reference to Pearce & Tan (2004), New Zealand is one of the few which have a structured, functioning, and challenging distribution channels for cultural and heritage tourism which naturally encompasses wedding events. These authors also mentioned that wedding tourism in the country is seemingly a success because its distribution channels are capable of reaching both domestic and international visitors. Therefore, wedding tourism can also serve as a support for the endeavour of popularising themed weddings across the country. This is because, if more and more visitors found out that New Zealand is one of the best wedding places to be, then there would be a greater possibility that other countries that are using themed wedding could influence the wedding market of New Zealanders.

Due of the outstanding geography of New Zealand, almost all wedding themes can be applied in this country. Johnston (2006) provided a brief imagery stating that New Zealand's landscapes like glaciers, lush green sub-tropical forests, rugged mountains, blue-water coastlines, and golden beaches alongside heteronormative tourist weddings, when constituted, can result to a natural, a hundred percent pure, romantic, and even an exotic, perfect place for a-once-in-a-lifetime event.



2.5 Theoretical foundation

2.5.1 Consumer Behaviour

This research is based on the theory of consumer behaviour. As in any business, the wedding industry has suffered some challenges caused by the ever-changing behaviours of consumer towards products. As pointed out earlier, present themed weddings are the innovative products in the wedding market, it is expected that this would be another centre of attention among wedding planners and wedding businesses in different countries. However, marketing themed weddings in New Zealand was perceived to be a new challenge for wedding planners since New Zealanders are known for having a different buying behaviour when it comes to important events like weddings (Baron & Byrne, 1987). In other words, buying behaviour of consumers are somewhat driven by different influences.

According to Baron & Byrne (1987), consumer behaviour is based on a socio-cultural context. As a part of this context, Mungall (as cited in Kotze, 2007)) also elaborated that New Zealanders are inclined to incorporate more depth of meaning into their ceremonies, which implies that wedding themes are definitely a new option for them. Therefore, the factors that influence consumer behaviour are the factors present in the socio-cultural realm, and consumers make their decisions through the influence of such factors.

Michman (1991) observed that, the buying motivation of clients when it comes to themed wedding packages reflects a five-stage decision-making or buyer-decision process which consists of:

- i) problem recognition;
- ii) information search;
- iii) evaluation of alternatives;
- iv) purchasing decision; and
- v) purchase evaluation, or the so-called ‘post-purchase behaviour’ (p. 152).



(i) Problem recognition:

Problem recognition regularly refers to the awareness of a certain product or service, which triggers a consumers' tendency towards buying (Michman, 1991). From this, it is evident that the external environment has the strongest influence in the first stage. Further, factors which influence this stage of the decision-making process are advertisements and word-of-mouth, social cues from families, friends, and anyone within the community. Linking this to buying themed wedding packages, couples may tend to be influenced during the course of problem recognition by news about themed weddings of celebrities on TV, radio, internet and especially by families and friends who may or may not oppose to the concept of a themed wedding versus a traditional wedding.

(ii) Information searching:

The second stage is information searching, where consumers venture on internal memory scanning or external information-seeking for relevant information regarding the product or service (Michman, 1991). In the case of themed weddings, searching for information can take consumers some time, which can result to either buying or not buying themed wedding. In other words, there is still a chance that consumers will still choose a traditional wedding over a themed wedding.

(iii) Alternative evaluation:

Subsequently, the third stage of alternative evaluation refers to the motives of consumers on buying a certain product or service. Michman (p.154) claimed that these motives consist of economic buying, emotional buying, product buying, and patronage buying. At this stage, there is a tendency that, after searching for information on the chosen and alternative weddings, couples may establish a comparison through emulation, pleasure, prestige, ambition or romance, in order to identify which would be most ideal.

(iv) Purchasing decision:

The fourth stage is the purchase decision is where consumers finally choose what and where to buy. The purchasing act includes the decisions of agreeing to terms of sale, and learning if the item is available (Michman, 1991). Moreover, this is the stage where



couples may already decide on whether or not to buy a themed wedding package. However, since this stage mirrors the act of strict evaluation on available information, specifically on the terms of sales, availability, and customisation of the package, there are some chances that consumers still adhere to traditional weddings instead of trying themed weddings. This may indicate that the appeal and features of a themed wedding is not competitive enough.

(v) Post-purchase evaluation:

Finally, the fifth stage centres on the post-purchase behaviour of consumers, which determines whether the product or service was found satisfying for the consumers based on their own experience. In themed weddings, this is the after-wedding scenario, where couples tend to decide if they were really satisfied with the wedding package and if it is worth recommending to friends and families. With these kinds of socio-cultural influences in New Zealand, couples may opt either to purchase themed-wedding packages or just stick to a simple traditional wedding.

With reference to Jacoby (1998, p. 319), consumer behaviour is defined as the “acquisition, consumption, and disposition of products, services, time and ideas by decision-making units”. This definition explains consumer behaviour with regard to themed weddings. It specifically pertains to the disposition of ideas, which refers to the theme the couple wants to incorporate in their wedding. Couples choose wedding themes so that they can make their wedding memorable. According to Otnes et. al (2003, p. 12), lavish weddings that prioritise wedding themes are opted for by couples because they want to experience magic in their lives. Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry (1989), a consumer behaviour scholars, further explains that wedding themes, as a manifestation of magic, are a transformation of ritual and that the couples, through wedding themes, can believe that their wedding, with a touch of magic, has achieved that end.

Consumer behaviour can be observed by consumers’ reactions and/or satisfactions to the products or services they had purchased. For example, consumer who are not completely satisfied with the result of wedding planning may show complaining behaviour but still



maintain their politeness to the receiver of the complaints. Impolite complaining behaviour of consumers, on the other hand, can be observed from those clients who are dissatisfied with the wedding planning outcome and, at the same time, show some above-average impolite reactions like shouting to the receiver of the complaints, with matching impolite actions. As Lerman (2006) pointed out that the relationship between politeness and complaining behaviour is one key observable element in consumer behaviour, because polite and impolite consumers do not have the same or do not engage in the same level of complaining behaviour.

According Johnston (2006), themed weddings require a lot of marketing strategies in New Zealand in order to promote them and improve the market existence or presence. This would only mean that wedding businesses would have to allocate enough attention to explore the nature of consumer behaviour in this country. Consumer behaviour is said to be a determinant of business marketing success, because, once consumers refuse to endorse the product this would mean that something is wrong in marketing and it may unfortunately indicate that the product will not be a success. Therefore, Foxall (1993) believes that marketers require having alternative interpretations on consumer behaviour with respect to structural psychology, in order to determine their pattern of choice as well as to cope with whatever changes occur, due to the natural evolution in consumer behaviour.

Similarly, Sheth & Parvatlyar (1995) mentioned that it is important to understand the motivations of the consumers in order to develop an efficient marketing theory. This can be used in order to reduce their market choices and engage them in relational market behaviour that will enable them to simplify the processing of information as well as to maintain a psychological state of comfort. However, doing so is not easy, because exploring the psychology of consumers requires the application of theories such as the attribution theory (Weiner, 2000). Principles of this theory include:

- i) perception on the stability and causality that influence the likelihood of consumer satisfaction in a product; and



- ii) perception on causality with the controllability dimension that influence judgments relevant in responsibility and retributive actions (Weiner, 2000).

To aid the complexities of consumer behaviour explorations, Perner (n.d.) identified some patterns that anyone can follow, such as:

- i) Psychology of consumer's way of thinking, feeling, selecting, and reasoning between appropriate alternatives that exist for brands and products;
- ii) Consumer psychology that is influenced by the different environment, such as culture, family, and media;
- iii) Consumer buying psychology when shopping;
- iv) Consumer's limitation in knowledge needed for processing information in order to make decisions;
- v) The gap between the level of consumer motivation and decision strategies that evidently influence the outcome; and
- vi) Marketer's strategies in order to earn and maintain the interests of the consumers.

Before making any further investigation regarding consumer behaviour, it is essential that those themed wedding marketers, in the personae of wedding planners, would first answer some important questions concerning the buying behaviour of consumers. With reference to Jobber (2001), these primary questions consist of:

- i) What do customers buy?
- ii) Why do customers buy the products?
- iii) When do customers buy the products?
- iv) Where do customers buy the product?
- v) How often do customers buy the product?

As mentioned previously, consumer behaviour is fuelled or influenced by different factors. It is however not closely relevant to the matters of themed weddings. Ethical implications in marketing also contribute to the change in behaviour and the buying-



decision process of consumers. Cui & Choudhury (2003) mentioned that to establish a harmonious and ethical relationship between the customers and the marketers, or wedding consumers and wedding planners, and this resolution is not limited to establishing an integrated framework consisting of the nature of the product, the characteristics of the consumers, and the selection of the market. By doing so, marketers would be able to establish an idea on how to make a connection between consumers' interests and ethical marketing that will thoroughly ensure harmonious marketing relationship between the two bodies.

Focusing more on the factors influencing consumer behaviour towards a product or service like themed wedding, some market analysts identified that the following are just some of the primary influential factors for the consumers:

Social Factor:

Social influence was said to be one of the determinants of consumer behaviours because consumers have a tendency to go along with or argue with issues that have something to do with their buying decisions (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). In addition, Brown (2007) stated that this factor is associated to consumer behaviour because it is natural for the consumers to take advice or opinions from other members of society other than the family, such as friends, social class peers, and officials.

Moreover, Calder & Burnkrant (1977) pointed out that sociological influence in a form of interpersonal factor is widely recognised as one of the major determinants of consumer behaviour. This has been identified and strengthened by three types of studies with different process levels, including:

- i) a study which examines the relationship of direct group pressures to evaluations of products;
- ii) a study which focuses on indirect social influence; and
- iii) a study that dwells on the connection between the normative beliefs and the attitude model provided by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975)

(Calder & Burnkrant, 1977).



Social influences are not new to the wedding industry because most of the time couples, especially brides-to-be, are consulting external parties in order to acquire ideas and suggestions on how to enrich the context and design of the wedding celebration. By simply reading bridal magazines, watching bridal shows, or even reading from online wedding business websites, consumers are already conducting a so-called social consultation which only shows the acceptance for social influences. Therefore, marketers would have to consider the likelihood of this social influence to ensure that marketing strategies would truly satisfy the ever-changing behaviour of the consumers.

Cultural Factor:

Culture according to Deshpande & Webster (1989) is very influential in tradition-based events like weddings. Practically, the reason why there are different forms of wedding celebrations is because people come from different culture and ethnic backgrounds. Since culture pertains to a group's way of life, it is important for them to follow and emphasise it on any occasion, as much as possible. Cultural influence is reflected through the impulsive buying behaviour of the consumers, which then encompasses certain characteristics like normative influence, emotional suppression, self-identity, and postponement for instant gratification (Kacen & Lee, 2002). However, by integrating these to establish a much clearer view on its relationship to consumers' buying behaviour, it can be seen that overall, consumers are influenced by two factors: the regional level factors (or the so-called individualism-collectivism) and the cultural difference factors (or the independent-interdependent self-concept) (Kacen et. al, 2002).

Psychological Factor:

To some extent, psychological factors pertain to the concept implying that consumers are accustomed to a freedom of choice with products or services they need from a variety of alternatives (Clee & Wicklund, 1980). Consumer psychology has already had much research. However, most of it is focused on cultural differences in consumers, since cultural factors are somewhat connected to consumer psychology (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000) which has been revealed through methodological and conceptual issues that are central to cross-culture.



Connecting this concept in consumer psychology towards the emergence of themed weddings, it can be concluded that customers have the authority to choose from a range of wedding themes available to them, regardless of outside influences, be it cultural or social. This is strengthened by the fact that consumer psychology pertains to how they think, feel, select, and reason whether there are alternatives (Perner, n.d.).

Personal Factor:

Personal factor refers to the personal values of the consumers that could determine their behaviour. With reference to Dholakia (1979), personal influence is one of the major determinants of consumer behaviour aside from the social and cultural factors because of its extra-personal persuasion and intra-personal influence. This could be illuminated in circumstances where positive emotions of the consumers towards a product or service indicates positive effects on consumers' impulsive behaviour, which also means a positive impact on product or service marketing.

As a matter of fact, personal values stood out as the most important factor that all marketers would have to understand, because it reflects several disciplines, which, according to Vinson (1977), include:

- i) anthropology, which focuses on the interest of lifestyles and cultural patterns (i.e. using other cultural wedding styles in New Zealand);
- ii) Sociology, which focuses on the ideologies and customs that could trigger support or arguments (i.e. choosing a themed wedding over a traditional setting);
and
- iii) Psychology, which includes the examination of values from attitude standpoints and personal motives that directly influence consumer behaviour, especially during the course of decision-making.

Personal attitudes influence the process of decision-making among consumers by excluding the referent influence or social power in order to give the consumer the chance to choose based on his own will and idea about the product or service he has been



exposed to (Minian & Cohen, 1983). If this concept is to be applied in dealing with wedding clients, wedding planners can likely conclude that there are chances that clients are quite hard to please or have to be convinced to consider a themed wedding because they have their own viewpoints on how they would want their wedding. For example, customers still prefer a traditional setting even though the wedding planner and some of the clients' peers insist that a themed wedding is much better and would make the event more unique and memorable.

2.6 The challenge of themed wedding for planners

Basically, there are a number of factors that must be considered when setting up a wedding, not necessarily perfectly themed but perfect in a sense that the couples and the entire guests to be satisfied with the result. With reference to Nutt (2007), setting up usually starts by setting a date. This is not a simple task, as the planner must choose a date which is not only convenient for the couple but also for the guests. A wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime-experience so it is assumed that most couples would prefer this event to be witnessed by their entire intended guests. Subsequently, the type of ceremony would have to be finalised as well because this will indicate whether the wedding is formal or semi-formal, big or small.

Nutt (2007) suggested that this factor must receive enough attention because this can also determine whether the celebration will be enjoyable or simply a civil ceremony. The budget must be decided upon immediately after the first two factors; date and the type of ceremony. The type of celebration determines whether the ceremony will be enjoyable, and the budget should reflect it accordingly. Zazulak (2008), states that the budget is extremely important because this mainly keeps the cost of the wedding under control in order to prevent future financial problems in the family. After budgeting, the planner or even the couple themselves might start to do the shopping since there are some available vendors open for wedding-related products if the couple do not prefer a wedding package. Aside from shopping around, booking facilities and delegating errands can also be settled right away.



Setting up a wedding celebration, ranging from the venue, props, foods, and reception can be done by anyone who has the patience and time to allocate for the overall operation, as weddings indeed consume much time. However, it would be more effective if couples hired a wedding planner because, aside from the fact that this person can save them all their effort, they can rest assured that their wedding will turn out according to their preferences.

Initially, wedding planners started to dominate the wedding industry primarily due to the growing fact that women, or the brides-to-be, were having a difficult time planning their wedding. With reference to Blakely (2007), the service of wedding planners is designed to meet the competing demands of women who are busily engaged in their respective work and who sometimes have no choice but to outsource the planning of the wedding.

However, with reference to “The advantages of hiring a wedding planner” (2005), the involvement of a wedding planner is quite important because this person can help in saving time (approximately 200 to 300 hours for preparation), and worry for finding the right things for the wedding the first time. Even though hiring a wedding planner is quite costly since their prices range from \$300 to \$3000, their assistance will still save money in the long run because all things are already settled before the actual preparation starts. Therefore, modifications in the plan as well as in the budget can occur less often (“The advantages of hiring a wedding planner”, 2005).

Wedding planners have the intelligence and creativity to set up difficult elements of wedding celebration, most specifically the venue for the reception, because, aside from food and beverage, this place has to be designed elegantly and to provide an enjoyable occasion for the guest. With reference to Riggs (2005), wedding planners are keen to identify the following important details:

- i) how far the reception hall will be from the site of the wedding;
- ii) how close the lodging accommodations will be for out-of-town guests;
- iii) what the maximum number of guests is that the facility can comfortably hold;



- iv) whether there is ample parking for guests' vehicles;
- v) how much the valet parking, if any, will cost;
- vi) if there is a time limitation for the reception venue, and how much it would cost if the event exceeds that time;
- vii) whether there are sufficient restroom facilities; and
- viii) whether the banquet package is all-encompassing and includes tables, dinnerware, and chairs.

Factors like these can be overlooked if the person-in-charge of the wedding setup is not details-focused. Moreover, wedding planners help in reducing the pressures brought about by the demand for themed weddings. Wedding planning and preparation are surrounded by different preferences. There are many requirements and instruction that the planner has to consider before putting it all to work. According to Dee (2006), some clients want their wedding to reflect their personalities while others want it to reflect their social status (Adrian 2003). Wedding planners would have to encompass a wide range of choice for themed weddings. Sometimes, they may want a theme that is unique, and has not been done before. This demonstrates how challenging themed wedding planning and preparation can be.

Moreover, the creativity of clients is also a challenge for wedding planners. Often the clients may only conceptualise a particular dream for a wedding and merely verbalise it to the planner with no actual illustrations at all being provided. As a result, wedding planners would have to be keen on details and put clients' conceptualisation into a much more visible and illustrative plan. This can only be possible if wedding planners have a wide understanding of the creativity that they are dealing with, such as making an effective linkage between the romance and drama metaphor of a client's concept (Pearson & Syson, 2006), in order to come up with a satisfying theme for wedding.

Generally, developing and managing a themed wedding is inherently difficult because, aside from the fact that it requires a lot of thinking and creativity between the planner and the clients (especially when the clients prefer an absolutely new theme). Some situations



frequently require a creative theme-making without disregarding the beliefs, values, and cultures of the clients. For example, a couple's belief in the highest inclusion of signs and symbols in the wedding (Leeds, 2002) like those of closed-tradition couples in China have a modern themed wedding but do not exclude their traditional signs and symbols. In other words, wedding planners have to make a link between modernity and tradition, and this should not only be reflected but should be totally visible in the wedding setup.

It should not be assumed that difficulties indicate that couples should not go on and take some risks just to achieve a dream-themed wedding, because if there is difficulty then absolutely there is a resolution. With reference to the ultimate advice posted in an issue of *Western Mail* by Cardiff (2007), planning and managing a themed wedding can be less difficult if there is aid from a wedding planner or even just a wedding planning diary. Subsequently, the trouble of managing and ensuring the availability of the intended venue can be minimised if the couple or the planner conduct a weekday visitation of the specific place to check on progress. Finally, settling a realistic budget can put the couple's mind at peace provided that it is flexible enough for a situation that may require them to spend either more or less for something important for the celebration.

Cardiff (2007) also points that, if clients had already established a realistic budget indicating that future expenses can no longer be accommodated, then the clients are advised to just stick to a general themed wedding. On the lighter side, themed wedding should not be considered as a challenge for the wedding planners only. Parrish (1999), found that themed weddings also brought significant changes in the bridal or wedding industry, which only means that wedding planners and those who are engaged in the said industry prosper from it. However, it seems that these significant changes are what wedding business owners and planners deserve, since being able to prosper from it is indeed challenging. Based on the experiences of some wedding planners from other countries, specifically in the U.S, several actions and risks would have to be made in order to prosper. One example is the statements of Mayain Chatman (cited in Parrish, 1999) a wedding consultant from New York who mentioned that, in order to be updated on the wedding trends such as the emerging themed weddings, wedding planners and



consultant would have to make an extensive market research for wedding trends. This may include attending bridal shows and consulting some industry magazines.

Another challenge facing the individuals engaged in the wedding business, especially wedding planners, is the expandable budget inherently required to be able to make initial investment for necessary equipments like computers, office supplies, sales and marketing paraphernalia for newly established themes, and software application to create custom-designed themes in a much easier way (Parrish, p.56).

2.7 Prevalent themes for a themed wedding

Modern weddings come in a variety of themes reflecting elegance, richer experience, and prestige through classy churches, luxurious receptions perhaps including a bespoke wedding menu compiled by an AA rosette-winning head chef, elegant table decorations, linen, and stylish flowers personalised for the couples (Cardiff, 2007) who requested it that way.

Preferences or wedding favour ideas gave birth to themed weddings, with one aim: having one wedding out of a limitless number of favourite ideas. Some prevalent themes in wedding nowadays consist of candle weddings, wine wedding, edible weddings, and practical weddings (AB, 2006). Similarly, Napolitano (2007), proved the variety of resources or themes to choose from, such as the popular Valentine's wedding, spring wedding, Christmas weddings and more unique themes like a fire-fighter's themed wedding, a monster truck wedding, and several themes that demonstrate a high level of creativity in compliment to the high level of the couple's feeling for each other.

Beverages are one of the fastest growing themes within the wedding industry these days, because of the potential features that can satisfy not only the couples but their guests as well. According to Palladino (2008), coffee is one of the ideal wedding themes today because of its advantages:



- i) it will be favoured by almost everyone because people all over the world have been drinking coffee for centuries in order to keep moving, especially in special events like wedding;
- ii) coffee themes can be matched to other wedding themes like the beach, autumn, or Christmas, as coffee is one of the few drinks that can be used in whatever occasion, season, and lifestyle;
- iii) coffee is quite a distinctive colour and can therefore match a colour orientated theme for a wedding
- iv) a coffee wedding can be within a reasonable budget because coffee is affordable regardless of how big the wedding party is; and
- v) Coffee can also be served as a wedding souvenir.

Another prevalent wedding theme around the globe is the garden wedding. Some say that garden wedding is one of the least expensive of all wedding themes (Naylor, 2001) but, with reference to some findings like that of Zhou (2005), garden weddings can be expensive, especially if the preference of the couple requires more spending. This spending can derive from some settings such as:

- i) dividing the wedding garden into different styles, like east and west; and
- ii) designing the landscape of the garden with poetic grace through architecture, stones, plants, hangings on pillars in the east garden with special emphasis for the southern style, lawn and couplet, and many others.

Setting up a garden wedding is perceived as expensive because the planners or those who are engaged in arranging the venue believe that, just like any other themes, the goal of the garden wedding is to illuminate the importance of the venue for the celebration. In order to do so, further improvement in terms of architectural designs and landscaping would have to be made (Canter, 2003). In addition, the context of having a garden wedding is all about creating a meaningful space for a lifetime event that is rooted in the centre of communities and supported by the personalities of the participants.



Because of the interesting beliefs and cultures that Asian countries have for special events like weddings, Asian style weddings have started to be one of the common wedding themes inside and outside New Zealand. With reference to Horton (2002), New Zealanders choose to put an Indian or Asian dimension in the wedding because couples aspire for an event that looks different even though it is just taking place in the countryside somewhere in New Zealand. So, themed wedding can put the wedding participants in two places at once, with the use of different props and venue settings that can link all the scenes together, in a romantic engagement such as Tea lanterns, (popular with Chinese, Japanese, and other communities) and a creative paper dragon floating in the sky with vibrant shades of primary colours, fortune cookies in every table, silver accented goblets with wine, a wide array of fruits, sea-shells, and even exotic flowers (Nash, 2008).

To be more detailed, there is no limit when it comes in following a specific theme because there are many ideas that can be used or can occur while in the process of planning the theme. However, Nash (2008) has mentioned that a themed wedding is usually driven by significance between the bride and groom, such as a wedding based on a hobby or interest that they both share. Some weddings are fuelled by out-of-time-zone setting where the couple-to-be and the entire guests are transformed into a land before time. Nash (2008) posits that weddings can be powered by anything that interests the couples that is transformable to a wedding theme such as a famous romance of historical characters like Antony and Cleopatra.

Other than these sources of expenditures is the spending for photography which can be rather expensive. It enriches the experiment of self-making, pertaining to the application of cameras and photography to different areas of the venue in order to get shots of the event. These will later be used as expressions of kinship and identity for the community (Lozada, 2006) aside from the couple's personal keepsake purposes.



2.7.1 Decorations

What makes the themed wedding even more effective is the arrangement of decorations because these communicate the intended atmosphere of the themed wedding to the couple and to the entire guests (Nash, 2008). Decorations can be made out of preferred materials like fresh flowers and lanterns imported from elegant cities like Paris, London, and several others. However, artificial decorations like flowers to be used by the bride to the event itself; from the Church to the reception, are increasing in popularity these days. There are substantial advantages by saving the couple much money, since fresh flowers are obviously sold by florists and commercial suppliers at a high price, as well as several requirements that have to be bought in order to keep those flowers fresh for the event.

Another advantage of artificial materials, as described by Lee (2008), is their availability regardless of season and other requirements that cannot meet the wedding setup requirements. For example is the availability of artificial flowers preferred by the couple regardless of the month of the wedding. Thus, the couple does not have to worry if the flowers of their choice are seasonal because they can be designed by the artificial flower manufacturer.

With the popularity of artificial products, the couple can just fix flowers if they want them to be more colour-strengthened, by requesting added colours to it without worrying about a dying or wasting flower.

Overall, though, the emergence of artificial materials for decorations somewhat threatens the industry of fresh products it means only one thing for the clients: another choice has been yielded in order to give them a chance to improve their wedding experience.

2.7.2 Invitations

Another item that has to be explored when considering a themed wedding is the wedding invitation, because it can be considered as the window to the main event. The theme is



primarily evident in the appearance of the invitation. If the wedding theme is 'Prince and Princess Nuptial' then the invitation must be in a totally elegant form, as if it came from the royal family in Wales. However, no matter what the invitation looks like, its informative purposes should never be disregarded, so it must have some additional thoughts concerning clothing, footwear, and getting to the venue must be clearly stated (Johnson, 2007).

2.7.3 Dress

Another powerful indicator of a themed wedding is dress, ranging from bride, groom, other participants, and guests. According to Nash (2008), themed weddings allow the bride, groom and their guests to relate to the theme by matching it with clothes they believe that are appropriate. It is not necessary to require the guests to cooperate fully in the wedding theme but it would be much appreciable if they would, at least, try to fit in and be a part of the stylish once-in-a-lifetime-event of their bride and groom.

Themed dress does not have to be expensive to be enjoyed by everyone involved. With reference to Porter (2007), a dress for the bride or for the guests can match the theme by just some colours which are suitable in the theme with matching self-made styles like back-of-the-dress details such as special embroidery. With a simple touch of creativity, everyone could simple fit in into the world created by the couple in their special life-changing event.

2.8 Statement of the problem

In setting up a themed wedding, appalling problems can occur out of nowhere. These can be due to problems in actors, props and audience, or anything else that has something to do with to the celebration (Miller, 2008). The most important problem is many couples know what they want in terms of a particular kind of wedding, but don't know where to start, or how to incorporate that theme into their wedding. "With a theme wedding you are working on things right from the start - from the time the invitations go out, to the style of cake, the ceremony, what is on the table, what people eat and drink.



2.8.1 Wedding Preparation

Prior to the modernity in the settings of wedding celebrations, problems are solely focused on wedding traditions and customs, such as the role of extended families, the etiquette in handling the couples gifts, and dining manners, just to name a few. With reference to “Wedding planning issues facing extended families” (2008), wedding problems are not limited to:

- i) lack of monitoring; for example someone who is eating with elbows on the table;
- ii) if someone is drinking too much and causing trouble in the celebration;
- iii) someone tasting icing from cakes with fingers;
- iv) handling gifts in a disrespectful manner; and
- v) having trouble in finding the set seating arrangements, especially with special guests.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned are now considered legendary problems, which mean that they are no longer considered as the highest priorities and are only minor in the grand scheme of things. Wedding settings are now surrounded by challenges relevant to themes and other necessary arrangements. According to Gunnin (2006), dreaming of a perfect wedding can be a nightmare because several challenges have to be faced by everyone involved in the wedding settings. In other words, having a fancy wedding can be difficult, primarily due to the fact that it will require a huge amount of money, and will need enough creativity in order to establish a link between the theme and the service, such as music and a themed reception.

2.8.2 Music Preparation

On the whole, music plays a very important role in the event as it adds life, a reminiscing quality, and communicates the worth of the event to the guests, the couple and their respective families. According to the Wedding Organization (n.d.), music serves as a key ingredient in setting the mood of the wedding, specifically the wedding reception theme song. However, choosing the right theme song for this particular part of the event is also



an additional burden because the suggestions of a wedding planner and the preferences of the couple are sometimes unable to agree. Since the couple are the ones who have the right to make the musical selection, the burden is being thrown at the wedding planner because he/she has to see to it that the music is suitable for the wedding reception no matter how difficult this may be.

The context of selecting music is also difficult due to the fact that couples can be exposed to different influential factors, which according to Wedding Organization (n.d.) include the following:

- i) the size of the group or guests to be entertained;
- ii) size of the band that will suit the size of the reception venue and budget;
- iii) age span of the guests; and
- iv) the interests of the majority when it comes to music.

A themed reception, as part of a themed wedding package, has music as its most important element. Therefore, if couples consider having a themed wedding package including music as it is within their budget, then one key step they have to do is to understand how the music will contribute to enriching the memories of their event.

2.8.3 Wedding Scams

Moreover, there is the presence of scams, such as bridal shops selling used or damaged wedding gowns as new or limousine services that do not show up or that have the wrong vehicle (“Top 10 Bridal Scams”, n.d.). These events in the wedding industry also add pressure in wedding arrangements nowadays: several couples from well-off families have already been victimised by these opportunists. Basically, problems arise because of the features of wedding themes ranging from the cost of cakes, flowers, the bridal vehicle, and venue for the reception (Elle, 2008), which should be communicated between the couple and wedding planner.



It was also perceived that a clients' ambivalence contributes to problems arising in wedding planning. With reference to Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum (1997), this factor becomes a challenge because of four antecedents, which include:

- i) expectation versus reality;
- ii) overload;
- iii) role conflict with purchase influencers; and
- iv) value and custom conflict.

In setting up a themed wedding, appalling problems can occur out of nowhere. These can be due to problems in actors, props and audience, or anything else that has something to do with to the celebration (Miller, 2008). But most of all, the key problem that can be encountered during the planning and setting up is the destination of the event, from the venue to the reception. Setups start by identifying the final destination because without this everything will not fall into place. Most themed weddings today take place as a destination wedding, where the ceremony is held in a new place. A wedding such as this is deemed rich in experience, as a new place brings a new experience. According to Holiday City (2005), a destination wedding has been an in-demand theme because it combines a dream wedding, honeymoon, and well-earned vacation.

However, a theme like this is not always a positive experience as it does have some constraints, and constraints can arise even at the early stages of planning. With reference to Holiday City (2005), planning a destination wedding is troublesome because either the couple or the wedding planner may have hectic schedules, to the point that they cannot go overseas just to see how things are proceeding. Subsequently, even if the preparation comes out as a success, the presence of all invited guests cannot be ensured since they could also have hectic schedules or budget limitations that cannot meet the requirement of the wedding. Similarly, having a destination wedding can be an expensive exercise because instead of putting the money into the whole wedding package, at least half of the intended budget may well be used to buy plane tickets for the couple and their families.



2.8.4 Wedding Menus

Due to the current trends and innovative thinking in the wedding industry, the level of difficulty for wedding preparation appears to be increased, in a sense that wedding celebrations are asking for more than what the current time zone and seasons can give; for instance, preparing a winter-themed wedding in the middle of summer where props and, especially foods, can only be provided by selected hotels and restaurants (Western Mail, 2007).

Focusing more on food, the presence of themed weddings in the market has also raised the expectations of the guests, especially when the couple comes from a wealthy family.

Cardiff (2007) noted that some of the trendy expectations of guests include:

- i) switching the expectation from a set menu to an a-la-carte menu, as this provides a wider choice, particularly for those with special dietary requirements;
- ii) a later wedding breakfast plus smaller evening buffet menu;
- iii) no more straight-forward menu items like soup, roast turkey and gateaux. instead, they are focused more on unusual requests or themed menus:
- iv) smaller wedding with many more courses; and
- v) moving away from having a separate traditional cake only to having a cake that can serve as a dessert later in the event.

2.8.5 Additional Touches

Prevalent themes are obviously made out of pure creativity, adding some special touches will surely bring out the best in the themed wedding. According to Nash (2008), special touches add richness to the theme, such as if everyone is placed in a fantastic destination the like groom arriving at Church on horseback and the bride being carried, like Cinderella, by a horse-drawn carriage.



Since the number of couples getting married under a themed wedding is increasing, it only means that more and more changes are emerging, revolutionising those existing themed wedding. However, if one takes a deeper look at the process of evolution in wedding themes, it can be concluded that there is a specific pattern. Changes are occurring in important aspects of themed wedding. With reference to Cardiff (2007), changes or suggestions for change occur in the following aspects:

Reflection:

It was suggested by Cardiff (2007, cited in Western Mail) that trends in the wedding industry these days requires injection of more glamour, and this means getting rid of casual gatherings and welcoming elegant and more sophisticated wedding ambiance which can be reflected into dress, venue decorations, and even accessories. It is not necessary to have an expensive wedding, just to reflect all these. With just a little touch of creativity and control on the theme, everything will be as perfect as every couple dreams for their wedding.

Entertainment:

This is one of the highlights of the event because without this then everyone may not appreciate the celebration. Entertainment not only involves the activities after the wedding ceremony but also it encompasses the items and performances before and during the wedding ceremony like the music allocated for the bride's entrance, music after the ceremony, and so on. In addition, Cardiff (2007) also posits that even picture-taking not only of the bride and groom but of the guests as well, is considered as a part of entertainment, because there are some themes which involve special touches like allowing the guests to request to personalise or make some further designs on their pictures as a souvenir.

Local attraction:

Themed wedding associate with specific venues since couples have different preferences on where they would want to hold their ceremony. However, it is recommended to choose a venue or destination that could best deal with accommodation. After all, the



couple will not be the only ones who have to spend hours in the venue - the guests will, too. Therefore, it is important to consider their concern also, and find a good venue accommodation is the right place to start.

Later wedding:

Themed weddings have different schedules for the reception, and much depends on what time the ceremony will last. With reference to some popular themes, holding the reception at evening adds glamour and elegance to the event. Therefore, even if it is just a simple themed wedding, it can still look glamorous as long as the decorations match the evening ambiance (Cardiff, 2007).

Gift lists:

This specific part of the themed wedding has already undergone substantial changes. According to Porter (2007), there are some themed wedding which are designed with donation as a subject for gift lists, which means that, instead of giving presents, couples prefer donations to charity as a part of their wedding tradition. But it was also mentioned by Cardiff (2007) also states that themes may require couples to ask for contributions from their guests in order to finance the honeymoon.

Each one of us dreams of a perfect wedding, not only in the sense that the bride and groom are in love with each other, but also in the visible sense that everything seems perfect around them. Everything around them is everything that they wish for and everyone around them is the people who they wish to share their lifetime with, and witness their lifetime acceptance for each other. Unfortunately, some findings like those of Adrian (2003) revealing that themed wedding are primarily not for enriching the essence of the celebration but to expose the wealth and prestige of the bride and groom and their respective families to their guests. Couples who are using themed weddings now are often mistaken for being ostentatious of their social status, resulting in a conclusion that the real essence of themed wedding is now marred by many wrong impressions.



2.9 Reasons for having a themed wedding

As was mentioned in the previous sections, couples have their own reason for setting up a themed wedding. Every couple has full control on wedding planning, specifically on whatever they want to put on view (Adrian, 2003, p.51). They can even hire someone who can do all the work for them, ranging from the church, the banquets, the decorations, foods and beverages, to some other additional touches. However, putting a burden on wedding planners' shoulders is not the reason why couples choose to set up a themed wedding. After all, the expenses are theirs, which is why there may be some important reasons for such preferences.

Different couples have unique ideas and share different interests, so when all of these are applied to a themed wedding then, they will definitely have a wedding like no one else's (Napolitano, 2007). Apart from this generalised reason, some researchers have managed to list some other reasons for having a themed wedding.

As posted in the FM Brides (2008), most couples have three common reasons for preferring themed weddings:

- i) couples believe that making a themed wedding is a unique way of ensuring that even the most common of wedding ideas becomes a reserved theme for the couple who thought of it. They also believe that even though the wedding is not of high profile, themes can still make it look elegant;
- ii) couples believe that themed weddings highly implant rich memories not only for them but for everyone who witnessed and experienced it. Thus, the event can be a lifetime treasure to be cherished later; and
- iii) couples prefer themed weddings in order to give respect and display traditions, because personalised weddings in the form of a theme can be a richer way of showing customs and traditions, such as allocating an extraordinary time for gestures of thanks for those who attended the wedding.



To complement the aforementioned reasons, there was also a time when Lingao, a director of wedding events and management, mentioned that couples chose themed weddings because they want to have a totally unique and a memorable wedding, an event that will be remarkable. Therefore, as a wedding planner and manager, the entire preparation must be perfect, from wedding planning services, flowers, cakes, to musical entertainment with accordance to the agreed setup (Reyes, 2004).

Unrau (2007) has another point of view on why there are themed weddings. According to this author, themed weddings offer wide-ranging advantages that have been known for several couples. Since information regarding the beneficial features of themes in important events like wedding spreads immediately, more and more couples begin to prefer them. In addition Unrau (2007) brought up that themed wedding yield the following:

Cooperation:

Cooperation, which is simply evident when all aspects are being planned around one central theme. In other words, the preparation could be easier and less time-consuming since the ideas that have to be considered in the wedding are all in one piece. Secondly is tradition, which couples would like to reflect since they want to integrate their varied pasts and individual histories into their marriage as an act of honouring their individual heritages.

Personality:

The next is the personality of both the bride and the groom. Most couples would want to show and share their happiness to everyone who will attend their wedding and one key to do it is to share them the sweet ambiance of their relationship and personalities. This could only be made possible by themed weddings where everything can be customised with respect to their preferences. In other words, the setup is flexible and it can be modified any time prior to the wedding just to ensure the preferred reflection.



Mood:

Lastly, a themed wedding allows the couple to be more specific by setting up the mood, which actually refers to the setting up of atmosphere and tone of the event. One key example of this is a black-and-white theme which only shows a formal tone for a celebration. Therefore, by setting up the mood of the celebration, everything will fall into place and reflect the frame of mind of the wedding.

2.10 Summary

According to Markby, 2006, the NZ market is borrowing ideas from America and other countries as far as the wedding market is concerned. This demonstrates that there is a need to meet the demands of couples for themed packages (and services) in order to be successful in the NZ wedding market.

Drawing from the above literature review, one can conclude that a wedding is the sole ceremony or practice that is prevalent and important in any type of culture in the world. It is perceived universally as a special occasion in a person's life. Whether it is the couple's first wedding, a renewal of their vows, or an anniversary, it is essential for them to have a pleasant and lasting memory of the occasion. In view of that, wedding themes can be customary as a theme enables a richer experience for both the couples and guests. This means that wedding themes have a potential share in every market.

To make the wedding as perfect as possible, it is crucial to plan ahead and decide how the wedding will be executed. Accordingly, wedding planners have in recent decades acquired an important role in planning the wedding ceremony and have become one of the most important factors in achieving a 'perfect' wedding.

This research is about studying the factors influencing the demands for wedding themes in New Zealand from Auckland region's perspective. In this research, the researcher will look for the factors that motivate people to choose themed wedding packages. By understanding the role of consumer behaviour and researching people's motives and



intentions, a conclusion can be reached about who will be interested in wedding packages and the type of wedding packages.

The next chapter discusses the methodology and the rational for choosing that particular methodology.



CHAPTER 3

3 Methodology

3.1 Chapter outline

This chapter describes the methodology used in this research study and also provides the justification for its use. This chapter starts with the research philosophy, followed by sections on research design, research approach, data gathering tools and sampling methods. Further, issues relating to the validity and originality of the data are briefly discussed. This chapter concludes by discussing limitations of this research study.

3.2 Research philosophy

In a search for an appropriate philosophy for this study, two philosophies have been identified: positivism and interpretivism. Basically, research philosophies are considerably important in the research process because, as described by Saunders, Lewis & Thornill (2000), they guide the researcher toward knowledge development, which is important especially when the research dwells on business management. Since research philosophy is also prioritised in this study, the researcher has made a thorough analysis of which one suits the research.

Positivism

The philosophy of positivism has a rich context because its broad thought movement marked the second half of the nineteenth century, which insisted on the appreciation of positive facts regarding the role of fundamental laws in governing matters involved in the evolution process (Radical Academy, 2001). According to Saunders et al (2000), the primary concept of positivism philosophy is to work independently, which means that knowledge to be developed cannot affect the subject of the research and that the subject of the research cannot affect the knowledge development. This philosophy is quite evident in positivists who are, by nature, objective and always keen on details in order to ensure that biases will not occur, especially during the collection of data.



Moreover, Saunders et al (2000) also stated that a positivist researcher produces law-like generalizations during his observation into social reality networks, which is similar to the process used by physical and natural scientists. Aside from this, a positivist researcher uses highly structured research instruments and methodology (Gill & Johnson, 1997 in Saunders et al, 2000) since positivism is most appropriate in research involving enormous amount of data from huge populations. In other words, the philosophy of positivism is likely to be applicable to quantitative researches because it is engaged in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data from sizeable or huge populations. Then again, the Columbia Encyclopedia (2007) states that positivism is a philosophy that denies validity from speculation and metaphysics because this philosophy insists that knowledge can only be developed through scientific knowledge.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism refers to a belief that there are some other ways to know about the world, specifically about society, other than relying solely on direct observation of people or population being studied. With reference to Ritchie & Lewis (2003), interpretivism encompasses such ideas as:

- i) perception relates to human interpretations of what their senses tell them;
- ii) human knowledge of the world is based on human understanding, which arises from both human thinking and human's particular experiences;
- iii) the process of knowing and knowledge go beyond basic empirical inquiry; and
- iv) There is a difference between scientific reason and practical reason, in that the former is about casual determinism while the latter refers to moral freedom and decision-making with less certainty (pg. 6-7).

This research philosophy is likely to indicate that studying social events is based on the interpretation of other's actions, which has less to do with psychological senses since the main purpose is the intention and goals of the individual (Holloway, 1997). With similar



findings, Tamanaha (1996) stated that the philosophy of interpretivism consists of two propositions:

- i) that most actions being acted are intentionally based on ideas and beliefs; and
- ii) that the meaning of ideas and beliefs is inter-subjective, referring to the interpretation that is derived from and shared by others in a particular social group.

The process of applying interpretivism in a research involves the overall examination to the subject being studied in order to understand the condition of the certain phenomenon (Neill, 2006), which in this study was the emergence of themed wedding packages in the wedding market of New Zealand. Therefore, compared to positivism which is possible to miss important aspects of comprehensive understanding during the course of methodology, interpretivism can secure the complete understanding on the subject being studied, as a whole. O'Brien (n.d.) believes that one key enabler for the efficiency of interpretivism, says the fact that qualitative design has no overarching framework to follow, unlike quantitative design, which gives a framework that tells how the whole study should be conducted.

With respect to the objectives and structure of the research questions for this study, the researcher chose interpretivism as the research philosophy. Apart from the fact that it dwells on understanding and analysing experiences and thoughts toward a social situation, the definition and description of this discipline likely indicates that it does not require scientific findings, which therefore indicates that this is best suitable for qualitative-designed research. By applying this, the researcher was enabled to develop knowledge and understanding, without sacrificing the results of analysis from data which are not statistical in nature.

More specifically, the researcher relatively reflected realistic interpretation in this study because the experiences (which pertain to the experiences of wedding planners in themed wedding matters) exist in real world, and have actually been experienced by genuine people.



3.3 Research design

Basically, it will be hard for the researcher to conduct the necessary methodology if there is no designated research design. Research design refers to the paradigm used in order to systematically obtain necessary data, with respect to levels of prior theory, guidelines for realism data analysis (Sobh & Perry, 2006), and other relevant elements as required by the study. Moreover, since researchers under different disciplines had respective data requirements, this only indicates that researchers may differ in research design, since some require the research to yield statistical information while some requires data derived from observation, human participations, and others things that are not statistical in nature. Although research design would have to be thoroughly specific since research design can be suitable for statistical data by simply categorising the design as quantitative. Qualitative research, on the other hand, simply focuses on the counterpart of the quantitative, non-statistical, data.

Quantitative and qualitative are the major research designs that can be chosen by the researcher, with respect to the required data needed in the entire study. As a part of the process, the researcher has to examine which is which, in order to ensure that the most appropriate design will feed this study the right set of information. Before going any further, it is imperative that the researcher has been aware of the fact that research design is very important because it is the determinant of the information reliability of the overall study (Churchill & Peter, 1984). Therefore, it is imperative that quantitative and qualitative research design is taken under a careful selection process, which can only be done by reading and analysing its features and uses.

Quantitative:

Quantitative research design uses methods that can yield statistical data like survey method or experimental methods. It aims to satisfy the research questions by using quantitative data with the aid of respondent's numeric description for their attitudes, opinions, and trends (Creswell, 2003). According to Jones (1997), quantitative design has been considered as a powerful research method because it can yield a large amount of



reliable information, aside from the fact that it allows flexibility in data management especially when this data will be used for comparative and statistical analysis.

However, since qualitative supporters have less preference towards quantitative as being the most powerful, some investigations had been conducted on the aims of this particular method, focusing on how it distinguishes characteristics, empirical boundaries, and elemental properties (Horna, 1994, p.121). Fortunately, quantitative method has somewhat proven itself through its inherent strengths, which can be seen in its appropriateness in measuring behaviour, descriptive aspects, appropriateness for comparison and replication, and capability to yield reliable and valid data (Jones, 1997).

Qualitative:

This is the non-statistical counterpart of the quantitative approach, which only means that this method gathers data in a completely different way. Qualitative research provides an access to the details of real life experience. Compared to the quantitative method which uses large samples and highly structured research instruments, the qualitative method simply gathers necessary data through naturalistic inquiry or research which involves interaction with the participants (Taylor, 1977).

The usual process of the qualitative method involves the interview of individuals or even small groups, to be followed by systematic observation from the same population's behaviour. However, qualitative method does not end there because, according to Darlington & Scott (2002), the process also involves the qualitative analysis of documented data in the latter part. Qualitative method is also comparable to assessment in clinical social work, since it relies on an interview with the participants, focusing on the context of the environment being studied which thoroughly involves their engagement.

Even though the quantitative method was hailed as the most powerful research design, it does not mean that qualitative design no longer has a weight in the field of research



methodology because, as described by Babbie (1986), this design still possesses advantageous features, such as flexibility, capability to yield in-depth analysis, and allowing the researcher to observe various aspects of a particular social situation. This has been supported by the findings of Garson (2002), which indicates that this design strives for in-depth understanding of the subject being studied by using appropriate techniques like participant observation, narrative analysis, or even deconstruction.

Moreover, qualitative design can be performed through a four-phase research that any researchers can use when dealing with communication and observation. According to Mankowski & Stein (2004), these four phases consist of:

- i) The act of asking;
- ii) The act of witnessing;
- iii) The act of interpreting;
- iv) The act of knowing.

For the first phase, the design requires the researcher to identify the target participants for the research. Then, the identification will be followed by selection and initial interview of the finalised participants. By linking this phase to this study, it is evident that this pertains to the stage where the researcher selects from a list of available wedding planners across New Zealand.

The second phase refers to the actual meeting of the researcher with the chosen participants. With reference to Mankowski et al. (2004), it is much better if the meeting will be held in the actual environment where the participants are working because the researcher will be able to observe the participants and how they react or respond to the working environment they are in, and not simply observe how they answer the questions given to them.

The third, of the phases was the act of interpreting, which means that qualitative analysis follows the gathering of data conducted from the first two phases. The researcher, in this



phase, is allowed to interpret data based on the participants' responses and the researcher's experiences.

Lastly, the act of knowing refers to the organisation of analysed and interpreted data gathered from the participants and from the researcher's experience and observations. Since this phase is designed for the qualitative method then automatically, the analysis and interpretation that will be used for the organised data are qualitative-based analysis.

This study chose qualitative as the research design because it evidently suits the intention of the researcher to build up an understanding on social and human activities involving examination and reflecting on the perceptions of the target population (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p.13). With respect to this design, the researcher uses naturalistic inquiry (Taylor 1977) in gathering necessary data which are non-statistical in nature.

To finger the technical element, since this study is more of a market research, the chosen design was used for determining the market for themed weddings in Auckland through an appropriate set of procedures. These procedures answered research questions, which focused on finding out factors influencing the demand for themed wedding packages, and also enables the researcher to provide interpretations of multiple realities that exist within Auckland couples' wedding requirements.

A qualitative method provides the awareness of multiple realities. In relation to themed wedding packages, this is likely to be prevalent because people will have differing views about wedding packages. With the use of a qualitative method in this research, the researcher gathered the necessary interpretation of the multiple realities that exist in the world of New Zealand couples relating to their wedding demands from the wedding planners. Hence, the researcher finds that qualitative approach is the appropriate methodology to explore the information that is critical for this research.



3.4 Research approach

In search of a research approach that will correspond to the chosen research design, two choices were encountered by the researcher: the inductive and deductive approach.

The deductive approach is considered applicable to qualitative design because this approach can be used as a basis for exploring the relationship between a social research and theory. However, one conflict that can arise is that it is driven by hypothesis testing (Bryman, 2000). This only means that this approach is commonly used for identifying whether the study will reject or accept the hypothesis. Since hypothesis testing is not applicable in this study, it only indicates that a deductive approach is disregarded and that its counterpart was used instead.

The inductive approach was employed in this study because its process allows the researcher to draw theories and interpretations from non-statistical data derived from the period of interviews, document reviews, and desk researches (Thomas, 2003). In addition, the inductive approach allows the researcher to:

- i) conduct reduction on extensive and varied raw data to transform it to a summary format;
- ii) build a link between the summary findings and research objectives without sacrificing the transparency of the results; and
- iii) Establish a reliable framework that will depict the structure of process and experience from the raw data (Thomas, 2003).

3.5 Method of data gathering

Basically, the framework of this study consists of three parts: exploration, interpretation, and conclusion. In order to proceed with the last two parts, exploration or investigation of the subject-at-hand must be conducted by using appropriate data gathering tools. For qualitative research, the interview is said to be the most powerful research instrument because it allows the researcher to gather different facts and ideas from questions



focusing on a specific situation which requires direct observation (Lowry, 1994). Therefore, a semi-structured open-ended interview was developed after reviewing literature on themed wedding, wedding ceremony and consumer behaviour.

3.5.1 Interview

This tool minimised the distance between the researcher and the subjects, which is why the researcher managed to determine target information like factors influencing the demand for themed wedding packages. By using this, the researcher has been able to gain a deeper understanding of the aspirations, motivations, and decision-making process of the wedding planners through developing a good rapport with them.

In detail, a semi-structured interview is one of the most common data collection techniques of qualitative method because it considers the notions of people about a particular event or phenomenon (Darlington et. al, 2002). It consist of semi-structured questions, which appears to be more of a general outline of questions to be asked or guide questions that the researcher can revise or adjust in order to satisfy the flow of the interview, with respect to the target knowledge and experience of the study. A copy of the interview questions for wedding planners is included in Appendix 1.

Interview questions are open-ended questions that give opportunity to the respondents to answer in details and clarify responses, if necessary. It also helps to reveal a respondent's logic, his/her thinking process and frame of reference. Due to the easy accessibility of the target respondents, instead of conducting remote interviews by telephone, the researcher conducted face-to-face interview of each respondent. According to Collis & Hussey (2003), response rates tend to be high and comprehensive data can be collected in case of face-to-face interviews. Respondents were asked about their knowledge and preferences of themed weddings. To be more detailed, questions focused on particular themes that most couples preferred. In addition, costs and other relevant expenditures are intended to be identified as well in order to know how much most couples would like to spend for the preparation of the wedding, with respect to their chosen or preferred theme.



In order to make sure that the interview questions are clear, relevant and in the best order, a pilot interview was carried out with a person known to the researcher. This also helped to ensure that the each interview was well within the desired time frame of 45 minutes. As for the technicality of the data gathering, both researcher and respondents had agreed to a tape-recorded interview. As a result, data gathered from this research instrument is considerably more reliable because the researcher will have a record of it, which only means that malicious alteration of information provided by the respondents was far from happening. Recorded information is transcribed by the researcher as a part of the data analysis and interpretation, as will be explained in the later part of this chapter.

3.5.2 Desk Research

The interview served as the primary source of data for this study. Therefore, if there is a primary then there should be a secondary source in order to serve as supportive information to any theory or claim which may arise from the primary source. Desk research was deemed to be the most popular instrument for obtaining secondary research, and this has been supported by Crouch & Housden (2003). Desk research enables the researcher to make reference to published materials written by first-hand authors, which actually make the researcher the secondary user of information that can worked on at the desk.

Moreover, this qualitative-in-nature research technique was considered to be one of the lowest-expense techniques because the researchers only conducts the research in libraries or even at home, where they can read and analyse published materials. However, though this technique requires less expense compared to any other research-gathering techniques, it does not mean that data derived from this is lesser in quality. Desk research exposes the researcher to huge amount of resources, so quality can be listed in the researcher's least concern.



Since the subject of this study is themed weddings, which is quite contemporary, most of the secondary information will be obtained from relevant magazines since this type of published materials features lifestyles preferred by the society, like that of themes for weddings. Even though desk research is for support purposes only, it does not mean that it is no longer the centre information at all. Information from desk research is also vital because this is also used in comparative procedures that can arise once the researcher has established an argument or assumption during the course of interpretation.

3.6 Sample

The researcher intended to gather information on what are the preferences of most couples for themed weddings, and obviously, the only persons who can provide the researcher with that information were the wedding planners. Wedding planners had first-hand experience in organising weddings and are also knowledgeable about the market for themed weddings. Therefore, interviewing wedding planners is like having the target information in a complete package.

Thus, the sample population of this study consists of fifteen wedding planners in Auckland. As has been mentioned, the researcher chose wedding planners because they are the most experienced when it comes in sharing the tastes of the New Zealand couples in terms of weddings. On the other hand, due to conflicts in scheduling the interviews, two of the fifteen respondents withdrew their participation, which had been legally requested since the two respondents had notified the researcher two to three days before the actual interview. Because of ethical agreement between the respondents and the researcher, the latter permitted the withdrawal from participation by the two respondents, leaving the study with a finalised sample of thirteen wedding planners.

Even though this research has not been able to meet the number of the target sample population, the researcher ensured that the necessary data would still be sustained, and that the quality of the results would not be adversely affected.



3.7 Sampling methods

Convenience sampling was employed in this study. The researcher found it more suitable since the respondents had willingly volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher. Basically, the researcher started the sampling by approaching a list of well-known wedding planners, and then worked down to the least-known ones. This has been conducted in order to equip the data with more credibility since, with no offence to the least-known ones; popular wedding planners can represent New Zealand couples' wedding preferences more accurately.

Moreover, some of the chosen wedding planners had been short-listed through New Zealand's popularly available websites and Yellow Pages. With the assistance of Michael Stump, the manager of New Zealand Wedding Planners website, thirteen recommended wedding planners were short-listed. They were accessible to the researcher since they are registered in New Zealand Wedding Planners website.

Ten of the wedding planners who agreed to participate in this study came on Michael Stump's recommended list, while three more of them were found in an internet search engine, Google New Zealand. These respondents had been contacted through email explaining the purpose of this research. Upon receiving these respondents' agreement to participate, the researcher immediately sent the information sheet to each of them, advising how the interview would be conducted and how information that will be provided will be treated. This sheet is included in Appendix 2.

The majority of the respondents selected in this study were busy with wedding seasons due to the nature of their work. In order to avoid the practical problems of non-availability of these respondents, appointments were made well in advance. At the beginning of each interview, they were requested to sign the consent form (Appendix 3). All identified participants willingly signed the consent form. Respondents were also asked if they have any objection for the interview being tape-recorded. Luckily, nobody



had any objection. All interviews were finished well within the limited time frame of 45 minutes.

3.8 Data analysis

The semi-structured interview in this study mainly contained open-ended questions in order to give the respondents the opportunity to answer in detail, and clarify responses whenever deemed necessary. Taking into account the short time frame of this research study, data analysis was undertaken immediately once all the interviews were completed. As cited by Collis & Hussey (2003), “there is no clear and accepted set of conventions for analysis corresponding to observed data”. One approach is to quantify the data but since factors influencing themed weddings is an experience and cannot be measured in numbers, this approach is not used.

The main data analysis technique in this research was content analysis. According to Jankowicz (1995, p.206), the purpose of content analysis is to enable the researcher to describe systematically the entire content of respondents’ utterances, and then classify the meanings that were recorded.

Moreover, the interview transcripts have been analysed using thematic content analysis, which focuses on investigating recurring answers in the data obtained. In addition, this analysis technique has been employed because it is relatively less expensive and time-efficient among other available data analysis method that are qualitative in nature.

Basically, thematic content analysis involves the process of identifying recurring themes, from the gathered data or data that has recurred in respondents’ answers, through assigning them to categories then grouping them afterwards (Collis & Hussey, 2003). This particular process involves three important steps: the first, to identify themes in bibliographical sources; second, to categorise topics; and the last, to analyse theme categories within a theoretical framework.



The process of analysing gathered primary data are somewhat simple since it only includes careful analysis and interpretation of the interview transcript. Then this is followed by creating a table where transcripts will be categorised within the framework of created topics. These results are presented in pie chart and graphs in the following chapter.

3.9 Validity of data

This study made use of a qualitative strategy, which also allows transferability that is equivalent to external validity. According to Yin (1994), collection data from various sources is useful in achieving construct validity in a qualitative research. For this study, the researcher has collected primary data through interviews. Secondary data were collected from multiple data sources like journals, article and websites. Though the data has been gathered in that way, it does not mean that it no longer has weight compared to quantitative data, because the reliability, veracity, and validity of data depends on the appropriateness of the methodology used in order to observe and investigate social sciences, with respect to all aspects of human interactivity and activity (Black, 1993).

Although no statistical data were yielded, the researcher has included some graphs or figures showing complements and arguments in the responses of the participants. These figures were included by the researcher because, according to Mason (1996), generation of relevant tables and lists that summarise the possible sources of data and methods add reliability and viability since they help in illuminating how the data has been analysed and interpreted.

Moreover, the researcher ensured that data are analysed, interpreted, and organised based on the primary validity criteria, which include authenticity, credibility, criticality, and integrity, as well as the secondary validity criteria which include explicitness, thoroughness, vividness, congruence, creativity, and sensitivity (Whittemore, 2001).



3.10 Ethical consideration

Since this research involves interviewing this means that it requires more communication with other people. Therefore, in order to ensure that researcher's communication with the respondents is fully ethical, the researcher followed some guidelines approved by Unitec Research Ethics Committee, including the following:

- i) Providing target respondents with an information sheet and consent form which is to be signed by the respondents who will receive it.
- ii) Assuring the respondents that the researcher will be conducting anonymous interviews, meaning all personal details of the respondents will be kept under high confidentiality throughout the research, and even when the research finally ends.
- iii) Other guidelines provided by Unitec are to be followed at all times.
- iv) Ensuring that fair treatment is practiced with the respondents or with anyone who is involved throughout the completion of this study.

Aside from following the guidelines, there is included in the scope of ethical responsibilities of the researcher an assurance that the following major barriers would be resolves whenever any occur in the process of research methodology:

- i) There would not be any necessity for participants to take part in the research without their knowledge and consent at the time. (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places).
- ii) The research will not involve discussion of sensitive topics or cultural issues
- iii) Research participants will be informed of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason and will not be given the impression that they are required to participate.
- iv) Explanations will be given on how far research participants would be given anonymity and confidentiality. Participants will have the option of rejecting the use of data-gathering devices such as tape-recorders and video cameras.



- v) No medical issues are involved.

In addition, a semi-structured interview technique was employed in this study, this means that the flow of information or conversation can be less limited. But, limitless conversation may bring up some sensitive issues and other out-of-ethics matters. In response to this, the researcher makes sure that the whole research is ethically-guided and therefore informs the respondents that they have the right to withdraw the participation, provided that they will notify the researcher at least several days prior to interview, and that they have the privilege of refusing to answer the questions being asked them if they think that it is no longer included in the scope of their participation.

3.11 Limitations of this research

Data has been limited to qualitative in order to provide more focus on the results derived from the course of interactivity between the researcher and the participants. This research involves a study on factors that are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages. Data should be collected from wedding couples and other service providers in wedding business. However, this study incorporates data only from wedding planners. This is an acknowledged limitation of this research. Having more than one approach would be the basis of more extensive research project resulting in a broader perspective.

The researcher monitored the limitation in order to prevent any issues from inhibiting the quality and reliability of the study, such as uncontrolled complexity, ambiguity, chaos, change, and unpredictability, which usually occur, especially in researches which involves general marketing (Gummenson, 2005).

Another limitation of this study was the time and resources. The researcher admitted that these two had almost hindered the completion of the study because wedding planners are hard to find due to the wedding seasons, and some of those who had already confirmed their participation had withdrawn few days before the actual meeting. As a result, the researcher suffered from some difficulties finding possible replacements. However, due



to lack of time for both researcher and wedding planners, the sample population ended up having thirteen participants only. Even so, the researcher ensured that limitation in time and resources did not have anything to do with the quality of the information because the target data was still acquired. In addition, several documents derived from the course of desk and internet researches had been considered and used in this study in order to support some theories and claims.

3.12 Summary

The researcher has adopted a qualitative methodology throughout this research. Primary data were gathered by interviewing the thirteen wedding planners from Auckland. Data were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Thematic content analysis is used to reach the conclusion. The following chapter discusses the results for this research study.



CHAPTER 4

4 Results

4.1 Chapter outline

This chapter describes the findings of this research project. This chapter focuses on the different perceptions and importance of interest in the general themed wedding, buying motivation and factors influencing choice of themed weddings, from respondent's point of view. Finally, this chapter concludes by presenting the results of the findings.

4.2 Introduction

In order to minimise uncertainties in the flow of discussion between the researcher and the interviewees, the researcher divided the topic into three categories:

- i) the interest of the general New Zealanders in themed wedding;
- ii) buying motivation; and
- iii) Factors influencing choice of themed weddings.

To outline the overall result, some arguments have been found in the analysis, but there are also some points of comparison, especially on the question of whether the majority has expressed similar opinion on to whether or not themed weddings are prevalent or have a bright market prospect in New Zealand. The following sections were the based on the information provided by the interviewees and their interpretation.

For the purpose of this research, thirteen weddings planners from Auckland were interviewed. In order to maintain their anonymity, their forenames are not mentioned. Therefore, in lieu of their real names, they have been mentioned throughout the study as "Interviewee 1", "Interviewee 2", and so on.



4.3 General interest in themed wedding

Themed wedding have different meanings for wedding planners. With reference to the viewpoints of the thirteen respondents, some of them gave the impression of themed wedding as something which allows the customer or couples-to-be to decide on what they want to include in their weddings, such as some kind of a twist in order to make it more unique.

A wedding planner like Interviewee 7 states that themed wedding refers to a linking of all aspects of the wedding. Most respondents expressed that whenever themed wedding is the topic, the first impression that comes right up to their mind is that it is a wedding that has scheme or pattern, mostly for colour, sometimes in decorations or anything that could keep the wedding event distinct from someone else's wedding. Table 1 presents the list of themed wedding definitions based on the transcribed interview with the interviewees.



Interviewees	Responses to “What does a themed wedding mean to you?”
Interviewee 1	Bride and groom deciding that there will be one focus or idea that may surround the event.
Interviewee 2	"A wedding that has a colour scheme or a pattern or something distinctive that would keep them apart from something..."
Interviewee 3	"it's the idea of a bride who chooses her colour schemes..."; "it's more that the wedding that have more...colour coordination...sort of thing"
Interviewee 4	"someone who wanted like a medieval type wedding, which is a colour theme...like a stage scene wedding"
Interviewee 5	"Themed wedding...is when you pick one particular theme and then you run it...you base the entire... ceremony and the reception and everything around one theme..."
Interviewee 6	"Could be as simple as a colour. It can be your grandmother's diamond...often starts off old context...start with one significant piece and then build around that"
Interviewee 7	"It's linking all aspect overall"
Interviewee 8	"It's the chance of people to have a consistency in their designs...it's a design that they can use throughout their whole wedding...say they can design from say its either colours or a place significant to both of them or the flow of the hobby..."
Interviewee 9	"Having a style that runs through the wedding...just need to take a subject...it is more of a styled wedding..."
Interviewee 10	"The most popular way to pick a theme on a wedding is to go with colours..."
Interviewee 11	"Themed wedding would be associated with the couple's choice of venue for the ceremony"
Interviewee 12	"Like a tradition...culture and also what the bride and groom want to do!"
Interviewee 13	"Full weddings, probably two. Part weddings, I don't know--many"

Table 1: Transcript of interview about the themed wedding definition.



The respondents had different responses when it came to describing the general interest of New Zealanders in themed weddings. The graphical distribution below shows that the responses of the majority were similar.

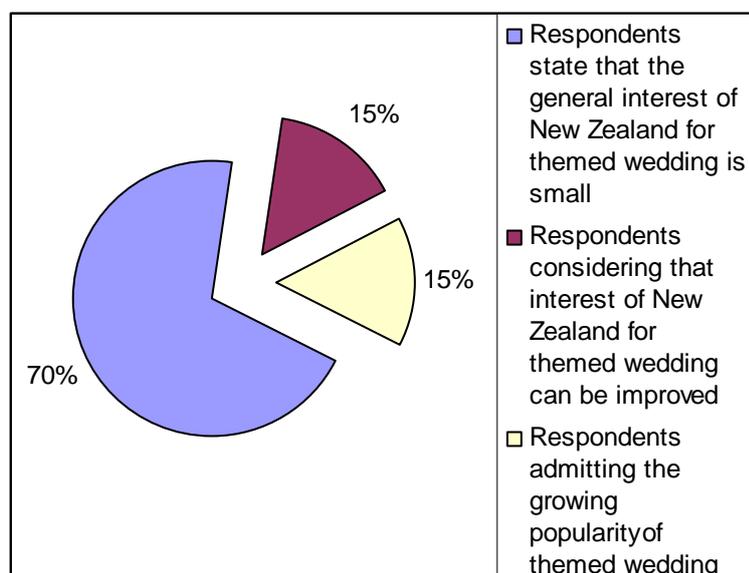


Figure 1: General interest in themed weddings

According to Interviewee 2, New Zealanders are not showing enough interest in going for themed weddings because, based on her business experience, most couples still prefer traditional wedding. This has been complemented with Interviewee 1's response indicating that unlike Western or modernist couples, New Zealanders have different personalities in a sense that they are really content having a simple yet elegant type of wedding. Besides, most people in New Zealand show interest in themes when it will be applied to corporate events rather than wedding, as described by Interviewee 9.

By and large, most wedding planners in this study thought that New Zealanders do not have innovative thinking just yet because themed wedding are not in demand in the country, although there are some who are asking assistance from them in order to have a wedding that reflects how extrovert they are. In other words, only a few New Zealanders are having a themed wedding. Further, Interviewee 5 mentioned that one common reason why couples are not demanding themed weddings is the budget. This wedding planner



mentioned that New Zealanders may tend to be pickier and may try something new for their wedding provided that it would not exceed their allocated budget for the event. Since having a themed wedding has been deemed expensive, couples think that having a simple yet elegant wedding would be a lot cheaper. Table 2 verifies this claim by presenting the transcript of interviews for this particular section.

Interviewees	Responses on "Describing the interest of NZ to themed wedding"
Interviewee 1	"New Zealanders' personalities...are getting more extravagant and innovative but I still think ... this is the one we got so we're not going to go and push ourselves through the boundaries of what we've think would be good for us and our families"
Interviewee 2	"Very little I think. I think most people want the traditional wedding"
Interviewee 4	"I really wouldn't have thought that it was a thing that was too much demand over here"
Interviewee 5	"...A lot of people try and stick to more sort of simple and elegant because...with your big theme and stuff, like the more expensive its going to be..."
Interviewee 7	"It's not high"
Interviewee 9	"It's not a huge thing in New Zealand...because a lot of money being spent... so they go pretty classic"
Interviewee 12	"We don't have any of those requests" [themed wedding]: Note: it only means that the interviewee think that New Zealanders are not interested in it
Interviewee 13	"Its quite low"

Table 2: Transcript of the majority stating that New Zealanders are not yet highly interested in themed wedding.

Most of the wedding planners shared that they had not yet experienced managing a real themed wedding, except for Interviewee 6 who had experienced planning extravagant weddings. Most respondents similarly explained that they are not offering themed wedding but what they want to emphasise more that they are giving wedding assistance.



This only means that they are open to client's preferences and only providing some recommendations if they are being asked for it.

According to Interviewee 11, a themed wedding, (if that is the right term for that since most of the respondents expressed that New Zealanders do not like the term because it is too Americanised) appears to be a second choice for couples who are contacting them saying that they preferred a non-church wedding. Interviewee 12 said that they are not receiving any request for themed wedding plans like Victorian or Medieval styles, those outside-church weddings are often being held in places like beaches, mountains and lakes, since New Zealand is abundant in such scenic spots.

In contrast, Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 10 both believe that, though themed wedding is yet to be in demand in New Zealand, this type of wedding can have a bright future in the market since significant changes are happening at least occasionally, like the number of couples requesting for themed wedding slowly increasing. Interviewee 3 elaborated that one reason that couples are not requesting a themed wedding is not only because it is expensive but simply because they are not really aware of what a themed wedding is all about and how it can enrich the wedding experience. In order for them to understand that, as a wedding planner, ideas must be put in front of clients through illustrations since the latter are becoming more interested when they get to see what the wedding planner is talking about. As a result, wedding planners should bring out the topic of themed wedding whether clients are asking for it or not, just as long as they are seeking assistance.

Moreover, couples might become interested in themed weddings if wedding planners would only provide them with a list to choose from with an estimated price range to help them decide. Unfortunately, only a few wedding planners around the country are providing list of wedding themes for clients to choose from. This is evident in the majority of the respondents who stated that they are not suggesting or offering themed wedding because they are more focused on emphasising that they are offering and providing wedding assistance, which is evidently too generalised. Interviewee 3



somewhat implied that it is not impossible to open a door for clients for a fabulous themed wedding, like a Victorian wedding for example. Everyone, especially the bride, dreams for a perfect and a fantasy-come-true wedding which is why themed weddings can be turned in demand in New Zealand.

Similarly, Interviewee 10 mentioned that it is quite evident that themed wedding is becoming popular and that brides of New Zealand are slowly getting away from traditional weddings. New Zealanders have a deeper respect for their tradition, which is why it is evident that couples in this country are taking one step at a time, and obviously not in a hurry to divert to a new settings for an important event filled with so many beliefs, values, and customs.

More or less, Interviewee 10 wanted to share that she had witnessed satisfaction from her clients who asked her to manage a themed wedding like a floral beach wedding where the bridesmaids wore tangerine, and the tables were decorated with shells and sand. There appeared to be a Rarotongan theme in New Zealand, with a flowery setting where the bridesmaids wore pink while the groomsmen wore charcoal grey. From this, it is likely conclusive that, despite the respect for traditional weddings, some couples in New Zealand is beginning to explore and be a bit more adventurous for one of their life's important event.

For further validity, Table 3 presents the experiences shared by the interviewees about planning and managing a themed wedding. For the record, these interviewees are not listed in Table 2 because they do not agree that New Zealanders are not interested in themed wedding, and that their shared experience will prove their argument.



Interviewees	Responses on "Wedding Planners with Themed Wedding Experience"
Interviewee 3	Among other interviewees, is the only one who provided the clients with a list of wedding themes. This is somewhat closer to having a themed wedding experience, since the clients seems to enthusiastic about it.
Interviewee 6	"We had one client involved the movie industry and they remember their wedding gown back 25 years. How did we refine them? 1940s Hollywood Glamour Glitz"; "we had a silver premiere...led the whole design...we had a big 30-piece gospel choir, we had Frankie Stevens song, we had gardens..."; "and now 25 years later they complained of its success for lack of the family and it was now time to remember it all and celebrate..."
Interviewee 8	"brides that I find...most of the girls that come to me...as soon as an idea of common interest that's going to suit them and a flow...as soon as they can visualise it...they embrace it very much...and give us the design that we can work with..."
Interviewee 10	"...the wedding I've just done, her bridesmaids wore tangerine...and so we sort of went in a very floral beach of sort scene...with tables we have shells...with some sands...it's just like having a Rarotonga but in a New Zealand type of thing"

Table 3: Transcript on interviewee's experience on handling themed wedding.

To balance the viewpoints of Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 10 and to contradict the viewpoints of the rest of the respondents, Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 8 asserted that the interest of the New Zealand's couples, in general, is increasing to the point that New Zealanders are starting to think that they have got to have a theme. This is also somewhat reflected in Interviewee 6's statement that New Zealanders do not have to have assistance coming from wedding planners, and do not have to make it expensive because themed wedding can be according to a plan; or they are just letting it happen. Therefore, it appears that as long as their ideas are settled on the event then everything will fall into place. Moreover, based on some evident trends in the wedding market of New Zealand, Interviewee 6 decided that New Zealanders are following even more comparative in nature. They are looking at American bridal magazines in order to take a closer look at the country's themes and also, to determine what themes in best overseas that can be



applied in New Zealand. Interviewee 6 insists that every wedding has a theme but perhaps it was not highly tolerated in New Zealand because New Zealanders do not label it that way. As mentioned in the transcript of Interviewee 9, style is a much acceptable term than themes.

Nevertheless the Interviewee 8 agreed that New Zealanders have a big interest in themed weddings. But compared to the level of interest in other countries, New Zealand has a different preference when it comes in seeking assistance for a themed wedding. Interviewee 8 mentioned that making a theme package is not feasible because it can be unpleasant for the client since it appears that the planner is limiting the choice of clients, and that the planner is narrowing down the client's choices. In other words, if the clients would prefer a themed wedding then it should only be themed after the preferences of clients have been finally linked all together.

Overall, the above discussion depicts that clients have different level of interest in themed wedding. However, figure 1 somewhat concludes that themed wedding is far from popular in New Zealand, at least for now, since there are some who are already aware of this innovation in the wedding market.

4.4 Buying motivation

A wedding is an important event, which is why couples are naturally motivated in terms of planning it. Some want it simple yet elegant while others have dreamt of having a wedding with different styles if their partner agrees to it (Shinn, 2007). This specific interest is evidently fuelled by motivations that some wedding planners have already known, since they are the ones who come in contact with wedding clients. By referring to the responses given by the respondents, the following motivation has been identified:



Interviewees	Buying Motivation	Viewpoint/Reason
Interviewee 1	Family & Friends	They are the most effective or influential advertisements, especially if the couples are close to them
Interviewee 2	Friends	People tend to listen to other's suggestion even though everyone has their own ideas
Interviewee 3	Families	Most couples believe in a family-oriented wedding
Interviewee 4	Family & Friends; costs	Family probably does factor a lot in the deciding factor. Also if they can pay for part of the wedding then the parents have to have a say in it as well.
Interviewee 5	Lifestyle	Couples want to be unique so they want their own ideas to be put to work
Interviewee 6	Family & Friends	Their wedding is their defining moment - defining them as a couple. It's their social entry point.
Interviewee 7	did not mention any	... I couldn't say. This is a hard one!
Interviewee 8	Bride & Groom; costs	They influence each other, and tend to use their shared interest for the wedding theme
Interviewee 9	Lifestyle	Couples has been together for quite long, that they want to consider their shared interest in the event
Interviewee 10	Advertisement	Couples even consult bridal magazines with sample pictures and articles
Interviewee 11	Advertisement; costs	People influencing the couples, most of the time, get their ideas from advertisement
Interviewee 12	Advertisement	New generations, new ideas, and new wedding settings too
Interviewee 13	Culture or Lifestyle	Planning a wedding, most of the time, include perceptions, and others.

Table 4: Result of data analysis on buying motivation of respondents.



Media:

Advertisements in different medium are one of many ways for wedding clients to be exposed to themed weddings. As Interviewee 2 mentioned that most clients hand them a page from a bridal magazine illustrating a style of wedding that they want for their own. They may even seek for assistance from wedding planners on budgets, as described by Interviewee 1. Media, especially those that are published, feature different articles that could easily confuse wedding clients since it usually involves articles on wedding planning checklists, selecting wedding venues, ideas for creating the wedding of the couple's dream, and sample pictures (Caravaglia, 2006).

Moreover, by referencing the statements of respondents in this specific motivation, it can also be concluded that media are being used or consulted by wedding clients. They want to get enough ideas on how to make their wedding a special day which can absolutely impress all the guests, whether or not they ask for a wedding planner's assistance.

Lifestyle:

Lifestyle plays a big role in important events like weddings (Partner, 2001) because it drives the theme or style of the wedding event itself, and this has already been reflected in the statements of some respondents in the previous section. Fortunately, the interviewees had been given a chance to elaborate more on how lifestyle becomes a motivator for a themed wedding. By referring on observations from past clients, Interviewee 3 indicated that wedding clients tend to have a themed wedding because they aspire to have a fun event that could satisfy their fantasies. Subsequently, Interviewee 6 asserted that lifestyle is one key buying motivation because it is used in defining the moment of the wedding as well as their social entry. In other words, some couples are using wedding styles for social interest, in that they want their wedding to reflect their social status. Similarly, Interviewee 7 asserted that couples want their weddings to be not only necessarily unique but to be filled with enjoyment. Therefore, it is conclusive that customers may also want to go for an already-used wedding theme, provided that it has proven to be successful and fun.



The statement of Interviewee 9 has been very detailed in linking the role of lifestyle in wedding themes by stating that couples tend to aspire for a themed wedding because they want to customise it with accordance to their personalities, the hobbies and any other interests they share. It is obvious that the lifestyle of the couple can totally dictate what style or theme the wedding should have. To strengthen this aspect, fashion has been said to be another buying motivation, as described by Interviewee 10. Since fashion is directly linked to lifestyle among the list of motivations, it is conclusive that lifestyle indeed plays a big role in planning a themed wedding or a wedding with style as it is called in New Zealand.

Lastly, Interviewee 12 and Interviewee 13 have a similar point of view on how lifestyle motivates the buying behaviour of couples for themed wedding. Interviewee 12 stated that a couple wants a change in setting which is why they want to have a theme wedding or a wedding with style. This setting is somewhat can link to the tradition and culture that other couples wants to avert from, as described by Interviewee 13.

Cost:

Cost motivates couples to have a themed wedding especially if they are informed that the wedding can be customised with style, without requiring the couple to spend excessive amount. With reference to the elaboration of Interviewee 4, couples are very meticulous in the cost of setting up a wedding because they want be sure of the cost involved. Part of them being meticulous is checking on how many people they would want to invite to the occasion and to consult about this with a wedding planner, if they prefer to have a planner's assistance. For instance, if a professional wedding planner provides an estimate that, if the couple budgets \$20,000 for the wedding and they only invite 100 guests then the couple would definitely be motivated to pursue a themed wedding. Interviewee 4 also mentioned that, alongside cost, the season and the environment also motivates couples to have a themed wedding. Couples may want to be married on a season when their preferred flowers are in full bloom in order to avoid further expenses that may arise from unavailability of flowers, especially if couples' preferred flowers for the wedding are seasonal.



In a similar manner, Interviewees 8 and 11 mentioned that cost has something to do with the buying motivation of the clients. Though it is true that a themed wedding does not have to be expensive, Interviewee 8 emphasised that, practically, clients would have to have a big budget in order to have a creative event. Interviewee 11 said that clients are after cost saving, in a sense that they would not pursue a themed wedding if this would exceed their allocated budget. In other words, cost only motivates clients to pursue a themed wedding if this would be in favour of the client's budget. Thus, evidently, clients at this point are just being practical and they are not allowing themselves to be motivated in the wrong way.



4.5 Factors influencing choice of themed wedding

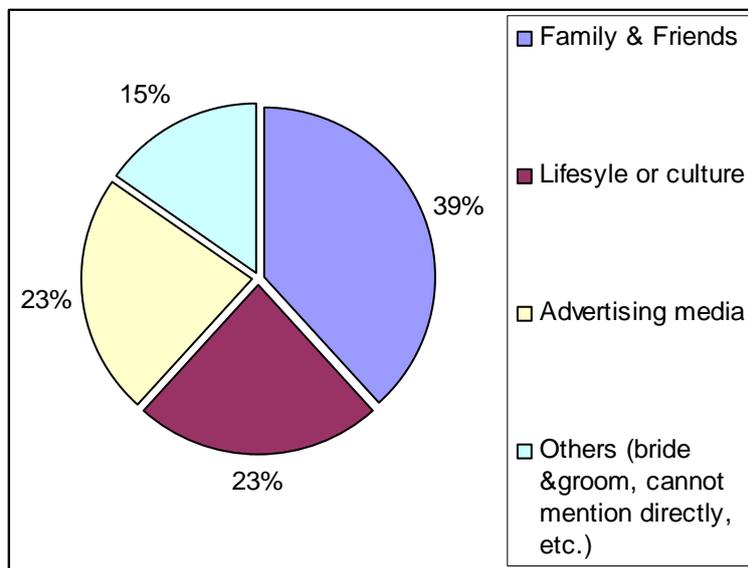


Figure 2: Influences on themed wedding

Family and friends

Based on the figure above, the majority of the respondents stress that family and friends are the most influential factors for a couple planning a wedding, either a traditional or a themed wedding. Interviewee 1 insisted that the influence of family in wedding planning can be seen especially when either or both the bride and groom are close to their families and friends.

Similarly, Interviewee 2 stressed that even though people are naturally filled with their own ideas, they still tend to listen to others, especially friends who have already experienced planning the same event, because it is a natural instinct for bride and groom to think of a wedding as an event to mesmerise themselves and their loved ones and friends. Therefore, it is usual for them to listen to suggestions coming from the same persons that they are expecting at the event that they are dealing with. Aside from families and friends, Interviewee 2 added that money is quite a big factor as well because no matter how couples plan for a wedding, if they do not have the budget to sustain it



then they have no choice but to either stick to a traditional wedding, though it can also be expensive, or just be creative in a cheaper way.

Moreover, there is somewhat of a link between the assertion of Interviewee 3, Interviewee 4, and Interviewee 6 where the first two respondents similarly asserted that most of their clients obviously have an interest in a family-oriented wedding. This is quite the same as the latter's assertion that most of her clients request the style of the wedding to match the house of either bride's or groom's parents, specifically the garden area where large marquees can be set. Interviewee 4 stressed the family's involvement in wedding planning is natural, but not in a sense that they are the ones who be completely in control of the planning. But, if this is the case, then evidently, it is either the parents are the ones who spending for the whole event or the parents have had half of the monetary contribution to the event. Media advertisement and other influences are tied, both having 23% from the overall number of respondents.

Media advertisement:

Firstly, media advertisement were said to be an influential factor, because bride and groom are sometimes establishing their own ideas from someone else's wedding shown in printed advertisements or in bridal magazines. Additionally, Interviewee 10 stated that brides, who are the usual concept organiser of weddings, tend to consult printed articles from magazines or online articles from the internet in order to have an idea of the latest trends in the wedding industry and the perceived lucky motifs for such events.

Subsequently, Interviewee 11 also insisted that media advertisements can be the most influential factor because they are the most accessible source of ideas in planning, organising, and experiencing perfect wedding events. In addition, families and friends, who are also been perceived as one of the most influential, sometimes get their ideas from advertisements.

In the same vein, Interviewee 12 emphasised that couples tend to consult media advertisement for their wedding plan because, among all the identified influences, these



can efficiently deliver new ideas suitable for the settings of the new generation. In addition, Interviewee 12 also commented that couples are using media advertisements to come up with a same-old-brand-new wedding setup like the ‘Bollywood’ style where both bride and groom are carried on a chariot-style box. This absolutely takes memories back beyond a modern time zone. After all, most couples would want to have a changed setting and they are using advertisements to gather ideas that could make their wedding event different to others’.

Lifestyle:

Lifestyle is another important influential factor according to the interviewees. Interviewee 5 mentioned that it is the lifestyle that differentiates and aspires couple to embark on something unique from that of the others, since wedding is one of the most important milestones in their lives. They are the ones who are patching their own ideas in order to come up with a plan for a perfect and distinctive wedding. This has been supported by the assertion of Interviewee 13, who stated that lifestyle can be influential because it involves the culture and perceptions of both bride and groom, which most of the time plays a big role in the wedding plan. The interviewee 13 also mentioned that some of her clients managed to conceptualise wedding plans with special emphasis on their own perceptions on what weddings are all about, and how weddings should be planned and celebrated.

Other factors:

Lastly, there are some influences which can be overlooked. For instance it is difficult for some wedding planners to identify the influential factors of couples especially when those couples are less open minded. Consequently, it depends on the wedding planner to identify and discover the information that is essential. This is what Interviewee 7’s statement is about when she mentioned that she did not really know what influenced her clients when planning a wedding. On the contrary, Interviewee 10 somewhat reflected that before something or somebody else can influence the couples, the couple themselves can strongly influence each other when planning the wedding. They have been together,



which is quite sufficient to draw their attention and to think innovatively together in order to establish an idea on how a particular event's setting would entertain them.

4.6 The future of themed wedding in the market

It cannot be denied that at present, themed weddings are not at their peak of popularity yet in New Zealand. According to most respondents, specifically Interviewee 2, New Zealanders have a very little interest as of now in themed weddings and are strictly adhering to traditional weddings. Another factor influencing the slow growth in popularity of themed wedding is wedding planners like Interviewee 4 who are not interested in marketing the product.

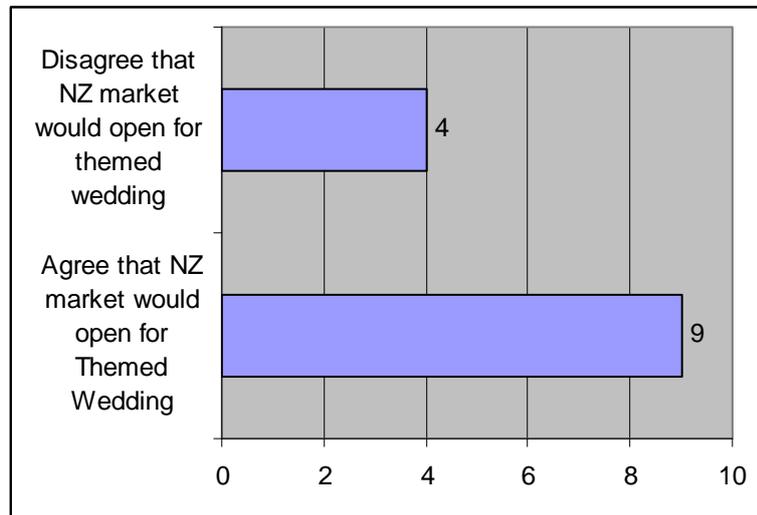


Figure 3: Future market for themed wedding

However, these seeming hindrances are not sufficient enough to conclude that themed wedding in the New Zealand market is negligible, since most of the respondents stated that they are planning to renew strategies to market themed wedding. They might have admitted that themed weddings have little or less popularity now but themed weddings evidently do have the capability to be a potential player in the wedding industry. (See Fig. 3). Therefore, it is worth the try. Respondents have different viewpoints and plans on how to build a bright future for the themed wedding in the market. However, by further analysis and interpretation, the following respondents stated most comprehensible responses that could expose the readers on what wedding planners in New Zealand may come up with to promote themed weddings. Table 5 presents the viewpoints of all the



interviewees regarding the future marketing strategies for themed wedding in New Zealand.

Interviewees	Response on "Future Marketing of Themed Wedding"
Interviewee 1	"Maybe that [themed wedding] is going to be a part of my marketing-part of what my clients will want more of.
Interviewee 2	"I suppose it's just coming up with the ideas really, and then putting them to people that--I think it [themed wedding] definitely could be a great idea.
Interviewee 3	"By providing packages, I guess, on the website, which I would have to researched on first"
Interviewee 4	"I'd stick to New Zealand register-type"
Interviewee 5	Interviewee 5 emphasised that she will put all the ideas in one book and use it for promotion
Interviewee 6	"I am constantly radar and scanning for ideas, concepts, images – I even pick up a piece of fabric and think “Oo – that has potential!”
Interviewee 7	"I already am marketing a theme on my website"; Interviewee 7 also mentioned that further marketing will be a part of her 5-year plan because New Zealand does not have a market that further yet.
Interviewee 8	"not sure...haven't thought that far"
Interviewee 9	Interviewee 9 had not thought of marketing themed wedding because her lifestyle is more suited to the New Zealand market rather than themes
Interviewee 10	"It is something I have thought about for the future. But I would want to get a lot of experience myself. Like if I was going to fully do the themed weddings, I would like to have all the props, all the different colours – um – just to make it more affordable for the couple"
Interviewee 11	"We intend to increase the range of offerings and include Packaged Honeymoons as well"
Interviewee 12	"Definitely we will do it and I think if we put it out there the market will be interested. There are no concrete plans yet on how we are going to market them yet in future!"
Interviewee 13	Interviewee 13 stated that they are marketing themed weddings through words-of-mouth. In addition, they treat their website as the strongest marketing tool.

Table 5: Transcript on wedding planners' plan for future marketing of themed wedding



Focusing more on elaborated viewpoints, firstly, Interviewee 6 stated that she has a different way of exploring and soon promoting services like themed weddings. For example, Interviewee 6 starts her plan to market themed weddings by constantly tracking and scanning for new ideas, concepts, and images and combining them with other elements. This creates 'theme boards', such as the type of theme that she and her crew had done couple of years ago, the 'long Safari' theme from Africa.

Similarly, Interviewee 10 mentioned that she had already thought of marketing themed weddings in the future but first, she would need to gain experience by managing a real themed wedding from scratch. There, she would have to start by collecting props, identifying matching colours, and be capable of making some adjustments to make the wedding affordable for the clients.

Subsequently, Interviewee 11 explained that all weddings that had been set by their crew were themed and, since clients are seemingly satisfied with those themes, this interviewee considered themed wedding has potential in the market. Therefore, as a part of future marketing, she said that they are thinking of increasing the range of their product offerings by including a packaged honeymoon in a themed wedding in order to attract more and more New Zealanders. In addition, since Interviewee 10's services and offerings had started to focus on the tourist market, it is now time for them to give consideration to the local market, and promoting themed wedding across the country.

Interviewee 13 believe that eventhough it would take some time, themed weddings can have a future in the wedding market in New Zealand, since new generations presumably would be wanting for more modern setting for special events like weddings, not to mention that there are some modern New Zealand couples these days who are requesting themed weddings regardless of the overall price. Interviewee 10 mentioned that in the near future, people would finally embrace innovative thinking like themed wedding because they want something different. Because of this need, they tend to push themselves to a particular area which is presently unexplored, like themed weddings, which have been rarely used in New Zealand.



4.7 Summary

This chapter is focused on the answers to the questions asked in the interview sessions. It revealed some interesting findings of the research. It also described what factors are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages in New Zealand. Many of the answers were consistent. However, some inconsistencies were also found. The next chapter will focus on the discussion and interpretation of these findings.



CHAPTER 5

5 Discussion

5.1 Chapter outline

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the key findings revealed in the research in relation to the aims and objectives of this study. Three research sub-questions will be discussed in this chapter: The interest for New Zealanders in themed wedding, buying motivation and factors influencing choice of themed weddings. The main aim of this research project is to explore the question: **What factors are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages in New Zealand?** and a series of related questions. Then conclusion is described followed by the recommendations for the further research.

5.2 Overview

Practically, a themed wedding is a product of innovative thinking of either the couples or wedding planners, where couples-to-be can have the opportunity to reflect their personalities, social status, and culture in their wedding. In addition, couples view themed wedding as one way of having an entertaining event that not only they but also the guests well could experience. However, it appears that themed weddings are yet to establish a competitive market in New Zealand because as theme wedding is not yet in demand across the country. In order to provide a better understanding of how it happened, interviews with selected wedding planners in Auckland were conducted.

Due to the evident popularity of themed wedding in other countries in the West, this study attempted to investigate the market of themed wedding in New Zealand. Unfortunately, some wedding planners admitted that some of their customers had already contacted them, asking for their assistance in managing a themed wedding, most respondents asserted that New Zealanders are not so fond of having extraordinary weddings. New Zealanders are still traditional; they prefer mostly simple but elegant



weddings because, aside from the budget, New Zealanders are not modern enough to embrace innovation in a tradition-driven event like weddings. However, some of the respondents point out that, although the majority do not want themed wedding in this country, this does not necessarily mean that themed wedding has no future in the wedding market.

In fact, with reference to Interviewee 6, all weddings have themes, but New Zealanders may not be aware of it because it is not a usual term. Most of them said that themed wedding are too Americanised. Instead, New Zealanders call them ‘weddings with style’ which primarily focused on colour schemes and the wedding venue. Moreover, customers have buying motivations which are not limited to cost, lifestyle, and media. These are also influenced by different factors that had been analysed by the researcher with the help of information provided by the respondents.

5.3 Research sub-question: Interest in themed wedding

What can the wedding planners say about New Zealanders’ interest in themed wedding?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it appears that wedding planners in New Zealand are not aware that they are already using themed wedding in almost commitment that they make. By analysing their responses regarding how they would define themed weddings, the majority pointed out that a themed wedding is all about colour patterns or schemes. Therefore, wedding planners have already been using wedding themes but seems unfamiliar about it; every wedding, no matter how simple it is, uses colours and other designs just to add uniqueness. As long as the wedding consists of colour patterns and schemes, then it means that it has a theme - a theme of simplicity as others would call it. After all, no wedding can be simple yet elegant without any styling, designing, and colouring. Therefore, themed wedding have existed in New Zealand from a long time ago.



Although themed weddings already existed in the New Zealand wedding market, this does not mean that all themes would become as popular as the simple-yet-elegant type of wedding. It is necessary to recognise that the themed wedding, which is the subject of this study, refers to a modernised or Americanised wedding setup which usually includes innovative thinking, extravagant settings, and extraordinary spending. New Zealanders are deeply committed to having simple themes or traditional wedding themes, so this means that modernised wedding themes are not yet well-accepted in the market.

Themed weddings, until today, are not yet changing or making an impact in the New Zealand wedding market because, quoting what Interviewee 2 already mentioned, “New Zealanders are not showing enough interest in going for themed weddings”. If some data derived from desk research were analysed, it is quite convincing that only few researchers managed to provide an emphasis in modernised themed wedding in New Zealand. Only few managed to mention real celebrations under a themed wedding. Further, Wilding (2006) strengthens this finding by posting that even now in this advanced period, only a few New Zealanders subscribe to wedding magazines, which happens to be the most accessible source for theme wedding advertisements and information’s. Since magazine already suffers from lack of subscribers, other advertising medium such as internet requires computer and internet connection just access for information online.

Although themed weddings did not manage to establish a competitive position in the New Zealand market over these past few years, it can be anticipated that the market might be ready in the coming years. These can however be achieved with the innovative promotions by some of the wedding planners who are planning to communicate the concept of themed wedding to their consumers. According to Kotze (2007), themed weddings are surrounded by promising opportunities in the New Zealand market because of the growing proliferation of wedding magazines and wedding websites that promotes wedding themes. By reference to the responses from some of the interviewees, it was found that the number of wedding planners who are opting to make marketing strategies for themed wedding is increasing, although slowly and gradually.



Is there a demand for themed weddings in New Zealand?

To lessen the argument, most interviewees who believed that themed wedding is not yet in-demand in the New Zealand wedding market, also agreed that a growth in popularity of themed wedding is not impossible. However, with the state of transactions today in the wedding industry, it appears likely that the market is not yet ready for such innovative change, most especially in the customers who are the ones deciding on whether or not to have themed wedding. Therefore, believers in themed wedding would have to realise that it is not yet the right time for New Zealanders to take the opportunity of the wonders of wedding themes, and to fully accept the term “themed wedding”. The term has far too long been avoided by consumers. This is because of its context, which suggests Americanisation or modernisation.

As mentioned earlier, western ideas and influences already has an impact on New Zealand market. However, New Zealanders may not yet be ready to accept innovation such as theme weddings when, especially when they think that they could affect the values and cultures of one of the most their tradition-bound events like wedding.



5.4 Research sub-question: buying motivations

What is the major motivation for couples to choose themed weddings?

In this study, four factors influencing the buying motivation of consumers are: families and friends, lifestyle, advertisements and personal influences. Among them, families and friends have been chosen as the most influential factors by the interviewees.

Families and friends:

First on the list of factors in consumer behaviour is the social factor. According to Burnkrant & Cousineau (1975), the social factor refers to the social influence that consumer get from everyone around them: their families, friends, or everyone in the community. They are the ones who, most of the time, provides suggestions for a specific product or service, which can be based on their own experience. Since it is natural for human beings to have an instinct of listening to the advice, recommendations, or opinions of others, it is no longer questionable why this factor was considered as one of the key influences in buyers' motivation. By creating a link between this factor and the factors for buying motivation derived from the interview, it is quite evident that the factor of families and friends is embodied as a social factor.

Most interviewees have their own opinion on why they thought of this factor as the most influential of all. With reference to Interviewee 1, families and friends are said to be influential because they have the capacity to convince the bride or groom on how the wedding should be, especially if the two are close to them. In some extent, families are considerably influential because they are the ones who are contributing financially to the celebration, as described by Interviewee 4. In addition, Interviewee 4 believes that most of the time, families have the authority to influence the decision-making for the wedding plan because of two possible things: the first one is that they are the ones who financed the whole celebration, and the second is that they have contributed to the budget of the wedding. On the contrary if they did not contribute to the wedding, then it is possible that their recommendation could indeed be futile.



Furthermore, Interviewee 2 believes that couples usually listen to the opinion and ideas of their friends. With these analyses, it is no longer impossible to see why families and friends have been rated as the most influential; it is a compliment to the buying motivation in consumer behaviour.

Lifestyle and culture:

Lifestyle and culture ranked as the second most influential factor because, other than the family, consumers are highly dependent on beliefs and traditions since a wedding is just one of the tradition-bound events in New Zealand. Therefore, this could also be a reason why the lifestyle factor is equally influential as that cultural factor. This is one of the reasons why New Zealanders seemed hesitant in adapting this wedding innovation as they want to preserve the tradition in wedding celebrations. Since, lifestyles are moving towards even more modern, it is no longer surprising that themed weddings, one day, will be highly in demand in the New Zealand wedding market. According to Interviewee 5, consumers may tend to walk away from a completely traditional setting to a modern one in order to make the wedding a unique ceremony.

As mentioned by Partner (2001), lifestyle plays a big role in the whole wedding preparation because it drives the style or mood of the wedding. For instance, if it is part of the lifestyle of the bride and groom to go boating every summer or spring then it might possibly be reflected in their wedding by setting the event in the midsummer theme. Moreover, lifestyle is also connected to socialisation; this could also be a buying motivation for the consumers because they may want to use an exciting wedding as their social entry. Interviewee 6 refers to this very reason as a wedding for social interest, in which some couples use the wedding in order to reflect their status in the society through wealth and prestige. On the contrary, this could be one possible reason why some traditional observers criticise the emergence of themed weddings - they discard the real essence of wedding which is all about the sacredness of being husband and wife, making it into an event which is bound to be a social instrument.



Advertising:

Third on the list was advertising. Media advertising was described by the respondents to be an influential factor, because the bride and groom are sometimes establishing their own ideas from someone else's wedding as shown from printed advertisements such as bridal magazines. Advertisements serve as windows for the consumers for information that could assist them in their wedding preparations. Most of the time, as described by Interviewee 10, brides who are the usual concept organiser of weddings, tend to consult printed articles from magazines or online articles from the internet have an idea on the latest trends in the wedding industry to create a personalised wedding. Interviewee 11 and 12 are of the same opinion as of Interviewee 10, stating that the advertising factor can also be influential because this is an accessible source of ideas ranging from wedding planning, organising, and experiences.

Personal influences:

Personal influences like the bride and groom decision on whether or not having a themed wedding duly reflects personal factors influencing consumer behaviour. By analysing the gathered information, bride and groom are usually having trouble in choosing themed weddings over traditional weddings due to influential reasons like the cost of the wedding.

Cost

The result showing that cost is one of the buying motivations of consumers should not be mistaken or misinterpreted. It is fine with consumers no matter how expensive the wedding is, as long as it is a success, as this factor motivates people in different ways. With reference to Interviewee 11, consumers are very meticulous in wedding pricing, to the point that they are not willing to pursue a themed wedding if this would require them to exceed their allocated budget. Alternatively, Interviewee 8 stated that themed weddings do not have to be always expensive because couples may be able to come up with alternate ideas with a combination of creativity and budgeting. Some propositions like this somehow encourage consumers to change their mindset about deciding for a



themed wedding. From this, it is evident that consumers are being motivated by the cost if this would be favourable to them. Almost everyone wanted to have a blissful wedding celebration because, as already mentioned, it is just a once-in-a-lifetime event. Unfortunately, it is rare for everyone to hear of an economically-themed wedding because the majority of themed wedding being promoted or advertised in different media, most specifically in bridal magazines are generally expensive.

Practically, consumers can really find a way to have a themed wedding without spending too much. But then, to some extent, this would not be considered as a mainstream themed wedding because most of the times, less expensive themed weddings are done by the couple themselves or by someone from their families. When we say themed wedding in the market, this refer to the “real” themed wedding which in reality is naturally expensive. Aside from the fact that the consumers would have to pay the wedding planners, they would also have to be prepared on the extra expenses which are not limited to the venue for the wedding reception, the church, the props, the foods, and the souvenirs.

5.5 Research sub-question: themed wedding influences

What are the usual types of theme packages preferred by the couples? (i.e. Medieval, Victorian, etc.)

Since themed weddings are not that in demand in the New Zealand wedding market, wedding planners who participated in this study did not have much to offer about themed weddings that they had encountered. In fact, most of them had not yet experienced planning a modernised themed wedding, and most of their work was engaged in traditional settings.

Nevertheless, there are few themed weddings that were mentioned by interviewees who had experienced that type of wedding. Therefore, the following sections, discussing the common preferences for themed weddings, are based on the findings from both interview responses and desk research.



Simple yet elegant weddings:

As described by most of the interviewees, the most common preference of consumers for a wedding is simple yet elegant. This meant that wedding celebrations do not have to be extravagant where the setting is almost out of the ordinary. Instead, a simple but catchy wedding setting is usually enough for the consumers to enjoy the event with all of the guests, without worrying about the budget since it has been strictly followed. This style or theme of wedding is very general because it mirrors the uniqueness of New Zealanders in terms of their personality. Interviewee 2, noted that New Zealanders may differ from each other in personalities, but they still have one thing in common: the contentment of having a simple but successful wedding event.

Beach, Mountain and lake weddings:

Beach, mountain and lake weddings can also be considered as growing in prevalence in New Zealand. Aside from the fact that these are the usual wedding venues preferred by tourists who consider New Zealand has very romantic (Johnston, 2006) fuelled by enticing scenes of mountains and lake.

Garden weddings:

Garden weddings are one of the usual wedding themes that appear often in bridal magazines, wedding planners' website, bridal shows and movies. This prevalence has been evident due to the distinctive aura of a wedding when it is held in beautiful, architectural, and sometimes structural gardens. However, an argument on whether a garden wedding is expensive already existed even before this theme had been popularised.

Some findings like that of Naylor (2001) say that garden weddings are one of the less-expensive wedding themes among all of the available, while others found garden weddings purely expensive because, aside from renting the whole place, which is already costly, planners would have to make thorough arrangements and modifications to the setting. These might include landscaping, placing of non-ordinary stones which serve as additional attraction, architectural style of the whole venue, the positioning of plants,



flowers, artificial flowers, tables, and banquet, the area for the music band if there would be a live band, and several others. With these preparations, it already conclusive that when others said that garden wedding is less expensive is no longer true. Gardens will always be costly because they still require arrangements and modifications which, most of the time, require additional costs, not to mention the costly payment for the rent of the wedding. Nevertheless, garden weddings could be less expensive if the consumers already owned a garden, where the only thing that the planners would have to arrange is the theme itself, and nothing else.

Asian-style weddings:

Lastly, Asian-style weddings are starting to be recognised as one of the common themes for weddings because the more people realise how unique Asian weddings are. In New Zealand, some couples wanted to experience the Indian dimension of weddings because they had been mesmerised by the uniqueness of the Indian style wedding setup, simply due to Indian beliefs and symbolism (Horton, 2002). In addition, by doing so, couples can already experience being in two places at once because the setup mainly involves the creation of a completely-different styled wedding in a particular country place somewhere in New Zealand. Moreover, using another culture's wedding style is somewhat interesting because it has different auras brought by the symbolism and props that have something to do with the occasion. These might include the romantic engagement of Tea lanterns popularised by the Chinese, creative paper dragon floating in the sky, and many others.

How does the cost of themed weddings, compare to non-themed weddings?

Some insist that a themed wedding is not solely destined for well-off couples because, as described by some of the respondents, specifically Interviewee 6, weddings can still come out with style even without a huge budget. However, it is practically true that a budget is very important for a wedding. Still, couples do not have to have excessive spending just to have a creative, personalised, customised, or styled wedding, since they could also do this by themselves even without asking assistance from professional wedding planners. Nevertheless, the latter's participation is highly recommended in order to ensure



collaboration in all aspect of the wedding. One of the reasons why themed weddings are not yet in demand in New Zealand is budgeting. 'Being expensive' has been a debate in the wedding market, because some interviewee believes that a themed wedding is expensive, while others insist that there are ways to have a themed wedding less costly.

Basically, there has to be a discussion in every debate. Therefore, the argument surrounding the budget issue in themed weddings must be addressed fairly. The reason why themed weddings are prevalent in other countries, especially in the West is due to commitment of people to their lifestyle, to the point that they want to reflect their personalities in their wedding. Westerners are not the only one who can agree on this reason. To establish this, Parrish (1999) mentioned that U.S. has recorded \$38 billion to \$42 billion spending annually for themed weddings, and unfortunately, a range like this keeps other countries like New Zealand from having themed weddings.

According to Toh (2007) budgeted weddings are already available in the market, which is why more and more couples would be able to have a themed wedding without sacrificing the huge amount of money that they prefer to keep for their future. This has been unintentionally complemented by some of the interviewees' responses, stating that themed wedding can be less expensive in some ways. But the real problem is that this so-called availability of less-expensive themed wedding is not present in the wedding market in New Zealand.

It was overly reflected in most responses that couples are trying hard to have a simple wedding just as long as it would be a success in the sense that the whole event is memorable and their budget has been strictly followed. New Zealanders are naturally born simple, which is why no matter how many times the country's wedding market evolves, it appears that people are hard to encourage, especially if this involves the matters of luxuries. Considering all the facts mention above, it is fair to conclude that themed wedding is expensive in New Zealand market.



Do themed wedding present a big challenge for wedding planners?

Themed weddings have a long way to go to make it to the mainstream wedding market of New Zealand. On the other hand, themed weddings may have already brought significant changes to the wedding market in countries other than New Zealand. Though it is not yet in demand here, if there are New Zealand wedding planners who happened to be a supporter of themed weddings (or ‘weddings with style’, as New Zealanders call them) then they would have to invest in marketing the theme wedding.

Unfortunately, it might take a long time for them to encourage the general public of New Zealand to pursue themed weddings. New Zealanders are quite conscious of spending, and they may find themed wedding expensive because they would have to consult wedding planners, which is automatically an additional expense. Besides, New Zealanders, as described by most respondents, are naturally simplistic, in a sense that they are not aspiring for anything outside the ordinary, as long as the wedding is held successfully even though it may be filled with simplicity.

Some respondents have mentioned that they have already had clients who asked them to make a styled wedding. Therefore, these respondents had already had an idea of what were the common preferences of their clients. As clearly elaborated by Interviewee 6, who experienced numerous themed wedding, some of the common themes preferred by most clients are Indian style weddings, beach weddings, and mountain and lake weddings. From here, it is quite obvious that clients’ style preferences are primarily focused on the venue. Likewise, Interviewee 9 mentioned that some couples aspire to diverge from the traditional setting to a much modernised one which is why they want to hold their event outside church. Linking it to the statements of Interviewee 6, it is quite conclusive that some of the alternatives for outside-church weddings are beach, mountain and lake weddings, since New Zealand is obviously abundant in such places.

Returning to the marketing of themed wedding, some wedding planners are coming out with different strategies in order to introduce the concept of themed wedding to the public. Despite differences in strategy, these wedding planners still have one thing in



common: to getting rid of the limitations in themed wedding packages. This means that wedding planners could offer theme packages yet explain to the client that those packages are still open to modification to satisfy their specific preferences. Themed weddings can bring out the best creativity for a wedding event but, since some couples are not aware of them, they just stick with traditional settings. Thus further marketing, specifically visual or illustrative marketing would help in improving the popularity of themed weddings in the country.

5.6 Consumer behaviour is a challenge for themed wedding market

As it was mentioned in the previous sections, New Zealanders are obviously refusing to look at themed weddings as a beneficial innovation at present because of their strict adherence to their culture, tradition, and values. Opportunities for themed wedding packages in New Zealand are evident in the proliferation of wedding magazines and websites that especially target New Zealanders but New Zealand has a different preference when it comes in seeking assistance for a themed wedding. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future researchers in this field should focus more in-depth on consumer behaviour and in the socio-cultural realm to understand why consumer makes their decision through the influence of such factors?

Consumer behaviour has already been recognised as a challenge for marketing because it determines whether the marketing outcome of certain strategies will be a success or a failure. Because of the growing importance of consumer behaviour in marketing, this subject has started to receive much research.

As stated earlier, consumer behaviour refers to the consumption of products or services by consumers. Since they are changing in quality over time, it cannot be denied that the behaviour of consumers is changing as well, since they are being exposed to ample of alternative market choices as well as plenty of unsatisfactory products and services.



By discussing consumer behaviour in the context of the themed wedding market, customers can be filled with different ideas that they may want to incorporate in their weddings. Couples have a different preference, which is why wedding planners are having a hard time marketing wedding themes; most of the time, customers want something new, themes that are not yet used by others. As a result, wedding planners would have to face a challenge to their creativity - to come up with different wedding styles, concepts, and gimmicks in order to cope up with the demands of the customers.

However, the problem is that wedding planners are not, all the time, competent to meet the first choice of customers, which is why they are also experiencing some difficulties interacting with them, as they have high expectations. Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry (1989) reported that customers have different points of view when it comes in wedding themes: some believe that a wedding is a manifestation of magic, a transformation of rituals, and so on. Therefore, the chances are that customers may not be enthusiastic with the existing themes and may demand something new or something more interesting although previous couples had already used it.

Based on the information derived from desk research, there are factors that are influencing consumer behaviour, one being the cultural factor. One perceived challenge which is relevant to consumer behaviour that can be encountered by wedding planners is the refusal of customers to adapt to themed weddings. As it was mentioned in the previous section, New Zealanders are obviously refusing to look at themed weddings as a beneficial innovation because of their strict adherence to their culture, tradition, and values. In other words, the cultural factor in consumer behaviour can be considered as a key hindrance in uniting New Zealanders to the concept of themed weddings.



5.7 Research question

What factors are likely to influence the demand for themed wedding packages in Auckland?

The aim of this research is to explore the above question. With reference to the interviewees, even though couples have different reasons why they are still choosing traditional weddings over the more innovative ones, it appears that their viewpoints yield only one perception: that they do not want to alter the essence of the wedding since a modernised wedding is, to some extent, diverging the focus of everyone attending the ceremony onto something else (i.e. a wedding seen as a social event rather than a sacramental ceremony). Most customers simply sought after preserve the real essence of the wedding even though it indicates that they would have to stick with a simple setting.

Then again, no matter how challenging consumer behaviour is for wedding planners, the latter should keep in mind that coping with the ever-changing behaviour of the consumer, through understanding the nature of their motivation, is very important. It is the only way for the marketing strategies and concepts to get their attention. In addition, Sheth et al (1995) already mentioned that knowing the motivation of the customers is helpful because this will enable the marketer, a wedding planner for example, to establish new set of efficient marketing theories and strategies that can suit the psychology of consumers. This will encourage them to get rid of other market choices to just stick to the product or service that the marketer markets to them. In doing so, different procedures or patterns can be followed. However, it is more efficient if facing the challenge of consumer behaviour starts from a very basic premise, which pertains to the fundamental information that every marketer has to know about customers: what do customers pay money for?, why do customers buy?, when do customers buy?, and so on.

However, with the responses of most respondents, it is conclusive that such popularisation seems far from happening. For the most part wedding planners are not focusing on themed weddings but on the primary service instead, which is managing a



simple wedding event. But wedding planners are not closing the door to the huge possibility that themed wedding could have bright future in the market. In fact, most of them are trying to extend their capabilities in order to market themed weddings in New Zealand.

It is not necessary to say that it is important to have a themed wedding these days since this is naturally optional. Couples-to-be can plan for a big wedding provided that this would not cause them future problems, specially in budgeting. However, what others want to imply is that a wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime-event for the couples and for that, couples only deserve one memorable wedding filled with entertainment, fun, and a unique atmosphere.

Themed weddings can be completely different from traditional weddings, if others would get to describe it especially in terms of an experience, but making it happen does not lie on the hands of the wedding planners or anyone else except for the couples-to-be. Therefore, everything is dependent on the preferences, driven by different influences, of the couples who will own the event.



5.8 Recommendations

Studying themed weddings can sound interesting, light, or easy but the truth is that it is quite difficult in nature and these difficulties primarily derive from the limited resources available. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future researchers in this field should focus more on the impact of themed weddings especially in countries like New Zealand. In addition, future researchers may want to explore from a variety of sources such as wedding planners and wedding clients, in order to establish comparisons or arguments that could help in bringing out richer information regarding the changes in the wedding market of New Zealand. One such possibility is obtaining information about the new sets of influences on couples' preferences for themed weddings or styled weddings.

As for the wedding planners, themed weddings are a good proposition because they can absolutely help in enriching ones' wedding experience. Thus, there is nothing wrong with marketing themed weddings for consideration instead of just focusing on the marketing of more general services. After all, the concept of a themed wedding is actually not to alter or contradict the traditional setting, but to provide a further enrichment of the experience by everyone at the event.

At present the packages available for weddings are related to venues and location rather than themes as stated by many interviewees during this research. According to New Zealand statistics (2004) the number of permanent and long-term migrant in 2004 was about 80,479. With the increasing number of tourists and migrants into New Zealand, wedding planners should consider advertising to order to suit the domestic market as well as to the migrant and the tourist market. This will be the next step of innovation for New Zealand wedding industry.



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7 APPENDIX

Appendices 1: Interview questions for wedding planners.

Interest in Themed Wedding:

Given your experiences in the wedding business:

1. What does a themed wedding mean to you?
2. What can you say about New Zealanders' interest in themed weddings in general?
3. Are themed wedding packages an emerging choice for couples or is there limited attention given to them?
4. What are currently the most popular themed weddings in the New Zealand and Auckland market? Why?
5. How do you market the idea of a themed wedding?

Buying Motivations:

The factors that influence consumer behaviour are the factors present in the socio-cultural realm, and thus consumers make their decision through the influence of such factors.

6. What do you think are the major motivations for couples to choose themed weddings?
7. Please rate each motivation from 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.
8. Why? Can you please elaborate on your answer?
9. What more can you say about the buying motivations of couples?

Themed Wedding Influences:

A themed wedding refers to the application of a certain pattern or concept that guides the overall ceremony.

10. Why do you think themed weddings are used?
11. What influences couples to choose a themed wedding? (Friends, family, advertising etc)
12. How does the cost of themed weddings, compare to traditional weddings?
13. Do you offer a themed wedding option to couples?
14. If yes to question 13 and couples reject having a themed wedding, what are their main reasons for doing so?
15. What are the most popular themed wedding packages couples choose?
16. What do you think are the prospective packages that can compete with traditional weddings?
17. What are your plans for further marketing of themed weddings?
18. Is there anything that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

***** THANK YOU *****



Appendices 2: Information sheet

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Factors influencing the demand for themed wedding packages.

I am Sivaa Krishnan and I am currently in my last semester of Master in Business Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Unitec, Auckland. Part of my degree program involves a research paper on a subject of my choice. My research topic is: Factors influencing the demand for themed wedding packages.

What I am doing:

I want to find out what factors are likely to influence the demands for themed wedding packages in Auckland.

What it will mean to you:

I want to interview you and talk about:

- General interest in themed wedding
- Buying motivations from consumers
- Themed wedding influences

I would like to meet you for about 45 minutes to talk about the points mentioned above. I will come to your office and interview will be done during office time unless you prefer otherwise. I will tape the interview and will be transcribing them (typing the conversation out) later on. All features that could identify you will be removed and the information on the tape will be erased, once the transcription is done.

You are free to withdraw from this research for whatever reason, up to two weeks after completion of the interview.



What will I do with this information?

By taking part in this, you will be helping me to understand if there is a demand for themed wedding packaged in Auckland.

Reward

In return for your valuable time, you will be entered into a draw to win \$30 duty-free voucher and a bottle of wine. Only one winner will be drawn upon research completion. Winners will be notified by email or telephone.

Consent

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

Please contact me on (09) 828-8489 or mobile 021-2584-277, if you need more information about this research.

At any time, if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor Mr. Asoka Gunaratne (09) 815-4321 ext 7035.

Confidentiality

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored in a secure place. Only my supervisor and I will have an access to your information.

Thank You!

This research has been approved by Unitec Research Ethics Committee.
To: September 2008 From: September 2007
Approval number: 2007.765



Appendices 3: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Factors influencing the demand for themed wedding packages.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I do not have to be part of this if I do not want to, and I may withdraw up to two weeks after completion of the interview.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only person who will know what I have said will be the researcher and her supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely for a period of five years.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I am aware that I may contact the research supervisor Mr. Asoka Gunaratne at Unitec, (09) 815-4321 ext.7035 or the researcher at (09) 8288489, if I have any queries about the paper.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this.

Participant Signature: Date:

Project Researcher: Date:

This research has been approved by Unitec Research Ethics Committee.
To: September 2008 From: September 2007
Approval number: 2007.765

