

The New Normal in Indian Marriages: Paradigm Shift During the Pandemic Era

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the changes in Indian culture in the context of marriages and social gatherings caused due to pandemic. The study employs archival and observational research using data drawn from the Internet. The research findings enrich our understanding of changes in the culture and behavior of Indian people. The said research paper is an attempt to indicate changes visible in the Indian culture in the context of marriages that are taking place today and following 'New Normal' rules and regulations.

Keywords:

Indian Culture, Indian Marriages, New Normal, Cultural Behavior, Pandemic.

Introduction / Background:

In today's India, a focus on the health of one's family and others has become an important component of social events. This has created new requirements and opportunities for offering products and services for the organizations postCovid19. Therefore, it indicates through this research paper that this is completely changing the event management of social gatherings and marriages. This study attempts to offer some of the options that may be considered or implemented in the context of event management with a limited presence of persons.

Note: The illustrations, names of the organizations, and brand names used in this research paper are provided as examples. They are used for representation purposes

only. Names of the persons used in this research paper are changed to maintain their confidentiality.

Scene 1: It becomes mandatory for Shantanu (in Bengaluru) and Sharvari (in Mumbai) to stay at their respective locations as the lockdown has started. Their marriage is on cards but it is not possible due to restrictions. No worry! They have decided to marry online in the online presence of their family members.

Scene 2: Namrata and Saurav's families had zeroed in on their wedding date last December and did not wish to change it in any circumstances. Nobody knows about the duration of the imposed lockdown due to this pandemic! They got married in a ceremony that is small and slim with the presence of limited people. The venue has



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just 50 guests, instead of the usual four digit attendance (TNN, 2020).

Scene 3: Kumar and Anita from the western city of Pune have decided to hold a civil ceremony at the end of December, followed by a dinner with only their immediate family. Family sources said that they feel sorry as they were unable to include their closed ones in the celebration. Instead, they have planned to organize special event in 2022 when they will be normal hopefully (DW, 2020).

Scene 4: Do not seek out for an envelope to keep the cash and then present ha same at the wedding. As an interesting example of deploying technology, there was the use of QR code on the wedding invites (such as Google Pay and PhonePe). The family thought that this will ease gift offerings as their relatives and friends were able to pass on gifts without any physical contact or personal touch. The money would be transferred to the bank account without worrying about envelopes (OI, 2021).

Sounds interesting!! Well, the first scene is from the television serial ‘Shubhmangal Online’ that narrates the story of the newlywed couple that married online. The next three scenarios are from life. Indeed, Indian weddings are taking place with modifications. They are changing and now deploying technology to provide the people festive experience as well as becoming smaller and leaner.

Research Limitations / Implications: The main limiting factors were theoretical choices, limitation of the literature. In this manner, the results cannot be applied to the universe of considered research, being restricted solely to the Indian context.

Practical Implications: From the main contributions, it is possible to highlight, at a theoretical level, the importance of personal

behavior, pattern of buying seen on special occasions such as social gathering and marriages. At a practical level, understanding of how the behavior of Indian people contributes to the changes in performing ceremonies like marriages is helpful in the understanding of changing social aspects.

Social Implications: At a social level, understanding of the social aspects in adopting ‘New Normal’ practices is advantageous for low key functions with minimum guests.

Purpose / Objectives:

As stated in the abstract, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate the changes in Indian culture in the context of marriages and social gatherings caused due to pandemic.

Review of Literature:

Marriage and Indian Culture

Marriage has an important place in Indian culture. A marriage, being an important part of Indian Culture, getting together on these occasions becomes imperative in people’s life in India. In Indian context, marriage is considered as foundation of social culture and followed as traditional practice. This is across all cultures, religions, and regions even if there are differences therein. Any calamity that affects human life will definitely have direct and indirect effects on marriage across the globe. The ongoing COVID19 pandemic seems no different and certainly affected the society and people. Its effect on events such as marriages is visible and will be seen post pandemic too (Maiti et al., 2020).

India has cultural diversity spread across the regions. With different religions and different languages spoken in different places, there exist different sets of culture. There exist a diversity of religion,



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languages, and culture spread across the Indian subcontinent. Accordingly, the process of getting married, traditions and culture specific practices followed during the ceremonies can have considerable variations. According to study findings (Sharma and Subramanyam, 2020), there are wide ranging psychological effects of the lockdown on society. With the cultural diversity In India, a family centric society with a high population density and extreme social stratification, impact (of these effects) might vary across diverse social groups. One such effect may be changing the behavior of people.

The behavior of consumers depends on their different aspects and characteristics, mainly personal, economic, social, and geographical. Marketing practitioners may get some insights from the marketing and behavior related literature as it addresses these characteristics, both for people and groups (Rana et al., 2020). The present study or research is about the behavior during specific times (in a pandemic) and for a specific event (special occasions such as marriages). This pandemic and the self isolation situation is the most recent one. In this context, there is no specific literature available about the effect of the same on cultural aspects (such as events like marriages) in India.

More specifically, the present research paper attempts to discuss the following questions:

- What are the behavioral aspects that may impact our daily activities (during difficult times)?
- What are the factors that impact purchasing behavior during special occasions such as marriages (during difficult times)?

- If the Indian marriages are changing due to the pandemic, what are the changes seen in the context of organizations (those related to the marriage industry as products manufacturers and services providers)?
- What innovations did people come up with to tackle the situation in the times of pandemic?

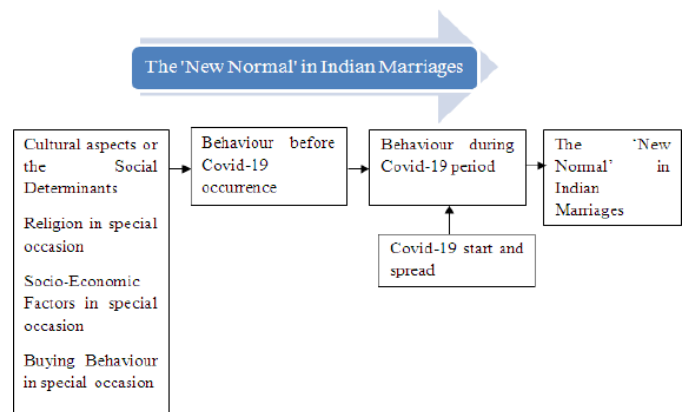
Methodology:

The present paper is prepared and positioned as a conceptual paper. Conceptual papers do not give data. They offer insights into the form of integration of literature (Rana et al., 2020).

Analysis and Discussion: Conceptual Framework

With the questions listed above, it was attempted to gather facts from the events taking place today. This has helped in investigating the aspects related to behavior (as a product). It was also attempted to understand how organizations make use of these special occasions and behavioral aspects to offer related products and services.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for this research



Source: Authors' Framework

The primary interest of our framework shown above in Figure 1 narrative focuses on the possible determinations of the changes in Indian culture (especially in social get together events) in the context of marriages performed in pandemic and the aspect of consumer behavior.

Offering the right kind of products or services will satisfy the need or want and this will result in good interaction with the customer. Further, this will lead to value enhancement both for consumers as well as organizations. We emphasize the situation and related events therein to develop a conceptual framework (as shown in Figure 1).

The expected result of this framework should lead to the development of a more theoretical and a managerially suitable explanation of behavior based offerings (of products and services) for the special occasions in the marketing domain.

Understanding Elements of Behavior (on special occasions)

The Elements of Behavior

The research paper considers the following parameters as aspects of behaviors of the people in the context of cultural shift or transformation. This is shown in Figure 2 (on the next page) as a series of concentric circles.

These are:

- Changing Pattern or behavior during special occasions: When people came across any kind of special occasion (such as social get together or marriages),

- it calls for changes in behavior. These changes are occurring at different levels such as interaction, purchasing, performing daytoday activities, and so on.

- Culture / Religion: It may be noted that these special occasions are mostly related to culture or religion. This is in the form of festivals or alike. On these special days, it is always felt that 'something new' is always a good sign. This pushes people to explore and consider innovations.

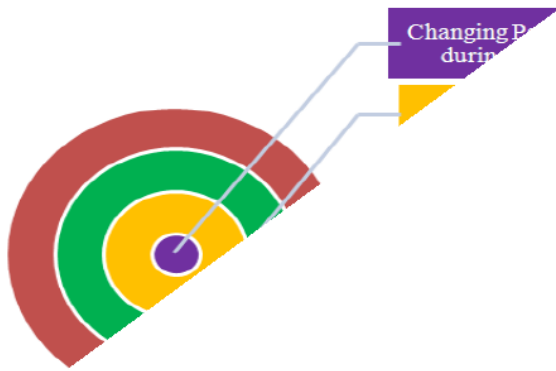
- Socioeconomic Status or Indicators: Indeed, purchasing the new thing/s is an experience and is influenced by socioeconomic parameters such as status in society. This will be driven by parameters like age, gender, occupation, annual income, food preferences and so on.

- Buying Behavior for special occasions: Special occasions such as marriages call for a different mindset that thinks about thanksgiving to the family members and the loved ones. Indeed, all are in the special 'functional' mode and want to celebrate at that particular time. Though purchasing intentions are high, with Covid19 interventions, these will be restricted to less and essential buying with due consideration of health and safety of the family.

Figure 2: The Changing Behavior as Product



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Source: Authors' Framework

Steps in Buying Behavior (During Special Occasions)

In the context of marketing and promotion for special occasions, general buying behavior may be going through the following steps as listed below: (Rana et al., 2020)

Step 1: Emotional Response to the Special Occasion

In this case, the special occasion becomes the central element and may attract all the attention both physically and emotionally. Here it may be possible that people are directly or indirectly exploring products or services. This may be with the help of either immediate or indirect contact with merchandise. It is but obvious that emotional responses are associated with emotions like joy, happiness, anger, grief and so on. Because of travel restrictions and limited attendance, it may not be possible for all the people to attend the ceremony. Hence it may be possible to make a video call and speak to the loved ones. This is like giving 'surprise' to them and sharing the 'joy' of seeing each other and sharing the feeling of 'happiness'.

Step 2: Cognitive Response to the Special Occasion

Overjoyed on account of the special occasion, people do not forget rules and regulations imposed by the authorities to handle the situation in the pandemic. Now people are more cautious about the health of the family and others. Cognitive is all about thinking, perception and acting accordingly. Complying with the rules and regulations is such a response that comes with more awareness about good health. Now, people are limiting the invitees (attending the function). Marriages are now taking place in the presence of a limited number of people. People are following social distancing norms and using masks. This will result in the venue as a safe place as there is no crowding.

Step 3: Behavioral Response to the Special Occasion

This response may be a combination of the above two responses that result in action or visible behavior. In the context of special occasions, the use of technology may be regarded as behavior response. People are livestreaming their marriage rituals so that their relatives and closed ones may watch it live. This is like providing them with virtual experience without being present at the venue. People are pushed to think innovatively and act accordingly. It is seen that slowly 'grand functions' are making their appearance in different parts of the country. In this context, people are exploring ideas and creative ways of enjoying together and receiving gifts and blessings from their loved ones. While numerous couples are tolerating actual endowments and monetary rewards from their visitors, some have changed to advanced wallets to dodge any actual contact.



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Service Marketing Mix (During Special Occasion)

Marriages or wedding is a kind of event and may be termed as service. Further, these four aspects also represent the 7Ps of the services marketing mix. Indian marriages are experiencing change recently. Marriages are changed and taking different formats (according to the people needs). In Indian culture, it is an important event. It is the

main day for the couple getting hitched. But due to the pandemic, they cannot have all their family and friends present at the venue.

Indian marriages are changing slowly and some trends are visible directly or indirectly. This is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Trends and Services Marketing Mix

Old paradigm in Indian Culture	New Paradigm after the Pandemic	Implications (How it has affected the 7Ps of the marketing mix)	(Services) Marketing Mix Elements
Inviting a large number of people to marriage.	Mini Ceremonies or Mini-monies	Less participation and involvement of people.	People / Participants, Place (Location), Physical Evidence.
No need for crowd or health management.	Required to have health-related precautions for the people attending the function.	Installation of sanitisation equipment at the venue. Guests will be offered sanitisation kits.	Process, Physical Evidence.
Fixed timings for the function with no control over people.	People in shifts to attend the function.	Guests are invited in shifts to allow them to adhere to social-distancing guidelines.	Process, Physical Evidence.
Preference to only 'auspicious days' for the function.	Wedding Dates (as available) after getting required permissions.	Selection of dates will depend on the availability of venues, wedding service providers. It is required to obey / comply with the regulations from the government as well as local authorities.	Process, Place (Location), Promotion (Distribution)
Traditional style arrangements for a large group of people.	Food and Beverages in buffet style prepared for limited attendance.	At most weddings, they will likely allow a sit-down plated meal instead of a buffet.	Process, Product / Service Offer, Promotion (Intermediaries and Distribution).
No specific choice of venue, whatever is available is booked.	Choice of Venue (depending on the facilities that comply with the 'new normal' guidelines).	Open-air places will be in demand as they offer less crowding as compared to high-risk air conditioning places such as closed halls.	Physical Evidence, Place (Location).
The traditional way of inviting people, home visits and other pre-wedding programs.	Virtual invitation emphasizing less contact and use of Digital Promotion for inviting people and Capturing Moments	Use of technology for inviting the guests. E-invite may result in cost savings. Use of services for grooming (make-up), photography and so on.	Price, Marketing Communications, Promotion (Intermediaries and Distribution).
Conventional ways of gifting to the people in the family.	Use of technology (online payment options) to receive gifts (in cash or kind) as applicable. Cost savings on traditional prints and saves the time required to distribute the same.	People may use online payment options so that it facilitates their closed ones to send gifts to them.	Price, Marketing Communications, Promotion (Intermediaries and Distribution).



Findings:

Future Outlook / Way Forward

It will be a challenging task to make any forecast in this context. One can only say that the effect of 'new normal regulations' will impact social gatherings. This new trend will slowly become part of such functions and as time passes people will get used to it. This is mainly because the pandemic has challenged the belief of people 'marriages are big functions as per the traditions. With the 'new normal' there are marriages taking place with enthusiasm and happiness albeit with not much extravaganza. This will set the new belief in the mind that marriages can be low key without compromising on human values such as coming together and enjoying together with changed context. Online marriage will become an option for the traditional one. It will be interesting to see whether such 'new normal' will set in for a long time to come or fade away as soon as the people get out of the grip of fear and swing back to the old normal under the weight of cultural burden or demands.

Conclusion:

Research paper findings indicate that some variables need to be looked at by organizations in this context. These are culture (especially religion), socioeconomic factors and the buying behavior during special occasions. The study suggests that these variables definitely configure and drive the buying behavior of the people. The behavior shows considerable positive associations with these variables and there is a change observed in following culture related practices. It may be noted that online marriage is a new concept and requires a lot of support in various aspects. Given this, it was suggested that all the stakeholders (such as government, organizations, and service

providers) may have an advocacy or supportive type of approach in offering products and services. The authors of this paper believe that mutual reciprocity and cooperation between government, society, and organizations will help in contributing to the development of this domain. This research paper may provide some theoretical insights to the readers. Changing behavior during special occasions is increasingly observed in terms of responses (such as emotional, cognitive and behavior). These responses may configure the buying behavior of the people and supported with individual characteristics, play a major role in the time of special events like marriages. The conceptual framework presented in this study depicts the mechanism of how behavior changes in time of social events and the aspects driving that behavior. This suggests ways for organizations to develop their offerings and (their) promotional strategies accordingly.

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