

Desire, Identity, and Rhizomatic Analysis of Social Media's Role in Shaping Wedding Photography Trends

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Abstract: *Social media acts as a catalyst for the spread of popular wedding photography trends, shaping the desire and mentality of couples' choices in celebrating their nuptials (Holzar, 2022). Especially, Instagram and Pinterest had played a greater role through its hashtags and collaborative features. This paper dives into the intricate relationship between social media dynamics and evolving trends in wedding photography. Over the last few decades, there have been big changes in how people hire wedding planners, use technology and social media for weddings (Maheshwari, 2018). Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) Rhizome Theory is underpinned within this research to examine the non-linear connection, multiplicity and heterogeneity of controversial wedding photos in social media. The technical parameters i.e., costume, location, special effects, and properties are considered in arousing desire and identity among the couples. This study also investigates how social media assists in getting wedding photos controversial and the ways in which these controversial photos are recreated from 2020 to 2024 in Kerala.*

Keywords: Rhizome Theory, Social Media's Influence, Wedding Photography Trends, Social Trends Multiplicity and Social Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has completely changed the way people communicate in India. It has created a huge forum for people to share ideas, opinions, and personal stories, including wedding planning and celebration. More than 10 million weddings occur in the nation each year, and a sizeable percentage of these unions spark conversations and garner attention on social media (Kannan, 2013). Social media's potential to transform private family affairs into public spectacles is a clear example of its transformational power, as couples try to highlight unique and popular aspects of their weddings (Maheshwari, 2018). The emergence of controversial wedding images, driven by elements like dress, setting, effects, and accessories, has sparked a conversation online and reflected shifting norms and opinions in Indian society. Social media serves as a dynamic medium for visual expression and cultural critique, as demonstrated by the frequently shared and altered photographs (Holzar, 2022). The study explores the complex relationships, multiplicity, and heterogeneity inherent in the spread of controversial wedding images over social media networks, drawing on Rhizome Theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As nodes in this rhizomatic structure, controversial wedding pictures generate a range of responses and conversations that strengthen the cultural fabric of modern-day Indian society.

Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome Theory provides a lens through which to view the dynamics of social media as a medium for the replication and spread of controversial wedding images. This theory holds that social media operates as a complex network in which knowledge spreads horizontally rather than vertically, encouraging the creation of many viewpoints and conversations. Through likes, shares, and comments, users amplify the reach of these photos, sparking discussions and debates within digital communities. Social media acts as a rhizome for controversial wedding photos, allowing users to quickly spread and alter the images. This study seeks to understand the complex dynamics of social media as a platform for cultural expression and interaction by investigating the dissemination and reconstruction of controversial wedding images via the lens of rhizome theory across photographs collected from 2020 to 2024.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pre-wedding photoshoots have gained popularity as a pre-celebration and pre-information tool by couples in recent times, particularly on social media. The cultural and

traditional significance of such a photoshoot is elaborated by Ari et.al. (2023) in their paper 'Pose-Pose Pre Wedding Tradisional Adat Bali Di Maxhela Photography' (Traditional Balinese Pre-Wedding Photography). The paper discusses the traditional versus contemporary model poses and the shift in cultural significance within the realm of marriage. The research concludes with the concept that Balinese pre-wedding photo shoots emphasize more creative and compelling photo narratives rather than traditional or conventional stories.

The popular and evolving trends in wedding photography are explored in the research article 'Actual Trends In Modern Creative Photography' authored by Khudaiberdieva (2019). The research reviews and identifies the primary trends that had emerged in modern creative photography, reflecting on its influence and contemporary culture. Khudaiberdieva dives deep into examining the overall landscape of creative photography, describing the contemporary situation and the way the medium of expression is used and misused.

Machado and Moraes (2021) introduce Rhizomatic Photography in their paper 'Fotografia rizomática: uma proposta para cartografia de memórias' (Rhizomatic Photography: A Proposal for Memory Cartography). The paper delves deeper into the philosophical ideology of Deleuze and Guattari, suggesting the cultural artefact the concept serves while being interlinked with photography. It emphasises more on the non-linear and interconnected nature of memories, which resemble rhizomes. The authors fervently content that photographs possess a potent ability to transform perception, contingent on the observer's past experiences and the surrounding context. Oral history in conjunction with photography highlights the personal narratives associated with photography, exposing it as a cultural story narrative tool that reflects personal experience. Preservation of photographs was emphasized more in this study as it acts as a way of preserving memories and passing on cultural and family stories across generations.

A new approach of 'weaving rhizome' was well researched and explored by Bañares (2023) in her study 'Weaving Rhizomes in Photography Research'. The study explored the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans in the research process through a unique research method. The author shared her photographic experiences of Cambodia's Angkor Temples, which led to the formulation of a new analytical method for understanding photography. Rhizome was the central concept of the paper, representing a non-hierarchical way of interpreting photographs through multiple connections. Breaking the traditional tree-like knowledge structure, the concept of Rhizome has a conventional multi source direction for the photographic analysis. The author introduces 'Body Cameras' as a key element of the research, which defines the spatial interactions between the photographer and the environment. This leads to the subject becoming entangled in the primary spatial connection between the camera and the environment.

The role played by couples in preserving their wedding memories through photography and videography is researched by Mäder (2023) in the paper 'Promising Images of Love: A Qualitative Ethnographic Study About the Mediatized Memories of Weddings'. The research utilized 27 interviews with recordings of married couples from Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. The couples expressed their recollection of their wedding moments and the way they were preserving their

wedding album and video recordings. The study revealed that capturing wedding moments as photographs had become a significant universal ritual regardless of culture and religious background. The study concluded with the perspective that the homogenization of wedding representations contributes to a collective memory connecting individuals into couples across different backgrounds. Similarly, the mediatization of weddings has fostered a sense of belongingness by transcending cultural and religious identities through shared experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this research is to explore the influential nature of social media in the creation and dissemination of controversial wedding photographs. This analysis employs a qualitative content analysis approach underpinning the Rhizomatic theoretical framework used within the study to attain deeper and dynamic insight delving into the interplay of social media and wedding photography trends.

The scope and significance of this study are centered on the understanding and evaluation of social media's impact in creating, sharing, and popularizing controversial wedding photography trends, utilizing the key aspects of attire, location, and special effects. Rhizomatic analysis (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) acts as a catalyst to bring out the invisible thread that connects and creates replication of these wedding trends in India. Wedding photographs have become a prominent ritual globally, which is undergoing evolution every year through adaptation and desire.

These are the research objectives of this study:

RO1: Investigate the influence of social media on contemporary wedding photography trends, particularly how platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest shape the expectations of couples and the stylistic choices of photographers.

RO2: Explore specific controversial elements within wedding photography as shared on social media, such as costume design, location selection, special effects, and other associated properties.

RO3: Identify and analyze controversial trends in wedding photography that gain significant attention on social media, considering their broader impact on the perception of wedding photography as an art form.

The above-mentioned research objectives led to the formulation of these research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to the virality of controversial wedding photographs on social media?

RQ2: What are the popular styles of wedding photography on social media, and how do these styles influence their recreation and further dissemination?

RQ3: What are some prominent instances of contentious situations involving wedding photography on social media, and what inference can be drawn from the selected cases?

Qualitative content analysis along with Rhizome theory, provides a lens to analyses the interconnection between the controversial wedding photographs and the role of social media in their perpetuation. The primary data analysis parameters include Connection (inter-connectedness and interdependence

of all the photographic elements), Multiplication (sharing and recreation), and Heterogeneity (diversity and variety). The wedding photographs are chosen based on their virality and controversial aspects, leading to multiple recreations among the couples. The evolution of the photo concept is checked in depth across the year from 2020 to 2024, resulting in multiple replications for identity and desire.

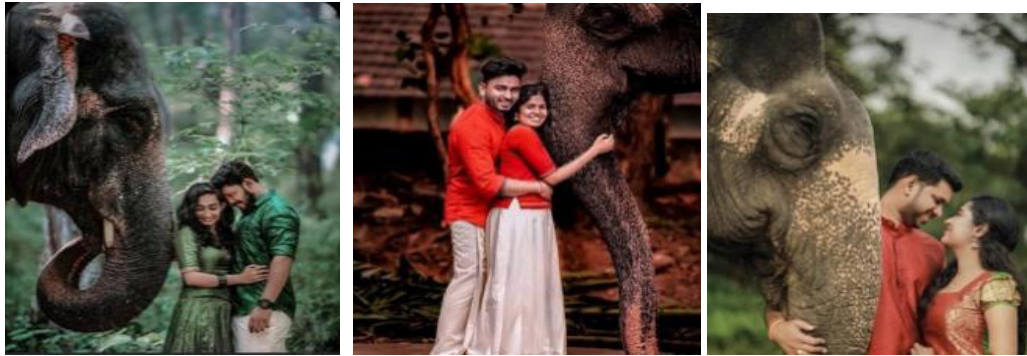


Figure 1: Elephant Photography Trend

The first photograph initiated the Elephant posing trend in April 2020 by Zero Gravity Photography, which later led to the second photograph taken in June 2020 by Catch Wedding Company in Kerala and the last photograph taken in December 2020 by Magmode Photography. Through Rhizomatic analysis it can be observed that all three images showcase a palpable connection between the posing couple and the elephant. This symbolizes a fusion of tradition and contemporary elements. All three of these photographs have gained quick attraction, forging connections among diverse

ANALAYSIS

The first set of photographs (Figure 1) can be named the Elephant-Based Wedding Photography Trend, as these photographs feature couples posing near an elephant, which serves as a subject of interest.

users drawn to their cultural resonance and captivating composition. These photographs evoke a multitude of interpretations and meanings among the viewers, reflecting the inherent diversity within the social media trends resulting in replication with minor variations. Multiplicity has resulted in the exemplification of the same trend across various social media platforms. Heterogeneity can be observed in the interplay of traditional attire and elephants (a cultural icon), forming a varied perspective.



Figure 2: Water Lily and Boat Trend

The figure 2 photos depicts couples posing in a thoni (a small round boat) in a calm lake decorated with Red Lilies. The first photo was taken in August 2021 by Vidhukannans Photography, the second photo was taken in September 2021 by Roopesh Nandana Photography, and the third photo was taken in September 2021 by Raheesmuhamd Photography. All three of these photographs are connected through the strong bond between the couple's posing and their water surroundings i.e., a boat and red or pink Water Lilies. This posture and mise-en-scène symbolise harmony with nature, adventure, and exploration. The photograph became viral, resulting in multiple resonations with romantic escapades in natural settings. The parameter of Multiplicity can be

observed in the way the women happily pose holding Water Lilies in their hands, connecting their love with nature. Yet, the variation can be clearly seen in photographic composition, costume selection, and background. Each multiplicity minor variation with new ideas, resulting in aesthetic pleasure. Heterogeneity can be observed through the combination of various elements, including natural landscape, traditional thoni, couples attire, and accessories. These heterogeneous elements combine to create a visually striking and culturally rich composition.



Figure 3: Masculine Pose in Feminine Attire

These photographs of figure 3 depicts brides dressed in traditional attire posing in front of the grooms with their hands held back, while grooms stand behind them, exposing their biceps, resulting in an imagery illusion appearing to be a masculine pose in feminine attire. This photography trend gained popularity due to its humorous and unconventional nature. The first photograph was taken in July, 2022 by KS Wedding Movies, the second photograph was taken in September 2022 by Loud story Photography, and the third photograph was taken in November 2022 by Team 24fps. The parameter of Connection can be seen through the interaction between the bride and groom. Despite the contrasting poses, the photograph displays physical connection within the compositional frame. This connection symbolizes their union in marriage and the combination of masculine with feminine strength. Multiplication can be sighted in the way the photograph was replicated through subsequent shares, likes, and reposts. Each of the replications of the photograph amplifies its impact and gender significance. The concept of Heterogeneity breaks the conventional wedding norms, empowering women with strength, encouraging the groom's passive nature, and challenging gender roles. This wedding photography trend sparks gender, power, and marriage, depicting women's role to be a mixture of feminine and masculine aspects.



Figure 4: Minimalistic Costume Photography

The figure 4 wedding photographs feature minimalistic costumes, with the groom wearing white and the bride wearing a blue saree with white patterns. The first photograph was shot in August 2023 by Wedding Company, the second photograph was shot in October 2023 by Magical Carpet Wedding Planner, and the third photo was shot in December 2023 by Snapshot Raw Rabbit Photography. The connection between all three photographs is evident in their costume selection and maintaining a minimalist approach, despite the background variation. The connection symbolizes the

simplicity and cultural values. Multiplicity can be seen through different versions of the photo concept being replicated, starting from the cycle prop to the ocean and in front of the shop. This exhibits the intensified adaptation of a trend among the couples and photographers for fame and aesthetic value. Heterogeneity is visible in the diverse photo stories narrated by the photographers, beginning with nostalgia, beaches, and street shops. The heterogeneity in location or setting adds richness to this minimalist photographic approach along with social significance.



Figure 5: Low Shutter Photography

In 2024, the use of low shutter speed technique gained more attention, particularly when used with a blurred background focusing more on the bride. The first photograph was shot in April 2024 by Ivory Tusk, the second photograph was taken in June 2024 by Pepperlane Wedding, and the third photograph was shot by Prasanth Bionic in Dec 2024. Connection is based on the primary focus provided to the bride in the first and second photographs, whereas with minor connection in the third photograph, the groom and bride are together. The circular blurred background and shaken foreground create more visibility for the mid-ground among all three photographs. Multiplication resulted in the spin motion similar in the first and third photographs, but the second photograph uses a varied multiplication with 360-degree spin motion, exposing evolution and creativity. Heterogeneity features the nature of interpretations within the trend, demonstrating different subjects incorporating blurry backgrounds in varied motion. The costume selection and insignificant setting act as heterogeneity, resulting in a versatile wedding photo concept enriching the overall diversity.

DISCUSSION

The Rhizomatic analysis resulted in various findings and discussions. Connection reveals a consistent theme of strong connections portrayed within the wedding photos. These connections extend beyond mere visual aesthetics and delve into deeper symbolic meanings. Couples are often depicted in close proximity to natural elements, such as animals or landscapes, symbolizing a harmonious relationship with the environment and the broader world. Moreover, the photos illustrate connections between tradition and modernity, as couples integrate cultural symbols and rituals with contemporary elements in their wedding photography. Social media platforms play a significant role in amplifying these connections by facilitating the rapid dissemination of images, fostering engagement, and creating virtual communities centered around shared experiences and aesthetics.

Multiplicity highlights inherent replications in wedding photography trends, with each photo offering a multitude of interpretations and meanings from 2020 to 2024. Replication and variation of images contribute to the diversification of wedding photography styles and ideas, reflecting the dynamic nature of cultural expression. Controversies surrounding certain images, such as unconventional poses or cultural appropriations, lead to further multiplicities as they stimulate discussions, reactions, and reinterpretations across digital platforms. The viral nature of certain photos underscores their ability to transcend geographic and cultural boundaries, reaching diverse audiences and sparking global conversations.

Heterogeneity is evident in the diverse elements, styles, and cultural contexts depicted across the wedding photos. The juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements reflects the dynamic nature of cultural identities and societal norms. Variations in interpretations and reactions to the photos highlight the subjective nature of perception and cultural

identity, emphasizing the richness and complexity of human experiences.

CONCLUSION

The study's comprehensive analysis of wedding photography through the lens of Rhizome theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) illuminates the multifaceted nature of contemporary cultural expression in the digital age. By examining the interconnected themes of connection, multiplication, and heterogeneity, the study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics shaping the landscape of wedding photography and its relationship with social media. In conclusion, the findings underscore the transformative power of social media in shaping cultural practices and visual narratives. The ubiquitous presence of digital platforms facilitates the rapid dissemination of images, fostering engagement and enabling individuals to connect, share, and reinterpret visual content on a global scale. Within this context, wedding photography emerges as a dynamic and evolving art form, reflecting shifting societal norms, cultural identities, and individual expressions.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of considering diverse perspectives and interpretations in analyzing visual media. By acknowledging the heterogeneity and multiplicity of human experiences, the study highlights the richness and complexity of contemporary cultural expression. Wedding photography serves as a microcosm of this diversity, celebrating the myriad ways in which individuals navigate tradition, modernity, and personal identity in the context of marriage and celebration. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for critical engagement with visual media in the digital era. As images circulate rapidly across digital networks, they shape collective perceptions, influence cultural norms, and contribute to broader social discourses. By adopting a rhizomatic approach to analysis, the study encourages scholars and practitioners to explore the interconnected networks of meaning and interpretation embedded within visual representations.

Ultimately, the study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving relationship between social media, cultural practices, and visual aesthetics. By illuminating the complex interplay of connections, multiplicities, and heterogeneities within wedding photography trends from 2020 to 2024, the study offers valuable insights into the ways in which digital technologies are reshaping cultural production and consumption in contemporary times. As we continue to navigate the ever-changing landscape of digital culture, the study provides a foundation for further research and exploration of the dynamic intersections of technology, art, and society in fostering one's identity and desire.

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