Wedding Dresses: The Effects of Culture and Technology on a Traditional Industry

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**Overall Industry Growth:**

The popularity of televised celebrity weddings, reality television programs depicting the various stages of wedding planning, and wedding-specific social media outlets have provided the wedding industry with a great deal of media attention in recent years. According to IBIS World, the $50.6 billion wedding industry is expected to grow 2.3 percent over the next five years, despite a slowly recovering economy ("Wedding Industry"). Because cultural expectations about the luxury and price of weddings continue to increase, the industry continues to gain momentum. One of the most frequently spotlighted sections of this industry is the growing wedding dress market. Even though spending on clothing makes up only nine percent of the wedding industry, this still amounts to an impressive five billion dollars ("Wedding Industry").

Although not as expensive as a wedding venue might be, the average cost for a wedding dress was still $1,211 in 2012 (Ponder). This is nearly a seven percent increase in cost from the average price in 2009, demonstrating consumer willingness to spend more on this "once-in-a-lifetime" dress (Ponder). Additionally, the demand for wedding dresses is increasing as the seventy million children of the baby boomer generation begin to reach marital age ("Millennial Brides"). This huge growth in the number of people reaching the median marital age is further demonstrated by the graph in figure 1 of the appendix (Van Beeck, Van Horn). With a greater number of consumers looking to purchase wedding dresses, it is not surprising that increase in demand has contributed to an increase in the cost of these gowns.

Cultural influences and expectations are also shaping the high wedding gown prices. For example, couples in recent years have shown a tendency to marry at a slightly older age when they are more financially stable ("Global Bridalwear Market"). This leads to increased spending on weddings as couples have more disposable income and purchasing power ("Cost of a
Wedding). Location also greatly influences the growth of individual wedding dress retailers, as the per capita disposable income for a particular area directly influences the prices local brides are willing to pay for a gown (Van Beeck, Van Horn). The most extreme examples of this are Manhattan, where the average price for a wedding dress is $2,877, and Idaho, where the average dress costs a substantially lower $878 (Cost of a Wedding). This effect is further demonstrated by the metropolitan locations of Vera Wang bridal boutiques, which are some of the most well-known and expensive wedding dress retailers in the United States. As demonstrated by the map in figure 2 of the appendix, these high-priced shops are located only in highly populated areas where the demand and income levels can support such expensive stores (Vera Wang Store Locator).

**Current Market Trends**

Location is equally influential in regard to the number of weddings, and wedding dresses, couples may have. The trend of a bride wearing multiple wedding dresses for various portions of the ceremony has gained so much popularity that, in many cases, the notion of purchasing only one dress is not even considered by the consumer. Couples often choose to have multiple marriage ceremonies to accommodate the vastly different customs of each spouse’s family or heritage. For example, an American woman with family from India may desire to wear a white ball gown for one wedding ceremony and a traditional Indian sari for a second ceremony. These types of marriage situations have more than doubled since 1980, and in 2010 alone, approximately fifteen percent of all first time U.S. marriages were between spouses of different races or ethnicities (Holmes).

Couples with families in different geographic locations may also desire multiple wedding ceremonies to accommodate family members with limited mobility, and the differing climates
for these ceremonies can often lead to the purchase of multiple wedding dresses (Holmes). This is also the case in regards to destination weddings, where a bride might purchase a lightweight dress for a beach wedding and a second fuller gown for her home-town ceremony (Millennial Brides). Even in cases where there is only one wedding ceremony and reception, about seventy percent of brides will still buy more than one dress in order to have something less formal to wear for the reception (Boncompagni (1)). Though the trend of wearing one dress for the ceremony and another for the reception was originally popularized by celebrities like Kim Kardashian as a status symbol, it is now a common practice that is fueling sales in the wedding dress industry (Rothman).

Other trends in the wedding dress industry relate to changes in cultural norms influencing bridal fashion. In general, there is a large movement away from traditional weddings and the pure white ball gowns associated with these occasions. A trend popularized by Vera Wang is the option of colored wedding dresses, ranging from pale pinks to deep reds and, in her more recent bridal collections, even black gowns (Boncompagni (2)). Weddings dress designers are also experimenting with increasingly more risqué gowns which include shorter hemlines and deeper necklines, in response to cultural demands for less traditional gown options (Hallett). While many brides still opt for white or cream dresses with lace and a long train, especially after the popularity of Kate Middleton's royal wedding dress, larger bridal shops with a variety of non-traditional options often have an advantage over smaller shops by capturing the business of unique brides searching for an avant-garde look (Finlayson).

**Environmental Factors:**

**Pop Culture**
Televised celebrity weddings have always captured a large amount of attention from consumers, but few in recent years can compare to the popularity of the wedding between Kate Middleton and Prince William. While such media attention does not always result in product sales, there is an incredible consumer response to anything worn publicly by Kate Middleton. The “Kate-effect,” as it has been dubbed by media personnel, is the immediate reaction of consumers to purchase anything worn by the Duchess, from wedding dresses to maternity wear (Kim). Shockingly, the maternity dress worn by Kate Middleton in a photo with the royal baby and Prince William sold out within hours of the release of the family portrait, and this effect is still being seen in the post-wedding bridal market as well (Kim). Since their wedding, there has been an onslaught of “copycat” dresses modeled after the modest design worn by Kate during her famous nuptials. For around $2,000 brides can sport a "lace 3/4-sleeve princess wedding dress" that is nearly identical to Kate’s original dress (see Figures 3 and 4; Finlayson). Despite the fact that the wedding occurred a few years ago, this style continues to be sought after by brides at every price point.

Other iconic figures, especially those from movies, also have been affecting consumer preferences in wedding dress styles. With the popularity of “The Great Gatsby” movie and the television series “Downton Abbey,” 1920’s style wedding gowns have been generating a large amount of sales volume recently (Chang). This style has also been perpetuated by Kate Moss and Lauren Bush, two well-known public figures who both chose retro, vintage dresses for their highly publicized weddings (Chang). Another recent cinematic phenomenon, “The Hunger Games” has also been inspiring replica weddings gowns styled after the wedding dress Katniss (played by Jennifer Lawrence) wears in the sequel that premiered November 22nd of this year (Gundell). Impressively, replica gowns resembling the apparel from this popular movie were
available in stores such as David’s Bridal weeks prior to the premiere of the film, demonstrating the influence such movies have on the bridal market (Gundell). As stated in the New York Times, “bridal is very influenced by celebrities and the red carpet,” giving a large amount of trend power to actresses, whether they are getting married on or off screen (Chang). For bridal designers and business owners alike, it is evident that staying ahead of pop culture trends is essential to achieving sales volume.

**Social Media**

Another pop culture phenomenon that has been impacting the bridal market is the exponential use of social media websites, such as Pinterest, for planning wedding details. Around eighty percent of the 48.7 million users of Pinterest are women, most of whom are ages 25 to 34 (Velasco). With the average age for a bride now at 29 years old, Pinterest and other social media sites seem to be ideal marketing outlets for bridal retailers (Cost of a Wedding). As repeat sales are not typical in the bridal industry, referrals are crucial to maintaining sales, and social media sites are an unbelievably important tool for modern bridal marketing. According to CNBC, Pinterest is now driving more bridal referral traffic than Facebook due to its ease of use (Velasco).

However, there are limits to the effectiveness of Pinterest as a marketing tool for the bridal industry. One massive complication is the number of users planning fictitious weddings while still single. In one 2011 survey by TheKnot.com, a popular wedding planning website, forty percent of the 20,000 brides questioned admitted to visiting a wedding planning site before becoming engaged, regardless of if they had a boyfriend or not (Krueger). In the same survey, thirteen percent of single women even created profiles, where they get a checklist, planner, and budget tool, demonstrating the depths to which women are planning their weddings prior to
engagement (Krueger). One psychologist, Lisa Morse, believes that this sort of pre-planning makes it more difficult for single women to find a relationship, as it is challenging to find someone who wants to be plugged into your life exactly the way it is (with) all the choices you’ve (already) made (Krueger). While this suggests that such social media sites may not be immediately useful for generating wedding dress sales, the technology is useful for building brand awareness.

When single or engaged women “pin” to an image of a wedding gown on Pinterest, they obtain a link to the product that is stored on their “board” for later viewing. When the woman eventually does go bridal gown shopping, she will likely go first to the retailer that offers the particular gown she “pinned.” Regardless of whether she purchases that gown or a different one from the retailer, the foot traffic is beneficial in an industry with so many substitutes (Van Beeck, Van Horn). Additionally, single women who are friends or bridesmaids may use ideas gathered from their social media sites to refer the bride to a particular retailer, even though they have not personally bought anything from that store. Similar referrals can also happen when a friend sees a bridesmaid’s gown she would like to wear. The woman may influence the bride to shop at that particular retailer for her wedding gown, so that the bridesmaid has the chance to receive her ideal gown as well.

Beyond the idea of referrals, the use of social media websites can greatly influence brand loyalty. Consumers often purchase a product simply because they have “seen” the commercial 10 times, and, as stated by Shannon Whitney, owner of Wedding Planning Plus, a successful wedding planning business explains, “it is the same with weddings... We’re just programmed to want what we see and what’s around us” (Chang). By using this tactic, social media buzz could help generate awareness about a retailer’s brand and product offerings for future purchase.
Reality Television

Besides social media, some of the most well-known media outlets affecting the wedding dress market are reality television programs such as TLC’s Say Yes to the Dress. This show depicts various brides shopping for wedding gowns at upscale boutiques in either New York or Georgia, as well as all the drama that ensues as they search for the one. The brides depicted usually have a large entourage of friends and family with them and even bigger budgets for their gown, adding the drama necessary for all reality television programs. Unfortunately, as the show has gained popularity, many brides have begun to view the program as a guideline on how a wedding dress should be purchased.

By following the procedures set up in the reality shows, brides are making it increasingly difficult for bridal salespeople to sell a gown. For example, in sync with the reality program, brides have been bringing an unprecedented amount of friends and family with them to help pick out their dress. What used to be an intimate affair for just a mother and daughter has grown to include six to ten people (McMillin). With so many opinions being thrown at the bride, it can be very difficult for salespeople to satisfy the entourage, please the bride, and make the sale. The multitude of different visions for the gown can also lead to trying on an excessive amount of dresses, taking up a consultant’s time. This makes it hard for consultants to have more than a few appointments each day, directly leading to a loss in sales volume.

Still, a few of the impacts of reality programs can be somewhat beneficial to wedding dress retailers, especially those firms that focus on offering low prices. On the show, dresses can cost over $10,000, which makes small-town or discount retailers with gowns around $2,000 or less look like colossal bargains (McMillin). However, the high prices of the gowns on these reality shows can also influence brides to spend more on their dress. In fact, in 2012, nearly one
third of all brides exceeded their wedding budgets, leading many couples to start their marriages already in debt (Grossman).

**Economy**

Economic pressures have been influencing all luxury industries, and while the wedding industry did experience a decline from 2006 to 2009, there has been a considerable increase in wedding spending in recent years (See figure 5; Van Beeck, Van Horn). While the increase signals the returning optimism of newlyweds about future financially stability, it also hints at a cultural belief in the necessity of lavish weddings. In 2012, the average wedding cost $26,989, not including the honeymoon, while the median household income was only $45,000 (Grossman). Even more shocking, a XO Group Inc. survey found that about 1 in 8 brides (13 percent) are spending more than $40,000 on their nuptials, and nearly 1 in 4 (23 percent) said they didn't even have a budget (Groenke).

Regardless of budget constraints, couples are still spending large amounts of money on lavish weddings. This demonstrates the deep cultural significance of weddings which is fueling industry growth. While the industry as a whole is growing, some segments of the wedding industry, such as wedding consulting, extravagant venues, flowers, and decadent decor, are suffering as couples attempt to avoid debt and cut costs (Balancing the Wedding Budget). Fortunately for wedding dress retailers, however, Global Industry Analysts, Inc. reports that the upbeat, unrelenting attitude of brides to compromise and skimp on everything, but their wedding dresses, is a major factor providing buoyancy to the industry even during tough, economic circumstances (Global Bridalwear Market). As eloquently stated in USA Today, brides have been groomed for magic ever since they played Disney princess, and that lofty fairytale idea is keeping the wedding dress industry afloat (Grossman).
Marriage and Divorce Rates

While couples, and especially brides, are spending more money on weddings, changes in the marriage rate have the potential to affect the wedding dress market. According to data from the National Center for Health Statistics, the number of marriages across the USA fell more than 5% during the recession, and this trend of decreasing marriage rates is clear in Figure 6 of the Appendix (Jayson). Many researchers cite the rise in cohabitation as a key factor in the decline, as well as the cultural ‘rules’ compelling couples to wait to marry until they have reached upper-class status (Marriage Rate Declines).

While marriage rates during the recession appear to signal a poor outlook for the wedding industry, the decline in the number of marriages does not directly indicate future profit loss for companies in the wedding dress industry. According to recent estimates, the approximately 175,000 weddings that have been postponed since the recession began may soon be taking place in the improved financial conditions (Jayson). According to forecasts by the private company Demographic Intelligence, marriage rates appear stagnant or declining among those with a high school education or less, younger Americans, and the less affluent, (however) numbers are rising among women ages 25-34, the college-educated and the affluent, which is where short-term increases in weddings will be concentrated (Jayson). The rising number of marriages among college-educated, wealthy Americans reflects the cultural belief that couples should marry when financially stable, which has been helping fund the increase in wedding spending for the wedding industry. This increase in spending, despite a decrease in the number of weddings, can be seen in Figure 7 of the Appendix (Van Beeck, Van Horn).

In addition to the increase in wedding spending, the decline in number of first marriages has been partially offset by rise in divorce rates, and the consequential rise in the number of
second marriages of one or more partners (Millennial Brides). While many young couples are waiting to marry later in life, older divorcees often have significantly more purchasing power when planning for a second wedding than with their first. With over thirty percent of all people who marry each year having their second or third marriages, it is clear that a large amount of wedding spending comes from couples getting remarried later in life (Jayson).

**Competitive Strategies:**

**Brick and Mortar Stores / “The Wedding Dress Experience”**

It is evident through all the previous statistics that the consumers who will be spending the most money in the wedding dress industry are mainly wealthy, college-educated women ages 25-34, and retailers are using many different tactics to try and capture their valuable business (Jayson). One tactic being used by most upscale, brick and mortar wedding dress shops is to sell the atmosphere and the wedding dress experience to brides, rather than just the gown itself (Tjader). This experience involves using a bridal consultant to focus the consumer on the emotional aspect of the sale and attempting to elicit an emotional response to a dress. To accomplish this, the consultant may jack up the bride with a veil, bouquet, and other accessories to give the image of walking down the aisle, so that they may focus on the emotion of the wedding rather than the price or features of the dress itself (Greathouse).

This technique is often extremely effective because when buying a wedding dress, the emotional aspects of the transaction can (often) overwhelm the buyer’s ability to make a rational decision (Greathouse). In some cases, bridal stores even offer champagne or other refreshments to add to the luxury and hype involved in the wedding dress selection (Tjader). However, this type of selling technique involves more than just emotional appeals. Since brick and mortar stores often have higher priced offerings than an online retailer, the consultant must provide
other benefits to convince the consumer that the price is worthwhile. This can include providing style and trend expertise, helping facilitate compromise between a bride’s desires and the expectations of her family, as well as suggesting slight alterations to a gown to help make the sale.

Many brick and mortar stores also offer added benefits such as brand name gowns, the ability to try on multiple fits and gown styles, and in-house alterations. Not only does the ability to have a seamstress discuss alterations with the bride before purchase provide additional benefit to the consumer, but it also generates added revenue for the retailer. Since wedding dress alterations can cost anywhere from fifty to two-hundred dollars, the ability to keep that revenue in-house is a massive benefit to the wedding dress shop (Khalil). Many brick and mortar retailers also offer sashes, veils, jewelry, and shoes that provide the customization that many brides seek while substantially adding to the shop’s revenue (Miksen). Some retailers go as far as offering tuxedo rentals and bridesmaid dresses in an attempt to be a “one stop wedding shop” which provides convenience to the bride while increasing sales (Miksen).

**Plus Size Options**

Another way for bridal stores to capture more market share is to accommodate the growing segment of plus-size brides. About twenty-five percent of the 2.4 million women who get married in the US each year are a size 14 or larger, yet sample sizes at most wedding dress retailers are often much smaller (Tjader). Additionally, bridal sizes are often smaller than their casual clothing retail counterparts, making wedding dress shopping for larger brides a stressful, and often embarrassing affair as they are forced to try on dresses that are too small (Beard). Even when plus sized options are available, there is often a very small selection of gowns to
choose from, leading many larger brides to search online for dresses rather than making a trip to a retailer.

However, some stores are taking advantage of this under-served segment by offering the "wedding dress experience" to plus sized brides through larger sizes, many options, and an inviting atmosphere. One such store in Minneapolis called Luxe caters specifically to plus-sized brides seeking a glamorous experience by greeting (them) with a glass of champagne as they enter spacious dressing rooms decorated with shimmering chandeliers, fainting couches, and size 18/20 mannequins donning the latest in bridal fashion (Tjader). This upscale bridal retailer has had massive success due to the lack of similar stores, and over half of their customers come from out-of-state to have their own "bridal moment" (Tjader). According to data from NPD Group, the success of this business is not surprising considering that plus size sales in apparel are growing faster than women's apparel overall, demonstrating the huge opportunities in this particular segment (Little (1)).

**Online Dress Shopping**

Another segment that is increasing in popularity is that of online wedding dress shopping. With the rise of online shopping and the focus on cutting wedding costs, many brides are opting to purchase a dress online rather than go to a traditional brick and mortar store. While this development has affected many traditional bridal shops, some retailers are embracing the technology as an extension of their current business. One such retailer is Vera Wang who, in addition to a website where brides can view and purchase her latest gowns, now has an iPhone app that allows brides to search and choose their dress from home (These Wedding-Planning Tools).
While many brides still choose to have the experience of going to a wedding dress shop and trying on gowns, this app, much like Pinterest, allows brides to get an idea of what they may be looking for and builds brand loyalty when they do go try on a gown. In addition, websites in which brides resell their gowns gained popularity during the recession and continue to be useful to many frugal brides (Lock). Another interesting development in these websites is the idea of preselling one's gown before actually getting married. According to PreOwnedWeddingDresses.com, brides typically get back 50% of the retail price of the dress (and) brides who pre-sell tend to be slightly more affluent women with gowns hovering in the $5,000 range (Thau). This demonstrates that while brides are still willing to pay a high price for a glamorous gown, they are often looking for ways to have a luxurious wedding without paying the upscale prices.

**Low Price and Mass Production**

Due to the number of brides searching for ways to have all the luxury for less, many mass merchandisers have entered the wedding dress market with cheap, mass produced gowns at affordable price points. While David's Bridal continues to be the leader in discount bridal wear, casual-wear retailers such as J. Crew, Chico's, Ann Taylor, and Urban Outfitters have entered the wedding dress market with mass-produced gowns aimed at a budget-conscious bride (Little (2)). Even Target recently created a line of wedding dresses ranging from $99.99 to $129.99 in an attempt to capture consumers at the lower ends of the income bracket (Roberts). However, many of these retailers still lack quality and uniqueness when attempting to compete with high-end wedding dress retailers. While brides can appreciate the lower cost of these dresses, many consumers still prefer a one-of-a-kind gown or the consulting experience that many budget retailers do not offer.
**Future Industry Leaders**

**Vera Wang**

Despite the large number of retailers entering the bridal industry, there are still a few large players who have a major hold on the wedding dress market. One of the most powerful names in bridal apparel is Vera Wang, and with her massive amount of brand popularity and constant innovation, it is likely that her brand will continue to rule the bridal scene in the foreseeable future. Vera Wang is often the first choice for celebrity bridal wear in the United States, and has been worn by countless musicians, actresses, athletes, and political figures, including most recently, creating all three wedding gowns worn by Chrissy Teigen during her wedding to John Legend (Rothman).

Beyond the influential publicity given to Vera Wang by such celebrities, the designer also has a reputation for pushing the envelope for bridal wear fashion and creating styles that appeal to modern non-conventional brides. One of the most outrageous ideas that Vera Wang has ever popularized is the creation of colored wedding dresses. What started as mainly subtle changes from white to pale pinks and tans now includes radical red and black weddings gowns, displayed in her 2011 collections (Arthurs). Vera Wang's popularity is largely based on her shocking, “pure theater” designs and while they are not usually high sellers, they still (cause) a trickle-down effect demonstrating the power the designer holds over the industry (Pasquarelli).

One of the ways Vera Wang further spreads brand awareness is through her use of technology and mobile marketing. The designer has her own “Vera Wang on Weddings” app which helps a bride see what dress styles would look best on her individual body type, even before stepping foot into a store (“These Wedding-Planning Tools”). Not only does this app help a bride determine what type of dress to look for, it also familiarizes the consumer with the many
product offerings available at Vera Wang. Through this technology, it is possible for a bride to “fall in love” with a Vera Wang dress before trying on any gowns at all. As with other mobile marketing techniques mentioned above, this alone may be enough to get a bride into a Vera Wang store, whether she purchases the same gown or not.

Despite all of her power and influence in the high-end bridal retail segment, Vera Wang has furthered her reach by partnering with lower-budget retailers to sell exclusive, affordable lines. In 2011, Vera Wang partnered with David’s Bridal to offer an exclusive collection of brand-name gowns ranging from $550 to $1,500 (Pasquarelli). According to Catalina Maddox-Wagers, executive vice president of merchandising for David’s Bridal, “the entire line, including accessories, bridesmaid dresses and shoes, exceeded sales projections by 20% in 2011,” demonstrating the immense impact Vera Wang has on bridal apparel (Pasquarelli).

**David’s Bridal**

The partnership with Vera Wang is only one example of the how David’s Bridal remains competitive. Despite being considered a lower quality retailer, “nearly 60% of all brides in the US choose to shop at one of (the) more than 300 David’s Bridal stores located across the US” (David's Bridal Launches My Event). Though David’s Bridal does not offer the same high standard as upscale bridal boutiques, they thrive on their ability to offer cost-effective versions of the latest bridal fashions and most popular designers, including Vera Wang and Zac Posen (Barker). The chain has also proven to be adept at recognizing growing trends, and making them available to the consumer sooner than can be accomplished by high-end designers. For example, knock-off dresses resembling those in the popular movie “The Hunger Games: Catching Fire” were available at David’s Bridal months before the movie premiered in November (Gundell).
Similar to Vera Wang stores, David’s Bridal also utilizes mobile marketing to increase brand awareness. Their “My Event on Mobile” campaign provides brides with ways to customize and publicize their wedding dress details, as well as plan and promote their wedding (David’s Bridal Launches My Event). The app not only allows brides to view product offerings at David’s Bridal, but also creates a format for them to easily share their dress shopping experience with their social media groups through pictures and other forms of media (David’s Bridal Launches My Event). This feature provides additional buzz for the company as pictures and information about their products are being shared with the bride’s peers, many of whom are likely of marrying age. Additionally, the retailer incorporates plus-sized gowns into their stores, catering to the highly overlooked plus-size market. This is additionally beneficial for capturing plus-sized brides who may not have the ability to purchase a gown from one of the few upscale, plus-sized retailers.

**Conclusion:**

Despite economic concerns, spending in the wedding dress industry continues to be growing in the United States. The social constructs involving marriage have created a good environment for increased nuptial spending, and bridal apparel is reaping the benefits. The tendency to marry at a later age, the large number of brides willing to overspend on wedding expenses, and the increasing population approaching marital age have all been fueling growth in the wedding industry as a whole (Global Bridalwear Market). Additionally, individual trends such as buying multiple weddings gowns, have caused the wedding dress industry to be successful.

Celebrities, social media, and various forms of pop culture have all influenced the success of different bridal styles and designers, though marriage rates and the economy are some
of the biggest determinants of future industry success. While marriage rates have been steadily declining, it has been mostly offset by rises in the number of couples remarrying and the increased amount of spending on weddings (Van Beeck, Van Horn). While economic factors have been a concern for the wedding industry, brides have demonstrated the willingness to spend large amounts on a luxurious wedding gown while reducing costs in other areas such as décor and entertainment.

In order to capture the lucrative bridal apparel market, firms are utilizing various competitive strategies involving technology, size options, price reductions, and the elusive "wedding dress experience." Brick and mortar retailers have focused on a service and quality approach in order to compete with the low prices of online and discount retailers, and many firms are also using social media and mobile marketing in order to build brand awareness. However, some are experiencing difficulties with this technology as many of the women who view wedding gowns online are not currently engaged, and therefore lack the willingness to purchase the product (Krueger). Some retailers are even focusing solely on the plus-sized segment of the wedding dress market, in order to capture consumers whose needs are not being fully met by traditional bridal boutiques with few options for larger brides.

While there are many small wedding dress retailers and a large number of substitutes, a few major firms have a grasp on the majority of the bridal apparel market. Vera Wang, with her high-end, innovative styles, well-known brand name, and constant celebrity endorsement has a clear hold on a large percentage of the high-end bridal market. Additionally, her work with David's Bridal allows her to reach even more customers by employing the one of the most successful discount wedding dress retailers. With its constant ability to provide the latest bridal
trends and designers at affordable prices, David’s Bridal has a steady hold on the lower-income segment of the wedding dress market.

Though the wedding dress industry appears to be extremely susceptible to economic fluctuations and consumer buying power, the cultural fixation on wedding dresses has made consumer willingness to pay extremely high. From the time they hear their first fairytale, women are primed for the wedding dress industry, and are prepared to spend an unbelievable amount of money on “the dress of their dreams” (Grossman). However, this can also make brides less willing to decide on a dress and more likely to shop at multiple stores, causing a challenge for bridal retailers. By providing wedding gowns at the correct price, quality, location, and style for their particular segment, wedding dress retailers can maintain a profitable business.
Appendix

Figure 1:

![Graph showing total population 20-34 and median age at first marriage over time in the United States.]

Figure 2: Vera Wang Bridal Boutique Locations - US
Figure 3: Kate Middleton's Wedding Dress

Figure 4: $2,500 Replica Wedding Gown

Figure 5:

![Graph showing U.S. Wedding Market Revenue from 2000 to 2015. The graph indicates fluctuations in revenue with peaks in 2002 and 2008, and a drop in 2009. The source is IBISWorld estimates.](source)
Figure 6:

MARRIAGE RATES AT HISTORIC LOWS

Marriage rates in the USA have been falling for the last 40 years:
Marriage rate (marriages per 1,000 pop.)

Figure 7:

Number of Weddings versus Average Wedding Spend

*In 2010 constant U.S. dollars
Source: IBISWorld estimates


<http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/style/118929249.html>


<http://www.verawang.com/EN/store-locator/?sl_cat=&sl_c=1&sl_s=0&sl_l=0>


<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/02/wedding-industry_n_3002354.html#slide=2292975>