

From Sacred to Shared: A Quantitative Study of Wedding Hashtag Use and the Transformation of Marriage Meaning

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Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed how individuals represent significant life moments, including marriage. One emerging practice in the digital era is the use of personalized wedding hashtags, which serve not only as tools for digital archiving but also as symbols of identity, image, and social engagement. This transformation reflects a cultural shift in which marriage has evolved from a sacred and private ritual into a public and performative event shared in digital spaces. This study examines the relationship between the intensity of wedding hashtag usage and the shifting meaning of marriage in the social media era among married social media users in Indonesia. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through an online survey involving 422 respondents who had experience using personalized wedding hashtags. The Pearson correlation test revealed a strong and significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.656$, $p < 0.001$), with a determination coefficient of 43.1%. These findings indicate that nearly half of the variance in the shifting meaning of marriage can be explained by hashtag usage intensity. Within the framework of Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), the study concludes that individuals who depend on social media for orientation and social validation are more likely to reinterpret institutional values such as marriage.

Keywords: *Marriage; Media System Dependency; Social Engagement; Social Media; Wedding Hashtags.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the rapid development of digital technology and social media has significantly transformed how individuals construct identity, express emotion, and commemorate sacred moments. One of the most striking changes can be observed in contemporary wedding practices. Once regarded as a private and sacred ceremony, the wedding has increasingly evolved into a public spectacle—highly documented and widely shared on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (now rebranded as X) (Gao et al., 2017).

A defining feature of this transformation is the emergence of *wedding hashtags*—custom tags created by couples to label, archive, and disseminate wedding-related content across social media. Hashtags such as *#RinaAndBima2023* or *#TheSmithWedding* not only serve as digital identifiers of a particular wedding but also function as narrative devices, tools of personal branding, and collaborative spaces that invite guests to participate in co-constructing the couple’s story online (Zhang, 2019).

Since its introduction on Twitter in 2007, the hashtag has evolved into a complex, multifunctional form of communication. Zhang (2019) describes hashtags as “the language of a new

era,” capable of transcending linguistic and geographic boundaries to convey meaning, connect communities, and organize the flow of digital information. On Instagram, hashtags extend beyond mere categorization—they act as markers of identity, expressions of social solidarity, and instruments of personal campaigns (Zhang, 2019).

The phenomenon of the wedding hashtag exemplifies how digital symbols become embedded in popular culture. These hashtags function not only as digital archives of wedding moments but also as performative acts through which couples display values, aesthetics, and social status via the visual curation of their content (Chen et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, the use of wedding hashtags has become increasingly popular, particularly among millennials and Gen Z. A study by Krisna, Handayani, and Azzahro (2019) found that the use of hashtags on Instagram correlates with users’ motivations to document personal journeys, including weddings. The motivations include informational purposes, visual chronicling, and adherence to digital etiquette norms.

As one of the world’s largest Instagram user bases, Indonesia demonstrates a growing trend toward the digital visualization of weddings. In many cases, hashtags are not merely technical tools but integral elements of wedding planning—appearing on invitations, decorations, and photobooth backdrops. Hashtags such as *#ArinNinoTieTheKnot* or *#MikaDanDara* have become part of a “digital ritual” that blends seamlessly with the sacred wedding ceremony itself.

Weddings, once private and sacred events, are now communal spectacles in the digital public sphere. The use of hashtags signifies that marriage is no longer solely about two individuals but also about how the couple wishes to be perceived and remembered by their digital audience. Consequently, a cultural shift occurs—from marriage as a “sacred rite” to marriage as a “shared social narrative.”

Zhang (2019) identifies three analytical dimensions of hashtags on Instagram: temporal-spatial, semantic, and social. The temporal dimension reveals clustering patterns during specific periods such as holidays or wedding seasons. Socially, hashtags denote affiliation and relationships among users. Semantically, hashtags undergo displacement or shifts in meaning over time, depending on context and circulation. This underscores that wedding hashtags are not static archival tools but dynamic socio-digital entities that evolve within media culture.

Wedding hashtags also reflect practices of social and cultural identity representation. According to Bansal et al. (2015), hashtags contain semantic entities that can be interpreted and traced, providing opportunities for deeper analyses of social representation. For instance, hashtags such as *#HijrahBarengSuami* or *#SundaWedding* not only indicate the couple and location but also convey embedded cultural or religious values. In this sense, wedding hashtags function as a form of *performative self-branding*, revealing not only who the couple is but also the values they wish to project—religiosity, ethnicity, social class, or lifestyle.

Several studies have linked hashtag use to tourism and the creative industry. Rasel et al. (2025) found that hashtags in the tourism sector play a role in shaping online discourse and destination perception, including within the context of *wedding tourism*. Wedding hashtags thus contribute to a visual narrative that promotes venues, vendors, and lifestyles, generating digital economic circulation. In this way, wedding hashtags form part of the broader digital creative economy ecosystem that encompasses content creators, photographers, wedding organizers, influencers, and tourism destinations.

Despite the growing scholarship on hashtags, specific studies on *wedding hashtags* remain limited, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context. Existing research largely focuses on linguistic, technical, or dissemination aspects (Chen et al., 2020; Bansal et al., 2015). Yet, wedding hashtags carry profound social, cultural, and even spiritual complexities—especially relevant to the digital transition of urban society. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the relationship between the intensity of wedding hashtag use and the changing meanings of marriage in the social media era. Specifically, it aims to assess the extent to which hashtag use contributes to the transformation of marriage from a sacred, private ritual to a public and digitalized experience.

Media has long served as a key instrument in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and driving social change. However, the technological transition from traditional to digital media has fundamentally altered how individuals engage with information and how social meanings are constructed, negotiated, and transformed. A pivotal theoretical framework that addresses this complex relationship among individuals, media, and the social system is the Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976.

Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), explains that media influence becomes stronger when individuals increasingly depend on media to fulfill their informational, social, and emotional needs. According to this theory, individuals rely on media to understand social reality, orient their attitudes and behaviors, and engage in social interaction. In contemporary digital environments, social media has become a major source of social orientation, allowing users to interpret events, construct identities, and seek validation from others. As media dependency increases, media messages are more likely to shape perceptions, attitudes, and social meanings.

Within the context of wedding hashtags, MSDT provides a useful framework for understanding how social media contributes to the changing meaning of marriage. Wedding hashtags enable couples to publicly document, curate, and share their wedding experiences with a broader digital audience. As individuals increasingly depend on social media for self-presentation and social recognition, marriage may be interpreted not only as a sacred and private institution but also as a public and performative

social event. Therefore, the use of wedding hashtags may contribute to the transformation of marriage from a personal ritual into a shared digital narrative.

In the context of hashtags such as *#LoveWins* or *#MyWeddingStory*, individuals may use social media for orientation (seeking models of modern marriage), understanding (accessing new narratives of love and union), or play (participating in social trends for pleasure and engagement). MSDT operates at both the micro (individual) and macro (societal) levels. Micro-level dependency stems from personal and social needs, while macro-level dependency reflects how institutions such as religion, law, and culture shape individuals' informational needs. The transformation of marriage meaning illustrates how traditional and liberal value systems interact and conflict, prompting users to seek new orientations through digital media.

Ball-Rokeach (1985) further asserts that media becomes most influential when individuals cannot satisfy cognitive or affective needs through traditional interpersonal or institutional channels. This is especially relevant in the digital era, where social media fills the void once occupied by family, community, or religious institutions. MSDT remains a highly adaptable framework for analyzing media–society relations across various contexts—from political crises and natural disasters to pandemics and cultural transformations. Its relevance is heightened in the digital age, where media no longer operates unidirectionally but as an interactive, participatory space for constructing social meaning.

Empirical studies support this premise. Salem (2024) demonstrates how the COVID-19 pandemic amplified social media dependency for information and social support, reinforcing media's role in orienting human behavior. Similarly, cross-cultural research by Sheldon et al. (2021) reveals that digital media dependency is stronger in individualistic societies like the United States than in collectivist cultures such as Thailand. Ma and Wan (2022) also found that dependency on digital media correlates with the formation of collective memory and social narratives during crises. These findings underscore that media not only provides information but also shapes interpretive frameworks and collective memory. This concept is particularly relevant to the present study, where social media facilitates the collective reinterpretation of marriage.

By integrating MSDT with social transformation theory, this study deepens our understanding of how individuals participate in the social construction of cultural values, including the institution of marriage. MSDT thus explains not only how media influences individuals but also how individuals collectively use media to construct and disseminate new social meanings. Within this research context, social media functions as a mediating space for the wedding experience. The use of hashtags is not merely a technical device for content organization but a cultural symbol reflecting the digital transformation of marital meaning. Hashtags enable weddings to become public, observable, commentable, and shareable events—blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the social.

Accordingly, this study employs two main variables: (1) Intensity of wedding hashtag use, which measures how frequently, strategically, and meaningfully hashtags are used during wedding events; (2) Transformation of marriage meaning, which assesses the extent to which marriage has shifted from a sacred, private ritual to a public, digitized narrative.

Hypothesis Development

Based on MSDT, individuals who increasingly rely on social media for social orientation, self-presentation, and social validation are more likely to adopt meanings and norms circulating within digital environments. Wedding hashtags facilitate the public sharing and presentation of wedding experiences, potentially influencing how individuals perceive the institution of marriage. As weddings become increasingly visible and interactive in digital spaces, marriage may be interpreted not only as a sacred and private institution but also as a public and shared social narrative. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H0: There is no significant relationship between wedding hashtag usage intensity and the shifting meaning of marriage.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between wedding hashtag usage intensity and the shifting meaning of marriage.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between wedding hashtag usage intensity and the transformation of marriage meaning. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of relationships between variables through numerical data and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2019). The study focused on two variables: the independent variable, Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X), and the dependent variable, Transformation of Marriage Meaning (Y).

Data were collected through an online survey administered using Google Forms. To improve respondent reach and target individuals who met the study criteria, the survey was distributed using Facebook Ads Manager. The inclusion criteria required respondents to be married individuals aged between 20 and 40 years, active users of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter), and individuals who had previously used a personalized wedding hashtag.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and 18 closed-ended statements designed to measure the two study variables. Variable X, Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity, was

measured using 12 items that assessed the creation, frequency, consistency, strategic use, aesthetic value, and social promotion of wedding hashtags. Variable Y, Transformation of Marriage Meaning, was measured using six items that assessed the extent to which marriage is perceived as a publicly shared, digitally represented, and socially visible event rather than solely a sacred and private institution.

Examples of items used to measure Variable X include: “I created a personalized hashtag for my wedding” and “I actively encouraged family members and guests to use the wedding hashtag when sharing content.” Examples of items used to measure Variable Y include: “I believe that marriage is a moment that should be shared on social media” and “I feel that hashtags make marriage more public than private.” Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Instrument Blueprint

Table 1 presents the operationalization of the research variables, including dimensions, indicators, and representative questionnaire items.

Table 1.
Instrument Blueprint

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Sample Questionnaire Item
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)	Creation and Ownership of Hashtag	Development of a personalized wedding hashtag	I created a personalized hashtag for my wedding.
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)	Frequency and Consistency of Use	Frequency and consistency of hashtag use across wedding-related posts	I used the wedding hashtag in most of my wedding-related social media posts.
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)	Strategic and Aesthetic Use	Hashtag use for organization, aesthetics, and event planning	I designed the hashtag to be unique, aesthetically appealing, and easy to remember.
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)	Social Participation and Promotion	Encouraging others to use and engage with the hashtag	I actively encouraged family members and guests to use the wedding hashtag when sharing content.

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Transformation of Marriage Meaning (Y)	Public Sharing Orientation	Marriage perceived as an event that should be shared publicly	I believe that marriage is a moment that should be shared on social media.
Transformation of Marriage Meaning (Y)	Digital Representation of Marriage	Marriage represented through visual and digital content	I adjusted my wedding concept to make it look attractive on social media.
Transformation of Marriage Meaning (Y)	Social Visibility and Validation	Influence of social expectations and online presentation	I felt pressure to make my wedding appear attractive in digital spaces.
Transformation of Marriage Meaning (Y)	Shift from Private to Public Meaning	Marriage perceived as increasingly public rather than private	I feel that hashtags make marriage more public than private.

Sampling Procedure

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, whereby respondents were deliberately selected according to the predetermined inclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to survey completion. After screening the responses to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria, a total of 422 valid responses were retained for analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Subsequently, Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between wedding hashtag usage intensity and the transformation of marriage meaning. Simple linear regression analysis was also performed to assess the predictive effect of wedding hashtag usage intensity on the dependent variable.

To ensure instrument quality, validity and reliability tests were conducted prior to hypothesis testing. Item validity was assessed using Corrected Item-Total Correlation, while internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient. These procedures ensured that the questionnaire accurately measured the intended constructs and produced consistent results (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity and Reliability Test

Based on the validity test conducted on data from 422 respondents through 18 statement items—comprising 12 items related to the *intensity of wedding hashtag usage* and 6 items concerning the *shifting meaning of marriage*—the results indicated that with a significance level of 5%, the critical *r-table* value was 0.095. It can therefore be concluded that if $r\text{-calculated} > r\text{-table}$, the item in the questionnaire is significantly correlated (valid); conversely, if $r\text{-calculated} < r\text{-table}$, the item is not valid. After statistical computation using SPSS, all 18 items scored above 0.095, meaning that all items met the validity criteria (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2.
Validity Test Results for Variable X

Variable	Item Number	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)	Item 1	0.787
	Item 2	0.740
	Item 3	0.791
	Item 4	0.798
	Item 5	0.802
	Item 6	0.777
	Item 7	0.778
	Item 8	0.816
	Item 9	0.800
	Item 10	0.782
	Item 11	0.803
	Item 12	0.802

Table 3.
Validity Test Results for Variable Y

Variable	Item Number	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Shifting Meaning of Marriage (Y)	Item 1	0.654
	Item 2	0.525
	Item 3	0.756
	Item 4	0.710
	Item 5	0.523
	Item 6	0.622

Based on the tables above, it can be concluded that the research instrument is valid. This conclusion is supported by the *Corrected Item-Total Correlation* values for each item in both variables, all of which exceed the *r-table* value of 0.095 (with $n = 422$ and $\alpha = 0.05$). For Variable X (*Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity*), all 12 items have correlation values above 0.740, many approaching or exceeding 0.800, indicating a strong relationship between each item and the total variable score. Similarly, for Variable Y (*Shifting Meaning of Marriage*), all six items recorded correlation values above 0.523, which also significantly exceed the minimum validity threshold.

The next analysis involved the reliability test, measured using *Cronbach's Alpha*. The result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.948 (see Table 4), which is substantially higher than the critical value of 0.095, confirming that the instrument is reliable and internally consistent. With a *Cronbach's Alpha* of 0.948, the instrument demonstrates excellent reliability. *Cronbach's Alpha* values range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency. Generally, a coefficient of $\alpha \geq 0.7$ is considered acceptable, while $\alpha \geq 0.9$, as observed in this study, is categorized as “excellent reliability” (Hair et al., 2019; Creswell, 2014).

This very high internal consistency also implies that respondents interpreted each item within the variables in a uniform manner, and no item appeared to deviate or disrupt construct stability. In the context of this research, both variables—*Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity (X)* and *Shifting Meaning of Marriage (Y)*—meet the criteria for high reliability. Therefore, the data derived from this instrument can be used with strong confidence, as it provides stable and replicable results. The combination of high validity and very high reliability strengthens the overall credibility of the study’s findings.

Table 4.
Reliability Test Results for Variables X and Y

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.948	18

Regression, Correlation, and Hypothesis Testing

To determine the effect of *wedding hashtag usage intensity* on the *shifting meaning of marriage*, a simple linear regression and Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis were conducted to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the two variables. The results are presented below.

Table 5.
Model Summary of Simple Linear Regression Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.656a	.431	.429	3.21762

a. Predictors: (Constant), Usage Intensity
b. Dependent Variable: Shifting Meaning

As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficient (R) of 0.656 indicates a strong and positive relationship between the independent variable (*Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity*) and the dependent variable (*Shifting Meaning of Marriage*). According to the interpretation guidelines for Pearson correlation coefficients, values between 0.60 and 0.79 typically represent a strong correlation. This finding suggests that the higher the intensity of wedding hashtag usage, the greater the perceived shift in the meaning of marriage among respondents.

The *R Square* value of 0.431 means that approximately 43.1% of the variance in the *shifting meaning of marriage* can be explained by the intensity of wedding hashtag usage, while the remaining 56.9% is influenced by other variables not included in this model. This is a substantial explanatory value for a single independent variable in social research, supporting the hypothesis that hashtag usage plays an important role in shaping or transforming the meaning of marriage among respondents.

Furthermore, the *Adjusted R Square* value of 0.429—only slightly lower than the *R Square*—indicates that the model is stable and not overly affected by sample size or the number of predictors.

The *Standard Error of Estimate* (3.21762) reflects the average deviation of predicted values from actual values. Although its meaning depends on the measurement scale of the dependent variable, a smaller standard error generally signifies better predictive accuracy.

The finding that wedding hashtag usage intensity explains 43.1% of the variance in the transformation of marriage meaning can be interpreted through the lens of MSDT. According to MSDT, media influence becomes stronger when individuals increasingly depend on media systems to fulfill their needs for orientation, understanding, and social interaction (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In the context of contemporary weddings, social media functions not merely as a communication platform but also as a space where meanings, identities, and social expectations are constructed and negotiated. As individuals become more dependent on social media to document important life events and obtain social recognition, the symbolic meaning of marriage becomes increasingly shaped by digital practices such as wedding hashtag use.

The relatively high explanatory power of wedding hashtag usage ($R^2 = 0.431$) suggests that hashtags are more than technical tools for organizing content. They operate as mechanisms through which couples publicly curate their wedding narratives, invite audience participation, and seek social validation. Through repeated exposure to wedding-related content, users may internalize new norms that position marriage as a visible and shareable social experience. This finding supports the central proposition of MSDT that dependency on media systems can influence how individuals interpret social institutions and cultural values. In this case, marriage is no longer understood solely as a sacred and private commitment but is increasingly reconstructed as a public and digitally mediated event within contemporary social media culture.

Nevertheless, the remaining 56.9% of unexplained variance indicates that the transformation of marriage meaning is also influenced by other factors beyond social media practices. Variables such as cultural values, religiosity, educational background, family traditions, and marital experiences may contribute to how individuals interpret marriage and should therefore be explored in future studies.

Table 5.
Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Test

	Intensity	Shifting Meaning
Wedding Hashtag Usage Intensity	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	422

	Intensity	Shifting Meaning
Shifting Meaning of Marriage	Pearson Correlation	.656**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	422

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 5, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is 0.656 with a significance level of 0.000. This indicates a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. In other words, the intensity of wedding hashtag usage significantly affects the shifting meaning of marriage.

This finding suggests that social media—particularly through hashtags—contributes to the transformation of social values related to marriage. Marriage is no longer perceived solely as a sacred and private institution but has become a form of visual commodity and social performance displayed in the digital public sphere. Consequently, the meaning of marriage shifts from a personal and cultural institution to a representation of social identity and status.

The influence of hashtags on perceptions of marriage demonstrates that repeated exposure to wedding-related content on social media can shape new norms and expectations. Especially among younger generations, marriage is increasingly seen not merely as a life stage but as an aesthetic experience that must be “Instagrammable.” This phenomenon can generate social pressure to conform to idealized standards portrayed online.

In summary, the significant correlation found in this study indicates that social media not only influences how weddings are promoted but also how marriage itself is understood within society. This serves as a reminder that modern communication technologies function not only as tools for sharing but also as cultural agents that reshape social meanings—requiring critical awareness from users and researchers alike.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, wedding planners, content creators, and couples should recognize that wedding hashtags are not merely technical tools for organizing online content but also symbolic mechanisms that shape how marriage is publicly represented and interpreted. Couples may therefore consider using wedding hashtags as complementary tools for documentation and communication rather than as primary indicators of a successful wedding experience. Greater attention should be given to

preserving the personal, relational, and cultural meanings of marriage beyond its digital visibility and online engagement metrics.

The findings also suggest the need for digital literacy initiatives that specifically address the role of social media in shaping perceptions of major life events and social institutions. Rather than focusing solely on technical media skills, such programs should encourage critical reflection on how social media platforms influence expectations surrounding weddings, relationships, and family life. This is particularly important for younger generations who increasingly rely on social media for social orientation and validation, as proposed by MSDT.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to examine the mediating factors that may explain the remaining 56.9% of variance not accounted for in this study. Variables such as religiosity, cultural values, family communication patterns, social comparison tendencies, and the need for online social validation may provide a more comprehensive explanation of how marriage meanings are transformed in digital environments. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts and qualitative investigations into couples' experiences with wedding hashtags would also contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

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