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# Faux Weddings as Cultural Appropriation: Reinterpretation and Transformation of Matrimonial Rituals by Youth

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## *Abstract*

This paper examines the burgeoning phenomenon of "faux weddings" among youth, analyzing how these simulated matrimonial rituals represent both a reinterpretation of traditional practices and a potential instance of cultural appropriation. Addressing two key research questions—RQ1: What motivates youth engagement in faux weddings, and how do they negotiate cultural borrowing and authenticity? RQ2: How does digital media accelerate the commodification and transformation of these rituals?—this study employs qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with 20 youth participants. Key findings reveal prominent themes of ritual hybridization, quests for authenticity, and the production of digital spectacles. The analysis further scrutinizes the role of digital media, particularly social platforms, in accelerating the commodification and simplification of these ceremonies. This research contributes a novel understanding of faux weddings as dynamic sites of cultural negotiation, illuminating how youth navigate power imbalances in appropriation while fostering innovative expressions of identity amid globalization.

## *Introduction*

In recent years, faux weddings—simulated matrimonial ceremonies staged by youth for non-legal purposes—have emerged as a compelling cultural phenomenon, merging traditional rituals with modern expressions of identity. Often amplified on social media, these events enable young people to experiment with ritual elements, seek personal authenticity, and create shareable spectacles. However, they ignite debates on cultural borrowing, commodification, and the erosion of sacred traditions amid globalization. This study tackles two central research questions: RQ1: What motivates youth participation in faux weddings, and how do they negotiate cultural borrowing and authenticity? RQ2: How does digital media hasten the commodification and transformation of these rituals? While existing literature examines weddings as rituals, youth reinterpretations, and digital influences on traditions, it overlooks faux weddings as youth-driven simulations intertwining cultural appropriation, authenticity quests, and online commodification. This research fills that gap through qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 20 youth participants, illuminating novel dynamics in ritual hybridization and digital mediatization.

## *Significance of the Study*

### *Academic Significance*

This study fills a critical gap in the literature, where scholars have overlooked faux weddings as youth-driven simulations entailing cultural borrowing, authenticity quests, and digital commodification (Tinson & Nuttall, 2010). By integrating Cultural Appropriation Theory with Performance and Ritual Studies (Arya, 2021), it advances theoretical frameworks, offering novel insights into ritual hybridization and mediatization in the digital era. These contributions refine understandings of power dynamics in globalized cultural exchanges, positioning the research at the forefront of youth subculture and anthropological scholarship.

### *Cultural Relevance*

Regionally, amid rapid globalization in non-Western contexts like Asia and Africa, the findings illuminate how youth navigate tradition versus innovation, mitigating risks of sacred ritual dilution. Globally, they underscore digital media's dual role in preserving heritage while accelerating commodification, equipping cultural practitioners and policymakers with strategies to balance authenticity and creative expression. Ultimately, this work empowers youth to forge identities that honor origins without perpetuating appropriation.

*Literature Review*

Weddings embody core cultural rituals, functioning as rites of passage that publicly affirm social transitions, familial alliances, and communal values (Vélez-Gómez, 2010). These practices provide the foundational context for understanding faux weddings, where youth simulate matrimonial elements to explore identity amid globalization.

Youth reinterpretations of such rituals reveal dynamic hybridization, selectively adopting global traditions—like U.S. proms in the UK—to create glocalised performances that blend authenticity with innovation (Tinson & Nuttall, 2010). This process illuminates how faux weddings emerge as subcultural experiments, negotiating cultural borrowing while constructing personal narratives (Nwagbara, 2025).

Yet, this borrowing often invokes cultural appropriation debates, highlighting power imbalances when dominant groups adopt marginalized elements without respect, risking commodification and meaning erosion (Kunst et al., 2023). Such concerns frame the ethical tensions in faux weddings, where simulated rituals may trivialize sacred origins.

Digital media exacerbates these dynamics, mediatizing weddings into shareable spectacles that prioritize visual commodification over substance, as seen in social platforms reshaping ceremonies for online consumption (Nwagbara, 2025; Suprajitno, 2023). This acceleration underscores faux weddings' transformation into digital performances.

While existing scholarship advances insights into ritual adaptation, youth agency, appropriation ethics, and mediatization, it largely overlooks faux weddings as deliberate youth-driven simulations intertwining these elements (Tinson & Nuttall, 2010). This study bridges that gap by qualitatively probing motivations, negotiations, and digital influences in these hybrid spectacles.

*Weddings as Rituals and Cultural Phenomena*

Weddings serve as key sociocultural rituals, functioning as rites of passage that publicly mark individuals' transitions into new marital roles and reinforce communal bonds (Vélez-Gómez, 2010). Beyond legal contracts, they affirm social norms, spiritual values, and familial alliances, transmitting cultural meanings across generations.

Youth reinterpret these rituals amid globalization, selectively hybridizing traditional elements with global influences to craft glocalised performances that balance authenticity and innovation (Tinson & Nuttall, 2010). This dynamic process underpins faux weddings as youth-driven simulations, enabling cultural negotiation and identity exploration—directly informing this study's analysis of motivations, appropriation, and digital mediatization.

*Youth Reinterpretation of Traditional Practices*

Younger generations, often exposed to a myriad of global influences through digital media, frequently engage in a dynamic process of reinterpreting and reimagining these established matrimonial rituals, adapting them to reflect contemporary values and personal identities. This reinterpretation often involves the selective adoption and modification of elements from diverse cultural practices, creating hybrid forms that challenge traditional notions of authenticity and cultural ownership (Nwagbara, 2025).

*Theories of Cultural Appropriation*

Cultural appropriation, in this context, refers to the adoption or use of elements of a minority culture by members of the dominant culture without understanding or respecting the original context, meaning, or significance (Carter, 2021). It raises ethical considerations regarding power imbalances, commodification, and the potential for misrepresentation or trivialization of sacred customs (Mutero, 2025).

*Cultural Hybridization and Syncretism*

This process often results in novel cultural expressions, blurring the lines between origin and innovation, and necessitating a nuanced examination of how diverse cultural threads are interwoven within contemporary matrimonial practices (Jokhio, 2023; Kirab et al., 2025).

*Digital Media and Ritual Transformation*

The proliferation of digital media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of matrimonial rituals, transforming traditional ceremonies into mediatized performances often designed for online dissemination and consumption (Nwagbara, 2025).

*Theoretical Framework*

This study employs a multi-faceted theoretical framework, integrating Cultural Appropriation Theory, Performance Theory, Ritual Studies, and Youth Subculture Theory, to comprehensively analyze the phenomenon of faux weddings and their cultural implications.

**Cultural Appropriation Theory.** This theory helps analyze the borrowing and recontextualization of cultural elements in faux weddings in my study.

**Performance Theory.** This theory helps analyze how these reconfigurations are performed and perceived in faux weddings in my study.

**Ritual Studies.** This theory helps analyze the symbolic functions and social significance of faux weddings in my study.

**Youth Subculture Theory.** This theory helps analyze how youth subcultures leverage these practices to construct identity and challenge established norms in my study.

*Cultural Appropriation Theory*

This theory provides a crucial lens for examining the ethical dimensions of adopting elements from other cultures, particularly when dominant groups borrow from marginalized ones without proper understanding or acknowledgment ([Arya, 2021](#)). It critically assesses the power dynamics inherent in such exchanges, highlighting concerns about misrepresentation, commodification, and the erosion of original cultural meanings ([Nwagbara, 2025](#)).

#### *Performance Theory*

Building upon this, Performance Theory offers insights into how rituals, including faux weddings, are enacted as performative events, wherein participants actively construct and present identities and meanings through their actions, gestures, and symbolic displays. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the wedding as a staged event, where participants not only embody roles but also interpret and re-interpret traditional scripts, often for a visible audience, both in-person and digital ([Giammetti, 2024](#)).

#### *Ritual Studies*

Ritual Studies, meanwhile, provides a framework for understanding the symbolic functions and social significance of weddings as structured, repetitive behaviors that reinforce community bonds and transmit cultural values across generations. This perspective helps to analyze how faux weddings either uphold or subvert traditional ritual structures, thereby challenging or reinforcing existing societal norms around marriage ([Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002](#); [Pollino et al., 2023](#)).

#### *Youth Subculture Theory*

Finally, Youth Subculture Theory aids in comprehending how young people utilize these reinterpreted matrimonial rituals as a means of identity formation, expression, and as a collective response to broader societal expectations and norms ([Burrow, 2023](#)). This theoretical lens is particularly useful for discerning how youth navigate dominant cultural discourses surrounding weddings, often subverting conventional notions of the "perfect day" through alternative celebrations ([Carter & Duncan, 2016](#); [Pollino et al., 2023](#)).

### **Methodology**

This investigation adopts an interpretivist paradigm, recognizing that social reality is complex, subjective, and constructed through human interaction and cultural interpretation. This approach prioritizes understanding the meanings and perspectives of participants within their specific social and cultural contexts, moving beyond mere observation to delve into the nuanced subjective experiences of those involved in faux weddings. This qualitative approach is particularly suited for exploring the intricate motivations, perceptions, and experiences that underpin the reinterpretation and transformation of matrimonial rituals by youth. This methodological stance enables a deep exploration of how individuals construct and negotiate their identities within the context of these evolving rituals ([Phillips, 2020](#)).

#### *Sample and Rationale*

The exact sample comprised 20 participants aged 18–35 years (11 females, 7 males, 2 non-binary individuals). Participants were purposively sampled and recruited via targeted posts on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) and university student networks to ensure direct, recent experience in organizing or participating in faux weddings. This sampling rationale prioritized depth and relevance, capturing diverse youth voices engaged in cultural reinterpretation while focusing on the target demographic driving this phenomenon.

#### *Interview Guide*

The semi-structured interview guide covered the following key themes: motivations for faux weddings processes of cultural borrowing and adaptation perceptions of authenticity and originality community and social perceptions, and ritual transformation and innovation.

### **Findings**

#### *Motivations for Faux Weddings*

The analysis revealed a spectrum of motivations driving youth to engage in faux weddings, ranging from purely aesthetic and celebratory desires to more profound expressions of identity and critiques of traditional marital norms. Many participants articulated a desire for a personalized celebration that deviated from the often rigid and financially burdensome expectations associated with conventional weddings, seeking instead a more authentic and self-determined expression of commitment or celebration ([Vélez-Gómez, 2010](#)). For instance, one 24-year-old female participant shared: "I didn't want the stress of a \$30,000 traditional wedding just to please my family; our faux beach ceremony with friends was real to us, no debt, all joy." Another participant, a 28-year-old non-binary individual, explained: "Faux weddings let me celebrate love without the heteronormative script—it's about our story, not society's checklist." A 22-year-old male reflected: "Traditional weddings feel fake and commercial; mine was a playful mock-up that captured who we are now, evolving."

#### *Processes of Cultural Borrowing and Adaptation*

This borrowing often involves incorporating elements from diverse cultural practices into their own "faux" ceremonies, demonstrating a hybridization of matrimonial traditions that challenges singular notions of authenticity ([Allo et al., 2024](#)). This dynamic interplay often reflects a conscious effort to blend traditional elements with contemporary expressions, thereby forging new ceremonial forms that resonate with individual and collective identities.

#### *Perceptions of Authenticity and Originality*

Participants' views on authenticity varied significantly, with some prioritizing personal meaning and emotional resonance over adherence to historical or cultural accuracy, while others engaged in selective appropriation to create a sense of novelty and individuality within their celebrations. This nuanced understanding of authenticity further highlights how youth reinterpret established matrimonial rituals, often prioritizing personal relevance over strict adherence to tradition ([Blake et al., 2023](#)).

#### *Community and Social Perceptions*

The study found that community and social perceptions of faux weddings were often polarized, with some embracing these events as innovative expressions of love and commitment, while others viewed them with skepticism or outright disapproval, questioning their legitimacy and cultural fidelity ([Rejowska, 2022](#)).

#### *Ritual Transformation and Innovation*

The reinterpretation of matrimonial rituals through faux weddings indicates a significant shift in how youth conceptualize and engage with life-stage ceremonies, moving beyond rigid conventions to embrace more fluid and personalized expressions of commitment. These innovative practices often incorporate digital media and destination elements, reflecting a departure from traditional norms to create unique and memorable experiences that resonate with contemporary lifestyles (Shen, 2023; Vinod & Nagar, 2024).

### Discussion

The findings resonate with existing literature on youth-led wedding subversions, such as counter-hegemonic responses to the "perfect day" ideal during disruptions (Pollino et al., 2023) and paradoxes of individualized conformity (Carter & Duncan, 2016), yet uniquely highlight faux weddings as proactive, debt-free identity assertions (Vélez-Gómez, 2010). Unlike traditional reinterpretations prioritizing heritage (Blake et al., 2023), participants emphasized playful evolution over accuracy.

These results contribute to ritual theory by extending rites of passage frameworks (Burrow, 2023) to secular, liminal performances (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2021), positioning faux weddings as cultural bricolage that decouples ritual from legal/institutional norms (Blake, 2024). They advance interpretivist paradigms (Phillips, 2020) by foregrounding subjective authenticity in hybridized ceremonies.

Regarding cultural appropriation, the selective borrowing (Allo et al., 2024) challenges singular authenticity notions (Rejowska, 2022), fostering hybridity but raising ethical concerns: while personal resonance mitigates exploitation critiques, power imbalances in globalized elements risk commodifying marginalized traditions without reciprocity.

Power dynamics surface in rejecting heteronormative scripts, empowering non-binary and queer voices against familial/commercial pressures.

Ethically, hybridization innovates inclusively (Fagbola et al., 2023) but warrants scrutiny: prioritizing "our story" over cultural fidelity may erode communal meanings, demanding reflexive practices to honor origins.

Linking to research questions, motivations reveal aesthetic/identitarian drivers; borrowing processes confirm hybridization; authenticity perceptions favor emotional truth; community views expose polarization; transformations affirm ritual fluidity—collectively illuminating youth agency in matrimonial reinvention.

### Conclusion

Faux weddings signal an emerging paradigm where matrimonial celebrations transcend legal bindings, functioning as autonomous cultural performances that prioritize experiential joy over institutional validation (Blake, 2024). This decoupling fosters a vision of commitment as a fluid, performative act, amplified by social media platforms that transform personal rituals into global hybrid spectacles blending local traditions with cosmopolitan aesthetics (Nwagbara, 2025; Suprajitno, 2023). In resisting the commodified excesses of the wedding industry, these events pioneer sustainable, inclusive models of festivity, potentially reshaping societal expectations around love as egalitarian co-creation rather than scripted conformity (Fagbola et al., 2023).

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