



GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS ON SAFETY AND SECURITY OF MALAYSIA MUSIC FESTIVALS

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Abstract:

Music festivals are often viewed as events that attract a large number of attendees. Despite their positive economic, environmental, and policy impacts on host cities, there are always safety and security concerns at music festivals. This paper emphasises the significance of having proper safety and security, with a particular focus on Malaysian music festivals. The perspectives of government agencies were sought to acquire evidence regarding the impact of a safe and secure music festival, as the approval or rejection of music festivals is dependent on them. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of safety and security at music festivals. However, studies on the perspectives of government agencies, particularly in the context of Malaysian music festivals, are limitedly explored. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the importance of safety and security at music festivals and the repercussions of their absence. Qualitative approaches employed in this study included semi-structured interviews with government agencies such as municipal councils, police, Malaysian Volunteer Corps Department (RELA), and ministries, observation at Malaysian music festivals, and document analysis. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the current study provide evidence of the impact of effective security and safety on the success of music festivals.

Keywords:

Music Festival, Government, Responsiveness, Safety, Security

Introduction

Music festivals were formerly a minor component of larger events. However, by the mid-twentieth century, organisers discovered they could generate revenue and established themselves as an important component in the event industry. According to Kruger and

Saayman (2016), the organisation of music festivals creates a positive destination image around the world, making festivals an increasingly competitive industry. Nowadays, attending a music festival has become a tradition for music enthusiasts, festivalgoers, and those who appreciate the social milieu of the music industry. Regardless of genre or band preference, seeing live music has become one of the most popular ways to appreciate the arts and pay homage to favorite musicians (Max, 2017). Despite the success of music festivals, some individuals believe that music festivals are not safe because of risks, including fights, overcrowding, intoxication, drug overdose, sexual harassment, and death. Although safety and security are vital in all types of events, the consequences of failing to have a sufficient risk management plan at music festivals are more severe compared to the other types of events such as conferences, exhibitions, sporting events, and weddings.

The concerns over safety and security issues at music festivals are normal. Governments, especially the host cities, are concerned if issues occurring at music festivals can directly tarnish the image of their country. As a result, they, particularly policymakers, remain a high priority for seizing the opportunity to address regional issues that could arise during music festivals. This indicates that government policymakers are aware of what constitutes their policy community (Whitford, 2009). In Malaysia, the policy of approving or rejecting music festivals is not standardised as it is primarily reliant on the regulations established by the municipal councils of each state. Thus, the rules and regulations, as well as the entertainment tax, for organising a music festival in Selangor will differ from those organised in Kuala Lumpur, Port Dickson, and Penang. However, in some circumstances, unacceptable work practices, including lying during the application process to host an event, jeopardise the safety of stakeholders during music festivals.

Issues and incidents at Malaysian music festivals involving safety and security such as drug overdoses, usage of illegal substances, intoxication, and exhaustion have been the focus of studies by Ismail et al. (2021), High (2020), Ismail and Meng (2017), and Tangit et al. (2016). Apart from that, there are also studies focusing on the risks associated with music festivals including the risks to local communities (Pavlukovic et al., 2019), the success of music festivals (Kujiken et al., 2016), the mortality at music festivals, and the role of government policy at music festivals (Lee et al., 2015). In accordance with that, previous research has also suggested ways for event organisers to implement additional security measures at music festivals (Carter & Mortal, 2018).

This paper investigates the views of the Malaysian government on safety and security at Malaysian music festivals in an effort to contribute to the qualitative research literature by utilising a case study method. The arguments put forward in this paper indicate that the absence of a risk management plan has implications not only for the event organisers but also for related stakeholders including government agencies. As a result of analysing the implications of safety and security at music festivals, recommendations for the government to have safe and secure music festivals are also highlighted.

Literature Review

Safety and Security in Music Festivals

Event safety and security are the essential pillars in the multi-disciplinary nature of event management and planning (Tarlow, 2002; Silvers, 2005; Fallon & Sullivan, 2005; Silvers,

2008; Mallen & Adams, 2008; Robson, 2008; Jennings & Lodge, 2009). They are to ensure the safety of human life and property against loss or harm. With the growing number of music festivals conducted in Malaysia and abroad and the increasing number of people attending music festivals, safety and security are the main issues for all stakeholders, including the event organisers, attendees, and suppliers. Regardless of the incidents, environments, or resource issues that occurred during an event, organisers should have a proper risk management plan. Arnott (2020) suggests that the information on the risk management plan is shared with the stakeholders of any music festival prior to the event, the routine arrangement, and its integration into the existing on-site working policy. This helps organisers to ensure safety and security, as well as the success of their event.

Multi-organisation approach is an effective method for two-way long-term collaboration and relationships between two or more stakeholders, known as integrated emergency management. It allows organisers to respond to any crisis or significant incident that occurs during an event. However, some policies do not address safety concerns; for example, Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994. Hence, it is important to ascertain the understanding of the act among organisers and venue providers because legislation is ineffective unless it is perceived to be implemented.

Merriam-Webster (2010) defines safety as ‘the experience of being free from harm or risk.’ On the other hand, security is defined as ‘the characteristics or circumstances of being free from danger’ and the ‘measures taken to prepare for covert work or injury, misbehaviour, attack, or escape.’ There is a high risk of mishaps occurring upon organisers’ failure to provide adequate safety and security. The main threat and risk categories at music festivals include harm to people and property damage, resulting in fewer attendees, revenue loss, and reputation damage. Therefore, having a safe and secure event assures attendees that not only is their safety a priority, but that event is significant enough to need protection (David Stone, 2014).

Government Intervention in Music Festivals

Governments have been exploiting special events like music festivals as a platform for economic development, believing that such events would benefit the host cities. According to Burgan and Mules (2001), the government subsidises events with economic consequences such as events that create job opportunities and generate regional outcomes. However, several organisers circumvent rules and regulations outlined by the government when conducting events. Frey (1994) believes that music festival organisers profit from the low marginal cost of production in an effort to dodge government rules. Pavlukovic et al. (2019) acknowledge that the role of the local community is frequently ignored and that local governments often make a crucial decision on whether to allow organisers to hold the event without adequate committee consultation. Although the power perspective is slightly different, these opinions demonstrate a schematic framework of government intervention in music festivals.

The findings from past research show that attendees are concerned about travelling to foreign countries to attend music festivals if there are incidents occurred during music festivals. Even though no event is free of risk because the music industry has its own set of obstacles and opportunities, implementing high-quality safety and security should be doable and reasonable. Given this sentence, having a proper risk management plan, with a safe and secure event being the main criterion for organising an event, is essential in many countries, including Malaysia.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is not to criticise the rules and regulations stated by government agencies, particularly policymakers, regarding their approval or rejection of a music festival as this could be the subject of a different research topic. Instead, the aim is to clarify some ambiguities and implications concerning the safety and security at music festivals and to define them more clearly to organisers to provide safe and secure music festivals. This study used qualitative methods through observation, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and a review of secondary documents. The questions used during data collection were based on prior research that investigated on the issues in music festivals. Apart from that, the interview questions were also based on from a scenario occurred in the Malaysian event industry.

Since this paper is exploratory and focused on a relatively specific group (the Malaysian government agencies), small samples are acceptable (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Three of the informants were managing directors from various government agencies including the ministry, a state government, and a government division. Five informants were senior executives from the state government, municipal council, RELA, and ministry. Finally, one informant was the director and executive from the municipal council and government division. All informants were deemed suitable for this study, despite that the majority of the informants were not festivalgoers, due to their experiences liaising, directly or indirectly, with Malaysian music festival organisers. The interviews were conducted based on the informant's availability and the interview location was primarily at the informant's office or café, which was close to their organization. Since most of the informants are Malaysian, it adheres to the Malaysia time zone, considering working hours ranging from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Table 1: Key Informants of The Study

Informants	Types of Organization	Experiences liaising with the music festivals organizers	Job Title
G1	Ministry A	5 years	Managing Director
G2	Municipal Council A	7 years	Director
G3	State Government A	5 years	Senior Executive
G4	State Government B	4 years	Senior Executive
G5	Municipal Council B	6 years	Senior Executive
G6	State Government C	5 years	Managing Director
G7	Ministry A	4 years	Senior Executive
G8	Government Division A	6 years	Managing Director
G9	Government Division B	4 years	Executive
G10	RELA	7 years	Senior Executive

Source: Authors (2022)

Field notes were taken during observations at two music festivals, namely the Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching, Sarawak and the Good Vibes Music Festival in Gohtong Jaya, Pahang. These field notes included information about the venue, crowd behaviour, safety protocols, security personnel, and event atmosphere at the two music festivals. The details of the semi-structured interview with the key informants are shown in Table 1. The questions for the interview focused on the core areas of the informants' expertise, such as event safety and security, as well as their consequences, and recommendations. The interviews were recorded

on the researcher's personal mobile phone. The transcriptions were then analysed using the thematic analysis and the themes were selected using an inductive approach, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify the patterns and themes in government responses to Malaysian music festivals' safety and security.

Findings

The Possibility of Endangering the Safety of Attendees

Different stakeholders are involved before, during, and after a music festival, leading to its complex nature. There are crews, volunteers, venue providers, suppliers, caterers, performers, sponsors, emergency personnel, and media. Having a variety of stakeholders involved in music festivals can lead to conflict and confusion since all parties have their objectives for a music festival. The conflict that arises will indirectly endanger the safety of attendees. One informant expressed this by saying:

I am aware that there are a lot of people involved in music festivals. But, one thing that we can see is how the organiser handles all the related stakeholders [...] if in the first place there is an issue arise among of them, I believe there will be a continuation going on after that... Some of these people (referring to the stakeholders) only think about profit, profit, and profit. They make a mistake by ignoring the attendee's safety since there is no incident occurred at their previous music festival. For me, this is a very wrong action.

This informant concluded that attendees should feel safe when attending a music festival by not being exposed to any consequences connected to the probability of occurrence and extent of the damage. Zainudin et al. (2020) have identified injury, legal regulation, licences and unlicensed operators, incompetent staff, and insufficient safety standards as examples of safety and security issues in events. The practice of identifying possible risks is sometimes not applied by organisers, resulting in situations in which safety and security are underfunded, thereby worsening the situation. The first author witnessed several occasions of attendee vomiting during music festivals. Although the reason was unknown at the time, the author suspected it was due to food poisoning. However, according to the emergency personnel in the medic tent, this situation occurred because the attendees consumed too much alcohol over a shorter period of time, resulting in fatal consequences, including vomiting.

The Possibility of Being Rejected by Government Authorities

The rejection of organising music festivals happens throughout the world, including in Malaysia. For example, in 2017, McFarland promised an exclusive music festival, named Fyre Festival, in the Bahamas. However, due to the negative experiences of the attendees, the government of the Bahamas decided not to endorse or approve any event that is affiliated with McFarland, who is also known as a fraudulent entrepreneur (Stanwick et al., 2019). This issue is related to a few cases in Malaysia. In some cases, organisers are too ambitious before the event and had made a pledge to the government to comply with the country's rules and regulations. However, informant G5 experienced this when asked if she had had any experiences with the organisers. The informant expressed:

Yes, I do. We rejected their approval to organise that music festival at our place. I heard they went to another municipal council to organise it [...] and two of them also rejected their application. Then one of the municipal councils in other states approved it and they proceed with their event there. Surprisingly, they indicate in the application form it was an arts festival and no alcohol was involved.

Then on the night of the event, the authority received a report saying that attendees brought drugs and alcohol to the event. See, how pathetic this organiser is.

Even though the government appreciates arts and creative music festivals, the lack of safety and security measures affects the decision to grant the application to organise music festivals. Taylor and Toohey (2006) find that the safety perception of the attendees influences their level of enjoyment. It means that being rejected from a music festival has become a source of frustration for people who have made an effort to participate in the music festival. There are numerous cases where, for example, placing barricades around the stage area is linked to controlling the behaviour of the crowd, specifically to not let them approach the performers on the stage. In this case, if the organiser is reluctant to provide the barricade and refuses to comply with the safety precautions, there is a possibility that their music festival may be rejected by the authorities.

The Possibility that Caused the Country's Image to Be Tarnished

A government invention becomes politically acceptable when the event generates economic, social, or cultural benefits (Hall, 2005). Therefore, it is a necessity for the government to oversee safety and quality measures, prohibit illegal music activities, ensure security, and create a drug-free environment (Lee, 2016) before, during, and after the event. The G1 informant expressed:

...That is why I think most of the event organisers made the mistake of not looking and making the government their strategic partner. They must look into ROI, economic senses, and government agenda [...] That is why I said the organiser failed in that sense. When they fail to align their event to what the government wants and allow incidents of safety and security to occur in their event, I don't think they can organise the same music festival again for the following year.

According to the quote above, there is a positive relationship between safe and secure music festivals and the government. The positive relationship contributes to the success of the event and influences the location image where the music festivals are hosted. In other words, the cost of hosting special events like music festivals must be viewed as a form of tourism promotion. Table 2 below shows the stakeholders effected from this issue and ways to overcome it.

Table 2: Government Responsiveness on Safety and Security of Malaysia Music Festival

Government responsiveness on safety and security of Malaysia music festival		
Government Responses	Stakeholders Effected	How to Overcome the Issue?
The possibility of endangering the safety of attendees	Attendees	Provide an effective risk management plan
The possibility of being rejected by government authorities	Organizers	Follow the rules and regulations stated by the authority
The possibility that caused the country's image to be tarnished	Government Agencies	To look into ROI (Return on Investment) which consists of economics and sustainability.

		To have a positive relationship with government agencies which also related to the tourism industry
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Source: Authors (2022)

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies have been using both qualitative and quantitative methods to build an understanding of the importance of safety and security during music festivals. However, the current study conducted only qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews, observation, and document sources. Nevertheless, the findings of the current study provide insights into how a safe and secure event can influence people to attend events. It is also evident from the research findings that this is due to the support gained from government agencies.

The current study reveals the government's responses to the issue of safety and security at Malaysian music festivals. The environment of Malaysian music festivals is observed and analysed through three themes, namely 1) the possibility of endangering the attendee's safety, 2) rejection by government authorities, and 3) tarnishing the country's image. The three themes identified in the findings also disclose the importance of establishing a relationship between stakeholders and government agencies. In addition, while some studies contend that risk possibilities include costs and rules that are mainly found before festivals, other studies identify physical risks as affecting the quality of music festivals as well as the safety and security of the attendees (Tenu & Ciocoiu, 2020). It can be argued that the risk possibilities of attendees' safety are not limited to the physical implications, but also between government agencies and music festival organisers.

The second finding of the current study indicates the possibility of music festivals being rejected by government authorities if there are no safety measures in place. This is consistent with what is said by G6 informant:

...They (organisers) should know alcohol should not be involved in their event. If they fail to comply with our terms and conditions, their deposit will not be refunded. But, in a few cases, this can be under the subject of negotiation which we will bring to the committee meeting [...] because entertainment is under the federal territory entertainment act 1992. There will be a long process if we decide not to refund their deposit.

This explains the relationship between government authorities and organisers at the beginning phase of planning a music festival, and the role of government authorities to approve or reject the organisation of a music festival. Nevertheless, the process raises a number of questions including the reasons music festivals continue to be held despite their application being rejected and the effectiveness of safety measures prepared by organisers given the occurrences of unexpected incidents at music festivals. These questions are pertinent to addressing the gap in the current case study and may be considered as a recommendation for future studies. Aside from that, the findings of the current study suggest the Malaysian government to strengthen policy support because music festivals are believed to be an effective political instrument to enhance tourism and generate economic benefits.

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