HOW DO YOU BEAT THE BARRIERS? INVESTIGATING THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF MANAGING EVENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract*: Event management is a multi-billion industry that was greatly hampered by the pandemic of COVID-19. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic saw many players go out of business, facing liquidation, or cease of operation. Thus, there is growing interest in the need to identify the critical success factors for organizing events in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was adopted. Data was analyses based on descriptive analysis; findings indicated that several elements influence the success factors of an event in the aftermath of COVID-19, such as engagement, reward, peer influences, communication, promotion, and information system friendliness.*

Keywords*: User Engagement, Event Management, Consumer Retention, And Information System Management.*

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Introduction

Novel Coronavirus 2019 pandemic or COVID-19 has greatly influenced the daily life of humankind for the past two years (N S et al., 2020). Many events have been cancelled, rescheduled, or completely gone due to the restriction of movement control order (MCO). The purpose of MCO is to slow down the rate of infection via lockdown activities (Lane, 2019). However, resistance and failure to comply with the government order caused further damage to the problem, making the pandemic worsen.

The rising cases of COVID-19 have caused damage to many industries, and one of the most affected industries is the event management industry. Recent studies indicated that a total of more than $600 million was lost and over 80 million jobs were at stake (Madray, 2020; Rosman et al., 2021) Event management provided over 1.5 billion visitors worldwide, with direct and indirect spending constituting a staggering 2.5 trillion USD (Gössling et al., 2020; Global Economic Significance of Business Events, 2022).

However, efforts and preventive mechanisms undertaken by governments have reduced the fatality rate of COVID-19, and most of the countries in the world are moving towards the endemic era – in which people will learn how to live their life alongside the disease. Countries are starting to open their international border, and life is slowly returning to the normal paradigm. The situations bring a new life to the event management industry – however, companies have been urged to put cautions and follow the standard operating procedures (SOP) that have been given by the authorities.

Consequently, studies are currently undergoing on the impact of COVID-19 on the event management industry, especially in the issues of engagement, user perception, critical success factors, potential impacts, and contingency measures (Mohanty et al., 2020; Perić et al., 2021) Since we are still in the early stages of the 'old norm', studying the critical success factors of event management may help companies to focus their effort on the success of their event.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we explained the method of the study. Second, we analysed the findings in form of descriptive analysis. Third, we discuss the finding of the study and develop a framework for further exploration of the topic.

Method

The conduct of the study is a mixed research methodology. First, the study was conducted using a quantitative research methodology with several steps. First, an instrument was developed by adopting previous studies of (Rosman et al., 2021), (Coluci & Alexandre, 2009), and (Joo et al., 2011). Second, the items of the instrument were evaluated by five experts in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS), Information Systems (IS), and Psychology. Few modifications were made to the instrument based on a suggestion from the expert review session. Third, a pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument. A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was then used to indicate the reliability of the instrument. Data collection took 2 weeks using Google Form and was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 26. The respondents of the study were selected using convenience sampling from the participants of one of the events organised by a public university in Kelantan.

For the second stage, an interview was conducted with several stakeholders selected based on convenience sampling. The purpose of the stage is to identify possible success factors and reconfirm the result of the quantitative analysis. To achieve triangulation, the interview session

was assisted with document analysis and observation of respondents. A total of 5 respondents were selected for the purpose of the study.

Findings and Discussion
The following subsections show the finding and discussion of the study. The result of the study was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.

Demographic
Table I shows the demographic details of the study. A total of 77 respondents participated in the first phase of the study. Most of the respondents are female (N=50 or 66.2%). A total of 26 respondents are male (33.8%). Concerning respondents 'age, most of the respondents are between 18 to 40 years old (N=52 or 67.5%), followed by 41 to 60 years old (N=21 or 27.3%) and below 18 years old (N=4 or 5.2%). As expected, most of the respondents usually participated in the professional category (N=39 or 50.6%), followed by Tertiary and Young Scientist (N=17 or 22.1%), and 3-Minute Thesis (N=4 or 5.2%). The majority of respondents are local participants (Malaysia) (N=74 or 96.1%), while only 3 (or 3.9%) of international participants participate in this study.

Table 1: Demographic

Item	Sub-Item	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	26	33.8
	Female	51	66.2
Age	Below 18	4	5.2
	18-40	52	67.5
	41-60	21	27.3
Category	Professional	39	50.6
	Tertiary	17	22.1
	Young Scientist	17	22.1
	3-Minute Thesis	4	5.2
Type	Local	74	96.1
	International	3	3.9

Medium
Table 2 shows the medium that usually connects the event to the potential participants. Social media is the most popular medium, particularly the use of Facebook (N=20) and Telegram (N=19). However, strangely Instagram was considered as the least popular social medium that influence participation in event management (N=5). Concerning personalized communication (using email), it seems that a special invitation email to participants is more favourable and appealing to the participant's decision to participate in the selected event (N=22), compared to regular email (N=5). On the other hand, the role of influencers is also important in the switching and participating decision among participants. Colleagues were identified as the most popular influencer (N=23) compared to teachers/lecturers (N=2). Consequently, the search engine is also considered as one of the influencing factors that motivate and provide additional information regarding the selected event.

Table 2: Medium

Item	Sub-Item	Frequency
Social Media	Facebook	20
	Instagram	5
	Telegram	19
	WhatsApp	8
Communication	Regular Email	5
	Special Invitation	22
Influncer	Colleague	23
	Teacher/Lecturer	2
Searching	Search Engine	6

Registration Process

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the registration process. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=75). Participants agreed that the easefulness and effectiveness of the registration process may influence their perception of participating in the event.

Table 3: Registration

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	1
Unsatisfied	0
Neutral	1
Satisfied	17
Highly Satisfied	58

Video Submission Process

Table 4 shows the descriptive analysis of the video submission process. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=76). Participants agreed that the easefulness and effectiveness of the video submission process may influence their perception of participating in the event.

Table 4: Video Submission Process

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	1
Neutral	0
Satisfied	17
Highly Satisfied	59

Digital Certificate

Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis of participants' perceptions of the digital certificate provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=76). Participants agreed that the design, easefulness, and quick availability of digital certificate is very important criteria for managing an event.

Table 5: Digital Certificate

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	0
Neutral	1
Satisfied	14
Highly Satisfied	62

Medal Delivery

Table 6 shows the descriptive analysis of medal delivery provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=74). The finding indicates that there is a need to provide a transparent medal delivery process such as providing the tracking number and blasting the delivery process to the participants.

Table 6: Medal Delivery

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	0
Neutral	3
Satisfied	13
Highly Satisfied	61

Medal Quality

Table 7 shows the descriptive analysis of medal quality provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=75). The finding indicates that the organiser must put utmost attention towards the design, attractiveness elements, and material of the medal to ensure the success of the event.

Table 7: Medal Quality

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	1
Neutral	1
Satisfied	9
Highly Satisfied	66

Medal Pricing

Table 8 shows the descriptive analysis of medal pricing provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=69). However, caution must be put towards deciding on the medal pricing, as the monetary issue is considered as a big influence towards participant willingness to participate in any event.

Table 8: Medal Pricing

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	2
Neutral	6
Satisfied	14
Highly Satisfied	55

Payment Process

Table 9 shows the descriptive analysis of the payment process provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=73). Only a few participants indicate their displeasure with the payment process. A good payment process will have a dual effect: first, reduce the burden on the organiser to validate the payment, and second, help participants to have access to the next stage of the registration process.

Table 9: Payment Process

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	2
Neutral	2
Satisfied	11
Highly Satisfied	62

User Engagement

Table 10 shows the descriptive analysis of the user engagement level provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=77 or 100%). It shows that continuous communication, constant interaction, information-delivery-effectiveness (IDE), and the existence of a support eco-system (such as Telegram or WhatsApp support group) will help to engage participants with the organisers. As found out by (Masrek & Samadi, 2017), (Masrek et al., 2018), (Rosman et al., 2021), (Thomas et al., 2016), and (O'Brien & Toms, 2010), an engaged individual is the one that will continue to use the specific object (or information system), as well as promote the usage to others.

Table 10: User Engagement

Rating	*Frequency*
Highly Unsatisfied	0
Unsatisfied	0
Neutral	0
Satisfied	12
Highly Satisfied	65

Awards

Table 11 shows the descriptive analysis of the number of awards provided by the event. Based on the data provided, the trend of the responses is towards a positive tendency (N=74). It is

worth noting that the number of awards provided has a significant influence on the participation rate for an event. However, participants do mention that awards should be accompanied by an appropriate reward (such as monetary, plaque, medal, etc).

Table 11: Awards

Rating	Frequency
Highly Unsatisfied	1
Unsatisfied	1
Neutral	1
Satisfied	14
Highly Satisfied	60

The framework of Critical Success Factors
Figure 1 shows the framework of critical success factors of event management post-COVID era. The framework consists of (1) engagement, (2) reward, (3) peer influences, (4) communication, (5) promotion, and (6) information system friendliness.

Figure 1: The framework of Critical Success Factors in Event Management

The thematic selection of the critical success factors is based on the result of quantitative analysis and confirmed through a qualitative interview with selected respondents.

Engagement refers to the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domain of respondents towards the subject or objects. It is one of the most important elements in ensuring the success of the event. Engagement, communication, and information system friendliness are usually intertwined elements that work best for the benefits of the organiser. As mentioned by the respondent "*...this is one of the best experiences I have ever had from start to finish. The process was smooth, and I am delighted to be part of this event. Thank you to the organizing committee. Please email me when you going to prepare for the next year!*". This is supported by another respondent who mentioned that "*...The best event management ... Efficient and well-flow event and assist the participants in a good way. Will join again next year!".*

On the other hand, a reward may also have a positive influence on continuing participation among respondents. Reward encourage participant to prepare early and focus on the judging criteria. This is supported by a few respondents that mentioned *"...We would like to have more awards for the upcoming event*". Another respondent also mentioned that "*...maybe the organiser can offer plaque, together with the free medal*". Both statements indicate the importance of reward towards continuing participation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to identify the critical success factors for organising an event in the post-COVID era. A mixed-method approach was adopted. The result of the quantitative study indicates that factors such as registration process, video submission process, medal management, user engagement, awards and payment process were rated as positively influencing participant decisions in participating in an event. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis was performed using interviews, document analysis, and observation: 6 factors similar to the previous stage were found significant as the critical success factors.

Although the research has met its purpose, however, few limitations still existed. First, there is a need to reconfirm the critical success factors in full-scale research. Second, future research may look at the impact of the success factors from a different perspective, such as satisfaction, performance, attitude, retention, and continuing participation.

Acknowledgment

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