

IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) ON PUBLIC ARCHIVES IN MALAYSIA

Ahmad Azman Bin Mohamad Ramli ¹
Norhidayu Binti Md Yatim ²
Noor Faraliza Binti Samsudin ³
Nor Zaina Zaharah Binti Mohd Ariff ⁴
Kasmarini Binti Baharuddin ⁵
Mohd Naim Bin Mohd Nasfi ⁶

¹ Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau
Email: ahmadazman@uitm.edu.my

² Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau
Email: norhidayu@uitm.edu.my

³ Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau
Email: noorf053@uitm.edu.my

⁴ Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, Kampus Puncak Perdana
Email: norzaina@uitm.edu.my

⁵ Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, Kampus Puncak Perdana
Email: kas@uitm.edu.my

⁶ Fakulti Pengurusan Maklumat, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau
Email: naim932@uitm.edu.my

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Abstract: *The emergence of Covid-19 has had an impact on various aspects of human life in the world and Malaysia is no exception to this situation. In this regard, the objective of this study is to make a survey to determine the impact of the emergence of the disease to the public archives in Malaysia. It is hoped that knowing the impact, it can make the parties responsible for managing public archives in Malaysia and the Malaysian community in general more prepared to face any emergence of infectious diseases that risk disrupting the smooth management of this invaluable national treasure. To achieve the objectives of the study, researchers use the approach of literature review (literature review) to obtain information related to the topic of study. Reference media such as newspapers, books, social media such as Facebook, websites and so on are used. The results of the study found that there are certain impacts on public archives in Malaysia because of the emergence of this disease in Malaysia. These impacts are described one by one in this article. It is hoped that the results of this study will be a catalyst for researchers to conduct research on this issue in more depth in the future to help ensure that public archives in Malaysia can continue to be preserved and can be used for current and future generations.*

Keywords: *Impact, Covid-19, Archives, Public Archives*

Introduction

Covid-19 was first detected in the world in mid-December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, Hubei, China and was recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. As of December 21, 2020, the WHO has reported that 75.7 million people worldwide have been infected with the Covid-19 virus while deaths due to the virus have reached 1.69 million deaths (Ammituh & Abdullah, 2020). The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia started as early as January 25, 2020 after tourists from China who entered Malaysia from Singapore were confirmed to be infected with the epidemic. As of March 14, 2021, this pandemic has infected a total of 330042 people in Malaysia and the total death toll is 1225 people. Currently, Covid-19 infection continues to occur in most countries of the world and has yet to show signs of subsiding or being controlled. Indeed, this disease has impacted various aspects of human life and is not limited to aspects of human health only. The presence of Covid-19 is a major threat to the world because it not only adversely affects the health of the world's population but also the economic condition of a country (Arkib Negara dan Pentadbiran Rekod Amerika Syarikat, 2021). COVID-19 has a direct impact on the domestic business ecosystem such as the food and beverage, construction and manufacturing industries, tourism industries, as well as agriculture, construction and services industries. This in turn resulted in many job losses (Arkib Negara United Kingdom, 2021). However, there is a positive impact as a result of the transmission of this disease (Arkib Negara United Kingdom, 2021). For example, data recorded by China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment between January and March found an increase of 84.5 percent days with good air quality in 337 cities in the country. Satellite data taken by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration shows a decline in nitrogen dioxide in China. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to make a preliminary survey to determine the impact of the emergence of this disease to the public archives in Malaysia. The focus of the study is on public archives that are being managed by the National Archives of Malaysia. This agency was chosen because it is the only agency in Malaysia authorized by Section 4 of the National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) to manage public archives in Malaysia. It is hoped that knowing the impact, it can make the parties responsible for managing public archives in Malaysia in particular and the Malaysian community in general more prepared to face any emergence of infectious diseases that risk disrupting the smooth management of this invaluable national treasure. It is hoped that this study will be a catalyst or impetus for researchers to conduct research on this topic in more detail or depth in the future.

Definition of Terms

To enable the reader to gain a better understanding of this topic, it is good to first define four important terms used in this paper. The terms are records, public records, archives, and public archives.

Records

The National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) states that a "record" is a material in written or other form that states facts or events or otherwise records information and includes papers, documents, registers, printed materials, books, maps, plans, drawings, photographs, microfilms, cinematographic films, sound recordings, electronically produced records regardless of form or physical features and any copies thereof (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2003).

Public Records

The National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) defines a "public record" as a record officially received or issued by any public office in the course of its affairs or by any public servant or employee of a public office in the course of his official duties and includes records any

government enterprise and also including all records which at the commencement of this Act, are in the custody or under the control of the National Archives of Malaysia established under the National Archives Act 1966 (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2003).

Archives

The National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) defines “archive” as a record preserved for its permanent and long-lasting national or historical value or both (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2003).

Public Archives

The National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) defines “archive” as a record preserved of its permanent and long-lasting national or historical value or both. The National Archives Act 2003 (Act 629) states that "public archive" means a public record designated by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia as having permanent and long-lasting national or historical value or both and which has been transferred to the National Archives of Malaysia or any other place as directed by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia from time to time. The Act also defines a public archive as any private record or other material designated by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia as having permanent and long-lasting national or historical value or both obtained for the National Archives of Malaysia by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2003).

Research Methods

To achieve the objectives of the study, this study uses a qualitative approach that is to review the work (literature review) on reference sources to obtain secondary information related to the topic of study. Review work as "a step-by-step process that involves the identification of published and unpublished work from secondary sources on the topic of interest, the evaluation of this work in relation to the problem, and the documentation of this work" (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). This paper chose this method due to its contribution to the achievement of the objectives of this paper. "Literature search will help the researcher to focus on the research problem based on certain aspects found to be important in the published studies (Awang, 2013)." "Literature review convinces readers about the significance of a study (Kee et al., 2009)." Reference materials such as newspapers, books, social media such as Facebook, websites and so on are used to obtain the secondary information.

Findings

The results of the study on secondary information obtained from reference sources found that there are indeed certain impacts that occur to the public archives due to the emergence of Covid-19 disease in Malaysia. The detected impacts are as follows;

Closure of the Research Hall

As one of the efforts to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, on 16 March 2020, at 10 pm Malaysian time, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin gave a live speech on television and officially declared the Movement Control Order (PKP) which first throughout Malaysia under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967. Under this order, Malaysians are prohibited from making public movements and gatherings throughout the country, including religious, sports, social and cultural activities (Yassin, 2020). Government and private premises including educational institutions were also ordered to be closed during the PKP period. Comprehensive restrictions are also imposed on all travel by Malaysians abroad. For those who have just returned from abroad, they are required

to undergo a health examination and perform voluntary quarantine (self-quarantine) for 14 days. The entry of foreign tourists is also restricted.

Impressed by this order, the National Archives of Malaysia immediately issued a notice to the public stating that all research halls, memorials and other research facility premises under the administration of the organization will be closed temporarily starting March 16, 2021. The closure of the research facility premises continues until it reopened on 15 June 2020. However, on 14 October 2020, the premises of this research facility was closed again until it reopened on 10 March 2021 until now. Indeed during this period of closure, this situation has resulted in researchers not being able to directly access the physical public archival materials stored at the organization. The alternative that exists for researchers during this closure period is to use the Online Finding Aid (OFA) system. Through this system, researchers can access digital archive materials from home or other locations by browsing the OFA on the National Archives of Malaysia website. The institution has promoted this activity to researchers by using infographics and distributed through websites, Facebook and other social media.

The closure of research facilities as done by the National Archives is also practiced by other archival institutions in the world. For example, the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has taken similar action as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country. The United States National Archives and Records Administration states “as a public health precaution, due to COVID-19, the following changes are in effect. All National Archives research rooms nationwide, including those at Presidential Libraries, are closed to the public until further notice (Athabasca & University, 2021).” The National Archives of the United Kingdom states that the National Archives’ reading room services are currently suspended. Many of our staff are working from home and still providing a service and point of contact for the archive sector (Athabasca & University, 2021).”

Acquisition of Public Records and Private Records

The National Archives of Malaysia is aware of the importance of keeping public and private records that store information related to the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Accordingly, starting on 2 May 2020, through social media channels such as the official Facebook, the institution has made a public announcement by using infographic posters to invite government agencies, non-governmental institutions and individuals in Malaysia to submit records. -their pandemic -related records to be stored and preserved in the National Archives of Malaysia. Such records can consist of various formats such as files, photographs, infographics, notes of experiences, scholarly writing, audiovisual and so on.

Abroad Institutions are also taking similar actions as those taken by the National Archives of Malaysia. For example, Athabasca University states that students, staff, and alumni of the university are encouraged to share their experiences on how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected lives (Athabasca & University, 2021). Accordingly, documents that store the experience are encouraged to be kept in the archives section or unit of the university. Indeed, such efforts are expected to contribute to the addition of the collection of public archival materials in archival institutions to be used as a reference for current and future generations.

Virtual Exhibition of Digital Public Archive Material

The Covid-19 pandemic has limited the movement of Malaysians. The Malaysian government imposes movement restrictions such as cross-district and cross-state restrictions. The premises of organizations, whether government or private, also had to be closed for a certain period. The

National Archives of Malaysia has been affected by this situation where visitors or researchers are unable to visit the research premises available in the National Archives of Malaysia throughout Malaysia to refer to public archive materials.

Recognizing this phenomenon, the National Archives of Malaysia has provided an alternative by holding a virtual exhibition of digital public archive materials stored in the National Archives of Malaysia. For example, starting on 1 June 2020, the National Archives of Malaysia has held a virtual exhibition of digital documents of public archival materials that contain information related to the history of infectious diseases that have been and are plaguing Malaysia. The exhibition can be accessed by the public through the official Facebook of the National Archives of Malaysia. Various digital document formats of public archival materials are on display such as letters, posters, newspaper clippings, minutes of meetings, books, audiovisual materials and so on. Such efforts should be commended because it can make the Malaysian community aware of the importance of preserving and using archival materials as a source of reference for the country's history.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The spread of Covid-19 in Malaysia has forced the National Archives of Malaysia to tighten the procedures for the use of research facilities at the National Archives of Malaysia. There are new procedures that need to be followed by visitors or researchers. The purpose is to curb the spread of this pandemic among visitors or researchers as well as staff at the National Archives of Malaysia. For example, through the SOP document issued by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia on March 9, 2021, visitors or researchers are not allowed to visit the facilities provided by the National Archives of Malaysia in groups. Visitors should always wear a face mask, scan the MySejahtera QR code and make a body temperature screening. Visitors who have a body temperature above 37.50 C or have symptoms of cough, flu and shortness of breath are prohibited from entering the research facilities provided by the National Archives of Malaysia. The maximum number of visitors is limited to 20 people on a given day. Visitors also need to make an appointment by phone at least one day before attending to use the facilities at the National Archives of Malaysia. If they want to refer to the archival material, they need to make a reservation through the Online Finding Aid (OFA) system at least three days before attending the research hall. Overseas Archival Institutions have also created their own SOPs for visitors in an effort to prevent this Covid-19 from spreading (Hin, 2020). For example, on the Australian National Archives website, there is a statement that reads “as a COVID-19 health and safety measure, the number of researchers allowed in the research centre at once is capped. No time limits apply, but researchers will be asked to leave the research centre from 1:00 to 1:30 pm while we perform additional cleaning. You need to request records in advance and book a time to visit. Please complete an advance request for records online and we will contact you to confirm your research centre booking (Sobian, 2021).”

Usage of Online Finding Aid (OFA)

Finding aids are tools that help a user find information in a specific record group, collection, or series of archival materials. Examples of finding aids include published and unpublished inventories, container and folder lists, card catalogs, calendars, indexes, registers, and institutional guides. Formal publications that help a user find information regarding a record group, collection, or series of archival materials are also finding aids (Richard et al., 2011). OFA is an online search system that has been developed by the National Archives Malaysia to enable Archival material is accessible anywhere and anytime and Archival material in digital form can be referenced without having to attend the research hall (Universiti et al., 2022). The

emergence of Covid-19 has indeed made it difficult for researchers to visit research halls in the national archives of Malaysia. This is because the National Archives of Malaysia has established various standard operating procedures to curb covid transmission in their research halls. For example, as discussed before, through the SOP document issued by the Director General of the National Archives of Malaysia on March 9, 2021, visitors or researchers are not allowed to visit the facilities provided by the National Archives of Malaysia in groups (Arkib Negara Malaysia, 2022). Indeed, this situation has caused many researchers in Malaysia to switch to using OFA to access digital archive materials stored in the national archives of Malaysia. Its former Director General, Datuk Azemi Abdul Aziz said the digital version of the material could be accessed online through ofa.arkib.gov.my, thus enabling researchers and the community to access the records and materials stored by ANM no matter where they are (Berita et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Based on the discussion as above, there are certain impacts on the management of public archives in Malaysia because of the emergence of Covid-19 disease in Malaysia. It is hoped that these findings can be used as a motivator or catalyst for researchers to research in more depth on this issue and subsequently produce more comprehensive findings. For example, it is hoped that future studies can use more detailed statistical methods on the effects of this pandemic on the feelings of employees at the National Archives of Malaysia such as their level of motivation and level of cheerfulness at work.

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