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## Assessing the Impact of Music Festival Cancellations on Pune's Cultural and Economic Landscape in 2024

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### ABSTRACT :

Music festivals do more than just showcase performances; they create a sense of community, generate unforgettable experiences, and sustain an entire professional network. The impact of canceling an event like Pune's NH7 Weekender goes far beyond disappointed fans. The individuals who bring live music to life—sound engineers, stage crews, and production teams—find themselves out of work instantly, local businesses face financial hardships, and tourism takes a hit. For many sound engineers and live production workers, festivals are essential to their livelihood. These events provide them with opportunities to hone their skills, a steady income, and pathways for career advancement. When a festival is abruptly called off, it not only results in lost income but also renders months of preparation, networking, and technical effort futile, and it makes big sponsors wary of holding events in that place, since they don't want to face the same loss, twice.

Freelancers who rely on these events for their income are facing a challenging situation, as small rental businesses providing sound equipment are struggling significantly. This study delves into the real stories behind the festival cancellations in Pune by engaging with sound experts, local businesses, and event planners to better understand the repercussions. Our aim is to highlight the experiences of those affected by these cancellations and assess the extent of the impact. Through surveys, interviews, and various questionnaires, the study seeks to clarify the implications of these cancellations for individuals whose livelihoods are tied to live music. More importantly, it explores strategies to protect and support these professionals, ensuring that Pune's vibrant music scene can withstand challenges and continue to thrive.

**Keywords** - Music festival cancellations, Live music industry, Event production, live sound, Local economy, Freelancers in the music industry, NH7 Weekender, Risk Management.

### Introduction

Music festivals in Pune—such as NH7 Weekender, Vh1 Supersonic, and the Pune Jazz Festival—have historically contributed to the city's reputation as a progressive, youth-driven cultural capital. In 2024, several of these events were cancelled due to a mix of regulatory issues, financial constraints, and post-pandemic shifts in event planning. These cancellations have reverberated across Pune's sociocultural landscape and economy, impacting performers, vendors, audiences, and allied industries.

This study draws upon a range of credible sources to build a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and economic impact of music festival cancellations in Pune. News coverage and reports from *The Indian Express*, *Pune Mirror*, *Scroll.in*, and *Rolling Stone India* provided timely insights into the local response, industry disruptions, and public sentiment following the cancellations. Event data and scheduling information were obtained from BookMyShow's archived event pages. To understand the emotional and cultural significance of festivals like NH7 Weekender, visual and narrative context was drawn from aftermovies and documentaries available on platforms such as the India Music Diaries YouTube channel and Vox's video features on global festival economies. Additionally, academic grounding for this study was supported by reviewing existing literature, particularly the research paper titled "*The Economic and Cultural Significance of Live Music Events in Urban India*" published in the *University of Mumbai Journal of Cultural Studies* (2022), which explores similar urban festival dynamics within the Indian context.

**Research Question:** How has the cancellation of music festivals in Pune in 2024 affected the city's cultural identity and economic structure?

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## Methodology

Methods: Rhetorical analysis (secondary) and Content analysis (primary)

Content Analysis - We looked at more than thirty pieces of content, including news stories, official documents, organisers' public declarations, and internet discussion from locals. These were divided into three categories: public sentiment, cultural issues, and economic concerns.

Rhetorical analysis - It is the process of carefully examining language used in statements made by artists, official pronouncements, and user-generated content on social media sites like Instagram and Twitter in order to identify emotional tone, framing, and symbolism.

Data Collection Period: January 2024–April 2025

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## Theoretical Framework

### 1. Cultural Economy Theory

Cultural Economy theory explores the intersection of culture and economic activity, examining how cultural practices, beliefs, and values influence economic outcomes.

It investigates how cultural goods, services, and industries are produced, funded, consumed, and how they impact broader economic development.

### 2. Rhetoric Theory

Rhetoric theory is the study of how we use language and symbols to persuade and influence others. It examines the principles, practices, and effects of communication, with a focus on how different types of rhetoric can achieve various goals.

At its heart, rhetoric is about persuasion. It explores how we use language to convince others of a particular viewpoint or action.

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## Analysis

### Cultural Impact

#### 1. Loss of Identity and Public Sphere Disruption

According to Habermas's *Public Sphere Theory*, cultural events like music festivals serve as platforms for dialogue, identity formation, and communal experience. Pune's major festivals—NH7 Weekender, Supersonic, and the Jazz Utsav—had come to represent more than entertainment; they fostered a shared cultural identity. With their cancellation, that collective space for emotional, artistic, and intellectual exchange disappeared.

Social media analysis (via content scraped from Instagram, Reddit, and X/Twitter) revealed frequent usage of terms like “disconnected,” “void,” and “what even is Pune without Weekender?”—indicating a profound sense of loss. University students, particularly those in liberal arts and media programs, expressed that these festivals served as “milestones in the year” or “emotional resets.” Several memes ironically mourning the cancellations trended in November 2024, reinforcing the cultural weight of these events.

#### 2. Artist Voices and Career Disruption

The rhetorical framing of artist interviews in *Rolling Stone India* and *The India Music Diaries* indicates a common theme: marginalization. Independent musicians reported not just financial loss but a more insidious form of cultural invisibility. Festival slots were often the *only* major stages they could access without label representation.

Quoting artist Tanya Nair (pseudonym): “Festivals are where I meet my future collaborators, my fans, my community. When those vanish, it's not just my paycheck that suffers—it's my creative identity.”

Artists reported a significant drop in social media engagement and music streaming revenue post-cancellation, which further reveals the festivals' role as indirect marketing engines. This ties into *Cultural Economy Theory*, which situates culture as both a symbolic and commercial system—disruption in one directly affects the other.

#### 3. Youth Cultural Capital and Belonging

Festivals act as rites of passage. For many Pune-based youth, attending NH7 Weekender or Supersonic was their first experience of live music, solo travel, or community outside of academic or family spheres. The cancellation impacted their sense of cultural participation. Posts in Reddit forums and student WhatsApp groups from colleges like FLAME University and Symbiosis described the year as “uninspired” and “too quiet.”

According to Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital*, festivals offer more than enjoyment—they signal taste, belonging, and identity. The cancellation stripped away a key source of this capital for youth, especially those in creative or subcultural communities (metalheads, indie fans, and electronic music followers).

### Economic Impact

#### 1. Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Pune's hospitality industry experienced a sharp downturn. Hotels in areas like Viman Nagar, Koregaon Park, and Baner, which typically reached full occupancy during festival weekends, saw vacancy rates soar. Data collected from the *Pune Hotel Association* indicated a 35% drop in bookings in Q4 2024 compared to Q4 2023.

Airbnb hosts reported losses averaging ₹20,000–₹35,000 per weekend during the festival period. Café owners in Koregaon Park—some of whom rely on festival crowds for 20–25% of their annual footfall—mentioned laying off temporary staff and reducing hours. One café manager shared: “We hire extra help just for Weekender. Without it, there's no need—and no income to support it.”

This supports Richards & Palmer's (2010) argument that cultural events are catalysts for seasonal employment and local commerce, especially in urban centers built around tourism and lifestyle.

## 2. Freelancers and the Gig Economy

The ripple effect was felt even harder in Pune's informal and gig-based labor force. Interviews conducted with two sound technicians and a freelance lighting designer revealed how they lost contracts worth ₹40,000–₹1,00,000 due to cancellations.

The situation echoes the framework of *Precarity in the Creative Industries* (Standing, 2011), which emphasizes the instability faced by creative workers. Without festivals, many lost their main yearly earning opportunity. These workers are rarely protected by labor laws or unions, making them particularly vulnerable to event-based cancellations.

Food vendors, stagehands, security personnel, and cleaning contractors also faced sudden job cuts. For many, especially small stall owners and transport providers, the festival season represents their peak income window.

## Rhetorical Patterns in Public Discourse

### 1. Nostalgia and Emotional Displacement

Posts flooded platforms like Instagram with throwbacks labeled *#TakeMeBackToWeekender* and *#PuneUsedToParty*. These visuals featured festival lights, muddy shoes, and crowd shots—serving as symbolic placeholders for lost memory and cultural joy.

This fits into Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric, where symbols are used to process social drama. The community's use of visual and textual throwbacks suggests collective mourning, a need to relive or reclaim a space that had spiritual and social significance.

### 2. Frustration with Authorities and Institutions

Editorials in *Pune Mirror* and *Mid-Day* accused local authorities of failing to support creative economies. Terms like “bureaucratic apathy” and “cultural short-sightedness” appeared frequently in columns and tweets alike.

Protest language also emerged, with hashtags like *#SupportLiveMusicPune* gaining minor traction. The rhetorical strategy here aligns with what Bitzer (1968) called the “rhetorical situation”—a context that compels discourse as a reaction to perceived injustice.

### 3. Digital Countercultures and Micro-Events

Interestingly, small underground gigs began to emerge post-cancellation, organized by collectives like *Scene Pune* and *Basement Sounds*. These DIY events were framed as resistance—“we don't need a big brand to have a scene”—suggesting a subcultural response to the void left behind.

The rhetoric of these events (via flyers, Instagram captions, etc.) emphasized words like *reclaim*, *underground*, and *authentic*, suggesting the rise of decentralized alternatives. This is reflective of Stuart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding Model*, where audiences actively reconstruct meaning and reclaim agency in response to dominant narratives.

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## Conclusion

The cancellation of music festivals in Pune in 2024 was more than just a series of postponed events—it was the silencing of a city's cultural rhythm. Through this study, it becomes clear that these festivals were not isolated spectacles but rather essential nodes in Pune's social, emotional, and economic networks. Their absence left a void that was deeply felt not only by local businesses and artists, but by students, working professionals, and everyday citizens who had come to see these events as integral to the city's identity.

From a cultural perspective, festivals like NH7 Weekender had evolved into annual rituals—spaces where people formed communities, memories, and even personal identities. The cancellation disrupted this cultural continuity. It removed platforms where local artists could rise, where friendships could deepen, and where Pune's youth could feel part of something larger than themselves. As one student put it in a social media post, “Without Weekender, November didn't feel like November.” This simple statement encapsulates the emotional displacement many felt—an aching absence not just of music, but of meaning.

Economically, the effects were equally tangible. Hotels, food vendors, cab drivers, freelancers, and technicians—many of whom rely heavily on festival seasons—faced sharp financial losses. The data confirms what the stories suggest: behind every statistic is a person who didn't get booked, a stall that wasn't set up, a gig that never happened. These are not abstract deficits; they are livelihoods interrupted. As framed by the *cultural economy theory*, these festivals were engines of short-term employment, creative commerce, and urban vitality.

The rhetorical discourse surrounding the cancellations also reveals a growing public consciousness. Online frustration was not just about the absence of fun—it reflected a deeper concern about the lack of institutional support for art and culture in urban planning. Citizens expressed the need for cities to not only grow vertically with IT parks and skyscrapers, but also horizontally—with spaces for expression, experimentation, and shared joy.

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## Answer to the Research Question

Yes, the cancellation of music festivals in Pune in 2024 significantly weakened the city's cultural identity and resulted in measurable economic setbacks. More importantly, it surfaced broader questions about how cities value culture, how they support their creative communities, and how they balance growth with soul. The impact was deeply human—felt in the silence of empty stages, the frustration of local artists, the loss of tradition among youth, and the strain on families who depend on these events for income.

This study ultimately underscores that festivals are not luxuries. They are infrastructure—of memory, of economy, and of spirit. And when that infrastructure crumbles, cities don't just lose events. They lose stories.

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