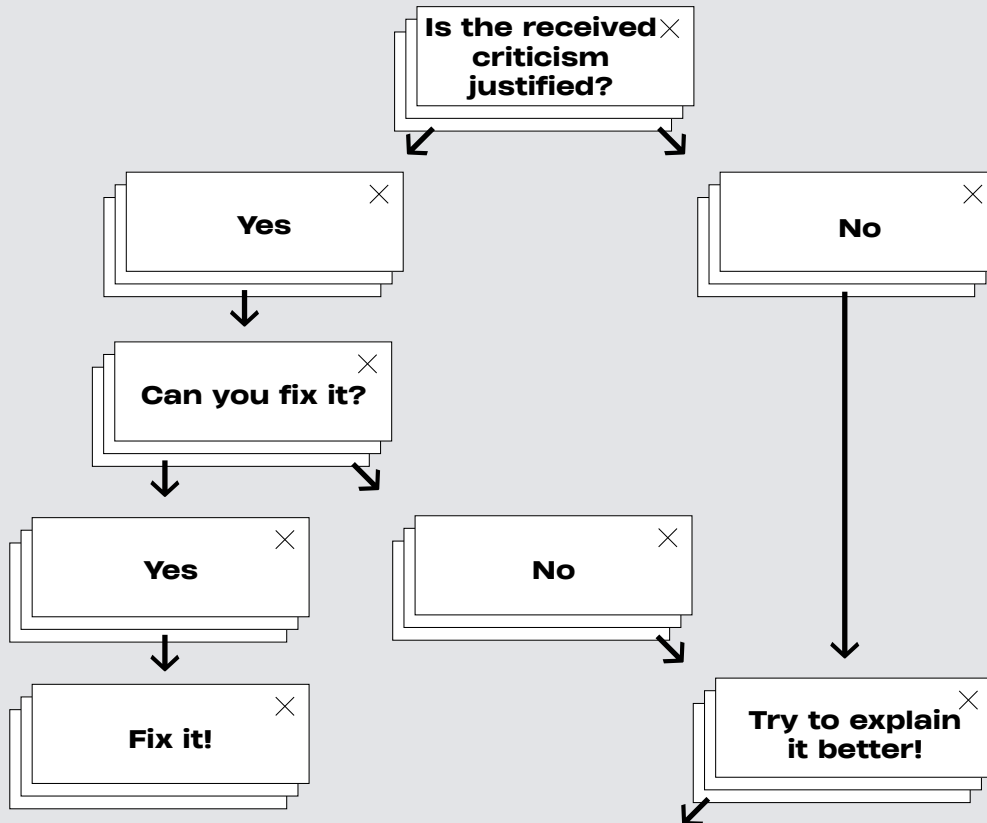


YOUR EVENT IS FACED WITH ONLINE HATRED, NOW WHAT?



Did you already explain it to the best of your abilities?

Just shrug off the online hate and think of the Instagram post from
Riot Fest (Chicago) which summed it all up:



SOMEONE WILL ALWAYS BE UNHAPPY

by LOTD



When you organise a festival, no matter how hard you try, someone will always be unhappy. Punters are disappointed by the lineup, the food, the number of toilets, the remote parking spaces, or the ticket price... the list of complaints can be endless. Bands may be outraged because of other artists on the lineup who have done something that goes against their morals and values. And within the team, the workload can become so heavy that people end up at home, completely burned out. It's easy criticising from the stands and you really don't have to mess things up the way Fyre Fest did to still get bombarded with animosity or downright hatred. In all honesty, at Left of the Dial HQ, we don't respond well to unreasonable discontent, and even the slightest negative social media comment can keep us awake at night. So, it is high time that we learn how to better arm ourselves against criticism, or better yet; how we can prevent people from becoming upset with us.

Dear Left of the Dial, improve
your after-party, nobody wanted
to dance with me!



When looking for information on how to deal with criticism, the most commonly given advice is not to take it personally. For an Ikea customer service operator, this is probably doable. Who cares if someone thinks the Klippan two-seater sofa is ugly and uncomfortable. It says nothing about your abilities as a telephone operator. It's different when people are hateful about something you've poured your heart and soul into, such as a new song or a festival you've spent months preparing with a small group of people. If you've been involved in every step of the development process, it's very challenging to mentally separate the end product from your own identity. You really don't have to be an extremely insecure individual to take criticism personally on something so close to your heart. Kind of like how parents seldom appreciate it when people describe their kids as quite annoying.

"Don't take criticism from someone you wouldn't take advice from"

Another tip that you'll come across repeatedly is that you should realise that criticism often says more about the criticiser themselves, rather than about the one on the receiving end. So, if someone says you can't carry a note in a bucket, they're probably just an underappreciated wannabe singer who is jealous of the attention you're getting. Although there may be some truth to this perspective, it's difficult to believe that all the people sending hateful messages to festivals are actually undervalued festival organisers. Sometimes, there's more to the story, and occasionally, these critics may simply be correct. →



Rolling Loud

WOO HAH!, a hip-hop festival, grew from 4,000 attendees in 2014 to around 37,500 per day in 2019, facing a formidable challenge after the pandemic. In recent years, WOO HAH! took place on beautiful fields with camping facilities next to a lake. The costs of organising such a large event at that location had increased significantly, by a factor of 1.5. However, there were no opportunities to offset these costs at that particular location. To compete with the lineups of other major hip-hop festivals in Europe, it was essential to accommodate a certain number of ticket buyers. Unfortunately, the festival site, as spectacular as it was, had too many capacity restrictions at the main stage. Concert promoter MOJO had no choice but to explore alternative ways to organise a large hip-hop festival in the Netherlands. The result was Rolling Loud Rotterdam, a two-day city festival with a similar lineup but a different location and experience. This meant no more camping, but it offered the convenience of a metro that takes you directly to the festival entrance. The announcement that WOO HAH! would transform into Rolling Loud Rotterdam triggered a flood of angry

reactions. We asked the festival's talent buyer Maarten van Vugt what transpired.

What went wrong?

'Part of WOO HAH!'s loyal attendees were very upset about all the changes. There was a lack of understanding, and they didn't agree with this new direction. WOO HAH! has a dedicated and loyal following, and they felt that we had taken something away from them. I think the main problem was that it all happened very suddenly and unexpectedly for them. In 2022, they simply saw over 30,000 people having the time of their lives. Unfortunately, behind the scenes and financially, such a weekend looks much different. There was also some dissatisfaction with the lineup, but that's something we've been accustomed to for years. Part of our audience is, especially online, exceptionally engaged, and they want to see all their favourite artists in that one weekend. It's safe to say that even if we announce 40 acts, they'll still only talk about the 41st artist missing from the lineup. I see that happening more and more, also at other festivals. Partly due to Spotify, this generation is growing up with playlists, and there's an expectation that all those artists should be available at any time. Unfortunately,

this is both logistically and financially completely unfeasible.'

Could you have handled it differently?

'The decision to discontinue WOO HAH! in this format and at this location was inevitable. Additionally, an American partner was now also involved, and we jointly chose to organise the festival in a different setup at a new location under the name Rolling Loud Rotterdam. Looking back, we could have provided the public with more insight into the reasoning behind these choices. We didn't adequately explain the insurmountable challenges we faced, and they were blindsided by it. We could have communicated it better.'

What's the worst thing you've heard/read?

'I don't have specific quotes on hand, but I've repeatedly read comments like, "I hope you go bankrupt." It really makes you wonder whether people are sufficiently aware of how hard we work to organise something of this magnitude in the Netherlands. The financial risk and the amount of time and effort involved in such a project are enormous. Sometimes, people forget that there is a whole team of enthusiasts with the right intentions

trying to get this kind of project off the ground. The alternative is that there simply isn't a festival anymore.'

Did it keep you up at night?

'Yes, of course. We knew that these changes would cause quite a stir, but at some point, negativity seemed to overshadow almost everything. It wasn't always easy to let go, especially in the beginning.'

Do you have any tips for other festival organisers facing negative reactions?

'You'll develop a thicker skin eventually. With more experience, you'll realise that certain reactions are just part of the job. It's important to remember that it's nothing personal. To balance it all out, the comments are overwhelmingly positive when you have a well-received last-minute replacement, like we did in 2018, for example, with Juice WRLD.'

Do I have the right to complain?

In a very unscientific way, we've spent a few festival seasons keeping tally of the topics generating the most online hate. Specifically for people who made it their daily habit to give their unvarnished opinion on social media we have divided those topics into three categories. We then asked other festivals organisers how they feel about these types of criticism to hopefully give a little more insight into how (un)justly some of your complaints might be.

The festival is (usually) to blame	Not fair to (entirely) blame the festival	Probably for a good reason
→ Not enough toilets and/or water points → Endless queues to get food/beverages → Hazardous situations → Other logistical errors → Poor sound quality	→ The weather conditions → Malfunctioning POS systems → The other punters were too young/too old/ no fun → It sold out too quickly	→ Your favourite bands playing at the same time → Timetable changes → The lineup in general → Increasing prices → A change of location

 **Juicy Festival organisers day social media backlash is 'gut wrenching'**

Endless queuing for food, drinks, or toilets

Estimating the necessary facilities to prevent long queues is a skill that a reasonably professional festival organisation should possess. Of course, if all festivalgoers suddenly crave a calzone at precisely 6 p.m., there might be an unexpectedly long queue at the pizza stand. And when the main headliner is about to perform, the toilets near the main stage will likely be busier than those at the camping site. Peak moments are unavoidable, and there's little an organisation can do to entirely eliminate them. However, if a quick toilet break takes more than an hour and a half, or if you've practically suffered from dehydration due to long queues, you have every reason to lay blame on the organisation.

Hazardous situations and weather conditions

Complaining is a common human tendency, and griping about the weather often becomes a daily pastime for many people. This habit

doesn't change when at a festival. The temperature can quickly become too hot, and a few raindrops can be just as irritating. However, it's primarily extreme weather conditions that have led to hazardous situations at festivals in recent years, sometimes even resulting in fatalities. These tragic incidents have prompted festivals to better prepare for severe thunderstorms and strong winds. Unfortunately, there are still numerous precarious situations at festivals unrelated to the weather. For example, when a festival organisation misjudges how revellers will move around the festival site. If there's only one narrow path leading to the main stage, and tens of thousands of people are pushing their way towards and away from the stage, things can turn chaotic rapidly. Continuously pointing out such issues to the festival organisers is entirely justified.

Other productional problems

A lack of parking spaces, an unreliable shuttle bus service, poorly marked routes, not enough

wristbands at the service desk, and noise bleeding from other stages are all examples of a slightly inadequate production. You can complain about them online – which many people do – but to maintain a festive spirit, it's better to just shrug them off. Chances are that the organisation is already well aware of these issues and is actively seeking solutions. As long as they only cause slight discomfort and no one is in actual danger, getting angry is a waste of energy.

Poor sound quality

Is a festival organisation to blame when you're watching a show and the sound is unbearably bad? Sometimes they are, and sometimes they're not. If the organisation has cut corners on equipment, they are definitely at fault. However, if the artist has their own sound engineer who hasn't the faintest idea how to work the monitors, even the best equipment in the world won't save them. Complaining, therefore, only makes sense if every single performance sounds dreadful. →

The Wife Guys of Reddit

It's easy to take the moral high ground in a social media post, but what if there's more at stake? Will you still do the right thing if it could impact your career, for example? The Wife Guys of Reddit, who played at Left of the Dial in 2022, surely put their money where their mouth is. They recently decided to cancel a festival show and were very clear about their reasons for doing so.

In March you have pulled out of a festival, why didn't you want to play there anymore?

'We'd heard information that a few acts from 2022 had only been partially paid, but we were reassured by the festival that repayment plans were in place, and everything was running smoothly behind the scenes. It wasn't until we came across a Reddit thread (ironically) that we realised the full scale of the trainwreck. Dozens and dozens of bands, as well as vendors still hadn't been paid from the previous year, with many of them not actually knowing if it would happen. In addition to this, through this thread we found out the new organiser of the festival had been involved in a high-profile sexual harassment case, where his friend was the defendant, and had been charged with contempt of court

for publishing identifying information about and endangering the survivors in said case. I don't think there was even a thought process after that. If you're willing to put women's lives and livelihoods at risk for the sake of an egocentric write-up defending your creepy pal you don't deserve anything, and as a band made up of survivors you definitely don't deserve us giving you the extra 0.1% of credibility for your f*ck-up of a festival.'

What would be other reasons to cancel a festival show? Would you consider not playing, because of other bands on the lineup that have been accused of abuse, racism, homophobia, or other toxic behaviour?

'Absolutely - I think if your headliner is a proponent of any of these forms of oppression that's reason enough. About half of our songs are about toxic band boys and until they're off these lineups we won't stop writing them.'

Is it difficult to decide where to draw the line? On one hand you've got innocent until proven guilty and sometimes there are only some rumours, or vague online accusations. On the other hand, you never want to take the risk

of indirectly approving toxic behaviour, how do you navigate between those two things?

'We've only had to make this decision when it's been very cut and dried, with heaps of proof and a criminal charge, and while we'd never want to - directly or indirectly - support or associate with bigots, it is extremely grim that often the responsibility in these moments is placed on other bands. Rather than a festival taking executive charge and removing someone from a lineup, for example. The onus is placed on the other artists - who are often smaller with less security if they cancel a show. I think that sacrifice is always worth making, especially when accusations involve sexism, racism, homophobia, or transphobia, but many festivals need to do more. Toxic behaviour generally stems from power imbalances - it shouldn't come down to small artists losing out on opportunities because you've still got "untouchable" bands like Arcade Fire headlining festivals.'

Do you think about the consequences of cancelling a festival slot might have for you as a band?

'I think you're always aware of the consequences - losing money, exposure, breaching contracts, et cetera - but if you're in this position you also need to think about why

you're making music. We want to create, we want to be silly, we want to connect with people - it's not worth validating bigots and abusers. I completely understand that some bands can't get out of contract clauses, they can't lose any more money on already impossible post-Brexit tours, but if you have the option, you should make the right choice. We're not a big band at all - I don't know if anyone at the top still has their morals intact - but for us this isn't a lucrative enough business to be worth doing for the wrong reasons. Make art, make friends, f*ck intolerance.'



Photography:
Marcel van Leeuwen



Music festival is cancelled amid 'sexual assault' allegations against its director



Malfunctioning POS System

Long queues at the bar or food stalls can very well be the result of a malfunctioning POS system. It's entirely possible that the festival organisation is to blame for this. If they underestimated the number of transactions the network has to process and forgot to install Wi-Fi signal boosters, then yes, all queueing chaos is their fault. However, we all know that banks aren't always reliable, and there's unfortunately not much that can be done if there's a nationwide POS problem.

Other People

Weirdly enough, it does occur: complaints about other punters because they were too old, too young, or simply no fun. Some people have actually complained about others who didn't sing along with the headlining act, for example. It's pretty obvious that a festival organisation can do little to fix this. After all, there is no selection committee for ticket buyers. A festival organisation can't force people to have a good time, but they can definitely contribute to a friendly environment to make everybody feel safe. For instance, by taking firm action if unacceptable behaviour is reported. Most festival organisations will go out of their way to ensure that you can party freely and safely. However, if, despite all these efforts, someone bothers you, posting online about it is not the best way to handle the situation, as online reports are almost always seen too late. Whatever you do, keep an eye on each other and lend a helping hand if you see a fellow festivalgoer in distress. And if you witness any signs of harassment in any form, go straight to a security guard so that immediate action can be taken.

It sold out too quickly

It's quite a simple calculation: If 20,000 people want to go to a festival and only 10,000 tickets are available for the event, there will be an equal amount of happy and frustrated people as soon as the pre-sales end. There might be no logic to getting angry at a festival organisation for missing out on a ticket simply because you were late, however, it's totally understandable if you get upset when you've been in a digital queue for ages and then get kicked out for no apparent reasons. We really did try but we have not been able to get a conclusive answer as to why these things happen, other than that it's purely bad luck on the technical side. Our conclusion: Life is just not fair and sometimes you miss out.

Favourite artists

It makes total sense that people complain about the lineup, after all, that's what a music festival is all about in the first place. Although some online haters take it a bit too far. If their personal top 20 favourite artists aren't all announced straight away, they become very vocal in their discontent. They don't care if their favourite band is already playing at another festival on the other side of the world; a festival organisation is nothing but a bunch of losers if they don't manage to add that one act to their lineup. Ticketholders also often demand to know exactly who's playing when and where months in advance. However, it usually takes a lot of time to complete the lineup, and to assign each and every artist a time slot they're happy with. You can trust a festival organisation to release a timetable as soon as realistically possible, but they need to wait for approval of all different management teams of the performing artists. And absolutely nobody wants last minute changes in the timetable, but artists sometimes miss a flight, or get sick resulting in time slots needing to be moved around. The one thing you can rightfully complain about is when those kinds of changes aren't clearly communicated.

Increasing ticket prices, venue changes and other seemingly incomprehensible decisions

Even a non-profit event needs to balance its books, and with rising costs, it's almost inevitable that ticket prices will increase. While there may be exceptions, most festivals struggle to break even, and tough decisions become unavoidable. So, before sharing an angry tweet with the world, it's worth considering the reasoning behind some decisions. In general, festivals want you to have the best time possible, but sometimes they lack the resources to organise everything exactly as you and your friends envisioned. If you truly believe they're not doing a good job, you have a more powerful weapon than a negative post: simply don't buy a ticket.

Complaints don't always go unheard

Occasionally, a festival organisation announces a new feature that is so poorly received that they reconsider their decision. So, yes, sending outraged messages en masse can be effective at times. A loyal festivalgoer explains why he felt compelled to call out a festival on Facebook:

'My favourite festival announced on Facebook that they were going to sell VIP tickets, including access to a special VIP deck with a better view of the main stage, private toilets, and more. My initial reaction was that VIP tickets didn't align with the idea of enjoying a festival together in equality. It felt like a cheap way to generate more revenue. It reminded me of the plans of organisations like Ticketmaster to implement dynamic pricing, which makes music less accessible, especially for people with less money to spend. They are treated as second-class festivalgoers who are denied the opportunity to get closer to the artists. I rarely complain on social media, maybe a few times a year if the topic addresses major issues that I consider important. This was such an example because music should be for everyone.'

Within 24 hours, the festival organisation announced that they would not sell VIP tickets after all. The festivalgoer was pleased that his complaint, as well as those of many others, had been heard. He has no regrets: 'I wouldn't have reacted if I hadn't hoped that my response would resonate. Of course, to make my point, I was a bit more forceful than strictly necessary, but I still believe my response was nuanced enough not to be taken personally. I addressed the organisation regarding their policy rather than singling out individual employees.'

A controversial lineup

Apparently, festivals are particularly sensitive when it comes to criticisms of their core values. The VIP ticket situation is a clear example, but you can also see festivals striving to align with their values through lineup adjustments made in recent years due to controversial artists. Sometimes, the public expresses strong opinions about certain lineup announcements, while other times, fellow performing artists refuse to share a stage with someone who has made disturbing statements or displayed unacceptable behaviour.

For instance, the South African duo Die Antwoord was removed from various festival lineups in 2019 after a video surfaced in which the two band members shouted homophobic slurs. More stories of the duo's misconduct emerged including allegations of sexual assault. However, in 2021, they were booked for the English ALT+LDN festival. Other contracted artists publicly threatened to withdraw from the festival and were applauded for doing so. Die Antwoord was subsequently removed from the lineup without further explanation. →

How to deal with (online) hatred from a scientific standpoint

By Simone Driessen (Assistant professor in Media & Popular Culture)

Pleasing everyone: that is something that's simply not possible. But what if you, as a festival or concert promoter, are confronted with online hatred? Comments, posts, tweets – people can easily share an opinion these days, but what should you do with those opinions?

When we look at academic literature about celebrities getting caught up in scandals or controversies, perhaps even getting cancelled, or suffering reputational damage, we always see the public's "mixed feelings" playing a role.

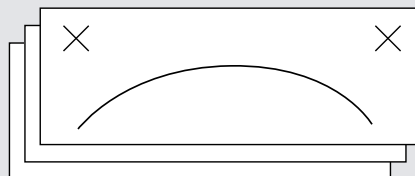
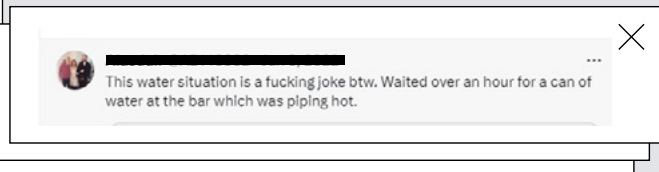
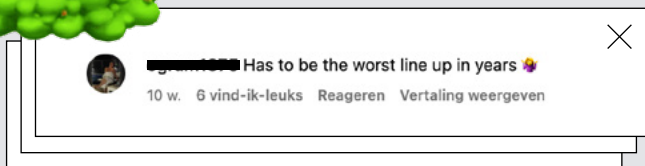
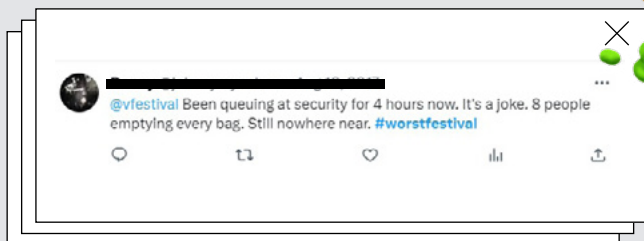
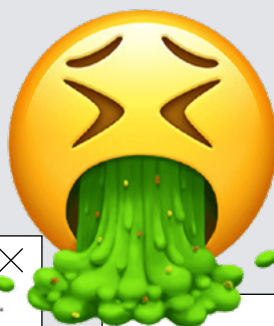
Not only you as an organiser or talent buyer feel connected to your festival, but so do the attendees. It may very well be a strong emotional connection, perhaps even so strong that we can see it as a parasocial relationship: a kind of one-sided, intense love, a connection in which the festivalgoer invests an immense amount of time, money, or other resources. The public has certain expectations of a festival: Parklife festival takes place in Manchester, not in Bristol; Glastonbury is outdoors, not indoors.

If a change does take place, such as from WOO HAH! to Rolling Loud Rotterdam, the audience needs time to get used to it. But: Communicate! Why did you choose to move a festival, why does a ticket cost more this year, why did you need a new logo? Include the public in the thought process and make it as transparent as possible so that people can digest the information and adjust to it.

This communication is even more important if you book a "tainted," artist. Use social media to share your considerations: What are the reasons for letting that specific artist or band perform? As an organisation, do you believe in "innocent until proven guilty" does someone deserve a second chance? Or do you think it is better to boycott such an artist for the time being? Think of ElectroniCON in New York, which invited John Maus but cancelled the artist due to the enormous outrage by "the public". Or imagine that you want to book or simply go see a discredited band: is that OK? What we see in scientific studies is that mixed feelings are also at play here: one group will remain defensive of their favourite idol and want them to perform either way. Another group may still like the music but have reservations due to the controversy. And for some, it is an evident reason to tear up or resell their ticket. As a festival or concert organiser, you should include the ticketholders in your choice: why is or isn't an artist allowed on your stage? Several festivals booked Johnny Depp's Hollywood Vampires – because he was acquitted in the case against Amber Heard, or was it because the

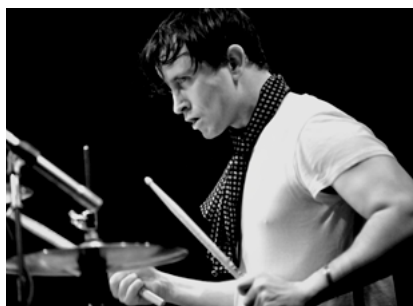
commotion also makes the artist more interesting? In some reviews, the lawsuit was briefly mentioned, which means they at least didn't try to sweep the controversy under the rug.

Still: there is not one perfect answer. As Taylor Swift said to her audience: 'Please, please, educate yourself.' Every challenging situation is different, but by sharing your own vision, you help the punters making an (informed) judgment and choose what feels right for them.





'No water, massive lines, money grab and dangerous'



ADAM FICEK
Former Babyshambles
drummer and psy-
chotherapist with a
practice in London

Based on accusations

It happens more often than artists are quietly removed from a lineup. British rapper Slowthai was scheduled to perform at a series of European festivals in the summer of 2023 but disappeared from the festival posters without any statement being made after he was accused of rape. This situation highlights the difficulty festival organisers face. Rumours alone can trigger public outcry, but as organisers, it's tricky to take a firm stance based solely on accusations. On one hand, everyone is presumed innocent until proven guilty, but on the other hand, there is no reason to assume that a victim would make such an accusation without valid grounds. These two perspectives are fundamentally opposed, and festival organisers can find themselves in a legal dilemma if they cancel a performance based solely on unsubstantiated allegations. Therefore, they often choose not to make a statement. As a festivalgoer, you must weigh whether making a general declaration against, in this case, violence against women, is more important than the risk of potentially participating in an unjustified online slaying when calling for the cancellation of a particular performance.

Apparent reasons

Being open about a cancellation becomes easier with evidence, or even better, thousands of eyewitnesses. In 2021, Ohio-born rapper DaBaby performed at the Rolling Loud festival in Miami. Via a live stream, the whole world witnessed the artist going on a misogynistic and homophobic rant. The day after, he made things even worse by posting an Instagram story declaring that he hadn't been referring to his own gay fans, because "they were classy". Aha, you mean unlike other gay people? Every sensible person on earth was appalled, and within a week the first three festivals removed him from their lineup, but only the Lollapalooza festival in Chicago was quite clear about their decision: "Lollapalooza was founded on diversity, inclusivity, respect, and love. With that in mind, DaBaby will no longer be performing at Grant Park tonight." Sometimes, festivalgoers don't even have to voice their opinions about a booking they consider controversial for whatever reason. Lineups are occasionally altered under pressure from unexpected sources. In 2016, the Pantera singer yelled "white power" at the end of a gig in Los Angeles and issued a Nazi salute. At

first, he didn't deem it necessary to apologise, but he quickly backtracked when it turned out that nearly everyone in the metal scene was distancing themselves from him. In a 90-second YouTube video, he explained that it was all a stupid mistake, and that he really hadn't meant it that way. Pantera had already called it quits in 2003, so the incident had no immediate further negative effect on the band. Until Pantera reunited six years later and planned to go on tour.

Almost every single show announcement caused divided reactions. For some, the singer had apologised, and that was the end of it. Others believed that such behaviour could not be dismissed with a simple "sorry" and remained outraged. Most shows went ahead as usual, but one Austrian show, and two German festival shows, were cancelled under the pressure of local politicians. They argued that sites which once hosted Nazi Party rallies could not be used for concerts by bands that espouse racist and inhumane ideologies. They called the singer's YouTube apology "not credible enough and therefore all the more problematic". Pantera was then removed from the lineup with a fairly general statement.

Professional advice

Festival employees, just like festivalgoers and artists, often find themselves dealing with a fair share of unhappiness. The demanding nature of festival organising can take a toll on one's mental health. Maintaining a regular daily routine and ensuring adequate sleep become challenging amidst the bustling world of festival coordination. It's an all-consuming profession, and during the busiest periods, it's difficult to dismiss any negativity. While the job itself is incredibly enjoyable, this very aspect can make it hard to slow down, even when you're on the verge of exhaustion. In these frantic moments, even the slightest criticism can feel particularly impactful.

To offer a bit of mental support to all of those working in the music industry, whether on stage or backstage, we asked Adam Ficek for some professional advice. The former Babyshambles' drummer has been active for over 25 years as a musician and DJ. Plus, he's a psychotherapist with a practice in London. If anyone can explain how to survive in this fickle world, it would be Adam:

'Negativity and criticism are a huge part of life, especially in the performing arts. I think

acknowledging how it is an impossible task to be able to please everyone all of the time is the primary step to being able to cultivate a sense of resilience within these demanding environments. If we start with a grounded sense of self, these criticisms are far less likely to take hold and become personally attached. We can also use strategies derived from cognitive-behavioural therapy to place these criticisms outside of ourselves and see them as just one person's opinion. It is neither wrong nor right, just an opinion from an emotional, flawed human attempting to communicate an emotional response whilst in a temporary emotional state, probably not related to us at all! We can then stand back and evaluate our response from a less emotional and personally intense "hijack" of our own emotions. The key here is to be mindfully reflective without being dragged down into a ruminative burrow of self-talk.'

Don't overstretch yourself

While it's helpful to be able to brush off negative comments, overworking can lead to burnout. According to Adam, it's crucial to be clear about your limitations: 'We know from research that prolonged high-pressure situations can lead to emotional overwhelm and burnout, resulting in feelings of depression and physical exhaustion. If you find yourself in this position, seek connections with others to objectively assess how these pressures are affecting you. From an interpersonal perspective, you can work on reducing your workload or establishing a pace that aligns with your schedule and goals. In the music and entertainment industry, which often demands short bursts of intense activity for shows, festivals, and performances, it's essential to stay connected and communicate your needs to others. Some may use these high demands as a way to test their self-esteem, but this can ultimately lead to burnout. Setting boundaries is key. Avoid overstretching yourself to the point of no return.' 🧘