



Research note

UAE public participation in the musical arts



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 June 2016

Accepted 17 August 2016

Available online 3 September 2016

Keywords:

Music performance

Attendance

Multivariate probit model

UAE

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade the UAE has invested heavily in improving its traditional and contemporary cultural arts institutions, including music. However there has been little effort to understand the nature of public participation in the arts in the UAE. The aim of the present study is to explore attendance in live music performances. We adopt a binary probit and multivariate probit model to investigate the factors that influence attendance in general, and attendance in four specific genres of live music performances (Arabic, Indian, Western popular and European classical music). The data consist of 650 and 727 households from Abu Dhabi and Dubai respectively. The results show that ethnicity and residency, among other variables, affect participation in live performances. However key factors show varied effects on the four music genres underlining the importance of evaluating specific music genres. Consider, for example, ethnicity and length of residency. Relative to UAE nationals, other Arab groups are more likely to attend Arabic music, while belonging to Western group positively affects likelihood of attending Western pop and European classical music. However belonging to Asian group positively affects likelihood of attending Indian music, but it reduces the likelihood of attending Arabic and European classical music. Relative to a short stay of up to three years, longer residency shows a positive effect on the likelihood of attending Indian, Western pop and European classical music, but has no effect on Arabic music.

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1. Introduction

“Music is something so elevated that it cannot be understood by the intellect, and its effect is such that it governs all things that no one is able to give an account of it” – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe 1749–1832 as cited in [Süskind \(1987\)](#)¹

From time immemorial, music has served various valuable functions among groups and within individuals in human societies. Studies have attempted to document the various influences of music. At the physiological level, [Chan, Chan, Mok, & Kwan Tse \(2009\)](#) find that music can alleviate depressive symptoms. [Jain & Bagdare \(2014\)](#) review shows that music impacts consumption at the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels. At the societal level, music serves as a means of communication, social cohesion, and cultural and national identity. For example, [Schnable \(2012\)](#) reports how religious and musical practice of gospel music, in an ethnographic study of an African American church, creates and nurtures social ties. [Onishi \(2014\)](#), in the context of the culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse community of Singapore, cites related extant literature ([Friedman, 2000, 2011; Stevens, 2003](#)) as well as her own research to support twelve social benefits of music

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participation: community bonding, racial tolerance and integration, entertainment/recreation, personal enjoyment, health/therapeutic benefits, confidence building, freedom of expression, performance opportunity, personal growth, family bonding, child development, and heightened social development.

In this study we look at public participation in live music performances in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Our interest is motivated by the fact that the UAE has grown to become a main global tourism destination for health, sports, and the arts in the Middle East, in addition to being a major international business and financial center. Another feature of the UAE that makes it an interesting study is its population composition. The UAE population is highly multicultural, with a very large expatriate community. Estimates put the Emirati population at only 13% of the total UAE population ([World Political Review, 2015](#)). Thus a vast majority of the population tends to be transient.

The UAE's emergence as a tourist destination has, in large part, been fueled in recent years by efforts to improve the traditional and contemporary cultural arts institutions in the country. Currently, for example, the visual and performing arts include Art Dubai, Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Dubai International Film Festival, Dubai International Jazz Festival, tens of musical ensembles performing a range of music genres including Khaleeji, Arab, Indian, punk, rock, metal, experimental, jazz, and Western classical among others. There are also a number of major presenting and sponsoring organizations like Flash Entertainment, 4Seasons, the Abu Dhabi Musical Arts Foundation, Ekata Sharjah (sponsor of the Indian classical music festival), and several others.

Unfortunately, knowledge of the nature of public participation in the arts in the UAE is still lacking. To date, besides relatively small surveys conducted by individual arts organizations about their audience's level of interest in their particular offerings and programs, there is not a national repository of studies about the nature of public participation in the arts as those prevalent in other countries like the national Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) by the American National Endowment for the Arts; Canada's biennial performing arts survey; Council of Europe's Compendium: cultural policies and trends in Europe; or by the Australian Council of the Arts, which, for example, in its recent (2014) survey documents how 94 percent of Australians attend live events, art galleries, or read literature.

The present study stems from the latest extensive survey of UAE public participation in the arts, which documents the demography (gender, age, income, occupation, education, marital status, nationality, ethnicity, and residency) of Abu Dhabi and Dubai adult populations' attendance at live performing arts events (music, dance, drama, movies), art museum, reading literature, arts and crafts, and participation through broadcast and recorded media, and the Internet. In this paper, which to our knowledge is the first to do so, we explore public participation in the musical arts performance in the UAE. We investigate the factors that drive overall attendance in the musical arts. In addition we assess the factors that influence attendance in specific genres of live music performances such as Arabic music, Indian music, Western popular, and European classical music. Of particular interest are the effects of cultural background (ethnicity) and the length of stay in the UAE (transiency).

The determinants of participation in the arts and performing musical arts have been the subject of numerous studies. [Andreasen & Belk \(1980\)](#) in their U.S. study of predictors of arts attendance found that several variables such as income, education, being socially active, and early exposure significantly affected the likelihood of attendance. Over thirty years later, the Australian report on public participation in the arts ([Australian Art Council, 2014](#)) corroborates Andreasen and Belk's finding, reporting that participation or arts attendance is significantly dependent upon early childhood arts attendance behavior. In their analysis of the Family Survey Dutch Population 2009, [van Hek & Kraaykamp \(2015\)](#) report on a positive generational influence of cultural participation, directly via active parental guidance and indirectly through the child's education. A recent study in the field of occupational therapy by [Nakamura-Thomas, Kyougoku, & Forsyth \(2014\)](#) reports significant correlation for both genders between interest, current participation, and desire for future participation in each activity (including cultural and entertainment activities) listed in the Japanese Interest Checklist for the Elderly. Other studies also indicate that education/lessons in the arts influence attendance. [Martin, Anderson, & Adams \(2012\)](#) in their study of Australian high school-aged adolescents' attendance at live theater, music, and dance events (receptive arts participation) outside of school, show that besides gender, age and socio-economic status, current studies in the performing arts is associated with attendance. The 2014 Australian report on public participation in the arts ([Australian Art Council, 2014](#)) finds that "People who were never taken to arts events as children are significantly less likely to have creatively participated or attended the arts in the previous 12 months".

In a Malaysian study of the audience at live music concerts, [Chiat \(2009\)](#) concludes that increased number of young audience at music concerts can be explained by the development of music education at local schools and tertiary institutions. In this study, Chiat reports that music education, particularly among those below age 30, was found to be an important predictor for attendance at art music concerts of Western classical, symphony and opera, but not for musicals. On the contrary, those without any musical background were more inclined to the more popular musical genre. One's life cycle stage, spanning adulthood through marriage, having and then being without dependent children, and retiring, has also been reported to influence attendance. Of the eight life cycles examined, [Belk & Andreasen \(1982\)](#) found the unmarried under the age of 41 with no children most frequently patronize the performing arts, including music. [Cameron \(2006\)](#) in his UK study reports that total attendance in the last twelve months for women, as opposed to men's, at live events such as opera, rock music, musicals and theatre is significantly related to hours of TV viewing as 'a substitute good'. Also the influence of perceived reasonable price is reported positive for women and negative for men. [Gainer \(1993\)](#) convincingly argues that exhibition of feminine identity traits, such as emotionalism and expressiveness irrespective of gender, are predictive of arts involvement and frequency of attendance. [Tkaczynska & Rundle-Thiele \(2013\)](#) identify fulfillment of religious motives as a

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