Impact of COVID-19 "Self-Restraint" on Events Participation: From the Event Space User Survey Targeting Residents of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area

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Abstract: The infection control measures taken by the Japanese government due to the COVID-19 pandemic have severely affected events organizations. Based on an online survey conducted from March 16 to 19, 2021, this paper discusses the behavior and consciousness of event participants under Japan's infection control measures of "self-restraint". The survey targeted the period between the first declaration of the state of emergency and the end of the second declaration in Japan. We analyzed the varying effects of calls for self-restraint on participation in different events at each stage of the pandemic policy, and the factors influencing continued participation in face-to-face events. Event management is a typical case where ordinary people react to and challenge the government's infection control measures. Our survey revealed the effects of the government's requests for "self-restraint". However, its impact differed among different types of events. The effectiveness of the request for "self-restraint" varies with the degree to which people were committed to event participation.

Keywords: *COVID-19, self-restraint, events participation*

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1. Introduction

Various infection control measures have been adopted in various countries since COVID-19. These worldwide infection control measures have made it difficult for people to gather in urban spaces. Facilities where people gathered, such as concert halls, theaters, movie theaters, nightclubs, music venues, museums, community centers, and rental spaces, were temporarily closed, making event organizations difficult. These facilities are the basic infrastructures for urban life, particularly for collective activities, such as culture, art, business, and civil activities.

This pandemic has forced us to rethink the nature of urban space and urbanity. Research on how COVID-19 affected cities has gradually accumulated worldwide. From the viewpoint of economic geography, although the pandemic is unlikely to change the spatial inequality of the global city system significantly at the macro-scale, at the micro-scale, it may bring about a series of short-term and long-term social changes in the structure and morphology of cities (Florida et al., 2021). Such social changes as a result of the pandemic were framed and significantly influenced by the relationship between the state and civil society in each country and region regarding infection control measures (e.g., Gierde, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2020; Samson et al., 2021).

The Japanese government has adopted an approach to infection control different from the lockdowns imposed by European countries and the United States. Specifically, it has been relatively passive in terms of civil rights restrictions. At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the government rejected lockdowns and instead appealed for behavioral change and "self-restraint" among the citizens. Japan reported and confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on January 16, 2020, and the first death occurred on February 23, 2020. Consequently, on February 26, 2020, the Cabinet Secretariat requested the cancelation, postponement, or scaling back of nationwide sports and cultural events. Due to the rising cases of COVID-19 infections, the Japanese government declared a state of emergency four times between April 2020 and September 2021. During the states of emergency, the Japanese national and local governments urged people to avoid the "Three Cs", namely closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings. However, this request was not legally binding and there were no penalties for non-adherence. These measures were regarded as "weak" interventions or "soft lockdowns", or attempts to avoid economic stagnation as well as prevent large-scale surveillance and enforcement expenses (Kodama, 2020).

The evaluation of the way civil society responded to the COVID-19 pandemic brought forth one of the most controversial issues. Did the "voluntaristic" activities of the public health regime during the pandemic enforce or subvert neoliberalism? Based on the context of the intervention, the consequences of ambivalent engagements with this interventionism were diversely evaluated (e.g., Leap et al., 2022). Event management is a typical case where ordinary people react to and challenge softly stepping state interventions (e.g., Coles et al., 2022; Ota, 2022; Estanyol, 2022; Dragin-Jensen et al., 2022). This study aims to consider this issue by examining a case in Tokyo through a survey analysis of event participants.

It was found that infection control measures without penalties affect people’s behavior in Japan (Kirimura, 2020; Yabe et al., 2021). During the first state of emergency (March-May 2020), more than 90% of event-related facilities were closed in Tokyo’s 23 wards (Machimura et al., 2021). Moreover, people voluntarily changed their behavior based on information about the number of confirmed infections (Takano et al., 2020). However, it is inaccurate to consider people’s reactions to infection control calls to be uniform. Powerful “calling” and people’s “turning” (obedience) to them require repetitive activities (Althusser, 1995). Depending on the time and type of event, this repetition had both strengths and weaknesses. Because public health attempts to keep the number of infections within a “tolerable” limit (Foucault, 2004), an increase in the number of infections approaching the set “tolerance” level, would lead to the implementation of stronger control, whereas a decrease in the number of infections would lead to the implementation of weaker control measures. Behavioral restrictions were emphasized during the state of emergency. Moreover, a campaign was held to support eating, drinking, and traveling after the first restrictions were removed in May 2020. Nevertheless, the media severely criticized holding events in tight and often crowded spaces, such as nightclubs and music venues, even after the end of the state of emergency. By contrast, while face-to-face events were strongly suppressed, online events were not considered problematic, and non-contact social relations were actively promoted in the form of telecommunications.

Infection control measures were influential; however, the reactions of facility installers and event managers varied among different event types. After the first state of emergency ended, event facilities were categorized into those that had reopened and those that had no prospect of reopening. There are wide gaps between the expectations of facility installers and the public request for “self-restraint”. There were also differences in online implementation according to the event.

Research on event facilities in Tokyo (Machimura et al., 2021) revealed that, at the outbreak stage of COVID-19, responses to the “calling” for infection control varied among different types of facility installers. However, these studies did not thoroughly investigate the attitudes and trends of participants. Therefore, we should comprehensively understand the differences in the strength of infection control according to the event type. For instance, did the participants’ attitudes toward infection control differ among events? Was the request for “self-restraint” accepted by a significant number of participants across different types of events?

These questions require an additional survey of event participants that covers multiple types of events. In this paper, we report the first results of our original survey, which includes the (1) number of participants in face-to-face events at each stage of infection control, (2) status of participation in online events and their motives for participation, and (3) differences in public consciousness between participants and non-participants in the face-to-face event. Through the analysis, we will clarify the change in the degree of responses to the “calling” for infection control, the difference in each type, and further analytical issues.

2. Survey Outline

This paper defines an event space as an urban infrastructure for collective acts of culture, art, business, and civic activities. This includes a wide variety of facilities and activities. To examine the impact of the pandemic on the event space, we focused on five distinctive users: (1) theaters, (2) music concerts, (3) nightclubs and music venues, (4) civil activities, and (5) ACG events (Table 1). According to the Pia Research Institute, the former three are the major spaces included in the "Live Entertainment Market" (i.e., the market for musical concerts and performance events on stage). In addition to these three areas, we included two other types of activities in our survey for a more comprehensive study. Firstly, the activities that characterize civil society, such as volunteering. Secondly, the cultural activities associated with anime, games, and manga, such as Doujin events, which mobilize people on various scales.

We investigated (1) the number of participants and visitors at each stage of infection spread and infection control measures, (2) participation in online events, and (3) self-restraint factors, such as restraint from face-to-face event participation and motivation for participation in online or face-to-face events during the COVID-19 pandemic. We divided the time intervals in this survey into the period (1) before the first state of emergency (February 2020), (2) during the first state of emergency (March-May 2020), (3) during the declaration cancelation period (June-December 2020), and (4) during the second state of emergency (after January 2021). Subsequently, we asked whether and why they participated in face-to-face events or visited event spaces each time. Further, we investigated whether and why they participated in online events during each of these.

Table 1 Survey target (10 types, upper row) and 5 events (lower row)

survey targets	Movie Theaters	Small Theaters	Concert Halls / Music Halls	Choral and Instrumental Ensemble Recitals	Club / Live Houses	Club Live Music Events	Lectures / Symposiums / Study Groups	Volunteers / Community Contribution Activities	Doujin events	Anime, Comics, and Games Events
conversion	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓
5 event	Theaters		Music concerts		Nightclub and music venues		Civil activities		ACG events	

Table 2 Gender and age of respondents (percentages in parentheses)

Male 20-29 years old	160 (12.9)	Female 20-29 years old	168 (13.5)
Male 30-39 years old	114 (9.2)	Female 30-39 years old	115 (9.2)
Male 40-49 years old	81 (6.5)	Female 40-49 years old	92 (7.4)
Male 50-59 years old	83 (6.7)	Female 50-59 years old	83 (6.7)
Male 60-69 years old	85 (6.8)	Female 60-69 years old	86 (6.9)
Male 70-79 years old	89 (7.2)	Female 70-79 years old	88 (7.1)
total	612 (49.2)	total	632 (50.8)

Based on the survey framework, we investigated behavioral changes following the spread of COVID-19 among those who visited the event spaces of participants at events from 2019 to 2020. We commissioned Intage Inc. to conduct an “Event Space User Survey of the COVID-19 pandemic”. Intage is a Japanese research firm that specializes in Internet-based polls. This online survey was conducted from March 16-19, 2021, among residents of the Tokyo metropolitan area (Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, and Saitama prefectures) aged 20-79.

We assumed that participants in nightclubs, music venues, and ACG events were in their 20s and 30s, and that a certain number of older adults participated in other types of events. Therefore, while increasing the allocation of young people, the survey retained a certain proportion of allocation for older adult respondents. For this survey, we asked 54,754 research company registrants who corresponded to the participants’ place of residence and age, and they collected 1,244 respondents who met the above conditions. The respondents included 500 respondents aged 20-39, 300 respondents aged 40-59, and 300 respondents aged 60-79. We also requested the research company to conduct the survey to an even number of male and female respondents. The total number of valid responses was 1,244. The distribution of respondents by residence was 529 (42.5%) in Tokyo, 345 (27.7%) in Kanagawa, 204 (16.5%) in Saitama, and 166 (13.3%) in Chiba. Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents’ gender and age.

Regarding the limitations and advantages of our data, our survey was unable to estimate the total population of event space users. This was due to the data having been collected through a web-based survey rather than a random or probability sample. However, this dataset includes various distinctive people who actively participate in a wide range of urban activities, which are important for examining the dynamics of event spaces. These people are a rare subgroup in the metropolitan area; hence, it is often difficult to identify these target populations from other general populations. In addition, we investigated event participation before and after various infection control measures taken during the pandemic using retrospective questions. Therefore, our data can capture the changes in the behavior of event-space users during the pandemic.

3. Survey Results

(1) Visits to Event Spaces and Participation at Different Time Periods.

Our survey targeted 29 types of events and event spaces and inquired about the increase or decrease in the number of visits across different time periods.

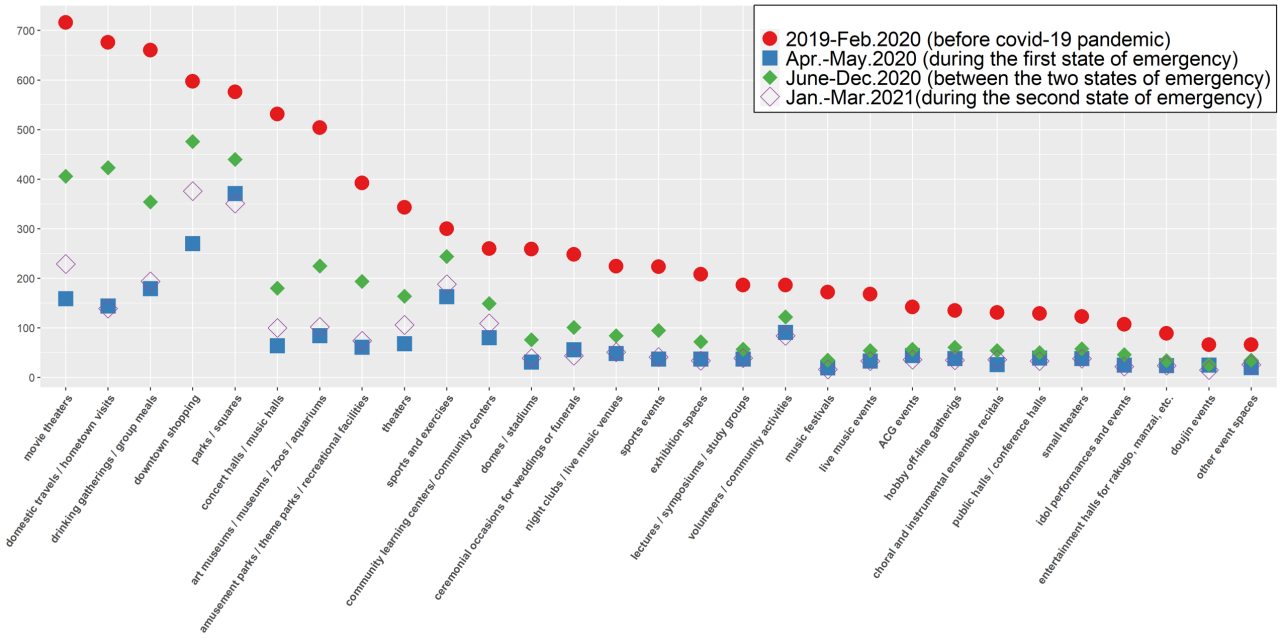
The number of respondents who reported visiting the listed event spaces and participating in the listed events decreased during the state of emergency (Figure 1). During the first state of emergency, the number of respondents who visited the event spaces significantly decreased for movie theaters (77.8%), theaters (80.2%), museums, zoos, and aquariums (83.3%), amusement parks, theme parks, and leisure facilities (84.4%), concert halls, music halls, and museums (88.2%), and dome stadiums (88%). Parks and plazas also showed a slight decline (35.6%).

The rate of event participants significantly decreased for drinking and dinner parties (72.9%), domestic travel and homecoming (78.7%), clubs and live events (80.4%), watching professional sports (83.4%), and music festivals (89%). However, the rate of decrease was less for sports training (45.7%), volunteering and community contribution activities (51.1%), and shopping in downtown areas and malls (54.8%).

The Japanese national and local governments requested "self-restraint" for travel across prefectures and the shortening of the business hours of restaurants to control the spread of infection through traveling and dining out. These measures were specifically directed at certain events and venues, such as clubs. By contrast, pushes for the request for "self-restraint" were relatively less prominent regarding outdoor events and sports. There was a significant decrease in the number of participants regarding those types of events that were considered problematic and of high priority in COVID-19 infection control measures (described below). Thus it can be said that the request for self-restraint by the declaration of a state of emergency did restrain participation in events and visits to event spaces. Additionally, the rate of decrease differed among events and spaces. The rate of decrease in events and spaces where "self-restraint" was strongly requested was more extensive than that in events and spaces that were less strongly advised to do so.

The numbers of event participants and event space visitors across the types of events and event spaces were different from time to time. The numbers during the first state of emergency (March-May 2020) and the second state of emergency (after January 2021) were approximately similar. However, when compared with the first state of emergency, a higher number of respondents visited movie theaters (44% increase) and shopping areas (39% increase) during the second state of emergency.

Figure 1: When and how many respondents visited the event space



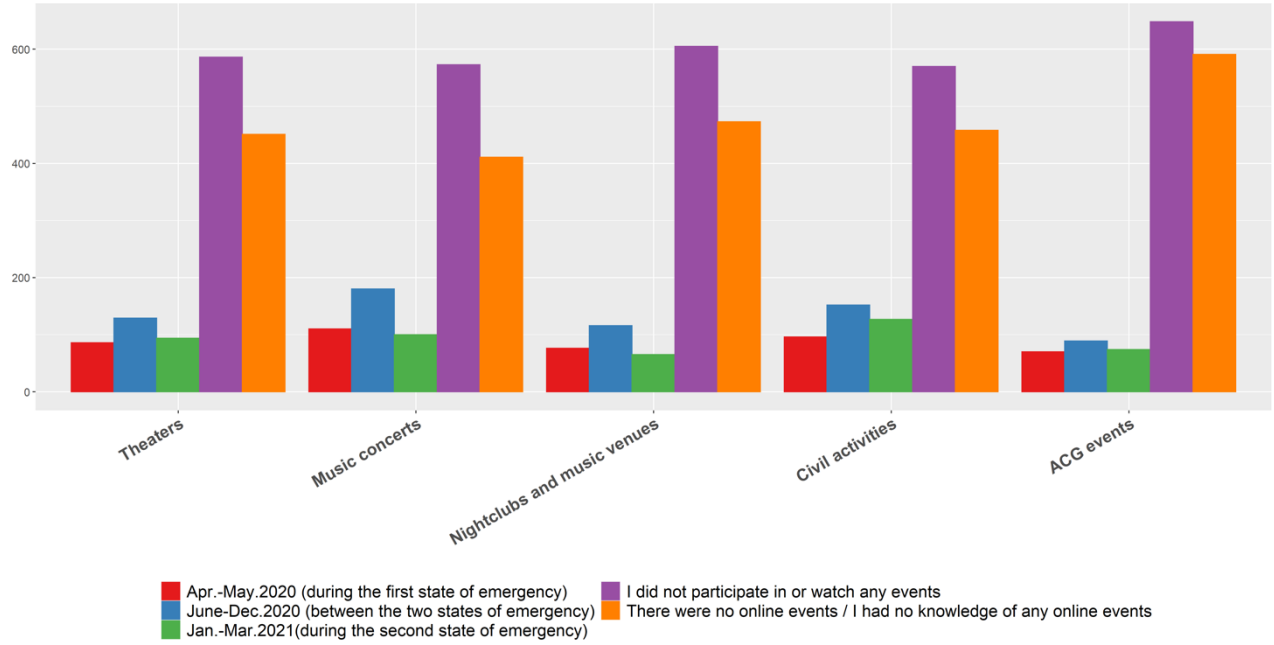
During the cancelation period between the two declarations, there were differences in the range of recovery for the number of event participants and event space visitors. During the declaration of the end of the state of emergency, there was a significant recovery in amusement parks, theme parks, and leisure facilities (218% increase compared to during the first emergency), museums, zoos, and aquariums (203.6% increase), concert and music halls (181% increase), movie theaters (155% increase), domestic travel and homecoming (193.8% increase), and drinking parties and dinner parties (97.8% increase).

The two types of event spaces, namely, “movie theaters” and “art galleries, museums, and aquariums” resumed operations early after the first state of emergency (March-May 2020) (Machimura, 2021). The speed of reopening contributed to the range of recovery. In addition, drinking parties/meals and domestic travel/homecoming were the targets of usage promotion campaigns which were encouraged and promoted by the government during the declaration-canceled period with the aim of economic recovery during the period after the deregulation of the state emergency. It explains the relatively larger increase in participation.

(2) Participation in Online Events

This section investigated the number of people who participated in online events and their reasons for participation or non-participation. Figure 2 shows the number of online events participants divided by the event type and holding time.

Figure 2: Number of participants in online events

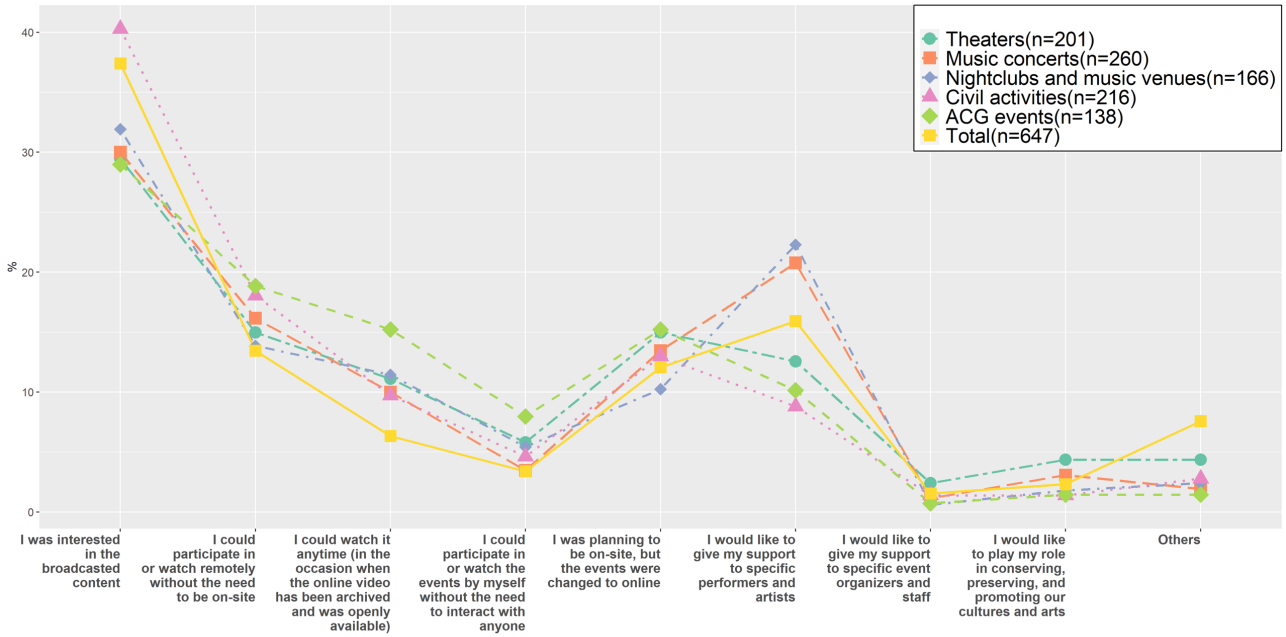


The number of participants in face-to-face events fluctuated over time, decreasing during the state of emergency and increasing after it ended. It should be noted that online events are not completely virtual, for instance, online music events and symposiums require broadcasting from an

actual space, while securing or gathering at a broadcast location to hold an online event can be difficult during a state of emergency. Thus, the declaration and the cancelation of the state of emergency possibly contributed to the decrease and increase in the number of participants.

Regarding the reasons for online participation, the most common reason was interest in the broadcast content (37.4%), followed by the aim of supporting artists and performers (15.9%) (Figure 3). In contrast, support for organizers and institutions (1.5%) and support for cultures and arts (2.3%) was less effective as a reason for online event participation. Generally, online event participants were strongly interested in the performers; however, they were less interested in the organizers, or the overall development of cultures and arts. In addition, a certain percentage (12.1%) of the respondents stated that the face-to-face events they planned to attend had become online. In other words, they tended to participate in online events which they originally planned to participate in when it was supposed to be conducted, in actual space.

Figure 3: Reasons for participating in online events

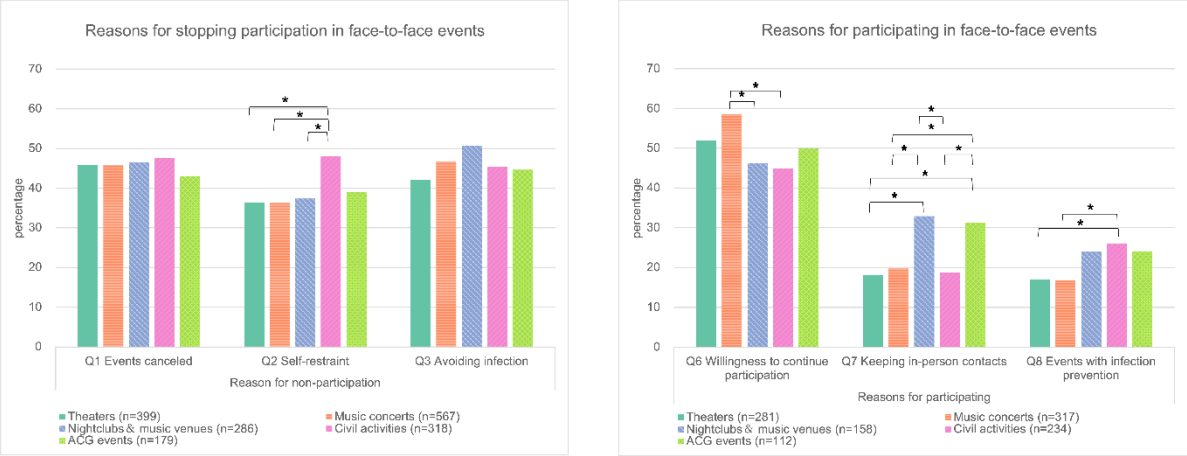


Our survey also covered the “convenience” factors brought by online participation, namely being able to participate remotely without being on-site (13.4%), participating at any time (6.3%), and participating alone (3.4%). These three responses are the commonly discussed advantages of online events that overcome geographical and time constraints as well as the need for socialization in face-to-face events. The need to avoid travel (the first factor) and personal contact (the third factor) also resulted from the need for infection control. On the other hand, the three “convenience” factors had differing degrees of dominance. Avoidance of interactions was selected by fewer respondents as a reason for online participation than avoidance of travel.

(3) Reasons for Participation/Non-Participation.

This section investigated the reasons for non-participation and participation in face-to-face events during COVID-19 outbreak (Figure 4). More than 40% of respondents canceled their participation, the main reasons being fear of COVID-19 infection and facility closures or event cancelations. In this group, in cancellations due to “self-restraint”, there was a higher percentage of non-participation in “civic activity” type events than the four other types, namely “theaters”, “music concerts”, “nightclubs and music venues”, and “ACG events”.

Figure 4: Reasons for stopping participation in face-to-face events and reasons for participating



Note: On the one hand, the left bar graph shows the percentage of respondents selecting each reason for canceling participation by event type (multiple answer questions). For each event type, *n* is the number of respondents who had not participated in on-site events between February 2020 and February 2021. On the other hand, the right bar graph shows the percentage of respondents who selected each reason for participating in events, and *n* is number of respondents who participated in on-site events during the study period. The differences between event types were evaluated using multiple tests with p-values corrected using the BH method by comparing proportions with partially overlapping samples by Derrick et al. (2015). Asterisks (*) indicate significant difference ($p < .05$.)

The reasons for participation also differed across the types of events and event spaces. In the case of music concerts and theaters, being a regular participant was a reason for a higher percentage of participation. In the case of theaters, music concerts, and civic activities, face-to-face interactions or a sense of presence were chosen by a higher percentage of the respondents as the reason for participation.

Face-to-face interaction or a sense of presence was the reason for participation by more than 30% of respondents who frequented nightclubs and music venues. This was also true for participants in the ACG events. Even after the COVID-19 outbreak, participants in nightclubs, music venues, and ACG events tended to participate in face-to-face interaction and enjoyed a sense of presence.

For civic activities such as symposiums, there is little interaction between the organizer and the audience, except for discussion sections open to the floor after the lectures. However, for certain types of civic activities, such as volunteering and community contribution, there is a slightly higher demand for face-to-face exchange. Despite the differences, generally speaking, the fact that infection control measures were taken served as a reason for participating in face-to-face civic activities.

4. Concluding Notes

Three observations were made from this study. First, the number of participations in events and visits to event spaces decreased significantly compared to the pre-pandemic levels. The decrease in number was higher during the two declarations of the state of emergency than the cancelation period. However, the degree of decrease in accord with the request for "self-restraint" was not uniform between the two declarations. The request for "self-restraint" targeted some event types more than others, which might be the reason for variations in the numbers across types of events and event spaces.

Second, while there was participation in online events, they were not a substitute for face-to-face events, as reflected in the number of participants. For instance, artists and people interested in distributing fan-made content could often continue their activities online. However, the online platform was not a place for those interested in the event space or organizers who valued face-to-face interactions.

Third, the attractiveness of face-to-face interactions was one of the important factors contributing to a role in the respondents' participation in face-to-face events during the implementation of COVID-19 infection control measures. However, respondents had different reasons for participation or non-participation in different types of events and event spaces. In the case of civil activities with relatively little face-to-face interaction, people tended to hesitate to obey the requests for "self-restraint". Trust in facilities' infection control measures was one of the reasons for participating in face-to-face events. A higher percentage of respondents selected face-to-face interaction and a sense of presence as the reason for participation regarding the event types of ACG events, nightclubs and music venues.

This study portrays participants' non-uniform responses to the request for "self-restraint". Participation in face-to-face events can be regarded as expressing one's "freedom" to choose whether to follow the request for "self-restraint" or not. In other words, "self-restraint" includes a call for (individual) power. The respondents decided to participate in events depending on the status of the state emergency. However, this decision varied with the stage of infection control and the event type. National and local governments have promoted non-contact relationships for infection control. However, an infection control policy does not necessarily offer a significant motivation to participate in online events. Respondents were aware of the request for "self-restraint", and selectively participated in online or face-to-face events depending on their reasons for participation.

This survey revealed the power of the influence of the request for “self-restraint”. At the same time, we understand that respondents’ actual consciousness and behavior concerning “self-restraint” was rather different among various types of events. The request for “self-restraint” was effective, but only when aligned with the respondents’ interests. These observations are starting points for further discussions on the relationship between “self-restraint” and event participation. To better explain the factors regulating participation, those determining face-to-face interactions should be comprehensively examined, including observations of face-to-face events. Further analysis of the survey results is required. If necessary, additional surveys will be planned to understand the factors determining future commitment to face-to-face contact.

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