

Understanding Convention Attendees' Motivations in the Post-COVID Era: A Comparative Study of Foreign and Japanese Participants

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Abstract

This study aims to verify convention attendees' motivations in the post-corona era and discuss the differences between foreign and Japanese attendees for onsite participation. The MICE industry was a significant contributor to the global economy because of supporting a wide range of industries such as hospitality services, transportation, and entertainment. Online questionnaire surveys were conducted to convention attendees at three conventions. The survey results of this study show that even if the corona is over, not all participants will shift to on-site participation. In addition to placing more importance on "educational purposes" than Japanese participants, foreign participants placed more importance on "avoidance from daily life" than Japanese participants. Creating more value for local participation is necessary than at previous conventions.

Keywords: MICE, convention industry, attendees' motivation, questionnaire survey

1 Introduction

This research aims to clarify convention attendees' motivations in the post-corona era and discuss the differences between foreign and Japanese attendees for onsite participation. Especially in the post-corona era, recovery of inbound tourism is expected, so this research will compare foreign participants and Japanese participants and clarify the differences between them.

The convention industry is classified into four categories: the acronym, 'MICE' (Meetings, Incentives, Convention/Congress, and Exhibition/Event).

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, the global MICE industry was experiencing steady growth. Businesses related to MICE were investing heavily in corporate events, trade shows, conventions, symposiums, and exhibitions as a means of promoting their products and services, networking with other professionals and participants, and attracting new customers and participants. Overall, the MICE industry was a significant contributor to the global economy because of supporting a wide range of industries such as hospitality services, transportation, and entertainment.

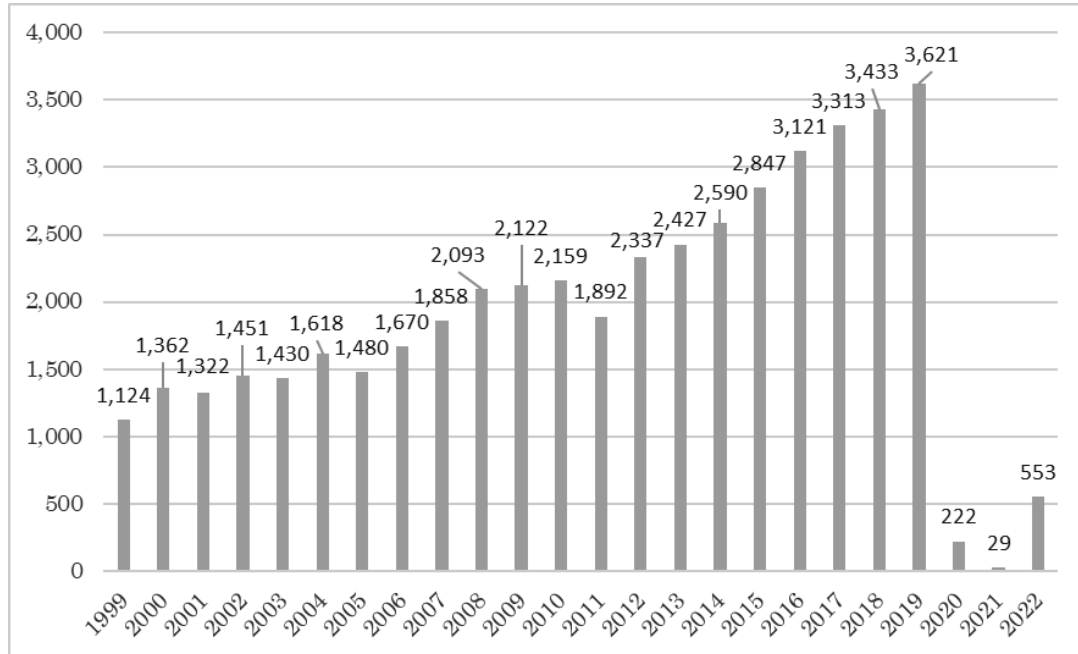
According to a report by Allied Market Research (AMR), the Asia-Pacific region as well as other regions was the large market for the MICE industry. However, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the MICE industry, leading to cancellations and postponements of events and a decline in revenue.

Union des Foires Internationales (UFI) points out that the MICE industry in the Asia-Pacific region was particularly hit with a huge decline in revenue of 71.4% in 2020. International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) reports that the MICE industry has had to adapt to new safety protocols and regulations by including social distancing measures and the use of personal protective equipment. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of virtual

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and hybrid event formats. In addition, vaccines have become more widely available and safety measures have been implemented.



Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)

Figure 1: Number of International Conferences held in Japan (1999 to 2022)

Figure 2 shows a number of international conferences held in Japan. The number of cases decreased further from 222 in 2020 to 29 (86.9% decrease compared to the previous year), and compared to 2019, it decreased by 99.2%, which is less than 1%. However, in 2022, the number of international conferences being held is finally showing signs of recovery.

The Japanese government and tourism-related industries are working to adapt and find innovative solutions to support the recovery of the inbound and MICE industry. The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has been taking various measures such as promoting hybrid events, implementing safety measures, providing financial support, developing new venues and facilities, and promoting Japan as a safe and attractive destination.

In the Tourism White Paper published in 2023, the Japanese government has clarified the following strategies for promoting MICE for the next year. Efforts to attract and hold MICE are reevaluating the economic effects and significance of hosting MICE in light of the impact of the new coronavirus infection, and the government is strengthening its unified support. the government is also working to improve the infrastructure to improve regional attractiveness and international competitiveness. Furthermore, while the Japan National Tourism Organization is actively conducting activities to attract tourists, efforts are also being made to develop specialized human resources and improve facility management.

With the anticipated revival of onsite participation in the convention industry in the post-corona era, this research will compare the perspectives of foreign participants and Japanese participants to identify any discernible distinctions between them.

2 Literature Review

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, local participation was mainstream at conventions, but previous research has pointed out the future of virtual conventions. For this reason, previous studies have early stated that hybrid conventions will be introduced in the near future [1][2][3].

It is undeniable that the Covid-19 pandemic hastened the introduction of virtual meetings. Even now that the new normal has become commonplace, it can be said that at conventions, local participants benefit more than online participants. A previous study that investigated the satisfaction level of conference participants found that local participants were more satisfied than online participants [4][5].

Hameed, Tanidir, Naik, Teoh, and Shah, et al [6] compare hybrid urological meetings with face-to-face and online ones during and after COVID-19, also assessing the preferred webinar format. Conducted globally via SurveyMonkey from June 6 to July 5, 2020, with 526 urology healthcare providers responding across 56 countries, a completion rate of 73.3%. Participants favored face-to-face meetings, then hybrids, and webinars least, citing better networking in face-to-face but cost-effectiveness and audience reach in hybrids. Hybrid meetings gain favor post-pandemic for global reach, signaling a potential shift.

S. S. Ram, D. Stricker, C. Pannetier, and N. Tabin, et al. [7] examine preferences for hybrid conferences, combining in-person and virtual aspects. An online survey of an international virtual conference's registrants garnered 823 responses. Results show 56.9% prefer hybrid, 32.0% in-person, and 11.1% virtual conferences. Most want virtual sessions during in-person events and year-round. Suggestions for in-person optimization include clinical skills sessions and live expert presentations, while virtual aspects could include live streaming and clinical case discussions. Attendees desire hybrid conferences for interactive in-person experiences alongside easy access to virtual content for extended learning.

Therefore, in this study, the authors will use the knowledge of previous research to clarify the motivation of convention attendees and investigate what factors are important to encourage local participation.

3 Method

3.1 Data Collection

To clarify the purpose of this research, an online questionnaire survey was conducted to convention attendees at three conventions: 'the 12th and 13th International Congress on Advanced Applied Informatics in 2021 & 2022' and 'The AIIT/DCS-BINUS International Symposium on Decision Science and Consensus Formation in 2021'. These conventions were held online.

The authors conducted an online questionnaire survey at the conventions and received responses from 131 respondents.

3.2 Data Analysis

The survey instrument is divided into three parts. In the first part, the questionnaire items include demographic information on the respondents' background (e.g., gender, age, position, and specialty). Descriptive statistics are used in the demographic factors.

In the second part, the respondents were asked about the means of participation with/post

Covid-19 pandemic. As the means of participants, the respondents choose either online or onsite.

In the third part, the 90 respondents who answered to prefer 'onsite participation' were asked about reasons for participating in the convention and the priority of travel destinations. As the reasons for participating in the convention, the questionnaire items include education purpose, presentation, opportunities for networking, job opportunities, interesting programs, career development, personal development, association-related activities, visiting friends and relatives, and escape from routine.

These questionnaire items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (less important) to 5 (most important). Mann-Whitney's U test is conducted in each respondent's evaluation.

4 Results

4.1 Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profiles of the respondents of each group ($n = 131$) are shown in table 1.

The gender ratio of foreign respondents was 16 females and 38 males. Foreign respondents to this survey are from 15 nationalities and regions, including the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Ireland, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Nepal, Brazil, and Russia. In terms of age group, 16 respondents were most in their 30s and 50s. The third largest age group was 13 respondents in their 40s. Of the foreign respondents, 16 were students, the most in their positions. The next largest number was 13 lecturers. In addition, one government official was participating. In terms of areas of specialization, the number of informatics specialists was the largest at 31. The second largest number of social science specialists was 10.

The gender ratio of the Japanese respondents was 15 females and 60 males. In terms of age group, 23 respondents in their 40s accounted for the most. The next largest age group was 17 respondents in their 20s. The third largest age group was 16 respondents in their 50s. Among the Japanese respondents, 22 were professors, the most. The next highest number was 17 students. The third largest number was 13 associate professors. In terms of areas of specialization, the number of informatics specialists was the largest at 32. Social science specialists were next in number with 18 respondents.

4.2 Measurement of Participation Method with/post Covid-19 Pandemic

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the means of participation in conventions during the coronavirus crisis and in the post-corona era.

In the coronavirus crisis, 80% of foreign respondents answered that they would participate online, while in the post-corona era, 70% of foreign respondents answered that they would participate on-site. Also, among Japanese respondents, 80% of Japanese respondents answered that they would participate online during the coronavirus crisis, while 60% of Japanese respondents answered that they would participate on-site in the post-corona era.

4.3 Measurement of Motivations between Foreign and Japanese Onsite Participants

In the results of table 3, the P-values of 'education purpose' (0.02) and 'escape from routine' (0.05) indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the means of foreign and those of Japanese attendees, with a 95% confidence level.

Based on the statistical analysis using Mann-Whitney's U test, it can be concluded that there are significant differences in the 'education purpose' and 'escape from routine' of the two groups to the questionnaire. Regarding these two questionnaire items, foreign respondents considered them to be more important than Japanese respondents. No significant differences were found for other items in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Demographic information of foreign and Japanese respondents (N=131)

	Foreign respondents N = 54		Japanese respondents N = 77	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender				
Female	16	30	16	21
Male	38	70	60	78
I prefer not to say	0	0	1	1
Age				
20s	6	11	17	22
30s	16	30	15	19
40s	13	24	23	30
50s	16	30	16	21
The 60s and more	3	6	6	8
Position				
An employee of a company	3	6	4	5
Honorary Professor	0	0	2	3
Professor	7	13	22	29
Associate professor	3	6	13	17
Lecturer	13	24	4	5
Assistant professor	3	6	5	6
Researcher	3	6	6	8
Undergraduate and graduate student	16	30	17	22
University staff	5	9	1	1
Other	1	2	0	0

Specialty				
Biology	0	0	1	1
Compound new area	0	0	1	1
Computer science	1	2	0	0
Engineering	8	15	12	16
General area	2	4	7	9
Informatics	31	57	32	42
Mathematics and physics system science	1	2	5	6
Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Science	0	00	1	1
Social science	10	19	18	23
Other	1	2	0	0

Table 2: Means of participation during Covid-19 pandemic (N=131)

	Foreign attendees N = 54		Japanese attendees N = 77	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Online participation	44	81	64	83
Onsite participation	10	19	13	17

Table 3: Means of participation post Covid-19 pandemic (N=131)

	Foreign attendees N = 54		Japanese attendees N = 77	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Online participation	13	24	27	35
Onsite participation	41	76	49	65

Table 4: Differences in motivations between foreign and Japanese onsite participants (N=90)

	Foreign respondents N = 41		Japanese respondents N = 49		P-value
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	
Education purpose	4.51	0.78	4.08	1.00	0.02
Presentation	4.24	0.89	4.02	0.99	0.25
Opportunities for networking	4.22	0.82	4.20	0.91	0.90

Job opportunities	3.02	1.19	2.88	1.05	0.47
Interesting program	4.27	0.87	4.14	0.84	0.38
Career development	3.61	1.22	3.43	1.08	0.33
Personal development	4.10	0.94	3.92	0.81	0.16
Association related activities	3.71	1.08	3.57	1.02	0.42
Visiting friends and relatives	3.34	1.22	3.04	1.24	0.20
Escape from routine	3.34	1.11	2.86	1.21	0.05

5 Discussion

The survey results of this study show that even if the corona is over, not all participants will shift to on-site participation. As a result, hybrid conventions are expected to attract more participants than conventions with only face-to-face participation. However, although hybrid conventions have the advantage of making it easier to participate due to the increased number of participation options, there are concerns about a decrease in the number of local participants and limited online exchanges between participants. Disadvantages such as the time difference problem can also be cited. To increase the number of local participants, it is necessary to create more value for local participation than at previous conventions.

In this study, the participants who answered that they would participate on-site were divided into foreigners and Japanese, and the differences between them were examined. Overall, foreign participants gave higher importance to all items than Japanese participants. As a result of statistical analysis, it became clear that foreign participants placed higher importance than Japanese participants on the items 'educational purpose' and 'escape from routine'. At conventions, many researchers present their research results, so many of the participants participate for educational purposes. Among foreign participants, the average score for 'education purpose' was the highest. Among Japanese participants, the average score for 'educational purpose' was the third highest. Considering the respondents' attribution results, the high average value for 'education purpose' may be related to the fact that many students participate in conventions where the questionnaire survey was conducted. Examining program content based on participant attribute information may also be useful in attracting on-site conference participants.

In addition to placing more importance on 'education purpose' than Japanese participants, foreign participants placed more importance on 'escape from routine' than Japanese participants. The average score for the question item 'escape from routine' is generally low, but foreign participants need to use excursions to create an extraordinary space.

In the post-corona era, hybrid conventions are becoming mainstream. However, as pointed out in previous studies, even if hybrid conventions were held, it would be difficult for online participants to be as satisfied as on-site participants. Local participants are most satisfied not only in terms of research presentations but also in terms of interaction. In the future, it will be necessary to devise measures to increase the number of local participants at conventions.

6 Limitations and Future Research

In this study, it was found that there are not a few differences between foreign participants and Japanese participants in their participation trends and desired tourism resources. However, the

results of this study cannot be regarded as generalized.

First of all, the number of questionnaires is quite limited, and the number of samples comparing foreign participants and Japanese participants is only about 40 people. In addition, the number of conventions for which a questionnaire survey was conducted was 3. Since the number of nationalities of foreign participants was very small, there was a bias in the specialties of the participants. Further examination of the correlation between participants' demographic data and their reasons for engaging is required. Therefore, the results of this research have some problems and cannot be generalized. To make the results of this research more accurate, it is necessary to continue conducting questionnaire surveys in future research and present more persuasive findings by increasing the number of samples.

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