



Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Finnish Heavy Metal Festivals and Concerts

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 leaving many industries suffering due to the governmental restrictions imposed to protect the public health. The cultural and entertainment industries took the hardest hit, as events and gatherings of any sort were considered hazardous for the public. This led to the cancellation of many heavy metal festivals and concerts, leaving the fans without live music. For the purpose of study the author has provided definitions for heavy metal as a genre and explained the difference between the sub-genres and their evolution through time.

This study explores the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on the Finnish heavy metal event industry and its consumers. It aims to determine if there is any change in the attitude of the fans towards the genre and the live music consumption. The academic purpose of this paper is to provide some of the first data regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the people and precisely on the fans live events.

The research was exploratory and it used qualitative data and open-ended interviews as a method of collection. The sample size of respondents was 7 and the provided data helped bring insight on the abovementioned topic. The author has used thematic data analysis to reveal the patterns and themes in the answers, upon which the conclusions were made.

The results showed that heavy metal fans have noticed the absence of live heavy metal event during the past 2 years and they were eager to go back to their pre-pandemic festival habits. It also revealed a strong emotional relationship between the fans and the genre and a social aspect going along with it.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Heavy metal, pandemic, COVID-19, festivals, heavy metal festivals, sub-genres, heavy metal concerts.

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

None

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1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 forced governments around the world to enforce various restrictions on their countries' population, endeavoring to limit the number of infections and manage the traffic in the health care facilities. Those restrictions affected a profuse number of industries, among which the cultural and entertainment industry suffered a serious hit. For this research I will focus on the heavy metal event scene in Finland and more precisely on the consumers' interest and attitude towards the genre and its live events during the past 2 years and their thoughts and feelings about the scene's future.

Taking into consideration my deep interest in the genre of heavy metal and the industry it occupies before the pandemic, I was curious to explore the effects of the restrictions on the fans' lives and to shed light on their perceptions of the future for the live events in the field of heavy metal. This information would allow me to determine whether this outbreak have caused and significant change in their way of heavy metal consumption and would that affect the future of the heavy metal event industry in Finland.

This study may be the first or certainly one of the first research projects on the impact of COVID-19 on musical festival attendance. Therefore, there is an academic reason to study this. The exploration of the response of people to the pandemic restriction in aspect of their festival and live music attendance can raise awareness on various themes and patterns, thus further support future researchers interested in the correlation between a global crisis and live music and their importance to their fans.

It is worth to explore the social aspect of the pandemic restrictions related to live music. I, as a researcher and a long-time consumer, found it exceptionally curious how did people manage when something that was assumingly an annual social engagement with the genre was taken away from them for such a long time period. The investigation of this matter would provide insight on various behavioural and emotional patterns related to live music consumption and potential changes in attitude towards these social interactions with the genre.

The literature review will familiarize the reader with the concept of a pandemic, the governmental measures taken to secure the public health and how they have affected the cultural and entertainment industries. It will also provide definitions on the topic of heavy metal, its history and explore Finland's connection to the genre, its economic importance for the country and the festival scene. The literature review is followed by the research questions and objectives and the methodology used in this study. They will tell the reader more about the aim of the study and methods used to acquire and analyse the data. Moving forward to the results and the discussion chapter where the reader can find of the data gathered for this research and what it means in relation to the research questions. The discussion chapter will also disclose the limitations this research has experienced as well as give recommendations to the future researchers. The study ends with conclusion, here the findings were summarised and the contributions were elaborated on.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic hit populations worldwide fast and unexpectedly. It was and remains a global problem, affecting the lives of billions of people. Beginning in March 2020, the pandemic led to lockdowns, forcing all but the essential workers to go to online mode. Work, studying, entertainment, and personal interactions were moved to the virtual world. Plenty of industries faced a tough reality where they either needed to find a quick and safe way to adjust to online service or stop working all together. Unfortunately, the music industry, alongside with the other fields of culture and entertainment, took one of the hardest hits, reports Yle (Yle News, 2020a). Music and culture events were considered hazardous, moreover any social gathering with over 10 people were prohibited (Yle News, 2020b). The current subsection presents what a pandemic is and what is known about its effect on the musical concert scene, particularly Finnish heavy metal festivals.

According to Qui et al. (2017), a pandemic is an epidemic that spreads globally in a significantly rapid manner. Its cause, typically, is a highly infectious disease with high rates of fatalities. A well-known example of a global pandemic, as indicated by Qui et al. (2017) who drew on World Health Organization data, is the Spanish influenza (1918–1919), which killed more than 20 million people around the world.

Covid-19's severity was unparalleled, due to globalization and the high rates of commercial air travel (Balkhair, 2020). This author also says that even though scientists joined forces in the research and the information exchange, it took them months before they could isolate a diagnostic of this particular virus. The minimal immunity of the population, combined with easy transmission, overwhelmed healthcare systems, leaving them unable to provide care to the ill. Hospitals experienced shortage of staff and resources. The correct treatment would be yet to be determined (Balkhair, 2020).

Governments around the world were forced to make quick decisions and take drastic actions in attempt to ease the load on the healthcare systems and to give scientists time to come up with a vaccine that would mediate the pandemic. Lockdowns were implemented and many populations' ability to move was extremely restricted, allowing outside movement only for basic needs.

2.2 Finland's Reaction to COVID-19 and its Impact on Cultural Events

Finland was also forced to take measures to prevent the spread of the virus and reduce the number of fatalities. The Finnish broadcaster Yle (Yle News, 2021a) reported that all cultural and entertainment type of events were heavily restricted or cancelled throughout 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Although some musical and sports events started taking place in the late summer and autumn of 2021, for a second year some of the biggest music festivals, such as Tuska, Ilosaarirock, Provinssirock, Ruisrock and Nummirock, did not take place (Yle News, 2021a).

The continuous lack of employment has put the people working in the cultural sector in an extremely difficult position. According to Yle News (2021b), no adequate financial subsidy has been provided to make up for the workers in the cultural sector's loss of monthly income. Yle (2021b) also reports that this led to many of them claiming the government is treating them unfairly, compared to other industries. On 3rd of June 2021, approximately 1,500 cultural sector employees gathered in a peaceful protest in front of the Parliament House in Helsinki. Their demands were to re-establish larger public events and adequate coronavirus financial support for the freelancers in the cultural sector (Yle News, 2021b).

2.3 What is Heavy Metal Music?

The music world has always been full of creative artists who put into sound what cannot be put in words. They use music as an outlet and a tool to express every emotion known to humankind and communicate it to everybody else. Throughout history, the birth of various musical genres and artists have left their marks on the cultural development of a society. For the purpose of this research, however, I will focus on heavy metal music.

The academic literature related to heavy metal music is extremely scarce and reveals a lack of depth in the definitions. Due to this scarcity of research materials, the few academic sources I was able to find will be supplemented by information from the trades, pop culture magazines and non-peer-reviewed publications.

In academic studies, one must define their concept. Based on material I found in trades and elsewhere, I can delineate this heavy metal concept for this study only. Drawing on Guatam, Trapp, Bowar and O'Neil, I define heavy metal for this research as a musical presentation that involves heavy percussion, "screaming" guitars, and growling/screaming vocals. But I also note that many sub-genres may have different applications of these components.

Categorizing music genres has never been an easy or straightforward task. Artists crave freedom of expression, which often results the mixing of musical instruments, techniques, and ideologies. These components, often mixed or experimented with, are some of the forming factors of the broad variety of heavy metal sub-genres. The ideologies play a huge part in the formation of a genre, an artist, or a band.

It is important for the reader to know how this *heavy metal*, as an umbrella term, has evolved through its genres. People identify with genres and it will be useful for the reader to know how these genres developed over time. Clark (2022) suggests that some of the most common lyrical themes in heavy metal are war, death, depression, and justice. However, the artists do not limit themselves only to dark or morbid topics. Equally, heavy metal artists write about love, heartbreak, and romance. According to DiVita (2013), heavy metal bands often take inspiration from history, covering events and historic figures from the ancient time to recent history. Various vocal techniques, from opera and folklore to the traditional metal music growls, are used by across

the heavy metal artistic spectrum. According to Trapp (2019) in *Loudwire*, an American online magazine that specializes in news and topics on all heavy metal genres, heavy metal is one of the fastest developing musical genres in the new millennium.

The birth of heavy metal is believed to lay somewhere between the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Originally, it was considered an underground sub-genre of rock music and it was distinguished by the at-the-time-unfamiliar loud and aggressive sounds of drums, guitars, and high-pitched vocals (Guatam, 2020). Though it is difficult to determine who are the forefathers of the genre, due to the various opinions on the topic, the pioneers are believed to be the British bands Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin (Bowar, 2019). Aside from the distinctive musical characteristics, Bowar said these artists also established a certain trend in outfits, hairdos, and even behaviour. Those trends often would be definitive for a heavy metal artist or fan.

The 1980s are believed to be some of the strongest years for heavy metal music and the artists involved in it (O'Neil, 2017). The '80s were the birthing time for famous bands such as Metallica, Guns 'N' Roses, Mötley Crue, Bon Jovi, and many more. According to O'Neil, this is the time when the genre spread out to North and South America and Western Europe, gaining popularity with a tremendous force. Many fans were attracted to the sounds not only as a preferred music, but they would want to create it themselves, and new artists and bands appeared on the scene. Those new-borns, so to say, would now be qualified under the sub-genres of thrash metal and glam/hair metal. This is when significantly heavier sounds were created than those of the genre's "founding fathers." According to Bowar (2017), thrash metal is well-known for its fast pace with a "staccato and high guitar riffs" (para. 7). The vocals are considered to be "aggressive and angry" (para. 8). The pioneers are considered to be the bands Metallica, Slayer, Overkill, and Anthrax. In another article, Bowar (2018) describes glam/hair metal as "polished and accessible" (para. 3). The sound is melodic, guitars are extremely important, and the vocals are high-pitched. Important members of this sub-genre are Motley Crue, Quiet Riot, Guns 'n' Roses and the Finnish band Hanoi Rocks. The author notes that "there are endless debates on who is and is not a glam/hair metal band" (Bowar, 2018, para. 3). Everley (2020) classifies the '80s as the period when heavy metal established its own culture, accompanied by its own look, language, venues and, most importantly, an identity separate from the mainstream. According to Clark (2022), that would later set the foundation for sub-genres like grunge, death metal, doom metal, black metal, symphonic

metal, nu-metal, and folk metal. Once again, it is observed that, despite the musical similarities, certain characteristics separate these sub-genres from one another.

The evolution of the sub-genres continued even more rapidly in the 1990s. According to Dome (2018), the birth of grunge and, later in the decade, nu-metal have brought new sounds and merits to the already existing variety in the metal world. The newest and most recognizable trait is the low-tuned guitars and bass guitars. The author says that everything about the sub-genres in this period was becoming more “sombre” (Dome, 2018, para. 1). Thus, the already-existing bands needed to take one of the forks in the road—adapt to the new sound or continue with their established one. This has brought to the scene exciting new recordings as well as more inspiration. Some of the underground sub-genres took a leap toward bigger crowds for their art and their “fast, loud and blasphemous sound” (Dome, 2018, para. 4) would start to leave a permanent mark in the chronicles of heavy metal.

As it was mentioned in the previous paragraph the origins of the nu-metal genre dates to the late '90s. It peaked in the early 2000s and gained itself a strong fanbase. The specific for the 90's detuned guitar sounds were paired with elements of hip-hop, punk and groove metal (Pereira, 2021). According to Clark (2022) some distinguished names are Linkin Park, Papa Roach and Limp Bizkit. Pereira (2021) suggested that this is the time when nu-metal became what could be described as “commercially successful” (para. 9).

Clark (2022) suggests that though the 1990s were considered to be quiet and slow years for the heavy metal scene as whole, the decade still gifted heavy metal fans with various artist and sub-genres. That, combined with the uproar of nu-metal in the early 2000's, paved the way to the most recent decade that brought inspiration to the new age wave bands, such as Ghost, In Flames and Parkway Drive. The author concludes that despite the rapid evolution of the genre and the birth of various sub-genres, “the legacy of the early works of heavy metal music is still alive” (Clark, 2022, para. 43). And heavy metal fans all over the world are still listening to music that had been created decades ago.

2.4 Finland, Heavy Metal and the Festival Scene

This subsection reveals more about the connection between Finland and heavy metal. In other words, why is this musical style so popular? Moreover, the country's contribution to the genre with bands and sub-genres will be addressed. Finally, I will familiarize the reader with the Finnish heavy metal festival scene.

Finland holds the largest number of heavy metal bands per capita in the world, followed by Sweden, which has only two thirds of the number of bands as Finland (Marian, 2016). According to Guatam (2020), Finland and heavy metal music share a special connection, as the genre is appreciated on a mainstream level and the public media does not shy away from covering substantially the genre and the people involved with it. Guatam (2020) also noted that today, Finland has left a huge mark on the music world as the home to world-famous bands such as Nightwish, Apocalyptica, Children of Bodom, Amorphis, Sonata Arctica, and HIM. Alongside with that, underground names like Beherit, Rotten Sound, and Archgoat draw the interest of heavy metal fans from all over the world (Guatam, 2020).

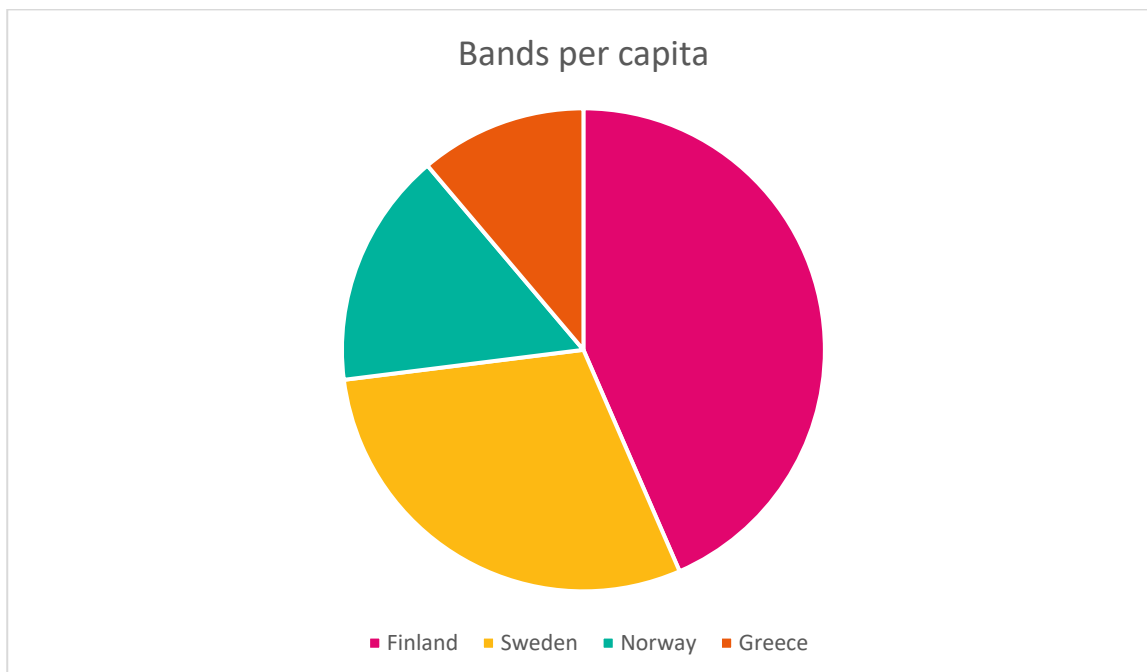


Figure 1: Heavy metal bands per capita (adapted from Marian, 2016)

Aabeg Guatam's (2020) research suggests a relation between heavy metal music and the geographic location of Finland. The long, cold, and dark winters are a huge influence for the Finnish heavy metal bands. This author also says the Finnish nature also plays a key role in the production of the genre. Almost two thirds of the Finnish land is covered by forest and it is a recurring theme for bands to take photoshoots and film videos to compliment and promote their albums and singles.

Guatam (2020) also observes that heavy metal has a valuable contribution to the Finnish economy. The economic prosperity of the genre is already observed in the 90s, as in this decade heavy metal giants like Iron Maiden and Metallica were having sold out shows and some of the most prominent Finnish festivals and bands were established. An instance of such is Tuska Open Air Metal Festival. Guatam (2020) also reports that a decline in the popularity of the genre has not been observed yet and many Finnish cities and towns have a minimum of one heavy metal event per year. Heavy metal themed bars, stores and record shops are not uncommon.

According to Mika Pajarinen and Jyrki Ali-Yrkkö (2021), the event industry contributes with 1.2% of the Finnish GDP. It also employs permanently 19,500 employees. A minimum of a 50% decrease in turnover has been reported for every fourth event company for the period between 2019 and 2020 (Ali-Yrkkö & Pajarinen, 2021).

This huge interest has led to the establishment of various heavy metal festivals, the most famous of which are Tuska Open Air Metal Festival (Helsinki), Nummirock (Kauhajoki), Provinssirock (Seinäjoki) and Steel Fest (Hyvinkää). These festivals traditionally have welcomed thousands of fans from around Finland and all over the world. According to the festival's official website (Tuska, 2019) the last edition of Tuska before the pandemic in 2019 has welcomed 43 000 guests from all over the world for the three festival days, two of which have been completely sold out. Kurikkala (2012) reports that the festival's history dates to 1998 and its stages have hosted numerous Finnish and foreign metal bands such as Nightwish, Children of Bodom, Apocalyptica, Lamb of God and Amon Amarth. The author also says that Provinssirock is one of the largest-scale festivals in Finland and it has hit a record in attendance in 2011 when it has welcomed 81 thousand visitors in three days. This success is owed to the headliners that year, among which was

System of a Down (USA). Kurikkala (2012) goes on to observe that these festivals are paying a valuable contribution to the Finnish tourism, as they attract visitors from all over the world.

According to Mäkiranta (2017) Nummirock is a festival, that is a part of the annual midsummer celebrations in Kauhajoki. The festival exists in its current form since 1987 but becomes recognized as a heavy metal festival in 2002. Karvonen (2016) reports that for its 30th anniversary the festival has welcomed 19 500 guests.

3 Research Objectives and Questions

3.1 Research Objective

The objective of this thesis is to determine if the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Finnish heavy metal industry and festival scene have affected the consumers. To discover if there are any significant changes in the lives of these consumers and their attitude towards the genre and festival culture.

3.2 Research Questions

Based on my research and musical interests, the nature of the pandemic and the literature that I was able to draw on, so I determined that the following questions would be important to explore with fans of heavy metal music in Finland.

1. How did the pandemic affect the lives of the fans involved with the Finnish heavy metal industry?
2. How is their interest in heavy metal events post-pandemic?
3. What are their thoughts about the future of heavy metal events?

4 Methodology

In the following chapter, I discuss the methods used in this research. The section ends with the presentation of my research questions.

4.1 Research Design

This research is exploratory, as I concluded that this methodology would be the best fit to answer my research questions, since the topics that inform my questions are not clearly defined and lack academic coverage. Exploratory research is the one that helps studies discover new insights that have not been studied thoroughly or at all previously (Stebbins, 2019).

4.2 Philosophical Stance

The philosophical stance of this research is interpretivism. This stance works with qualitative data, the research method for this research. The research questions aim to answer the questions of how and what the phenomena of focus. Interpretivism investigates the words and meanings of the research participants, outcomes that cannot be provided by quantitative data (SAGE Publications, 2017).

4.3 Research Purpose

Considering the scarce amount of academic information on heavy metal festivals, this research aims to enrich the current knowledge and provide consumers' points of view on festival life and the Finnish heavy metal industry. Of particular interest is the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on heavy metal consumers and their activities. This research aims to gather perspectives that might be different from those found in the media or trade publications. Another crucial part of this research is to establish grounds for further discussions and studies.

4.4 Approach to Data Collection

The data were first planned to be collected by semi-structured oral interviews. This method would have allowed the participants to freely share their opinions and experience and provide this research with qualitative, in-depth data. However, this implementation method was substituted with open-ended interviews, due to the participants' expressed discomfort with being recorded. Nevertheless, the answers they provided were clear and rich, giving insights into the research questions proposed in this academic work. An open-ended interview is a common method for gathering qualitative data. It consists of questions asked in a way that allows the participants to

form their own answers. It helps identify patterns and behaviors and collects the thoughts and feelings of the participants (Weller, 2018).

The interviews were distributed via social media applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram. The participants were asked to complete the Word document sent out to them. Only one participant agreed to a face-to-face interview, which was recorded and transcribed. The data collection took part between February and April 2022.

4.5 Analysis Methods

This research utilizes thematic data analysis. Thematic analysis is a popular method for analyzing qualitative data. This method allows flexibility for discovering common themes and patterns within the data. Moreover, it allows the research to connect and understand these patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

5 Research Results

Seven interviewees took part in this research. The following tables provide the responses to the posed questions and the interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. In line with an inductive line of analysis, the tables reveal the codes created during the data analysis process.

The reader should be aware that the following tables contain unedited answers and there are some grammatical and or usage errors, as all respondents are using their second language to answer this survey. Another point that must be brought to the reader's attention is that respondents #6 and #7 are a couple and they have completed these surveys together, that led them to providing similar answers.

Initially I wanted to determine how the participants were introduced to heavy metal. My thinking was that if there is emotional or relational context to the music, it might impact their answers regarding the loss of access to live music during the pandemic. Table 1 provides the data of how they were introduced to the genre.

Table 1: Introduction to heavy metal

Participants	Code: Introduction to heavy metal
#1	By myself, via the Internet
#2	Through a friend
#3	Through a friend
#4	Grew up with it, my sister introduced me to it
#5	Through a friend and family
#6	Through a friend and the radio
#7	Through a friend

In this instance I felt it was important to understand how the respondents were feeling about heavy metal, when they first heard it. Therefore, I asked what their first impression of this musical genre was, when they were introduced to it. Table 2 provides that data.

Table 2: First impression of heavy metal

Participants	Code: First impression of heavy metal
#1	Rough and powerful sound, feeling of power, lyrics, speed
#2	Fast riffs mixed with anger, guitars, lyrics
#3	Raw sound and heaviness
#4	Guitar solos, drums growling
#5	Appearance and style, sense of community
#6	Guitars and overall sound
#7	Beautiful melodies, powerful and aggressive

Considering the previous questions, one more important point was to establish the parameters of the emotional connection between the fans and the genre. It was curious to explore the significance heavy metal carries or carried into the lives of the respondents. Table 3 presents the data of how important heavy metal is to them.

Table 3: Emotional importance of heavy metal

Participants	Code: Emotional importance of heavy metal
#1	Very important, excited about it, life would not be the same without it
#2	Very important, would not be a musician without it
#3	Very significant, helped me through times, makes me happy
#4	Definitely yes, it is important
#5	Not as much nowadays, there is a feeling of connection to people who listen to it, it unites people
#6	Not as much nowadays, helped me through times, feeling of nostalgia
#7	Significant during teen ages, shaped me as the person I am

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the lack of heavy metal events during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main purposes of the paper is to find out how important are heavy metal events to the fans and how they have felt without them in the last two years. That is why I wanted to start the exploration by asking them about their first live heavy metal event and the feelings it has brought to them. Table 4 provides the data.

Table 4: First heavy metal experience and its emotional value

Participants	Code: First live heavy metal experience and its emotional value
#1	Did not like the very first gig, first big gig was Sonic Syndicate, it had an amazing atmosphere
#2	The Rasmus, cool experience
#3	Nummirock, met most of my friends there, got drunk for the first time
#4	Kivenlahti, went to see a favorite band and got exposed to heavier stuff

#5	Czech band, great experience made we want to go to more gigs
#6	Ankkarock, exciting, favorite bands were there
#7	Cannot remember the band, but it was at Tanssisali Lutakko (Jyväskylä), still going there

Despite collecting predominantly qualitative data, to determine the importance of live music participation in the respondents' lives, I deemed it necessary to ask them how many heavy metal festivals and gigs they would normally attend before the pandemic. The answers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Attendance of heavy metal events pre-pandemic

Participants	Code: Attendance of heavy metal events pre-pandemic
#1	10 gigs, 5 or 6 editions of Nummirock
#2	No regular participations, 3 editions of Nummirock
#3	2 or 3 festivals, depending on the bands playing
#4	1 or 2 per year, one gig and one festival
#5	1 or 2 per year, one gig and one festival
#6	8 gigs, 0 to 1 festival
#7	8 gigs 0 to 1 festival

In line with my interest of the relational aspect of live heavy metal, I asked whether the festival goers attended with friends. Their responses are found in Table 6.

Table 6: Do you attend alone or with friends?

Participants	Code: Do you attend alone or with friends?
#1	With friends, but would go alone
#2	Always with friends, never alone
#3	With friends, but would go alone
#4	Used to be alone, now with friends, sister or girlfriend
#5	Never going alone, used to go with friends and now with my boyfriend
#6	With friends
#7	With friends

In line with the role of relationships in the festival life of heavy metal, I sought to know whether they were building significant relationships when meeting fellow fans at these heavy metal festivals. Table 7 provides the respondents' description of the relationships they found at these festivals.

Table 7: Important relationships made through heavy metal

Participants	Code: Important relationships made through heavy metal
#1	Met nice people, but did not keep in touch
#2	Yes, I have
#3	Made some friends
#4	No
#5	Hung out at a festival, but did not keep in touch
#6	No
#7	No

As this thesis investigates primarily how the lives of heavy metal fans have changed during the pandemic, the following question is directly in line with the 1st research question of the paper. It is

of greatest importance to understand the thoughts and the feelings of the fans regarding the lack of heavy metal events in the past two years, as this question will help draw the conclusions of this research. Table 8 displays the answers of the respondents.

Table 8: Two years without heavy metal events, what are your thoughts and feelings about it?

Participants	Code: Two years without heavy metal events, thoughts and feelings
#1	Sad but understanding, will be attending again after the end
#2	It has been too long without gigs and festivals
#3	I would like to go, it has been too long without one
#4	I do not feel different, I am afraid of getting sick and cancellation
#5	Would like to go, but money is an issue, afraid of cancellation
#6	Missing it, afraid of cancellation
#7	Missing it, afraid of cancellation

This question correlates with the previous one and it aims to gain deeper insight on the emotional significance of live music. The answers can be found in Table 9.

I found it of high value to gain perspective on the need of attending heavy metal events and the current time, as this is the topic of the 2nd research question of this thesis. The aim is to determine whether the fans are still finding it important to attend these events or have they adapted to different ways and means of heavy metal music consumption. The answers can be found below in Table 10.

Table 9: Has the lack of heavy metal events changed your life and how?

Participants	Code: Has the lack of heavy metal events changed your life? How?
#1	Nummirock has been an annual positive thing in my life, I feel distressed and anxious without it
#2	Living in solitude, feeling way lonelier, lack of events has a huge impact
#3	Life has not changed much, but I am in need of an event
#4	Missing live music, but I do not need to go out to listen to it
#5	I miss it, but it has not changed my life
#6	I prefer gigs to festivals
#7	I prefer gigs to festivals

Table 10: Have you noticed the absence of heavy metal events?

Participants	Code: Have you noticed the absence of heavy metal events?
#1	Yes
#2	Yes, very much
#3	Yes, due to boredom
#4	Yes
#5	Yes, it is challenging to not enjoy stuff
#6	There is a craving for events lately
#7	There is a craving for events lately

I was interested if the lack of heavy metal events has somehow affected the personal relationships of the respondents with other fans. Table 11 presents the answer to this question.

Table 11: Have your shared relationships through heavy metal been affected?

Participants	Code: Have your shared relationships through heavy metal been affected?
#1	Have not changed much, we try to do other things
#2	Yes, I have not seen them since the beginning of the pandemic
#3	Not really
#4	No, I do not have any
#5	No
#6	No
#7	No

The discussion about the near future was essential to determine if the interest for heavy metal events has declined or increased in the participants. This question is in direct correlation with the 2nd research question of this thesis. The answers can be found in Table 12.

Table 12: What are your plans for summer 2022?

Participants	Code: Plans for summer 2022
#1	I do not think I will be attending, feels irresponsible
#2	I strongly hope for events
#3	I will attend if it is possible
#4	Possibly will attend
#5	Perhaps later in the year, money is an issue
#6	I am going to see Ghost, Rammstein and Nightwish
#7	I am going to see Ghost, Rammstein and Nightwish

Considering that the 3rd research question of this thesis is: “What are their thoughts about thoughts about the future of heavy metal?” it was essential to implement this question in the interview and gather first hand opinions on the matter. It is of immense importance for this research

to determine whether the fans are eager to return to the pre-pandemic festival life or do they have another vision of the scene. The answers can be found in Table 13.

Table 13: What are your thoughts about the heavy metal events 5 years from now?

Participants	Code: Thoughts about the heavy metal events 5 years from now
#1	I hope everything is behind us and back to normal
#2	I hope nothing like this ever happens again
#3	I hope we could carry on with our normal festival lives
#4	I hope everything will be back to normal
#5	I hope things will be back to normal and I will be going to more events
#6	I hope things will be the same
#7	I hope things will be the same

Lastly, I wanted to give the participants the chance to express any additional thoughts and feelings they may have regarding the genre, the heavy metal festival life or lack thereof for the future. Table 14 presents the answers.

Table 14: Is there something else you would like to add that has not been asked yet?

Participants	Code: Something else you would like to add
#1	No
#2	No
#3	No
#4	No
#5	No
#6	Expressing sympathy for the bands, as they took the hardest hit
#7	Expressing sympathy for the bands, as they took the hardest hit

The data show that most of the participants were introduced to heavy metal through a personal relationship and their first introduction was very favorable. The answers to the interview questions tell that 5 out of 7 respondents firmly state that would attend heavy metal events with friends or family. The other 2 state that they could go alone but prefer to be with friends. Yet, 6 out of 7 respondents say that the pandemic and lack of heavy metal events have not affected their established relationships.

The data reveals consistent heavy metal event attendance pre-pandemic. Every participant would attend a minimum of 1 heavy metal event a year, most commonly a festival. When asked how they feel about the past 2 years without heavy metal events, the 6 out of 7 interviewees express desire to attend as soon as possible. To describe their feelings about the situation, they use words as *“sad”* and phrases like *“it has been too long without gigs and festivals”* and *“missing it”*. The fear of cancelation pops up as a reason to have not purchased event tickets in the past 2 years. The theme of personal finance is observed consistently in the answers of one participant. The interview data shows that 5 out of 7 respondents do not feel that their lives have changed much without heavy metal events. Despite that they once again state that they miss live music. When asked this question, 2 of the respondents say that the lack of heavy metal events has had a noted negative emotional impact on them, making them feel *“distressed and anxious”* and *“feeling way lonelier”* as they describe that they have been *“living in solitude”*. Upon asked if they have noticed the absence of live heavy metal music all participants firmly answer *“Yes”*. The data shows that 4 out of 7 respondents express desire to attend heavy metal event in the summer of 2022 or later in the year. Concrete festival and gig participation plans have been made by 2 fans taking part in this research.

All the interviewed fans hope for restoration of the previous heavy metal event life. They use the word *“normal”* in their answers, as well as the expression *“I hope things will be the same”*. When given the chance to add something that has not been discussed yet in the interview, 5 out of 7 declined the opportunity to give further comments, while the other 2 participants expressed sympathy for the bands and the artists, *“as they took the hardest hit”* according to them.

6 Discussion

The objective of this thesis is to determine if there are any significant changes in the lives of the heavy metal consumers and their attitude towards the genre and festival culture, having spent 2

years without live music due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By acquiring this information, I aimed in this thesis to provide deeper insight to the lives of the fans in the past two 2 years and whether have they adapted to new alternative ways to consume heavy metal and their plan of action for the near and far future regarding festival attendance.

The data suggest that despite the loss of access to the live heavy metal music scene, the respondents note that they do not feel their lives have been significantly impacted. That said, they still express deep interest in it and have felt its absence. The analysis identifies the fear of cancelation as a key factor in the fans' decision-making process when booking heavy metal event tickets in the past 2 years. The results indicate that all participants hope for the return of pre-pandemic festival life and express strong desire to return to it already in summer 2022 or later in the same year.

The interview data display that the participants strongly identify emotionally with the genre of heavy metal. It is disclosed that heavy metal is a coping tool for negative life events and emotions. The respondents answer that the genre has *"shaped them as the person they are"*, *"life would not be the same without it"*, *"makes them happy"*, *"unites people"*, *"helped them through tough times"*. Clearly the responses suggest that heavy metal music plays an important role in their lives. But it is also a possibility that the emotional attachment to the music genre relates to that people personally close to them were the channel for the introduction of this musical genre to their lives. Their first live heavy metal experience is related to various positive emotions, which they describe with the expressions *"exciting"*, *"cool"*, *"amazing atmosphere"*. This finding is important in understanding of the value the genre holds in the fans' lives and supports my supposition, that there is indeed an emotional context to the genre. Therefore, the limitation of access to live heavy metal music consumption could lead to negative emotions in the lives of the participants. However, when analyzing the themes in results, most of the respondents claim that their lives have not changed much without the access to live heavy metal music. That indicates that despite, the emotional connection to the genre, the fans have found ways to cope without this form of music consumption. Nevertheless, when going further with the analysis, the interviewees unanimously state that they have noticed the absence of heavy metal events and they are *"missing it"* and *"there is a need for them"*. Another correlated theme that is observed that once again the interviewees unanimously express their strong eagerness to return to the festival scene in the near future. These findings provide evidence that the interest in live heavy metal has not

suffered a significant decrease and the fans are as excited about attending heavy metal festivals and live gigs as they were pre-pandemic.

In line with the strong emotional aspect to the genre, it was observed that there is a strong social and relational aspect to it as well. All participants say that they are attending heavy metal events with friends, family or partners or would rather go with friends than going alone. Yet, in contradiction with this claim, most participants say that they have not created any lasting relationship through attending heavy metal festivals. That could present a reason why these respondents noted that their social lives have not suffered significantly due to the lack of access to live heavy music.

When discussing the future of the heavy metal festivals and gigs in Finland the fans express hopefulness and excitement. Overall, they have not made yet concrete plans for attendance in summer 2022 but say that they *“will attend, if possible”*. This result displays that the fans have an optimistic view of the future and hope for restoration of the previous heavy metal event life.

6.1 Research Limitations

One of the challenges I had in this study – and future researches may as well— is lack of peer-reviewed academic literature on the topic of heavy metal and the heavy metal event industry in Finland. In fact, this scarcity was one of the inspirations for this paper. Future researcher also could benefit from the comprehensive definitions of terms related to the heavy metal industry provided in this research.

Another limitation is the small number of interview respondents. For this research 7 heavy metal fans were willing to participate and share their thoughts and experiences regarding their connection with the genre and live music events. However, this sample size is too small to draw any firm conclusions on the research questions. Yet even with this small sample size, the responses of the participants do provide an interesting insight into the experiences of those heavy metal fans on the topics related to heavy metal events, as well as some idea on their social/relational and emotional attachment to the genre. This topic can be explored in greater detail by future researchers using both a larger sample size of respondents and research methods to delve more deeply into

the thoughts, insights and feelings about the heavy metal genre and the role of live festivals, both in Finland and other countries.

The respondents were unwilling to participate in recorded semi-structured interviews and the data collection method was supplemented for open-ended interviews. This change of method limited my abilities to engage in a discussion with the respondents and potentially gaining a brighter perspective on the respondents' frame of mind and experiences on this topic. Future research could benefit from investigating this topic further by acquiring respondents, willing to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Finally, I must acknowledge that language may have played a part in the process of data collection and perhaps the outcomes of this study. Although having sufficient English skills to understand the questions posed and provide answers, their lack of confidence could have resulted in their desire not to be recorded. Furthermore, as none of the respondents are either native speakers of English or have bilingual proficiency, managing the interview questions in English might have negatively impacted their ability to respond as fully as they (and I, as a researcher) would have liked. Future research could conduct the research in the native language of the respondents as it gives them full ability to express themselves. It would allow them to conduct a discussion.

6.2 Further Recommendations

This research lays the groundwork for further academic works on the topic. The analysis of the data showed themes and patterns, that successfully answered the research questions of this study. Future research could focus on some observations that could not be verified due to the small sample size. For instance, the issue of personal finances arose in my data, and perhaps future research could look more explicitly at the role of money and finances in relationship to heavy metal fans attending live events, particularly when the reliability of the festival organizers might be tested by overarching social/environmental issues.

Future research could examine further the social aspect of heavy metal. The findings suggested that most of the participants have not created any new lasting relationships on the common basis

of the genre. In future work it might be important to investigate the nature of the social relationships and interactions during festivals. It might extend the explanation of why it is important to attend with friends and family.

Observation from the data has shown that fans use heavy metal as a coping tool for emotional turmoil. I, as a researcher, find this theme extremely interesting and I would suggest this issue to future researchers for exploration. They could further develop and confirm these initial findings in a larger scale and contribute to the understanding of the emotional connection to the genre and perhaps relate it to existing psychological studies.

7 Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to explore how the COVID-19 government limitations on large group gatherings affected the fans of Finnish heavy metal live festivals. It can be concluded that the lack of heavy metal events has not led to a decrease in the fans' interest towards the genre or its consumption in the form of live events.

The first research question was devised to explore the lives of the fans during the past two years. It would appear that there have not been any significant changes in the personal and social lives of the fans due to the restricted access to heavy metal events.

The second research question focused on exploring the respondents' interest in live music post-pandemic. The findings provide evidence that the interviewees are looking forward to the possibility of attending a heavy metal event already in summer 2022.

The last research question asked the respondents about their thoughts on the future of the scene. These heavy metal attendees collectively expressed their hopes for a bright future of the industry and, further, noted their desire to return to their pre-pandemic festival and gig habits as soon as possible.

These findings provided awareness on the lives of the interviewed heavy metal fans during the COVID-19 pandemic and their thoughts and feelings about the heavy metal event scene in Finland.

The data could be found of value to industry professionals interested in potential changes of the fans' attitude towards live music and the genre. It might also help them think of ways to approach similar situations in the future. This study aims to fill the gap in the academic literature on the topic of heavy metal, as well as publish some of the first data covering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the genre.

The study has met its academic goal and the results has provided a basis for future research and enhance how the fans relate to the genre, the importance of live music and the reaction towards a global crisis. In regards of the social aspect of this study, the results suggested that fans indeed relate to live music socially. Future research could consider the effects of pandemic restrictions, curfews, or any sudden events that could lead to the limitation of fans participating in social consumption of music.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Please, state your name and age:

Please, state if you would like to remain anonymous:

The following interview will be used for research purposes and the results will be included in the author's bachelor's thesis.

1. How was heavy metal music introduced to you?
 - a. What impressed you about it?
 - b. Would you say it's a significant part of your life?
2. Which was the first festival or gig that you attended? Can you tell me more about it?
3. How many festivals or gigs you would attend before the Covid-19 pandemic?
 - a. Would you attend them alone or with friends?
 - b. Have you made any relationships through attending heavy metal festivals?
4. Now that we have been living with the Covid-19 pandemic for 2 years, how do you feel about festivals and gigs?
5. How have the last 2 years during covid without the heavy metal festivals been for you? Has the lack of heavy metal events changed your life in any way? How?
 - a. Have you noticed their absence in your life?
 - b. If you have shared relationships through heavy metal have, they been changed due to covid-19?
6. What are your hopes for summer 2022? Are you planning on attending any festivals or gigs?
7. What are your thoughts about 5 years from now?
8. Is there something you would like to say, that I didn't ask?

Thank you for your participation!