

ISSN 1840-485
e-ISSN 2233-0046

Review paper
<http://dx.doi.org/10.70102/afts.2026.1836.843>

A STUDY ON THE AESTHETICS OF NATIONAL HOLIDAYS REFLECTING THE HARMONY OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Received: June 09, 2026; Revised: July 20, 2026; Accepted: August 26, 2026; Published: September 29, 2026

SUMMARY

National holidays can be seen as concentrated aesthetic events where traditional symbolic systems meet the contemporary systems of staging, media, and design. The current study explores how the visual, ritual, and spatial language of national holidays is transformed in the encounter of traditional and contemporary ways of presentation, and suggests an approach to interpreting such encounters as aesthetic harmony rather than disjunction. The case study analyzes the festive culture of Uzbekistan focusing on the ancient spring holiday Navruz and the modern state holiday Independence Day. The architectural structure of the research is based on the combination of two layers: the traditional aesthetic layer made up of ritual, costume, crafts, and oral symbolics; and the modern aesthetic layer made up of digital media, urban lighting and design, and technology-enabled access, bridged by the third mediating layer of continuity, interpretation, and co-design. The comparative and illustrative analysis in terms of six aesthetic criteria – symbolism, color and ornament, ritual depth, technological convergence, public engagement,

and value to national brand – reveals not only the conflict between traditional and modern registers in the aesthetics of national holidays, but also a selective combination of these registers based on the depth of tradition and civic role of a holiday. The results reveal that the aesthetic coherence of national holidays is realized more through the selective preservation of symbolic legitimacy combined with the use of modern technologies than through the process of modernizing and diluting traditional elements.

Key words: national holidays, aesthetics, tradition and modernity, cultural identity, Navruz, festival design, heritage, visual symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most visually rich events made by any society is its national holidays. All these musical, costumed, colorful, architectural, linguistic, culinary, and choreographic elements are compressed in a specific amount of time and space to make people perceive in an immediate way all those abstract notions of belonging, continuity, and progress. If we consider these festivals as aesthetic phenomena and not just as calendars of political or religious events, then we can ask the question about how the self-perception of this community becomes shaped. In recent works on ritualistic and collective festivities, the idea emerged that the high level of emotional charge which occurs in shared festive activities, also called collective effervescence, not only reinforces individual connections within the group but also contributes to the formation of common identity. This is a part of the overall sensory design of this event: costumes' colors, movements' choreography, and the spatial arrangement.

At the same time, national holidays are rarely static, as the growing use of televised broadcasts, ritual mediations, and state-sponsored broadcasts has been found to change how citizens experience the festive practices and to reconstitute their ancestral practices in an edited and narrated format [12]. The folklore festivals organized by national organizations provide an additional example of how old practices passed down through oral traditions have been structured and developed into festive events to instill a common identity into young generations and foreign visitors. In turn, the cultural festivals of postcolonial and transitional nations demonstrate how the choreography, parade structure, and symbolic language of the festivity have been deliberately crafted to include a hybrid identity [2][18].

The primary issue that this research attempts to clarify is that of the aesthetic logic under which both traditional and contemporary elements can exist simultaneously during a national holiday. There exist two main, contradictory intuitions in regard to this topic. According to the first one, modernization threatens the concept of authenticity, whereby the modernization of traditions through new staging techniques, lighting and spectacle takes away from their meaning. The other intuition views modernization as an inevitable part of tradition in that skilled adaptation will always preserve meaning whatever the form. None of these intuitions can provide a full explanation of the diversity witnessed among different types of holidays and societies [6]. It is necessary to determine what happens to the maintenance of symbolic continuity in light of such contemporary modification.

This paper attempts to fill this void by looking at the celebratory culture of Uzbekistan in which an old agrarian festival called Navruz and a relatively new civic festival called Independence Day are held in the same calendar year and with the aid of similar technology. Similar cases of nation branding through public festivals have been studied elsewhere in which governments utilize public and sports spectacles in order to exercise soft power and create international visibility for their country [8]. Looking at the national holidays of Uzbekistan through this broader perspective enables us to examine the aesthetic dialogue between the traditional and the modern as a general phenomenon rather than an exceptional one.

Novelty, Objectives, and Key Contribution

- The first major goal of this research project is the construction of a framework through which the relationship between traditional aesthetics and modern aesthetics may be described in relation to a single national holiday, not as a case of two separate sets of aesthetics.
- The second goal is the identification of the different aesthetic components associated with a

national holiday, including symbolism, color and ornamentation, ritual depth, technological staging, public involvement, and value for national branding, in a manner that allows for systematic comparison of the holidays and of national traditions.

- The third goal is the application of this framework to the celebration culture of Uzbekistan in two different cases, those being Navruz and Independence Day.

The major contribution of this research is associated with the development of the framework of Traditional-Modern Aesthetic Harmony that creates a mediative layer for interaction between the traditional and modern levels of the aesthetic system of a national holiday. The concept of this mediative layer allows the use of a more specific language as opposed to such concepts as authenticity and modernization widely discussed when considering festivals; it is complemented by a multi-format visualization approach, involving flow, architecture, bar, radar and line visualizations.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In Section I, an introduction to the research background, objectives, and contributions is presented. In Section II, literature related to holiday aesthetics, cultural identity, symbolism, and digital heritage is reviewed. In Section III, the proposed Traditional-Modern Aesthetic Harmony framework and methodology are described. In Section IV, comparative aesthetic analysis and selected findings are discussed. In Section V, the framework is used for the analysis of the Navruz and Independence Day holidays in Uzbekistan. Discussion and interpretation of the findings are provided in Section VI. Conclusions are offered in Section VII.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Holidays, Ritual, and National Identity Construction

Theory of ritual offers the initial framework for exploring why national holidays are laden with disproportionate symbolic significance compared to typical public events. The field work concerning participation in carnivals has proven that a ritual can lead to psychosocial effects, such as increased awe and a greater feeling of connection to a wider community, both human or civic, effects that transcend individual participants and become a part of collective memory of the event. In general, commemorative events have been found to create particular atmosphere within the memorial places or events, where architecture, movement and timing come together to create the feeling of national identity experienced, not just spoken about [16].

The media organizations have been becoming ever more involved in the process of transmitting the rituals to their national audiences. Media studies of cultural programs based on festivals have revealed that the process of broadcasting involves not only the transmission of a certain ritual but also its construction as a part of national identity through the mechanisms of framing, narrating, and visualizing, thus transforming a heritage ritual into a symbolic text which is readable to the current audience [4][12]. Studies of postcolonial festivals reveal that the parade and festive performance can be designed in such a way to accommodate hybrid identity, making it possible for a single festival to include several different histories [18].

Semiotics and Symbolic Analysis of Festive Aesthetics

The semiotics of festival design sees costume, color, gesture, and space as a carefully constructed system of signs rather than as mere ornamentation. Detailed analysis of temple-fair and festival attractions has revealed that organizers create a "festivalscape" made up of elements of safety, culture, services, and atmosphere, which are interpreted by attendees through cultural, novel, social, and emotional codes in a two-way process of sign creation and sign interpretation [13].

A service-based approach to semiotics of events reveals that the symbolic code of an event is strongly correlated with its target audience and its position in the field of contemporary experience design, suggesting that even those events aimed at being modern and luxury have a rich tradition of semiotics to communicate their special status and exclusivity or occasion [3]. In folklore festivals specifically designed for preserving and communicating inherited practice, the same process can be observed on the

other side of the spectrum, where symbolic elements like regional costume, crafts and heritage storytelling are carefully selected for an audience both national and international.

Material, Craft, and Costume Aesthetics

The costume and craftsmanship serve as one of the most explicit identifiers of national or regional aesthetics in a festive context. Analysis comparing traditional costumes over various time periods has proved that there are distinctive aesthetic criteria set by the combination of agriculture and local resources along with the social organization, giving rise to distinct aesthetics in terms of color design, form, and style of dressing which are different from one cultural context to another [20]. Studies dedicated to national costume have also stressed the fact that traditional techniques of dressing involve history, social structure, and aesthetics altogether and thus make up the symbol of belonging to a specific cultural context, especially during national festivals and weddings [24].

Indeed, color itself functions as a separate symbolic code in this material language. The cross-cultural analysis of the symbolism of colors has shown that one and the same color may be associated with completely opposite meanings in various cultures due not to the natural psychological reaction to the color but to the cultural influences of the religion, history, and linguistics of the country [5]. This means that the choice of colors used to stage a national holiday has a definite cultural significance.

Urban, Spatial, and Lighting Design in Festive Environments

There is now a growing trend of designing national holidays using concepts generated through urban design and public space design. Participatory practices in the design of public space reveal the fact that festivals are often designed and implemented to test or legitimize new designs in civic spaces, breaking away from usual planning restrictions and involving greater community involvement in the entire process of design [14]. Research into the reuse of urban derelict spaces reveals that the attitude of the community towards the use of such spaces as temporary or festive spaces depends on legitimacy and cultural resonance, implying that design for festivities has repercussions in the design of public space that are more than temporary.

Lighting design represents another level of technology within such spatial staging. The literature on intelligent lighting systems for landscape and public spaces shows how sensors, control technology, and cloud computing could be used in combination for managing large scale decorative and functional lighting to create additional perceptual ambience for festivals and events, while also adding new challenges for managers of those events [9]. Specialized events which are meant to increase social capital in cities torn by divisions or conflicts show that the spatial and aesthetic design of festivals and celebrations can be harnessed consciously for creating cross-community interactions [7].

Digital and Technological Mediation of Heritage Aesthetics

The digital technology is now a key means for the conservation, dissemination, and reinterpretation of intangible heritage within the framework of traditional festivities. The results of system development research of intangible and tangible heritage conservation show that the use of digital platforms can record the performance and material elements of ritual, both providing conservation of threatened traditions and increasing the awareness of lesser-known heritage sites [1]. Related research into the problematics and difficulties of advanced digital technology for heritage conservation proves that intangible heritage is highly prone to decay due to its necessity of transmission [10].

Immersive technologies enhance the documentary aspect with an experiential one. Research that examines a framework for extended-reality applications in the field of cultural heritage reveals that virtual and augmented reality have been employed in recent years not only for the purpose of documenting the processes of heritage but for enabling its participants to experience them, thereby transforming the aesthetic nature of tradition from observation into interaction [11]. A consumer adoption study that uses an extended technology acceptance framework to assess digital intangible heritage reveals that the readiness of the audience to interact with the digitized heritage experiences is

contingent on the presence of certain contextual, technological, and process-oriented factors, and not on a specific design component, which implies that the aesthetic quality of digital heritage mediation is contingent rather than guaranteed [17]. The case-based studies examining paper-cutting art captured through virtual reality [15] and digital museums evaluated with technology-acceptance and task-fit approaches [25] both illustrate that aesthetic perception affects the success of digitally mediated heritage experiences.

Tourism, Branding, and the Political Economy of Festive Aesthetics

Public holidays work both as internal practices of identity construction and as external tools of nation branding. As demonstrated in the study of nation branding through sport mega-events, governments actively employ spectacularly orchestrated large events to exercise their soft power, increase international visibility, and draw tourists and investments, thus positioning festive spectacle as an effective tool of public policy as opposed to culture [8]. In turn, studies of festivals from the perspective of tourism prove the double nature of holiday celebration: co-creation between hosts and visitors that occurs in the process of participation in festivals creates emotional bonding with the place and positively impacts overall festival experience.

The concept of authenticity is still controversial but consistently used within the body of literature concerned with the topic. The studies of flow experience in the context of cultural and creative tourism show that the perception of authenticity which is mediated by innovation and cultural identity contributes significantly to engagement of tourists and implies that people are not interested only in traditional presentations but also in combinations of innovations and traditions [22]. Cultural and creative tourism and the process of national identity formation has also been shown to be mediated by two aspects of cultural experience – implicit cultural memory and explicit cultural learning, showing that the aesthetic experience in a festive event can trigger both kinds of cultural memories, implicitly formed and explicitly learned [23]. Research into nature-based tourism and literary and aesthetic association proves the fact that the aesthetic experience of a tourist is also affected by previously created cultural and narrative context as much as the natural environment, which is crucial for understanding the way national holidays are aesthetically experienced [21].

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The model that is formed in this study involves two complementary steps, which have been shown in figures 1 and 2 respectively. The first step involves defining the analysis process that would enable the formation of an interpretation from cultural data. The second step involves the definition of the structure of the aesthetic system, including the distinction between traditional and modern aesthetics of a national holiday.

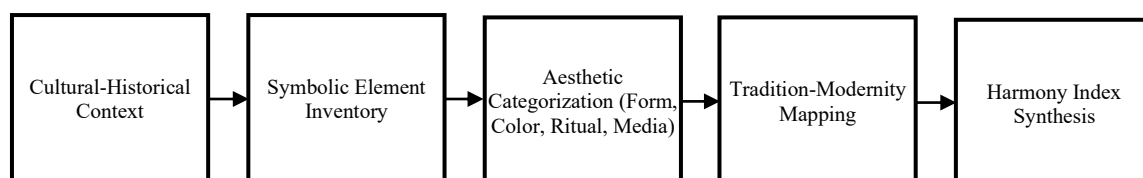


Figure 1. Research and analytical flow

Figure 1 shows the flow of the research and analysis process employed in the research. The analysis starts from the historical-cultural setting in which the selected holiday exists, determining its origin and location within the calendar as well as past symbolism. Next comes a symbolic element inventory of all the tangible elements involved in that particular holiday such as costume, color, music, food, and space. The next step involves classifying the symbolic elements along the four aesthetic dimensions of form, color, ritual, and media, followed by placing them along the traditional-modern scale for each dimension.

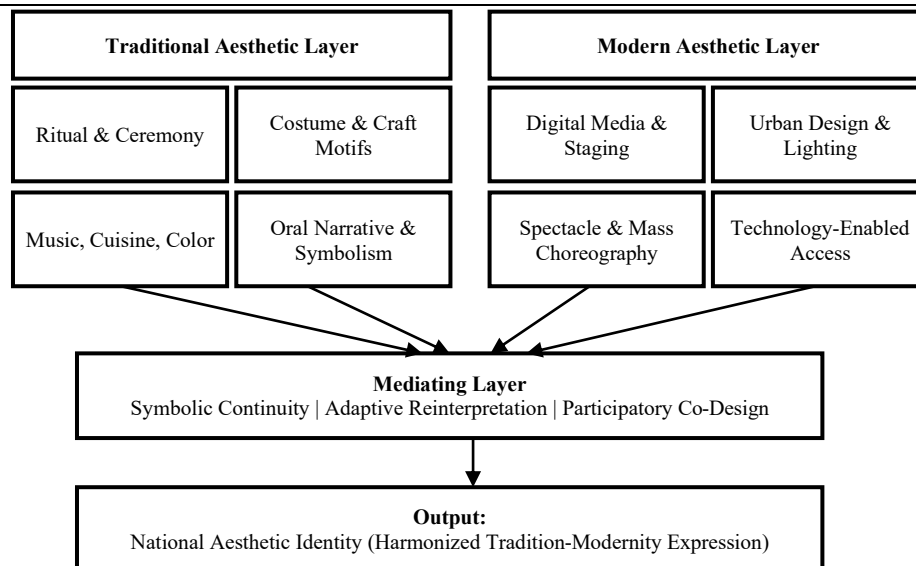


Figure 2. Architecture of the traditional-modern aesthetic harmony framework

Figure 2 shows the architecture of the proposed Traditional-Modern Aesthetic Harmony Framework. The traditional aesthetic layer includes ritual and ceremony, costume and craft motifs, music, food, and color, and oral storytelling and symbolism. The modern aesthetic layer includes digital media and production, urban design and lighting, spectacle and mass choreography, and technology-mediated accessibility. Instead of seeing the two layers as opposing forces, the proposed framework mediates between them using a layer of symbolic continuity, adaptive reinterpretation, and participatory co-design. Symbolic continuity is concerned with maintaining recognizable inherited motifs in new media of expression. Adaptive reinterpretation is about re-designing traditional content for modern audiences and modern media. Participatory co-design is about incorporating community and audience voices in the evolution of how the holiday is expressed aesthetically. The result of this mediation is a cohesive aesthetic identity for the nation that is anchored in tradition but is sensitive to contemporary design and communication technology.

AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS: ILLUSTRATIVE COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

In order to provide a comparative illustration of how this framework can be used, there is an analysis of six aesthetic dimensions in relation to the traditional and modern registers of national holiday performance: symbolism, color and decoration, ritual intensity, technological dimension, popular involvement, and the value for national branding. The values shown in figures 3 and 4 below serve as a sample conceptual index, which was generated based on thematic generalization of the literature under review and on the common features of celebration.

The relative aesthetic emphasis on traditional or modern registers among the six dimensions is shown by figure 3 using bar chart comparison. The symbolic meaning of the performance, use of color and ornamentation, and ritual enactment are found to have higher traditional emphasis, which can be seen in line with the review of the material and craft aesthetics literature above. Technological staging and media amplification have relatively high modern emphasis in line with the digital mediation and urban design literature. On the other hand, public participation seems to be relatively balanced.

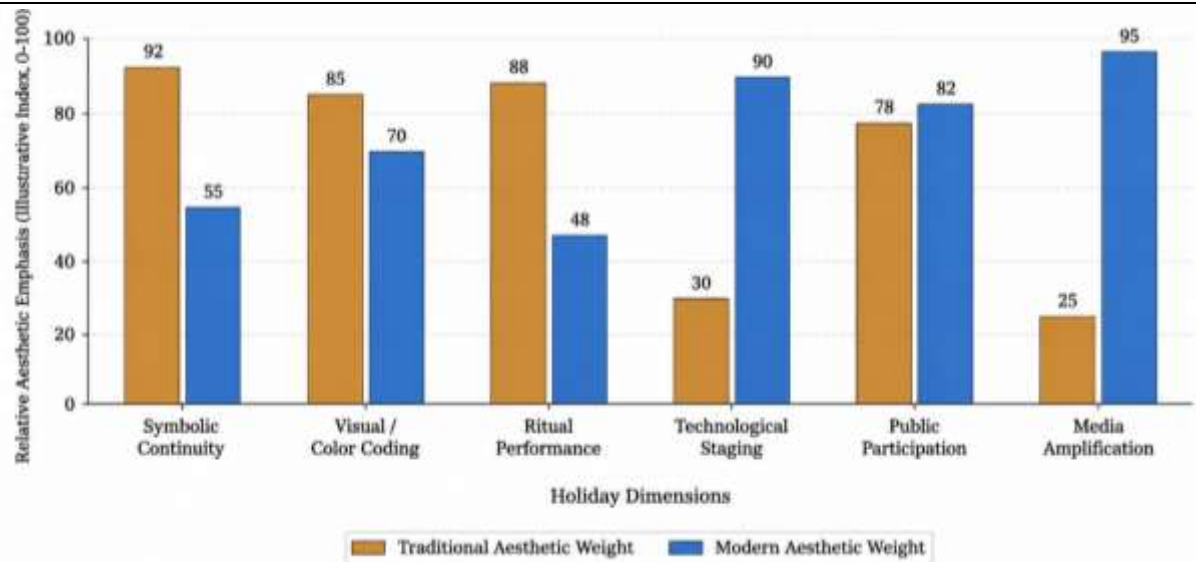


Figure 3. Comparative aesthetic emphasis across holiday dimensions

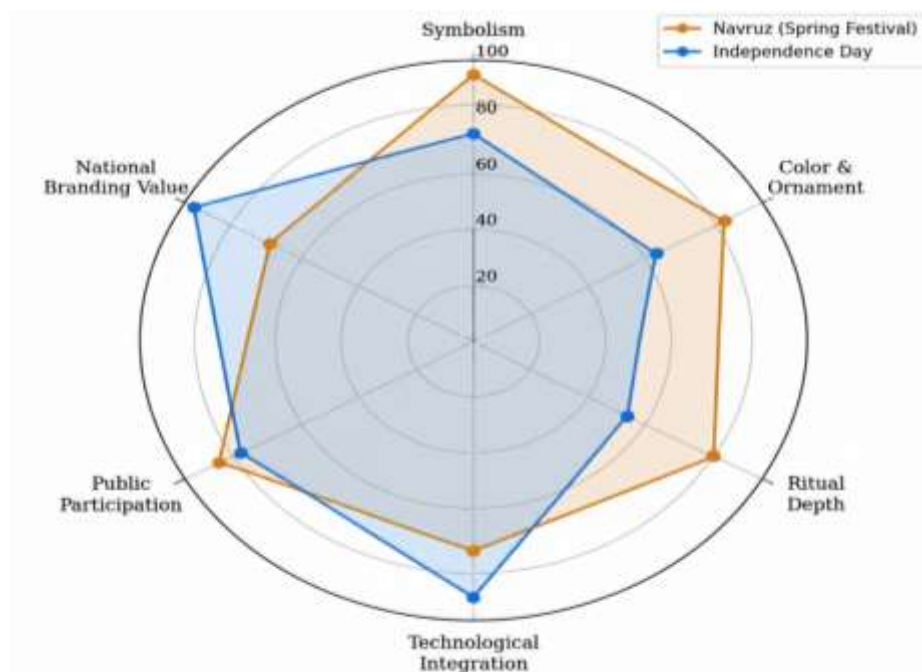


Figure 4. Multidimensional aesthetic profile of two national holidays

Figure 4 displays the radar chart analysis of two very different national holidays celebrated in Uzbekistan namely Navruz and Independence Day on the same six indices. The holiday of Navruz is clearly more developed than the holiday of Independence Day in terms of symbolism, ritual development and color and ornament. This is because Navruz has an old tradition associated with agricultural activities and calendar events. Independence Day is clearly more advanced than Navruz in terms of technological integration and national branding. This is because Independence Day represents a modern national holiday representing the state and its international image. Both holidays have high public participation which is an important aesthetic element.

Figure 5 shows a line chart representation of what might be a possible long-term trend in the aesthetic composition of the nation's holiday celebration from the year 2000 to 2025, drawing upon the general trend depicted in the reviewed literature on digital heritage and urban design. The graph indicates a gradual rise in the proportion of modern and technology-oriented aesthetic elements, without the

necessity that traditional elements will vanish, as they remain the foundation of the legitimacy of the occasion despite any shifts in their proportion in the entire composition of aesthetics.

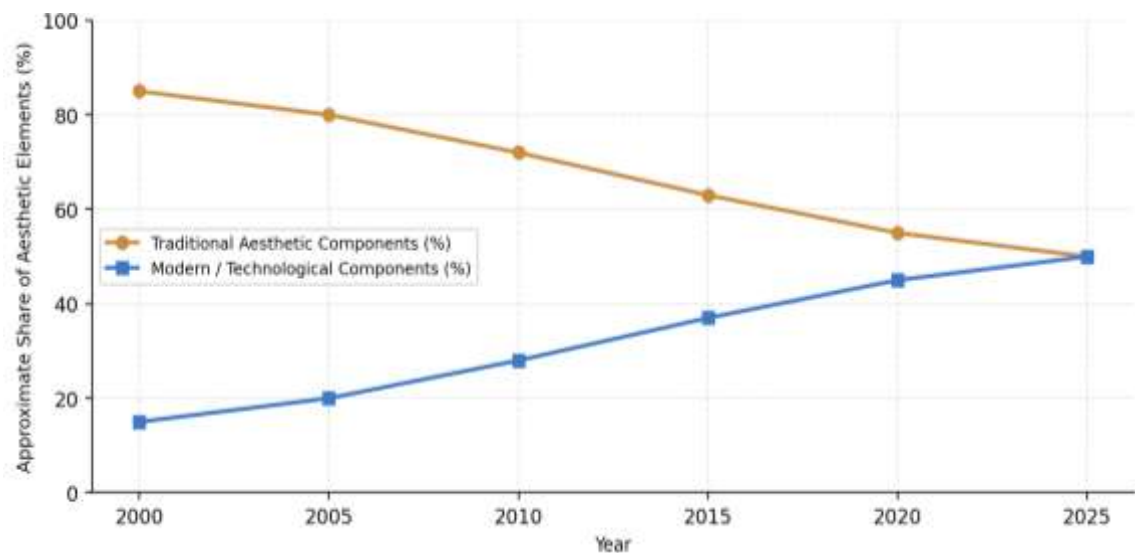


Figure 5. Illustrative trend in the traditional-modern aesthetic composition of national holiday STAGING (2000-2025)

CASE ILLUSTRATION: NAVRUZ AND INDEPENDENCE DAY IN UZBEKISTAN

The spring equinox festival of Navruz celebrated in Central Asia serves as an example of the holiday where the aesthetic language is based on agricultural and calendar symbols. The elements which repeatedly occur in Navruz include the communal production of sumalak food, traditional attire, performances of folk music and dances in city squares. At the same time, the celebrations of Navruz today also feature staged concerts, decoration of public places, light shows and broadcasting of the events, which is an example of the mediating processes suggested by the framework. Symbolic continuity is preserved by maintaining key elements of ritual activity such as sumalak cooking and wearing traditional costume, and the process of adaptive reinterpretation and co-designing is reflected in the use of amplification systems, stage design and mass media.

While Independence Day was created post-1991, it serves as the exact opposite end of the tradition/modernity continuum within the same national calendar. Unlike Navruz, which has had centuries of ritual practices, the aesthetic language of the holiday has been carefully thought out and involves national symbols like the flag and anthem, mass performances, and illuminating public squares and monuments through organized lighting. Yet, even in this case, the mediating layer of the framework is present since costume design, music themes, and crafts from older traditions often feature within the celebrations of Independence Day in order for this relatively young civic holiday to achieve some degree of legitimacy through its material and aesthetic heritage. The example of the contrast between these two holidays within one national calendar shows the core thesis of the framework – that aesthetic harmony of tradition and modernity is not a natural consequence of time and access to technology, but a curatorial and design choice.

DISCUSSION

The findings compiled here provide an interpretation of tradition and modernity within the aesthetics of national holidays as complementary versus opposed aesthetics, as supported by festival co-creation studies which find that the assessment of the quality of an event is bolstered when festival organizers consciously combine heritage with design and communication in the process [19]. Such complementarity, however, does not necessarily come naturally, as is seen in the research on consumer adoption of digital intangible heritage, in which context the acceptability of the technological experience of heritage is conditional upon particular design conditions [17]. In the comparative case of Navruz and

Independence Day, this conditional relationship is exemplified in the contrast between the aesthetic strength of one based on ritual and symbol, and the other based on technology and brandability.

The mediating layer that is proposed within the framework – with its focus on symbolic continuity, adaptive reinterpretation and co-design – provides a more precise language than the common contrast between authenticity and modernization in public debates regarding festivals. This preciseness is supported by the semiotic theory of the design of the festival, according to which meaning of the festival is jointly created through the process of sign production and interpretation by organizers and audiences, and not pre-defined either by tradition or innovation [13]. Also, this preciseness is reinforced by the evidence from the field of participatory public-space design, according to which the festive events serve as a place for experimental negotiation of the space, emphasizing once again the notion of deliberate design in achieving aesthetic consistency [14].

The powerful presence of color, costuming, and craft symbolism in the literature review analysis provides clear implications for how national holidays are to be planned and analyzed. Cultural-specific analysis of colors reveals that the very same visual choice may have various meanings and may even be contradictory depending on the cultural context, emphasizing the importance of planning the use of colors and ornaments in accordance with local culture rather than assuming their universality [5]. Likewise, the fact of rich symbolism of traditional costuming, reflecting not only history but also social hierarchy and crafts as well, shows that even the most technological national holidays require preservation of such elements [24][20].

An additional aspect related to the nation branding aspect of the literature review is worth noting. The fact that the governments have been strategically making use of public display on a large scale as a means of exercising their soft power and becoming visible on the international scene implies that the aesthetics of national holidays cannot be studied merely through the cultural approach [8]. It is also political and economic motives that can determine the aesthetics of the holidays, especially of those holidays that were created relatively recently and lack a deep ritual background. This means that in the future when analyzing the aesthetics of national holidays, it will be important to focus on the institutional actors behind the design of festivals.

Last but not least, according to the existing studies in the field of digital heritage, the tendency for greater technological integration in the organization of national holidays, presented conceptually in figure 5, is expected to continue on account of developments in the sphere of immersive and extended reality technologies which are able to make heritage transfer a truly interactive experience [11]. The results of analysis of digital museums also show that design aesthetics still plays an important role as a predictor of user engagement and, therefore, technological modernization of national holidays is possible only when aesthetics and symbolism are taken into account [25].

CONCLUSION

This paper intended to analyze the ways in which the aesthetics of national holidays incorporate inherited traditions and modernization at the same time, taking the festive culture of Uzbekistan as a comparative case. A five-step analytical flow was constructed along with a multiple-layered framework of Traditional-Modern Aesthetic Harmony to account for the processes of symbolic continuation, adaptation and interpretation, and co-creation which make the connection between a traditional aesthetic layer consisting of ritual, costumes, crafts, and oral symbolism and a modern aesthetic layer based on digital media, urbanism, and technological accessibility. The comparative and illustrative analysis was carried out in relation to six aesthetic aspects, including symbolism, color and ornament, ritual depth, technological presence, public participation, and national brand value, proving that traditional and modern modes are not inherently opposed to each other but selectively combined depending on the historical depth and civic nature of a holiday. It was illustrated on the basis of Navruz and Independence Day that an old agrarian celebration and a relatively new civic holiday could have different yet complimentary places in the national aesthetic system, receiving legitimacy from varying combinations of ritual depth, symbolic materiality, technological performance, and brand value. It turns out that aesthetic balance between traditional and modern elements in national holidays is not automatically

achieved either with the passage of time or due to the availability of technology, but is a consequence of deliberate curatorial and institutional decisions of cultural authorities, designers, and communities. The insights presented above have direct practical implications for cultural policies, festivals, and heritage-aware urban planning, in the sense that a successful modernization of national holidays' aesthetics presupposes the maintenance of recognizable symbolic anchors in conjunction with well-balanced modern design, media, and technology. Further research can develop the above framework through empirical measurements of the illustrative dimensions discussed, through cross-national analysis beyond the case of Uzbekistan, and through a more detailed analysis of the institutions behind the staging of national holidays' aesthetics.

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