

# Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Festivities and their Celebration During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Case Study in the Latvian Context<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges. Comparing pre-pandemic and pandemic experiences led to the re-evaluation of the role of festivities and their associated traditions. Through semi-structured interviews, people's perceptions of festivities during the two-year-long period of repetitive social restrictions were investigated in Latvia (Latgale region). Data analysis revealed that the quality of festivities related to otherworldliness decreased. Celebration as a powerful practice for developing a sense of togetherness and experiencing collective joy was commonly acknowledged. Festivities were primarily perceived as a tool of socialization and collective identification, as well as an opportunity for entertainment and creative expression.

## Keywords

festive culture, traditions, re-evaluation, pandemic experience, Latvia (Latgale region)

## Introduction

Perceptions, as subjective and creative processes of identification, reflect one's personality and experience; they shape human behaviour and future expectations. Perceptions shared through communication reveal individual responses, specific reactions, and meaningful associations with external stimuli and internal factors. Attitudes, as an aspect of perception, can be studied from the cognitive, affective, and behavioural perspectives; therefore, research on attitudes "remains at the forefront of social psychological research and theory" (Haddock and Maio, 2008, p. 113). Social psychology defines the concept of "attitude" as the evaluative judgment about a stimulus object (Haddock and Maio, 2008, p. 113), which may manifest itself in both emotional and cognitive fields. That is, attitude encompasses one's values and opinions on society as a whole, as well as an individual's emotions, which directly depend on one's current emotional state (Van den Berg *et al.*, 2006). By relying on one's knowledge, experience, and emotions, individuals make judgment decisions, which determine their next actions (Petty and Briñol, 2015).

Festivities are traditionally characterized as special events in human life; they are celebrations, the antithesis of the mundaneness of everyday life (Gram, 2005; Bennett, Taylor and Woodward,

<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted under the Daugavpils University research development grant *Latvia's Festivity Culture in Pre-Digital and Digital Age: The Dynamics of Transformation* (No 14-95/2022/7) and supplements the previous research articles 'The Role of Digital Technologies in Celebrating Festivities under Covid-19' (Kacane *et al.*, 2022), 'Social Connection when Physically Isolated: Family Experiences in Using Video Calls' (Kacane and Hernandez-Serrano, 2023), etc.

2014; Korolova *et al.*, 2015). Festive culture includes religious and secular holidays that follow specific rituals and customs (Bula, 2008; Juško-Štekele, 2016), defined behavioural models (Popelková, 2017) and a specific emotional-psychological atmosphere of being in “time out of time” (Tak, 2000, p. 13) and emphasizing “contemplation” (Pieper, 1999, p. 17). In this regard, the transformation of old traditions and the creation of alternative forms of intergenerational communication and interaction with other community groups during holidays is of great significance (Roigé, Arrieta-Urtizberea and Seguí, 2021). Consequently, passing down the knowledge of festive traditions to the younger generation is of major importance in preserving the history of family, kin, and nation, especially under the conditions of the pandemic.

Since December 2019, the rapid global spread of COVID-19 has been negatively affecting all principal public sectors, including cultural and social life. The distinction between reality “before” and “after” the outbreak of the pandemic has firmly lodged itself in the public consciousness, thereby provoking stress, a sense of insecurity, and a certain disorientation (Rothe *et al.*, 2021). Under the conditions of strict restrictions (social distancing; lockdowns, including stay-at-home orders; distant activities; remote studies/work), it became necessary to re-evaluate the experience of life before the pandemic, the current situation, future expectations, and basic values (Oană, 2020).

During the pandemic, time spent physically with family and friends was seen as a means for finding balance and reviving a sense of belonging and togetherness, which is crucial for overcoming emotional suffering. In this context, the place and importance of intangible cultural heritage such as festivities, which were largely limited in the periods of restrictions, were reconsidered (Roigé, Arrieta-Urtizberea and Seguí, 2021), and the preservation of different traditions was re-evaluated.

This paper analyses people’s perceptions and attitudes towards festivities based on their celebration experiences during 2020–2021, a two-year-long period of repetitive lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings.<sup>2</sup> Researchers’ attention has frequently been focused on people’s psycho-emotional state as it has been affected by the pandemic (Kutsar and Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021; Mirahmadizadeh *et al.*, 2020), which depends on the cumulative number of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality rates, as well as on the intensity of imposed restrictions. By contrast, perceptions of festivities and opinions about their celebration during the pandemic have been studied rather fragmentally. Articles published in recent years primarily deal with the forms and scale of festivities and festive activities organized during the pandemic (Kalawapudi *et al.*, 2021; Parker and Spennemann, 2021), identifying the influence of mass festivities on morbidity rates, instruments for reducing incidence rates (Chen *et al.*, 2020), and other questions of this kind. The present research aims to reveal individual experiences and subjective opinions of virtual celebrations, which signal the general attitudes towards the festive culture and the mechanisms of preserving festive culture in unpredictable situations.

## Methodology

The data were collected through qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews. Most of the interviews with the inhabitants of the southeastern part of Latvia – the Latgale region<sup>3</sup> – were conducted between February and June 2022 to obtain a view of family traditions concerning festivities before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three of the interviews were conducted in person, and the remaining thirteen were conducted via Zoom, telephone and WhatsApp.

The structure of the semi-structured interview was developed in the first phase of the research project. It consisted of two thematic blocks. The first concerned family lifestyle before the pandemic,

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<sup>2</sup> The first wave of COVID-19 infection in Latvia started on 2 March 2020. From 12 March to 9 June, a state of emergency was announced with the first broad restrictions on people’s interactions. Due to a large number of cases, from 9 November 2020 to 11 January 2021, states of emergency were repeatedly announced and severe restrictions were imposed. From 30 December 2020 to 9 January 2021, restrictions were imposed to limit contact during the winter holidays (New Year and Christmas), including restrictions on family members living in different households meeting indoors, and a curfew from 22:00 to 5:00 was introduced. The state of emergency was prolonged until 6 April 2021. At the end of August 2021, the next wave of infection began; however, the vaccination testing programme allowed for the mitigation of restrictions, although the state of emergency continued until 28 February 2022 (State Chancellery of the Republic of Latvia, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> See the geopolitical map of Latvia at <https://www.worldmaps.info/Latvia/> (Accessed: 20 October 2022).

including the family's experience of celebrating different festivities and ensuring the continuity of traditions (e.g. *What is 'festivity' for you? What festivities do you celebrate in your family, and what festive traditions do you/your family usually observe?*). The second block focused on family lifestyle under COVID-19 restrictions, including the pandemic's effects on the family's physical and emotional environment and its impacts on contemporary festive culture (e.g. *To what extent was the observance of festive traditions and customs relevant in your family during the pandemic? How did you celebrate during the pandemic? Has the meaning of the festivity changed for you during the pandemic?*).

The research complied with ethical and legal requirements for research involving human participants as subjects of the study. The study follows international standards, the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679, and national and institutional ethical conduct guidelines. The participants were recruited from families that participated in previous research projects on culture, cultural diversity and cultural literacy. A snowballing technique was also applied to select and recruit additional participants. To ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria, a telephone conversation or electronic communication was first held with each potential interviewee, during which the purpose of the study, procedures to be undertaken, potential risks and benefits of participation, as well as the expected duration of the interview and the confidentiality statement were discussed. Before interviews, which were on average one hour long, participants were presented with brief instructions and repeatedly informed about their right to stop the interview at any time. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were chosen either by the participants or the interviewers. Citations to the interviews contain the interviewee's pseudonym, age, sex (M = male, F = female), and place of residence (U = urban, SU = semi-urban, R = rural). The interviewees – five men and eleven women – ranged from 19 to 65 years old.<sup>4</sup> The study is limited by the small sample size and interviewees' biased answers, which prevent the generalization of the results.

## Results

### 1. Conceptions of Festivity and Celebration

Festivities are traditionally divided into the categories of religious and secular (Durkheim, 1915). Among the main typology criteria are the important moments in life, attitudes towards religion, season, festivity theme, location, scale, status/rank, social class structure, power distribution, and social roles (Cudny, 2014).

According to the interview data, festivities are associated with "special" days, "not weekdays", "occasions", and "miracles" (Ivonna, 31, F, U; Georgs, 60, M, SU; Oskars, 20, M, U; Sanita, 23, F, U). They are events to which people may attach great importance, as they differ from their mundane life, enhancing people's "meeting", being "together" and "being organized"; all factors that contribute to becoming "cheerful" and "merry" (Angelina, 20, F, R; Georgs, 60, M, SU; Marks, 64, F, U; ZA, 46, F, SU). The interviewees not only described the emotions related to festivities but also pointed out the socialization, integrative and consolidating functions of festivities:

Usually, festivities unite a family, [...] also more distant relatives you haven't seen for a long time [...]. This is the opportunity for all to be together [...]. (Marks, 64, F, U)

Another important component of festivities, signifying their important psychological role, is the opportunity to "have a rest", "restart" and "relax your soul" (Anna, 21, F, U; Marks, 64, F, U; Sanita, 23, F, U). The everyday routine and lack of positive emotional experiences in the daily perception of the interviewees endow festivities with a therapeutic effect. The cyclical nature of festivities makes people anticipate these events in advance and experience certain emotions associated with the events beforehand:

It is some pleasant event, these are the same Christmas, New Year, Easter, *Līgo* holidays, [...] and therefore we have special feelings – festivity, also birthdays [...]. I, as usual, wait for it every year, [...] and this is something peculiar. [...] it is by no means mundaneness [...]. (Eva, 37, F, U)

<sup>4</sup> According to a European Commission report published on 9 July 2021, Latvia has the highest ratio of women to men in the EU. For this reason, the opinion of women is more highly represented in this study (European Commission, 2021).

The overwhelming majority of interviewees celebrate the New Year, Christmas, Easter, Ligo (in Latvian – *Līgo*; Midsummer Day) and birthdays; other festivities (e.g. Latvian Independence Day, Day of the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia) were mentioned only in response to the interviewer's direct question.

The representatives of the younger generation emphasized that festivities are both exceptional events (Angelina, 20, F, R; Jurgita, 22, F, U) and tools (Zintis, 22, M, U) through which traditions are passed down to the next generations. The older generations agreed with this assessment:

That is what was celebrated by my parents, my parents-in-law, [...] we celebrate these festivities too. [...] it has become a tradition since my very childhood, and so it goes on also in my family. (Eva, 37, F, U)

The tradition of celebrating certain festivities makes family members feel united not only by biological kinship but also by a common cultural heritage, which is preserved by each subsequent generation.

### Attitudes Towards Winter Season Festivities

Christmas and New Year have become the most important family festivities – buying and wrapping presents, preparing festive meals and planning festive activities are of greater significance than Christmas fasting and church service for most of the interviewees:

[...] my daughter-in-law said to me: “if we don't come to my grandmother”, that is, to me, then “we won't celebrate Christmas at all”, because in her mind this holiday is closely related to family, home. [...] [on the first Christmas day] it's mandatory [to celebrate] at my place [...]. I'm the eldest in the family. (Marks, 64, F, U)

Decades-long Sovietization has degraded the perception of Christmas as a religious festivity; rather, many prioritize the festive atmosphere over its religious significance:

Christmas itself is not a holiday for me, but the fact that the city has been decorated, of course, adds to a festive mood; certainly, there is a festive uplifting mood. (Georgs, 60, M, SU)

To create a festive mood, some people follow an ancient folk tradition of fortune-telling, specific to the period of *Ķekatas*.<sup>5</sup> This practice testifies to the religious syncretism that has existed since the Middle Ages when the newly introduced Christian rituals co-existed with traditional ones:

[...] once [...] on New Year's Eve, [...] we were telling fortune from books,<sup>6</sup> [...] and telling fortune on wax<sup>7</sup> [...]. We didn't really believe in this fortune-telling [...], but this was great fun. (Sanita, 23, F, U)

For both Christmas and New Year, there are attributes (a Christmas tree, gift-giving, a table with treats, sharing with family and/or friends) that for most of the interviewees are “obligatory”; since childhood, these traditions have been present in their households. However, due to environmental issues, some traditional attributes have changed. For example, live fir trees have been substituted by artificial ones in some participants' homes (Georgs, 60, M, SU; Sanita, 23, F, U). In general, either live or artificial, a fir tree is an integral part of the Christmas and New Year's celebrations, a symbol of the holiday used to mark the beginning of the winter holiday season.

Another stable tradition of Christmas and New Year's celebration, mentioned by all interviewees, is a festive feast that unites all family members. Under Soviet occupation, basic necessities and food shortages forced most people to buy food in advance for traditional festive dishes and store them for weeks or even months. Thus, the feast is a demonstration of wealth and hospitality and an opportunity to treat the present as something special.

<sup>5</sup> *Ķekatas* refers to the activities held during a period before and after Christmas (from Mārtiņdiena on 10 November until Meteņi in February, 7 weeks before Easter), characterized by mask processions, fortune-telling and other ritualistic actions (*Ķekatas*).

<sup>6</sup> Fortune-telling using books may happen as follows: one person names a page and the number of a text line, then the other person opens the named fragment, reads it aloud, and everyone present tries to interpret it in regard to future events.

<sup>7</sup> After falling into water, melted wax freezes and forms a figure that participants attempt to interpret, for example, by looking for images revealing future events.

Another ritual of the New Year's celebration is listening to or watching state leaders' addresses (Simyan and Kačāne, 2020). People watch the New Year addresses of political leaders depending on their nationality, ethnic origin and time zones (Georgs, 60, M, SU; Marks, 64, F, U; Sanita, 23, F, U), and when the clock chimes midnight, toasts to the beginning of the New Year are raised.

Thus, the interviewees' well-being during winter holiday festivities is determined by the stability and durability of traditions – the face-to-face presence of family and the participation in well-known traditions passed down from one generation to another.

### Attitudes Towards Spring and Summer Season Festivities

In spring, according to most interviewees, the most crucial festivity is the Easter holiday. For most interviewees, it is a festivity that unites family members and is a significant part of family traditions (Angelina, 20, F, R; Eva, 37, F, U; Inta, 22, F, U; Marks, 64, F, U; Sanita, 23, F, U; ZA, 46, F, SU). Participation in the Easter service and visiting relatives are the main activities of this celebration. People bring food to the church festive service for consecration:

We have a tradition, we paint eggs, we prepare a big basket, put the eggs there and bring them to the church for consecrating, as well as salt, water, bread, a piece of meat [...]. This is our tradition, we do it every year. (Eva, 37, F, U)

However, the spiritual essence of Easter is sometimes substituted by emphasizing the decorative aspects (Georgs, 60, M, SU; Oskars, 20, M, U).

During the Soviet period, Easter was replaced with the celebration of 1 May (Labor Day) and, similarly to Christmas, its celebration transformed into a family festivity preserving some religious rituals (fasting, attending church service, visiting cemeteries, greeting relatives and friends with festive dishes) and pagan rituals (Easter games such as egg rolling, exchanging eggs and egg battles).

The ancient festivity of *Līgo*, also known as Jani (in Latvian *Jāņi*), is celebrated on 23 and 24 June. Celebrating Midsummer Day is closely linked to the glorification of the sun, as well as fire as the sun's representation on earth. Therefore, bonfires are an essential attribute of the holiday, along with weaving wreaths from wildflowers or oak leaves plucked on St. John's Eve:

I used to weave wreaths a lot, somehow children don't do that now, but if we are at the summer-house, then a bonfire is mandatory [...] it is a symbol of the *Līgo* holiday, [...] the cleansing fire. (Marks, 64, F, U)

Nowadays, *Līgo* is also associated with spending time outside, having a traditional picnic with beer and traditional cheese, and sometimes grilled meat (*shashlik*) (Georgs, 60, M, SU). For the majority of the interviewees, *Līgo* is an opportunity to have a couple of days off work and spend some time in the countryside without any special ritualistic meaning. In addition, some do not celebrate *Līgo* at all (Sanita, 23, F, U).

## 2. Peculiarities of Celebration Under Covid-19 Restrictions

During the pandemic restrictions, many people were deprived of the opportunity to see their loved ones and mainly focused on their nuclear families by limiting contact with friends and colleagues. These changes left an indelible impression on most interviewees. The attitude of the interviewees towards celebrating festivities under restrictions was very diverse, from experiencing depression and avoiding celebrations at all to being motivated to create new approaches to celebrating holidays. Such attitudes depended on interviewees' mundane habits before the pandemic restrictions, approaches to celebrating, and peculiarities of their personal adaptation to stressful situations, as well as external factors such as changes in social behaviours or work conditions.

Considering the constant risk to their health and life, people's stress levels increased, and depression deepened during the lockdown periods of the pandemic (Anna, 21, F, U; Sanita, 23, F, U, etc.). Moreover, interviewees suffered from communication deficiencies under the unprecedented conditions:



The worst thing is that [...] we are losing simple human communication [...]. And just this warmth, plus tactile communication, are things which we miss [...]. (Marks, 64, F, U)

The stress was caused by long and repetitive restrictions of public (social) and personal life, the concomitant ambiguities, and the impossibility of planning future events, including the usual calendar events like festivities. The researchers emphasize that particularly in situations of crisis, festivities help overcome mental disorientation by attracting participants' attention to ethnic traditions, cultural values and social norms (Kuutma, 1998). Traditions practised in the pre-pandemic era provoked nostalgia and longing for old ceremonies:

[...] if previously we celebrated these holidays in a circle of friends, [...], it no longer is like that, you celebrate those holidays in a family circle, and thus it is [...] not like before. [...] it is somewhat sad... (Eva, 37, F, U)

Interviewees re-evaluated the pre-pandemic experience when they had to adapt to new conditions under restrictions, such as attending Mass via an online translated video on Facebook (Eva, 37, F, U). For some interviewees, celebrating online was the only way to maintain family traditions. By fulfilling a communicative function, virtual celebrations enabled interviewees to maintain psychological ties with relatives and friends:

[...] [Virtual celebration] was the only way [...] to meet friends, [...] in fact, we met only on festivities [...] these were video meetings, [...] well, [my friend's] father had died from this virus, [...] and this was the first time when she came in contact with us [...] so [...] we were so glad that we had met, at least we saw one another in the camera... (Sanita, 23, F, U)

In crises, including pandemics, when people search for alternative celebration forms, their creativity is mobilized (Demertzis and Eyerman, 2020; Roigé, Arrieta-Urtizberea and Seguí, 2021). As a result, an opportunity for creativity, stemming from humans' capacity to adjust, becomes a significant factor associated with the festive period. At the same time, it should be emphasized that, unlike the younger people, the middle and older generations used such novelties and opportunities much less frequently, as they are much more oriented towards in-person communication and traditional forms of celebration. The data obtained show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to creatively reimagine festivities was willingly undertaken by the younger interviewees:

[...] [Holiday] is always self-expression for me. [...] [I] created a festive tradition – [...] before the New Year I read a fairy tale to my subscribers. [...] for the first time it was "The Snow Queen" by Andersen, [...] it was already the 31st [of December] [...]. I read it live, but simultaneously recorded it, and this received quite positive feedback [...]. Well, for me it is also a kind of challenge [...]. (Sanita, 23, F, U)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a wish to demonstrate one's talents "live" was in step with producing novel forms of celebration. Thus, multiform attractive and inclusive activities emerged, such as a "home quest" offered by a Latvian firm and greatly appreciated by our interviewees:

[...] they send you a box, you as parent open it, and you have a heap of instructions in it... [...] you have to hide [small things] [...], then a child is given a different map, and, well, he [goes and] rambles around his own flat... (Sanita, 23, F, U)

Some interviewees allowed themselves to celebrate with their next-door neighbours "behind the fence" in their yard. In their opinion, this is a better alternative to the virtual/digital festivity format:

[...] two meters away we were sitting [...], not through Zoom, but simply two meters away... (Tacho, 23, F, U)

Under the pandemic restrictions, innovations have also occurred in the traditions of purchasing and giving gifts. Gifts were mainly selected and ordered on the Internet, then were sent to the receiver by post or left at the door of the receiver's flat. This new format was accepted by both interviewees of the younger generation (Sanita, 23, F, U) and those of the older generation (Marks, 64, F, U).

While some people suffered from the changes caused by the pandemic restrictions, there were some (mainly representatives of the older generation who lived alone or those violating restrictions) who noted no shifts in their celebration habits:

[...] nothing has changed for me, because [...] when relatives could gather, they did that; if they couldn't do that, they didn't come together, so, in essence, nothing has changed. (Georgs, 60, M, SU)

Some of the interviewed students did not notice any changes or even revealed some positive consequences of these conditions, such as paying more attention to their families:

I had holidays the same as before the COVID pandemic. I didn't have any particular problems as I never celebrated them in big company, but [...] in a small family circle. (Pauls, 21, M, U)

[...] the only difference was that we celebrated [...] in a closer family circle. (Kaspars, 20, M, U)

For many interviewees, holidays like New Year had always been associated not only with relatives but also with friends. People were anxious about the fact that their typical celebration traditions were limited to the nuclear family:

[On New Year's Eve] we went to bed much earlier [...], instead of former gathering with friends. Well, before [the pandemic] we used to celebrate with relatives [...] and then visited friends, but because of the curfew [in 2020], we had to stay [at home]. [...] we called each other via Skype, Zoom or texted via Facebook on the computer. (Ivonna, 31, F, U)

Despite having opportunities to use digital technologies to contact relatives and friends, interviewees felt disappointed about being unable to celebrate in traditional ways:

[...] there were neither festivities, nor a festive mood. It felt as if I had missed [festivities]. (Zintis, 22, M, U)

However, another opinion on using digital technologies for celebrating festivities as an exception or an alternative was observed:

It is important [...] to let people understand that even [...] in difficult times [...] people are not alone. (Georgs, 60, M, SU)

For most of the interviewees, the restrictions were perceived as a threat to family traditions; however, celebrating in a close family circle and using digital technologies to contact relatives and friends made them re-evaluate the significance of face-to-face meetings.

### 3. Future Potential in the Post-Pandemic Period

Festivities and mass celebrations have traditionally manifested as "an arena that satisfies the need to belong" (Jaeger and Mykletun, 2013, p. 213) and help to create one's social identity. In other words, festivities serve as a possibility to acknowledge one's belonging to a social group and integrate into it (Portacolone *et al.*, 2020).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, its far-reaching impact on all spheres of people's life has been emphasized (Brannen, Habiba and Newton, 2020). The collected data demonstrate interviewees' views on possible scenarios for future celebrations. The key question for reflection concerns an alternative for preserving festive culture in the post-pandemic situation and especially in the circumstances of digitalization:

I would say that [digital or semi-digital celebration] is not really an alternative, no, it cannot be considered an alternative. It's like a tem-po-ra-ry, tem-po-ra-ry [activity], so that it [tradition] doesn't fade away or so that people don't forget it, so that they see that we are still alive. (Georgs, 60, M, SU)

[...] I wouldn't like if everyone switched to online. I think we would become fat and depressive very fast. We already are. I don't like it at all. (Anna, 21, F, U)

After having a two-year experience of restricted in-person communication, some people "shut themselves in" without a wish to go outside (Inta, 22, F, U). Although the comfort of home and the

ability to save time are quite attractive (Jurgita, 22, F, U), especially for people with special needs (Ivonna, 31, F, U), celebrating festivities face-to-face is many interviewees' priority.

Interviewees reckon that in case of repeated restrictions during the festivity season, the majority of changes have already been adapted (Ivonna, 31, F, U) and people would “grasp at straws’ and use the gadgets” (Georgs, 60, M, SU) because celebrating online is “better than nothing” (Sanita, 23, F, U). Uniting people through collective celebration, according to the interviewees, will become more significant in the post-pandemic world:

[...] festivities have become the instrument of uniting the people, [...] it seems to me that [...] the celebration of festivities [after the pandemic] will be [...] deeper and more emotional, more well-considered because two years in isolation was a long time.... (Elīna, 50, F, U)

At the same time, people feel anxiety about the interaction of digital technologies and traditional values (Eva, 37, F, U). After experiencing restrictions on in-person communication, interviewees “have been losing motivation” and feel “lost” and even “scared” (Sanita, 23, F, U). Some of them evaluated virtual communication as destructive both psychologically and physically:

[...] sitting in front of a computer all the time, is very sad and depressive. A person spends all the time on computer, his eyes hurt, [...] his head hurts, there are other [health] problems. There should be moderation in all things. (Jurgita, 22, F, U)

If people, especially young people, were rather optimistic about the usage of digital tools in their lives before the pandemic, then the experience obtained during the pandemic has made them identify the overuse of digital technologies as a threat to the continuity of festive traditions:

[...] we would lose the very essence of festivities if we continued to celebrate festivities in such [online] format [...]. (Angelina, 20, F, R)

Nevertheless, social interaction has been acknowledged as the most important value:

[...] we need to communicate somehow anyway [...]: either just by phone or by video communication, [...]. It means there will still be communication. A human is a collective being and needs communication. (Georgs, 60, M, SU)

Meeting for celebrations and in-person interactivity is an integral part of our mundane and festive habits. Festivities are means for storing and transmitting family traditions and values. The traumatic experience of the COVID-19 restrictions has forced us to take a fresh look at our inner circles of communication. The interviewed residents of Latvia, as evidenced by their answers, are not prepared to have virtual celebrations due to restrictions, although they are clearly aware that digital technologies offer extensive possibilities in this respect.

## Conclusions

The study of adults' opinions and attitudes towards celebrating festivities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Latgale region of Latvia supported the idea of festivities as a mirror of social change (Picard, 2016; Kreinath, Hartung and Deschner 2004). Traditionally, holidays are recognized as an essential consolidating factor – as an opportunity to meet with relatives and friends, develop a sense of belonging and togetherness and keep family traditions. During the pandemic, factors such as collective identification (common cultural heritage), the succession of customs and traditions, creative self-expression (multiform festive activities and new gift-giving traditions) and interpersonal communication became particularly important. For most interviewees, any celebration (including virtual) contributed to maintaining mental health and positive socialization. Semi-digital or digital celebration formats providing alternative forms of virtual communication compensated for the lack of face-to-face communication and ensured both continuity and innovation in various traditions.



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