

Measured Imagination and Conscious Play: A Comparative Theology of Video Games in Digital Culture

Muhibudin Wijaya Laksana^{1*}, Bambang Qomaruzzaman², Ahmad Gibson Albustomi³

^{1,2,3} Religious Studies Program, Postgraduate Program at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia,
E-mail: muhibudinwijayalaksana@gmail.com

Abstract

Purpose: This article aims to develop a theological analytical framework for reading video games as meaningful digital cultural practices without reducing theology to doctrinal abstraction or dissolving it into uncritical cultural acceptance. It responds to the growing significance of video games in shaping moral imagination, identity, and existential reflection in contemporary digital life. **Methodology:** This study employs a comparative literature review design with a dialogical-conceptual analysis approach. The analysis focuses on Martin Nguyen's concept of religious imagination and Frank G. Bosman's formulation of video games as *locus theologicus*. Data were collected through close reading, conceptual annotation, and thematic mapping of the two primary texts, supported by relevant literature in digital religion, cultural theology, and game studies. **Findings:** The study finds that Nguyen and Bosman share a view of theology as a lived and situated practice, yet differ in their sources of normativity. Nguyen emphasizes measured imagination grounded in revelation and ethical orientation, while Bosman highlights conscious play as a reflective engagement with existential experiences in games. **Research Implications:** The article contributes to religion and media studies by offering a framework for analyzing video games as spaces of moral, existential, and theological reflection. **Originality:** The originality of this study lies in its cross-tradition dialogue between contemporary Islamic theology and Christian cultural theology, resulting in an integrated framework of measured imagination and conscious play for the theological analysis of video games.

Keywords: Comparative theology; conscious play; digital religion; religious imagination; video games.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary religious experiences and moral reflections are increasingly taking place in spaces that were not previously recognized as faith-forming arenas, including video games. With over 3.6 billion players worldwide, video games have become one of the most dominant digital cultural practices in contemporary life (Newzoo, 2025). The global gaming industry has also surpassed the film and music industries in terms of revenue, marking a significant shift in patterns of cultural and entertainment consumption (PwC, 2025). This dominance is particularly visible among younger generations and young adults, who not only constitute a major segment of users but also demonstrate high levels of engagement through intense and repetitive play in everyday life (Bryan, 2025). A number of studies show that gaming experiences can influence the moral and spiritual development of young people, including ethical reflection on choices, the formation of empathy, emotional regulation, and the construction of meaning and self-identity (de Wildt & Aupers, 2019; Nugroho, 2024; Schaap & Aupers, 2017; Thomas et al., 2024). In practice, this influence can be seen in the emergence of religious communities in multiplayer online games (Mike, 2025; Morreale & Rosa, 2024; Roblox Lore Database, 2025), as well as in the role of streamers and content creators who function as non-institutional moral authorities through the narratives, ethical evaluations, and behavioral examples they share with their audiences (Hidayatullah, 2024; Hjarvard, 2016;

*Corresponding author

Rautalahti, 2018). If theology and religious studies do not critically engage with this kind of digital cultural practice, religious reflection risks becoming detached from the lived experiences of the digital generation, while the formation of values, morality, and meaning orientation increasingly takes place beyond the reach of formal religious discourse. Therefore, the theological study of video games is important not only academically but also socially, because it addresses the ways contemporary society constructs meaning and responsibility amid an increasingly dominant digital culture.

Although the social significance of video games is increasingly recognized, theological responses to this phenomenon remain limited in academic discourse. Studies of video games have generally developed within psychology, education, and the creative industries, and are often framed through moral panic discourses that highlight their potential negative effects on ethics, spirituality, or mental health (Karlsen, 2015; Markey & Ferguson, 2017; Widerberg & Zia, 2025). In religious studies, efforts to read video games theologically have emerged, particularly through cultural theology and religion-and-media approaches. Early works, such as Detweiler's (2010) *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God* and Campbell's (2012a) work on digital religion, opened space for understanding digital games as symbolic arenas and practices of meaning-making. Similarly, ethical approaches to games developed by Sicart (2009) and further discussed in information ethics scholarship affirm that playing games involves moral reflection and the responsibility of the subject (K. Miller & Taddeo, 2020). However, these studies still show several limitations, including a tendency to depart from one particular religious tradition, especially Western Christianity, and a fragmentation between normative theological approaches and analyses of cultural experience. Few studies have systematically brought together a normative theological framework from a non-Christian tradition with the reading of gaming experience as an existential practice in a coherent conceptual dialogue. This article addresses this gap by bringing together the thought of Martin Nguyen (2018), who develops the concept of religious imagination in contemporary Islamic theology, and Frank G. Bosman (2016, 2019), who formulates video games as a *locus theologicus* within the Christian theological tradition. This cross-tradition dialogue is generative because it allows video games to be read both as spaces of existential reflection and as practices that require normative measures of faith, so that theology is not trapped in either ahistorical rejection or uncritical acceptance of digital culture.

Religious imagination, as developed by Martin Nguyen, refers to the human capacity to interpret life experiences symbolically, affectively, and reflexively in relation to faith and ethical orientation, without reducing faith to mere doctrine or subjective fantasy (2018). Meanwhile, the concept of *locus theologicus* formulated by Frank G. Bosman refers to a cultural space or context in which theological reflection can legitimately emerge, not as a normative source of faith, but as a field of existential experience that raises questions about human meaning, responsibility, and limitation (Bosman, 2019). Within this framework, video games are understood as cultural spaces that present moral and existential situations, while theological reflection emerges from the subject's reflective interaction with the experience of play.

These two concepts are positioned in a complementary relationship. *Locus theologicus* explains where theological reflection may arise, while religious imagination explains how experience within that space can be interpreted theologically. Without a *locus theologicus*, religious imagination risks becoming detached from the concrete contexts of contemporary experience. Conversely, without religious imagination, the gaming experience may remain psychologically or culturally meaningful but does not necessarily develop into a reflection of faith. Thus, this article does not aim to establish a doctrinal assessment of video games, but rather to analyze how the experience of play, mediated through a reflective subject or conscious player, can function as a field for the formation of meaning and faith orientation in digital life.

This article aims to develop a theological analytical framework capable of reading video games as a digital cultural practice without losing the normative depth of faith reflection. Specifically, it pursues three main goals: first, to explain how contemporary theology, through the thought of Martin Nguyen and Frank G. Bosman, conceptualizes the relationship between faith, human experience, and cultural practice; second, to examine how the concepts of religious imagination and *locus theologicus* can be used to read the experience of playing video games as a space for existential and theological reflection; and third, to show how dialogue across Islamic and Christian traditions can enrich religion-and-media approaches to digital culture. Based on these goals, this article is guided by the following research question: how can contemporary theology maintain its normative depth while engaging reflectively with digital cultural practices such as video games? Through a dialogical analysis of Nguyen and Bosman, this article argues that a theological approach to digital culture does not have to be caught between normative rejection and uncritical acceptance. Rather, it can develop as a form of faith reflection that remains responsive to the lived experiences of religious subjects in the digital age.

METHODS

This study employed a comparative literature review design with a dialogical-conceptual analysis approach. This design was chosen to enable a systematic and reflective reading of two contemporary theological frameworks derived from different religious traditions, namely the concept of religious imagination developed by Martin Nguyen and the concept of *locus theologicus* in video game theology formulated by Frank G. Bosman. The comparative approach was not used to identify surface similarities, but to examine the conceptual structure, epistemological assumptions, and theological implications of each framework in reading digital cultural practices. The dialogical analysis in this study was informed by the principles of philosophical hermeneutics, particularly Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas of dialogue, the fusion of horizons, and the reflective engagement of the interpreter with the text (Gadamer, 2013). In this framework, texts are not treated as static objects from which data are simply retrieved, but as dialogue partners to be engaged critically and reflectively. This approach allows for cross-tradition comparison without collapsing doctrinal differences, while opening space for constructive conceptual synthesis.

The main sources in this study consisted of two contemporary theological works: Frank G. Bosman's *Gaming and the Divine: A New Systematic Theology of Video Games* and Martin Nguyen's *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World with Faith and Imagination*. These two sources were selected purposively based on several criteria. First, both works demonstrate contemporaneity and thematic relevance, as they explicitly respond to the dynamics of modern and postmodern culture, including the relationship between faith, experience, and popular culture. Second, both works offer theoretical and reflective depth, presenting systematic theological frameworks rather

than merely apologetic or normative responses to culture. Third, they represent different religious traditions, with Bosman writing from the context of Christian theology and Nguyen developing theological reflection within the horizon of contemporary Islamic thought. Fourth, both works directly engage human and cultural experience, thereby allowing for a conceptual dialogue on gaming as an existential practice. In addition to these primary sources, this study also used secondary literature relevant to religion and media studies, cultural theology, and the ethics of digital games. This secondary literature was used to map the field of study and enrich the comparative analysis, rather than as the primary object of analysis.

The data collection process was carried out through careful and repeated close reading of Nguyen's and Bosman's works. Each text was read thoroughly to identify key concepts, theological assumptions, argumentative structures, and the ways in which each author understands the relationship between faith, experience, and culture. During the reading process, the researcher conducted systematic note-taking and conceptual annotation, both manually and digitally, to mark sections of the texts relevant to the research focus. The annotations focused on conceptual definitions, key metaphors, normative arguments, and epistemological implications that emerged from the reading process. This procedure enabled the extraction of consistent and structured conceptual data before the study proceeded to the comparative analysis stage.

Data analysis was conducted through five analytical steps. The first step was conceptual extraction, which involved identifying and formulating the main concepts in each text, including how those concepts are defined, used, and connected to human experience. The second step was thematic coding, in which the extracted concepts and arguments were classified into four main analytical dimensions: (1) epistemological assumptions, (2) understandings of human experience, (3) normative and ethical orientations, and (4) theological implications for digital culture. The third step was comparative mapping, which compared the coding results to identify points of convergence and tension between Nguyen's and Bosman's frameworks. The fourth step was critical evaluation, which assessed the internal coherence of each framework, the consistency of its arguments, and the conceptual limitations involved in applying the framework to the phenomenon of video games. The fifth step was dialogical synthesis, namely the development of an integrative framework that brings together religious imagination and *locus theologicus* as complementary analytical lenses for reading the experience of playing games.

As a literature-based study involving textual analysis, this research did not involve human participants and therefore did not require formal ethical approval. Ethical considerations were focused on academic integrity, including the fair representation of the authors' arguments, avoidance of interpretive distortion, and accurate and responsible citation practices in accordance with academic standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing Theology as Lived Practice in Contemporary Contexts

The analysis of Martin Nguyen's (2018) and Frank G. Bosman's (2019) works reveals a shared reconfiguration of contemporary theology as a lived and situated practice rather than a purely doctrinal or systematic enterprise. Both authors reject the notion of theology as an abstract discourse detached from concrete human experience, although they arrive at this position through different conceptual pathways. This convergence indicates a broader shift in contemporary theology toward

praxis, while also revealing divergent assumptions regarding normativity and the starting points of theological reflection. This convergence is summarized in Table 1, which compares how Nguyen and Bosman conceptualize theology as a lived practice.

Table 1 Conceptualization of Theology as Lived Practice

Analytical Aspect	Martin Nguyen	Frank G. Bosman
Starting point of theology	Faith-based response to God rooted in revelation and religious tradition	Cultural and experiential engagement, particularly through gameplay
Nature of theology	Normative–existential practice shaping life orientation	Interpretive–experiential practice emerging from play
Relation to doctrine	Doctrine serves as ethical and spiritual orientation, not mere propositional belief	Doctrine is implicit; theology emerges through reflection on experience
Role of experience	Experience must be interpreted and measured by faith commitments	Experience is the primary site where theological meaning emerges
Overall orientation	Theology as lived response before God	Theology as reflective interpretation of cultural practice

In Nguyen’s framework, theology is conceptualized as a *normatively measured human response to God* grounded in faith commitments and revelation (Nguyen, 2018, pp. 17–20).. Theology is never neutral or ahistorical; it emerges from the believer’s situated life before God and is oriented toward ethical formation, responsibility, and spiritual discernment. Central to this framework is the concept of *religious imagination*, understood as the human capacity to interpret lived experience creatively while remaining accountable to normative faith horizons. The analysis of Nguyen’s text consistently shows that imagination is not free-floating but must be evaluated in relation to submission to God, moral orientation, and awareness of human limitation (Nguyen, 2018, pp. 73–101). This positions theology as an ongoing interpretive practice embedded in everyday life rather than as a static system of beliefs.

By contrast, Bosman conceptualizes theology as an interpretive engagement with cultural experience, particularly the experience of playing video games, where existential and ethical questions emerge through player action (Bosman, 2019, pp. 15-36). Rather than beginning from internal faith commitments, Bosman starts from popular culture as a site where theological meaning becomes visible during play. His formulation of video games as *locus theologicus* frames gameplay as a space in which players confront choice, consequence, finitude, and responsibility. Analysis of Bosman’s argument shows that theology, in this view, arises when players reflect on the meaning of their actions and the structures that shape their experience, positioning theology as a mode of cultural interpretation rather than a confessional declaration (Bosman, 2019, pp. 249-257). Table 2 presents the main differences between Nguyen and Bosman regarding the sources, functions, and clarity of theological normativity.

Table 2 Normativity and Criteria of Theological Judgment

Normative Dimension	Martin Nguyen	Frank G. Bosman
Source of normativity	Revelation, faith commitments, and ethical orientation	Existential meaning and interpretive reflection
Function of normativity	To measure imagination and prevent self-centered or commodified spirituality	To illuminate meaning within experience, often implicitly
Risk identified	Excessive abstraction if detached from concrete media practices	Over-theologizing everyday play without clear criteria
Treatment of digital culture	Digital experiences must be critically assessed through faith-based norms	Digital games are read as meaningful sites without strict normative filters
Normative clarity	Explicit and systematic	Implicit and situational

Despite these different starting points, a key finding of the comparative analysis is that both Nguyen and Bosman conceptualize theology as a practice oriented toward lived experience. Nguyen situates this practice within explicit faith commitments, emphasizing theology as a response to God that shapes life orientation and ethical judgment. Bosman situates theological practice within experiential engagement, emphasizing the interpretive labor through which players discern meaning in digital environments. This convergence suggests that contemporary theology increasingly understands experience, rather than abstract doctrine alone, as a primary locus of theological reflection, even while different frameworks continue to disagree about the sources and limits of normativity.

The comparison also reveals an important divergence regarding the mediation of experience. Nguyen treats experience as something that must be normatively interpreted through revelation and faith tradition, thereby guarding against the risk of imagination being shaped solely by cultural or technological forces. Bosman, meanwhile, foregrounds experience itself as analytically primary, focusing on how meaning emerges through interaction with game systems and narratives. This difference does not negate their shared emphasis on lived theology. Instead, it delineates two complementary approaches: one prioritizing normative orientation, and the other prioritizing experiential attentiveness. Table 3 shows how Nguyen and Bosman position the subject of theological reflection, respectively as the responding believer and the conscious player.

Table 3 Subject Position and Agency in Theological Reflection

Aspect of Subjectivity	Martin Nguyen	Frank G. Bosman
Primary subject	Responding believer	Conscious player
Mode of agency	Ethical and spiritual response before God	Reflective awareness of action and consequence
Relation to responsibility	Responsibility grounded in faith orientation and submission	Responsibility emerges through gameplay choices and outcomes
Awareness emphasized	Moral and spiritual orientation	Existential and ethical awareness during play
Risk if unexamined	Normativity without sensitivity to media-specific experience	Experience without ethical measurement

Taken together, these findings indicate that contemporary theology, as articulated by Nguyen and Bosman, is neither confined to institutional doctrine nor dissolved into cultural relativism. Instead, theology appears as a reflective practice through which subjects interpret their lives, actions, and experiences in relation to questions of meaning, responsibility, and transcendence. This shared reconceptualization establishes the analytical basis for examining how video games can function as spaces of theological significance, while also setting the stage for subsequent analysis of normativity, subjectivity, and the tensions that arise when faith-oriented and experience-oriented approaches intersect.

Analysis of Nguyen's Framework

The analysis of Nguyen's *Modern Muslim Theology* yields four key findings regarding his theological methodology and conceptual framework. First, Nguyen reconceptualizes theology as a lived response rather than a doctrinal system. Second, he develops religious imagination as a measured theological capacity that bridges revelation and contemporary experience. Third, his framework emphasizes contextual normativity that avoids both ahistorical fixation and relativism. Fourth, although his approach offers robust normative grounding, it requires further operationalization for analyzing concrete digital practices. Each of these findings is elaborated below.

Theology as a Response to Life

In *Modern Muslim Theology*, Martin Nguyen redefines theology as more than a set of ideas about God or a field of doctrinal debate. Rather than limiting theology to academic discourse or textual formulation, Nguyen understands theology as a comprehensive human response to God involving reason, imagination, emotion, action, and life orientation (Nguyen, 2018). In this sense, theology is not confined to scholarly reflection but is embedded in daily life. This approach situates Nguyen within a broader current of contemporary theology that understands theology as a reflective practice grounded in lived experience. Within the Christian theological tradition, a comparable understanding can be found in David Tracy's view of theology as critical reflection on human religious experience within a particular historical context (Tracy, 1981). Nguyen adopts a similar concern for lived experience but articulates it within the Islamic tradition, so that modern Muslim theology is not presented as an adoption of Western theology but as an internal and contextual articulation of Islamic thought.

Furthermore, Nguyen argues that modern Muslim theology does not represent a break with tradition, but an ongoing engagement with God and the world. He rejects the dichotomy between "traditional Islam" and "modern Islam," which often either freezes tradition or imposes modernity in an ahistorical manner (Nguyen, 2018). This position resonates with Fazlur Rahman's *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, which understands Islamic ethics and theology as a dynamic process of moral interpretation between revealed texts and social reality (Rahman, 1982). Thus, Nguyen's central argument is both descriptive and normative: theology not only articulates Muslim belief but also guides the practical enactment of faith in a changing world. Theology, in this view, is a dynamic activity that requires continual engagement rather than mere repetition of established formulations.

The Language of Theology: Language, Horizon, and Dimension

One of Nguyen's important conceptual contributions is his emphasis on theological language. For Nguyen, theological language is not merely a matter of technical terminology or classical Arabic vocabulary, but a space of meaning through which human beings understand God, themselves, and the world (Nguyen, 2018). Language is not neutral; it shapes imagination, frames experience, and influences how faith is articulated and lived.

Within this framework, Nguyen introduces the concept of the horizon of engagement, which refers to the recognition that every form of theology is rooted in a specific context, including language, culture, community, and historical time. Muslim theology written in English or developed in a diasporic context, for example, cannot be regarded as "less Islamic," because language and context constitute the concrete horizon within which contemporary Muslims articulate and live their faith. This idea resonates with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics of historically effected consciousness, in which understanding is always shaped by a particular historical horizon (Gadamer, 2013).

However, recognizing the contextual horizon of theology does not lead to theological relativism. Nguyen therefore emphasizes revelation as a normative measure for theological language. Revelation continues to function as a criterion for theological articulation, even though human responses to revelation are always active, creative, and contextual (Nguyen, 2018). In this regard, Nguyen takes a position similar to Fazlur Rahman, who emphasizes that revelation provides moral orientation, while human beings are responsible for interpreting and implementing it within changing historical contexts (Rahman, 1982). Accordingly, in Nguyen's framework, the language of theology is dynamic, contextual, and subject to normative evaluation. He rejects both the ahistorical fixation of religious language and the relativism that separates theology from revelation. Theological language, therefore, becomes a space of dialogue between divine revelation, human interpretation, and worldly experience.

The Religious Imagination: Imagination as a Theological Capacity

The most innovative part of Nguyen's book lies in his development of the concept of religious imagination. Nguyen rejects the assumption that authentic faith must always be expressed in terms of propositional rationality or legalistic obedience. Instead, he argues that faith cannot exist without imagination, because imagination enables human beings to envision their relationship with God, the meaning of revelation, and a life orientation that transcends empirical data (Nguyen, 2018).

It is important to emphasize that Nguyen does not oppose imagination to reason. Rather, he critiques the reduction of reason to a narrow form of modern rationality. By acknowledging the plurality of rationalities, including narrative, symbolic, affective, and practical forms of reasoning, Nguyen positions imagination as a partner of reason rather than its opponent. This critique resonates with Talal Asad's argument in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, which shows that secular modernity often privileges one form of rationality as a universal standard (Asad, 2003).

Nguyen further demonstrates that the Islamic tradition has been rich in religious imagination throughout its history. Qur'anic narratives, eschatological metaphors, stories of the prophets, Sufi poetry, mosque architecture, and ritual practices all show that Muslim faith has never been merely legalistic or doctrinal. This argument resonates strongly with Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, which argues that historical Islam developed through ambiguity, aesthetics, and imagination (Ahmed, 2016).

Nguyen also emphasizes that religious imagination must be measured and disciplined. Religious imagination must not be allowed to degenerate into self-centered fantasy or reduce God to

a projection of human desire. Its measure remains revelation, ethical orientation, and God-directedness (Nguyen, 2018). At this point, Nguyen distances himself from forms of contemporary spirituality that emphasize personal experience without clear normative criteria.

The theological implications of this concept are substantial. Faith is conceived as an ongoing practice of interpreting life, rather than merely as the possession of doctrinal beliefs. To have faith is to continually interpret the world, oneself, and one's actions in relation to God. In this sense, theology becomes a sustained and accountable exercise of imagination.

Nguyen's primary contribution lies in his formulation of a dynamic, reflective, and contextual language for modern Muslim theology. By bringing together theology as a lived response and religious imagination as a measured theological capacity, Nguyen offers a productive framework for interpreting contemporary Muslim experiences, particularly in contexts of pluralism, modernity, and digital culture. This framework allows faith to be understood not merely as formal adherence to doctrine, but as a life orientation shaped by ethical responsibility, imagination, and responsiveness to God.

Furthermore, Nguyen situates modern Muslim theology within broader contemporary theological discourse without losing the distinctiveness of the Islamic tradition. His approach resonates with wider theological movements that emphasize praxis, experience, and cultural engagement, as seen in different ways in liberation theology and cultural theology (Tanner, 1997; Tracy, 1981). Thus, Nguyen's work can be read as a bridge between Islamic tradition and contemporary global theological discourse, offering conceptual resources for engaging modern cultural realities while remaining accountable to normative religious commitments.

Analysis of Bosman's Framework

The analysis of Bosman's *Gaming and the Divine* identifies four principal findings. First, Bosman establishes video games as legitimate *loci theologici* through their capacity to generate existential experiences. Second, he develops the concept of the conscious player as the reflective subject necessary for theological engagement with games. Third, his use of systematic theological themes, such as creation, theodicy, ethics, and death, provides an analytical structure for organizing gaming experiences. Fourth, although his approach offers strong experiential grounding, it requires supplementation with clearer normative criteria and greater attention to the political-economic dimensions of gaming platforms.

Video Game as a Theological Locus

Frank G. Bosman's central argument in *Gaming and the Divine* is that video games can be understood as a *locus theologicus*, namely a cultural space in which theological reflection can legitimately emerge. Bosman does not claim that video games contain revelation or explicit religious messages. Rather, he argues that the interactive, immersive, and participatory nature of gaming experiences can raise serious theological questions concerning the meaning of life, responsibility, suffering, and human limitation (Bosman, 2019).

Unlike films or novels, video games are not simply consumed as narrative texts but are experienced as practices. Players do not merely watch or read; they act, choose, and bear the consequences of their choices within the game world. From Bosman's perspective, this dimension makes video games a significant medium for theological reflection, since theology itself concerns human responses to situations that demand decisions and shape life orientations (Bosman, 2019). This view aligns with game studies approaches that emphasize games as systems of experience.

Bosman advances two principal theses. First, video games can serve as *loci theologici* by shaping players' existential experiences. Second, under specific conditions, the act of playing may function as a form of religiously significant practice, not as formal ritual, but as a reflective activity involving values, meaning, and existential orientation (Bosman, 2019). This assertion does not seek to sacralize games, but rather to expand the theological horizon so that contemporary cultural practices can be read as meaningful sites of theological reflection. With this argument, Bosman places himself within the tradition of cultural theology, which understands popular culture as a field of theological reflection. This tradition can be traced to the works of Paul Tillich and Gordon Lynch, who argue that religious meaning often emerges implicitly in modern cultural practices, not only within formal religious institutions (Lynch, 2004; Tillich, 1958).

Bosman's Theological Method: Cultural Theology and the Structure of Systematic Theology

Methodologically, Bosman does not offer a formally or procedurally fixed theological method. However, the way he constructs his argument shows that he works within a theology of culture. This approach reads cultural artifacts, in this case video games, as symbolic expressions that contain ultimate questions about the meaning of life and humanity's relationship to the transcendent. This position aligns with Paul Tillich's legacy in *Dynamics of Faith*, which understands culture as a form through which human religious questions are articulated (Tillich, 1958).

Bosman does not stop at a general reading of culture. He organizes his reflections using themes from classical systematic theology, such as creation, Christology, theological anthropology, theodicy, ethics, and death. This structure serves as an analytical lens for interpreting gaming experiences rather than as an imposed dogmatic framework (Bosman, 2016). In this way, Bosman demonstrates that systematic theology remains relevant when it is used reflectively and contextually.

For example, in his discussion of creation and anthropology, Bosman reads the player's position as that of a subject who possesses significant power in a virtual world but remains constrained by the rules of the game. This experience opens reflection on human beings as both creative and limited, a classic theme in theology. In game studies, this dynamic is also discussed through the relationship between agency and constraint in game design (Juul, 2011).

In his discussion of suffering and evil, Bosman points out that many video games offer no satisfying moral resolution. Players are often forced to live with tragic consequences without final closure. Rather than seeking a definitive theological answer, Bosman reads this tension as a space for theodicy reflection, where players existentially encounter human limitation in the face of evil. This approach resonates with contemporary theology's tendency to reject speculative theodicy and to emphasize solidarity with suffering (Tanner, 1997).

It is important to note that Bosman's method is not empirical. He does not engage in player observation or statistical analysis. Instead, his approach is a reflective hermeneutic of gaming experiences and the structures of meaning that emerge from them. Consequently, Bosman's theology is interpretive rather than descriptive-empirical.

Key Concept: The Conscious Player

One of the most important conceptual contributions of Bosman's work is the notion of the conscious player. This concept refers to a player who is not only technically engaged in the game but also reflectively present, aware of the ethical and existential significance of the choices they make

(Bosman, 2019). Without this awareness, gaming remains an activity rather than a site of theological reflection.

Within this framework, Bosman distinguishes between victory-oriented and meaning-oriented players. The conscious player does not simply ask, “How do I win?” but also asks, “What is the meaning of the choices I make?” This question marks a shift from entertainment consumption to existential reflection. This approach aligns with Miguel Sicart’s *The Ethics of Computer Games*, which emphasizes gaming as an ethical practice that shapes the player’s character and responsibility (Sicart, 2009).

By foregrounding player consciousness, Bosman illustrates that gaming experiences can function as spaces of ethical formation. Players are invited to confront dilemmas, accept failure, and assume responsibility for their actions. Although this form of ethical formation does not substitute for formal religious practice, it may cultivate moral and reflective dispositions that are relevant to real-life contexts.

The concept of the conscious player also emphasizes the subject position in Bosman’s theological method. Theology does not emerge from the game itself, but from the reflective interaction between the player and the gaming experience. Thus, theology is relational and practical rather than inherent in the medium.

Bosman’s primary contribution lies in opening a serious and systematic theological path for reading video games. He demonstrates that games are not merely superficial entertainment, but cultural practices capable of shaping players’ existential and ethical experiences. By using the lens of systematic theology, Bosman provides conceptual legitimacy for the theological study of video games.

Furthermore, Bosman contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, cultural studies, and game studies. His work broadens the field of religion and media studies by including video games as legitimate objects of theological reflection alongside film, music, and popular literature. In this context, Bosman’s work can be regarded as one of the important contributions to the emerging field of video game theology.

DISCUSSION

The most fundamental point of agreement between Nguyen and Bosman lies in the way they move theology from doctrinal abstraction into human experience and practice. Nguyen explicitly defines theology as a lived human response to God, while Bosman reads the practice of playing video games as an existential experience that implicitly raises theological questions. Both reject the understanding of theology as a closed system relevant only within academic spaces or formal religious institutions.

In Nguyen’s framework, lived experience becomes the primary terrain in which faith is lived and tested. Faith requires religious imagination in order to respond meaningfully to God within complex and pluralistic modern contexts. Imagination enables human beings to connect everyday experiences with broader theological horizons. Meanwhile, Bosman demonstrates that the experience of playing games, even when not explicitly religious, can trigger similar forms of reflection, as players confront existential choices, consequences, and limitations. For example, in *The Last of Us*, players encounter Joel’s decision to save Ellie at the cost of humanity’s potential cure. Through Nguyen’s lens, this situation requires religious imagination to interpret the moral weight of the decision. Through Bosman’s lens, the conscious player engages it as a theological reflection on love, sacrifice, and limitation. This similarity becomes even clearer when both authors emphasize response as the core of theology. For Nguyen, theology is the human response to God; for Bosman, gaming can be understood as the player’s existential response to a world

that demands decisions and value orientations. Thus, theology does not exist merely as knowledge about God, but as a way for human beings to act within concrete situations.

At this point, Nguyen's religious imagination can be brought into dialogue with Bosman's concept of the conscious player. Religious imagination enables human beings to interpret experience as part of their relationship with God, while the conscious player refers to a subject who is aware of the ethical and existential significance of their actions within the game. Both concepts position the reflective subject as central to theology. Furthermore, these two approaches align with a broader trend in contemporary theology that emphasizes praxis and experience as loci of theological reflection. David Tracy, for example, argues that theology must begin from concrete human experience and the ultimate questions that arise from it (Tracy, 1981). In this context, the convergence between Nguyen and Bosman lies not in a shared religious tradition or subject matter, but in their orientation toward theology as a response to life. Theology is conceptualized as a reflective activity emerging from human experience, whether in explicit faith commitments or in popular cultural practices endowed with existential significance.

Despite this significant common ground, there is an important conceptual tension between Nguyen and Bosman, particularly regarding theological normativity. Nguyen explicitly departs from Muslim faith commitments and positions revelation as the normative measure for theology and religious imagination. In contrast, Bosman works within a relatively looser framework of Christian cultural theology, focusing on the theological reading of experience without always articulating strict normative criteria.

This difference has important implications for the study of digital culture. In digital environments, imagination can easily be shaped by market logic, algorithmic systems, and platform capitalism. Nguyen's framework recognizes this risk and therefore emphasizes the measurement of imagination, so that religious imagination does not degenerate into self-centered fantasy or the commodification of spirituality. In Bosman's work, critical awareness of this risk is present, but it is not formulated normatively and systematically. Another tension arises at the analytical level. Nguyen is strong in providing spiritual and ethical orientation, but his framework remains relatively abstract when dealing with concrete media forms such as digital platforms, games, and algorithms. Bosman, by contrast, is strong in reading the experience of play and the structure of the game medium, but pays less attention to the political-economic dimensions of the gaming industry that shape player experience.

This limitation becomes even more important given that contemporary gaming experiences are shaped not only by narrative or game mechanics, but also by monetization systems, microtransactions, and platform logic. Studies of religion and media show that these structural dimensions significantly influence user value orientations and experiences (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Contemporary gaming increasingly operates through "games-as-a-service" models that prioritize monetization and continuous engagement, sometimes at the expense of narrative depth and reflective play (Clark, 2014; Lehtonen et al., 2022). Loot boxes, battle passes, and engagement-maximizing mechanics may blur the line between play, consumption, and compulsion. Under such conditions, it becomes an open question whether measured imagination or conscious reflection can operate authentically within exploitative systems. Neither Nguyen nor Bosman explicitly addresses how platform capitalism structures the conditions under which theological engagement with games becomes possible or constrained. Future work must therefore integrate political economy with phenomenological and normative analysis in order

to address digital religion more adequately within late capitalist media environments (van Dijck et al., 2018).

Crucially, this tension should not be understood merely as a theoretical weakness, but as an analytically generative space. Bosman's sensitivity to gameplay experience can ground Nguyen's normative concerns in concrete media practices, preventing theological reflection from remaining abstract or detached from lived digital realities. Conversely, Nguyen's insistence on normative measurement offers a corrective to the risk of over-theologizing gameplay experiences, such as reading routine resource management in city-building games as "stewardship theology" without sufficient ethical criteria. In this way, the interplay between normativity and experiential openness does not resolve the tension between Nguyen and Bosman, but renders it productive. It opens a pathway toward a theological framework capable of engaging video games as lived digital practices while remaining critically attentive to ethical boundaries, media structures, and the conditions under which meaning is produced.

This section therefore proposes a conceptual synthesis that combines the strengths of Nguyen and Bosman without obscuring their differences. The synthesis begins with the recognition that video games can be understood as loci of existential experience, as Bosman argues, because they create situations in which players must choose, act, and accept consequences. However, such experiences are not automatically theological. This is where Nguyen's concept of religious imagination becomes crucial. Religious imagination functions as an interpretive mechanism that allows gaming experiences to be read within broader horizons of relationship with God, ethics, and life orientation. Without this imagination, gaming experiences may remain psychologically or culturally meaningful, but they do not necessarily become theological.

This synthesis also places the subject at the center of reflection. For Nguyen, the subject is a responding agent who continually interprets life before God. For Bosman, the subject is the conscious player who is aware of the meaning of their actions within the game. By combining the two, theological reflection on games requires a reflective player, not simply a user or consumer. Finally, this synthesis requires theological criteria for evaluation. Gaming experience can be evaluated by asking whether it shapes an orientation toward submission to God, moral responsibility, and awareness of human limitation, or whether it reinforces the illusion of absolute power and unreflective consumption. This question aligns with Nguyen's emphasis on faith orientation and Bosman's aim to read the existential meaning of gaming experiences.

As shown in Figure 1, video games can function as loci of existential experience that become theologically meaningful only through reflective engagement by a conscious player and mediation by religious imagination. This process is evaluated through qualitative heuristic criteria rather than quantitative measurement. Within this framework, the dialogue between Nguyen and Bosman extends beyond theoretical comparison and offers a practical tool for reflection in the study of religion and media. The synthesis shows that contemporary theology can maintain a substantive presence in digital contexts when it integrates critical engagement with experience and reflective normative criteria.

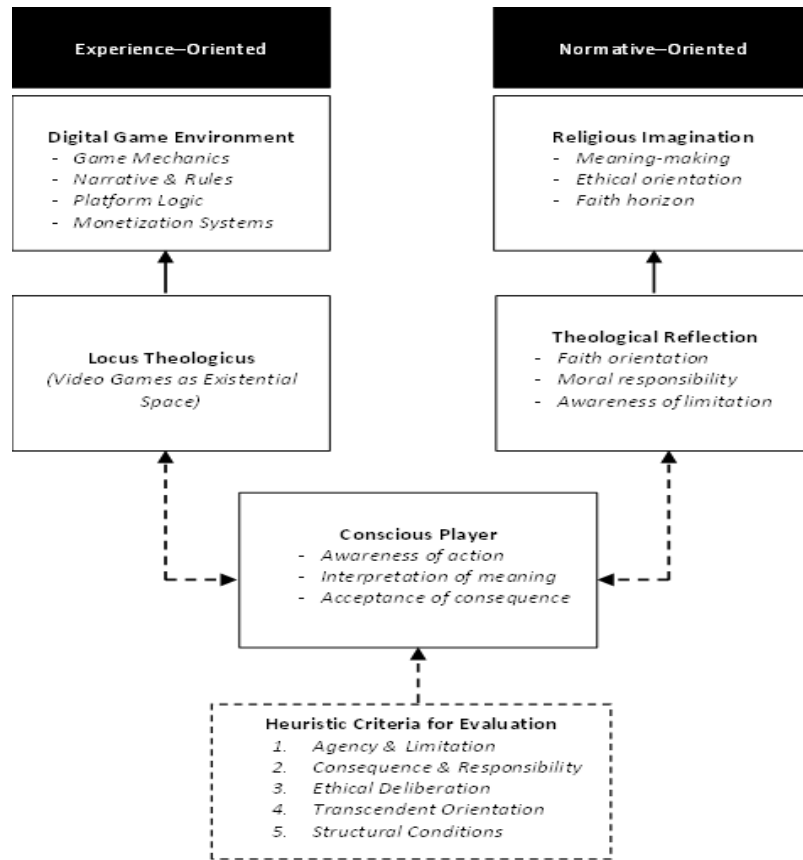


Figure 1. Integrated Framework of Measured Imagination and Conscious Play in Theological Analysis of Video Games

The combined reading of Nguyen and Bosman opens a way to understand video games as a form of religious ecology, not as a new religion, but as a practical environment in which habits, symbolic actions, moral exercises, and affective engagements are repeatedly enacted. Gaming involves rhythms of time, patterned actions, rules, symbols, and emotional investment that may resemble ritualized practices, although they are not institutionalized as formal worship. Research in religion and media has shown that such patterned practices can play an important role in shaping moral dispositions and religious identities in contemporary societies (Campbell, 2012b; Campbell et al., 2016). From this perspective, games can be understood as moral rehearsal spaces, where players practice ethical responses in simulated environments without necessarily facing the same consequences as in offline social life, a dynamic also discussed in studies of digital game ethics (Sicart, 2009).

Nguyen’s framework of religious imagination provides important conceptual resources to prevent the study of religion and digital media from becoming uncritically celebratory of technology. Digital culture is often praised for its creativity and participatory affordances. However, without normative measures, imagination shaped by digital media can easily be guided by market logic, algorithmic curation, and platform incentives. Nguyen emphasizes that religious imagination must be continually measured by ethical orientation and relationship with God, rather than allowed to devolve into self-centered fantasy.

This emphasis resonates with critical media studies that highlight how digital infrastructures actively shape users' moral and spiritual imaginations (Coudry & Mejias, 2019).

Bosman's contribution lies in providing academic and theological legitimacy for the study of video games. By positioning games as a *locus theologicus*, Bosman enables religion and media studies to move beyond reductive approaches that treat games merely as entertainment or as objects of moral panic. He demonstrates that gameplay experiences can be analyzed seriously as existential and ethical practices, comparable to engagements with film, music, or popular literature. This legitimacy is important because religious studies must remain attentive to cultural practices that shape the everyday lives of the digital generation (Lynch, 2004).

The dialogue between Nguyen and Bosman also enriches methodological approaches in the study of religion and media. From Bosman, scholars gain a conceptual basis for reading media forms and gaming experiences theologically. From Nguyen, they gain normative criteria for assessing the direction of those experiences. Together, these approaches enable analyses that are not only descriptive but also reflective and critical, moving beyond documenting what gamers do toward examining how gaming practices shape orientations toward meaning, ethics, and religiosity. This methodological stance aligns with broader trends in religious studies that emphasize praxis, discipline, and subject formation (Asad, 2003).

Methodologically, this study is strengthened by its use of comparative-dialogical theology to read Islamic and Christian theological frameworks without collapsing their doctrinal differences. Comparative theology has been understood as a method that enables deep engagement with another religious tradition while preserving the particularity of one's own tradition, thereby avoiding both universalizing comparison and superficial juxtaposition (Cheetham, 2011; Clooney & von Stosch, 2017). In this sense, the dialogue between Nguyen's religious imagination and Bosman's *locus theologicus* does not aim at doctrinal synthesis, but at mutual illumination across distinct theological horizons. This approach is consistent with recent methodological discussions that emphasize interreligious comparison as a reflective practice capable of maintaining parity, particularity, and openness in cross-tradition theological engagement (Schmidt-Leukel & Nehring, 2016; Sivasubramanian, 2022). It also resonates with newer directions in comparative-dialogical theology, which stress the need for methodological attentiveness to religious difference, contextuality, and epistemological justice in interreligious theological inquiry (Hwang, 2024; Sherma, 2022). By situating this comparative dialogue within religion and media studies, the article further integrates theological reflection with the analysis of lived digital culture, allowing video games to be examined neither as merely sociological phenomena nor as objects of abstract normative judgment. The close and systematic reading of Nguyen's and Bosman's works therefore serves to preserve textual fidelity while enabling a constructive cross-traditional framework for understanding religion in digital culture.

These limitations have important implications for interpreting the findings of this study. The proposed framework should therefore be understood as heuristic rather than exhaustive, offering a structured interpretive tool for thinking about theological engagement with video games rather than a definitive model applicable to all contexts. In the humanities and social sciences, heuristic frameworks are often used not as final empirical explanations, but as flexible and adaptive devices for navigating conceptual complexity, organizing inquiry, and guiding methodological reflection (Cristofaro, 2025; Litchfield et al., 2011). Similarly, conceptual models are valuable because they enable structured interpretation across interdisciplinary fields while remaining open to contextual revision, epistemic plurality, and further empirical testing (Ortiz-Núñez & Santa-Álvarez, 2026; Sokolova & Tukhvatulina, 2022). From this perspective, the absence of empirical validation in the present study does not weaken the framework's interpretive value, but clarifies its function: it describes conceptual possibilities and

theological orientations rather than measurable outcomes. The focus on Nguyen and Bosman highlights specific trajectories in contemporary theology, but it does not negate the relevance of alternative approaches emerging from other religious traditions, gaming communities, or critical perspectives.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not invalidate the findings of this analysis. Rather, acknowledging limitations is an important methodological practice that clarifies the scope of a study, prevents overgeneralization, and helps readers interpret the claims within appropriate boundaries (Brutus et al., 2013; Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). In this sense, the limitations of the present study function not as weaknesses that undermine its contribution, but as markers of its conceptual and interpretive scope. Methodological literature also emphasizes that well-articulated limitations can serve as a basis for identifying unresolved questions and guiding future research agendas, especially when they are presented in specific and contextualized ways rather than as generic disclaimers (Brutus et al., 2013). Accordingly, the non-empirical character, limited textual corpus, and rapidly changing digital context of this study clarify the kind of contribution it offers: a foundational and heuristic framework for theological reflection on video games, rather than a conclusive account of player behavior or religious practice in gaming communities. By articulating a dialogical and normatively attentive framework, this study provides conceptual resources that can inform future empirical research, comparative theological work, and interdisciplinary inquiry. The acknowledged limitations therefore point not to the weakness of the approach, but to the need for continued research that extends, tests, and contextualizes the framework developed here in response to the evolving realities of digital culture.

This integrated framework opens several concrete directions for future research in the study of religion and digital media. First, future studies could examine how religious gamers negotiate faith identity within gaming cultures, especially because empirical research shows that religious players may experience tension between gaming as a potentially “vain act” and gaming as a meaningful or beneficial activity within their religious frameworks (Cengiz & Ataman, 2025). Second, further research may investigate how religiosity shapes gaming behavior, since previous findings suggest that religious belief, denomination, and spiritual practice can influence gaming frequency and patterns of engagement (Braun et al., 2016). Third, online gaming communities should be explored as spaces of religious discourse and meaning-making, as studies on “pop theology” and Reddit-based gaming discussions show that players actively debate religious symbols, sacred narratives, blasphemy, and the educational or communal potential of games (de Wildt & Aupers, 2020; Maram et al., 2024). Fourth, ethnographic and netnographic research is needed to understand how gaming environments may function as “third spaces” in which religious and secular identities interact, overlap, and are negotiated in everyday digital life (Okun & Nimrod, 2017). Finally, comparative theological inquiry should investigate how different religious traditions interpret ethical issues in virtual worlds, particularly as religion and gaming increasingly intersect in the formation of digital religious identity, moral imagination, and networked forms of community (Campbell et al., 2016; Cheong & Campbell, 2022). Taken together, these directions demonstrate how the concepts of measured imagination and conscious play can be operationalized in future empirical, comparative, and interdisciplinary research at the intersection of religion, media, and digital culture.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that contemporary theology can engage video games as meaningful digital cultural practices without losing its normative depth. Through a dialogical analysis of Martin Nguyen’s

concept of religious imagination and Frank G. Bosman's formulation of video games as *locus theologicus*, the article finds that both thinkers reconceptualize theology as a lived and situated practice rather than a purely doctrinal system. Nguyen emphasizes theology as a measured response to God through faith, imagination, and ethical orientation, while Bosman demonstrates that gameplay can generate existential reflection through choice, consequence, limitation, and responsibility. The convergence between these two frameworks lies in their shared emphasis on experience, subjectivity, and reflective response, while their key tension concerns the source and clarity of theological normativity.

The main contribution of this article lies in its formulation of an integrated framework of measured imagination and conscious play. This framework positions video games as loci of existential experience that become theologically meaningful only when mediated by reflective subjects and evaluated through normative criteria. By bringing Nguyen and Bosman into dialogue, the study offers a cross-traditional approach that bridges Islamic theological reflection and Christian cultural theology without collapsing their doctrinal differences. It also contributes to religion and media studies by moving beyond moral panic and descriptive accounts of gaming, toward a reflective-critical framework capable of examining how digital games shape moral imagination, ethical orientation, and religious meaning-making in contemporary digital culture.

This study, however, has several limitations. It is a non-empirical study based on conceptual and textual analysis, and therefore does not make claims about actual player behavior or lived religious practices in specific gaming communities. Its analysis is also limited to two primary theological texts and cannot represent the full diversity of religious engagements with digital games across traditions, regions, platforms, and genres. In addition, the rapid development of gaming technologies, monetization models, and platform economies means that the proposed framework must remain open to revision and contextual testing. Future research should therefore extend this framework through ethnographic studies of religious gaming communities, empirical research on moral decision-making in games, and critical analyses of how monetization, algorithms, and platform capitalism shape the conditions of theological reflection in digital gaming environments.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2016). *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400873586>
- Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford University Press.
- Bosman, F. G. (2016). The Word Has Become Game: Researching Religion in Digital Games. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 11, 28–45. <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.rel.2016.0.23626>
- Bosman, F. G. (2019). *Gaming and the Divine: A New Systematic Theology of Video Games* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507892-1>
- Braun, B., Kornhuber, J., & Lenz, B. (2016). Gaming and Religion: The Impact of Spirituality and Denomination. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 55(4), 1464–1471. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0152-0>
- Brutus, S., Aguinis, H., & Wassmer, U. (2013). Self-Reported Limitations and Future Directions in Scholarly Reports: Analysis and Recommendations. *Journal of Management*, 39(1), 48–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312455245>
- Bryan. (2025). *Average Gaming Session Length by Age Group*. IconEra. <https://icon-era.com/statistics/average-gaming-session-length-by-age-group/>

- Campbell, H. A. (2012a). Introduction: The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion. In H. A. Campbell (Ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice In New Media Worlds* (1st ed., p. 31). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203084861>
- Campbell, H. A. (2012b). Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80(1), 64–93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074>
- Campbell, H. A., Wagner, R., Luft, S., Gregory, R., Grieve, G. P., & Zeiler, X. (2016). Gaming Religionworlds: Why Religious Studies Should Pay Attention to Religion in Gaming. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 84(3), 641–664. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv091>
- Cengiz, Ö. F., & Ataman, K. (2025). “Religious” and “Gamer”: Negotiating the Legitimacy of Video Games in a Muslim Context. *Games and Culture*, 20(4), 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231204146>
- Cheetham, D. (2011). Comparative Theology. In *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization* (p. 1). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470670606.wbecc0331>
- Cheong, P. H., & Campbell, H. A. (2022). Digital religion futures: Propositions and complexities in the now and not yet. In *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion* (pp. 630–638). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.013.39>
- Clark, O. (2014). *Games as A Service* (1st editio). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315849102>
- Clooney, F. X., & von Stosch, K. (2017). How to do comparative theology. In F. X. Clooney & K. von Stosch (Eds.), *How to Do Comparative Theology*. Fordham University Press.
- Couldry, N., & Mejias, U. A. (2019). The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating it for Capitalism. In N. Couldry & U. A. Mejias (Eds.), *The Costs of Connection*. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503609754>
- Cristofaro, M. (2025). A framework for Understanding heuristic shifts and adaptation. *Mind & Society*, 24(2), 413–435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11299-025-00340-1>
- de Wildt, L., & Aupers, S. (2019). Playing the Other: Role-playing religion in videogames. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(5–6), 867–884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418790454>
- de Wildt, L., & Aupers, S. (2020). Pop theology: forum discussions on religion in videogames. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(10), 1444–1462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1577476>
- Detweiler, C. (2010). *Halos and Avatars: Playing Video Games with God* (C. Detweiler (ed.); 1st editio). Westminster John Knox Press.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2013). *Truth and Method* (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall (trans.)). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hidayatullah, R. (2024). Otoritas Keagamaan Digital: Pembentukan Otoritas Islam Baru di Ruang Digital. *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 10(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v10i2.42831>
- Hjarvard, S. (2016). Mediatization and the changing authority of religion. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(1), 8–17.
- Hwang, E. (2024). Comparative Theology as a Postcolonial Hermeneutics: A Global Historical Approach to the Encounter between Augustinian Christianity and Tiantai Buddhism. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 44(1), 105–122. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2024.a940769>
- Juul, J. (2011). *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. MIT Press.
- Karlsen, F. (2015). The Dark Side of Game Play. In T. E. Mortensen, J. Linderoth, & A. M. Brown (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Game Play* (1st Editio). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315738680>

- Lehtonen, M. J., Vesa, M., & Harviainen, J. T. (2022). Games-as-a-Disservice: Emergent value co-destruction in platform business models. *Journal of Business Research*, 141, 564–574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.11.055>
- Litchfield, A., Baloch, F., & Cusack, B. (2011). Arguments for the adoption of a heuristic approach to IS research. *International Conference on Information Systems 2011, ICIS 2011*, 3, 1969–1977.
- Lynch, G. (2004). *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Maram, S. S., Pfau, J., Kasar, M. R., & Seif El-Nasr, M. (2024). A Topic Modeling Approach Towards Understanding the Discourse between Religion and Videogames on Reddit. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 8(CHI PLAY), 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3677054>
- Markey, P. M., & Ferguson, C. J. (2017). *Moral Combat: Why the War on Violent Video Games is Wrong* (1st ed.). BenBella Books, Inc.
- Mike. (2025). *Faith-Based Video Games*. Gaming and God. <https://gamingandgod.com/christian-video-games/>
- Miller, K., & Taddeo, M. (2020). The Ethics of Information Technologies. In K. W. Miller & M. Taddeo (Eds.), *The Ethics of Information Technologies* (1st editio). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003075011>
- Morreale, D., & Rosa, A. (2024). Roblox and the Pervasiveness of Play: What Game-Making Communities Can Teach Us About Participatory Practices in Affinity Spaces. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 4281–4299.
- Newzoo. (2025). *Global Games Market Report 2025: Updated November 2025*. <https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoo-global-games-market-report-2025>
- Nguyen, M. (2018). *Modern Muslim Theology* (M. Nguyen (ed.)). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881829148>
- Nugroho, T. B. (2024). When Games Meet Worship: A Study Of The Impact of Urban Youths' Mobile Legends Gaming Habits on Worship Times. *Proceeding of The International Seminar (Enhancing Creative Knowledge in the Modern Era)*, 6, 516–526.
- Okun, S., & Nimrod, G. (2017). Online ultra-orthodox religious communities as a third space: A netnographic study. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 2825–2841.
- Ortiz-Núñez, R., & Santa-Álvarez, J. S. (2026). Interdisciplinary Theoretical Model for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences Based on the Categories of Subject, Society and Culture. *Social Sciences*, 15(5), 335. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci15050335>
- PwC. (2025). *Global Entertainment and Media industry Revenues to Hit US\$3.5 Trillion by 2029, Driven by Advertising, Live Events, and Video Games*. PwC Global Entertainment & Media Outlook. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2025/pwc-global-entertainment-media-outlook.html>
- Rahman, F. (1982). *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Rautalahti, H. (2018). Disenchanted Faith—Religion and Authority in the Dishonored Universe. *Religions*, 9(5), 146. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9050146>
- Roblox Lore Database. (2025). *Religion on Roblox*. Miraheze. https://robloxloredatabase.miraheze.org/wiki/Religion_on_Roblox
- Ross, P. T., & Bibler Zaidi, N. L. (2019). Limited by our limitations. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(4), 261–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-00530-x>
- Schaap, J., & Aupers, S. (2017). 'Gods in World of Warcraft exist': Religious reflexivity and the quest for meaning in online computer games. *New Media & Society*, 19(11), 1744–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816642421>
- Schmidt-Leukel, P., & Nehring, A. (2016). Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited. In *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and*

- Theology: Comparison Revisited*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474285162>
- Sherma, R. D. (2022). Methodological Considerations for Interreligious Theological Engagement: New Directions in Comparative-Dialogical Theology. In *Sustainable Development Goals Series: Vol. Part F2690* (pp. 11–23). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79301-2_2
- Sicart, M. (2009). *The Ethics of Computer Games*. The MIT Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262012652.001.0001>
- Sivasubramanian, D. M. (2022). *A Postfoundationalist Comparative Christology: Parity, Particularity, and Universality in Indian Interreligious Dialogues*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Sokolova, T. D., & Tukhvatulina, L. A. (2022). Methodological Reductionism and the Idea of Progress in the Social Sciences and Humanities: An Internalist Perspective. *Voprosy Filosofii*, 2022(11), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.21146/0042-8744-2022-11-76-86>
- Tanner, K. (1997). *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Fortress Press.
- Thomas, J., Kuhail, M. A., & AlBeyahi, F. (2024). The Metaverse, Religious Practice and Wellbeing: A Narrative Review. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 27(1), 57–63. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.000>
- Tillich, P. (1958). *Dynamics of Faith*. Harper & Brothers.
- Tracy, D. (1981). The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism. *Horizons*, 8(2), 329–339. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900018983>
- van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford University PressNew York.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.001.0001>
- Widerberg, D., & Zia, M. (2025). *Moral Panic over Games is about Trauma, Not Games*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5685803>