Games – Forschungsprojekt

Minecraft is not just a game, it's a religion.

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1 Abstract

This paper looks at Minecraft as more than just a sandbox simulation. It explores gameplay, community traditions, and symbolic structures that show patterns of mythmaking, rituals, and a faith-like connection. The game's open and creative design encourages devotion. Collective creation myths, and shared moral values that are like those found in organized religions. By using visual and cultural analysis, this study demonstrates how virtual spaces can inspire spiritual experiences and reshape collective meaning-making in today's culture.

2 Introduction

2.1 Topic Area

Since its release in 2011, Minecraft has changed from a basic game into one of the most important cultural platforms of the digital age. Its simple design, with pixelated visuals and endless creativity, gives players the freedom to build, explore, and express themselves. What started as a solo experience of survival and creation has turned into a communal space where millions join in shared imagination and community building.

Beyond gameplay, Minecraft has influenced online culture through teamwork, performance, and storytelling. Communities like the Dream SMP show how the game goes beyond entertainment, becoming a way for people to express their digital identities and culture. In this way, Minecraft acts as both a creative tool and a reflection of how players find meaning and connection in virtual spaces.

2.2 Research interest

This study looks at Minecraft as more than a computer game; it explores it as a digital space that creates rituals, stories, and symbolic practices like those in religion and mythology. The enormous interest in YouTubers' speedrunning events, the community's creation of mythic characters such as Herobrine, and the enthusiastic involvement of millions of players highlight a unique cultural phenomenon. Minecraft offers a place where meaning, devotion, and shared imagination come to life within a sandbox game.

2.3 The Question

The question guiding this study is:

In what ways can Minecraft, compared to other games, be perceived as a digital space where players attribute symbolic, ritualistic, or even sacred meaning to their creative and communal practices?

Sub-questions include:

- How do players and creators build meaning, ritual, and identity within the game?
- What symbolic parallels exist between Minecraft communities and traditional belief systems?

2.4 Structure of the Paper

The paper starts by discussing the methods used to study Minecraft as a cultural artifact. It then offers a detailed analysis of social and visual elements. After that, there is a comparative discussion of its religious aspects. The paper wraps up with thoughts on how the popularity of this game influenced the creation of this paper. Before addressing the theoretical framework, it is crucial to clarify how this study will define religion.

2.5 Defining Religion: Interpreting its Relevance within a Digital Game Context

Before exploring how Minecraft symbolizes meaning, it is important to define religion in this context. In the humanities, religion goes beyond belief in a deity; it is a system of symbols and rituals through which people create meaning and community. Clifford Geertz describes religion as a "system of symbols that establishes powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations." WAS IST RELIGIÖSE PRAXIS EINGEHEN

Similarly, through repetitive play, such as building, exploring, and preserving creations, Minecraft players engage in actions that resemble ritual and devotion. Their emotional investment and sense of belonging show the human search for purpose often found in spiritual practice.

This comparison is metaphorical rather than theological. Minecraft does not claim spiritual truth, but it allows players to connect with something larger than themselves, a shared world of imagination. In this way, Minecraft reflects humanity's ongoing need to create, connect, and believe.

3 Methodological Approach

3.1 Methodology

This study takes a theoretical and interpretive approach based on cultural and media studies. It looks at how meaning, ritual, and identity develop within Minecraft's creative and communal spaces. The analysis draws on several qualitative sources, including:

• Direct observation of gameplay in Minecraft
• Community-created content
• Case studies of Minecraft subcultures
• Forum posts and player reflections

The research explores in-game actions, player interactions, and community stories to view Minecraft not just as a hobby but as a cultural platform that encourages creativity and shared expression. While the lack of direct interviews limits the study, the abundance of community content offers **valuable** material for symbolic and thematic analysis**.**

3.2 Research process

The research process was divided into three stages to explore how religious and cultural patterns show up in Minecraft:

1. Observation of in-game worlds, analyzing symbolic structures like temples, monuments, and sacred landmarks that reflect spiritual or mythological themes.

2. Community analysis, examining interactions within Reddit, Discord, and YouTube to understand how players create meaning, ritual, and identity together.

3. Literature and media review, studying academic and journalistic sources that discuss the social, creative, and metaphysical aspects of Minecraft.

By interpreting texts and symbols, the study views in-game actions, server cultures, and community myths that can be analyzed using methods from cultural and religious studies. This approach helps identify patterns, metaphors, and analogies that connect Minecraft's design and social practices to religious ideas.

4 Results

4.1 General Description of Minecraft

Minecraft is an open-world sandbox game created by Mojang Studios. It lets players explore, build, and reshape a world made entirely of cubes. Every block can be destroyed, collected, or changed, giving players endless creative freedom. This design encourages a strong emotional connection, making gameplay a personal act of imagination and expression. Without set goals or stories, players create their own narratives, structures, and worlds, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. Over time, Minecraft has evolved from just entertainment to a global cultural platform that holds educational and artistic value. This reflects humanity's ongoing desire to build, connect, and find meaning. This shows how digital spaces can turn into important extensions of creativity and community.

Fig. 1: Evolution of Minecraft

4.2 Symbolic and Religious Elements of Minecraft

Fig. 2: Ocean monument

The symbolic aspect of Minecraft goes well beyond its basic mechanics. Its open design lets players create in ways that reflect ancient myths and religions. Each new world starts from nothing, similar to creation stories found in different cultures. Within Minecraft's ecosystem, several elements represent mythic themes:

• **Creation and Genesis:** The endless world stands for continuity and rebirth. Unlike most games, Minecraft has no real ending; players build lasting connections with evolving worlds that keep their creations and memories alive.
• **Good and Evil:** Hostile mobs represent chaos and darkness, while tools and shelters symbolize order, light, and survival.
• **Ritual and Renewal:** The ongoing cycle of mining, crafting, and building is like spiritual rituals of creation and transformation. The respawn feature serves as a metaphor for rebirth.
• **Sacred Spaces:** Players create temples, cathedrals, and landmarks that act as shared symbols of community and respect. At the same time, some strange or unsettling structures that the game loads with, give the world an eerie feel. This suggests that Minecraft holds deeper stories and hidden lore beneath its surface.
• **Myth and Legend:** The Herobrine myth, once just a rumor, evolved into a collective story of mystery and nostalgia for players who grew up with the game.

From a cultural viewpoint, Minecraft works as a living mythology where players create worlds, stories, and identities together. Its lasting popularity shows deeper human needs for creativity, belonging, and symbolic meaning in the digital age.

4.3 Community and Rituals

Fig. 3: 2b2t "The Jesus Donut"

The *Minecraft* community represents one of the most dynamic and multifaceted digital cultures in contemporary gaming. This is what reminds me that its more then just a game, the players exhibit patterns of devotion that resemble religious behavior. The game's players often treat certain servers, events, and creations with a kind of reverence, transforming ordinary gameplay into sacred experiences.

A prime example of this is **2b2t**, the oldest anarchy server in *Minecraft*. Within its lawless environment, destruction and creation coexist in a continuous cycle. Despite having no formal rules, players have established a collective mythology around legendary events, bases, and players. Sites like the *spawn ruins* or ancient monuments are remembered and revisited as if they were sacred relics of a shared history. This transforms 2b2t from a simple server into a living archive of digital myth.

Across servers, platforms, and events, Minecraft's broader community engages in activities through spaces like YouTube, Twitch, and Reddit. These interactions help create a sense of belonging. Annual Minecraft Live events, memorial builds, and fan-made tributes act as cultural landmarks, bringing players together in celebration and nostalgia.

These behaviors are not religion in the strictest sense. Minecraft serves as a cultural mirror, reflecting our natural desire to find meaning, continuity, and community, even in virtual worlds.

4.4 Creative Mode and Transcending the Game's Limits

Free from danger and limitations, Creative mode offers infinite resources and unrestricted movement. This makes creation a meditative act.

Players describe Creative Mode as a peaceful digital sanctuary where imagination has no limits. The worlds built here become personal expressions of identity and artistry. They give devotion to creation rather than just gameplay.

The creative spirit is captured in the video "Minecraft isn't just a game. It's an art form" (Vox, 2016). This video showcases Blockworks, a global design group that builds entire worlds for museums and cultural institutions within the game. Their work shows how Minecraft goes beyond entertainment, evolving into a medium for collaborative art and digital craftsmanship.

Creative Mode serves as both a creative outlet and a communal ritual. It blurs the lines between play, art, and collective imagination.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Discussion of Results

The findings of this study show that Minecraft should not be viewed only as a game. It is a cultural space where creativity, cooperation, and symbolic expression have deep personal and collective meaning. Players do not worship the game, but their actions often resemble ritual, devotion, and emotional attachment found in cultural or spiritual activities.

In Minecraft's many worlds, creation becomes a meaningful act, offering stability, reflection, and self-expression. In Creative Mode, players experience a kind of emotional uplift through building and collaborating. Multiplayer communities like **2b2t** further illustrate how shared struggles and achievements foster belonging and collective memory.

These practices reveal humanity's desire for meaning and connection, even in digital settings. The worlds players create may not be sacred, but they are treated with care and carry symbolic importance, and sure do feel sacred. They serve as modern reflections of creativity and digital spirituality.

5.2 Limitations and Open Questions

This study's interpretive approach provides valuable insight into the symbolic and emotional aspects of Minecraft, but it has limitations due to its qualitative nature. The analysis relies on observation and community discussions instead of hard data. Future research could include player interviews or surveys to better understand how individuals view their experiences, whether as creativity, social connection, or personal reflection.

Comparing Minecraft with other creative platforms like Roblox or Fortnite Creative could also show whether similar symbolic or ritualized behaviors exist in different gaming cultures. Overall, the findings highlight how virtual spaces can create meaning, collaboration, and emotional depth. These turn play into a shared form of creativity and cultural expression.

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7 Screenshots