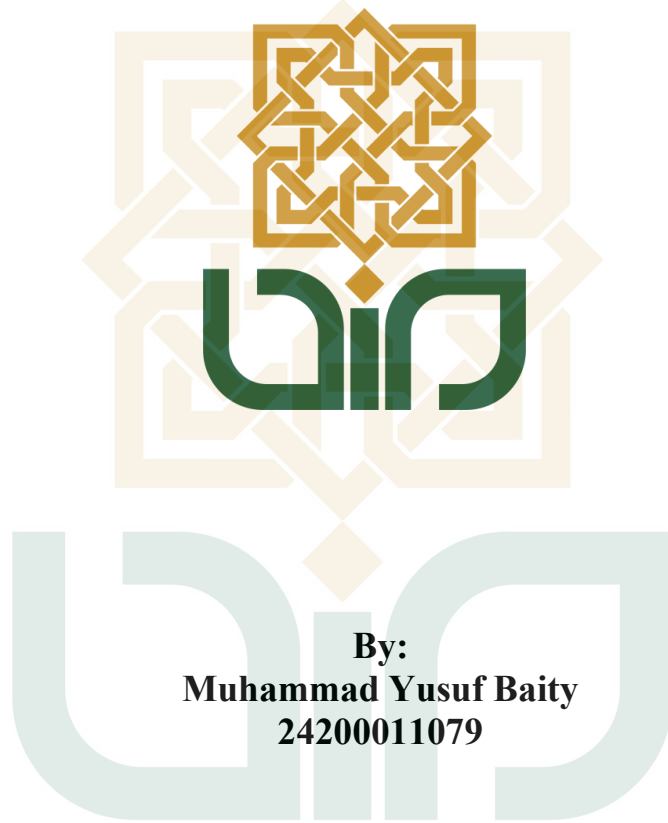


**RELIGION ON ROBLOX: A DISCOURSE ON
MEDIATIZATION AND RELIGIOUS MARKET**



By:
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A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Program of UIN Sunan Kalijaga
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (M.A.)

Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Program
Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies Concentration

YOGYAKARTA
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Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

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MOTTO

Opgeven kan morgen ook nog.



DEDICATION PAGE

First and foremost, I want to thank myself for choosing to survive against all odds, for learning from every mistake, and for believing that every journey has its own time. I also dedicate this work to the people who love me and wish me all the goodness. Thank you for being a place to come home to and a reason to keep moving forward on this journey. Without dismissing the significance of every process I've gone through, this work serves as a reminder that achievements never truly stand independently. There are always a struggle and people who sincerely walk alongside.



ABSTRACT

The emergence of the metaverse era apparently has expanded the scope of religious practice into digital environments that no longer serve merely as a medium of communication, but also as social spaces where religion lives. One platform that exemplifies this phenomenon is Roblox, which has encouraged the emergence of religious communities that bring religion into the virtual world through symbols—such as mosques and churches—and practices—such as preaching, religious lectures, and even simulations of worship in the form of virtual experiences. This demonstrates that religion has become part of the Roblox landscape, although in a form that has not yet been extensively explored academically. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer questions regarding how Roblox contributes to the discourse on the mediatization of religion and how the mediatization process unfolds when it intersects with the religious market.

This research uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method. Data were collected through participatory observation of religious communities on Roblox, specifically the Indonesian Roblox Council (MARIO) and the Archdiocese of Roblox Indonesia (KARI), accompanied by interviews with community organizers, analysis of digital documentation, and a review of supporting content on the social media platforms used by the communities. This data was then analyzed through Stig Hjarvard's framework of the mediatization of religion, supplemented by discussions on secularization and privatization. Additionally, religious market theory was incorporated to examine the economic dimensions of this phenomenon.

This research found that religion on Roblox does not exist in its native form. Rather, it is shaped by media logic that adapts religious practices into forms suited to the platform's characteristics, as well as by market mechanisms that influence how providers of religious "products" produce, distribute, and promote their religious activities. There is also a form of "banal religion" that differs from Hjarvard's formulation, since it contains explicit doctrinal promotion behind the circulation of symbols that seems merely aesthetic. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that privatization and deprivatization occur simultaneously (albeit at different levels), rather than as two sequential stages. Other findings in this thesis also emphasize how the processes of mediatization and the formation of a digital religious market mutually create and reinforce one another. These findings indicate that religion on Roblox is not a decline of religion, but rather evidence of its transformation into new forms that emerge from, and in turn shape, the digital platform environment itself.

Keyword: Roblox, Mediatization, Banal Religion, Privatization, Religious Market

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I understand that this thesis is definitely not perfect. Although many people assisted in the completion of this thesis in one way or another, I take full responsibility for any errors or mistakes. Therefore, I would greatly appreciate any constructive criticism and suggestions for future improvements. I hope this thesis will be beneficial to readers and contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

Yogyakarta, July 29, 2026
The Author,

Muhammad Yusuf Baity

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GLOSSARY

Celebgram	: Celebrity endorsements on Instagram.
Discord	: An instant messaging and VoIP social platform that allows communication through voice calls, video calls, text messaging, and media.
ESQ	: <i>Emotional Spiritual Quotient</i>
Experience	: Term for a map or 3D virtual world or game created on Roblox.
Gen Z	: demographic group born roughly between 1997 and 2012, following Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha.
Gen Alpha	: demographic group of people born approximately between 2010 and 2025, following Generation Z
GMJ	: <i>Good Morning Jesus</i>
HSM	: <i>Heman Salvation Ministry</i> (A Catholic church community in Surabaya)
KARI	: <i>Keuskupan Agung Roblox Indonesia</i> (Archdiocese of Roblox Indonesia)
MARIO	: <i>Majelis Roblox Indonesia</i> (Indonesian Roblox Council)
Metaverse	: A shared, immersive 3D virtual world where people use digital avatars to work, play, and socialize.
NgaCak	: <i>Ngaji di Puncak</i> (One of MARIO's lecturing agenda)
Roblox	: A popular online platform and game creation system.
Robux	: Currency used in Roblox
Tobat Blox	: An experience developed by MARIO.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

The development of digital technology has brought about fundamental changes in the way humans interact, build identities, and interpret their existence. In the context of religious life, this transformation is manifested in the shift of religious practices from physical spaces to digital spaces, where physical presence, which was previously a pre-requisite, can now be replaced by digital presence. This phenomenon can be understood as part of the process of the mediatization of religion—a process in which religious practices, symbols, and authority are shaped and negotiated through the media logic.¹ The media referred to in this discussion is digital media, which includes social media and its extension, the *metaverse*.² In this case, religion is in a condition where it no longer only uses media as a means of dissemination, but also adapts itself to the character of the media itself.

One such media platform will be highlighted in this thesis is Roblox. A game-based metaverse platform that allows users to create their own virtual worlds and experiences. With the platform's capabilities, some groups have begun to incorporate religious values and symbols into it. The Indonesian Roblox Council (MARIO) and the Archdiocese of Roblox Indonesia (KARI) serve as concrete

¹ Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (2008): 9–26. Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change," *Nordicom Review* 29, no. 2 (2008): 102–31.

² Metaverse is derived from the words meta (beyond) and universe. In other words, the Metaverse is a post-reality universe, an eternal and persistent multi-user environment that combines physical reality with digital virtuality. Stylianos Mystakidis, "Metaverse," *Encyclopedia* 2, no. 1 (2022): 486–97.

examples of groups that have intensely brought religion into Roblox. They also carried out several religious practices that attracted many people to become part of the religious community there. On the one hand, this demonstrates the increasingly public presence of religion and encourages its banalization. On the other hand, religion is also becoming increasingly privatized, given that Roblox allows religion to be practiced individually through digital devices and channels. This preserves what Turner calls “low-intensity religion”—a form of religion that is privatized and characterized by individualism.³

This issue of religion in Roblox is important to discuss since it illustrates how religion is imagined by a group of individuals who are not connected to institutionalized religion. These examples demonstrate the gradual weakening of institutionalized forms of religion in the public sphere and the rise of the individualization of religion. These developments represent a form of structural transformation toward a modern world that is part of the processes of secularization and mediatization.⁴ Regarding mediatization, secularization, and banalization, which were mentioned earlier, these concepts will be explained further within a theoretical framework in the following section. Therefore, this thesis will examine the extent to which Roblox influences the process of the mediatization of religion.

Mediatized religion also describes a transformation in which new media are introduced to both consumers and producers of religion.⁵ In Turner’s terms, the new

³ Bryan S. Turner, “Religious Speech: The Ineffable Nature of Religious Communication in the Information Age,” *Theory Culture & Society* 25, nos. 7–8 (December 2008): 231–33.

⁴ Stig Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion,” in *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (Nordicom, 2012), 23–24.

⁵ Oliver Krüger, “The ‘Logic’ of Mediatization Theory in Religion: A Critical Consideration of a New Paradigm,” *Marburg Journal of Religion* 20, no. 1 (2018): 7.

spirituality emerging in the modern world is truly a consumerist religion.⁶ Therefore, whether we like it or not, the process of the mediatization of religion will always intersect with the market. In this context, this thesis will also examine the intersection of the mediatization of religion with the digital religious market and how both play a role in shaping the dynamics of modern digital religiosity.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background described above, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of Roblox in the process of mediatization of religion?
2. How does the process of religious mediatization in turn intersect with commercialization and religious market?

C. Research Aim

This study aims to understand how the process of religious mediatization on Roblox unfolds through the influence of media logic. It analyzes how this process adapts forms of religious practice, community, and social presence into a digital space that provides a virtual religious experience. Furthermore, since the discussion of the mediatization of religion intersects with the market, this thesis seeks to analyze how Islamic and Catholic religious markets are formed and operate on the Roblox platform. It examines how these two communities shape the religious market arena and create audience segmentation within the digital ecosystem.

⁶ Turner, "Religious Speech: The Ineffable Nature of Religious Communication in the Information Age," 233.

Eventually, through an in-depth analysis of the Roblox platform and several religious groups that utilize it as a space for mediatization, this study is expected to address the research questions outlined above and make a slight contribution to the academic discourse on the mediatization of religion. By treating Roblox as a digital-social arena, this study can explain how religious reconstructions are built through digital interactions, avatar representations, symbolic expressions, and virtual spaces that replace or complement physical presence in conventional religious practices.

D. Literature Review

The study of the intersection of religion and digital media has grown rapidly over the past two decades. Generally, earlier research has focused on how new media have transformed religious communication, ritual practices, online communities, and individual religious experiences. These early studies highlighted how websites, online forums, and social media are used for preaching, evangelism, the dissemination of teachings, and the formation of religious communities that are not limited by specific geographical boundaries.

In this phase, Stephen Jacobs conducted research on how religious rituals are performed through the Virtual Temple and Virtual Church websites. He analyzed these religious websites and carried out a number of interviews with the web designers involved in developing the sites. Ultimately, he concluded that these sites were conceived as conventional sacred spaces, meaning that these new spaces were not perceived as something entirely new.⁷

⁷ Stephen Jacobs, "Virtually Sacred: The Performance of Asynchronous Cyber-Rituals in Online Spaces," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1103–21.

As the development of digital media has entered the metaverse, Nur Aisyah Fadillah and Ahmad Nailul Murad demonstrate how the metaverse has become a space for simulating the Hajj pilgrimage. In their work, they discuss the extent to which the metaverse can facilitate the Hajj through digital platforms.⁸ In this sense, Marco Adria believes that religious practices within the metaverse can provide a spiritual experience comparable to that of the real world. According to him, the accessibility of the metaverse fosters a sense of belonging and expands the capacity to mediate ways of being within online religious spaces.⁹

In another case, Sung-Hyuk Nam, in his work discussing the metaverse as a digital missionary arena, proposes that missiological discussions about the metaverse should promote a holistic understanding that highlights the interconnectedness of the two worlds—rather than viewing it through a dualistic lens. He emphasizes that this development is not opposed to the principles of the Christian Church; therefore, Korean churches need to understand the metaverse as a space for coexistence and the dissemination of religious values.¹⁰

Other studies on the relationship between religion and the metaverse can also be found in the research by Mustafa Yiğitoğlu, which examines a transformation that enables people to worship and pray virtually just as they do in the real world, thereby blurring the lines between religion and media.¹¹ Then, there

⁸ Nur Aisyah Fadillah and Ahmad Nailul Murad, “Virtuality of Online Religion in Cyberspace: Study of Virtual Hajj in Metaverse Discourse,” *Fitrah: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (2024): 29–44.

⁹ Marco Adria, “How to Worship in the Metaverse: Religious Experience and the Affordances of a New Medium,” *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 487.

¹⁰ Sung Hyuk Nam, “The Metaverse as a Digital Missionary Site,” *Ecclesial Futures* 4, no. 1 (June 2023): 18–30.

¹¹ Mustafa Yiğitoğlu, “Religious Virtual Living and Metaverse on the Real World,” *Afro Eurasian Studies* 10, no. 1 (April 2022): 5–14.

is the research by Henky Fernando et al. regarding the increasing practice of worship in the metaverse, which reshapes individuals' perspectives on the concepts of space, authority, and community within the context of collective worship in such a new space.¹² Similarly, Javier Fernandez's study of game-based metaverses highlights how the metaverse can become a new environment for religion to live in, and theorizes about changes in the nature of religious rituals, communities, and sacred elements within the metaverse, particularly through the so-called "Second Life" platform.¹³

In a more specific locus, studies on the mediatization of religion itself have also experienced significant development in recent decades. In particular, this concerns the media and supporting elements that operate behind this process. This study highlights that the media has its own logic that shapes how religion appears and functions in the public sphere. An example is the quantitative research conducted by Thomas Frissen and his colleagues on how Muslim communities represent themselves visually on Instagram. By analyzing 1,357 unique posts on Instagram that included hashtags related to Islam and Muslims, they provided a fundamental understanding of contemporary Islamic visual traditions. One of their findings, in particular, highlighted the importance of aesthetic aspects in the representation of religious identity on Instagram.¹⁴

¹² Henky Fernando et al., "Religion in the Metaverse Scheme: Practices of Worship in the New Media Age," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 26, no. 1 (June 2025): 12–26.

¹³ Javier Fernandez, "The Future of Religion Is Virtual Reality: Authenticating Religious Practice in the Coming Metaverse Through an Examination of Religion in Second Life" (University of California, 2024).

¹⁴ Thomas Frissen et al., "#Muslim? Instagram, Visual Culture and the Mediatization of Muslim Religiosity Explorative Analysis of Visual and Semantic Content on Instagram," in *European Muslims and New Media*, ed. Merve Kayikci (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), 141–69.

Still in the domain of social media, Sayeed Al-Zaman writes about how contemporary Bangladeshi society is using the YouTube platform to acquire religious knowledge as a means of living a pious life. He demonstrates how the production of religious content on YouTube continues to rise and become increasingly accepted by the digital community. This argument is supported by his observations, which show that viewers of this growing religious content on YouTube tend to give “likes” rather than “dislikes.” The findings of this study also confirm that social media (along with its media logic) influences Islamic practices as well as the production and consumption of religious content.¹⁵

This is in line with Rolando Perez-Vela's argument that today's media is not merely a channel for the dissemination of religious doctrines and beliefs. The places where mediatization takes place contribute significantly to the process of public rearticulation of religion, where traditional religious elements are being negotiated outside traditional sacred spaces. In this study, Perez-Vela conducted a number of interviews with several believers in Latin America who have embraced new media such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp in their spiritual journeys. He also found that mediated religious practices are shaping a new type of believer. They operate through social media and consume cultural industry products without completely detaching themselves from their traditional religious communities. This indicates the existence of a space within social media to reconnect with cultural worlds and products that tend to be marginalized by traditional religion. The

¹⁵ Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, “Social Mediatization of Religion: Islamic Videos on YouTube,” *Heliyon* 8, no. 3 (2022): e09083.

interviews he conducted also show that contemporary believers do not merely passively adopt religious offerings but also generate new discursive constructions while establishing new consumption paradigms to meet specific (religious) needs. In other words, the mediatization of religion shapes a new type of believer through the consumption of religious products, plays a role as a co-producer by modifying these products and ultimately provides new meaning upon their adoption.¹⁶

As can be seen, most previous studies have tended to view the media as the primary mediating factor in religion, focusing on the social and cultural implications of specific media use. Only a few studies have touched on market economic aspects, but they have not discussed in depth how these aspects contribute significantly to the process of the mediatization of religion. In this regard—although not directly related to the metaverse—Putri and Sunesti attempt to analyze the role of these economic aspects within the framework of mediatization. They found that the mediatization of religion through sharia housing advertisements constitutes a commodification of religion. Through this work, they demonstrate how the commodification of religion, guided by market logic, has the potential to influence Muslim consumption behavior.¹⁷

Thus, the main gap in existing literature lies in the lack of attention to discussions of secularization and privatization in the context of evolving digital platforms and the process of forming digital religious markets. This study seeks to

¹⁶ Rolando Perez-Vela, “The Mediatization of Religious Practices in Urban Daily Life: The Peruvian Case,” *Religions* 14, no. 5 (May 2023): 649.

¹⁷ Addin Putri and Yuyun Sunesti, “Mediatization and Commodification of Religion: A Study of Media Sociology in Sharia Housing Ads,” *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democracy and Social Transformation, ICON-DEMOST 2021*. (Semarang, Indonesia), 2022.

fill this gap by analyzing how religion is produced through the imagination of Roblox users—not merely as dogma and cultural elements, but also as commodities operating within market mechanisms. This is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation of religion in the digital age, namely as an intersection of technology, media culture, and the economic platform.

E. Conceptual Framework

This study relies on the concept of the mediatization of religion as the main framework for understanding the process whereby religion is no longer a dogma that uses the media as a conduit for disseminating its message, but rather becomes a product shaped by the logic and structure of the media itself. According to Stig Hjarvard,¹⁸ the mediatization of religion shows how the media has become an independent agent that mediates, represents, and transforms religious practices. In this view, the media does not merely broaden the outreach of religious messages, but also plays a role in shaping spiritual experiences, religious ways of thinking, and public perceptions of religious institutions. Hjarvard then emphasized that the mediatization of religion does not modify religion to produce a new religion, but involves interactions between various social changes and religion, which continues to be adjusted, with the emergence of individualization and secularization.

At the same time, the mediatization of religion is reshaping public representations of religion, while secularization is driving the decline and transformation of religious organizations, practices, and beliefs.¹⁹ Both are

¹⁸ Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion,” 11.

¹⁹ Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion,” 22.

interdependent because they share the same roots in globalization and modernization. Looking back, theories of secularization have often been associated with the disappearance of religion from society. However, Peter L. Berger regards this view as an outdated theory of secularization that does not align with empirical evidence in the field.²⁰ Therefore, secularization is better understood as a shift in the position of religion within the modern social order. This is characterized by a diminishing role for institutionalized forms of religion in society, accommodation of secular elements, and the transformation of religion into more individualistic forms.²¹ This aligns with Jose Casanova's analysis, which divides theories of secularization into secularization as religious decline, as differentiation, and as privatization.²² Thus, secularization signifies a social condition arising from the process of mediatization, which in this context drives the transformation of religion into the media sphere and its adaptation to the media logic.

As a consequence, what Hjarvard refers to as “banal religion” emerges. The term “banal” indicates how religious elements can operate more easily beneath the radar of conscious thought. Through their implicit nature, decontextualization, and non-propositional character, they do not appear as representations of religious issues, yet they continue to provide a religious backdrop in the public sphere.²³ Banalization does not mean that religion automatically loses its meaning or

²⁰ Peter L. Berger, “Secularization and De-Secularization,” in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, 1st ed., ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2002), 337.

²¹ Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion,” 23.

²² José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 7.

²³ Hjarvard, “Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion,” 36.

undergoes spiritual decline. Rather, it indicates a shift in how religion is present in everyday life. It can implicitly reinforce religion's public presence in culture and society through the media's portrayal of various symbols and actions.²⁴ In other words, when religion operates under the media logic,²⁵ religious symbols, narratives, rituals, and identities tend to be packaged in formats that are lighter and easily consumed by a broader public. Religion becomes part of popular culture, coexisting alongside entertainment, lifestyle, and media consumption practices. In the context of Roblox, for example, religious experiences can be realized through the construction of virtual mosques and churches, the hosting of interactive study sessions, and the use of avatars with religious attributes.

Those experiences demonstrate that religion is no longer understood solely through formal institutions but also through cultural representations that follow the mechanisms and logic of digital platforms. "Banal religion" and "banalization"—which Hjarvard identifies as one form of mediated religion—thus circulate outside the framework of religious institutions.²⁶ This transforms religion into a consumer product at the individual level, which in turn pushes religion back into the private sphere. Turner refers to this post-institutional form of religion as "low-intensity religiosity." It is a form of religion in which, in fulfilling the individual's need for meaning, it does not always place high demands on the individual. These privatized

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁵ A set of values, formats, and mechanisms that determine how messages are conveyed and received. As a key element in the process of mediatization, it is regarded as the framework that shapes the ways of thinking and acting within the media system. David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow, *Media Logic* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979); David L. Altheide, "Media Logic," in *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, 1st ed., ed. Gianpietro Mazzoleni (Wiley, 2016), 1, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc088>.

²⁶ Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion," 39–40.

forms of religious activity provide subjective sustenance to the individual but do not exert a significant influence on society.²⁷

Whereas in the past religious practices were largely guided by institutional authorities and took place in collective spaces, digital media now afford individuals much greater freedom to shape their own religious experiences. These trends toward individualization and privatization are fostered by the mediatization of religion. Individuals have the freedom to choose which religious figures to follow, which communities to join, which rituals to perform, and even which platforms best align with their preferences. All of this can be done independently at home and is easily accommodated by public technologies that support a lifestyle that is both mobile and home-centered. This is a form of mobile privatization that portrays people as mobile, while the spaces and devices of privatization—such as homes, cell phones, televisions, and radios—are stationary.²⁸ Religious authority is no longer singular and hierarchical, but rather fragmented and dispersed across various digital networks that compete with one another for users' attention. Religion is becoming increasingly personal and dependent on individual preferences within a digital space that remains structurally public, since it stays connected, visible, and negotiated with other users within the same network. In other words, in this context, religion faces a paradox in which it is simultaneously privatized and increasingly public.

²⁷ Turner, "Religious Speech: The Ineffable Nature of Religious Communication in the Information Age," 231.

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 26; Stephen Groening, "From 'a Box in the Theater of the World' to 'the World as Your Living Room': Cellular Phones, Television and Mobile Privatization," *New Media & Society* 12, no. 8 (December 2010): 1339.

This framework is then enriched by the religious economy approach, which views religion as a competitive arena where various actors offer religious “products” in the form of practices, experiences, symbols, and meanings to individuals who act as rational consumers. Just like the secular economy, it involves interactions between supply and demand.²⁹ So when there is a social interaction in which a person or group pays a price for a particular religious commodity, that is where the religious market emerges.³⁰ In this perspective, the sustainability and appeal of religious practices depend heavily on their ability to respond to market needs and preferences.

Essentially, the concept of the religious market derives from the vast number of religious choices (religious pluralism) that enhance participation and competition among religious institutions, causing religions to compete for the attention, trust, and commitment of the public.³¹ In the context of digital media, the logic of the religious market is further intensified because platforms provide a space that allows religious practices to be produced and consumed flexibly, cheaply, and limitlessly. The digital space, which is dominated by consumerism and promotional culture, encourages the digitalization and commercialization of religious products. This creates a world that mixes faith and commerce, secularizing the sacred and sacralizing the secular.³² In this case, religion has been reified and circulated by

²⁹ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2000), 193.

³⁰ Anthony J. Blasi, “A Market Theory of Religion,” *Social Compass* 56, no. 2 (2009): 264–65.

³¹ Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Introduction to the Economics of Religion,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 36, no. 3 (1998): 1486.

³² Bouziane Zaid et al., “Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices,” *Religions* 13, no. 4 (April 2022): 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>.

consumerism, which gives new forms and meanings to religion, and commercialization changes the orientation of religion from ‘belief and belonging’ to lifestyle, practice, and willing reception.³³

In this thesis, mediatization and secularization will serve as tools to explain that the transformation of religion is not merely a consequence of technological development, but also the result of a complex interaction between changes in the structure of modern society, the logic of digital media, popular culture, and the increasing autonomy of individuals in shaping religion within digital spaces. Furthermore, incorporating a religious market framework enables this study not only to understand changes in the forms of religious practice on Roblox but also how religion operates within the mechanisms of the digital market. Thus, the phenomenon of religiosity on Roblox is not understood as a deviation from conventional religion or merely an expansion of the space for proselytizing, but rather as a new manifestation of the highly complex process of religious transformation taking place in an increasingly digitized society.

Through this framework, Roblox is positioned as a space where religion is both mediatized by technology and influenced by the dynamics of the religious market. Therefore, this research positions Roblox as a socio-religious laboratory where the processes of mediatization and interaction between market demand and supply can be observed simultaneously, while also reflecting on new ways in which

³³ François Gauthier, “From Nation-State to Market: The Transformations of Religion in the Global Era, as Illustrated by Islam,” *Religion* 48, no. 3 (July 2018): 389, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2018.1482615>.

religious communities interact with technology and the meaning of spirituality in the digital age.

F. Research Methods

This thesis is a qualitative research study that utilizes digital ethnography as its primary method. Using this method, this thesis explores how users interact and what they experience while participating in religious practices on Roblox, as well as the construction of meaning that occurs in digital spaces. To that end, digital observations were conducted by participating in several religious activities on the Roblox platform, which serves as the primary place for religious practices in this context. Additionally, observations were conducted on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which serve as supporting platforms for encouraging participation in and interpretation of social and religious activities on Roblox. Because it is a comprehensive approach that refers to the exploration of digital platforms and their integration into a broader social context,³⁴ it allows researchers to understand how metaverses such as Roblox become spaces for spiritual expression and religious practices that are constantly negotiated between media logic and religious values.

In regard to its focus on religious practices in the virtual world of Roblox, this thesis examines two Religious communities, namely the *Majelis Roblox Indonesia* and the *Keuskupan Agung Roblox Indonesia*, which contribute to the promotion of spiritual values within the Roblox world. They were selected because

³⁴ Anna Neumaier, "Digital Ethnography," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 2nd ed., by Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg (London: Routledge, 2021), 217–28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003222491-16>.

they have a significant number of followers on their social media accounts and are considered to represent the diversity of religious expression in the digital world. In this thesis, they are not only positioned as agents of mediatization, but also as suppliers of commodities in the religious market.

To gain a comprehensive understanding and data on these phenomena, in addition to digital ethnography, digital content analysis will also be carried out on the digital activities performed by those communities. Both on the Roblox platform itself—which features religious symbols and interactive content—and on the social media pages they use to promote their agenda and expand their network. This is important for understanding religious expression and identity in the media, because although this method has many limitations, it allows researchers to look beyond the apparent content to the meaning behind it.³⁵

Interviews were also conducted with the key figures who initiated and contributed to the formation of these communities—such as the founders of MARIO and KARI, along with their teams. The same goes for some users who participate in religious practices on Roblox. Considering that interviews are an important way to learn many things that cannot be accessed through observation,³⁶ this method is expected to be able to explore the experiences, motivations, and reflections of the parties involved in the religious dynamics in the world of Roblox

³⁵ Diane M. Badzinski, Robert H. Woods, and Chad M. Nelson, “Content Analysis,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 2nd ed., by Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg (London: Routledge, 2021), 180–93, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003222491-13>.

³⁶ Tanya Marie Luhrmann, “Interview Methods,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, 2nd ed., by Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg (London: Routledge, 2021), 345–64, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003222491-24>.

as well as their background and other information related to their religious communities. In addition, an in-depth analysis of academic literature and websites related to Roblox was conducted, including regulations, user policies, and community guidelines, as well as other reference sources, particularly those related to religious expression, content regulation, and community interaction both within the same platform and across platforms. This step is also taken to provide a conceptual basis for the research findings.

G. Structure of Thesis

To gain a deeper understanding of this research, this thesis will be divided into five sections. The first chapter is an introduction that will provide a general overview of this research. It contains the background, research questions, research aims, review of literature, conceptual framework, sources and methods, as well as structure of the thesis.

Then, in Chapter Two, how the religious ecosystem has taken shape on Roblox as a new arena for religious life will be explored. The discussion begins with an examination of Roblox's characteristics as a metaverse platform that allows users to build virtual worlds, create communities, and engage in social interactions through avatars. It will then examine the emergence of various religious communities on Roblox and the networks that shape them. The analysis then focuses on how these communities leverage social media and its algorithms to expand their reach. This chapter also explains that the religious landscape on Roblox is shaped not only by religious institutions but also by creators, game

developers, influencers, and the users behind these practices, who enact religious authority and collectively build a digital religious ecosystem.

The next chapter will analyze how religion is practiced within Roblox's virtual spaces. The discussion focuses on emerging forms of religious practice, such as virtual worship gatherings, religious lectures, Mass, religious education, religious role-playing, the construction of digital places of worship, and the formation of religious identity through avatars. The analysis also examines how interactions among community members shape religious experiences that differ from religious practices in physical spaces. Additionally, this chapter discusses how the platform's logic shapes users' religious experiences. Through this discussion, this chapter demonstrates that religious practices on Roblox are the result of a negotiation between religious teachings, digital culture, and the platform's technological characteristics.

Chapter Four will form the core of the study's theoretical analysis. Building on the findings from the previous chapter, the discussion aims to explain how religious phenomena on Roblox offer a new perspective on the theory of the mediatization of religion. It analyzes how Roblox is not merely a medium for the dissemination of religion, but rather a space where religious practices are produced and consumed through the characteristics of the metaverse platform. This chapter discusses how Roblox shapes religious imagination and representations, how the banalization and privatization of religion emerge in virtual experiences and how virtual spaces enable the emergence of new and distinctive forms of religiosity.

The final chapter concludes the entire discussion in the previous sections. This section summarizes the answers to the questions posed in the first chapter. In addition, this chapter also contains the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research on the potential of virtual space as an arena for expression or other similar studies.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

According to the discussion presented, this study demonstrates that the religious practices carried out by the Indonesian Roblox Council (MARIO) and the Archdiocese of Roblox Indonesia (KARI) represent a new development in the process of religious mediatization within the digital era. The presence of religion on Roblox demonstrates how digital media is no longer merely a means of disseminating religious messages but has evolved into a space where religious practices themselves take place. Roblox was chosen as a medium for religious practices due to its position as a popular metaverse platform, particularly among digital natives. This situation indicates that religion continues to adapt to the direction of technological development and digital cultural trends to remain relevant to contemporary social interaction patterns.

The main argument of this thesis is that the religious practices and symbols circulating on Roblox are not merely a transposition of existing religions into a new digital medium, but also help to rearticulate the definition of digital religion itself. Through its features and elements, Roblox redefines what counts as a religious presence from something that is watched to something that is worn and performed, from piety legitimized by religious authorities to piety legitimized by market mechanisms and from religion existing in its own distinct time and space to religion that blends directly with the secular.

This rearticulation serves as empirical evidence for the development of the discourse on the mediatization of religion. A process in which religion submits to

the media logic—previously mapped largely through broadcast media and social networking platforms—is now entering a new phase through digital platforms that combine market economics with a comprehensive youth gaming framework. This thesis demonstrates that the mediatization of religion is not a process that stops at its forms in the broadcasting era or the social media era, but rather continues to evolve in accordance with the characteristics of the medium that accommodates it—and Roblox serves as concrete evidence of this development, as well as a case that illustrates forms of religious mediatization that are likely to become increasingly common on similar digital platforms in the future.

Furthermore, the analyses above consistently show that religion has undergone a form of translation—whether through the logic of the media, which constantly demands adjustments to certain aspects, or through market mechanisms that transform religious symbols into commodities. There is not a single point in this chapter where religion can be found in its “pure” form, unaffected from the external influences that surround it. This led to several interesting findings that are highlighted in this thesis.

One finding that needs to be underlined in this thesis is how the “banal religion” found on Roblox is a slightly different version from what Hjarvard characterized. The difference lies in the presence of explicit doctrinal promotion. According to Hjarvard’s framework, “banal religion” emerges from media that have absolutely no interest in promoting religion—such as soap operas or advertisements that incorporate religious imagery without the slightest intention of proselytizing. In Roblox, the situation is more complex. From the consumer’s

perspective, it is true that most players who wear a hijab or a cross necklace on their avatars do so without full religious awareness—this is what perpetuates the “banal religion” Hjarvard refers to. However, from the production side, a number of creators and developers who make these items and experiences actually have clear doctrinal interests that are openly declared, as reflected, for example, in posters encouraging worship and so on. In other words, the banality visible on the surface coexists with a layer of production that may not be banal at all, but is instead deliberate and explicitly carries a proselytizing message.

Another finding concerns where this process of mediatization is actually leading religion. What is happening on Roblox does not support the interpretation that religion is being marginalized or losing its relevance on the platform. Thus, rather than being called secularization, it is more accurately described as transformation. Religion is not declining but rather transforming—from sermons delivered at physical pulpits to lectures transmitted via Roblox (and Discord), from physical presence in mosques and church benches to symbolic presence through avatars adorned with religious attributes. Religion on Roblox does not indicate that it is declining; rather, it is transforming into forms that were unimaginable before the existence of platforms like Roblox.

This transformation also explains why privatization and deprivatization—two concepts often viewed as opposites—are actually occurring simultaneously in this case. At the individual user level, privatization occurs as users individually practice their religion on Roblox through their computer or smartphone screens. At the same time, however, at the organizational level, deprivatization occurs when

communities such as the Indonesian Roblox Council and the Archdiocese of Roblox Indonesia deliberately establish an organized presence in the same space. They are able to assert their authority, even reminding their members of the boundaries between virtual worship and actual religious obligations. Privatization and deprivatization, therefore, are not two sequential chapters in the history of religion on Roblox, but rather two processes that grow from the same roots and occur simultaneously.

Furthermore, within this entire process of mediatization, market mechanisms play a crucial role by operating in two directions simultaneously. On one hand, market demand dictates how religion on Roblox must be shaped. Religion here can be packaged as a product competing for the attention and reviews of its consumers. In this sense, the market is not merely a place where religion is bought and sold, but also helps determine the form that religion can take once it enters Roblox. Yet in the opposite direction, it is mediatization itself that created the conditions for the emergence of this digital religious market from the very beginning. If religion had not been subject to the logic of the media from the onset, there would be nothing that could be bought and sold as “religious goods” on Roblox. Mediatization drives the creation of raw materials, and subsequently, the market processes these raw materials into commodities that circulate and compete. Once the market is established, it in turn contributes to reinforcing mediatization itself.

Thus, referring back to the central question of this thesis, regarding how Roblox contributes to the discourse on mediatization, it provides some insight into

the evolving academic discussion on the mediatization of religion through the findings mentioned earlier. Consequently, when religion is present on Roblox as a highly complex metaverse platform, it cannot be understood through any single framework. It is shaped simultaneously by the complexities of media and the market, which adapt religion to an ever-evolving platform. Religion on Roblox is not something that has been fully formed, but rather an ongoing process that will continue as long as Roblox itself continues to grow and change.

Last but not least, there are several suggestions that may be useful for future research: Firstly, the author realizes that a single metaverse platform is insufficient to represent the entire metaverse—both current and future. Therefore, future research could expand the research object to other metaverse platforms beyond Roblox. Particularly those utilizing virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR), which are potentially even more immersive than Roblox. This is important to determine whether the dynamics of mediatization of religion and digital religious markets identified in this work also occur on platforms with different technological characteristics and user cultures. Furthermore, discussions related to religious experiences of users or audiences engaged in digital religious practices can also be included there. Since this research primarily focuses on mediatization and religious market, further investigation needs to dig deeper into how users interpret their spiritual experiences and how digital religious practices influence their religious lives in the real world would provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Secondly, a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between digital religion and the platform economy is also recommended for future research.

For example, this could involve the monetization of religious practices, donation practices within religious communities, or the use of Roblox currency, which requires users to exchange real money. These issues are important for understanding how technology and market mechanisms are increasingly influencing the way digital communities interact with religion.

Thirdly, considering that the case studies examined in this thesis are limited to digital religious communities in Indonesia, it is also necessary to explore other perspectives or phenomena that may be found in other parts of the world. Therefore, it is important to collaborate with international scholars. This will not only increase a researcher's visibility in the wider academic world but also enrich and broaden the discussion regarding the mediatization of religion within the market framework of metaverse platforms.



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