Türkiye İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi / Turkish Review of Communication Studies • Yıl/Year: 2026 • Sayı/Issue: 49 ss/pp. 256-272 • ISSN: 2630-6220 • DOI: 10.17829/turcom.1695068

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conflict of Tradition and the Modern in Digital Video Game Narratives: The Case of *Ghost of Tsushima*

Dijital Video Oyun Anlatılarında Gelenek ve Modern Çatışması: *Ghost of Tsushima* Örneği

Mehmet Emin SATIR[*]
Mert DEMİR[**]

Abstract

The interaction between tradition and the modern is one of the most fundamental issues in social theory. Especially the art of narrative, which has diversified with the opportunities provided by new media technologies, has not remained indifferent to this issue. Game storytelling, as a digital narrative, has emerged as a medium for portraying the interaction between tradition and the modern. At this point, the study examines the thematic conflict between tradition and the modern in *Ghost of Tsushima*, a digital video game. Through the thematic axes established through the dialogues and character structures in the game, it is emphasized that this conflict serves as a narrative trigger. In the study, in which the thematic analysis method was preferred, three main themes were identified under the titles "honour as a traditional value versus the modern," "traditional ethos versus modern ethos," and "technological development and the tradition–modern conflict." Based on this, the study found that the game *Ghost of Tsushima* explores the conflict between tradition and the modern across multiple dimensions, and that there are examples where this conflict is used as a functional element in digital narratives.

Keywords: Digital Game Narrative, Tradition, Modern, Cultural Conflict, *Ghost of Tsushima*

[*] Assoc. Prof., Izmir Katip Çelebi University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Media and Communication, İzmir, Türkiye, E-mail: mehmeteminsatir@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-5353-8742

[**] Res. Asst., Istanbul Beykent University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Media and Communication, İstanbul, Türkiye, E-mail: m.demirmert@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0009-6025-1120

How to cite this article/Atıf için (APA 7): Satır, M. E., & Demir, M. (2026). Conflict of tradition and the modern in digital video game narratives: The case of *Ghost of Tsushima*. *Turkish Review of Communication Studies, 49*, 256-272. https://doi.org/10.17829/turcom.1695068

Makale Geçmişi / Article History

Gönderim / Received: 08.05.2025 **Düzeltme / Revised:** 09.11.2025 **Kabul / Accepted:** 10.11.2025

Content of this journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Copyright © 2026 Mehmet Emin Satır, Mert Demir

Öz

Gelenek ve modern arasındaki etkileşim toplum kuramının en temel konuları arasında yer almaktadır. Modern olanın geleneksel olan üzerindeki etkisi veya ilkinin ikincisine direnmesi gibi olgular, toplum bilimcilerin ve anlatı sanatının her daim ilgisini çekmiştir. Söz konusu ilgi çeşitli veçhelerde günümüzde de sürmektedir. Özellikle yeni medya teknolojilerinin sağladığı olanaklarla çeşitlenen anlatı sanatı da bu konuya ilgisiz kalmamıştır. Bir dijital anlatı olarak oyun anlatısı, gelenek ve modern arasındaki etkileşimin işlenebildiği bir mecra olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu noktada çalışmada, bir dijital video oyunu olan *Ghost of Tsushima*'da gelenek ve modern arasındaki tematik çatışma ele alınmaktadır. Oyunun söz konusu bu çatışmayı temel bir anlatı aracı olarak ne şekilde kullandığı incelenmektedir. Diyaloglar ve karakter yapıları üzerinden kurgulanan tematik eksenler aracılığıyla gelenek ve modern çatışmasının bir anlatı tetikleyicisi olarak nasıl işlevsel kılındığı üzerinde durulmaktadır. Analiz aracı olarak tematik analiz yönteminin tercih edildiği çalışmada, "modern karşısında bir gelenek aracı olarak onur", "geleneksel etik modern etik karşısında" ve "teknik ilerleme bağlamında gelenek ve modern çatışması" başlıkları altında üç ana tema tespit edilmiştir. Buna göre çalışmada, *Ghost of Tsushima* oyununun gelenek ve modern arasındaki çatışmayı farklı boyutlarda ele aldığı; bu çatışmanın dijital anlatılarda işlevsel bir unsur olarak kullanıldığı örneklerin var olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Oyun Anlatısı, Gelenek, Modern, Kültürel Çatışma, *Ghost of Tsushima*

Introduction

The interaction between tradition and the modern has been a recurrent research topic in many academic disciplines, including sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies. The dichotomy between these phenomena has been examined historically in the context of social transformations, economic structures, and ideological shifts. However, the emergence of digital media, especially video games, has created a new space in which this dichotomy is narratively constructed and experienced. Among contemporary digital games, *Ghost of Tsushima* (released by Sucker Punch Productions in 2020) stands out as a particularly interesting example of how game narratives can encompass ideological and thematic tensions between tradition and the modern. By analysing the subtext and thematic architecture of the game, this study aims to explore how the conflict between traditional values and the imperatives that pave the way for the modern is represented in digital game narratives.

As a medium, digital video games are not only a means of entertainment, but also sophisticated narrative platforms that convey ideological structures. The possibilities offered by this medium, such as interactivity, emergent storytelling and world-building, open the door to an immersive interaction with cultural and philosophical discourses. Previous research has examined digital video game narratives from different perspectives such as culture, gender, ideology, identity, and representation (Keever, 2022; Malkowski & Russworm, 2017; Šisler, 2008; Soderman, 2010). However, the theme of tradition versus the modern as a fundamental narrative structure in digital video games has not been sufficiently examined. Therefore, this study situates *Ghost of Tsushima* within this thematic gap and explores how narrative elements, character constructions, and gameplay address the ideological struggle between commitment to tradition and the demands of a rapidly changing world for a variety of reasons– in our case, the exigencies of war play a dominant role.

In this study, the word "the modern" is used instead of "modernity" to refer not to a specific historical period or philosophical framework, but to a set of ideals, methods, and worldviews that stand in contrast to conventional cultural standards. This linguistic decision echoes the thematic framework of *Ghost of Tsushima*, where the struggle is not with modernity in its historical meaning, but with a broader idea of "modern" behaviour and ethics.

Ghost of Tsushima is set in 13th-century Japan during the Mongol invasion of Tsushima but the thematic tension that establishes the basic narrative extends beyond the mere depiction of a moment of historical struggle. The protagonist, Jin Sakai, is portrayed as the subject of a conflict between samurai traditions and the imperative to adopt non-traditional methods, including martial techniques, to repel the invaders. His moral and intellectual transformation reflects the broader question of whether tradition should be maintained at all costs or adapted to new circumstances. Through its narrative design, the game embodies questions that have long preoccupied scholars interested in the conflict between tradition and the modern: Is progress inherently opposed to tradition? Does the fundamental dynamic of progress stem from the forced impositions of the outside world? Can cultural heritage coexist with innovation or does adaptation require the abandonment of historical values?

The study is particularly interested in how the game's creative elements contribute to this thematic dichotomy. The distinction between the "samurai code" and "ghost tactics" in the game functions as a symbolic framework that outlines the ideological divide between tradition and the modern. Jin's adherence to the samurai code, which emphasizes direct and honourable warfare, is pitted against the necessity of stealth and deception tactics, which are considered dishonourable according to traditional norms but are essential for survival. By allowing players to choose the latter, the game mechanic serves as an interactive manifestation of the tension between historical fidelity and pragmatic adaptation. This tension is not just a narrative tool but a fundamental game mechanic that reinforces the thematic struggle through player agency and a forced-choice orientation.

The broader scholarly literature on tradition and the modern provides an important theoretical basis for this analysis. Classical sociologists such as Émile Durkheim (2013) and Ferdinand Tönnies (2001) theorized structural transitions from traditional *gemeinschaft* societies to modern *gesellschaft* formations and emphasized the sociocultural consequences of such transitions. Other sociologists have focused on how tradition functions as a stabilizing force or as a restrictive framework that hinders progress (Eisenstadt, 1966; Lerner, 1958). In today's digital age, these debates have a new resonance in the context of digital game narratives, where players can actively engage with ideological tensions through interactive storytelling and create a space of experience by encountering them firsthand. This study aims to demonstrate how digital narratives create a new field of experience by constructing spaces of ideological conflict or negotiation within the tradition–modern narrative, and to build a bridge between classical social theories and contemporary game studies.

Moreover, the thematic conflict in *Ghost of Tsushima* is deeply intertwined with historical memory and cultural identity. The game's depiction of the samurai ethos hosts a romanticized vision of Japanese tradition, drawing on cultural myths and historical symbols. At the same time,

the rigidity of tradition is questioned, and the notion of an immutable past is challenged. The game's exploration of tradition and the modern is not only a reflection of the historical period it depicts, but also a projection on contemporary concerns about cultural continuity and transformation.

In this study, a multidisciplinary approach is adopted, drawing on game studies, cultural theory and sociology to situate *Ghost of Tsushima* in the context of the above. In this context, the analysis of the game will focus on three main dimensions: (I) the narrative representation of tradition and the modern; (II) the thematic elements that reinforce the tension between these two; and (III) the broader cultural and ideological implications of the game's engagement with narrative adaptation in the face of historical authenticity. This study is thus guided by a perspective that treats digital video games not simply as entertainment, but rather as more complex cultural texts that embody, draw on, and are shaped by long-standing philosophical and sociological debates.

The study addresses how the tradition–modern dichotomy is narratively and interactively constructed in *Ghost of Tsushima* and how this construction reflects broader sociocultural meanings in digital game narratives. In line with this problem, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How does *Ghost of Tsushima* represent the tension between tradition and the modern at the level of narrative (characters, dialogue, plot)?
- In what ways are game mechanics (e.g., the samurai code vs. ghost tactics) used to make this tension experiential for the player?
- What sociocultural or ideological implications emerge from this representation for contemporary game studies?

In short, the analysis put forward in this study positions *Ghost of Tsushima* as a significant example of how digital games represent and narratively engage with the tradition–modern conflict. As this study demonstrates, the game's thematic depth extends beyond its historical setting, engaging with broader questions about the evolution of cultural values and the interplay between the tradition–modern dichotomy, which is constantly in flux over time. By approaching the topic from a different perspective, this research highlights the importance of digital video games as distinct sites of ideological and narrative exploration. It also contributes to a broader discourse on cultural transformation.

Fundamental Dynamics of Tradition and Modern

Tradition, which is considered a social phenomenon, is often discussed in the context of modernization thought. Deriving from the Latin root word *traditio*, tradition can basically be defined as what has passed from the past to the present (Shils, 1971, p. 123). At this point, the relationship between the past and the present is important, since there must be continuity between the two in order for tradition to be formed (Martin, 1943). Traditions, passed down through generations, surround individuals within the society in which they were born and shape their experiences, thoughts, and behaviours (Benedict, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007). It is critical to underline that tradition essentially has constitutive aspects for societies and individuals. Traditions not only have the potential to keep

a society together, but also to shape its overall way of life (Glassie, 1995, pp. 395–396). Therefore, it is important to underline the necessity of a binding relationship between tradition and social life. Within the ontological relationship between tradition and society, societies are shaped by tradition at some point. Thus, it is not possible to separate the phenomenon of tradition from any society. However, at a certain point, it is brought up for discussion on different axes. Especially, the debates on the traditional and modern social structure are concentrated in this area.

The debates between the traditional social structure, in which tradition plays a very dominant role, and the modern social structure, which is predominantly based on non-traditional elements, are extremely important in understanding the conflict between tradition and the modern. As a matter of fact, Durkheim's analyses on the axis of social solidarity can be regarded as pioneering in discussions of the separation between traditional and the modern societies. Durkheim (2013) emphasizes the concept of division of labour in determining the points where traditional and modern societies differ. The opposition between tradition and the modern, which Durkheim addressed through the division of labour theory, was addressed by Ferdinand Tönnies through community and society (Tönnies, 2001). Both Durkheim and Tönnies discuss the conflict between tradition and "the modern" on different levels in their sociological models. Here, it should be stated that the conflict between tradition and the modern is most fundamentally characterized within the framework of social space. These debates over modernization theories of the existence and functioning of societies are primarily used to make sense of social structure. In addition to Durkheim and Tönnies, there are many other studies that deal with the functioning and structure of traditional and modern societies and their positions in line with the idea of modernization (Eisenstadt, 1966; Inkeles, 1969; Lerner, 1958; Parsons, 1991).

The fact that tradition has a constitutive role for societies creates the conflict between tradition and the modern, but it also leads to the spread of this conflict to a social level. On this axis, it can be stated that the conflict between tradition and the modern has different aspects. A number of studies in the literature consider traditions and traditional ethos as an obstacle to modernization (Banfield, 1967; Harrison & Huntington, 2000; McClelland, 2010). This type of research mainly focuses on the resistance of tradition-bound societies and traditions to modern thought/modernization, and the handicaps these resistances pose to modernization. On the other hand, many studies in the literature emphasize that traditions do not have a significant problem with the modern; on the contrary, traditions can nurture modern thought and modernization (Eisenstadt, 2000; Gaonkar, 2000; Hefner, 1998). Therefore, the conflict between tradition and the modern does not have a single and generally valid plane. At this point, it is important to look at the basic dynamics and roots of the debate between tradition and the modern to make sense of the dichotomy between tradition and the modern.

Considering the basic dynamics of the conflict between tradition and the modern, it can be stated that there are conflicts around the difference in moral systems and value judgments, differentiation in social structure, economic structure, perception of time, the idea of change, and technological progress, all of which can be deemed critical. The belief systems and value judgments of traditional societies, which are primarily shaped by tradition, differ significantly from those of modern thought

and modern society. In traditional societies, religious thought and values are among the dominant elements that shape not only collective action but also collective thinking. In modern society, on the other hand, social and individual action is influenced by worldly knowledge, science, etc., rather than religious knowledge (Durkheim, 1995; Taylor, 2007). Though this differentiation fundamentally affects the entire cultural life of individuals, it reveals significant distinctions in value judgments. Hence, the distinction in values and moral judgments, where the conflict between tradition and the modern becomes apparent, is of great importance for the modern-tradition dichotomy.

Another basic dynamic of the conflict between tradition and the modern is found in social structures and institutions. The modern-tradition conflict can be traced in many areas such as gender, social roles, norms, social hierarchy, status, rituals, etc., especially in the family. In traditional and modern societies, there are significant differences in family roles and family economy, such as the division of labour, and so on (Gernsheim, 2002). Another dynamic in which the conflict between tradition and the modern emerges is the idea of change, technological progress, and time. It can be argued that the most important distinguishing elements between traditional and modern society are the metric system, calendar, and time (Weber, 1976). There are also important contrasts in the perspectives of traditional societies, shaped along the axis of tradition, and modern societies towards technology and the idea of progress.

There are significant differences between the attitudes of traditional societies towards technological developments and the idea of progress, and the attitudes of modern societies. In this regard, it should be noted that societies with strong traditional aspects and a traditionalist ethos may be more distant and resistant to the idea of progress (Nisbet, 1994). As a result, traditions, which have a foundational role in social life, can also be seen as a barrier to the idea of progress and modernization at different levels. Based on this, it can be concluded that tradition conflicts with the modern, and that this conflict has distinct components. The traditional-modern conflict, which is shaped on the axis of dynamics such as social value judgments, interpretation practices, social institutions, structures and norms still continues to exist in different forms at the very centre of society.

Digital Game Narration

Narrative is a notion that is almost as old as the history of how humans began to engage in meaningful communication with each other to represent, communicate, discuss, and transmit our knowledge about the world (Koenitz et al., 2022). According to Barthes and Howard, who says that there has never been a human time in the world without a narrative, this notion begins with human history itself (1988, p. 95). Abbott suggests that we create narratives every day in our lives, and we do so almost from the moment we begin to put words together: "As soon as we follow a subject with a verb, there is a good chance we are engaged in narrative discourse" (2008, p. 1). Narratives are basically a kind of story with a beginning, middle, and end, a temporality, one or more characters, and a plot (Launer, 2009, p. 167). Narrative, which can be understood narrowly as a piece of discourse in the form of a series of interrelated events, can be broadly defined as a historically

and culturally-associated interpretation of certain aspects of the world from the perspective of an individual, which performs as a universal discourse pattern (Iegorova, 2021, p. 180). Representing an event or a chain of events, narrative is a reflection of an interest in human life and is capable of transforming the contexts in which humans are situated (Bold, 2012, pp. 15–16). The role of narrative in making sense of life or in feeling and experiencing the phenomena inherent in social life is significant. In fact, human beings experience life in narrative form; individuals or groups acquire the realities that surround them through the affective data they receive and instinctively reformulate them in the form of a story (Launer, 2009, p. 167).

Moreover, unlike human life, which is often chaotic, narratives, thanks to their plot and temporality, enable people to build their daily lives on a certain structure and order, that is, to interpret them (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 6). Stating that a universe without narrative cannot be imagined because such a universe would be a world without history, myth, or drama. Ochs notes that narratives can be produced in all forms of oral, written, kinaesthetic, visual, and musical representation (Ochs, 1997, p. 185). Barthes emphasizes that there is always a narrative element in myth, legend, fable, fairy tale, epic, story, newspaper article, and even in speech (Barthes & Howard, 1988, p. 95).

Narratives typically involve a protagonist with an agenda that is supported or thwarted by other actors; events are often reflected from a participant's perspective, and narratives attribute a particular type of action to a certain category of actor, such as hero, traitor, victim, coward, etc. (Leerssen, 2010, p. 71).

Herman (2009) argues that four key elements play an important role in the creation of narrative: (i) situatedness, (ii) event sequencing, (iii) worldmaking/world disruption, and (iv) what it's like. According to Chatman (1975), every narrative consists of two parts. The first is the part called the story, which includes the content, the chain of events —in other words, actions and things that happen. Entities such as characters and places are also included in this part. In other words, the objects and people who realize, are exposed to, or provide the background for the events in the narrative constitute the story. The second part is called discourse and includes how the content is conveyed, how the narrative is articulated, and the means of expression used. In other words, the actual narrative expressions that constitute the narrative are included in this part (Chatman, 1975, p. 295). For a narrative to exist, its relationship to story and plot is crucial. Thus, a story contains information about an event or series of events (typically linear), while plot is the causality and connections between events; in this case, narrative is the unique way in which the story is presented to the audience (Ip, 2011, p. 107). Pointing out that narrative engages the listener and invites interpretation, Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999) argue that narrative also enables the transmission of some information that is not directly related to the development and transmission of events. In this case, the main criterion for what is relevant or not in the narrative, or what should or should not be told, is shaped by the narrator's choice and the listener's questions (Greenhalgh & Hurwitz, 1999, p. 48). To summarize, it can be said that narrative in the traditional sense is the presentation of a chain of events, which are mostly connected to each other by a certain cause-and-effect relationship, by building on a certain structure.

Developments in digital technology have significantly altered traditional narrative forms and storytelling styles. In today's technology, where traditional linear storytelling has been replaced by more interactive and participatory formats, narrative perceivers can now actively participate in the narrative through real-time feedback and collaborative platforms (Zafar et al., 2024). Through tools such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, social media, and hypertext, the one-way narrative structure has changed; consequently, forms that allow for the construction of more dynamic and interactive narratives have been put into use. Among these technologies, digital video games have not only transformed the story from narrated content but also made the narrative open to the player's direct intervention.

However, in today's academic literature, where it is still difficult to arrive at a generally agreed-upon definition of what exactly a digital game narrative is, it is generally based on pointing to ontological and phenomenological differences with more traditional forms of narrative for the time being (Koenitz, 2024). It would not be wrong to say that the debates in the literature focusing on digital video games take place between narratologists and ludologists. According to Domsch (2013), narratologists argue that digital video games are narratives, whereas ludologists argue that they are not. While ludologists argue that the essence of digital video games is too different to be defined by a single narrative form, narratologists argue that these games are narratives because of the characteristics they possess, just as a painting presents a visual narrative (Domsch, 2013, p. 15). While ludologists argue that games should primarily be studied for their unique interactive and structural elements, narratologists emphasize the storytelling aspects (McManus & Feinstein, 2006). As gaming technology advances, the tension between these approaches continues to evolve, with some scholars advocating for a combination of ludic and narrative elements to better understand the complex nature of digital games (Kokonis, 2014; McManus & Feinstein, 2006). Given all this, it can be argued that the clearest indicator distinguishing the narrative structure in digital games from the traditional format is that players' choices and actions can directly influence the narrative's course, leading to different outcomes and experiences (Mejeur, 2020). Such a structure supports dynamic, actor-dependent story flows that foster diversity rather than a single plot, distinct from the traditional narrative form. Each player can experience a unique narrative that is shaped based on their choices. Narrative in digital games is of great importance as an essential component of game content, and its role and function are very similar to that of narrative in cinema or literature: "In essence, it is the dramaturgy of any game that tells a story" (Elson et al., 2014, p. 525). In digital video games, narrative is integrated with game mechanics, enriching and deepening storytelling through introductions, contextualization, and level transitions (Zarzycki, 2016, p. 4). These games are more than the fictions they create; they exist primarily as games and encourage players to form a mental image of the game situation at any given moment (Domsch, 2013, p. 29).

The narratives of digital games often include the hero's journey (e.g., *The Legend of Zelda*); exploration and adventure (e.g., *No Man's Sky*); moral choices and ethical dilemmas (e.g., *Detroit: Become Human*); dystopia and future scenarios (e.g., *Cyberpunk 2077*); war and resistance (e.g., *Metal Gear Solid*); survival scenarios (e.g., *The Last of Us*); time looping and alternate realities (e.g., *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*); mythology and fantasy (e.g., *The Witcher*); personal stories

and psychological depth (e.g., *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*); and conspiracy solving (e.g., *L. A. Noire*). These themes offer different experiences depending on the game's genre and target audience and determine how the player is involved in the story.

At this point, in the narrative of *Ghost of Tsushima*, an open-world action-adventure game set in feudal Japan, which is essentially an AAA game about the main protagonist's journey, the player, as Jin Sakai, goes beyond traditional samurai values to fight against the Mongol invasion with a strategy that deviates from tradition and adopts a combative approach. The game's narrative emphasizes the conflict between the traditional samurai code and the role of the "ghost," who advocates a more flexible, ruthless, and often modern approach to fighting the enemy. This conflict is also characterized by the player's decisions and actions, while exploring the deep ideological divisions between tradition and the modern. As stated on the game's official website, as one of the last surviving samurai in 1274, honourable tactics will not lead to victory against the Mongol invasion: "But honourable tactics won't lead you to victory. You must move beyond your samurai traditions to forge a new way of fighting—the way of the Ghost—as you wage an unconventional war for the freedom of Japan" (IMDb, n.d.).

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that despite these differences, the specific qualities of digital game narratives—interactivity, agency, and the fusion of mechanics and narratives—create a unique platform for the representation and living experience of ideological tensions between tradition and the modern. *Ghost of Tsushima* represents a prime example in this sense because it inscribes not only the struggle between tradition and the modern into its fictional world but also extends it into its very design. The contrast between the samurai code and the ghost tactics displaces the ideological struggle into a lived experience for the gamer, enabling them to live into the moral and cultural choices associated with the modern. In these conditions, *Ghost of Tsushima* represents a living laboratory for narratives in which traditional values are juxtaposed with the modern values that are condemned to permanently negotiate with them. Based on these theoretical considerations, the subsequent section explores this tension in connection with three interrelated topics: honour, a traditional value contrasted with the modern value, traditional ethos contrasted with the modern ethos in general terms, and technological development related to the tradition–modern binary opposition.

Method

The conflict between tradition and the modern can be observed in many different fields. Although primarily a cultural and social phenomenon, this conflict unfolds across a wide range. The aim of this study is to trace this conflict in digital game narratives and to examine its role in them. In this context, the study was conducted within the limitations of *Ghost of Tsushima.* The narrative of the game was analysed within the framework of the tradition–modern conflict and subjected to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns and themes in data, thematic analysis is employed to organize and identify these data with their details. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

The primary data consists of the game's main quests and accompanying character dialogues. The authors played the game from start to finish for approximately 20 hours, focusing on scenes that highlight the tension between traditional values (e.g., honour, loyalty, and ritual) and modern strategic/rational choices (e.g., secrecy, technology, and innovation in warfare). Side quests and open-world exploration content were excluded to maintain the analytical focus.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-stage framework. On this basis, (I) Familiarization with data: The authors completed the game experience and took detailed notes on dialogues, cutscenes, and mission structure; (II) Generation of codes: Dialogues, narrative events, and game sequences have been manually coded as examples in which the tension between tradition and the modern stands out. The codes have been created both deductively (based on theoretical concepts: "ethos," "honour," "technological divergence") and inductively (derived from data); (III) Combining codes into themes: Codes were grouped under specific preliminary thematic categories, such as honour, survival, tradition, and samurai spirit; (IV) Reviewing themes: Categories and data were reviewed again to ensure the themes were internally consistent and distinct; (V) Determine significance of themes: The final themes were explained in relation to the broader cultural and narrative context of the conflict between tradition and the modern; and (VI) Reporting of findings: The findings section presents how these themes are symbolically and narratively staged in the *Ghost of Tsushima* game.

Honour as a Traditional Value versus the Modern

In shaping game narratives, many themes can be employed functionally. To accelerate game narratives and make the player more active in them, many elements can align with the game story. A clear example of this issue can be seen in *Ghost of Tsushima*. The most important element in the game's narrative is the conflict between tradition and the modern. This conflict, which runs through the game's narrative, not only gives the story momentum but also has been highly effective in organizing the game's introduction, development, and conclusion. The first theme in which the conflict between tradition and the modern becomes apparent in the game's narrative is honour. It should be emphasized that the dichotomy between tradition and the modern is at the heart of the conflict between the protagonist Jin Sakai and his uncle, Lord Shimura.

The phenomenon of "honour," which can be considered as the first indicator of the conflict that occurs at many points throughout the game, is at the centre of this conflict. Indeed, in the game Jin Sakai said, "The Mongol Empire is invading our home, they are brutal. Relentless. Unstoppable... We will face death and defend our home," while Shimura says, "Tradition, courage, honour. They are what make us." underlining the vital role of tradition in general and honour in particular in the formation of Japanese identity. In this context, Shimura makes honour and tradition an ontological reference point. Similarly, Shimura made a speech to Sakai when he was a young boy. Once Shimura said, "A samurai must always fight with patience and discipline even when his opponent resorts to trickery... For generations, our families have lived by a code. Tell me the virtues that guide us." He conveyed the role of tradition, cultural codes, and virtue to Sakai. On many points of tradition and

honour, Sakai stands in the same place as his uncle Shimura. Sakai tells his friend Yuna: "Before the samurai, this island was ruled by criminals. We changed that by creating order and delivering justice in the open. We live by a code of honour. And sometimes we die by it," referring to the founding role of tradition. At this point, it must be underlined that the relationship between tradition and samurai is based on honour. After underlining the roles of honour, tradition, and cultural codes for samurai and the Sakai family, it is necessary to trace their role in the conflict between tradition and the modern. At this point, a few aspects of the game are noteworthy. As Sakai tries to come up with a series of solutions to deal with the enemy and save his island, he asks Yuriko to teach him how to make poison. Thus, he will be able to use poisonous weapons and save his island from the Mongol invasion. The dialogue between Yuriko and Sakai is interesting in this context. Yuriko says, "Poison has never been the Sakai Way," highlighting the Sakai family and samurai traditions and honour. In response to this, Sakai says, "No, Sakai had to fight the Mongol Empire. I need every weapon we have. Tsushima cannot afford anything less." Yuriko tells Sakai that he has changed. Sakai replies to Yuriko, "The World has changed."

At this point, it is necessary to evaluate the knowledge of poisonous weapons as a modern phenomenon. In the end, the poisonous component falls within the field of chemical science, and references are made to rational knowledge here. Yuriko, on the other hand, emphasizes the conflict between tradition and the modern, arguing that this situation is incompatible with samurai traditions and customs. In fact, the production of poisonous weapons has also led to conflict between Sakai and Shimura. In response to Sakai's use of poisoned weapons, Shimura says "An act of terror... If you continue down this path, you will be no better than the Mongols. I trained you to fight with honour" and criticises him. As can be seen, Shimura rejects Sakai's choices and unconventional practices in favour of honour. This opposition between the two led to very serious conflicts. Indeed, Shimura accuses Sakai of being a traitor for embracing practices that could be considered "modern" and outside tradition. Shimura says, "Honour me with a warrior's death," while Sakai replies "I have no honour." As seen here, honour-based conflict arises between tradition and the modern. While Sakai represents a reformist, innovative generation, Shimura remained in a traditional orbit. The central motif of this conflict is honour. The idea of honour, which constitutes the first stake of the conflict between tradition and the modern, which appears to be a conflict of generations, is also considered one of the basic founding elements of traditional thought.

Traditional Ethos versus Modern Ethos

Another dimension in which the conflict between tradition and the modern becomes evident is the tension between traditional and modern ethos. As is well known, ethos refers to the general tendencies, thoughts, and behaviours of a society. Therefore, societies develop a distinct ethos that shapes specific patterns of thought and behaviour. On this axis, it is important to underline that there are many points in the game's narrative where the traditional and modern ethos clash. Characters such as Lord Shimura and Yuriko, who represent the traditional ethos, often take a critical stance toward Sakai, who embodies modern tendencies and ethos. Within the game's framework, the traditional ethos is based on social phenomena such as the samurai, customs and traditions, clan

ties and belonging, and the Shogunate. This commitment is further illustrated in a dialogue between Shimura and Sakai. In response to Shimura's question, "Tell me the virtues that guide us," Sakai replies, "To fight bravely and uphold the legacy of Clan Sakai," and underlines the dominant role of clan belonging and organisation. Indeed, alliances such as clans, tribes, and families are recognised as critical structures in traditional societies.

Regarding the structure of the ethos of samurai as a social institution that embodies tradition and traditional thought, Shimura said, "Look him in the eye and teach him a samurai never acts out of anger or fear. And take his life with honour. Only cowards strike from the shadows." Criticising Sakai's different tactics in battle, Shimura offers him a traditional ethos, a bundle of ideas rooted in samurai and honour. This dialogue shows that the role of the traditional ethos in the conflict between tradition and the modern can be extremely decisive. While Shimura sees himself as perpetually justified in leaning on tradition and speaking on its basis, he implicitly criticizes and devalues innovation and what is modern. Shimura makes similar statements to Sakai many times throughout the game. In order to see Shimura's inclination towards the traditional ethos, it is interesting to consider his statement "One day, our people will look to you as their leader. You will become their honourable Jito. Backed by all the power of the shogun." Emphasising that Sakai needs the shogunate's power and influence to gain authority and become a charismatic figure is extremely important for understanding the traditional ethos. At this point, it should be noted that the conflict between tradition and the modern is handled within the framework of ghostliness, which is crucial to the game's narrative.

Later in the game's narrative, the character Sakai transforms into a form characterised as a ghost beyond traditional samurai and cultural codes. In this form, Sakai adopts a more aggressive and modern fighting style. His rules are more innovative and modern. He uses a wider range of weapon techniques and positions, thus reflecting the modern ethos. Shimura expressed his displeasure with this situation by saying, "When our island is saved, you will be heir to clan Shimura, not as a ghost, but as a samurai." As can be seen, according to Shimura, Sakai's transformation into a "ghost" is undesirable. Therefore, it creates a conflict between the traditional ethos and the modern ethos. Similarly, Shimura criticizes Sakai's understanding of the expression "You are acting like the enemy" and emphasizes that Sakai is outside the traditions and traditional ethos. As a matter of fact, the Shogunate, the apex of traditional authority, declares Sakai a traitor in the later parts of the game. Shimura informs Sakai of this fact with this statement: "The Shogun has disbanded clan Sakai. As of today, you are no longer samurai... The Shogun has declared you a traitor." As can be seen, the traditional ethos characterized modern approaches and initiatives as traitorous and, as a result, punished Sakai. When evaluated in this context, the conflict between tradition and the modern also manifests as a clash of thought and ethos within the game's narrative. Shimura's adherence to tradition, his traditional ethos, and samurai ethics make Sakai say to him, "You are a slave to it." By characterizing Shimura as a slave to tradition and samurai ethics, Sakai essentially hints at the conflict between the traditional and the modern.

Technological Development and the Tradition–Modern Conflict

Technology and scientific knowledge are another plane where the conflict between tradition and the modern emerges. It should also be emphasized that the significant differences between traditional and modern societies are also realized on this ground. While modern life implies a more information and technology-based rational cycle in terms of world imagination, perception of social phenomena, and coordination of daily life, it is observed that traditional social structures are dominated by more flexible, traditional behaviour and thought patterns. In the game, the most prominent example of the conflict between tradition and the modern driven by technological development is the use of the Hwacha.

The Hwacha is a type of modern weapon used by Mongolian forces to fire multiple arrows rapidly. A highly effective weapon, the Hwacha catches Sakai's attention. Shimura tells Sakai, who sees the Hwacha and is impressed, "A weapon of the enemy. Not Samurai," In fact, this is extremely important in terms of comprehending the attitude of Shimura, a representative of the traditional ethos, towards modern technology. Sakai replies, "Saving our people is all that matters... I will learn." As can be seen, Sakai's attempt to go beyond traditions can be considered as a reflection of his will to become modern. By seeking new ways and methods when necessary, Sakai ultimately adapts an allegory of the modern to his own conditions. Thus, Sakai, who demonstrates this desire and motivation in the production of poison arrows as mentioned above, utilises technological support to improve the existing conditions. Given the conditions of the period, making poison weapons can also be considered as an extension of chemical technology. Shimura constantly criticises Sakai's use of poison, saying, "The Ghost was an outlaw. He taught our people to defy their leaders." Sakai, in response, voices the phrase "to defend themselves." Shimura terrorises Sakai's act of using poison by saying, "with poison?" At this moment, it is worth noting a severe conflict between tradition and the modern. Given the close relationship between technology and culture, it is clear that poison technology is incompatible with traditional culture.

This discomfort is observed not only in Shimura but also in the statements of Yuriko, who is Sakai's nanny. While Yuriko emphasises that poison cannot be a style of Sakai, she also draws attention to the limits of the relationship between traditional identities, samurai, and technology. It should be particularly underlined that the use of technical knowledge in traditional social formations is not the same as the use of technical knowledge in modern social formations. Hence, this difference manifests itself at many points in the game. Sakai, who wants to overcome the limits of tradition and acquire modern skills, methods, and knowledge, draws a modern path by engaging in extremely serious clashes with traditional authorities and institutions.

Conclusion

The conflict between tradition and the modern is a multi-layered issue that has been addressed in many fields of social sciences. Regarding the historical context, it can be argued that the projections of this conflict are broad and widespread. At this point, many social changes and technological developments have reinforced and popularised the conflict. Therefore, the conflict is characterised

by many sources. Social institutions and structures, norms, social organisation, the division of labour, and so on are vital for capturing the projections of this conflict. This conflict, which is supported by widespread grounds, is addressed and clarified across various narrative genres and in scientific research. Especially game narratives, which are considered a form of digital narrative, are important for tracing the conflict.

As this research shows, the conflict can be embodied in game narratives through a series of appearances. In *Ghost of Tsushima*, the conflict between tradition and the modern is symbolised through the characters Jin Sakai and Lord Shimura. Shimura, who is portrayed as the defender of tradition, problematises the foundations and social manifestations of being modern by developing discourses in opposition to Sakai, who advances modern initiatives and reveals his will towards the modern. At this level, it is observed that the conflict in the game primarily occurs across three areas: technological advancements and scientific knowledge; honour, clan justice, and samurai ritual; and manifestations of traditional ethos.

By describing Sakai's innovative thoughts and attitudes as unworthy of samurai, untraditional, and dishonourable, Shimura reveals the role played by traditionalism in the development of a discourse against the modern. As emphasised within the scope of the research, the notion of honour is employed very functionally in this regard. In the conflict that takes place on the axis of technological developments and scientific knowledge, the production of poison and the use of the firearm named the Hwacha are noteworthy. While these two technical leaps are described as untraditional by Shimura, the will and means of being modern are brought into question. The final dimension is the conflict between the traditional and modern ethos. Characters such as Shimura and Yuriko, within the game's narrative, are critical of modern means and Sakai's modern thoughts, thereby crystallising the traditional ethos. At this point, it should be underlined that the most important manifestations of the conflict take place on the plane of ethos. Especially in the criticisms directed against the new style of warfare and attack techniques adopted by Sakai, the discursive barriers brought by the traditional ethos to the desire for modernisation are striking.

Ghost of Tsushima deals with the conflict between tradition and the modern through a complex narrative and interactive design. From a narrative perspective, the conflict is addressed pragmatically by tracing Jin Sakai's transformation into an actor who adopts tactics that cannot be reconciled with a samurai committed to honour. From an interactional perspective, the player is constantly confronted with moments of decision that reflect the tension that this conflict manifests, reinforcing the ideological struggle at the centre of the narrative. Through this dual perspective, it becomes clear that the modern is not inherently at odds with tradition but emerges out of situational necessity as a response to external threats and internal contradictions. Accordingly, in the game, tradition and the modern are not regarded as constant opposites. Instead, this dichotomy is presented as a narrative that frames the multifaceted nature and the dynamically negotiated elements of cultural identity in turbulent times.

To conclude, in the *Ghost of Tsushima*, the conflict between tradition and the modern is a primary source of motivation in the game's narrative. While this conflict drives the story, it also

shapes the game narrative, leading to the actual conflict between Shimura and Sakai. Here, it should be stressed that this conflict is a constitutive element of the game. Therefore, this conflict can also function as a tool for digital narratives. It should also be noted that the conflict between this duality can manifest in many dimensions and ways. As this research shows, the conflict between tradition and the modern is a practical element in the creation of narratives, especially in game narratives.

Author Declarations

Peer Review Statement: This article has been evaluated through a double-blind peer review process.

Plagiarism Check: The article was scanned with intihal.net and iThenticate program and found to be in compliance with the journal's plagiarism policy.

Conflict of Interest: The author(s) declares to have no conflict of interest.

Financing and Project Support: No institutional/financial support was received for this study.

Ethics Committee Approval: This study does not require ethics committee approval.

Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools: No AI tools were used in this study.

CRediT Author Contributions Statement: Conceptualization: M.E.S. & M.D.; Methodology: M.E.S. & M.D Software: M.E.S. & M.D; Validation: M.E.S. & M.D; Formal analysis: M.E.S. & M.D; Investigation: M.E.S. & M.D; Resources: M.E.S. & M.D; Data curation: M.E.S. & M.D; Writing – original draft: M.E.S. & M.D; Writing – review and editing: M.E.S. & M.D; Visualization: M.E.S. & M.D; Supervision: M.E.S. & M.D; Project administration: M.E.S. & M.D.

Data Sharing Statement: No new data were generated or analyzed in this study. Data sharing does not apply to this study.

References

Abbott, H. P. (2008). Narratives and life. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (pp. 1–12). Cambridge University Press.

Banfield, E. C. (1967). *Moral basis of a backward society*. Free.

Barthes, R., & Howard, R. (1988). *The semiotic challenge*. Basil Blackwell.

Benedict, R. (2006). *Patterns of culture*. Mariner.

Bold, C. (2012). *What is narrative*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.

Chatman, S. (1975). Towards a theory of narrative. *New Literary History*, *6*(2), 295–318. https://doi.org/10.2307/468421

Creswell, D., & Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Domsch, S. (2013). *Storyplaying: Agency and narrative in video games*. De Gruyter Publications.

Durkheim, É. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life*. Free.

Durkheim, É. (2013). *The division of labor in society*. Palgrave.

Eisenstadt, S. N. (1966). *Modernization: Protest and change, Englewood Cliffs*. Prentice–Hall.

Eisenstadt, S. N. (2000). Multiple modernities. *Daedalus*, *129*(1), 1–29.

Elson, M., Ivory, J. D., & Quandt, T. (2014). More than stories with buttons: Narrative, mechanics, and context as determinants of player experience in digital games. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(3), 521–542. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12096

Gaonkar, D. P. (2000). *Alternative modernities*. Duke.

Gernsheim, E. B. (2002). *Reinventing the family: In search of new lifestyles*. Polity Press.

Glassie, H. (1995). Tradition. *The Journal of American Folklore*, *108*(430), 395–412. https://doi.org/10.2307/541653

Goodson, I. F., & Gill, S. R. (2011). The concept of narrative. *Counterpoints*, *386*, 3–16.

Greenhalgh, T., & Hurwitz, B. (1999). Why study narrative? *Bmj*, *318*(48). https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.318.7175.48

Harrison, L., & Huntington, S. P. (2000). *Culture matters: How values shape human progress*. Basic.

Hefner, R. W. (1998). *Market cultures: Society and morality in the new Asian Capitalisms*. Westview.

Herman, D. (2009). *Basic elements of narrative*. John Wiley & Sons.

Iegorova, A. V. (2021). Nature and constitutive features of narrative as universal discourse pattern. *Transcarpathian Philological Studies*, *18*, 180–185. https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2021.18.32

IMDb. (n.d.). *Ghost of Tsushima*. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7651352/?ref_=ext_shr_lnk

Inkeles, A. (1969). Making men modern: On the causes and consequences of individual change in six developing countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, *75*(2), 208–322. https://doi.org/10.1086/224767

Ip, B. (2011). Narrative structures in computer and video games: Part 1: Context, definitions, and initial findings. *Games and Culture*, *6*(2), 103–134. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010364982

Keever, J. (2022). Videogames and the technicity of ideology: The case for critique. *Game Studies*, *22*(2).

Koenitz, H. (2024). Narrative in video games. In N. Lee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of computer graphics and games* (pp. 1230–1238). Springer.

Koenitz, H., Barbara, J., & Eladhari, M. P. (2022). Interactive digital narrative (IDN)—New ways to represent complexity and facilitate digitally empowered citizens. *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia, 28*(3–4), 76–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614568.2023.2181503

Kokonis, M. (2014). Intermediality between games and fiction: The "ludology vs. Narratology" debate in computer game studies: A response to Gonzalo Frasca. *Film and Media Studies*, *9*, 171–188. https://doi.org/10.1515/ausfm-2015-0009

Launer, J. (2009). Why narrative? *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, *85*(1001), 267–168. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/pgmj.2009.079871

Leerssen, J. (2010). Setting the scene for national history. In S. Berger & C. Lorenz (Eds.), *Nationalizing the Past. Writing the Nation: National Historiographies and the Making of Nation States in 19th and 20th Century Europe* (pp. 71–85). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lerner, D. (1958). *The passing of traditional society: Modernizing the Middle East*. Free.

MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After virtue: A study in moral theory*. University of Notre Dame Press.

Malkowski, J., & Russworm, T. M. (2017). *Gaming representation: Race, gender, and sexuality in video games*. Indiana University Press.

Martin, L. (1943). On Tradition, belief, and culture. *The Journal of Philosophy*, *40*(4), 100–105.

McClelland, D. (2010). *The achieving society*. Martino Fine.

McManus, A., & Feinstein, A. H. (2006). Narratology and ludology: Competing paradigms or complementary theories in simulation. *Proceedings of the Annual ABSEL conference*, *33*.

Mejeur, C. (2020). Playing with playthroughs: Distance visualization and narrative form in video games. *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *14*(3).

Nisbet, R. (1994). *History of the idea of progress*. Routledge.

Ochs, E. (1997). Narrative. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as structure and process: Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 185–207). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221884.n7

Parsons, T. (1991). *The social system*. Routledge.

Shils, E. (1971). Tradition. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *13*(2), 122–159. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500006186

Šisler, V. (2008). Digital Arabs: Representation in video games. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *11*(2), 203–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407088333

Soderman, B. (2010). Every game the same dream? Politics, representation, and the interpretation of video games. *Dichtung Digital Journal für Kunst und Kultur digitaler Medien*, *12*(1), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/17734

Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. Harvard University Press.

Tönnies, F. (2001). *Community and civil society*. Cambridge University Press.

Weber, E. (1976). *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France 1870–1914*. Stanford University Press.

Zafar, Q., Jabeen, G., Asif, M., & Rauf, Z. (2024). Exploration of how digital media and technology are changing narrative forms and literary consumption. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, *13*(3), 264–272. https://doi.org/10.61506/01.00486

Zarzycki, A. (2016). Epic video games: Narrative spaces and engaged lives. *International Journal of Architectural Computing*, *14*(3), 201–211. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478077116663338