

EVOLUTION OF GAME DESIGN ELEMENTS IN POKÉMON AND ANIMAL CROSSING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

The gaming industry has undergone significant evolution, witnessing advancements in technology, design methodologies, and player preferences. Among standout franchises, Pokémon and Animal Crossing have captured global attention with their distinctive gameplay experiences. This thesis delves into the evolutionary trajectory of game design elements within these franchises, explaining their transformation over time and the implications for players and developers.

Pokémon made its debut in 1996, introducing players to a world inhabited by fantastical creatures known as Pokémon, which trainers capture and train for battles. Its turn-based combat system, collection mechanics, and social interactions revolutionized the role-playing game (RPG) genre. Animal Crossing emerged in 2001, offering a serene life simulation experience where players reside in a village populated by anthropomorphic animals, engaging in various activities such as fishing, bug catching, and home decoration. Both franchises gained immense popularity, spawning sequels, spin-offs, merchandise, and influencing popular culture beyond gaming.

Initially, Pokémon relied on sprite-based graphics and limited hardware capabilities, constraining its gameplay mechanics. However, subsequent iterations capitalized on technological advancements to introduce 3D graphics, online multiplayer features, and augmented reality elements, enhancing player immersion and interactivity.



Figure 1 – comparison of sprite-based graphics in the initial Pokémon games with modern 3D graphics

In contrast, Animal Crossing maintained its quaint charm and simplicity throughout iterations, prioritizing player autonomy, community-building, and real-time gameplay mechanics. While Pokémon embraced competitive gaming and strategic depth, Animal Crossing focused on fostering emotional connections and providing a tranquil escape from reality.



Figure 2 – A serene village scene from Animal Crossing: New Horizons

The evolution of Pokémon's game design brought numerous advantages, including expanded gameplay features, enhanced graphics, and a thriving competitive scene. However, it also faced criticism for repetitiveness and monetization practices in recent games. Conversely, Animal Crossing's enduring appeal lies in its relaxing atmosphere, wholesome interactions, and continual updates, fostering a sense of belonging and creativity among players. Nonetheless, it has been scrutinized for occasional lack of innovation and reliance on repetitive tasks.

In conclusion, the evolution of game design elements in Pokémon and Animal Crossing mirrors the dynamic nature of the gaming industry, balancing innovation with tradition to appeal to diverse player preferences. While Pokémon evolved to embrace technological advancements and competitive gaming, Animal Crossing stayed true to its roots, emphasizing simplicity and community-building. Both franchises continue to captivate audiences worldwide, showcasing the legacy of their timeless gameplay experiences. Understanding the evolution of these iconic franchises offers valuable insights for future game developers aiming to create memorable and engaging experiences for the players.

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