A Study of Visual Background of Animal Crossing: New Horizons Game

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Abstract. As a visual medium, Animal Crossing: New Horizons is a social simulation game with a beautiful visual design set in nature, which became one of the most popular games during the Covid-19 pandemic when people were required to stay at home. The advantage of this game made by Nintendo for the Nintendo Switch console from similar games is its real-time system. The time situation in real life occurs the same as in the game, so the visual background changes according to real-time. Previous research has discussed the gameplay and the relationship between this game's popularity during the pandemic, and this research is about its visual background. This study is intended to determine the background visualization displayed in the Animal Crossing: New Horizons game based on the time of day changes in four different seasons. The method used in this study is a descriptive method to expose the types of visual backgrounds for four seasons in the Animal Crossing: New Horizons game. Data collection was carried out through literature studies and observations. Based on the time shift in each season in the morning, noon, afternoon, and evening in four seasons, the findings generated up to 16 visual backgrounds.

Keywords: visual game, background game, Animal Crossing: New Horizons, real-time.

1. Introduction

Video games, known since the 1970s, are a type of visual media that continues to evolve and develop along with the advancement of technology [1]. A video game is an interactive game on electronic devices such as a game console, PC, or mobile phone. In video games, users can interact with virtual characters, environments, and objects through control devices such as joysticks, mouse, or buttons. A game usually has stories, objectives, and different mechanisms and can be played singly or together with other people through the internet (online). As an audio-visual product, video games also have multimedia features such as stunning graphics and sound, making the gaming experience more real. In the concept of games as a visual medium, the visual elements play an essential role in the player's experience and interaction with the game. This interaction is established through the sensory input gathered by sight [1].

Why Animal Crossing: New Horizons? This Nintendo-made game for the Nintendo Switch console is one of the most popular games in the world during the Covid-19 pandemic [2], when people were required to stay at home. Animal Crossing: New Horizons (ACNH) has a beautiful visual design with an attractive natural background with cute and unique visuals of the player characters. This social life simulation game offers the latest features, such as the ability to bring players together online, where a player can visit another player's island (with the owner's permission)

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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or receive a visit [3]. This feature answers people's need to socialize amid an isolated situation at home, which makes it impossible to socialize and interact directly [4]. Likewise, the player's house and the entire contents of the island, the layout can be designed and arranged according to the player's wishes. The design of the island will then be assessed/rated by officer at Residents Service [5].

In the gameplay, the player characters in this game will do activities like in real life, such as socializing with animal characters who also behave like human characters. They celebrate birthdays and other events together, planting flowers, fishing in rivers and seas, catching insects, digging fossils, swimming in the ocean, and discovering common and rare sea creatures, which can be displayed in the island's museum [6]. When players interact with the story in the game, players will get an experience that involves cognitive and emotional aspects, which makes players feel more involved and a part of the game [7].

These elements make the gameplay on ACNH so flowing, can be adjusted to the player's pace, and successfully grab so much attention from the world community that it has recorded sales of 41.59 million copies [8] (as of December 31, 2022) since its release on March 20, 2020. This figure ranks as the second highest game sales for the Nintendo Switch console, after Mario Kart 8 Deluxe, which sold 52 million copies [8]. ACNH is also preferred because it allows players to acquire various skills related to education and training [9]. ACNH has a lot of educational content from objects and content in the gameplay, such as the Critterpedia list [10], which contains player catches that add a lot of knowledge about the types of sea creatures, insects, and fishes.

In the visual context of the game, there are constituent elements that synergize with each other. Player engagement with what is shown in the game is important for good interaction. The player's focus on a game is formed by the perception of its visual appearance [1]. Playing a game requires active interaction from the user, wherein that interaction comes visual communication to convey messages through a visual medium called game [11]. The image below is a general display of the Animal Crossing New Horizons game.

Figure 1. Animal Crossing: New Horizons Game

The advantage of Animal Crossing: New Horizons over similar games is that the game system is played in real-time [12]. This game coordinates the state of the seasons in the game with the seasons in the real world using the inbuilt clock system in Nintendo Switch console. It means that if it is winter in the real world at this time, then in the game, it will also be winter [13]. The time situation in the real world occurs precisely the same as in the game, so the background visuals displayed on the ACNH become very dynamic and change according to real-time. When there is climate change in the life of the four seasons, namely Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, the background also displays changes according to the seasons' state.

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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The background is the image that serves as the backdrop of a scene featuring characters in a pose. In a broader sense, background refers to the setting of the events or location of characters in a story, which can include designs of a region, forest, countryside, city, home, character's dwelling, school,

mall, office, and so on [14]. The background in a digital game contains elements of color to support the mood, lighting, time, and weather [15].

In this research, the author takes the Northern Hemisphere zone in this game, which has a seasonal period in the following months: Spring occurs in March, April and May; Summer occurs in June, July and August; Autumn occurs in September, October and November; Winter occurs in December, January dan February [13]:

Table 1. The Four-Season Period in the Northern Hemisphere

Seasons	Northern Hemisphere
Spring	March, April, May
Summer	June, July, August
Autumn	September, October, November
Winter	December, January, February

What does the real-time visual background of the game Animal Crossing: New Horizons look like when the four seasons change? What changes occur in its background elements? Previous studies have discussed ACNH's gameplay, the relationship between ACNH and its popularity during the pandemic, and this paper is about its visual background. Therefore, this study aims to know the visualization of the background displayed in the Animal Crossing: New Horizons based on the change of time in one day from the four different seasons.

2. Method

This study used a descriptive method to explain the types of visual backgrounds for the four seasons in Animal Crossing: New Horizons. That means that the resulting data is not a numerical data set but descriptive data in the form of exposure to the results found. Data collection was carried out with literature studies and direct observations on ACNH games. This method is in line with the discussion of the visual background because the authors can present the data of their findings with more attention to detail.

3. Results and Discussion

The images from the visual background captured in the ACNH game in this study are located in the side area of the player character's house against the backdrop of an outdoor environment during the four seasons, namely Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. The captured time is early morning, around 6 a.m.; midday, around 12 p.m.; in the afternoon, around 5 p.m.; and in the evening, around 10 p.m. Capturing images at those hours to get the best moments representing each time of the day.

The results obtained were as many as sixteen visual background images, four images each per season, based on the change of time in the morning, midday, afternoon, and evening. Based on the images obtained, the changes after the changes occurred in the background of the ACNH game for four seasons can be seen in the following pictures showing the color schemes in each season such as Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter [16]. Figure 2 is the visual background in Spring with a soft color tone. Figure 3 is the visual background in Summer with bright and contrasting tones, Figure 4 is brownish tones in Autumn, and Figure 5 is a snowy cover that characterizes the bleakness of Winter.

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Figure 2. The visual background of ACNH Game in Spring

Figure 3. The visual background of ACNH Game in Summer

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Figure 4. The visual background of ACNH Game in Autumn

Figure 5. The visual background of ACNH Game in Winter
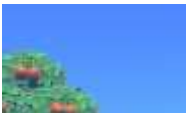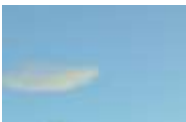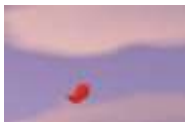
The results of the observation of sixteen visual backgrounds of ACNH game indicate numerous changes in the background elements, each of which represents the characteristics of the four seasons occurring in nature, such as the color elements of the sky, trees, land, and atmosphere [13]. However, the results also reveal that there are elements that change and remain unchanged. The elements of the findings are presented in the following tables. Table 2 is the background component, consists of colour, lighting, colour composition, and colour shades. Table 3 is the assets in the background image, consist of sky, clouds, trees, flowers, and grass. Table 4 is the changed and unchanged elements/objects, consist of sky, pine trees, fruit trees, flowers, and grass. Table 5 is characteristics of the visual background of the ACNH based on time in the morning, day, afternoon, and evening.
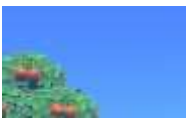
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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Table 2. The components of the background

Parameters	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Colour	Spring is represented by green	Summer is represented by red	Autumn is represented by a brownish tint	Winter is represented by blue
Lighting	Bright lighting	Bright lighting	Dim lighting	Dim lighting
Colour composition	The colour composition consists of soft bright colours	The colour composition consists of bright colours	The colour composition consists of a combination of light and dark colours	The colour composition consists of soft colours, and non-contrasting colours
Colour shades	Bright cloudy	Bright and contrast	Brown shades	Gray shades

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Table 3. The assets in the background image

Assets	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Sky	Bright cloudy	Bright and contrast	Partially cloudy	Gray shades
Clouds	Cloudy in the morning to afternoon	Slightly cloudy in the morning	Cloudy in the morning to afternoon	Cloudy all day
Trees	The trees are full of green and pink leaves	The trees are full of green leaves	The trees are full of green and brown leaves	All parts of the leaves are covered with snow
Flowers	The flowers grow colorfully	The flowers grow colorfully	The flowers grow colorfully	The flowers grow colorfully
Grass	The grass grows in full light green	The grass grows in full green	The grass grows fully brownish-yellow	The grass is fully covered with snow

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Table 4. The changed and unchanged elements/objects

Elements/objects	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Sky	Predominantly cloudy blue	Predominantly blue	Predominantly dim blue	Predominantly gray
Pine trees	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Changed into snowy covered
Fruit trees	Changed into pink	Changed into green	Changed into brown	Changed into snowy covered
Flowers	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged
Grass	Changed into light green	Changed into green	Changed into brownish tint	Changed into snowy covered

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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Table 5. Characteristics of the visual background of the ACNH based on time

Time	Spring (April)	Summer (July)	Autumn (November)	Winter (January)
Morning (6+ a.m.)	Quite bright, soft light, slightly cloudy sky	Bright, colorful, cloudy sky, green trees and grass	A bit dim, there is lighting from the street lamps and houses, the sky is cloudy, fruit trees and grass are brownish	A bit dim but the object looks contrasting, there is light from the house lights only, the sky is partially cloudy, snowy
Day (12+ p.m.)	Bright with high saturation and contrast colours, cloudy blue sky, pink fruit trees, light green grass	Bright with high saturation and contrast colours, the sky is blue and clean, trees and grass are green, objects look sharp	Bright and vivid, the sky is blue and clean, fruit trees and grass are brownish	Fairly bright, the sky is gray and cloudy, some objects look a bit blurry, snowy
Afternoon (5+ p.m.)	Bright, soft color tones, partial cloudy sky	Bright, softer color tones with clear sky, green trees and grass	Slightly dim, soft color tones with a cloudy sky, brownish fruit trees and grass	Slightly dark, soft color tones, some objects look a little blurry, snowy
Evening (10+ p.m.)	Dark, cloudless, there is full moonlight and stars, as well as light from the street lamps and houses	Dark, cloudy, there is moonlight and shooting stars, as well as light from the street lamps and houses	Dark, cloudless, there is little crescent light and stars, as well as light from the street lamps and houses	Dark, a little cloudy, there is no moonlight but there is light from the street lamps and houses, snowy

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The 6th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social
Sciences, and Humanities 2023
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

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4. Conclusion

Animal Crossing: New Horizons with its real-time gaming system, features a vast amount of highly detailed visual content, presenting a beautiful, aesthetically pleasing, and impressive 3D game visual media. The presence of detailed visual backgrounds during the four seasons of the game provides a richer and more varied visual display, with clear characteristics of each season. Users will experience a full range of colors with a soft tone in Spring, bright and contrasting tones in Summer, brownish tones in Autumn, and a cold, snowy cover that characterizes the bleakness of Winter. Observation of the visual background details shows that Autumn has the most colour variations, while Winter has the least. Meanwhile, some natural elements and objects in the game's background change with the seasons, while others remain constant. Flowers are entirely unchanging, while pine trees undergo minimal changes. In contrast, the sky, fruit trees, and grass elements are constantly changing with the seasons.

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