

# Genre or Not: Examining the “-like” Suffix as an Emergent Category Expression

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The “-like” suffix is used in game discourse to express categorizations such as Roguelike, Soulslike, and recent “Genshin-like,” the last of which remains a highly contested term. It can be observed that this suffix is used frequently in game communities as a category expression—a linguistic unit that functions to group entities based on perceived shared features. This paper focuses on how the semantic role of these “-like” terms differs across these three key examples, ranging from denoting formal mechanics to capturing affective experiences and to signifying commercial-aesthetic models.

The cases of Roguelike and Soulslike demonstrate how such category expressions can solidify into widely recognized genres. The term Roguelike originates from the 1980 game *Rogue* (Toy and Wichman 1980) and became formalized around a core set of mechanics, notably procedural generation and permadeath. It represents a categorization based on a shared structural and formal logic (Vargas-Iglesias 2020). In contrast, Soulslike emerged from player discourse to describe the shared experience of games developed by FromSoftware, beginning with *Demon's Souls* (FromSoftware 2009). This category is defined less by a strict list of mechanics and more by what has been described as an “atmospheric assemblage”—a holistic player experience characterized by a specific feeling of tension, patience, and precision (Andiloro 2023). Its acceptance demonstrates that a genre category can be established based on a shared affective experience, rather than being dominated by a list of formal mechanics. Both Roguelike and Soulslike exemplify emergent game categories—genre labels that arise retrospectively through player and industry consensus rather than predefined taxonomies. These genres are constituted through recombining pre-existing ludic mechanics: the Roguelike synthesized permadeath, procedurally generated dungeons, turn-based grid movement, and resource management from earlier role-playing games (RPGs) and tactical games; the Soulslike reconfigured stamina-based combat, checkpoint-as-progression nodes, dodge rolls with invincibility frames, and environmental storytelling. What distinguishes these as genres is not single innovations, but the specific orchestration of recombined elements into cohesive design paradigms and the collective player’s emotions and feelings.

More recently, the commercial success of *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020) has led to the emergence of the term “Genshin-like.” This expression is used to describe a pattern of games, including newer subsequent games like *Wuthering Waves* (Kuro

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Game 2024) and *Infinity Nikki* (Papergames 2024), that share a distinct combination of features: a high-production anime aesthetic, a vast open 3D space, and a gacha-based monetization system. This pattern represents a specific and highly successful commercial and aesthetic formula. These games are typically grounded in expansive storyworlds with richly layered narrative frameworks. From a ludic perspective, they integrate sophisticated RPG design conventions and diversified gameplay mechanics drawn from established console games, including the Roguelike dungeon structures and environmental storytelling discussed earlier. Outside the game, they also provide rich storyworld-related texts and encourage fan creations to co-build game worlds. This kind of gacha game reflects a modern media mix strategy where the free-to-play game is the central service and its characters are the primary products (Blom 2023).

However, the status of the term “Genshin-like” as a genre remains contested. Criticisms often point out that the core gameplay loop of *Genshin Impact* is heavily derived from predecessors like *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo EPD 2017), and its defining gacha system is a controversial monetization strategy rather than an innovative game mechanic. This focus on monetization aligns with broader critiques of its mechanics as a form of gambling and gambification, where design patterns intentionally blur the lines between gameplay and financial risk-taking (Brock and Johnson 2021; King & Delfabbro 2018). The gacha model itself, by commodifying player desire through randomized character acquisition, creates digital atmospheres centered on affective embedding and monetization rather than purely on play (Woods 2022b). Furthermore, the time-intensive “grinding” required to circumvent paying is a form of “playbour”, blurring the lines between leisure and exploited labor (Woods 2022a). The term “Genshin-like” is therefore often seen as describing a collection of trending features of gacha game blockbusters rather than a unique gameplay genre. From an industry perspective, neither Sony nor Nintendo—the intellectual property holders of games from which *Genshin Impact* drew design inspiration—has raised official legal objections or initiated litigation; on the contrary, Sony even engaged in collaborative projects or developer communication events with miHoYo. Within player communities, apart from the game's initial launch period, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* is no longer frequently invoked in discussions of “Genshin-like” games. It seems *Genshin Impact* is, in fact, the starting point and centre of the discourse on this type of gacha game.

The debate regarding “Genshin-like” and gacha reflects a fundamental tension between defining categories based on established, core gameplay mechanics versus recognizing emergent commonalities driven by commercial success and gaming community trends. Nevertheless, the widespread use of the “-like” suffix indicates an attempt to name a potential atmospheric assemblage, recalling the process that validated genres such as Roguelike and Soulslike, and it highlights the practical utility of such terms for curators at game museums and expos, who can use them as powerful labels and slogans to engage a knowledgeable player base.

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