

Virtual reality: game-changing revolution in eSports

November 1 2019, by Erwan Lucas



Players getting off the couch is one theme of this year's Paris Games Week

Encased in headsets and carrying electronic replicas of weapons in their hands, the players prowl around the arena, ducking behind virtual obstacles before emerging to shoot at the enemy.

All around, screens allow an enthralled public to follow the action live at Paris Games Week, where the company SmartVR studio has installed an immense arena to hold the first virtual reality (VR) competition in its popular [game](#) After-H.

Industry participants agree that such groundbreaking VR technology is going to be crucial to the future of eSports, although it remains unclear how radical the revolution will be and whether it will change the nature of eSports for good.

"The future is going to be VR," said Jean Mariotte, cofounder of SmartVR Studio.

"The 'in-game' experience is, to a certain extent, the dream of every player. To feel oneself move inside a game and this way experience it more intensely," he said.

"There will be eSports before and after VR," added Laurent Michaud, director of research at Idate, a consultancy specialised in the [digital economy](#).

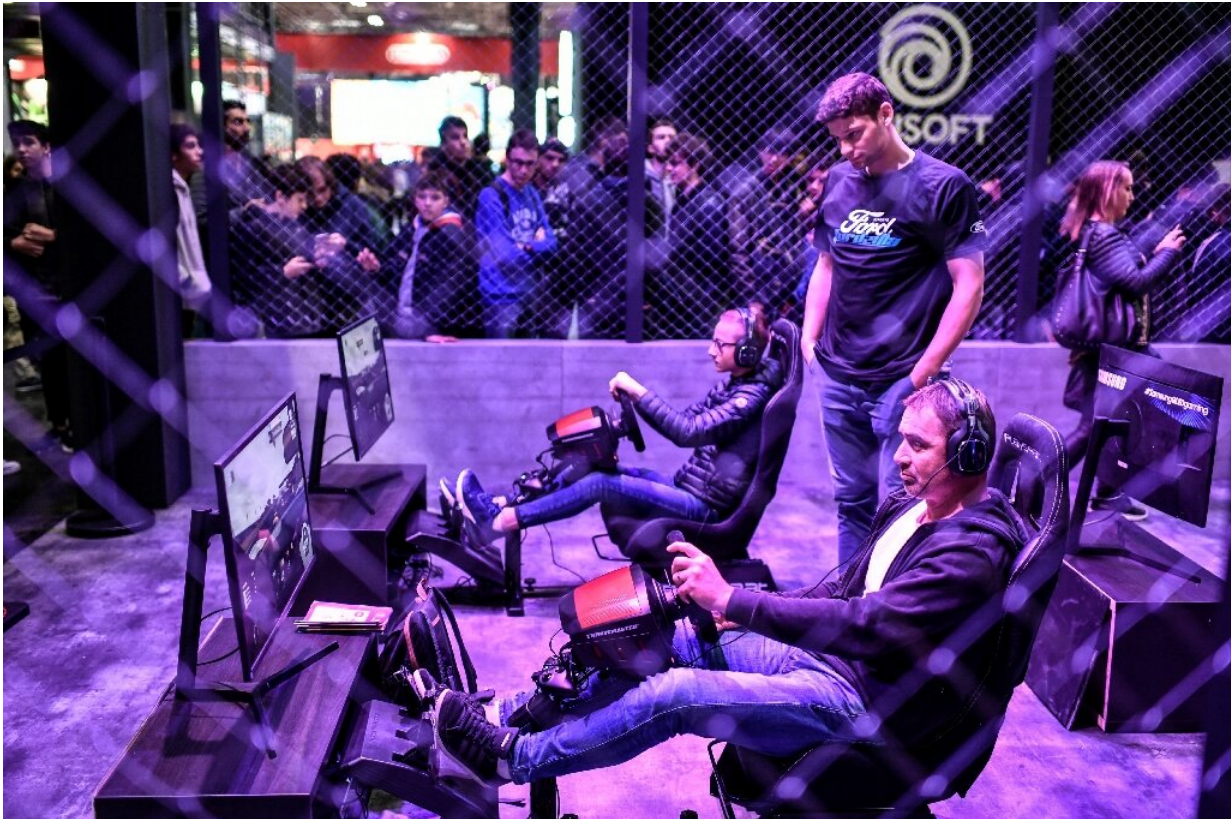
"It will become even more spectacular and will allow a player to really express his or her own personality, which will allow a better identification with the game."

'Better for spectators'

Spectators, meanwhile, can enjoy a completely different experience compared with the standard eSports tournaments.

Not only can they follow the action on screen, they can also see the players moving around an arena, not simply sitting in front of their screens.

"They have LED lights on their headsets according to the colours of their teams but also you can see the number of lives that remain for every players," said Mariotte.



Visitors attend the 10th edition of the Paris Games week (PGW) show on October 30, 2019 at the Porte de Versailles exhibition centre in Paris.

This is by no means the first technical great leap forward for eSports.

The arrival of high-speed internet paved the way for players to take part in hugely sophisticated games in stadiums that are broadcast live.

But VR could profoundly transform eSports, allowing players to interact

between each other on two levels during the games—on- and off-screen.

"This will be the new way of playing, that's for sure, and in marketing terms it's a revolution," said Frederick Gau, head of Gozulting, a consultancy specialised in eSports.

But he also expressed scepticism over whether VR would take over eSports, saying the cost of the devices could prove prohibitive for many gamers, as could a lack of bandwidth, "even with 5G."

'Niche market'

But VR could also put an end definitively to the debate about whether eSports can really be considered a sport, by getting players to be physically active.

"Virtual Reality can bring eSports closer to sport but it could also drive them further apart," said Gau.

"Playing at simulating (actions) does not involve the same sense of risk or fear of injury that there is in the same situations in reality."

How it evolves will also depend on whether developers choose to highlight the physical aspect of the games.

Gau said he expected the adoption of VR to be limited in scale, at least for now.

"We were already expecting a revolution with the mobile phone but in the end eSports players stayed on their consoles and PCs. When we have connected armour and gloves then yes but for now it (VR) will remain a niche market," he said.

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