

Green Capital of Simulated Entertainment: The Reformed Relationship Between Motorsports and Sim Racing and Their Sustainability

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Abstract

This article suggests that the rising visibility and status of sim racing may lead to new challenges owing to its increased synergy with motorsports. Risks are accelerated because of the position of sim racing between motorsports and esports, and the lack of institutional resources and sustainable, healthy ecosystem faced by sim racing. These lacks also increase the tendency for image-cleaning actions such as greenwashing. The position and status of these sports were viewed through Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, including capitals and doxa. The collaborations and status that sim racing has achieved has allegedly subjected it to more criticism for its ethical aspects, namely environmental friendliness and accessibility. Further adoption of traditional sports institutionalization to compensate the lack of a clear structure for sim racing might not be ideal. This is due to the possibility of ethical conflicts of the motorsports world emigrating to sim racing.

Keywords

Bourdieu, greenwashing, esports, motorsports, sustainability

1. Introduction

This article addresses the sustainability of the relationship between motorsport and sim racing. Over the last few years, sim racing and motorsports have increased their collaborations [1,2]. The first goal is to investigate how these sports will cope in the future regarding their environmental friendliness, compared to the capital and resources they must maintain to adhere to their ethical responsibilities. Possible challenges include the changing interests of different stakeholders from sponsors to dedicated fans, and the evolving societal and global values, including the consumption of sports and entertainment. These issues are also related to questions about the sustainability and accessibility of sim racing, notably the energy consumed by esports [3] and the additional equipment that is required to compete, such as rigs, wheels, and pedals.

-Research question 1: to what extent will sim racing be able to label itself as an ecological and independent form of sustainable competition in the future? This is particularly relevant if motorsports is unable to respond to growing ecological and ethical demands.

Regarding the future of esports and motorsports, esports still needs to professionalize, popularize, and adopt more durable business models. However, the future of sim racing seems optimistic due to its dynamic nature and relation to on-track racing [4].

-Research question 2: could the entertainment value and acceptability favor simulated competition over on-track racing if esports reaches a more stable ecosystem, or is there a middle ground for them?

I position sim racing in this article as both a genre of racing games that embraces realism and a category of esports that is positioned within emotorsports.

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These questions are first reflected against previous research literature regarding the development, consumption, and sustainability of esports and motorsports. After this, concepts of white-, green- and sportswashing discussed by Skey [5] will be visited. I address gameswashing as a rising form of ethically questionable image strategy adopted by nations and corporations that use gaming as a tool to appear more acceptable.

For the main analysis, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts about the different forms of capital and symbolic power, which evolve around his theories regarding class, are adapted to analyze both series. As main examples Formula One (F1) and F1 Esports Series are referred throughout this paper due to their popularity and explicit connection.

This paper suggests the potential for two risky future scenarios to develop. The first is that sim racing becomes increasingly co-dependent on the status of motorsports: a sport that must constantly try to justify its existence and maintain popularity by approaching new audiences through other media than broadcasting [6, 7]. This can be problematic regarding general acceptability and ethicality. The COVID-19 brought these series closer together validating the status of sim racing [8] due to the compensating of sim racing broadcasts with the occasional involvement of real F1 drivers, thus raising discussion about its position within motorsports and esports [1].

A second plausible development is that it might be harmful for sim racing or esports in general to involve themselves too tightly with real-life sports organizations or adopt organizational patterns from them [9]. Despite the argued need for clearer sports structure and organizing for the health of players [10] and the whole esports ecosystem [11], this might bear undesirable consequences. Such consequences are present in the real-life sports world and include corruption, sportswashing, and organizational and contractual feuds. Therefore, could these developments accelerate the risk of gaming becoming a tool for image washing by organizations and nations?

Based on the below analysis, I argue that despite the considerable exposure and popularity sim racing gained during the pandemic restrictions, its future might not be on solid ground. There are ethical issues regarding accessibility and ecological sustainability as well as institutional sustainability [12] on a global level, as the esports ecosystem structure is varied and excessive involvement with traditional sports organizations might turn out to be harmful to the future of sim racing. This ethical position is challenging as currently sim racing seems to be positioned between motorsports and esports.

2. The long-shared road between motorsports and esports

Motorsport and esports share a similar historical lineage regarding their development into mainstream entertainment. Over the years, both automobiles and computer hardware have gone from being standard everyday mass-produced products to mediatized sports entertainment, as they were originally accessible to a narrow societal segment before they enjoyed general demand, mass production, and monetization through entertainment [13].

The growing mediatization and similar development paths to commercialized consumption have since overlapped motorsports and gaming. This trend has bloomed since the 1980s, when motorsports such as F1 became globally televised, spectacular media entertainment and computer and console technology became more accessible to consumers.

For sim racing, the developments have been ongoing from the early 1980s onwards (starting with arcade games) and have evolved into contemporary licensed simulation games [14]. This was due to technical developments of computer technology in terms of accessibility (price and size) and the increased realism and entertainment value of racing games. As a byproduct, the visibility of racing series and automotive brands increased for consumers via games. Notable simulative racing games from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s include Pole Position (Namco 1982), Grand Prix Circuit (Accolade 1988), Indianapolis 500 (Papyrus Design Group 1989) and Sega Rally Championship (Sega 1994) on different platforms.

By the latter half of the 1990s, the development of sim racing games on PCs such as Grand Prix 2 (MicroProse 1996) and Gran Prix Legends (Papyrus Design Group 1998) furthered their credibility and popularity although the racing genre ranged from easier arcade racing to demanding hyper-realistic simulations. A similar trend eventually occurred among consoles, namely with Gran Turismo

(Polyphony Digital 1997) on Sony Playstation. The synergy between motorsports and gaming resulted in the development of licensed content.

Founded in 1950, F1, the “pinnacle of auto racing” is a global high-tech spectacled media entertainment that has attracted spectator, corporation, and political interest [14]. The series has enjoyed long-term prestige as inter-textual sports entertainment and as of 2023 was held in 20 countries. In 2021, the series had a 70.3m television spectator average per race in 2021, 49.1m social media followers, and 2.69m on-location spectators despite COVID-19 restrictions [15].

However, F1 has had to evolve through regulation and content production to maintain popularity against global tastes and media usage. Over the years, it has also met political and humanitarian pressure due to its operation of venues in countries such as South Africa during the apartheid reign and later in nations such as Russia and Saudi-Arabia. A constant ethical and sustainability challenge it confronts is the carbon footprint of the series and related industries.

In 2017, F1 Esports series was launched in collaboration with its paragon and was designed as an open qualification of gamers to find the fastest drivers for teams based on F1, culminating into a global success story [14]. Apart from licensed games, no substantial motorsports organization collaboration was present before various esports racing series took off during the 2010s. Previous International Automobile Federation (FIA) licensed F1 games since the 1990s were published by companies like MicroProse, Psygnosis, and EA prior to the current Codemasters.

Hence, besides the obvious simulated reference, the images of the series were distant. Contrary to motorsports, esports has not had to explicitly emphasize ecological values to address sustainability as a condition for acceptability.

Since the 2000s, the popularity of esports has been constantly growing by significant numbers and is expected to reach 318m regular viewers worldwide by 2025, from the 212.5m of 2020 [16]. Attention towards sim racing skyrocketed largely due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, broadcasters televised sim racing, where F1 Esports 2020 drew 11.4m livestream views (98 percent more than 2019), and iRacing subscriptions increased to 160 000 by April 2020 from 110 000 in January [17].

Over the years motorsports, like F1, have included other newer media to attract fans and maintain entertainment value [7]. This has been in line with the development of media consumption habits as internet and social media have gained leverage over press and linear broadcasting, which has caused traditional sports organizations to adapt and develop ways to reach their audiences [18]. Furthermore, aside from the effortless simulated relationship between motorsports and gaming, the current and potential future audiences are such that they have oriented themselves towards broader and more versatile media usage, including videogames.

3. Differences in accessibility, carbon footprint and institutionalization

The carbon footprint and societal space given to motorsports have been discussed and questioned due to emissions and street circuits in city centers, which is made possible by economic and political interests [19]. The primary negative effects of these events have been the health impacts on people and the environment, yet there is a strong socio-cultural atmosphere embracing such activity, which adds to the difficulty of adopting more eco-friendly general policies and consumption habits [20].

During the last few decades, the general trend of media consumption has changed and environmentally friendly discourses have mainstreamed, and so has the need to guarantee the future popularity of motorsports. F1 responded to this challenge with an updated media strategy to seek new future audiences via newer media, including investing in gaming, social media content and Netflix-series after the series commercial rights were bought by Liberty Media in 2016 [14, 7]. Themes manifesting equality, inclusion, and efforts to become emission-free through more sustainable technologies have been introduced as core values to increase acceptability with image renovations [21].

The emergence of esports was noted early on as a potential challenge to motorsports. Already in 2018, the growing realism, professionalism, entertainment value and general interest in participating due to the accessibility of the games and prize money caused gaming to be considered as a serious competitor to the popularity of F1 racing [22] when the F1 Esports Series was first held in 2017. It was, however, the quarantine restrictions of COVID-19 that boosted the popularity and status of sim racing,

including F1 Esports, as traditional on-track sports events were cancelled, and series promoters and media companies opted to broadcast simulated racing for audiences [8].

Just before and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interest in sim racing and its relation to traditional motorsports drew academic attention in a range of esports-related studies. Articles have addressed the distanced positioning of sim racing by motorsports fans [1], the neoliberal logic surrounding F1 Esports and its possible effect on motorsports [14], the opportunities for and the limitations of simulated racing compared to traditional motorsports [6] and speculations about future forms of motorized esports [23]. Subsequently the effects of popularity of sim racing compared to motorsports during COVID-19 [8] and sim racing as an evolving sport due to the pandemic [4] have been elaborated further as future trends.

Tudor [24] has noted that despite the eventual decline of the virtual grand prix popularity during 2020, she did not object to the possibility of esports challenging traditional sports in the future, although it did seem that the primary function of simulated racing was to maintain interest toward motor racing. In contrast, the possibility of esports even replacing traditional sports has been addressed as a result of COVID-19 [2].

Many of these articles opt towards sim racing with careful optimism and underline the changing consumption and tastes that are built on the existing preferences of younger gaming and older motorsports consumers and audiences. Based on these studies, evolving esports can be considered as a future sports option due to its lighter carbon footprint and the various global crises and conflicts that traditional sports have been riddled with. The lack of esports needing any image washing to appear ecologically sustainable also seems to be evident. The safety of competitions that are held in a simulated environment, on the other, can be regarded as a both positive and negative feature in terms of attractiveness [6]. Accessibility is also an issue that favors sim racing over a risky (financially, time-wise, and health-wise) career in motorsport even though participating competitively requires more costly hardware than is required of other esports. The possibility of participating in F1 racing, for example, let alone many other motor racing categories, typically requires years of competing, considerable financial resources, and social capital in the form of beneficial career connections to even have a chance. Benefits also include the absence of expensive tickets and pay-per-view broadcast packages.

However, compared to previous literature, a new need to re-evaluate the ecological impact of esports and its similarity to traditional sports has been addressed by Ross and Fisackerly [25], among others, through sport ecology. These researchers have noted that like traditional sports, sportified esports, due to climate change and use of natural resources, may be affected with regard to hosting, travelling and data storage [25]. On the other hand, despite the need for energy to establish esports competitions and the development of new hardware and software (servers and natural resources), the opportunity to organize competitions remotely significantly decreases the pollution caused by travel and on-location waste [25].

In this light, sim racing appears as a much more affordable, accessible, and ecological option than on-track motorsports, but its growing popularity and professionalization has meant that the need to gain better and more expensive hardware has grown.

One challenge faced by esports in competing with traditional sports for general popularity is its unstable ecosystem and lacking institutionalization. I regard institutionalization in this context as the action whereby a game community applies universal compulsory rules, promotes institutional philosophy, and is determined to make the game grow in its scene [26]. Hence, I consider institutions as organizations that apply these criteria to the sports (represented) to gain legitimate status.

However, the plurality of games, the power of publishers and the varying involvement of other institutions have hindered the institutionalization and stability of esports [12]. Inter-group feuds over game licenses and rules tend to be common in esports [12].

Attempts have been made to adopt structures and solutions from traditional sports. Nevertheless, the videogame industry and professional sports are not as such applicable to the esports ecosystem and stakeholder management [27]. Murray et al. [28] have emphasized the need for solutions and regulation as the industry has met growing challenges due to its popularity and resulting opportunism. Saiz-Alvarez et al. [29] have analyzed the reasons behind the rapid growth and monetization of esports and raised concerns about social aspects and power dynamics between stakeholders' actions.

Esports league regulation and economic models seem risky and run on non-sustainable profit maximization [11]. Hong [10] has underlined the declining health (financial, physical, and psychological) of young players and addressed the lack of media and management responsibility for this development. The legal rights of players have also been questioned as the popularity and monetizing around esports have evolved. Using examples of traditional team sports, Ridenhour [30] has noted the benefits of esports player unionizing and negotiations with stakeholders as a possible solution for guaranteeing the wellbeing of players and the sustainability of industry's ecosystem.

Overall, the status and image of the institutionalization of the esports ecosystem has not, despite its obvious shortcomings, met such crises that would require it to do image campaigning for sustainability. There is still considerable variation and a need for a clearer and fairer management structure for sustainability, which have turned out to be challenging to solve. By far, the needs and challenges surrounding its institutionalization have underlined the need to develop original solutions. However, issues addressed less in esports, but in world of traditional sports, have centered on ethical and green image.

4. Dirty laundry: green-, white-, sports- and gameswashing

Neither traditional sports nor esports are free from various forms of ethically problematic image washing. Organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), FIFA, and FIA have been subjected to criticism for actions that have seemed to corrupt sports, such as choosing ethically questionable hosts for sporting venues [31, 32].

In this article sports are approached with the concept of global ethics, as global motorsports and esports involve questions around environmental, economic, and human rights ethics in sports. The concept includes broadly accepted values and norms that support interpersonal relationships and well-being. It also indirectly addresses globalization, concordance, and Western hegemony over locality of moral values and views [33].

This article uses the white-, green-, and sportswashing definitions by Skey [5], originating from the term *whitewashing*, which generally describes covering up crimes, crises, and variations of corporate and political corruption. The aftermaths of doping or cheating scandals in sports can also be addressed as such. Among game industry, the scandals around Activision Blizzard and Ubisoft qualify as examples, as they attempted to downplay allegations of toxic work cultures [34]. Similarly, the political stir around the so-called Blitzchung case underlined that esports is not a non-political setting, when during a live tournament an esports player took a stance for the tense situation of Hong Kong [35].

Greenwashing refers to false image communication and representations at corporate (and possibly governmental) and product level that aim to make audiences believe these companies to be environmentally friendly actors, as a means of avoiding environment-related public relations damage [5]. Consuming a particular product is made to seem eco-friendly despite production and emission issues.

Sportswashing is a popular term used to describe situations where certain regimes seek to bolster or manage their international image and reputation via sports [5]. Central features of sportswashing are attempts to build positive associations, actions at state level and collaborating supra-national sporting organizations, and a tendency to apply the term narrowly to describe the motives of only non-Western actors [5]. Sportswashing discussion has escalated during the 2000s [31, 32], but the use of sports to project an image is not a new phenomenon. Prior to the concept of sportswashing, biased terms such as propaganda, diplomacy, soft power, and place branding have been applied to describe the political and economic motives behind organizing major sporting events [5].

Finally, regarding these developments, there is an increasing risk for the future of game tournaments and esports to become such washing tools. This paper addresses the term *gameswashing* as a sportswashing-like method, where agents use games and game culture as a tool for image washing with financial, cultural, and political leverage. This phenomenon has been recently addressed for example due to Saudi-Arabia's investments in gaming [36].

5. Applying Bourdieu's concepts about capital to sports and esports

The elaborated synergy, possibilities, and environmental and ethical acceptability of motorsports and esports are mirrored against sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts around his class theory. These concepts are rooted in 1) the distinction by capital and power different people and groups have 2) how these might revoke the reigning societal status quo [37, 38, 39].

Even though Bourdieu's concepts are fundamentally inductive and subject driven, this paper opts to apply them to institutions, which I perceive as contingent and connected agent-like entities that act in and influence numerous fields in societies. This helps to understand the power relationships between institutions that function similarly to classes [39] and the dynamics of accommodating institutional influences [9]. The need to apply Bourdieu's concepts about capital to analyze video games has been expressed by Korkeila [40].

What makes motorsports and sim racing ideal for these concepts are the forms of capital and power they hold. Motorsports is possible to understand as a vast phenomenon. Besides being a sport itself, it has connections to different industries and technologies and political interests in the form of organized sports events all the way to the role of companies and national economies. Motorsports also function in the field of culture as entertainment and leisure that bears national symbolism and pride in the form of success as do other international sports [41].

Due to the highly technical and mediatised nature of the operational structure of motorsport, a sport such as F1 is fundamentally business oriented and riddled with numerous pitfalls and conflicts of interests just to survive in the uncertain and competitive ecosystem [42, 43]. These characteristics also apply to sim racing and other forms of esports, as they have professionalized and sought to institutionalize for further legitimation. Esports has vastly attracted the attention of sport organizations, various media, sponsors, and technological industries to increase their visibility and to protect an image of radiating youthfulness and potential [1, 7].

Bourdieu's societal theory of power dynamics is set around individuals generating and exchanging capital, which he divided into three different forms, as accumulated labor in embodied or objectified form that takes time [38]. Firstly, economic capital, which is regarded as the ultimate capital, is primarily understood in the form of (or is immediately convertible into) wealth, money, or property rights [38]. Secondly, cultural capital can be understood in three sub-forms: the embodied state (disposition of the mind and body); the objectified state (concrete objects of culture such books, instruments, pictures etc.), which implies objectified goods; and the institutionalized state, objectified skills (qualifications and such) [38]. The third and final main form is social capital, a network of social connections [38]. It is possible to comprehend the division of these three forms of capital in a way, where two main categories are economical and symbolic capital, with symbolic capital being divided into cultural and social capital [39]. In this paper symbolic capital (or power) is understood as a form, by which other forms of capital gain their meaning, experimentality and effect [39].

The significant feature of these forms of capitals is that they can be converted into other forms under certain conditions and terms. One form of capital may provide access to power (or more valuable capital/skills) in one field of society, but not in other, where other forms of capital are needed. Economic capital and its logic are at the very core of this exchange and accumulation process to convert forms of capital that give power in society. Cultural capital provides taste and status and, social capital benefits one's wellbeing and the ability to gain capital and access to other fields of society. This logic aims to maximize and make use of different types of capital by converting them when necessary [38, 39].

In modern societies skills are highly differentiated to different fields where certain forms of capital are required [39]. These vast numbers of fields are regarded as parts of social reality, where people try to enter to collect as much capital as their habitus enables them to [39]. Bourdieu summarizes habitus as the individual and collective practices produced by history "in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" [37].

The word "doxa" can be used to describe a situation between a possible conflict and status quo in a selected field between groups regarding their symbolic power, where certain levels of capital are triumphed as naturalized. Doxa, the universe of the undiscussed, can be represented as a structured and shared hierarchical order of the social world, where certain values and features are classified and established as being the natural state, so that certain limits are drawn to separate people and things by

certain criteria. These are meant to be taken for granted but serve the interest of those who reign at the expense of those with less power [37].

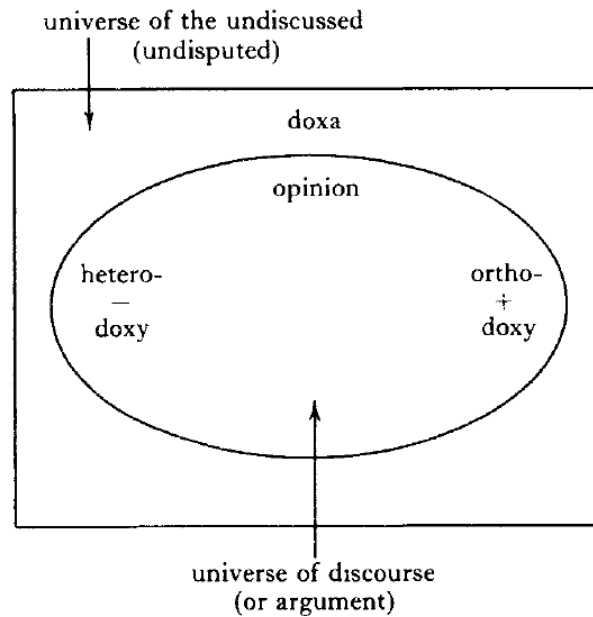


Figure 1: Universes of the discussed and undiscussed [37].

The doxa can be questioned only in the form of an argument in the field of opinion (a field within doxa), the universe of discourse, as competing discourses challenge the reigning unquestioned doxa. This state in which the structure of social world is called into question is called heterodoxy. As the discussion enters the field of the undiscussed, the social order of doxa must confront this crisis. Crisis is necessary for the questioning of doxa but is not enough to produce a critical discourse. In this situation, the dominant classes aim to push the boundaries of doxa to such a degree that the status quo does not change too much and aim for a substitute state of doxa with orthodoxy. This is designed to make doxa, or an updated version of it, the orthodoxy, seem better than heterodoxy, which is considered as a heretic alternative by the dominant classes. Hence, this narrows down possibilities and reworks the lines of norms between right and wrong opinions especially if the critical discussion/argument cannot be pushed back to the field of doxa [37, 39].

6. The reformed universes of motorsports and sim racing

Based on Bourdieu's concepts and the relationship between motorsports and sim racing there has been a two-way renegotiation that has been accelerated by the emphasis on environmentally friendly values and the consequences of the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first renegotiation involves the (media) credibility and popularity of sim racing in the doxa of motorsports and the second the position of sim racing within the doxa of esports. These are also affected by the forms of capital and power these sports have regarding their capacity for image washing and maintaining (ethical) sustainability.

Though motorsports and esports share certain characteristics regarding their technical development and access to consumption [13], well-established media relationship and entertainment value [6, 14] and transnationality, the natural states of motorsports and esports differ largely in social and cultural capital.

The doxa of motorsports could be described embracing physical on-track vehicle competition, institutionalization, dependency on the latest technical innovations, and tradition. Motorsports has a long history and legacy associated with excitement, speed, elitism, pollution, and glamor: a spectacle

about the limitations of man and machine. Motorsports is a universe of danger, innovations, and various skills, which makes it ideal media content.

Despite financial capital being a fundamental force throughout motorsports, finance cannot guarantee success or survival in this ecosystem. Motorsports requires field-crossing cultural capital (qualifications, status, heritage), social capital (sponsors and contracts, politics, fans), but overall, a combination of resources and a mind set to survive transformations [42]. It is an introverted and rigid competitive ecosystem with high stakes.

The doxa of esports is by nature simulated and computerized, accessible, and globally participatory entertainment, yet highly competitive. It depends on the undisputed technical power position of publishers despite the essential positions of players and grassroots activity. It has a shorter and more niche heritage and status than traditional sports. Esports has recently expanded towards non-internet media, but it is a competitive, media-friendly sports that is dynamic, scattered and less regulated than motorsports.

Scholtz [44] specified three rules that the esports ecosystem relies upon: co-competition; co-destiny; and convergence. Regarding value creation Scholtz noted the five different strategic business model orientations working together and competing: established, 'traditional' esports organizations; innovation seeking entrepreneurs; synergy-oriented media businesses; audience seeking sports organizations; and growth-motivated investors [44]. Stakeholders involved in esports can be divided to primary stakeholders (publishers, technology and infrastructure providers, teams etc.) and secondary stakeholders (general audience, media, sponsors etc.) who by their actions establish the characteristics of the esports ecosystem [44]. The ecosystem logic of esports is thus centralized and collaborative yet dispersed and conflictive.

This article does not specifically address the role between different stakeholders within the ecosystem of esports or traditional sports between organizers, broadcasters, sponsors, manufacturers, publishers, fans, and spectators among others. The focus is on redefining the field (or doxa) of both motorsports and sim racing, as the pressures to add green values and pandemic lockdowns pushed to compensate the lack of traditional media sports with esports content. This proved to be vital for on-track racing, and it drew attention to and gave credibility to sim racing and esports. However, these developments may have consequences that pose new challenges rather than provide mutual benefit, such as imbalances of power and capital in fields and the responsibilities surrounding collaborations (particularly for sim racing balancing between these two fields). Naidoo [45] noted that in a context where universities navigate along competing societal agendas (exclusivity versus inclusivity) the desired status of academic fields is contingent as institutions begin to function according to their interests.

6.1 Assessing the position of sim racing

When viewed through the framework of Bourdieu, it can be said that the effects of COVID-19 shook the doxa of motorsports, as sim racing questioned the status of motorsports and how sim racing fit within or alongside it. On the other hand, the popularity was also visible within the field of esports [46]. Although the fans of motorsports and gaming have overlapping features, the history of motorsports and sim racing are still somewhat unbalanced due to the issues related to the limitations of simulations compared to risks and affection for exclusive on-track racing with its historical heritage and global media presence [6]. Along with the general image and socio-demographic taste differences of groups, another aspect that can be regarded as a limiting factor to its popularity is the argument about the physicality of esports [47].

However, the occasional involvement of current racing drivers in esports, especially when participating in certain sim racing competitions during lockdowns, compensated the lack of broadcasted races and media content, which helped to reform the general status of sim racing in the field of motorsports. Instead of being positioned as merely simulated product or a plain continuation of real racing in general, this media boost generated new audiences and gave sim racing foothold alongside different motorsport series. This development was backed up by the continuous successful transition of

sim racers competing against racing drivers, which can be traced back at least to the launch of Gran Turismo Academy in 2008, which sought to turn gamers into professional racecar drivers [48].

Sim racing (and esports) are currently more closely assimilated to motorsports canon, enabling new orthodoxia, but this development is still progressing globally at different pace. Simultaneously, sim racing still remains more in the fringes of esports, as its popularity seems to have stabilized since the COVID-19 restrictions, but the simulated realism and relationship with real-life sporting organizations still makes it stand-out from the more virtual esports [49].

An aspect worth consideration is related to the position of sim racing within motorsports and esports, especially its varying and even lacking level of structural institutionalization. Motorsports such as F1 are decades-ago established sports and a form of media friendly entertainment that is associated with commercial, technical, political, and cultural interests and surrounded by numerous stakeholders who have invested their wealth, time, and health in it—be they fans, drivers, manufacturers, sponsors, representatives or even politicians.

Compared to other esports, the field of sim racing is composed of multiple games that vary by platform and difficulty. The more accessible and less challenging games tend to be the most popular, which is not in line with the desired realism and skillful competitions. Contracts may also backfire, as in the case of the terminated collaboration between FIA and Gran Turismo [50]. Official series may also opt for different games, underlining that the licensed contracts between publishers and federations are contingent.

Still, the idea of esports structure and institutions mimicking sports organizations or accommodating their structural logic might not be beneficial [9]. This is relevant due to the synergy between on-track teams and licenses granted by the FIA. As the esports and gaming world are not free from negative features and scandals, close association with real-life sports organizations increases the level of new possible confrontations and contradictions. For example, the terms by FIFA and IOC have resulted in their competitions becoming something that nations with a budget to spend and a need for an image wash will tend to host.

Fundamentally, the tendency toward image crises and washing varies between esports and traditional sports, but so do the resources for tackling them. Despite popularity and monetization, esports is still lacking in stable global institutionalization. By far their biggest scandals have centered on the most powerful stakeholders the—publishers.

6.2 Racing with a virtually green washing machine

Sim racing is a game genre within esports, that has its authenticity and whole existence derived from motorsports and the automotive industry. Making these two environmentally consuming sporting economies sustainable regarding the resources required, the mass production involved, the desired maximized performance, and the overall emissions produced, an eco-friendly image is a challenge. Added to this is the equipment needed to compete or even play sim racing games with competitive results. Seats, rigs, steering wheels and pedals with accessories and other gear mean that more equipment must be bought and manufactured for the market compared to other esports. These demand financial resources and space that not everyone interested in sim racing possesses. Therefore, despite the minor emissions compared to traditional motorsports, the sense of excess and unavailability echoes.

Despite some similarities regarding stakeholders and their interests, the possibility of sim racing, with its connections to esports, to truly challenge traditional motorsport in the future is met by many conflicts of interest that would require the development of drastic ecological and economical global political policies and shifts in the attitudes of its global fan base.

However, it should be noted that the balancing between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, caused by the popularity of sim racing, is not completely off the table due to the popularity of gaming and the contingent economic, social, and political pressures of motorsports to evolve and survive to maintain its status in the future as a media sport. The varying global degree of institutionalization in sim racing and in esports overall make it natural for both parties to collaborate for their mutual benefit: for motorsports to seek new audiences and sim racing to adapt stronger sports structure and legitimation.

There are some looming challenges and possible detrimental outcomes for sim racing regarding environmental and institutional sustainability compared to its image.

This takes us to the forms of capital and eligibility of the presence of sim racing that are played in both fields: motorsports and esports. Even though it can be stated that sim racing functions as a mediator between the two, the capital of traditional racing series and sim racing series are not identical, nor are they fully convertible despite the economic, cultural, and social capital both motorsports and esports enjoy. As for sim racing alone, it is still a part of gaming and is becoming increasingly more involved in the motorsports world that it imitates. Sim racing could be deemed as too unrealistic and ineffective in motorsport and too realistic and difficult to adopt by the gaming masses despite efforts to promote its greenness and accessibility.

7. Conclusions

When mirrored against Baudrillard's concepts, it seems that traditional sports with its longer heritage has more forms of capital for image washing if needed to adapt and negotiate than esports ecosystem, let alone sim racing. If sim racing opts to further its alignment with traditional motorsports organizations, it might find itself in a position, caused by traditional sports organization or themselves, where it must resort to image washing. Thus, it might not have the means to do this successfully, which could mean that sim racing must further adjust to the discourse of the sport it simulates. It is possible, that from an ethical perspective the sustainability and accessibility of esports and sim racing will be tested, as will the tendency toward image washing.

In summary, the barter of capitals between institutions embraces economic capital. Thus, it could be stated that these institutional stakeholders act similarly to individuals who aim to gather capital to sustain certain habitus to succeed in different societal fields. So far, the cultural capital in sim racing is quite valid in both esports and motorsport but relies heavily on the status of motorsports.

Regarding capital and symbolic power, it seems that F1 and motorsports still have the upper hand compared to the leverage sim racing or whole esports have in the field of mediatized motorsports. The symbolic acceptance granted by F1 to sim racing when launching F1 Esports series has now evolved and bloomed and is regarded as a growing part of the whole F1 media franchise but the dependence of gaming on "the real" thing seems increasingly evident.

This development can be reviewed from the perspective of Bourdieu's concepts set around his class theory when applied more broadly to the current situation between sim racing and motorsports in terms of accessibility. Sim racing is cheaper, eco-friendlier, and easier to access than traditional motorsports, which requires larger amounts of capitals and long-term commitment. However, sim racing is a less environmentally friendly option, when compared to other esports. Its position between motorsports and esports can be challenging considering the lack of clear institutional and structural grounds of esports globally. The adoption of sports federation guidelines and structures with contractual obligations may also increase the risks related to integrity, image, and finance. Fundamentally, an institutions' logic to achieve certain habitus is similar to that of individuals.

Should the cultural and social capital of esports increase, it may favor sim racing in motorsports, especially if these forms of capital begin to overlap with those of motorsports. In the end, both esports and motorsports must come to terms with one another's cons instead of just the potential pros of sim racing.

Regarding future research, it is worth considering how relative the pressure to accept certain sporting events or actions of sports organizations is to esports, considering the sportswashing and corruption scandals. These sorts of developments might be possible for the future of the esports scene if it adds collaboration with traditional sports organizations and/or adapts similar stakeholder business logic. It would be beneficial to analyze the development of stakeholder power dynamics within and between the field of esports and traditional sports.

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