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SA's esports following global growth trend.

Gaming and esports are one of the fastest growing sports globally and South Africa is no exception to the rule with SA esports stars earning a total of R3.78 million in 2018, up 6.8% year-on-year. While still not at the same level as some of the international markets, the quality of the competition is growing with local teams chasing leaders from Europe and Asia. Globally esports are expected to be worth more than R15 billion in 2019.

According to a PWC media report from 2018, the number of fans in South Africa increased to 35,845 in 2017 from 33,000 in 2015. And, with more than 160,000 unique Twitch connections in 2018, South Africans are showing a hunger for esports.

This rise of esports can be attributed to a number of elements, not least of which is the growing popularity globally but locally there has been an increase in the number of tournaments that take place annually throughout the country, and as these tournaments grow in popularity, so does the prize pools and therefore the competition is getting more and more fierce.

With the growth in viewership as a backdrop, local brands can no longer ignore the projected high growth in the sector in streaming and sponsorship revenue. More importantly, brands have to invest in these avenues early, before the market is saturated. Those brands that saw this potential a decade ago are still making waves in this space.

Moreover, this growth cannot be ignored by brands wanting to reach a variety of audiences as gaming reaches more than just the old stereotypical idea of what a gamer looks like. These days gaming is attractive to all spheres and while still predominately male, the female teams and those from more diverse backgrounds are rapidly on the increase. Additionally, fans don't view brand involvement in the sport as necessarily negative. Instead, the data from the four major Western markets shows that between 50% and 60% of fans have favourable responses towards brand involvement in tournaments, streams or sports events.

Telkom VS Gaming is the premier gaming league, not only in South Africa, but across the continent. With 33,500 members it has grown 15% year on year. It is this growth that has propelled Telkom VS Gaming to invest more and more in tournaments and events such as Comic Con Africa where they will be holding their Masters Finals for Dota2 and CS: GO with a combined prize pool of R1.14 million.

"Telkom backed gaming before it was cool to do so. As a corporate we acknowledged that we wanted to play in the space that our customers were interested in, as well as potentially tapping into brand new markets for us and this resulted in us creating what is now the premier league on the continent," says Wanda Mkhize Executive, Content for Telkom VS Gaming.

Since 2016, when Telkom announced the first ever R1 million esports tournament there have been several tournaments with ever increasing prize pools. It is this level of investment from various brands that is helping to further drive the growing interest in esports.

Esports has also become far more accessible for not only those wanting to play but also those wanting to watch. Online platforms like Twitch make it easy to keep track of your favourite teams but, by showcasing tournaments on local TV stations such as DSTV, has taken the interest to new heights. Telkom VS Gaming is also always exploring ways to make esports more accessible to players and viewers and the VS Sport channel on the Telkom LIT platform is another step in the evolution of the Telkom VS Gaming platform to

promote local esports and viewership. Competitive esports could soon become as regular a feature as rugby and as the local scene grows more and more will be broadcast to bigger audiences on different platforms.

By branching into new tournaments at new events and venues such as Comic Con Africa, this shows the brands willingness to continue to invest heavily in esports in South Africa. This, coupled with the continuous additions of new titles to the league place Telkom at the forefront of brands that are not only supporting esports but actively pushing its growth.

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