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INCLUSION OF WOMEN: A CHALLENGE FOR ESPORTS

Nicolas Maurer is the head of Team Vitality, the largest club in France for high-level video game competition, otherwise known as esports. Below he argues that clubs have a role to play in promoting the inclusion of women in this activity, which attracts more than 530 million spectators worldwide.

One of the challenges of esports today is to become more inclusive. After years of rapid development, it is time for competitive video gaming to open up to all – and do so at the highest level. In fact, this is key to unlocking its future growth. Note that 50 per cent of people who play video games are women, but top female players can be counted on one hand. The issue is not a dearth of competitions for women. Indeed, all the competitions are, in effect, mixed and do not require any particular physical ability.

Rather, this situation results from our gendered lifestyles. From childhood onwards, girls are steered towards games that are considered gentler and non-competitive, while the most popular esports games (League of Legends, Dota 2, Counter-Strike, etc.) are dominated by male players. And the girls who make the leap to playing these games face pervasive sexism, sexualised characters and constant toxicity. ‘Go back to the kitchen’ or ‘Go and play Animal Crossing’ are common messages posted when a player identifies as a woman. This reprehensible behaviour ends up repulsing even the most determined players.

Hence the vicious cycle: less practice and visibility means that women do not participate in major international championships. This then translates into a lack of support (sponsors, high-performance coaching, equality in infrastructure and equipment, etc.) and ultimately few female role models showing the possibility of being a top-level female professional in esports.

This cycle needs to end. The time has come for all esports clubs to fight for greater gender diversity in esports. The timing could not be better: the community is growing fast in France. In 2023, 11.8 million French people aged 15 and above had played or watched competitive video gaming – a 25 per cent jump from 2021, according to France Esports barometer (see also next page). This growing, young and passionate community is an opportunity for our industry. With the support of committed partners, clubs can form female teams to promote women in gaming, and offer the same working conditions and resources as men's teams. Team Vitality has achieved this by creating a women's team for League of Legends with the support of two partners. In the medium term, the goal is to increase the general level to enable female players to become professionals.

Game publishers have also created competitions dedicated to women and non-binary people, but these need to be developed further. Riot Games' VCT Game Changers programme in Europe and the Equal Esports Cup in Germany are promising examples. Also noteworthy are the growing number of publishers implementing strict rules on online toxicity (moderation and penalties) to restrict harmful behaviour.

Inclusion and diversity should also be supported by initiatives outside the sector. This is a task for society as a whole: it is essential to raise awareness among boys and girls from an early age. It behoves educators to deconstruct stereotypes about women to pave the way for the inspirational role models of tomorrow. Finally, it is imperative to raise awareness among all stakeholders in the video game industry: players, spectators and organisations. There is much work to do.

TEAM VITALITY

Team Vitality is a French esports club founded in 2013 by Fabien ‘Neo’ Devide and Nicolas Maurer. Its success has turned the club into a model in France and Europe. Team Vitality has an international presence in 14 iconic games, including League of Legends, CS2, VALORANT, Rocket League, Teamfight Tactics, Mobile Legends, Bang Bang and Tekken 8. The club includes top-performing international players and is fully dedicated to identifying and developing a generation of esports athletes. The Team Vitality community has more than 4 million fans across all social networks, which it also federates on its V.Hive mobile app. The French club has teams all over the world (Paris, Berlin, Mumbai, Seoul, Jakarta).



Esport is defined as high-level competition in video games. Below are some figures on video games in general and esports in particular, for the world, Europe and France.

3,38 billion

Number of video game players worldwide as of 2023 – almost half the world's population.

Globally

532 million

Esports had around 532 million spectators worldwide in 2023, with growth projected to reach around 640 million by 2025.

39 million

Number of video game players, representing more than 70 per cent of the total population.

In France

USD 187.7 billion

Revenue generated by the video game industry in 2023, a large share of which came from mobile games that account for around half of the market.

In Europe

715 million

Number of video game players, making Europe one of the biggest markets in the world.

EUR 6.1 billion

Revenue generated by the video game market in 2023, placing France among European leaders in the sector.

11.8 million

Number of internet users aged 15 and over who are interested in esports (consuming or practicing it) in 2023.

Team Vitality's Mobile Legends: Bang (MLBB) team.

Sources: Newzoo's Global Games Market Report, 2023 ; Rapport de l'Observatoire économique de l'esport, 2024 ; Jeux-video-Plus-de-32-milliards-de-joueurs-dans-le-monde, DFC Intelligence Report, 14 September 2021; 'Quel est l'état du marché du jeu vidéo en France et quelles sont ses perspectives d'avenir?', Natixis Wealth Management, October 2024; Baromètre France esport, résultats de l'édition 2023.