

# NBA Social Media Marketing Strategy: From Globe to China

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## ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, the emergence of social media has changed the speed and scope of communication and interaction between individuals and organizations across the globe [9]. The significant growth of social media has also spurred changes in the market. Businesses are paying more and more attention to their official media which plays an important role in their development. Thus, it is necessary to research what social media strategies are used by companies. In this paper, NBA was taken as an example of business alliance to figure out how business uses diverse strategies in social media. The passage focuses on two different scales: Globe and China. This paper analyzes the various strategies that NBA used from these two different scales. It is concluded that from the globe scale, NBA chooses international media and uses a common way to make commercial value. To China, NBA adjusted its strategies to better suit China's unique media characteristics. Meanwhile, to meet the needs of Chinese audience, NBA even develops Chinese local media such as "Chinapacers". It can be concluded that basically all of the strategies used by NBA can be helpful in different markets. Those strategies are not only suit for sports associations like NBA but can also be used in normal business activities.

**Keywords:** NBA, Social medias, Sports, Global, Marketing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest sports associations in the world is the National Basketball Association. NBA has been regarded as the highest level of competition on the whole planet. According to research, in season 2019-2020, NBA received 6.9 billion broadcasts on social media. There is one thing that differentiates NBA from most sports organizations—NBA is a business alliance. In that case, the major goal of the NBA is to make commercial value, but not sport spirit. In the past, NBA was only a national basketball competition, seldom did people from other countries pay attention to this game. However, things changed after 1984, David Stern became the chairman of the NBA. Under his reform, NBA embarked on the road of developing the global market, and the global media marketing decision is one of the core ways for NBA to expand the global market. It started with using common media such as radio station and television programs to gain the attention of audience. As society develops, social media plays a more and more important role in our daily life. Therefore, NBA shifts its key propaganda from normal media to social media. NBA benefits a lot from the development, not only for the association itself but also it promotes some new industries.

Thus, the problem of how NBA take the advantage of social media to make commercial value is worth figuring out. Also, NBA has created a special social media strategy for its second biggest market—China. Therefore, to know the difference between global strategies and Chinese strategies that NBA used in social media, this paper lays out three major strategies both from globe to China. It can be a strategy about a specific social platform, or an efficient strategy that can be applied more widely. And some evidence including data analysis is mentioned in the paper as a support to each strategy. The research can help people get familiar with the NBA marketing system and can provide some classical marketing strategies of social media from two different scales. The research can also help the global companies to better understand Chinese market and its local culture.

## 2. NBA GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

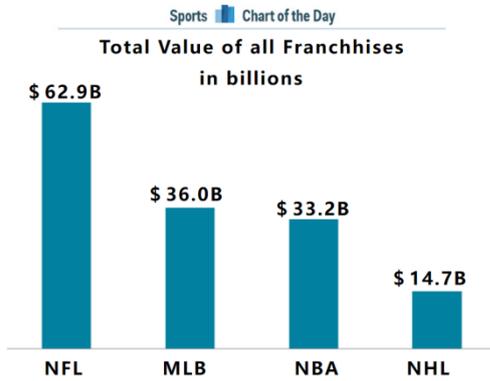


Figure 1. Total value of all franchises in billions

NBA is the third biggest franchises in America, and it has a great value about 33.2 billion dollars. Thus, the commercial value of NBA should not be ignored [11].

Basketball as a global sport, is common in our lives. NBA is also popular around the world because of its wonderful game moments. Nowadays, NBA keeps using a new strategy to attract more viewing rates from other countries. There's no doubt that social media is a great way to facilitate this connection.

### 2.1 “Twitter” strategy

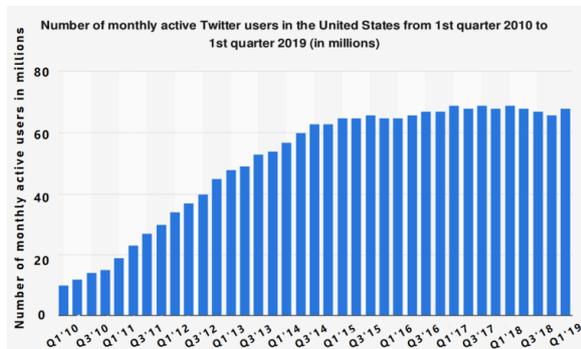


Figure 2. Active users of Twitter in each quarter

The number of active users has continued to grow since 2010. Twitter has nearly 70 millions users in the first quarter 2019. It can be seen that twitter has a significant influence among the globe [3].

Twitter is a significant social media in America. NBA started to use “Twitter” strategy in 2016. In 2016, NBA has become the first league with more than 1 billion social media points and fans in all leagues, teams, and player accounts. Basketball-related tweets themselves have become an asset - NBA websites now track League-related tweets and display them on the website home page. At present, the number of tweets is still increasing without slowing down. Even the president of the United States, Trump, would also use Twitter as a tool to

announce his statements. According to some research, Twitter has 1.92 million active users each day [1]. Twitter is also a social platform used by users from the whole world. It has a significant influence on the globe. Therefore, NBA officials can communicate with people around the world easily through Twitter. NBA and its managers realize the important use of Twitter, they also make the announcement and public exclusive news reports on Twitter to attract audience. For instance, on 8.24, 2021. NBA official twitter post a statement to commemorate the famous basketball player—Kobe Bryant. It attracted the fans of Kobe from all over the world.

### 2.2 Advertising marketing strategy

NBA is widely known as a business alliance. To get the biggest benefit, NBA adds a lot of advertisements in its competition. NBA commodity advertising is the use and development of NBA League Sports Cultural Image by commodity enterprises. Relying on the great influence of wonderful events, NBA can gain a win-win situation with commodity enterprises. The most common way that NBA uses to make advertise of its products and other companies’ goods is social media. The way that people watch games has been changed in the past years. Before social media such as Tiktok was invented, people can only watch them on TV. In that case, if there are advertisements on the screen, the audience might change channel and later get back to the game when the advertisement ends. However, social media advertising is a totally different way. It often shows the advertisement without games. People can see the advertisement through player’s own account. Some of the advertisements can even be seen in NBA official account. When the accounts share a moment in a social platform, millions of fans around the world can notice the advertisement. It can transport information to people from all over the world at the first time. Advertisements in social media cannot be ignored by the audience. NBA managers are willing to progress this situation because it propagates NBA at the same time. A significant portion of the NBA’s annual profit comes from advertising. Most of the large companies want to advertise their goods on the world’s biggest basketball competition, thus, advertising fee of the NBA will also go up, helping NBA earn a lot.

### 2.3 Sensory stimulation strategy

Different from normal media like TV station, social media can report things selectively, thus, it is easy for those who use social media to attract the audience, and not everything would be reported includes boring stuff. Instead, the most exciting part are most likely to be shown to the public. The essence of video editing is to control audio-visual language. Editing needs to have a certain theoretical basis, learn audio-visual language and theoretical knowledge of film and television images, not

entirely by feeling [10]. Through the close-up of the camera lens, the audience has the opportunity to see the facial features of each player in the game and every vivid move of them on the field. Through lens editing and slow playback, the visual experience of the audience can be prolonged and strengthened. All these actions stimulate the sensory of the audience. But what is its commercial value to the NBA? If the games are boring, then the viewing rate will certainly decrease a lot. Through watching the wonderful moments on social media, people will expect more from the competition and leads to an increase in viewing rate. Only when enough audience are attracted by the games, the association can achieve its commercial goal.

### **3. NBA'S SOCIAL STRATEGY IN CHINA**

China is one of the biggest markets of NBA besides the U.S, so how to use social media efficiently in China is important. The concept of global localization put forward by Robertson holds that global localization is composed of the necessary interaction between globalization and the local [7]. NBA not only gives the Chinese audience and social media some privileges, but also adds Chinese local culture in their strategies. Instead of seeking to realize the global single culture of the NBA, it creates a "Chinese" NBA media marketing strategy in combination with Chinese cultural tradition and social background.

#### **3.1 We-media strategy**

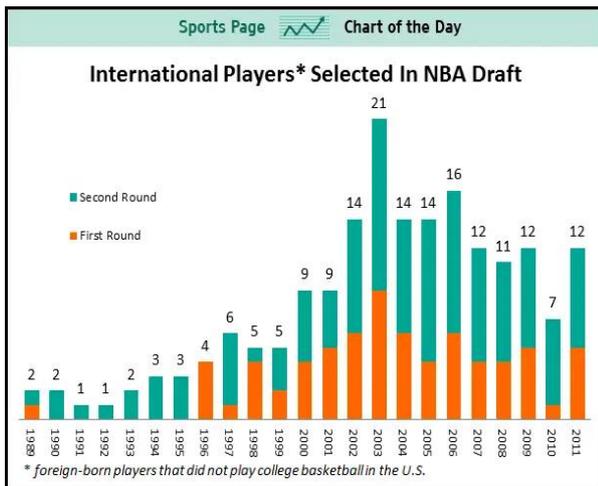
There are a large number of new we-medias appear each year in China, and this also happens in NBA. Thousands of different we-media accounts for a large part of social media marketing. Big as a western alliance, small as a single ball-game star, we-media can be seen everywhere in our society. Taking "Chinapacers.com" as an example, it started in 2000, twenty years of various reports of Indiana Pacers has made the website become one of the biggest NBA we-medias in China. In 2000, we-media, even the Internet, was not popular in China. However, a man called Holick Lee first built the we-media of Indiana website in 2000. Media needs lots of information about NBA official, sometimes tort cannot be avoided. They might use images, videos, and logos on the website. Why don't NBA officials stop the we-media? The reason is that we-media like "Chinapacer.com" can help NBA to expand their reputation in China. People from different places can get new information about NBA in their own ways. The "Chinapacers.com" has accumulated 2millions views on the website [2]. There are people who want to make money or share their interest with other people, and NBA also wants to use free media to improve their influences in China. Therefore, they both can get benefits from it and make a significant contribution to the market.

#### **3.2 Short video strategy**

China is the origin place of Tiktok, so it is not surprising that a large number of Chinese are active users of Tiktok. Japan economic news recently commissioned app market analysis enterprises to investigate the total amount of social app downloads in 2020 according to the world, regions, and countries. The results show that the short video app "Tiktok" from the Chinese byte beating ranks first [4]. Bobby even regards TikTok as one of the most popular and fastest-growing social media apps in the world [5]. Short videos application such as Tiktok can be popular in the world because of their convenience. Modern people's lifestyle becomes much faster than before, so most of them do not have enough time to watch a long video. People might just have several minutes of free time on the subway, they still need a way to relax during break time. Therefore, short videos app is a key way for having fun.

NBA managers saw the significant influence of Tiktok in China. It has already set up its official account in Chinese Tik Tok and accumulated about 14 million fans in China. Its official account often updates daily news that happened in the association. It gives the audience a way to know the information of their favorite players for the first time. Plus, sometimes NBA will organize some exciting activities in China and make an exclusive report of the games. The strategy is so successful that the official account has received 550 million "likes". What's more, Tiktok is a new social networking platform that relies on powerful algorithm recommendation technology and high user activity. It begins to display talents in the field of social business [6]. Because of the covid 19, people in China seldom go shopping. Instead, most of the Chinese people choose to shop online because it is cheaper and more convenient. The bad economic depression caused by covid 19 makes many companies decide to sell their products on the platform such as Tiktok. NBA also needs plenty of money to make up the loss of the off-season, so they start to sell peripheral products in short videos application through live broadcast. However, the main income of the NBA in Tiktok is not selling their own products. Many businesses sell the significant influence of the NBA in social media. Thus, NBA has cooperated with other sports companies and created co-branded products. Therefore, NBA can gain revenue through brand publicity and achieve rapid development in China.

### 3.3 Player social account strategy



**Figure 3.** The international players selected in NBA draft from

There is an increasing trend of the number of international players that NBA selected. As time goes, international players have been more recognized by NBA teams [12].

Most of the players in the NBA are black and white people, the audience seldom see Asian players. But there are expectations, players like Yao Ming and Jeremy Lin are both great players in NBA. Sometimes NBA teams hire these Asian players not only because of their great skills and talents but also for the commercial value they have in China. Taking Jeremy Lin as an example, during the time he was in Atlanta Hawks, Lin attended a reality show in China. Lin kept sharing moments in his social account to express his excitement about the show. By that time, the Atlanta Hawks official account in China only had 3 million fans, but Lin already has 7 million fans. More and more Chinese people started to know the name of Atlanta Hawks and its number of fans increased immediately. Like Chen states: Jeremy Lin and the resulting “Linsanity” has caused an unprecedented media and marketing frenzy worldwide [8]. Thus, the great effect of players’ social accounts cannot be ignored. In addition, NBA often organizes basketball stars to come to China and organizes meetings with their fans. Then most of the players will share the meeting information with their fans on their social accounts in order to conduct the campaign. These activities always cooperate with Chinese local brands, such as Lining. NBA gets lots of benefits from the collaboration. Thus, it can be seen that “Player strategy” is an important means for NBA to improve brand awareness and expand the influence of the league.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Comparing the different strategies that NBA used in Globe and China, it can be concluded that there are three main strategies used by NBA that can influence different

people. From the globe scale, these strategies include twitter, advertising marketing and sensory simulation. To China, NBA’s strategies include we-media, short videos and player social account. Admittedly, no matter in China or in the globe. The reputation of NBA is widely due to its effective methods in social media. The key difference among diverse places is the balance of strategy and the addition of new factors in order to adapt to local culture. Meanwhile, this paper focuses relatively much on the macro level, so it still lacks some specific researches about individual influence in social strategy. All in all, social media plays an important role in our modern society, business organizations and business can all get benefits from it. Also, there are still many concepts that deserve further research. For instance, the target audience of each strategy might have a different result. How to use different strategy to adapt diverse audience should be studied in terms of its great efficiency in the market.

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