

**RED
CARD
2018**

**CHINA
DIGITAL
FOOTBALL
AWARDS**



Foreword

Welcome to Red Card 2018: China Digital Football Awards. Since 2012, the report has developed alongside China's fast-moving sports industry into the leading analysis on European football's China digital performance.

So as to reflect the amount that China's digital landscape has changed over the last 7 years, we have reimagined the report for 2018. Alongside the traditional rankings of the most popular team, player, and league online in China, there are now additional awards which allow the report to recognise outstanding performance in 5 core areas. The report is now better placed to educate teams and organisations on what it takes to produce a successful digital strategy for China. By going deeper into the key areas that lead to digital success, we are able to provide deeper insight into Chinese fan preferences and the pitfalls that should be avoided.

The headline awards were assessed by Mailman's traditional metrics and all 5 of the new awards have been judged by a panel of industry experts, another first for the Red Card.

Once again, 2017 has been a busy year for China's sports industry. Although there were fewer headlines, it was a period of consolidation which has led to a more professionalised industry moving into 2018. At the core has been consumer behaviour and their approach to digital platforms. Their increasing selectiveness in the content that they consume on both Weibo and WeChat shows that the days of overloading netizens with branded content are numbered. This trend further emphasises the importance of a complete digital strategy for China. Several European

teams have recognised this fact and we have seen several permanent offices opened in China this year including Real Madrid, FC Bayern, Borussia Dortmund, and VfL Wolfsburg.

The emergence of new platforms has also been a key development. In 2016, live streaming was China's hottest trend. Following a number of trials and new regulations, it is now beginning to find its place through ecommerce applications and increased access to clubs. 2017 saw the turn of community-based sports apps which grew in both popularity and standing. Platforms such as Dongquidi now offer challenger clubs a chance to gain a foothold in the Chinese market by interacting directly with their core fans in a less crowded space.

Another important shift came in the broadcasting landscape where, for the first time, the majority of Chinese fans began to show a willingness to pay for content. The wait for this change to occur saw some of China's biggest broadcasting platforms sustain huge losses. The leading digital platforms, including Tencent and PPTV, are now working to refine their packages to match the market. Whilst access to top-level sporting content is still significantly cheaper in China than in the West, this marks a big step in the maturation of the Chinese sports industry.

We hope that you enjoy Red Card 2018 and look forward to monitoring another year as China continues its rise to becoming the biggest sports industry in the world.



Panel Introduction



Andrew Collins
CEO
Mailman Group

Since acquiring Mailman in 2007, Andrew has transformed the business into a globally recognised consultancy. Mailman has become the fastest growing sports marketing and innovation group with investments across technology, media and content.



Zhang Zhe
Senior Operations Director
Weibo Sports

Zhang Zhe is responsible for the operations, strategy, and UX management of various departments within Weibo, including Weibo Hot Spot, Weibo Sports, Weibo Fitness, Weibo E-gaming, and Dancing.



Yu Hang
Advisor to the Chairman
DDMC Sports Group

Yu Hang is in charge of overall operations at DDMC Sports and responsible for the strategy of the entire sports department. His previous roles include COO at LeSports, Director of Partnerships at Sina Sports. He is also an experienced keynote speaker.



Zeng Gang
Executive VP of Media Division
Suning Sports

With huge experience in the sports, entertainment, and culture industries, Mr. Zeng has worked on large-scale sports event operations, popular sports content and sports merchandising. He became Executive VP of the Suning Sports Media Division in 2016.



Richard Young
Managing Director
NFL China

During Richard's illustrious career in Asia, he has been responsible for launching China's first nationwide HD sports cable channel, founded The Young Company, and is now responsible for the NFL China's day-to-day operations and strategy.



The Winners



**Number One
Club Online
in China**
**Manchester
United**



**Number One
Player Online
in China**
**Lionel
Messi**



**Number One
League Online
in China**
Bundesliga



**Best
Live
Stream**
**Borussia
Dortmund**

**Best
Use of
Technology**
FC Bayern

**Best
Sponsor
Activation**
Arsenal

**Best
Online
Campaign**
Bundesliga

**Best
Tour
Campaign**
FC Bayern



No. 1 Club Online in China Manchester United



Manchester United's 2017

Manchester United is the most followed club on both Weibo and WeChat

Their WeChat Red Devil selfie creator activated 80,000 people

The club interacted with Luhan, one of China's biggest celebrities, to create the second most engaged post of any club in 2017

The club's WeChat gained 3x more reads than the 2nd most popular club account, Real Madrid

Manchester United's Europa League win was the most read European football club WeChat article of all time

The biannual '#ILoveUnited' event is the biggest offline sponsorship event in China by a football club

"With over 107m followers, China is one of Manchester United's most important markets and we have a long history of innovation and fan engagement in the region. Through data analysis, geo-specific content creation and on-the-ground activities, we continue to be the most followed football club on China's major social media platforms: Sina Weibo and WeChat. We are honoured to receive the Red Card award for the second consecutive year and we are excited about the ongoing opportunities to innovate and build our brand, allowing our fans in China to interact with the club and our products."

Phil Lynch, CEO of Media, Manchester United



2.
Real Madrid



3.
FC Bayern



4.
Arsenal



5.
Liverpool



European Clubs in China

2017 Takeaways

2017 saw a 50% increase in new European football clubs online on Weibo, but a much smaller increase of 10% launching on WeChat. This platform has still seen the large majority of football clubs struggle to reach their ambitious targets. Here there remains some misalignment of goals. Clubs should be starting to focus on translating their large followings of casual fans into a loyal fan base that can be monetised. One way to do this is a China membership program which rewards fans for their loyalty. Arsenal have traditionally hosted theirs on their website, however, an alternative method is to host it directly on WeChat, where a loyal fan base already exists. We expect to see more initiatives like this in 2018.

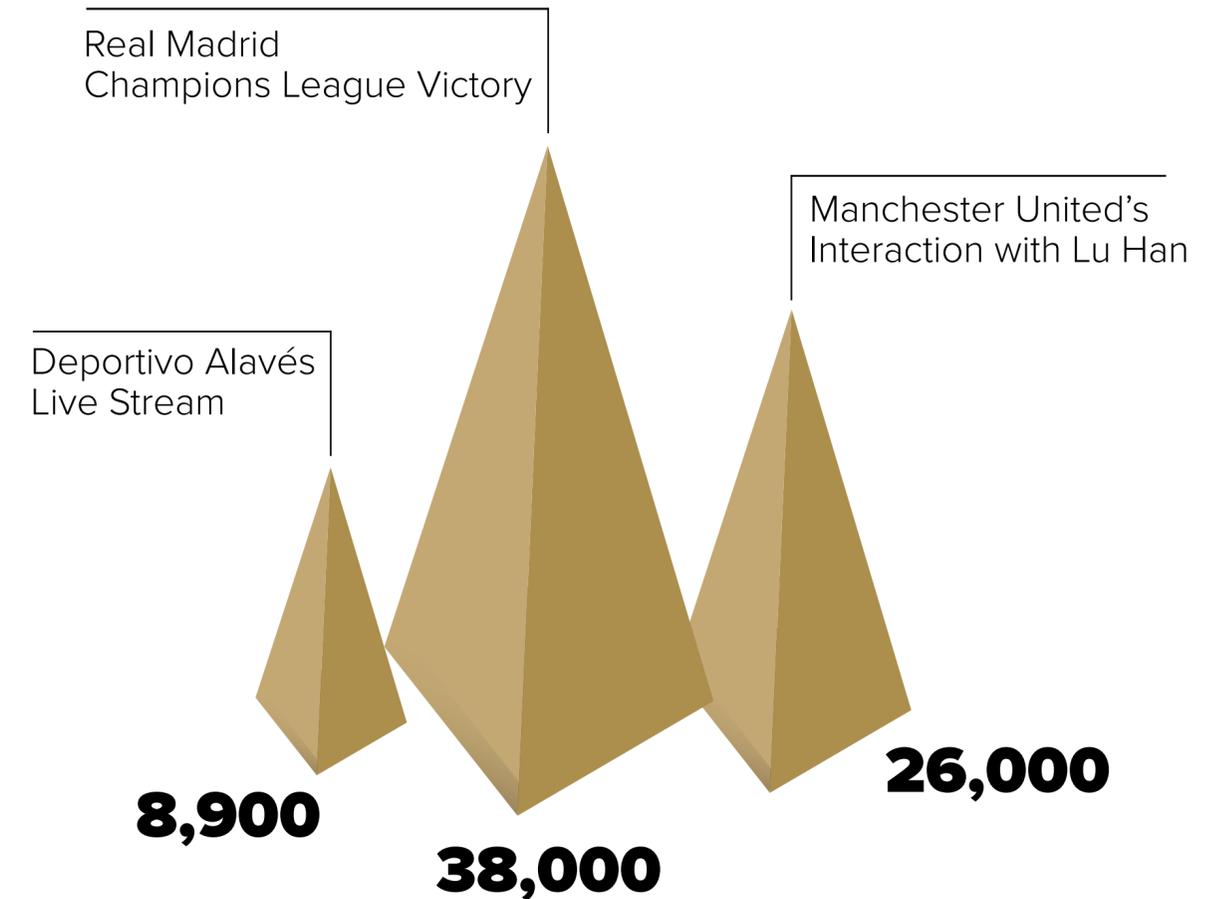
We also observed more “challenger teams” establishing an official online presence in search of their niche. In all, total European clubs online **increased from 55 to 76** in 2017. Whilst China remains an icon market driven by the biggest stars, there are plenty of opportunities for challenger clubs to gain a foothold. **66% of China’s football fans live in tier three cities or lower**, meaning that clubs do not directly engage with the majority of their fans when touring. Of the 14 teams that visited this summer, **none went to a tier 3 city**. As such, clubs which focus on highly localised strategies stand a better chance of success.

Another area in which teams can carve out an identity and following is through the booming esports industry, which is

predicted to be worth well in excess of **\$1.5 billion by 2020**. Esports offer clubs access to huge numbers of new, engaged consumers through a variety of methods including investment into teams, establishing academies, utilising common sponsors, and cross-licensed merchandise. The only club currently leveraging this is Olympique Lyonnais, who announced the formation of their Chinese FIFA Online 3 team in March.

Only 5 of the clubs online in China have a presence on one of the two biggest ecommerce platforms (JD.com and Tmall) and no club has a WeChat store. In order to drive sales in China it is vital to integrate ecommerce platforms into clubs’ established ecosystems. The product supply also needs to be localised and adjusted to Chinese income levels, the cost of a jersey plus shipping can easily come to a fifth of an average monthly income.

The vast majority of growth is still driven by the very top clubs. Of the **6 million followers gained** in 2017, **the top 5 clubs received over 50%** of them, with **only 12 teams gaining more than 100,000**. In order for this to change in 2018, exploring emerging platforms will be key to tapping into new groups. Sports apps are growing fast in China, Dongqiudi now has 2.7 million daily active users making it the most active online football community in China. Partnerships and official accounts offer chances to diversify fan bases and reach more specific audiences.



3 most popular football club posts in 2017 by total engagement



No. 1 Player Online in China Lionel Messi



Messi's 2017

Messi had the highest average engagement of any player - 13,320

Messi accumulated over 1 million new followers in 2017

Messi toured China attending events and announced the plans for the \$220m, 42,000m² Messi Experience Park

71% of Messi's followers are male

Messi is a global brand ambassador for Chinese phone company Huawei

Messi had the most engaged post of the year - 204,212, 5x more than the top club post

Following the relaunch of his Chinese social media channels in May, Messi outstripped 2017 winner Cristiano Ronaldo with **45% higher engagement per post** and **100% higher follower growth**. His immense popularity was also shown by 6 of Barcelona's 12 most successful 2017 posts involving him.



2. Cristiano Ronaldo



3. Anthony Martial



4. Paul Pogba



5. Wayne Rooney



Player Accounts in China

2017 Takeaways

2017 saw a **44% increase** in the total number of Europe-based players on Weibo, including the arrival of several notable names such as Harry Kane, Kevin De Bruyne, Neymar Jr, and the relaunch of our 2018 winner, Lionel Messi.

3 of the top players visited China with their personal sponsors. This proved to be a significant reason for the large gap between the top players and the rest, highlighting the impact of being on the ground in China. It makes them far more valuable and attractive to sponsors for a number of reasons. The first is consistency in global messaging. If a player can become synonymous with a brand, for example Cristiano Ronaldo and Nike, promotions around the partnership are much more likely to be perceived as genuine in China. Additionally, stars hold more influence over consumer choices in China than in the West, meaning the right match can pay huge dividends.

Having players online is also highly beneficial to clubs' performance. All of **the top 4 teams in the Red Card 2018 rankings have 3 or more players active online**. Content around star players is also very popular with fans, for example, Tottenham Hotspur's content around Harry Kane performed more than **90% better** than their account's average. Player accounts are now a key part of a club's holistic digital strategy and are crucial as teams look to

engage new fan demographics. The Premier League currently has the most players online with 22, followed by La Liga (12), and the Bundesliga (7).

Despite increasing recognition of the benefits that being online can bring all parties, in general, there is a lack of understanding as to what it takes to make the venture worthwhile. The simplest example of this is regular posting. Of all the player accounts, over 1/3 didn't post at all during 2017. The importance of regular content is demonstrated by Andre Schurrle, who may not command the global presence that some players possess, however, his 194 posts earned him over 100,000 new followers, ahead of Gerard Piqué, Eden Hazard, and Gareth Bale.

Showing effort and taking time to create content specifically for China goes a long way, which can be as simple as photos or short, self-shot videos. **A photo thanking Chinese fans for their fan mail earned Mesut Özil double his average engagement.** Making fans feel valued is at the core of sports marketing throughout the world and it is no different in China, where brands are particularly often too heavy handed with their messaging.

There is potential for a lot more from player accounts in 2018. If players are able to position themselves as celebrities, rather than just sports stars, they will stand a good chance of

growing a dedicated fan base that will both offer value and remain engaged following retirement. This will require continued improvement in strategy and effort from players to develop this area of the industry.



The 3 most engaged players visited China on tours



No. 1 League Online in China Bundesliga

Bundesliga's 2017



BUNDESLIGA

110% higher total engagement than the other European leagues.

60% higher social output than the Premier League, La Liga, and Ligue 1

The Dream Campaign attracted over 50,000 submissions and 160,000 new followers.

There was full on the ground coverage of 4 Bundesliga teams across their China tours

Launched a strategic partnership with Baidu, one of China's major technology platforms

Bundesliga fans spent 41.9 minutes per day on Weibo, the most active of Europe's top leagues

"It is a great honour for the Bundesliga to be awarded as #1 European League for the fourth consecutive year. It shows that 'Football as it is meant to be' is celebrated in the entire world and that we found a way to share our passion with the Chinese fans. Focusing engagement and being really close to the fans, understand their dreams and treat these with respect is part of our DNA and has been celebrated with our clubs during the year, especially during our 'Bundesliga Dream campaign' which set a new industry benchmark in spring 2017. And the best is, this is just the beginning, with our partners CCTV and PPTV we will be able to even share more of the fascination Bundesliga to football fans in China. For now I want to thank all clubs, our local partners, and most of all – OUR CHINESE FANS who live and share the Bundesliga values everyday."

Robert Klein, CEO Bundesliga



2.
Premier
League



3.
La
Liga



4.
Ligue 1



European Leagues in China

2017 Takeaways

Over 70% of Chinese fans follow more than one European team, typically from multiple leagues. Due to the lack of any geographical connection or inherited allegiance, Chinese fans are able to spread the risk of an unsuccessful season across a number of teams. This figure challenges the traditional belief that leagues and clubs must be successful to own the voice of each individual fan, especially as their financial spending power continues to grow.

From the 2019/20 season, PPTV will own the broadcast rights to the major European football leagues, including the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga, and Serie A. This monopoly on football rights means that fans only need one subscription to watch all matches, however, this will all be behind a paywall. With all the rights housed on PPTV, it will be important for European leagues to differentiate themselves from each other through additional content production and innovative digital initiatives.

Success here will require a close relationship with PPTV to develop value-adding initiatives for all three parties, the league, PPTV and the fan. Technologies such as Fantasy Football, VR experiences, and AR apps are already being discussed and implemented online by some sports organisations and broadcast networks. Investing in this area will be mutually beneficial for all parties.

Outside of digital products, there is still a huge opportunity for offline activation and events. La Liga are currently expanding their La Liga Club initiative into several Chinese cities, aimed at supporting China's goal of growing grassroots initiatives. Pop up stores, viewing parties and football tournaments will be further areas to grow the league's brand awareness in China with casual sports fans.



Number of teams that visited Greater China in 2017

60%

of sports fans on Weibo are interested in football

\$1.5 billion

spent by PPTV on acquiring the top European football rights



Best Live Stream

Borussia Dortmund



Borussia Dortmund are the market leaders amongst European football teams. They produced a series of 8 episodes over the summer that resulted in **12 million total views**, the highest of any club in 2017. The live stream series was filmed in both Germany and China, featuring several first team players across the team's training ground and stadium, Cup Final preparation, and summer tour special in China.

Notable Mention: Deportivo Alavés



Alavés published a 90 minute live stream on Weibo ahead of their match against Barcelona in February, the Chinese host talked about the pregame atmosphere and delivered a stadium tour. The club had less than 10,000 followers, but the live stream reached over 1.5 million people, becoming the most engaged post from a European football club that month.

Live Streaming In 2017

Best practice

Timing: Chinese audience's viewing behaviour is different to the West and timing plays an important part in this. Being in a different time zone, the European clubs should target live streams during the early evenings mid-week and late evenings during the weekend.

Content: Live stream content needs to be authentic and deliver new value to the viewers. What works on Facebook Live can now be localised to China, an easy solution especially with **74% of fans preferring videos of training sessions**. However, the best content will be tailored exclusively for the market and feature a Chinese host.

Promotion: The final key is to ensure that the content reaches the maximum audience possible. Content can be promoted on both Sina Weibo through paid media and a KOL strategy, as well as on the live stream platform to reach new non-sports audiences.

Predictions for 2018

We expect to see live streaming maintain its popularity amongst netizens and become a mature and stable industry. It will become increasingly regulated, which is a positive move, and still provides a big opportunity for European football brands.

Live broadcast of fixtures will become a high demand digital product. Manchester United and BVB launched live broadcasts of their U19 Youth Cup game and winter break friendlies on Sina Weibo, **reaching 1.6 million and 2.6 million views respectively**.

Sponsor integration into live streams will become a creative commercial concept. Real Madrid were one of **the first to integrate their key partner Adidas** into a Chinese live stream, with over 510,000 total viewers.

“There’s lots of crossover between the audience of live streaming events and ordinary sports fans. Additionally, the interaction, the culture of barrage in China, the well integrated social functions and the convenience of live streaming content to generate into short-form videos all fit the online social behavior of millenials.

This is very different from the interaction and participation of traditional TV media, live streaming is easier to attract the peripheral sports fans to participate in the production of content, it can also increase the audience’s stickiness by producing experiential content.”

Fu Si, Business Development Manager, Douyu Live Streaming Platform



Best Use of Technology

FC Bayern



During the 2017 summer, FC Bayern developed a VR experience for the fans to provide them with a 360 degree view of the Allianz Arena and the club headquarters in Munich. The club sent more than 4,000 pairs of VR glasses to Chinese fans and also made the experience available in the fan zones outside the Shanghai and Shenzhen stadiums before Bayern's summer tour matches.

Notable Mention: Juventus VR app



The Juventus VR app offers both 360 videos and images of the club's facilities in Turin, events, and player appearances. Launching the China specific version of the app gave millions of VR owners and Juve's Chinese fanbase an opportunity to experience Juventus football from their living room. The Chinese version of the app was launched in Shanghai with club legend David Trezeguet and fans from a local supporters clubs. The launch event was broadcasted live on Yizhibo and Weibo, gaining over 1.5 million views. Today, China represents the third largest country in terms of downloads for the app, trailing only the USA and South Korea.

Use of Technology In 2017

In 2017, European Football clubs focused mainly on providing users with a product that could bring fans closer to the club. This approach ranged from immersive 360 degree content to digital membership programs and redesigned the way Chinese fans interact with their favourite European club.

New tech trends, such as VR, have been extensively explored in China through both LBE (location based entertainment) and interactive mobile apps. Both FC Bayern and Juventus have entered this space with 360 degree video content, reaching new demographics, particularly tech and sports enthusiasts.

Many sports brands and organisations have identified the potential of this trend and invested in technology as a means to increase their brand value in China. Manchester United, introduced their Red Devil Cam H5 campaign around Chinese New Year on WeChat, allowing fans to upload their

own selfies and use the H5 to create a photo with United players inside Old Trafford. As a direct result, there were over 17,000 entries and more than 13,000 images created during the campaign.

The popularity of these initiatives shows how ready China is to adopt and enjoy these new technologies as a part of their social media lifestyle. The use of technology remains a major resource to raise brand awareness in China and will only continue to evolve, raising the bar for football clubs. Live streaming will continue to develop and solidify its merging with ecommerce, becoming a possible direct revenue stream from China. VR will become more interactive and accessible, paving the way for football clubs to offer VR gaming and experiences to their fans.

“In order to improve the overall quality of live broadcast, Tencent Sports has introduced advanced technology with both VR and AR being brought into the studio. This allows an interactive user experience to see comments, buy gifts and fan personas. For the World Cup, an AI algorithm will be integrated within the football reports to enrich the user experience for predicting match results.”

Ewell Zhao, General Manager at Tencent Sports Operations



Best Sponsor Activation Arsenal



During Arsenal's preseason tour to China, the club co-hosted Fan Zone events with kit partner PUMA in both Beijing and Shanghai. They included club trophies on display (The Invincibles' Premier League and the FA Cup), a replica dressing room, club memorabilia and an interactive zone. Two Arsenal legends, Ray Parlour and Gilberto Silva, visited both Fan Zones, meeting the fans, taking photos and signing merchandise. The Shanghai event ran for five days outside the PUMA store and attracted over 5,000 people, more than 700,000 video views and a digital reach of 3.1 million. The Beijing event was held in the CBD area and welcomed 11,500 people, over 2m video views, and a digital reach of 5.1m.

Notable Mention: VfL Wolfsburg



Sponsor Activation In 2017

Sponsors have a particularly strong influence on football fans in China, **65% of fans intend to buy official sponsors' products.** Through being highly visible during matches, at sponsorship events, and across social media, fans are highly influenced and feel pride in purchasing official sponsors' products and merchandise.

Viewing parties are a popular and convenient way for sponsors to engage with fans. Manchester United had a total of 10 sponsors at their IloveUnited viewing party in Shanghai last year, seeing over 1000 fans attend the event. Two club legends visited each sponsor booth to interact with fans, take photos and give away signed prizes.

Timing is vital for achieving success with sponsorship activations. Real Madrid partnered with their Chinese sponsor Yili on a Champions League final campaign, which saw the campaign slogan hashtag hit almost 60 million reads. Yili is one of the two largest milk brands in China, with Mengniu, a sponsor of the FIFA World Cup 2018, the other.

Campaign Series with Xiamen Airlines: 16.8 million hashtag reads

The final campaign of the series eventually lead to a trip to Wolfsburg for some lucky fans to attend a match courtesy of Xiamen Airlines. The first task was to follow Wolfsburg on WeChat where fans were asked a series of questions which they had to answer correctly in order to be entered into the grand prize draw.

“The tourism industry in China has been maturing over the past 5 to 10 years, and when customers are looking for certain “themes” on their trips, many like to incorporate sport as part of their travel experience. A chance to watch their favorite team is always high on the priority list. Exclusive match breaks (game ticket + hotel) packages in Europe have become more affordable to the rising middle-class of Chinese sport fans, therefore adding further potential to the market and giving sponsors more initiative to create partnerships with clubs. Sponsorships are getting more important and recognisable as brands become more approachable to the fans through interactions with sport IPs or co-branded marketing.”

Billy Ko, Marketing Director Thomas Cook Sport



Best Online Campaign Bundesliga



Following their Red Card 2017 success, the Bundesliga once again demonstrated their commitment to the Chinese market and the league's diehard fans with the launch of their 'Bundesliga Dream' campaign. The campaign canvassed Chinese fans' opinions, discovering their ultimate Bundesliga dreams with the aim of making them come true for 2 lucky winners. The league developed a microsite for fan submissions, leveraging the full Bundesliga digital ecosystem to drive traffic, including exclusive club and player video content. 50,000 fans submitted their Bundesliga Dreams. 15 were realised, including 2 fans that won a trip to watch the National Derby at Borussia Dortmund's famous Signal Iduna Park. The campaign microsite attracted more than 570,000 pageviews whilst the official campaign video amassed 15 million total views.

Notable Mention: Manchester City



Manchester City celebrated Chinese New Year, the most important event in the Chinese calendar, with a half time Dragon dance show during their Premier League game against Tottenham Hotspur, which attracted a total of 5.5 million video views. Offline fan events and a selection of unique pre-match and half-time activities were held in City Football Group territories in Manchester, New York, and Melbourne over the CNY period, whilst the Club's exclusive Chinese New Year online video series generated over 9 million Miaopai views.

Online Campaigns In 2017

The unrivalled success of the Bundesliga's Dream Campaign serves as an important distinction between the impact of short term, result-driven campaigns, often witnessed across the Chinese digital landscape, and those targeting long term impact built upon a fan-driven narrative.

Whilst almost every club on Weibo leveraged the popularity of official merchandise giveaways for short-term follower and engagement gains at some point in 2017, those who went above and beyond ultimately gained the most. Building a campaign focused on sharing and creating fan stories was key for brands desperate to prove that their Chinese followers are integral to their global strategy.

Juventus' #ItsTimeToPromise campaign also attracted impressive results. Fans made a promise to a club legend that they would stop at nothing to be in Cardiff during the Champions League Final for a chance to win tickets to the match. So too did Manchester United's season long #ILoveUnited campaign which featured 1,000-strong fan viewing parties, club legend appearances, media interviews and partner fan zones at #ILoveUnited events. Both of these further highlighted the ongoing commitment of the most influential organisations to creating a lasting legacy in China.

“Professional soccer clubs and leagues who want to reach out to the Chinese soccer fan require digital adeptness that can cope with the pace of digital innovation in China. With its “Dream” campaign the Bundesliga once again showed, that it understood how to be successful in China. The production of video content with players and clubs exclusively for the Chinese fans and the use and activation of all available digital channels for the campaign show that the Bundesliga not only acts with great passion in the Chinese market, but also operates very strategically and well thought through. 50,000 submitted dreams and over 15 million video views speak for themselves. The Bundesliga created China’s most participated online football campaign ever. Congratulations!”

Prof. Dr. Schmidt, Director of the Center for Sports and Management at WHU and member of the China Soccer Observatory



Best Tour Campaign FC Bayern



FC Bayern demonstrated best that an exceptional digital strategy is the key to maximising excitement among football fans whilst in China by translating offline events to their online platforms. The FC Bayern 2017 Summer Tour came to Shanghai and Shenzhen. During the tour, Bayern documented all of their offline activities on their official social media channels.

The activities included square dancing in front of the iconic Oriental TV Tower, an LED show on the Bund, Giovanni Elber's birthday party, and a 100m 'show wall' of FC Bayern at Shenzhen Airport. On Sina Weibo, the tour reached 52 million total reads and a total engagement of 240,000. On FC Bayern's WeChat, the tour attracted 417,300 total reads.

Notable Mention: FC Schalke 04



Touring China In 2017

Visiting China remains a vital part of a European football club's strategy to succeed in this region. It allows teams to engage directly with both the Chinese fans and culture, with digital presence playing a crucial role in opening the tour up to the rest of the country. **14 clubs visited Greater China last year**, doubling last year's total. Over the 7 peak days of the China tour, over 180,000 fans engaged with the clubs' digital content, reaching over 100 million social reads.

Best Practice: The China digital team should be on hand for 24 hours a day during the tour. FC Bayern populated their social channels, such as Sina Weibo, WeChat and Yizhibo throughout, but also developed wide coverage from the traditional media. This was driven by a series of offline to online activations across the country. Part of their success was also being able to spend an extensive time in the region to demonstrate their dedication to the fans all over the country.

We will see an ongoing trend of more football clubs coming to China over the coming years. Many of these will be the challenger clubs, who will try to establish their niche whilst on the ground. Particularly for these clubs, visiting lower tier cities can offer a great way to gain fans in many regions, that the biggest clubs are ignoring.

Schalke showed great dedication towards their Chinese fans during their China tour by looking into different platforms and on the ground accessibility. The club broadcasted 16 live streams during their time in China, the most of any of the 14 clubs on tour. In addition, various offline events took place, including football school activities in Kunshan and Changzhou, providing a great example of how clubs can profit from travelling to less affluent areas and build their brands away from the highly competitive tier 1 market.

“Be clear on why you are coming to China, come with genuine enthusiasm and don't hide away. Chinese fans deserve more than just a peek at their heroes walking 10m between a hotel lobby and a team bus. We saw great benefit from a focus on partnering with local brands. Chinese sponsors are totally underestimated in the West from an activation standpoint. Brands like Eastroc, Xianiu88.com and Der were an absolute pleasure to work with and promoted their partnership with passion, creativity and purpose.”

Ned Negus, Senior Vice President Sales and Marketing at Catalyst Media



| | | TOTAL | Weibo Followers | Weibo Follower Growth | Weibo Total Engagement | WeChat Total Reads | Live Stream | Chinese Website | Ecommerce | Chinese Apps |
|----|---------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 | Manchester United | 71 | 9.22m | 9 | 13 | 20 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 2 | Real Madrid | 68 | 3.00m | 10 | 20 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 3 | FC Bayern | 66 | 3.47m | 10 | 20 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 4 | Arsenal | 48 | 4.67m | 10 | 8 | 10 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 5 | Liverpool | 43 | 2.36m | 9 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 6 | AC Milan | 41 | 0.76m | 7 | 11 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 7 | FC Barcelona | 40 | 5.74m | 6 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 8 | Borussia Dortmund | 38 | 1.58m | 10 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 8 | Manchester City | 38 | 8.24m | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 10 | Tottenham Hotspur | 29 | 1.53m | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 10 | Juventus | 29 | 0.18m | 4 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| 12 | Chelsea | 28 | 2.91m | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 13 | Inter Milan | 26 | 0.61m | 3 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 14 | Atlético Madrid | 22 | 0.32m | 1 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| 15 | Paris Saint-Germain | 19 | 1.26m | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 |

Methodology: The online performance of the football clubs, talents, and leagues were assessed according to a number of different metrics. The data analysed was collected between January 1st 2017 - December 31st 2017. Points were awarded in each category as shown above.

The platforms selected for analysis were those judged to be the most relevant to assessing performance in China's current digital landscape. Points were weighted so as to reflect the importance of each platform and caps were added in some categories to ensure that no single metric could hold too much weight and render the rankings unfair.

Full methodology available on request.

ABOUT MAILMAN

Mailman is China's leading sports digital consultancy and marketing platform. We design marketing programmes to build audiences, drive engagement, and create a successful business in China. Our services are tailored towards nascent sports organisations entering into China, and the more developed organisations looking to grow.

Our services include:

Digital Strategy
Chinese Social Media Activation
Media Partnerships
PR Management
Video/Live Stream Production
Brand Sponsorship

For questions about the report:
Maximilian Baier
max@mailmangroup.com

For business opportunities:
David Hornby
david@mailmangroup.com

