

NBA RED CARD

2018

CHINA DIGITAL REPORT



Published by
MAILMAN



GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS

**ARE THE
MOST
POPULAR
NBA TEAM
ONLINE
IN CHINA**



JEREMY LIN

**IS THE
MOST
POPULAR
CURRENT
BASKETBALL
PLAYER
ONLINE
IN CHINA**



KOBE BRYANT'S

**LEGACY
LIVES ON
IN CHINA
AS THE
MOST
FOLLOWED
NBA
STAR**



Welcome to the second edition of our NBA Red Card. For the second year in a row we have produced a comprehensive analysis on the digital performance of the NBA teams, players and its sponsors. The aim of this report is to educate sports professionals, teams, and organisations about basketball’s digital landscape in China, to highlight new opportunities and potential challenges.

In the year following the 2017 report, there has been a lot of discussion about the strength of the NBA in China, what is rarely talked about however is the strategic positioning of its teams and players. The NBA Red Card 2018 aims to measure the influence of the NBA teams and players online in China across 5 different metrics. Outside of this, the report also undertakes a content analysis of two NBA teams, comparing their global and Chinese channels to reveal best practice and the key factors for success online in China.

NBA players, unlike the teams, are free to leverage the NBA’s strength in China financially. Two of the most recent examples of this was the \$80 million, 10-year deal between ANTA and Klay Thompson in June 2018 and Dwyane Wade’s lifetime deal with Chinese apparel brand Li Ning. While teams are not allowed to directly drive revenue from overseas, indirect revenue streams from China such as jersey sales, new sponsorship deals and even ticket or tourism sales should be of interest for every franchise.

Separately, despite NBA teams being one of the most innovative groups in sports business, only a few teams have a clear digital strategy and a long term plan in China. Most notably are the NBA

Red Card 2018 winners, the Golden State Warriors who produced special edition Chinese New Year jerseys for the sixth consecutive year and recently began a tailored digital marketing strategy for China. As a result, the team have been able to secure four sponsorship deals and have recorded the highest quantity of jerseys sold in China. The Dallas Mavericks are the highest movers in our rankings, with Mark Cuban himself demonstrating great dedication to the market, asking Chinese fans for a new nickname for the team. 100,000 votes later “the Lone Ranger Heroes (独行侠)” were born.

Congratulations go to both the Golden State Warriors and Jeremy Lin as the winners of the NBA Red Card 2018, as well as Kobe Bryant for an outstanding job remaining its legacy in China. All are examples of what dedication towards the Chinese market and a tailored local digital strategy achieves. We are also looking forward to welcoming the Dallas Mavericks and the Philadelphia 76ers to China this October for this year’s China Games, marking a 25th consecutive sell out crowd for the NBA in China. If the NBA manages to leverage this popularity optimally for all stakeholders, such as players, teams, owners and more, will show the future.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the report.



Andrew Collins
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Most Popular NBA Team Online in China

slide 5

Content Analysis

slide 6-7

Most Popular Current NBA Player Online in China

slide 8

NBA Players in China

slide 9

Digital to Sales

slide 10

NBA China Partner Analysis

slide 11

Report Takeaways

slide 12



NBA

RED CARD

2018



1.

**GOLDEN STATE
WARRIORS**

74
POINTS



2.

**CLEVELAND
CAVALIERS**

66
POINTS



3.

**HOUSTON
ROCKETS**

62
POINTS



4.

**LA
LAKERS**

48
POINTS



5.

**SAN ANTONIO
SPURS**

47
POINTS

The NBA teams were assessed across the following metrics:
1. Weibo followers 2. Weibo follower growth 3. Weibo engagement 4. Baidu Mentions 5. Weibo Mentions

Full methodology upon request.



WINNER:
GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS

In order to get a better understanding of the NBA teams global social strategy, we analysed upwards of 2,000 posts over a set duration for both the Portland Trail Blazers and the Golden State Warriors Warriors' Twitter and Weibo accounts. Whilst both platforms have individual traits and different user behaviour, they are the closest platforms in terms of output, engagement and channel strategy.



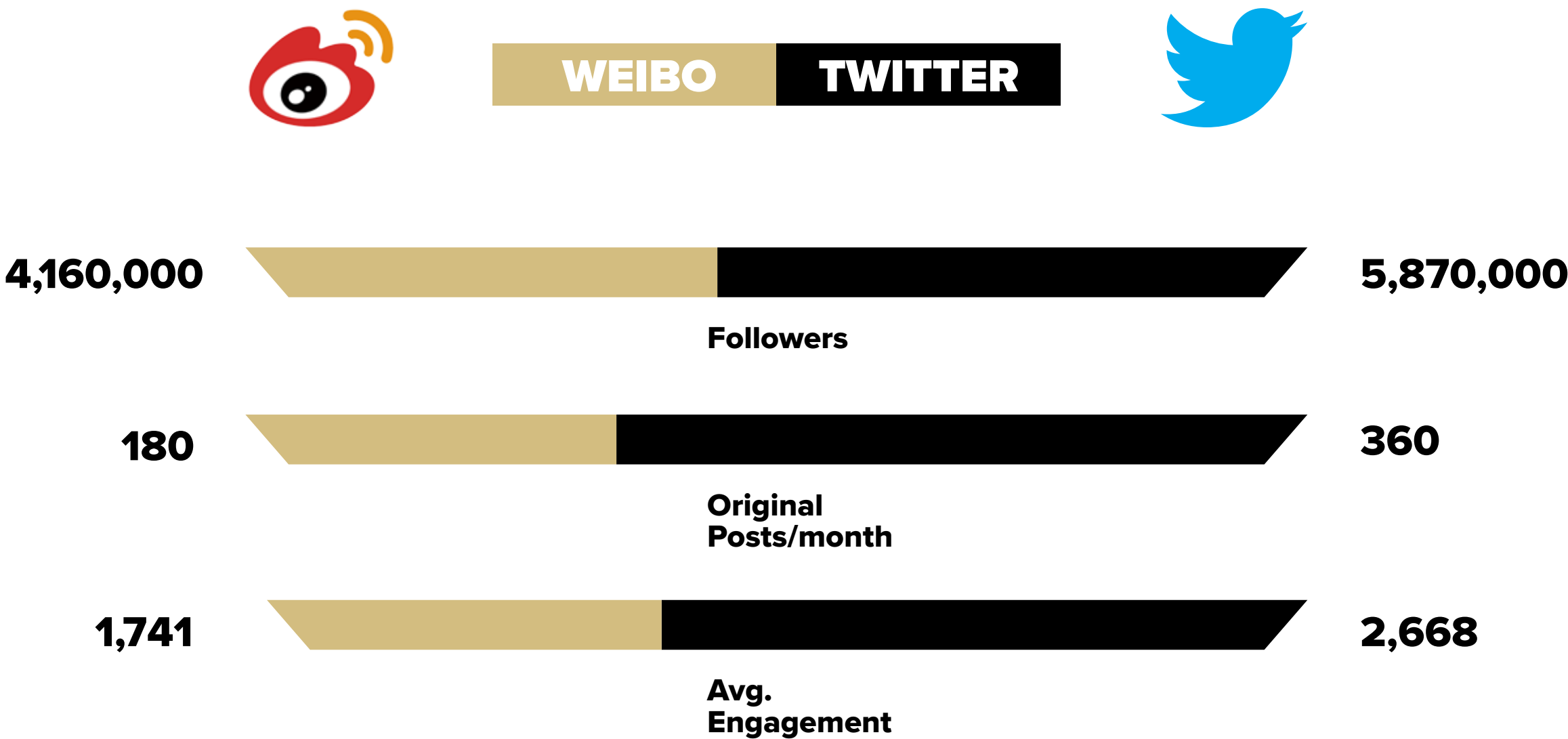
WARRIORS
VS AVG. NBA TEAM

3X
more popular

NBA

RED CARD

2018



Data correct as of July 31st

1. Situation: The Golden State Warriors are the most followed account on Weibo with 4.4 Million followers. They also have a strong engagement rate (average engagement divided by total followers) of 0.042% which is nearly the same as Twitter and the **highest amongst all NBA teams**. These results are similar on Twitter, where the Warriors have one of the most popular accounts of all the NBA teams with 5.9 million followers and a higher than industry average engagement rate of 0.045%.

2. Reason: Whilst the Warriors' recent triumphs are one of the main drivers for progress online, their **popularity cannot be attributed solely to sporting success**. The Warriors are the team with the highest output and the highest percentage of rich media (42% videos and gifs per month). Most importantly, the Warriors post **6x more China original content** than the average NBA Team on Weibo. From a content diversity perspective, the Warriors leverage Chinese interest around entertainment, with over half of their output focus on this category. This resulted in a **14x higher total engagement than the average NBA team**.

3. Takeaway: The Warriors show a clear **social strategy** for the local market which has led to the team developing their brand identity and generating a cult following online in China. This dedication has enabled them to translate their sporting and global digital success into the #1 spot online in China as well as reaping the financial reward. The Golden State Warriors are not just the #1 team in terms of jersey sales in China, but with 4 Chinese partners, the franchise has the highest number of sponsors from this region.



CONTENDER:
PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS

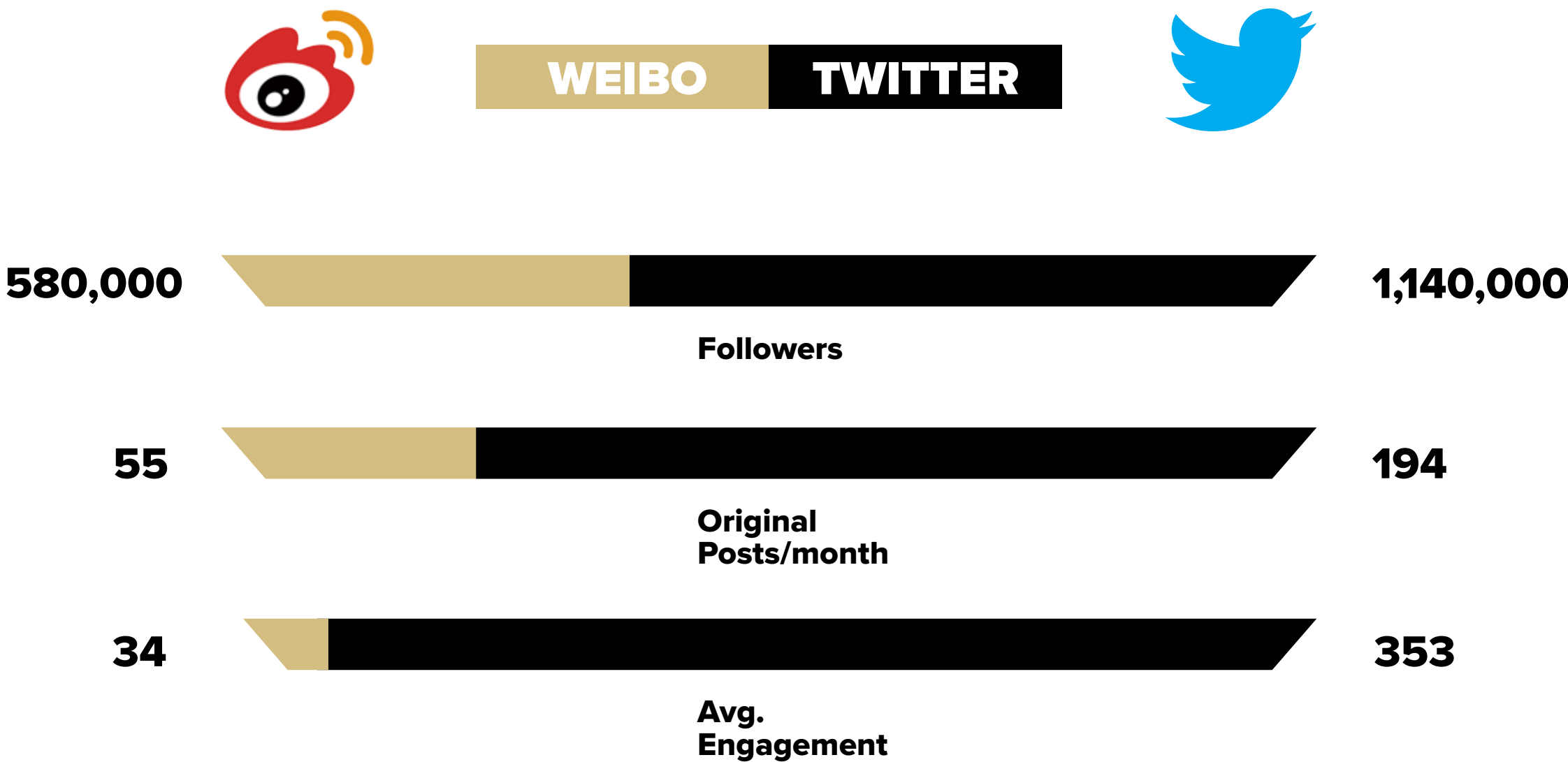
We performed a Weibo content audit on the Trail Blazers to gain a clear understanding of their digital performance in the NBA Red Card 2018. Serving as a case study for other relative teams, we have then analysed their Twitter performance to draw comparison on the team's approaches to both platforms.



NBA

RED CARD

2018



Data correct as of July 31st

BLAZERS WEIBO
VS. BLAZERS TWITTER

11X
lower engagement

1. Situation: The Trail Blazers' Twitter is renowned as one of the most fan-centric NBA team accounts online, however their approach to China is very different. On Twitter, the team has a relatively strong engagement rate of 0.031%, driven by their entertaining interaction with other accounts, on average 4 per day. Yet their Weibo **engagement rate is 5x lower than on Twitter**, and ranking at 24th on the NBA Red Card, the Blazers have a long way to go to bring their fan-centric social approach to Chinese netizens.

2. Reason: On Twitter, the Blazers integrate the fan community into their social strategy. One in ten posts incorporate a fan-centric element, including CSR, fan activities and votes etc, however, **only 4% of their Weibo output was fan specific**. This unique characteristic was decisive to the outcome of their digital ranking. Their output on Weibo is also significantly lower than on Twitter, only posting around 25% of content featuring on their global channel. This has led to lower exposure as well as fewer interactions and touchpoints with fans. In comparison to the Warriors, the Blazers focus primarily on match related content, rather than the more engaged entertainment content on Weibo.

3. Takeaway: The Trail Blazers are **lacking a clear Chinese content strategy** to grow their brand in China. The team needs to localise their successful western approach to the China market, and by putting the fans first, the franchise will become increasingly popular in China. This in turn will open the door to more opportunities such as sponsorship deals or an increase in jersey sales.

MOST POPULAR CURRENT NBA PLAYER ONLINE IN CHINA



NBA

RED CARD

2018



1.

JEREMY
LIN

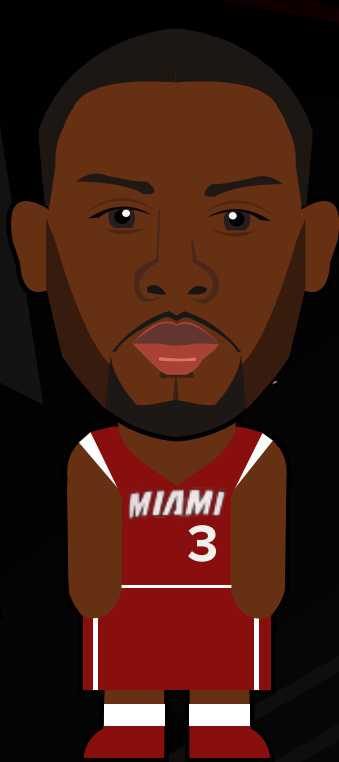
93
POINTS



2.

STEPHEN
CURRY

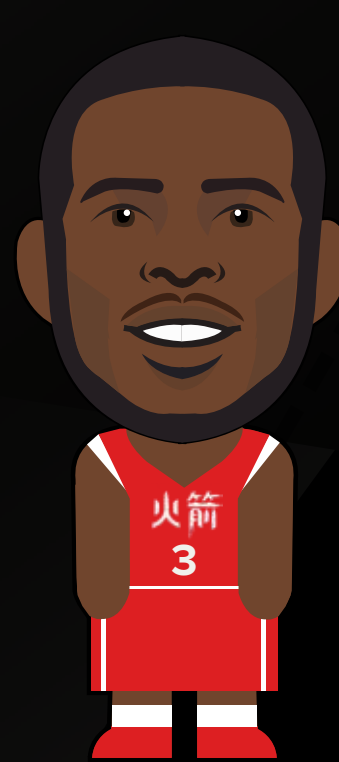
84
POINTS



3.

DWYANE
WADE

52
POINTS



4.

CHRIS
PAUL

36
POINTS



5.

CARMELO
ANTHONY

23
POINTS

Each NBA Player were assessed across the following metrics:
1. Weibo followers 2. Weibo follower growth 3. Weibo engagement 4. Baidu Mentions 5. Weibo Mentions

Full methodology upon request.



NBA

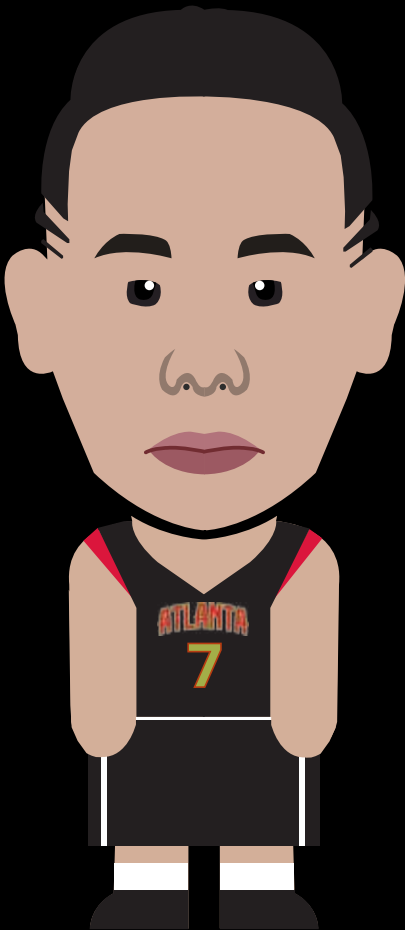
RED CARD

2018

THE WINNER: JEREMY LIN

Jeremy Lin's average engagement is 10x higher than the average NBA player and highest amongst all players, while commanding the second highest following amongst current NBA players online in China. This is due to his high content frequency, interaction with online stars, content originality and platforms.

Alongside this, he has launched his own cartoon series and featured in a Chinese New Year documentary on the NBA's Weibo. He has also been quick to jump on new trends, launching an account on short form video platform Douyin, amassing over 6.8 million followers and becoming the highest followed western sports star in the process.



KOBE BRYANT'S LEGACY LIVES ON

Kobe Bryant has continued to build his brand online as he engages with Chinese fans on life outside of basketball. The superstar has travelled to China for 15 consecutive years, whilst his Academy Award announcement was the most engaged post from a basketball star last season.

In the list of current NBA players' performance, the NBA Red Card 2017 winner would still be ranked as **#1 above Jeremy Lin**, and remains the most followed NBA star with 2x higher followers than Stephen Curry.



25

Over 25 current NBA players have endorsement deals with a Chinese apparel brand



3 PLAYERS
THE FACE: **KLAY THOMPSON**



12 PLAYERS
THE FACE: **DWYANE WADE**



10 PLAYERS
THE FACE: **TONY PARKER, DWIGHT HOWARD**

NBA players are increasingly looking to the East to monetise their popularity and brand. Currently, over 25 NBA players have signed with Chinese apparel brands, with Klay Thompson and Dwyane Wade making the biggest headlines. The advantages are clear, aside from the monetary incentives compared to Western apparel brands, they increase the awareness of their personal brand in China. Nearly every one of Li Ning's 6,000 stores in China stock Wade's signature shoes, with 10 stores exclusively dedicated to brand Wade.



NBA RED CARD VS. JERSEY SALES CHINA

NBA
RED CARD
2018

	NBA Red Card Team Ranking	Jersey Sales China NBA Teams
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		









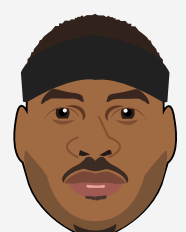

Investment in digital performance has a direct impact on sales in China.

Team Ranking:

When comparing the NBA Red Card ranking with the Top 5 jersey sales in China, there's a clear correlation with **4 of the 5 teams featuring in both lists**. A clear relationship exists between online performance in China and jersey sales.

We identified in the team analysis previously that a high level of dedication towards digital in China has a direct positive impact on popularity online. Hence, one can argue that an **investment in digital performance has a direct impact on sales in China**. Only the Bulls are an exception here, which can be explained with the historic ongoing popularity of Michael Jordan in China, especially in the older generation, which are not as active online.

NBA Red Card Player Ranking	Jersey Sales China NBA Players
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1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Players are not leveraging their popularity digitally.

Players Ranking:

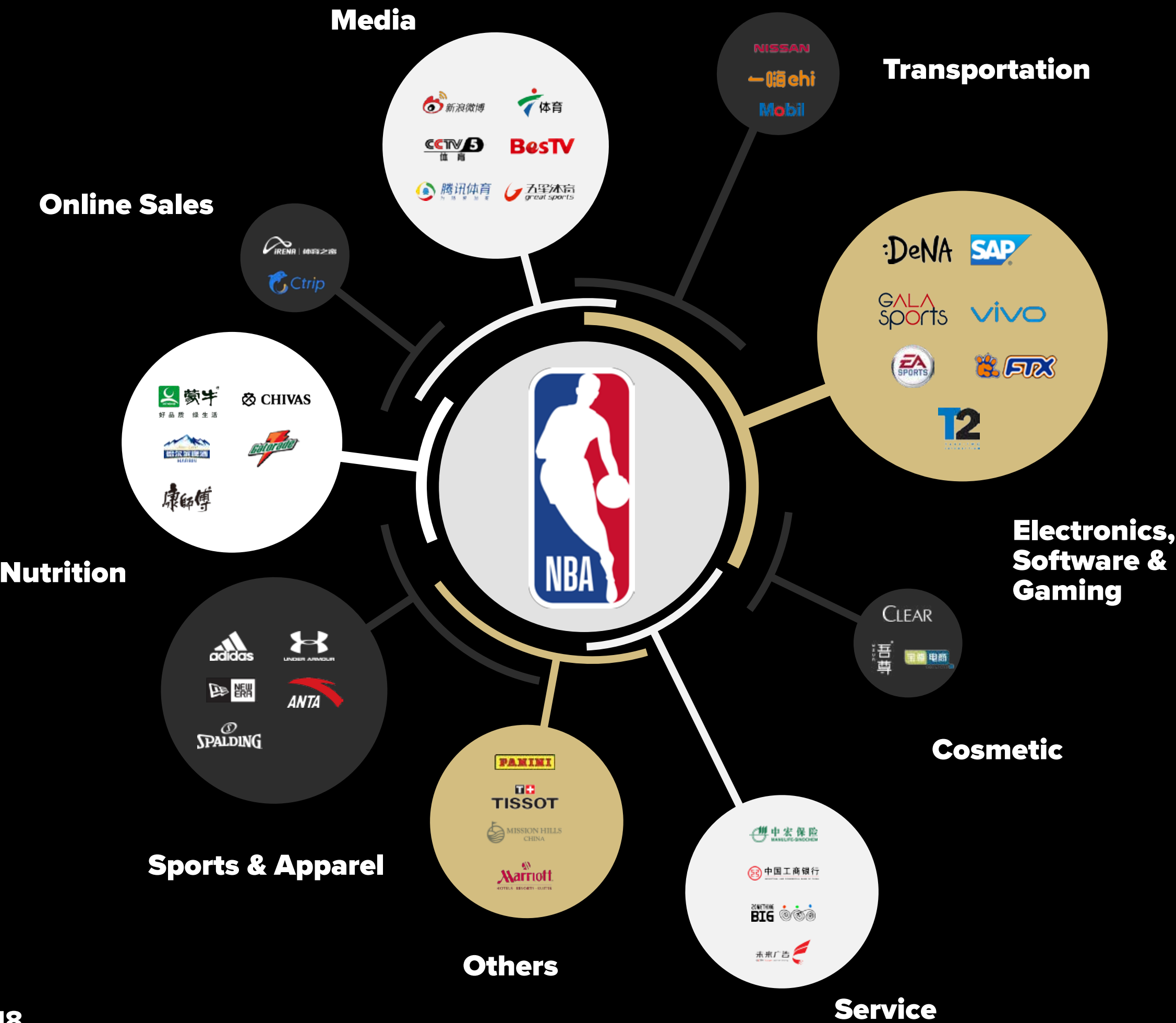
In contrast to the team rankings, there is **low correlation between the players' online popularity and the jersey sales of players** despite them having more power and freedom to monetise their popularity. Of the NBA Red Card Top 5, only Stephen Curry sits in the top 5 for jersey sales. China is an icon market, where players are the main trigger for fans to follow a team.

We discovered that players who are not investing in their digital presence **are leaving millions of dollars on the table in China**. LeBron James, despite his is digital savviness in the West, his widespread interest in China and offline presence through Nike tours, does not have an official social presence.



NBA CHINA PARTNERS IN OVERVIEW

NBA
RED CARD
2018



NBA China has more than 40 media and marketing partners in China.

As China’s sport industry is maturing, western brands are shifting their focus from brand awareness to monetisation. When looking at the NBA in China, there is a lot to learn for other sport organisations, especially sponsor and partner activation. NBA China has **more than 40 media and marketing partners in China**, more than any other sport. The NBA launched its sub-division, NBA China, 10 years ago and is now worth more than \$4 billion.

The breakdown of NBA’s Chinese partners shows that **20% are from the “Electronics & Gaming” industry**. This is due to the NBA’s global focus on being the most innovative sports organisation in the world but also highlights their local expertise. This industry overlaps heavily with their target audience and gives the NBA a major competitive advantage in the market.

Many of the NBA China partnerships target **longer-term sponsorships with multiple purposes**. A good example of this is their multi million dollar deal with Tencent, which not only fulfills a financial purpose, but also to build the technological infrastructure for the leagues China development, including their digital broadcasting platform. Similarly, their partnership with Ctrip is a great opportunity for the NBA to grow in the thriving Chinese tourism industry.

NBA China manages to successfully activate these partners with local expertise. The league’s Chinese New Year campaign **featured 12 partners** with Dongfeng Nissan acting as the campaign title partner and also co-launched a CSR project (including Spalding) around China. The NBA announced the Chinese New Year themed weeks where a total of 93 games were broadcasted in China across media partners, with Nike designing special edition Chinese Jerseys for a few of the 12 participating teams. The holistic campaign was activated digitally through Mini Games on the NBA App, on Chinese social platforms as well as the fan loyalty platform NBA QMQ, with the chance for fans to win a trip to a NBA game.

REPORT TAKEAWAYS



Following the findings from this report on both the NBA teams’ and players’ digital performance, we’ve identified five key takeaways that can be applied to not only NBA franchises and talent, but also implemented by global sports brands.

NBA

RED CARD

2018

1

NBA FOUNDATION

The 30 NBA teams have a combined 68 million social followers in China. The league’s commitment to launch every team online has provided the foundation for each to succeed and grow their own following and revenue. No other single sports league has a comprehensive team presence with this level of followers, and the NBA’s rule on this has been instrumental.

2

CHINA FIRST

The team and talent that appeared at the top of the rankings have implemented a local content and platform approach to their social presence. Jeremy Lin launched the most followed Douyin channel of any sports star, meanwhile the Warriors have the highest percentage of original China content across all teams. This China focus has been key to their success.

3

STAND OUT

With all 30 teams and over 80 NBA players online, it’s hard to deliver something different. The teams and players at the top of the rankings have been able to negotiate this competitive landscape and develop something unique. The Mavericks nickname campaign was a record-breaking campaign, and will be followed up by their China Games appearance this year.

4

DIGITAL INVESTMENT

Four of the top five in the NBA Red Card ranking featured in the top 5 of team jersey sales. This correlations demonstrates that there is a direct link between social popularity and investment into this market with potential revenue streams from China. The Warriors also have the highest number of China partners, an opportunity to further activate in this region.

5

GIVE BACK

The biggest challenge for the NBA, teams and talent now is to deliver a value-add to the Chinese stakeholders. Very few sports IP are asking themselves ‘how do we give something back to China’, a question that reverses the traditional marketing. The fan loyalty app ‘NBA QiuMiQuan’ and the ongoing ‘NBA Cares’ initiative, both showcased during CNY, are a step in the right direction.



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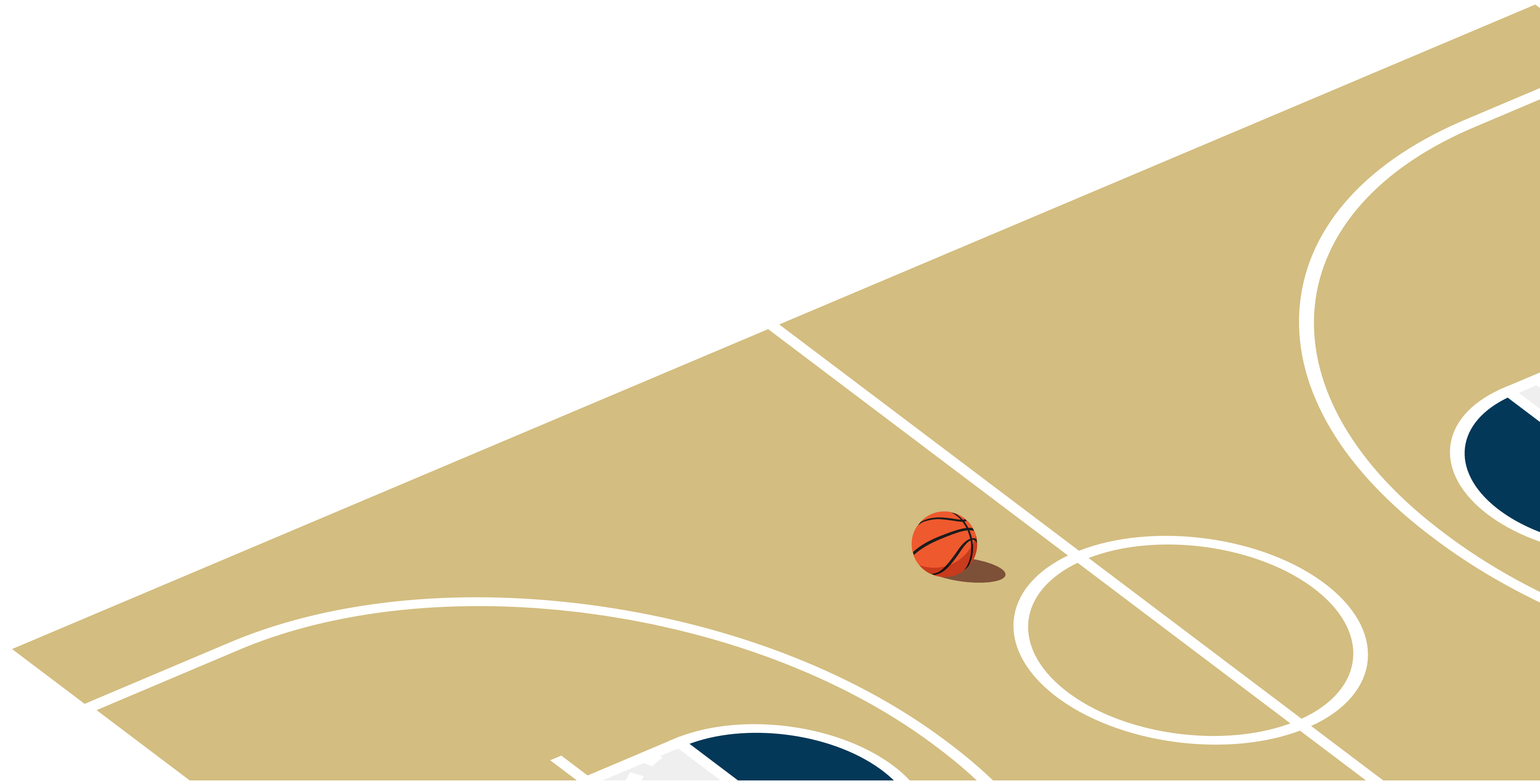
Est. 1999, Mailman is China's leading sports digital marketing agency. We have over 120 experts across China, UK and the US powering the brand for the world's most ambitious sports organisations and athletes.

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Our services include:

Digital Strategy
Content Production
Technology
Social Media
PR & Brand Activation
Sponsorship
E-Commerce



NBA

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2018

FULL NBA TEAM RANKING































NBA

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2018

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TEAM			FOLLOWER	FOLLOWER GROWTH	ENGAGEMENT	MENTIONS	TOTAL
1		Golden State Warriors	20	4	30	20	74
2		Cleveland Cavaliers	18	5	30	13	66
3		Houston Rockets	19	5	30	8	62
4		LA Lakers	17	6	14	11	48
5		San Antonio Spurs	14	4	27	2	47
6		Dallas Mavericks	16	11	8	4	39
7		Toronto Raptors	20	12	3	2	37
8		Boston Celtics	6	5	13	10	34
9		Minnesota Timberwolves	15	10	4	1	30
10		Milwaukee Bucks	15	10	1	2	28
11		Oklahoma City Thunder	10	3	10	1	24
12		LA Clippers	15	2	3	3	23
13		Brooklyn Nets	11	3	6	2	22
14		Miami Heat	12	3	3	3	21
15		Sacramento Kings	6	3	8	2	19
16		Chicago Bulls	9	2	1	3	15
17		Philadelphia 76ers	7	3	3	1	14
18		New York Knicks	9	2	1	1	13
18		Orlando Magic	9	2	1	1	13
20		Charlotte Hornets	6	3	1	2	12
20		Denver Nuggets	6	3	1	2	12
20		Portland Trail Blazers	4	3	3	2	12
23		Detroit Pistons	6	2	1	2	11
23		Indiana Pacers	6	3	0	2	11
23		New Orleans Pelicans	6	3	1	1	11
23		Memphis Grizzlies	3	2	3	3	11
27		Phoenix Suns	4	3	1	1	9
27		Utah Jazz	4	1	2	2	9
29		Atlanta Hawks	4	3	1	0	8
29		Washington Wizards	4	2	1	1	8