

RED
CARD

NBA RED CARD 2019

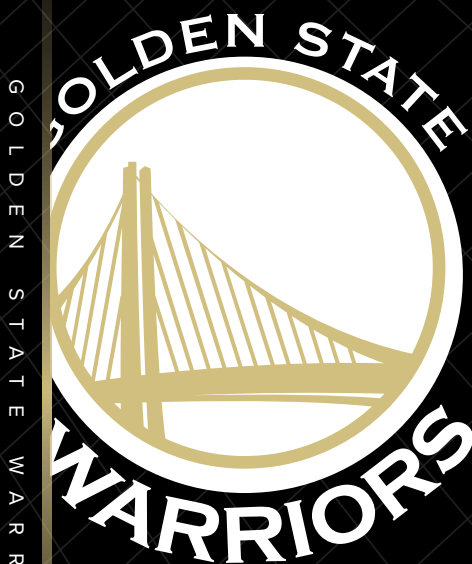


Published by



MAILMAN

Golden State Warriors
retain title as
#1 team online



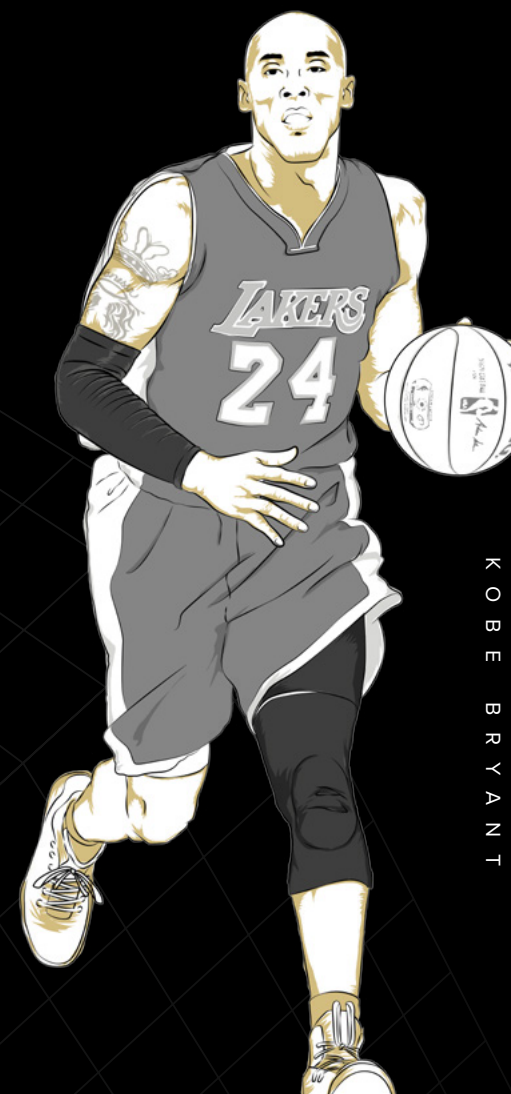
GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS



JEREMY LIN

Jeremy Lin most
popular current
basketball player

Kobe Bryant is
#1 NBA Legend



KOBE BRYANT

REPORT LEARNINGS

Welcome to the third edition of our NBA Red Card. For the third consecutive year we have produced a comprehensive analysis on the digital performance of NBA teams, legends, players and sponsors. We discover new market insights and key fan learnings. These findings can be applied not only to NBA franchises and talent, but also to the wider global sports community.

- 01 China Prominence**
This year, a record 15 NBA teams celebrated Chinese New Year at their home arenas, part of the League's eighth successive Spring Festival initiative. An increasing number of teams are recognising China as their #1 growth market - now is the time for teams to effectively integrate domestic arena activations with their digital channels and audiences in China.
- 02 Commercial Revolution**
International sponsorship rights are now available, offering new opportunities for NBA teams and Chinese companies to collaborate. NBA teams can directly drive revenue from China and are now, more than ever, in commercial competition with their NBA counterparts and other sports teams. We can expect a significant increase in Chinese sponsorship investments in the NBA.
- 03 Digital Investment > Success**
Online popularity in China is strongly linked to the level of digital investment, with basketball less reliant than football on on-court success. To realise growth, more teams will start taking control of their digital presence in China and invest resources in China marketing. We have seen this phenomenon already, with Jeremy Lin outperforming Stephen Curry across Chinese social channels, due to his team's strong commitment to this market.
- 04 Broadcasting**
The NBA and Tencent's substantial five-year \$1.5b extension of their existing digital partnership makes Tencent the NBA's largest partner outside the US. Regardless of how this agreement directly impacts Tencent's ability to grow their fanbase (Weibo is a significant competitor), this is a massive indicator for the perceived value and enormous potential of the China market.
- 05 Legends Live On**
NBA legends continue to grow their legacy in China. We've seen a number of examples, from Kobe Bryant's e-commerce stores, Dwayne Wade's exclusive Chinese wine partnership, and FIBA World Cup gaining ambassadors including Dirk Nowitzki.

P.5 **Most Popular NBA Team
Online in China**

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Online in China**

P.8 **NBA's Commercial
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MOST POPULAR NBA TEAMS ONLINE IN CHINA



NO.1
Golden State Warriors 90

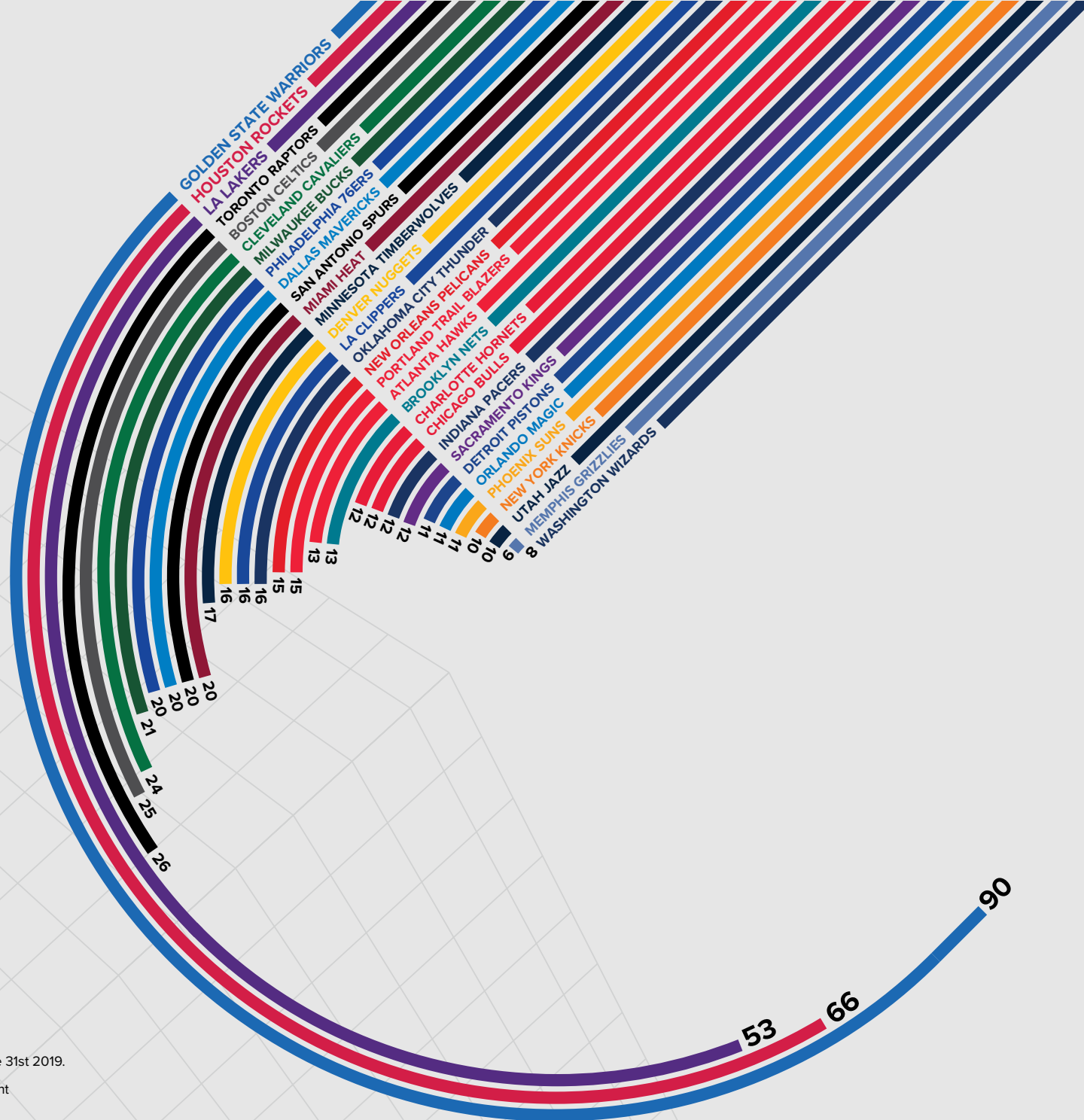


NO.2
Houston Rockets 66



NO.3
LA Lakers 53

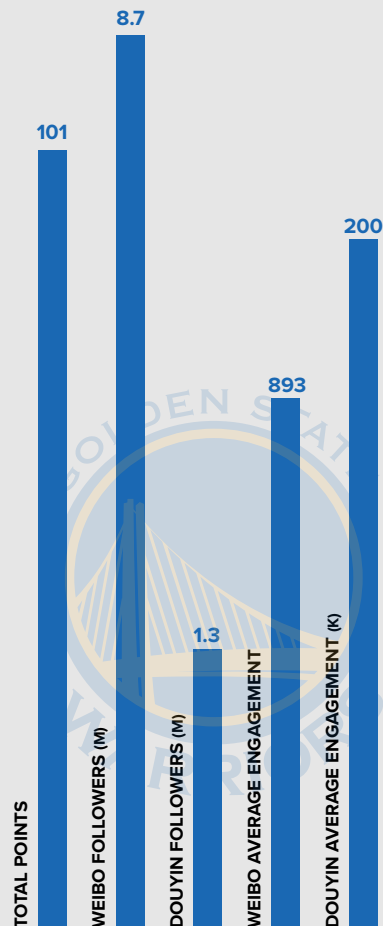
The data analysed was collected between August 1st 2018 - June 31st 2019.
Points were awarded across the following metrics:
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The full methodology is available upon request.



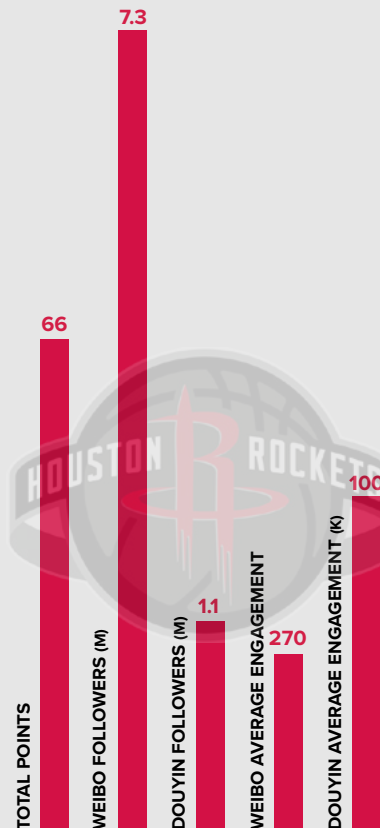
NBA TEAMS ONLINE IN CHINA - ANALYSIS

NBA teams online are stronger than ever in China. This past season, NBA teams gained a cumulative **47 million new followers**, around **2x higher growth than last season**. Despite the total growth, there is a clearly-established top tier through the 'Big 3': the Golden State Warriors, Houston Rockets and Los Angeles Lakers all scoring significantly higher than the rest of the teams across all digital metrics.

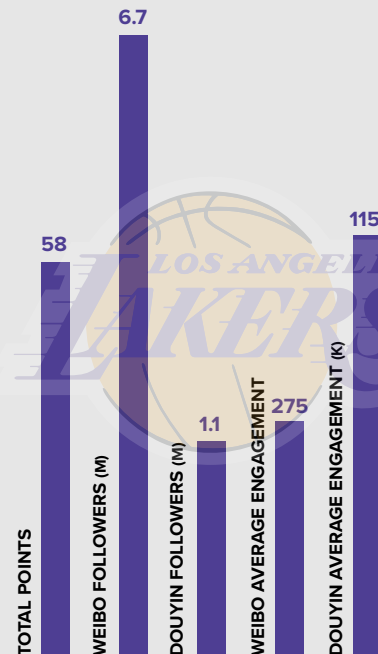
Golden State Warriors



Houston Rockets



LA Lakers



The Power of Icons

The NBA has leveraged this to promote the League by sending out all 'Big 3' teams to China between 2016 - 2019. China is an icon market - the Warriors are best known for their all-star team, excitement around the Rockets stems from current star James Harden as well as the Yao Ming era, whilst the Lakers can thank Kobe Bryant and LeBron James for their continuous success. Meanwhile, Cleveland Cavaliers dropped out of the NBA Red Card top 3 and have felt the impact of the icon market after losing their star asset LeBron James.

The Power of Content

On-court success and icons are not the only drivers of popularity. It's notable that the three leading teams have **20x higher content output** than average. All three teams also published **15x more original content** on Chinese platforms than the average NBA team. This is demonstrated in these three teams having published **the top 10 posts** on Weibo measured on engagement in the past 12 months.

The Increasing Gap

While it's easy to argue that the success of the 'Big 3' is solely due to big-name individuals and past sporting successes, a significant factor in the teams' popularity is that they are amongst the most dedicated teams to the Chinese market in the past 12 months. Interestingly, none of the top posts of the 'Big 3' is sports related, but all Chinese & Fan related.

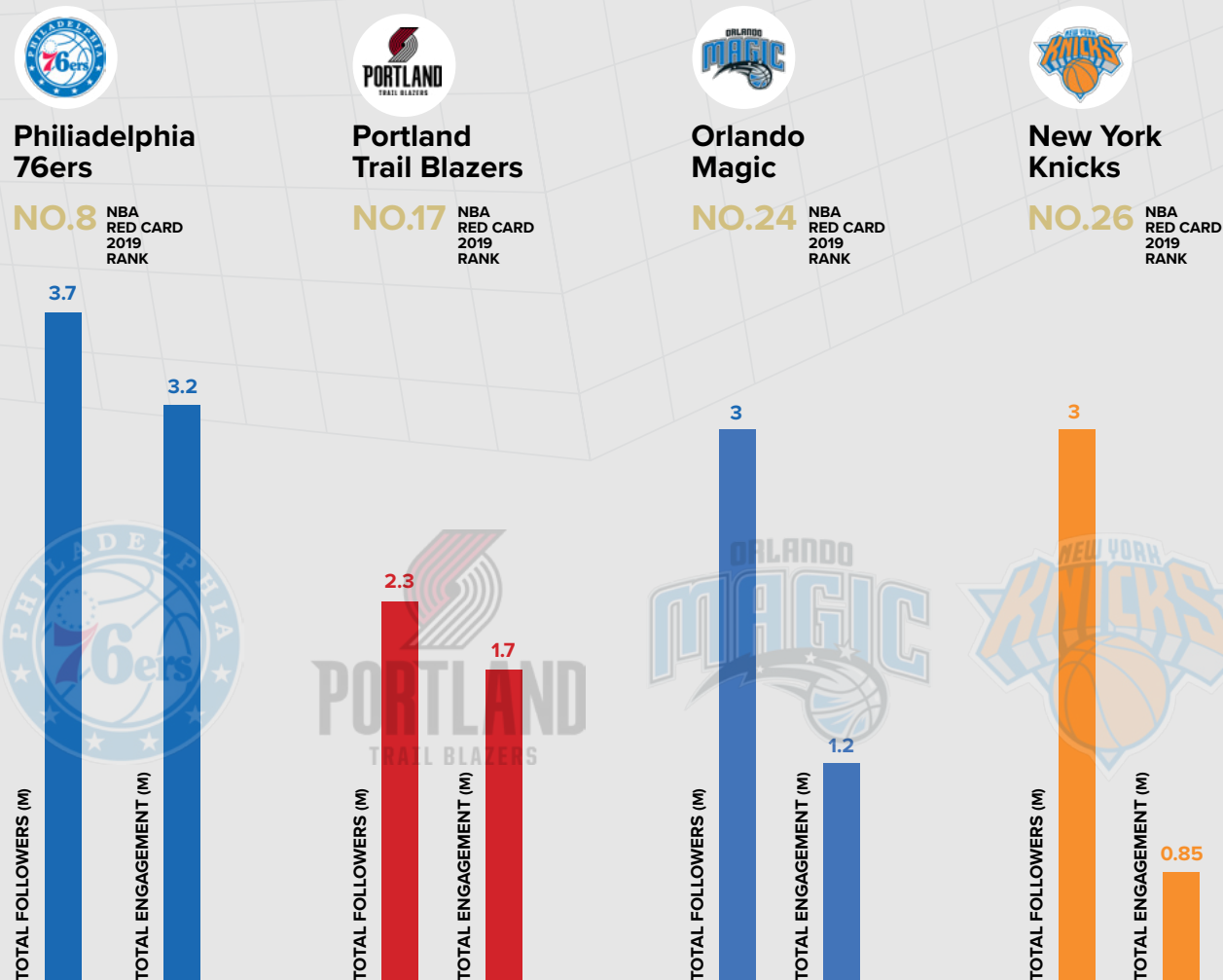
TAKEAWAY

Teams cannot generate success through an individual player, Championship or piece of content. Teams succeed in China through commitment to market, respecting fans and providing a unique experience to all stakeholders.

*Figures as of August 2018 - June 2019
(Average Engagement = (Likes + Comments + Reposts) / Total Posts)

NBA TEAMS ONLINE IN CHINA - CASE STUDY

Each year, two teams participate in the NBA China Games. By the end of 2018, 17 NBA franchises had visited China as part of this annual series, meaning almost half have never been on the ground in the country. If you can't be on the ground physically, then you have to engage the community digitally. In order to demonstrate differing levels of dedication and impact on local popularity, we have chosen two teams which had similar success on-court but a very different development in their popularity.



A majority of NBA teams have no clear China strategy, showcased by their content quality across social platforms. As an example we have picked three NBA teams that perform below average in comparison to their marketing potential on China digital. Orlando, Portland and New York Knicks all have one of the lowest total and original content outputs among NBA teams. As a result of missing dedication to the biggest sports market in the world, the teams have slowly fallen behind others with similar potential, such as the 76ers.

After participating in the NBA China Games 2018, the 76ers kicked off Jr. NBA Week with a youth clinic from the Philadelphia Suns, a non-profit organisation based in the city's Chinatown neighbourhood. They hosted their annual Chinese New Year Game, and recently announced they would be hosting 40 junior journalists from around China.

To start the 2019-20 season in October, the 76ers will host the Guangzhou Loong Lions from the Chinese Basketball Association in Philadelphia for a preseason game. Their star player Joel Embiid is also extremely active on Weibo and Douyin and was present with Stephen Curry for their Under Armour tour, leveraging the player's popularity.

On social, the 76ers posted over 5,000 times on Weibo throughout the season, as well as over 200 China original posts - 25x more than the Trail Blazers. Social performance is key: The 76ers had the fourth highest follower growth and around 3x higher engagement than the Trail Blazers.

The results of being dedicated, rather than necessarily successful, can be highlighted further by the Toronto Raptors. The **reigning NBA Champions had the lowest follower growth of all 30 NBA teams** online in China in the 18/19 NBA Season. This correlates with one of the lowest social outputs of all NBA teams. Despite this, they still ranked high in our NBA Red Card ranking due to viral Douyin engagement around the NBA title win.

TAKEAWAY

If you want to be successful in the biggest basketball market in the world, you have to engage actively with the local communities. Only with a clear digital strategy and investment into the market, can teams be relevant in China in the long run.

NBA'S COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION

The recent phenomenon of selling international sponsor rights by the NBA has driven a potential commercial revolution. By not activating their digital rights in China, NBA teams will leave potential revenue on the table.

TEAMS - OUTLOOK

NBA teams suddenly find themselves competing with other franchises, but also with other sports and entertainment brands. This means that teams have to shift from a purely marketing model, to a marketing and commercial approach in China. The franchise which does this in the most agile and unique way will become the market leader in China.

Jersey Sponsorship: We expect a number of teams to activate this right with existing sponsors. As the majority of three-year jersey deals end by the next NBA season, this announcement offers the franchises additional negotiation power in order to gain a higher-value global contracts. The existing \$150 million worth of jersey sponsor deals is likely to grow significantly due to increased global competition.

Outlook: The new commercial of the NBA teams pathway is most likely just the start. After the jersey sponsorship announcement two years ago and the new international sponsorship rights, the NBA will look to advance the commercial independence of NBA teams, develop the influence of each team and increase the value of the teams in the long run. Once new opportunities arrive, including new forms of digital sponsorship, the teams with the highest fan bases will profit the most. Digital investment means an investment into the future.

Metric: Current sponsorship deals focus heavily on reach and viewership figures. Social channel following and broadcast reach on Tencent Sports and CCTV are an important metrics. We've seen a high correlation between the digital popularity in the NBA Red Card and the broadcasting viewership in China.

TAKEAWAY

NBA teams should invest actively in their China Digital ecosystem in order to maximise the commercial opportunities the NBA offers.

**Top 5
most popular
NBA teams
digitally in China**



**Top 5
most watched
NBA teams
in China**



BRANDS - OUTLOOK

China Basketball Market: Basketball has over 300 million active players and 700 million viewers in China and is arguably the most popular sport in China. NBA teams now provide a powerful medium for brands to drive awareness, activate fans and emotionalise their brand. This goes for international brands who are looking to grow their business in China or local brands looking to grow in China and the rest of the world.

The Product NBA Franchise: NBA franchises are currently the most popular sports teams to activate as a brand in China. The average NBA team has over 3.5 million followers on Weibo, 7x higher than the average football team in China. Meanwhile, NBA players individually visit China more often than any other western sports league.

Existing Partners: Some of the NBA franchises have existing partners that identify China as their biggest growth market. These include Orlando Magic & Disney, the Milwaukee Bucks & Harley Davidson, and the Boston Celtics & General Electric. Through working closely, brand and franchise can succeed by halving marketing spend and growing fan affinity.

New Partners: NBA teams have the opportunity to search for new sponsors, especially new jersey sponsors from China. From looking at European football and the FIFA World Cup, we have seen that Chinese companies are highly interested in these rights. As opportunities arise to activate sponsorships in China, and also utilise off-court content on their own platforms, brands will have a wealth of options on where to invest their capital.

TAKEAWAY

The NBA offers huge opportunities for global corporates and local companies to activate their brand through some of the biggest sport teams in the most prominent basketball market in the world.

MOST POPULAR NBA PLAYERS ONLINE IN CHINA



The data analysed was collected between August 1st 2018 - June 31st 2019. Points were awarded across the following metrics:
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NBA PLAYERS ONLINE IN CHINA - ANALYSIS



Jeremy Lin's Reign in China

For the second consecutive season, Jeremy Lin was the most popular NBA player in China, after now joining the Beijing Ducks. He is the most followed basketball star online with a combined 12.5 million followers on Weibo and Douyin, as well as the highest average engagement. Many argue globally that 'Linsanity' is over, however the data shows it still lives on in China.

J E R E M Y L I N



Douyin

Lin's is the most popular Douyin account of any sports star in China. A platform that many basketball players are missing out on, despite there being clear evidence of potential fan growth and commercial activation. Jeremy Lin's top Douyin videos have 10x higher engagement than on Weibo.



Entertainment

While joining TV Shows like Tencent's 'Game On', Jeremy Lin is holding the 'Jeremy Lin All Star Game - Hoops for Hope' for the third year running as part of Jay Chou's (famous singer) foundation initiative. This platform mixes him with some of the biggest stars in China, and an opportunity to grow his fan base with casual and non-sports fans.



Digital Dedication

Jeremy Lin is very aware of the power of digital. He has a videographer with him throughout the majority of his days to capture relevant content in his daily life online.



Language

An obvious but rare advantage for Lin is his Chinese language skills, which help him to communicate in a more genuine way to his audience, participate in TV Shows and interact with other influencers online.

TAKEAWAY

The NBA and Basketball is so much more than just a sport, it's a lifestyle. Lin is leveraging this by utilising the local entertainment and music industry over digital as well as classic media platforms to elevate his personal brand as the most popular basketball player in China.

MOST POPULAR NBA LEGENDS ONLINE IN CHINA

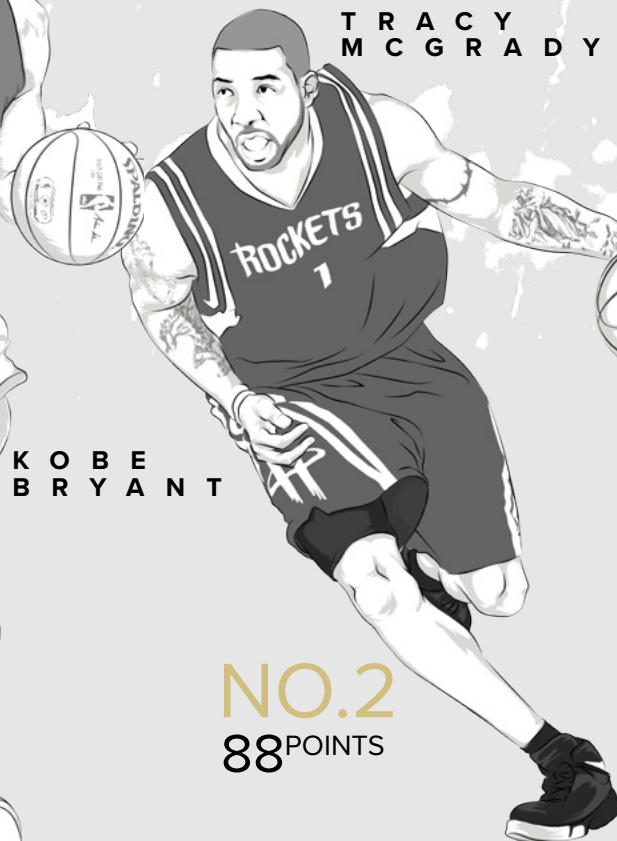
NO.1

142POINTS

K O B E
B R Y A N TT R A C Y
M C G R A D Y

NO.2

88POINTS



NO.3

87POINTS

D W Y A N E
W A D E

ANALYSIS OF NBA LEGENDS ONLINE IN CHINA

Kobe Bryant in China

The most followed Weibo account of any basketball player online in China, surpassing NBA Red Card winner Jeremy Lin.



On-the-Ground Presence:

Visited China for the last 16 consecutive years. Recently in Shenzhen as a FIBA Basketball World Cup Official Ambassador.



Commercial Exposure:

Activated over a dozen Chinese commercial partnerships, including one with Chinese popstar Jay Chou and one with food delivery company ele.me (饿了么). The latest deal was a partnership with Fun88.



Interaction with Fans

On a bi-weekly basis, Kobe Bryant answers questions from fans through video. This shows the great connection he is looking for with all his fans in China.



E-commerce

In April, Kobe Bryant officially launched his own e-commerce store in T-Mall. One of very few NBA individuals, this is not only a monetisation initiative, but provides a tangible connection with fans through original products with a local shopping experience.

TAKEAWAY

Kobe Bryant is China's biggest Basketball legend because of his dedication and constant connection with the Chinese fans on a personal level. He has integrated himself into the local Chinese culture, becoming an icon. He embodies the values he stands for, which separates him from the rest.

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WHAT

Throughout this report we have analysed the existing state of play. Here are our predictions on how this will develop the NBA ecosystem in China.

01

Digital Commercialisation

NBA teams will utilise their digital channels as new mediums for sponsor activation. The teams that will succeed though will be the ones that provide an authentic, creative and value-driven experience for fans and sponsors.

02

Decentralisation & Diversifying

We will see an increasing independence of the NBA teams from the league in terms of communication strategy and execution in China. This will result in a more diversified landscape. If this will be in favour of the 'challenger' teams of the NBA Red Card ranking remains to be seen.

03

NBA x Tencent

The extension of this partnership gives Tencent more time to grow and develop the IP on its platforms. Alongside NBA 2K, which also sits on Tencent, will deliver more options and value to the fan base the NBA & Tencent have spent years growing together.

04

Douyin Focus

With the Bytedance partnership and the growing importance of the platform, especially in key target groups, teams and fans will continuously shift their focus more to this platform. In particular, more and more athletes will join the platform to leverage the lifestyle aspect of the NBA.

05

Chinese Investment

Following the acquisition of the Brooklyn Nets, we expect to see more Chinese sponsors and investors enter into the NBA ecosystem as sponsorship opportunities have risen exponentially. The efforts of the teams in the market must reflect this.

2019/2020?



ABOUT MAILMAN

Mailman is a global sports digital marketing agency and consultancy. We have a team of 200+ experts helping global organisations, rights holders, athletes and brands build a successful business across China, Europe, the US, and Southeast Asia.

Digital Marketing & Strategy

Community Management

Campaign Management

Sponsor Activations

Ecommerce

Social Media

Production

Affiliate Marketing

Partnerships

PR

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