

LUISS



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“NBA brand management in the digital age: social media engagement strategies.”

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Table of contents

INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER 1: DIGITAL EVOLUTION OF BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE SPORTS SECTOR	8
1.1 EVOLUTION OF BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL CONTEXT	8
1.1.1 <i>The social impact of brand management evolution</i>	9
1.1.1.1 <i>Challenges and opportunities in digital brand management</i>	12
1.1.2 <i>Strategic brand management in the sport context</i>	14
1.1.2.1 <i>Evolution of sport brand management: ISBM framework</i>	15
1.2 THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SPORTS MARKETING	17
1.2.1 <i>Social media strategy</i>	20
1.2.2 <i>Social media strategy in the sports sector</i>	22
1.2.2.1 <i>Strategies for building and managing digital relationships of sporting events</i>	23
1.2.2.2 <i>Strategies for building an athlete's brand and engaging fans on social media</i>	25
1.2.2.3 <i>The future of social media in sports marketing</i>	27
1.2.3 <i>Strategic KPIs: definition and framework</i>	29
1.3 THE CONCEPT OF BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA	31
1.3.1 <i>Definition and key components of engagement</i>	33
1.3.1.1 <i>Engagement in the sports sector</i>	35
1.3.2 <i>Tools and metrics to measure engagement</i>	37
1.3.3 <i>Effective social media engagement and interaction strategies</i>	39
CHAPTER 2: THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION OF THE NBA BRAND	41
2.1 THE NBA BRAND AND ITS INTERNATIONAL POSITIONING	41
2.1.1 <i>Historical evolution of the NBA brand</i>	43
2.1.1.1 <i>Historical evolution of the NBA logo</i>	45
2.1.1.2 <i>Development of the brand's visual elements</i>	47
2.1.1.3 <i>Development of the brand's communicative and value elements</i>	49
2.1.2 <i>Strategic positioning and brand identity of the NBA</i>	52
2.1.3 <i>The key distinguishing features of the NBA brand</i>	54
2.2 NBA SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT STRATEGIES	56
2.2.1 <i>Types of content and analysis of their effectiveness</i>	58
2.2.2 <i>Visual content: highlights, iconic moments and graphics</i>	60
2.2.3 <i>Narrative content and storytelling: behind the scenes, personal stories and team storytelling</i>	62
2.2.4 <i>Strategic collaborations with influencers and celebrities</i>	64
2.3 ADAPTATION AND PERSONALISATION OF NBA CONTENT FOR GLOBAL MARKETS	66
2.3.1 <i>Cultural adaptation of NBA content in key markets</i>	68
2.3.2 <i>Language strategies and localised content</i>	70
CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	73
3.1 DETAILED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	73
3.1.1 <i>Description of quantitative method: the questionnaires</i>	74
3.1.2 <i>Sample selection and data collection</i>	75
3.2 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS RELATED TO THE FIRST HYPOTHESIS	77
3.2.1 <i>Theoretical reflections in support of the results</i>	79
3.3 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS RELATED TO THE SECOND HYPOTHESIS	81
3.3.1 <i>Theoretical reflections in support of the results</i>	83
3.4 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH FOR NBA BRAND MANAGEMENT	84
CONCLUSION	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87
WEBSITE	91
APPENDICES.....	93

Introduction

In the fast-paced era of cyber communication, social media websites have become crucial arenas for brands to interact with customers. This enables businesses to develop stronger relationships with customers and situate themselves within highly competitive markets strategically. This trend has been most visible in the sports industry, wherein fan engagement, emotional connection, and live interaction are not luxuries, but fundamental elements of an effective brand management program. The National Basketball Association is a highly representative case study among all the sport leagues of the globe. NBA has been a leader in digital communication innovation over the past decade. It has used platform-specific content strategies, influencer collaborations, and personalized storytelling habits to engage more people and boost its global brand equity. Its ability to evolve in content in line with the unique nature of each social media platform, ranging from the immediacy of Twitter (X) to the creativity of TikTok and the visual narrative richness of Instagram, reflects a high and adaptive standard of digital branding. This thesis examines the strategic management of the NBA's brand during the age of the internet, focusing especially on its social media use to optimize user engagement, brand trustworthiness, and customer loyalty. Digital content marketing is at the heart of the examination. It is more on producing valuable, pertinent content that will attract people rather than relying on advertising. This research, based on contemporary theory, conceptualizes engagement as a construct with behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions, and explores its role in the building of long-term brand-consumer relationships. This research is informed by three overarching hypotheses that form the main research questions: that various social media sites have an impact on the degree of fan engagement in varying manners, that increased degrees of engagement are positively correlated with brand loyalty

To respond to these queries, we used a quantitative research design involving the gathering of an online questionnaire from NBA or similar sports league fans who are social media active. The gathered data allow for an empirical assessment of conceptual model proffered, using statistical procedures such as OLS regression and t-tests to analyze hypothesized associations among content strategies, engagement level, and loyalty measures.

Despite some of the research's limitations, including sample size, application of a convenience sampling technique, and lack of a well-defined comparative group, the findings cast insightful light on the strategic leveraging of digital platforms in sport brand management. The research contributes to current academic literature on the role of content-based engagement and platform-related strategies in influencing consumer-brand interactions in the digital era.

CHAPTER 1: Digital evolution of brand management in the sports sector

1.1 Evolution of brand management in the digital context

The discipline of brand management encompasses all activities carried out with the aim of creating, developing, managing and finally consolidating a brand identity. In recent times, especially in highly competitive and differentiating markets, brand management strategies play a considerable role in marketing activities. Since brand management activities include communication practices capable of influencing the perception of one's brand among customers and guaranteeing an effective positioning, this perspective highlights how the brand has always been considered a highly strategic asset that not only generates value in economic terms but also generates value in symbolic terms in the long term by guaranteeing distinctive characteristics from competing brands. From the past consideration of the discipline of brand management we see that the main objective was to communicate a precise, uniform and coherent brand image to the outside world using mainly planned communication tools such as advertising campaigns, packaging, promotions or pricing strategies; the approach as previously outlined has been totally revolutionised in favour of modern practices more suited to digital platforms. In the modern digital context, the brand must necessarily take on a dynamic character, as in this more engaging context the brand increasingly takes on a “*rhizomatic*” connotation, where there are numerous heterogeneous and complex variables due to the presence of individuals, social groups, concepts and digital content that determine a non-linear and ever-expanding environment, overcoming the univocal tendency of the traditional model.

The core values of modern brand management are co-creation, with stakeholders no longer playing a marginal but necessary role in building a strong brand image, and consumer empowerment, i.e. the ability of consumers to actively influence the brand's reputation through reviews and spontaneously created digital content. In addition to the change in the values of the discipline, the main change has concerned the centralised and hierarchical management by reference managers, in fact, thanks to the advent of digital

tools, brand management practices have increasingly taken on a bidirectional and dynamic character due mainly to the advent of continuous interaction.

Therefore, in order to adapt to these changes, new brand managers were required to acquire advanced skills such as reputation risk management using strategies that integrate traditional marketing activities with innovative tools such as digital listening, sentiment analysis and social interaction management. Thus, managers have developed a broader view of branding as a continuous and engaging process, including the role of external stakeholders in defining and evolving the brand. This radical change is well represented by the involution undergone by a tool, formerly considered highly strategic, such as the website, which used to function as the company's main “touch-point” while it now plays a mostly institutional and informative role after the advent of social media. Thanks to social media, internal communication has also taken on a more reticular and participative character, definitively setting aside the top-down style of the past. Finally, brand management in the digital era is no longer limited to the management of institutional communication; it requires an integrated, dynamic and engaging approach; based on listening and building a relationship with users due to the continuous proliferation of new digital “touch-points”.

The ability to generate economic and symbolic value through co-creation with stakeholders, turn the challenges of digitalisation into competitive opportunities and ensure efficient brand management in the complex contemporary scenario is what makes brand management strategically important. This new perspective makes brand management a key discipline for the success of companies in global digital markets, emphasising how important it is for creating lasting and sustainable competitive advantages.

1.1.1 The social impact of brand management evolution

With the digital revolution and the resulting change in strategic brand management, established paradigms have been revolutionised and new social, cultural and communicative logics have been introduced. This major change has been brought about by the creation of direct and simplified communication between consumers and

companies, which has therefore affected strategies for creating relevance and meaning. This change is mainly due to the enthusiasm of many companies to seize digital opportunities such as the disintermediation of communication to make room for direct customer relationships through viral content, engaging stories and real-time interaction.

These activities have contributed to the creation of “branded content”, i.e. the editorial or multimedia content with which companies entertain, inform or inspire their users in order to strengthen the bond between users and brands; despite large investments, strategies based centrally on branded content have not produced significant results. This surprise is due to a fundamental error that explains this seemingly strange dynamic: companies have attempted to adapt the conventional communication strategies of the mass media era to a completely different environment, since branded content historically derives from traditional advertising techniques, in which companies gained attention through media with limited availability, often monopolistic or oligopolistic. To gain a foothold in the dominant cultural discourse of that era, all that was needed was a good budget and exciting content, whereas attention in the digital age, characterised by an overabundance of content, is fragmented and often reserved for non-institutional actors such as creators, influencers and online communities. The growth of crowdculture, a group of self-organised digital communities that work together to produce, share and edit content, is a sign of the real revolution brought about by the digital transformation; these online people are not just passive spectators but have become true cultural innovators, capable of creating practices, ideas, styles and languages that have a direct impact on public opinion and consumption trends.

The two main types of manifestations of popular culture are:

- *Widespread subcultures*: marginal or geographically isolated groups that in the past have connected, collaborated and strengthened through social media. Strong collective identity and the promotion of new values and lifestyles can be created by these subcultures, ranging from environmental activism to paleo cuisine, Japanese anime to intersectional feminism.
- *Digital art areas*: a group of people working as artists, designers, creators and videomakers in shared digital environments, experimenting and developing new

genres, formats and narratives. These “creative scenes” change rapidly, creating new cultural trends that often take hold before brands can even notice them.

Today, culture is created in a disintermediated way from below, unlike when companies acted as cultural mediators, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for brands to impose an unambiguous and controlled narrative. This change is devastating: creating original content is not enough; it is necessary to acquire an understanding of and active involvement in the cultural dynamics that are emerging. The low presence of traditional brands in YouTube, Instagram or TikTok rankings is empirical evidence of the inadequacy of traditional branded content in fact branded content tends to be perceived as spam, unwanted elements in a communication flow dominated by authenticity, immediacy and participation, rather than creating cultural centrality.

Moreover, audiences love independent creators like Mr Beast, Dude Perfect or Gigi Hadid because they are often affordable and create authentic and interactive connections. The ineffectiveness of traditional brands has mainly structural origins, as many companies continue to function according to vertical and bureaucratic organisational models, described as “brand bureaucracies”. Although these models are exceptional in large-scale implementation, they are unable to create culturally relevant, rapid and situated content, and brands have difficulty establishing relationships with communities that seek authenticity, inclusivity and horizontal interaction. In short, digital culture is built “from below”, while brands continue to speak “from above”.

Cultural branding is a theoretical alternative that is proposed as a response to the ineffectiveness of traditional models, this method aims to build cultural relevance by resonating with the ideologies that emerge in crowdcultures rather than through unilateral persuasion; the goal is to identify dominant cultural orthodoxies, grasp their fragilities and offer alternative perspectives that can inspire and unite communities. Therefore, the way brands communicate can no longer be simply about telling stories: they must become part of bigger stories, share their stories and collaborate with online communities. Thus, in the digital age, brand management has become a deeply rooted cultural and social practice, whose success depends on its ability to intercept and reflect emerging ideologies.

1.1.1.1 Challenges and opportunities in digital brand management

The digital transformation has opened up new perspectives for brand-customer interaction, it has also profoundly changed the operational and strategic situation of brand management. Today's brand managers have to deal with a complex environment characterised by increased interconnectedness, more fluid communication channels and evolving consumer expectations, with digitisation in these cases requiring a conceptual rethinking of brand management beyond just being a technical opportunity. With the change brought about by the arrival of the digital environment, that is, from an authoritarian organisational model to a more participative one in which stakeholders and customers actively participate in defining a brand's values. Companies have to learn to manage the structural loss of control over brand identity, so they have to adopt a more open, dynamic and transparent approach, because in the digital world, many actors, such as customers, influencers, online communities and even competitors, have the power to influence a brand's reputation.

Brand management also becomes a discipline of persistent trade-offs, opposing needs must be balanced by brands: maintaining consistency over time, narrative continuity must be simultaneously balanced with experimenting with new ideas to remain relevant in an evolving environment, listening to and guiding customers, increasing the audience catchment area. This tension adds further complications as a company increasing its audience base also increases the risk of identity fragmentation.

Despite the various challenges companies face in the various brand management processes, managers have been presented with numerous opportunities in this expanding environment. For example, brand management has become more efficient, predictive and personalised thanks to artificial intelligence, with advanced analytics tools enabling real-time monitoring of consumer sentiment, identification of emerging trends and personalisation of communication strategies. In particular, predictive analytics enables the prediction of behaviour and preferences by shaping messages and offers to better suit individual needs, e.g., specialised software allows for the integrated scheduling of content

across multiple channels, such as newsletters, chatbots and social media, while keeping the tone of voice, visual identity and brand value consistent. Furthermore, the ability to provide fully customised and built-to-order experiences for each user is one of the main opportunities offered by digital, as brands that use big data in an ethical and intelligent way can present content, goods and interactions that meet individual customer preferences. In fact, hyper-personalisation goes beyond segmentation with the adoption of intelligent systems such as algorithms suggesting the most suitable content or personalised purchase proposals to provide a seamless and meaningful experience, which is now an essential component of the contemporary brand experience.

Thus, the need to unite all touchpoints in a single omnichannel vision is another strategic advantage as customers not only want but expect consistent and seamless experiences regardless of the channel used: from the physical store to e-commerce, from the website to social media, from apps to customer service. Social commerce, virtual rehearsals, interactive content and augmented reality experiences are tools that, if used correctly, can enhance the relationship between brand and consumer, as well as support narrative consistency and interaction. With consumers' increasing focus on social and environmental issues presents brand management with a challenge but also a great opportunity; brands that demonstrate responsibility, clarity and consistency in their ethical commitments gain a long-term advantage in the marketplace. This ethical branding opportunity encompasses social issues such as inclusion, equity, diversity, consequently digital brand management requires an in-depth analysis of conventional conceptual and operational categories.

From these opportunities and challenges it is even clearer that creating an authentic connection with one's customers requires a good mix of smart new technology adoption, personalisation, omnichannel integration and commitment to modern ethical challenges. With the right strategy based on listening and adaptability, companies will not only survive the digital transformation but also help define the cultural and strategic boundaries of this transformation.

1.1.2 Strategic brand management in the sport context

Within the evolution of brand management, sport has progressively assumed a unique and strategic role, becoming both a privileged context in which to develop and strengthen internal brands and a platform through which external brands can build added value. This dual track “in sport and through sport” now represents one of the most fascinating and potential-rich perspectives for marketing scholars and practitioners. With the evolution of the brand management discipline that has recognised a more dynamic and co-creative character to the brand, the possibility of creating an even more unique brand image has consequently increased; this change especially in the sports context is even more relevant as it is strongly characterised by emotions such as passion and loyalty.

In the sports sector, reference is made to the practices by which sports organisations such as clubs, leagues, federations act on their brand identity; these activities include the management of symbols, values and experiences offered to fans, as well as challenges in adapting the brand to external factors such as globalisation and digitalisation. One of the most illustrative cases applicable to the world of sport is surely that of the NBA professional basketball league, which has been able to transform its brand from an American sports phenomenon to a true global cultural icon. The NBA is not just a sports competition but a narrative universe, a container of stories, values, icons and languages that go far beyond the parquet. The NBA brand is based on recognisable symbols such as the Jerry West logo, but above all on faces, lifestyles and narratives that speak to different audiences around the world. In this context, NBA stars, from Michael Jordan to LeBron James, play a brand within a brand, being ambassadors of the values of the league itself.

In this sense, the NBA has elevated brand management to the highest level as a co-created platform: the league's image lives as much through the strategic choices of the commissioner and the clubs as it does through the players' performances, public statements and initiatives, thus making the internal players not mere athletes but an integral part in all branding activities. Furthermore, another important topic in sport management is that defined as “sport management through sport”, i.e. when companies outside and/or surrounding the sporting world use the sporting context to position and differentiate their brand. Sponsorships, naming rights, co-branding and CSR partnerships

are just some of the ways in which non-sporting brands link with sport to tap into its emotional and symbolic capital. The association with an iconic team or a major sporting event allows the positive characteristics of the sports brand passion, authenticity, team spirit to be transferred to the sponsor brand, generating memorability and uniqueness.

Taking the NBA case as a reference, there are numerous examples to be made including the most iconic Gatorade, Beats, Samsung and the historical collaboration with Nike, culminating in the rebranding of the game uniforms. This dual dimension of the NBA brand is possible mainly due to the “glocal” dimension of the brand achieved through a proper balance in building brand strength between local adaptation and international expansion strategies, such as the NBA Global Games or the NBA Africa League. In the discipline of sports strategic management, new challenges arise such as the increase of “marketing noise” as well as the overabundance of advertising stimuli that could deteriorate the privileged space offered by the sports context, thus dispersing key values such as loyalty and attachment.

1.1.2.1 Evolution of sport brand management: ISBM framework

In recent years, individual-level sport brand management has emerged as a crucial field of research and practice for understanding how athletes, managers, coaches and other figures in the sport system construct and communicate their brand identity. This shift has shifted the focus of sports branding to individuals as the focus of value creation especially in storytelling, connection to fans, sponsors and media; demonstrating the dynamic nature of the discipline of brand management in the sports industry. With the increasing rise of individuals to the detriment of collectives, an innovative framework (ISBM) has been proposed to frame the variety of actors and their dense networks of relationships and influences acting across sporting boundaries. Individuals such as the modern athlete but also agents, coaches and even sports influencers become a “human brand”, i.e. an entity that produces value both through its competitive performance but also through its presence in public debate, popular culture and social issues.

This new vision of individual branding is characterised by disintermediation, offering athletes the opportunity to manage their own narrative, alternating between frontstage

content (performance, training, highlights) and backstage content (family, personal values, extra-sports passions). This dual dimension as explained in Goffman's theory is perfectly suited to the sporting context, in fact thanks to this duplicity an authentic and recognisable image is created that allows for a sincere relationship with the public.

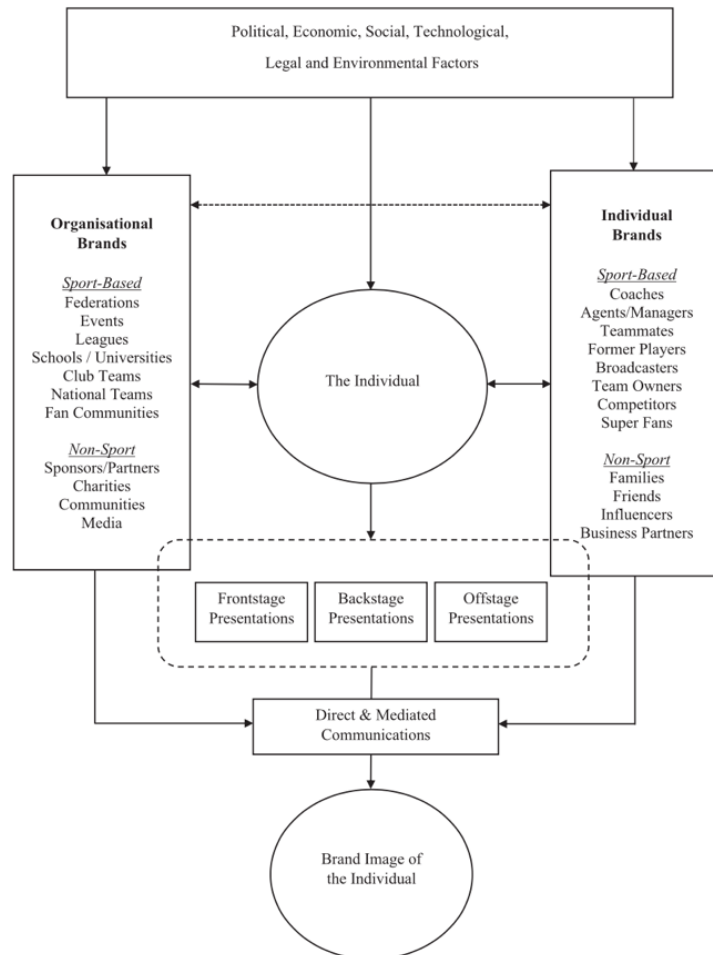


Figure 1: The Individual-Level Sport Brand Management Framework

The interconnection is bidirectional: the popularity of the athlete feeds the brand strength of the league and team, and vice versa. LeBron's star power effect, for example, has revitalised the Los Angeles Lakers franchise after years of mediocrity in merchandising, media exposure and strategic partnerships. Similarly, the Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) phenomenon in the American collegiate system has further created new spaces to monetise and develop personal brands since their college careers, providing additional

power to individuals over sports organisations. This interdependence is also clear when sporting events or partnerships affect an athlete's brand; in fact, a league or team move can exponentially grow an athlete's digital fanbase, in parallel, the individual's image influences the perception of the team or league: think of the so-called Beckham effect that created interest and gave visibility to the MLS that was previously snubbed both locally and globally.

This framework also emphasises the importance of endemic and extra-sports relationships, explaining that although it is a huge ecosystem it does not live in isolation, but is immersed in a network of connections. Sponsorships, collaborations with non-sporting brands and partnerships with external celebrities amplify the resonance, exemplary is the recent union between Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift, which mixed sports audiences and pop fan bases, generating a multiplier effect for both personal brands.

Thus, this model underlines how important it is to manage the transitional phases in a sports career: from entry into professionalism to team changes, from image crises to retirement and post-career relaunch. The stories of athletes who have become entrepreneurs, coaches, commentators or philanthropists show how the conscious management of an individual brand can generate new business opportunities and influence far beyond the playing field.

1.2 The strategic role of social media in sports marketing

Especially in the field of sports marketing, social media has significantly revolutionized the way sports, supporters, sponsors, and related events interact over the past fifteen years, digital platforms have emerged as the most effective tool for increasing the engagement of one's fanbase, supporting sports events, and enhancing brand image. In this new context, the strategic way in which athletes, professional sports leagues relate to audiences has been changed from a one-way broadcasting logic to a personalized global interaction logic.

The key effects of social media on sports marketing are mainly seven:

1. *Disintermediation*: this has certainly been the effect with the widest scope since sports communication has been simplified to the point of direct, albeit digital, communication
2. *Expansion of the fanbase*: social platforms have been able to reach new audience segments, even from afar, due to their global reach and easy accessibility. This has led to the growth of digital communities surrounding athletes and clubs.
3. *New opportunities for sponsors*: the focus on athlete and official profiles has made social perfect for integrating native and engaging sponsorships, resulting in cheaper and more effective forms of branded content than conventional media.
4. *Redefining time and space*: today's sports content can be enjoyed without temporal or geographic limitations-in fact, highlights, replays, clips, and statistics can be accessed in real time from any connected device, meaning that the sports brand is always present in fans' daily lives.
5. *One-to-one connections*: these days, fans have the opportunity to personalize their relationships with their teams or idols by following personalized content and interacting directly through comments or messages, creating an authentic and unique relational dimension.
6. *Strengthening brand identity*: social media offer tools to develop a distinctive communication style, convey values, and build a consistent image. Tone of voice, colors, exclusive content help differentiate the sports brand.
7. *"Bit-size" and consumable content*: In the era of fragmented attention, it is critical to be able to communicate in a short, direct and shared way. It seems that social media are ideal for creating and disseminating high-impact micro-content.

These effects are also emphasized by the new dimension of modern sports events that are hybrid, interactive, and cross-media, and this has an impact on everyday communication. An additional effect that has impacted sporting events that have been particularly affected by social media, the change in context, accelerated by the pandemic, which has led to the end of the sharp distinction between the physical and virtual dimensions of events. Today

we speak of hybrid events, in which the fan experience extends temporally beyond the moment of competition itself through a series of physical and digital touchpoints. Social media thus becomes:

- communication tools in the pre-event phase (advertising, teasers, influencer marketing, promotion and conversion);
- amplifiers of the experience during the event (live streaming, social wall, UGC content, instant feedback);
- means of realising the event itself in a completely virtual mode, as in the case of the virtual live broadcast of the NBA on VRChat and Meta Horizon Worlds, an event that redefined the very concept of “venue”.

These effects required the presence of specific skills especially in omnichannel experience design, story telling management, and the ability to actively engage the customer throughout the entire experience, with the ultimate goal of creating a bond authentic and emotional. Social media plays a strategic role in connecting emotions, identity and community in sports. Key implications for sports brands include:

- Personalization and data-driven marketing: brands can increase interaction and loyalty using social data (interactions, preferences and behaviors);
- Experiential event design: the social component must be incorporated from the very beginning of event design, taking into account the "hybrid" experience that fans will have, rather than as an ancillary component;
- Expanding business opportunities: social platforms generate value for sponsors and enable new ways to monetize, such as social commerce, online pay-per-view events, and exclusive content licensing;
- Fluent and continuous communication: interaction with the fanbase is constant and continuous. Maintaining consistency, creativity, and responsiveness in a fluid environment with high reputation exposure is a challenge;
- Sustainability and social responsibility: social media is a medium through which brand values, including ethical and environmental issues, can be communicated to new generations of fans.

Consequently, social media is a strategic platform for sports marketing that redefines the relational, business, and narrative models of the entire sports environment; therefore, they are not simply a communication tool but are an indispensable means of interaction with the public on which business success is based.

1.2.1 Social media strategy

In the context of modern digital marketing having a social media strategy is necessary to have proper business communication, in fact no company can afford an absence or sporadic presence on social media also because a well-organized strategy consistent with business goals can ensure continued success over time. The set of management practices on social networks to achieve branding and communication goals is known as social media strategy.

This strategic planning is combined consistently with other business activities since this is composed of three main macro-dimensions: activity in publishing and monitoring content, functionality in integrating with different business areas, and connection at the organizational level. With proper balancing the social media strategy will connect the strategic vision with the daily operations, the first step to achieve this goal is a thorough analysis of the competitive environment in fact from the study of the target market, it will be easier to understand the behaviors of competitors and the main trends in the industry.

In addition to understanding audience expectations and habits a well-structured analysis also helps in identifying gaps and opportunities, having also explored future prospects it will be possible to set truthful and achievable goals. Generally there are various types of goals those in which reinforce brand awareness, generate as many leads as possible or create a good reputation, for them to be consistent goals they must be clear, measurable and related to the company mission. An example of defining a consistent goal could be the goal for a club to increase the number of followers in a certain geographic region, while for a professional sports league it could be to increase the audience of a tournament, from these examples we understand how the process of identifying buyer personas is also a crucial component in social media strategy, in fact knowing the key information of the target audience will make it easier to choose

the platform and the content of the message to be delivered. Communication strategies branch mainly into two types:

- *B2C strategies*: which are characterized by being more emotional and developed in visual content;
- *B2B strategies*: have more informative content and are directed at building professional relationships.

The selection of topics the creation of the tone of voice, editorial planning and the definition of the content format are also part of the strategy selection phase. The strength of a strategy is closely linked with its compatibility with brand identity, which will subsequently help create positive interactions and strengthen relationships with fans.

The most effective monitoring systems are certainly KPIs, or Key Performance Indicators, which are indicators that can summarize a body of data with a summary numerical value by which the effectiveness of the enterprise and various activities is assessed, allowing timely and functional action to be taken in critical areas. KPIs have a dual nature as they can be quantitative, such as click-through rate, or qualitative, such as comment analysis, these indicators are functional because they help reduce error in an environment characterized by experimentation, adaptation and learning. Precisely because of these constant changes in user behavior and in technology itself, there are no real rules for gaining visibility and maximizing digital presence.

The continuous development of new technologies makes this environment even more dynamic and therefore requires a cross-functional mindset in incorporating new tools and formats as well as total openness to collaboration with external agencies and collaborators. In addition, management must establish clear roles, public policies, and crisis management. Without a robust organizational structure, even the best tactics are likely to fail. Beyond these challenges, brands must ensure multichannel integration to provide synergy between channels that will ensure high brand perception in the long term.

To conclude, the social media strategy is an essential resource for any organisation that wants to emerge in the Internet world, facilitating visibility and rapport with the public as well as offering opportunities to strengthen brand identity; in the sports sector, it offers a great chance to convert a fan into a true representative of the brand.

1.2.2 Social media strategy in the sports sector

An emblematic case of how sports branding strategies have evolved with the advent of social media is represented by the experience of Amy Martin, founder of Digital Royalty, one of the first companies created to monetise the digital universe of sports leagues, clubs and athletes. In an interview she recounts her experience in understanding how digital practices have changed the way they strengthen relationships with their fans, the first example she gives is her initial experience with the Phoenix Suns, an NBA franchise, where she introduced then innovative initiatives such as fan tweet-ups, behind the scenes content and viral pep rallies. The company Digital Royalty was founded in 2010 with the objective of helping athletes and teams build an “integrated digital universe”, this choice was based on the intuition that social media are not just channels of dissemination, but true relational environments, in which the brand narrative is built by dialoguing in real time with the public. A central concept in Martin's vision is that value comes from authenticity so any interaction must be natural, human and consistent with the personality of the athlete or club, supporting a genuine exchange and not one-sided communication.

An explanatory case is that of the social management of former basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, one of Digital Royalty's iconic clients, with whom thanks to campaigns such as Random Acts of Shaqness (consisting of tweets with clues to meet him) and surprise phone calls have made Shaq a pioneer of direct connection with fans, transforming his social presence into a viral phenomenon and a multiplier of value for sponsors and partners. Martin also emphasizes how social, by their nature bidirectional, overturns the classic logic of unidirectional marketing in fact the key to success is to listen to the fanbase by modeling one's strategy on their needs this approach is in line with the dynamics of modern engagement that prefers a fluid conversation to an advertising monologue.

Another relevant aspect is risk management Martin warns that constant exposure can turn into vulnerability for the athlete, which is why Digital Royalty has developed guidelines, training summits, and social media education tracks to coach athletes, managers, and staff to communicate in a conscious way, avoiding reputational crises.

Finally, Martin's experience also shows the economic dimension of social media as a monetization asset, explaining how sponsors, as in the case of Shaquille O'Neal invest directly in an athlete's ability to generate reach on social, without the need for traditional commercials or media appearances. He also shows how the success of the sports brand in social media does not depend only on numbers, but on the quality of relationships that are built day by day-in fact, if fans perceive authenticity and narrative consistency, they become not only followers, but spontaneous ambassadors, multipliers of reputation and value.

1.2.2.1 Strategies for building and managing digital relationships of sporting events

Social media are more than just means of communication in the contemporary sports world: they have become a strategic infrastructure capable of supporting leagues, teams, and athletes for key objectives. Therefore, in the contemporary sports landscape, building strong relationships between brands and audiences can no longer disregard the strategic use of social media because social media are not just promotion tools or content showcases, but real relational spaces where sports events, teams and organizations can cultivate an ongoing dialogue with fans and convert digital interaction into loyalty, belonging and brand value. The main objective therefore is no longer to "broadcast" sports, but to promote their sharing and interpretation this new challenge is uniquely met by social platforms by transforming communication into narrative and interactive laboratories where fans can experience sports in creative, personalized and engaging ways.

Social is an important tool for humanizing sports by telling the human side of the players, reducing the distance with their fans by promoting authenticity. In addition to mediating the relationship with athletes, socials have also developed an ongoing dialogue with

sports organizations and events this evolution is demonstrated by studies that take Grand Slam tennis tournaments (Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and US Open) as an example and show how different platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, are used with distinct but complementary logics and functions: on the one hand, Facebook, with its visual and narrative component, is a privileged space to reinforce brand identity through iconic images, behind-the-scenes content, and value storytelling; on the other hand, Twitter proves to be an ideal tool for real-time coverage, direct interaction, and building a more conversational and immediate connection with followers.

One of the most interesting evidences concerns the difference between the strategies during the event and those between events; while during the event period social activities focus on live updates, match coverage, highlights and content geared toward immediate engagement (such as live polls, Q&As with players), in the off-season period an often underestimated opportunity emerges: continuing to preside over the relationship with the fanbase when the lights of the field go out. In fact, it is highlighted that the frequency and quality of posts between events are still insufficient, despite the fact that this is precisely the time when a strategic use of exclusive content (behind-the-scenes, historical rivalries, distinctive values) could consolidate brand awareness, nurture shared fan identity as well as create narrative continuity.

In terms of content, the tournaments analyzed show extensive use of strategies that foster brand association (unique event features, history, symbols) and relationship building. Elements such as stadium enhancement, tradition (think of Wimbledon's image as a temple of tennis in white) and “social” interaction become real intangible assets that fuel the perceived authenticity of the sports brand. The approach also highlights how fans are no longer just spectators but have concrete opportunities to co-create content, participate in surveys, share personal materials and experience “exclusive moments” reinforces their identification with the brand, nurturing that emotional relationship that, as the literature shows is the basis for turning a consumer into a loyal fan.

A key aspect that emerged from the study is the need to overcome the one-size-fits-all approach in managing the platforms-in fact, Facebook and Twitter content are not interchangeable: each has its own logics of use and languages. Facebook favors the

construction of a coherent and visually curated narrative while Twitter values speed and interaction in addition to different objectives there are also differences in the type of posts, photos, links, status updates, videos, polls demonstrating how a successful strategy must know how to orchestrate different formats for different objectives, without neglecting the overall consistency of the brand image. Some content with strong engagement potential that was not fully explored in the case studies such as player rivalry or iconic moments from the tournament's history are also pointed out to be still under-exploited. Yet with these elements strong symbolic connections are generated, enriching the wealth of positive associations that fuel loyalty in the long run. This leads to a strategic suggestion: strengthen agenda-setting strategies i.e., guide the audience's attention to themes, values and content that define the event's distinctive identity.

Finally, the role of social media as a service and customer care tool should not be underestimated in fact with usual practices such as real-time monitoring of comments, the ability to respond to fan questions, and the use of social as a customer service counter during complex events are practices that, if managed well, improve not only brand perception but also the overall spectator experience, transforming the relationship into a virtuous circle of trust, satisfaction and recommendation. The analysis on Grand Slams confirms the centrality of social media in strategic brand management even during periods of apparent “silence,” demonstrating how consistent, creative and continuous use is capable of creating a competitive advantage especially in the relationship with one's customers.

1.2.2.2 Strategies for building an athlete's brand and engaging fans on social media

In today's context, where an athlete's visibility no longer depends only on performance on the field but also on the ability to tell his or her story online, social media and Instagram in particular are confirmed as central tools for building a solid personal brand. Through an analysis of a large sample of posts, we explored in depth what concrete strategies make an Instagram profile capable of generating real engagement. The first firm point that emerges is that not all content is equal-in fact, posts related to athletic performance are generally preferred: game photos, highlights, and workouts. This content has an inherent

communicative power because it reinforces the most “authentic” dimension of the athlete: his being first and foremost a professional on the field, this preference is perfectly consistent with self-presentation theory: the frontstage part, the performance, is the most effective lever to reinforce credibility and connection.

Alongside strictly sports content, the data show that including attractive appearance details, which curate the image and create a recognizable look, or snippets of marketable lifestyle, non-sports life moments, and backstage activities that deviate from one's professional environment, can add variety, but does not replace the centrality of sports content. The main risk is the use in a forced way that slips into the generic and disperses personal brand identity. From a tactical perspective, some concrete profile management strategies emerge:

- *Visual quality*: images of “good” quality, natural but curated, are more engaging than shoddy photos or, paradoxically, overly perfect photos such as publicity shoots this is due to the impression of authenticity winning out over the obsessive search for glossy aesthetics.
- *Involvement of teammates*: posting content in which other athletes or team moments appear works as a form of co-branding as it increases likes, fuels community dynamics and multiplies reach through cross-tags.
- *Use of hashtags and sponsors*: interesting is the data on hashtags since when abused they are perceived as forced, lowering engagement. The same goes for clearly sponsored content in fact if poorly integrated, it can look like inauthentic “advertising posts,” generating distrust.

The essential concept is to create a balance between enhancement and exploitation; in fact, athletes must use Instagram to enhance their sports image (enhancement); but they must monetize popularity with promotional content (exploitation). The highest engagement is achieved when the perception of authenticity prevails: fans reward athletes who speak in their own voice, show real life as professionals, and invite backstage, without ever losing sight of the competitive dimension.

Thanks to this analysis, it is clear that the sports side should remain prevalent in athletes' social strategies, but that sometimes this should be supplemented with backstage content to also create a connection with the person rather than solely with the athlete. As we have already seen for sports organizations, it is also imperative for athletes to create continuity during void periods to maintain a high degree of fan interest and loyalty. To achieve these goals it is important to educate athletes since not all of them know how to strategically manage a social profile since many come from poor and degraded backgrounds ground rules are needed to avoid reputational errors and targeted training.

1.2.2.3 The future of social media in sports marketing

The continuous evolution of social media has brought sports marketing and many other areas of communication and branding to a new phase of profound transformation, social networks are becoming the main medium through which athletes and their supporters can interact with each other, in a context in which the relationship between a brand and its audience becomes increasingly personalised, dynamic and participation-oriented. To see the future of this pair, it is necessary to understand how technologies, behaviours and language are changing in directions that present both great opportunities and complex challenges.

The first major transformation concerns the need for sports brands to adopt a more strategic social approach rather than a “presential” approach, in fact it is not enough to be there but it is necessary to control the right channels and speak to the right people with the right voice, this requires the ability to combine genuine content, shared values and a coherent yet dynamic narrative identity over time. Social media are no longer just tools for advertising; they are also places where people discuss, experiment and build trust; in the coming years it will be important for leagues, teams and athletes to remain active and human on social media, and the further expansion of personalisation and advanced audience segmentation will be a key factor.

Social media can use its huge pool of behavioural data to learn more about fan demographics, psychographics and culture with this process will no longer be limited to dividing fans into general age groups or interests but will create specific experiences for

micro-niches of fans. In other words, it is about moving from “mass” engagement to a deeper, more constant and personalised discourse, which is made possible by tools such as predictive analytics, marketing automation and artificial intelligence. The social media of the future will increasingly focus on content with high emotional and immersive value, as well as personalisation, videos will continue to dominate, but they will be increasingly short, inventive and responsive while narrative can be built using reels, clips, highlights, stories and real-time content that deliver authenticity and immediacy.

Videos already have a share rate up to 1200% higher than textual content right now; In the future, we will see the emergence of new hybrid experiences between real and “augmented” sports thanks to the spread of augmented reality, the first to experiment with this new technology were the Dallas Cowboys who allowed fans to take hologram photos of players right in the stadium. These initiatives will provide the basis for new forms of fan experience that will unite the digital and physical worlds, enriching the sporting event with narrative, visual and interactive layers. Female audiences in sport are becoming increasingly important, both as spectators and as protagonists of social narratives.

The success of content related to female athletes and the Women's World Cup show that future strategies will have to be increasingly inclusive and representative of a plurality of sensitivities, lifestyles and experiences. Success and loyalty will be rewarded for sports brands capable of telling diverse stories consistent with the new cultural balance. In parallel, gaming and eSports are becoming increasingly important as new forms of sports communication as sports entertainment is increasingly interactive, fluid and transmedia for younger audiences.

Moreover, the integration of digital experiences and real sports becomes fundamental to engage the new generations certainly the process that will lead social media to increasingly embrace the universe of gaming, immersive experience and gamification includes events such as the FIFA World Cup sponsored by McDonald's, Hyundai and Allianz and games such as NBA 2K League. The importance of social and value-based causes is another strategic point of view since sport has always been an effective tool to deal with sensitive issues of public relevance. In the last few years alone, athletes such as Serena Williams, Michael Phelps and Neymar have used social media to spread messages

of responsibility, thus playing an active role, demonstrating how powerful social networks can be in making an impact, building moral reputations and bringing together communities that share values.

A final important objective will be to increasingly give their strategies a relational and non-invasive character in order to avoid effects such as excessive buying pressure that do not respect the emotional values of fans. Finally, the balance between technology and humanity, automation and personalisation, visibility and value is what will determine the future of social media in sports marketing that will allow proactive organisations to transform social media from tools to narrative ecosystems that enable not only communication, but also connection, inspiration and mobilisation.

1.2.3 Strategic KPIs: definition and framework

KPI's not only ensure the verification of the impact of strategies on the selected objectives, but also promote a corporate culture based on measurement and the will to continuously improve based on concrete data; thanks to these indicators, it is in fact clear which initiatives generate value and to what extent. Mainly in the sports sector, the values that reflect the overall performance of a brand are the significant impact on sales, fanbase loyalty and brand visibility. Clearly defined KPIs also optimise resources and internal communication as they have the effect of creating a shared language between departments and also provide a general corporate overview among employees.

Reviewing the literature and operational best practices, at least 13 key metrics are identified, covering the entire customer journey: from brand awareness to engagement and conversion.

Among the most relevant are:

- *Engagement rate*: measures the quality of interaction between users and content (likes, comments, shares, saves). A high engagement rate indicates an active and involved community, but it is important to distinguish between general interactions and “likes” (positive reactions, saves), which give a more precise measure of actual liking.

- *Click-through rate (CTR)*: represents the number of times users click on links or call-to-actions in posts. A high CTR signals that the message is effective and stimulates the user to take a desired action.
- *Profile visits*: indicate how many people visited a social page in a given time interval. A spike in visits is often a symptom of an effective campaign or the virality of a piece of content, and can anticipate an increase in followers or conversions.
- *Audience growth rate*: measures the change in the number of followers. It is useful for assessing the effectiveness of awareness actions and for identifying trends over time.
- *Website traffic*: measures the number of hits from social media. It is a key KPI for assessing the impact of online activities on the conversion funnel.
- *Amplification rate*: indicates how much content is shared by followers, emphasising the level of audience advocacy.
- *Bounce rate*: measures the percentage of users who abandon a web page after clicking on it without interacting further; this is used to assess the consistency between the social content and the target content.
- *Cost per click (CPC)*: KPI specific to paid campaigns. It indicates how much each click generated by a sponsored advertisement costs, on average. The more relevant and targeted the content, the more the CPC tends to decrease.
- *Conversion rate*: measures how many useful actions (purchases, subscriptions, downloads) result from a post or campaign. It is one of the most important indicators in terms of ROI (return on investment).
- *Active vs. passive followers*: monitors the level of activity and interaction of the fanbase. It is not enough to have a large number of followers: it is necessary to know how many of them are really engaged.
- *Customer Satisfaction Score*: measures user satisfaction through surveys or direct questions. It allows you to detect community sentiment about content, campaigns or products at a glance.
- *Impressions*: indicate how many times a piece of content has been viewed in the user feed, regardless of interactions. They are a key KPI for measuring brand awareness.

- *Share of Voice (SOV)*: measures the brand's presence in the social landscape compared to competitors. A high SOV indicates a strong visibility and ability to generate conversation.

The choice of the various KPIs varies mainly from two variables, namely the specific objectives to be achieved and the platforms used to achieve this, in fact, each social channel prefers metrics consistent with the characteristics of the platform, so it is essential to adapt the KPIs to the platform, avoiding common methods. In order to make the best use of the indicators, it is essential to establish the starting data and update it regularly according to one's needs in order to assess the trend in relation to the reference context. Sometimes companies can collect these tools directly from platforms such as Meta Business Suite, Instagram Insights and Twitter Analytics; or they can opt for more sophisticated tools, such as Clearview Social, Hootsuite, which offer more detailed analyses including predictive and cross-channel functionalities.

1.3 The concept of brand engagement on social media

The concept of consumer engagement has taken on a whole new centrality in the digital age, the relationship between brand and audience has become more widespread, distributed and multi-channel, largely fuelled by social media. In the past, this relationship was exhausted in a few predictable moments, such as the purchase of a product or exposure to an advertising message; people are no longer simply “consumers” of a brand: they observe, criticise and share. Today, we call it brand engagement when the brand enters into a conversation that can continue over a long period of time.

However, how does it actually translate to “engaging” someone on a social platform? It is not simply a matter of receiving comments or shares. The consumer's cognitive, emotional and social spheres are involved in the complex process of brand engagement. It manifests itself through the attention a person pays to a piece of content, the willingness to interact with it and the choice to be part of it by contributing content, opinions and personal interpretations.

Several factors can be at the basis of this relational experience, in certain situations, the user is simply looking for useful information: he/she wants to know about a product, receive assistance and stay informed about offers and events. In others, the desire for fun, entertainment, visual or narrative pleasure prevails. However, there is a deeper and more important need: that of feeling identified by a brand, feeling part of a community and reinforcing one's social identity through interactions, all of which can be easily satisfied by social media, so consumer engagement with online brands takes place in a wide range of experiences, from superficial interaction to deep participation.

A comment under a post, an ironic share, a video made spontaneously by a fan and a thread on X/Twitter about a recent campaign: these are all examples of engagement at various levels of intensity and importance. It is no coincidence that the most famous brands are often able to inspire not only reaction, but also creation, a very strong link is indicated by this type of involvement that directly involves the time and creative abilities of users. It's not just about interaction: a fan changing their team's logo, a fan writing a public letter to their idol or a young person filming a response during an NBA final: they are becoming part of the brand story.

Needless to say, this involvement does not come about by chance, it is the result of a set of circumstances that brands must be able to maintain. First comes coherence: the brand's message must be identifiable, genuine and in line with the values it claims to uphold, the second issue concerns accessibility: people must feel empowered to participate, be heard and express themselves. Finally, there is the relationship dimension: a brand must act as an interlocutor rather than a megaphone, it must promote and respond.

However, from a management point of view, this is not simply a “relationship” in an abstract sense: it has a concrete and visible meaning. Engagement with the brand has a direct impact on brand equity, which is one of the most important findings of the research, when you increase engagement with the audience you create a stringent loyalty with the audience that perceives the quality and supports the brand by increasing its popularity; thus highlighting how participation is a key component in predicting brand equity. In the world of sport, where passion, belonging and participation are fundamental, this takes on even greater force, as every sporting event offers numerous circumstances for interaction

between the various players not only as an exchange of information, but as active, creative and emotional participation.

So, for any organisation working with sport, understanding and maintaining this connection becomes a strategic priority in today's digital world, as it is necessary to be part of people's lives and conversations.

1.3.1 Definition and key components of engagement

The value of engagement has become increasingly important with the advent of social media in digital marketing, in fact in addition to being a technical indicator it perfectly reflects the relationship of the brand with its audience, this relationship is the result of a lasting and emotional bond built over time. This data describes a user's degree of involvement and interest in a given brand; engagement is only built actively and through actions such as commenting, sharing, clicking.

One of the fundamental pillars of brand equity is engagement, in an era where the value of brands is increasingly built in discourse and interaction, rather than in advertising alone. Engagement is very interesting because it is multidimensional as it involves three main components the emotional, cognitive and behavioural spheres of the consumer:

- The *emotional dimension*, which relates to the sentimental and relational bond between the consumer and the brand, i.e. when a consumer feels connected to the brand, shares its values, is moved by well-constructed content or feels empathy for the story of a player or a team, is the type of engagement that occurs. This part of the relationship is crucial for loyalty because it creates familiarity and trust.
- The *cognitive dimension*, relating to knowledge, understanding and recognition of the brand, on the other hand, is manifested when consumers give the brand values such as competence, authority or narrative coherence. It is an involvement fuelled by informative content and experiences that reinforce the positive mental association.
- The *conative dimension*, which finally concerns the motivation to act, is the most evident part of engagement that leads to concrete behaviours, such as clicks, shares, comments, participation in challenges and content production (UGC). It is

what makes the user a protagonist in the relationship with the brand and not just a spectator, when it comes to sports, this can include cheering on social media, participating in a game with a meme, answering a quiz or interacting with official accounts during a live event.

Although these three dimensions function separately, they work together, supporting each other and social media is the ideal place for them to manifest themselves, in particular digital platforms, due to their conversational, visual and instantaneous nature, offer opportunities for engagement on multiple levels, both spontaneously and through brand encouragement. Despite this, it is necessary to measure the actual impact of engagement the engagement rate, is the most widely used metric that links the number of interactions (such as likes, comments, shares and saves) with the total number of followers or views of a piece of content.

ENGAGEMENT RATE FORMULA

$$\text{Engagement Rate (\%)} = \left(\frac{\text{Likes + Comments + Shares}}{\text{Total Followers}} \right) \times 100$$

Figure 2: The formula of engagement

The value can vary widely depending on the platform, type of content, format and even the size of the fanbase this value is generally considered acceptable if it is between 1% and 5%. The task of maintaining high interaction rates increases with the size of the audience and in this regard engagement is generally divided into four successive levels: from the lowest (low engagement), which indicates minimal interaction such as a like or a tag, to the highest (high engagement), where the user not only interacts but also actively

contributes to community building, creating original content or animating conversations between fans.

Of course, engagement is not limited to a number, each interaction has experiences, motivations and desires that drive it, which is why, in addition to quantitative data, qualitative considerations such as the tone of comments, the frequency of returns, the time spent on content and, in particular, the brand's ability to provoke sincere and meaningful discussions are crucial. Finally, engagement is an indicator of vitality: it explains how engaged, excited and motivated an audience can be by a brand, it is an ongoing process that requires listening, creativity and consistency. Moreover, for sports brands, which have always relied on shared passions, emotions and identities, it is the true measure of their relevance in the online world.

1.3.1.1 Engagement in the sports sector

When it comes to the sports sector, the concept of engagement is particularly rich and complex. The relationship between fans and sports teams tends to be intense, identity-based and long-term, unlike in other consumer contexts, where the link with a brand may be functional or occasional. Sport is a shared passion, ritual and belonging as well as entertainment, fan engagement can have a significant impact on the economic sustainability and value of a sports brand in this context. Sports engagement is not limited to cheering or stadium attendance: it is a complex structure with many aspects and includes active participation, behaviour, emotion and social identification. Being divided into three main parts: behavioural, emotional and cognitive, each part reflects how fans experience and build their relationships with the team.

The cognitive dimension assesses fans' attention, awareness and interest in their team, including the habit of regularly following news, results and statistics, as well as the ability to analyse and discuss in an informed way the decisions made by management or the team's performance. Cognitively engaged fans also “live” the sport off the field, actively participating in discussions and staying up-to-date on sporting issues. Perhaps the emotional element is the deepest and most distinctive, it reduces the emotional connection with the team, the strong emotions arising from matches, the pride in belonging and the

disappointment at a defeat or indignation at a decision taken by the club, this component is deeply rooted in the identity of the fans, who see the team as a representation of themselves and their principles. It is from this deeply emotional side that sports brands become a symbol of identity that provokes strong emotions such as love or suffering.

The third component, the behavioural one, concerns the physical actions performed by fans to support the team such as buying products, accompanying the team on away trips, attending events, interacting with digital content, creating and sharing content. This part has gained importance with the advent of social media: it is now important to be a fan by commenting, tagging, making memes or participating in online challenges, these behaviours increase the brand's visibility, build its reputation and attract new audiences.

The literature has shown that sports engagement is never unidirectional it is built over time through conversations between fans and the sports organisation; these ongoing conversations can be fuelled or damaged by the management and communication decisions of the club. For this reason, it is essential for sports managers to be aware of the importance of listening to their fan base, engaging them, creating opportunities for real participation and enhancing the emotions derived from the game of sport.

Furthermore, the literature emphasises the strategic effects of fan involvement, a high level of involvement strengthens team loyalty even during difficulties and stimulates pro-social behaviour that benefits the financial and reputational company. Fans are more inclined to buy official products, participate in events, spontaneously promote the brand and forgive mistakes or difficult situations. This commitment creates a lasting relationship that allows for a long-term competitive advantage that brings together not only the most passionate fans (hardcore fans), but also a wider audience, the so-called casual fans, who can be converted into fans if managed correctly.

To conclude, sports engagement is not just an indicator to be evaluated: it forms the basis of the relationship between team and audience, one of the main challenges and opportunities for current and future sports marketing is to understand its dimensions, support its development and recognise its strategic value. Involvement means existing in a world where competition between clubs is increasingly played out on a digital and relational level.

1.3.2 Tools and metrics to measure engagement

Measuring engagement has become an essential practice to monitor the correct performance of a brand's digital strategy and to understand the quality of the relationship between the brand and consumers, as engagement today is not only considered as an online 'presence' but as the main consequence of the active link created with the fanbase. By measuring the level of engagement, one is able to observe how this relationship elicits attention, participation, discussion and, most importantly, action which represents the fundamental shift that changes communication from unidirectional to bidirectional and the customer from a passive spectator to an active character in the brand narrative. The main means of assessing this link is the engagement rate describable as the percentage of people interacting with a piece of content compared to the total number of people who have viewed it or follow a brand profile. Although an extremely concise value, it offers a general overview: a high engagement rate indicates that content is seen as relevant, entertaining, and useful; in contrast, a low rate indicates a troubling distance between the recipient and the message.

There are numerous methods that help determine engagement rate, each of which is appropriate for different scenarios and goals:

- *Engagement per reach*: measures how many people interacted versus the actual reach of the content. Following, you can find the Engagement per reach formula:

$$\text{Engagement per reach} = \left(\frac{\text{Total Interactions}}{\text{Post coverage}} \right) * 100$$

- *Engagement per follower*: assesses the ratio of interactions received to the total number of followers. Its formula:

$$\text{Engagement per follower} = \left(\frac{\text{Total Interactions}}{\text{Number of followers}} \right) * 100$$

- *Engagement per impression*: takes into account the number of times of piece of content was viewed, including by repeat users. Its formula:

$$\text{Engagement per impressions} = \left(\frac{\text{Total Interactions}}{\text{Total impressions}} \right) * 100$$

- *Daily engagement*: useful for monitoring daily activity. Its formula is:

$$\text{Daily Engagement} = \left(\frac{\text{Daily Interactions}}{\text{Number of followers}} \right) * 100$$

- *Engagement per video views*: specific to audiovisual content. Following, you can find its formula:

$$\text{Engagement per video} = \left(\frac{\text{Interactions on a video}}{\text{Video views}} \right) * 100$$

Each formula meets a variety of analytical needs, and the choice of a formula varies depending on the type of content, the channel used, and the goal of the campaign (perception, loyalty, conversion) there are also professional tools such as Not Just Analytics that facilitate these calculations by providing data on how social profiles work and average interactions, follower growth, top posts, and most used hashtags.

In addition, these tools provide exportable reports that can be used for reporting to customers and stakeholders or for comparison with competitors. But measuring engagement is not limited to numbers. It is equally important to have an understanding of the characteristics and features of interactions. Not all likes have the same weight or level of participation, nor are all comments indicative of genuine participation. This is why reading the data must always be accompanied by a consideration of context: the tone of the message, the importance of the content, the type of active audience, and the presence of fake or inactive accounts.

Furthermore, to quantitative metrics, integrating qualitative tools such as sentiment analysis, semantic analysis of comments, and observation of recurring behavior patterns is beneficial. The value of engagement as a relational experience, rather than as an algorithm-generated value, can only be understood in this way.

Finally, an adaptation and optimization phase must always be accompanied by good engagement monitoring. The editorial plan can be modified, formats can be changed, messages can be tailored, and the audience can be better segmented using the data collected. The real strategic power of the engagement rate lies in this continuous cycle of analysis and improvement: not as a simple “report card” of performance, but as a guide to directing the entire brand communication in an increasingly audience- and relationship-focused direction. Measuring engagement with appropriate metrics and tools is not just an analytical requirement; it is an act of listening. It is proof that business, in sports, a team, a league or an athlete is willing to evaluate not only what they say, but also how they behave. In the age of social media, engagement is the leading indicator of brand value.

1.3.3 Effective social media engagement and interaction strategies

The concept of engagement in digital marketing, particularly in social media marketing, means creating meaningful, lasting and participatory relationships as well as capturing users' attention. Digital engagement tactics are based on the idea that social media is a relational environment in which companies, users, brands, and stakeholders work together to create value together. Engagement is a strategic capability based on four interactive dimensions: connect, engage, coordinate and collaborate; it is not just a metric or an outcome of communication activities each of these requires planned actions that incentivize active participation and generate shared value.

Personalization of content is one of the most effective methods found; it allows brands to interact directly with their target customers using formats, references, and language that fit the target audience's digital culture. Personalization increases followers' perceived sense of relevance and promotes deeper, more authentic interaction if it is supported by careful social listening; materials should be relevant, up-to-date, and convey experiential value by, for example, telling stories, showing backstories, or directly engaging community members with polls, quizzes, or challenges. The ability of brands to participate in open discussions, listen actively, and respond consistently is the second strategic pillar social media have become public spaces for discussion, so one-way message delivery alone is obsolete. Effective engagement depends on symmetrical

interactions in which brand and users collaborate to construct the content and meaning of the message. From a community enhancement perspective, this type of relationship is achieved primarily through quick and personalized responses, as well as public recognition of users (e.g., through reposts, mentions, and digital rewards). More sophisticated engagement techniques focus on creating value together rather than just communicating; the brand acts as a platform that helps users work together and promotes the sharing of content, ideas, products and initiatives.

This dynamic works well in sporting contexts, where passion and a sense of belonging to the champion or team provoke participatory behaviors, co-creation can be of various types: creative contexts can be created, fans can be involved in decision-making (e.g., deciding on the jersey of the season or the name of a new mascot), or hybrid experiences can be created that combine physical and digital events (event storytelling). Continuity of engagement is another important aspect that requires long-term strategic planning, supported by clear content calendaring and a consistent and recognizable narrative. It is critical to keep the relationship alive even during off-season periods, for example by using serial methods (weekly columns, countdowns, throwbacks), emotional storytelling, or educational and informative content that reinforces the brand's role as a competent “content provider.”

Strategic engagement is achieved at the operational level through codified tactics, such as the effective use of hashtags (to promote virality and thematic positioning), the use of short videos (Reels, Stories, Shorts) to increase interaction, integration with external platforms (such as apps or e-commerce), and gamification as a means to increase active and repeat engagement. Strategies must be tailored to the platform with consistent multichanneling so that effective engagement can be achieved because what works on TikTok may not work not be equally effective on other platforms.

In conclusion, engagement must be viewed as a dynamic, multidimensional process that develops over time and is reinforced through recursive cycles of interaction, evaluation, and adaptation.

CHAPTER 2: The digital evolution of the NBA Brand

2.1 The NBA brand and its international positioning

Thanks to innovative strategies over the last few decades, the National Basketball Association has become a cultural organisation of international importance as well as one of the world's major sports leagues. This process of internationalisation has been made possible by a more deeply rooted and systematic strategy of building its own identity, as well as the entry and spread of basketball into other markets. Now, the National Basketball Association is not only one of the most influential sports associations in the world but also a paradigmatic example of a brand that has been able to redefine its positioning to readjust itself to the demands and expectations of a diverse and global audience.

The National Basketball Association has faced heightened sensitivity to its symbolic significance from the onset. The league began to expand outside the United States during the 1980s, although it was largely concerned with the spectacle of the game and the U.S. market initially. Opening up to international players was a major component of the evolution that made the contest technically superior and brought in new fans and NBA enthusiasts back to their native countries.

Most of the players in the league are European, Asian and African by descent, thus bringing in cultural diversity and value and potential for communication of the brand. A solid branding platform has supported the creation of a uniform and recognizable identity globally. Every aspect of communication, ranging from the logo to the jerseys, from the advertising campaigns to the handling of digital channels, has contributed to defining a shared story. The National Basketball Association has been able to maintain a unique graphic and symbolic line and remain faithful to its history and symbols, but not so rigidly to a line. On the other hand, the brand architecture was designed to provide room for organic and modular expansion, in which each component of the league (i.e., the WNBA, the NBA Europe or NBA China) maintains its own visual identity yet continues to interact with the core matrix on a consistent basis. In doing so, the NBA has managed to achieve

a balance between unity and differentiation with a strong degree of symbolic consistency, adapting across multiple audiences and environments.

The potential to create synergies with other brands through co-branding is one of the most important aspects of the NBA's strategy. These partnerships go beyond visibility and are placed within a more articulate project in which the NBA brand positions itself as a cultural player able to communicate with a variety of different subjects, from entertainment to technology, from luxury to fashion. The collaboration with Louis Vuitton is a case in point, where the National Basketball Association brand has been redesigned in a high-fashion avatar, but still keeping the league brand front and center. These types of collaborations, which are carefully curated and balanced, not only increase brand awareness but also help position the NBA as an aspirational brand that embodies values such as contemporaneity, diversity and excellence. A strong focus on customers and their technological and cultural specificities has helped the brand expand worldwide. In this context, the National Basketball Association has been able to distance itself by adopting a strongly user-oriented vision, identifying that the “global fan” is not a single audience, but a grouping of local audiences with radically different needs, tastes and styles of enjoyment.

For this reason, the league has invested in personalising the viewing experience, adapting video content to mobile devices, improving streaming quality and providing localised versions of content with language commentary, subtitles and even ad-free viewing modes in cases where these are less accepted. In some markets, individual teams are allowed to produce their own content, enabling local fans to receive personalised live feeds. The NBA has distinguished itself in the online world for its ability to manage social media in a differentiated and strategic way, recognising that each platform has its own communication protocols. Social media campaigns are not limited to advertising events or matches; they also exploit engagement dynamics to increase community participation. In this context, the league has been able to establish an emotional and conversational relationship with its fans by creating ready-made content such as iconic playoff moments on Pinterest, emotional videos on Instagram, or viral initiatives on TikTok.

The NBA's social communication is not one-way; it is designed to facilitate interaction, identification, and a sense of belonging, which are essential components of an immersive brand experience. Finally, the National Basketball Association has demonstrated an exceptional ability to integrate advertising and content distribution in a consistent and highly effective environment. The official website, which is constantly updated, offers an ideal combination of information, entertainment and interaction. This is reinforced by an efficient SEO structure and a carefully designed editorial proposal. Its presence on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube has also allowed it to reach younger and more mobile targets, enabling more widespread penetration even in emerging markets.

2.1.1 Historical evolution of the NBA brand

The NBA basketball league was founded in 1946 under the name Basketball Association of America (BAA), changing its name to NBA in 1949 after merging with the National Basketball League (NBL). Thanks to this initial evolution, it expanded its user base and began its journey from a national sports organisation to an international commercial and cultural brand. The NBA was originally classified as a rather national sports league, with a local audience and American origins. But over the years, the league has managed to reinterpret its role and positioning, expanding to become one of the most powerful sports competitions in the world.

This transformation was not only sporting, but also in terms of communication and identity: the NBA has grown as a unique, attractive and universal brand capable of combining sporting supremacy, technological innovation and cultural relevance. The league experienced a media explosion in the 1980s thanks to the emergence of stars such as Magic Johnson, Larry Bird and, above all, Michael Jordan. During this period, the NBA took on a “glocal” character: on the one hand, deeply loyal to its American roots, but also appealing to an audience from all over the world, attracted mainly by the quality of the game and the charisma of its stars. The arrival of international players from different regions of the world, such as Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, has led not only to sporting improvements, but also to a strategic advantage for the spread of the NBA brand in new markets.

The National Basketball Association has also been able to capitalise on the evolution of communication. The league has long invested in the global dissemination of content and in amplifying access to its spectacular offerings, from cable television broadcasting in the 1990s to the current aggregation with digital platforms and social networks. The latest innovations, such as virtual reality and formats optimised for mobile devices, are just some of the technological advances used to increase fan engagement and consolidate the NBA as one of the most advanced sporting institutions in terms of communication. Not only have the media changed, but the game itself has also changed. NBA basketball has become faster, more athletic and more tactically sophisticated over the last twenty years, reflecting a shift in sports consumption patterns. The technical nature of the game has been revolutionised by the adoption of analytical tools, the use of sophisticated statistics and the emphasis on three-point shooting, which has added continuous value to the sports product provided to fans.

The most representative NBA stars have brought sporting values and cultural symbols to the world of sport, and this has been a fundamental aspect in the creation of the NBA brand. In fact, thanks to the arrival of athletes of the calibre of Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant and Steph Curry, the league has become famous and is considered a stage of excellence and aspiration for the public. As the sport's popularity grew, so did its influence on other sectors such as fashion, music, cinema and digital culture. The NBA quickly transformed itself into an integrated cultural environment with the ability to speak to young people and influence global trends. Thus, the NBA's journey is an example of how a sports league can transform itself into a structured global brand through careful management of symbolic capital, a strong ability to adapt to international contexts, and consistent storytelling based on experience and engagement.

In recent weeks, the National Basketball Association has become more than just a sports league; it is an entertainment platform, a repository of values, an example of innovation in the digital market, and an international community of fans. Its history is an absolutely central reference point for the study of brand management strategies in contemporary sport.

2.1.1.1 Historical evolution of the NBA logo

The logo is one of the most essential elements in the process of creating a long-term brand identity, as it has more than just graphic value; it is an effective visual representation of the history and value of the brand. In the specific case of the NBA, the logo has accompanied the league through all its stages of evolution since its foundation and has also played an important role in consolidating its reputation as the representative of professional basketball at an international level. The history of the NBA logo began in 1949, when the league officially became the National Basketball Association after the merger of the Basketball Association of America (BAA) and the National Basketball League (NBL).

The first representation used was a simple basketball with the initials “NBA”, designed primarily to distinguish the league rather than for strategic communication. The league kept this first logo for about twenty years before establishing its own identity. In the mid-1960s, the NBA was not doing very well. The American Basketball Association (ABA) was called upon to rebrand itself to strengthen its positioning and visual identity following its emergence as a direct competitor with a more dynamic and spectacular style of play. Alan Siegel, a renowned designer and branding professional who had already created the Major League Baseball (MLB) logo, was called upon to respond.

The goal was clear: to create a symbol that would convey strength, movement and prestige, while maintaining a sense of authority and classicism. Siegel found the ideal inspiration in a photograph of the legendary Jerry West, then a player for the Los Angeles Lakers, after looking at thousands of images of NBA players. Siegel wanted to capture the essential qualities of elegance, dynamism and power in West's silhouette, captured in a fluid, vertical movement. The result was a stylised graphic icon consisting of three main fields of red, white and blue, aligned with the colours of the American flag, with the player's silhouette in motion in the centre. The new logo was officially introduced in 1971 and has remained unchanged since then, becoming one of the most recognisable symbols in the world of sport.

Although the NBA has never officially confirmed the identity of the athlete depicted, it is widely recognised that it is Jerry West. Although West never received the Finals MVP award, his appearance has become a symbol of the spirit and tradition of the league, giving it an institutional and mythical aura. The National Basketball Association logo is not simply a static brand: it has been and remains a strategic means of communication and marketing. Its presence is evident everywhere: it is used on uniforms, shoes, balls, advertising campaigns, official stores and online platforms. The power of the logo lies in its iconic synthesis, its visual simplicity and its ability to endure over time, maintaining its evocative impact unchanged. The National Basketball Association has also established strict regulations for the visual branding of affiliated teams. The NBA has had an impact on the aesthetics of all visual communications associated with its sporting environment, in addition to requiring each team's logo to incorporate a basketball to reinforce the league's iconographic consistency.

The story of Michael Jordan and his Nike shoes is an excellent example of the regulatory and inventive power of the NBA brand. At a time when players were required to wear shoes that reflected the official colours of their uniforms, Jordan defied the rules by wearing red and black shoes on the court. Despite the penalties, the move generated unprecedented publicity, contributing to the founding of Air Jordan, one of the most iconic sports brands in history. This episode shows how the visual and symbolic management of the NBA brand is not limited to preserving identity; it can also help develop co-branding activities and unconventional marketing.

Due to its apparent simplicity, the National Basketball Association logo combines sport, visual culture, national identity and commercial strategy. It tells the story of a league that, starting from a competition, has been able to create one of the strongest and most enduring images in contemporary sport, confirming the strategic value of design in building brands that can reach across generations and locations.

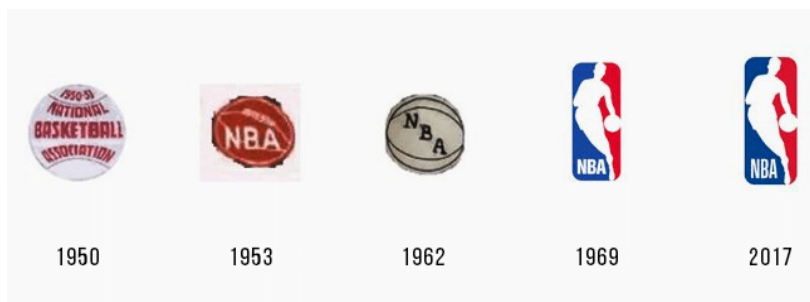


Figure3: The evolution of the NBA logo

2.1.1.2 Development of the brand's visual elements

Over the years, the visual identity of the National Basketball Association has become an essential part of the league's positioning and communication strategy. Aesthetics have become a fundamental component of brand equity in a sports system that is increasingly interconnected with the logic of marketing, fashion and digital consumption. The National Basketball Association has dared to embrace this innovation by designing a unique and consistent visual symbolism that has amplified fans' pride in belonging and reproduced the brand's values through iconographic details. The management of official jerseys is one of the key elements in the evolution of the brand's visual appearance.

Until the 1980s, each franchise could choose its own technical equipment supplier, but since the 2000s, the league has chosen to centralise everything, entrusting the production of playing kits exclusively to a single brand. The supplier chosen was Nike, which became the global technical sponsor after a long partnership with Adidas, which lasted from 2006 to 2017. The design plan also underwent a change as a result of this transition in fact, for the first time in the league's history, the technical sponsor's logo was visible directly on the match shirts.

One of the choices that contributed to reconfiguring the iconography of National Basketball Association uniforms, accentuating their hybrid nature as both technical garments and symbolic consumer items. The diversification of game kits also reflects visual identity, which today is divided into four main lines: “Association”, “Icon”,

“Statement” and “City Edition”. The first two maintain a more institutional function, similar to the traditional distinction between “home” and “away” jerseys, while the latter two are the result of a sophisticated branding operation. In particular, the “City Edition” series stands out for its narrative intensity: each design is intended to evoke historical, cultural or symbolic elements of the team's city or state.

To transform the jersey from a simple uniform into a vehicle for identity and culture, colours, fonts and graphic elements are carefully selected to create an emotional connection with the territory. Sports shoes, or “signature shoes”, are another key component of the National Basketball Association's visual communication, in addition to uniforms. The sneaker culture, which originated in the world of the National Basketball Association, has contributed significantly to defining the league as a brand that combines sport, fashion and urban culture. Iconic product lines, often bearing the player's name, have been created through collaborations between athletes and famous brands such as Nike, Adidas, Under Armour and Jordan Brand. Under Armour's Giannis Antetokounmpo Zoom Freaks and Joel Embiid Embiid Ones are examples of this.

In these cases, the shoe becomes more than just a technical tool, but also an extension of the athlete's personal brand while reinforcing the league's image as an aesthetic and performative environment. The design of the materials used by the National Basketball Association is also constantly being updated. Since the game began with heavy wool uniforms and long trousers, it has moved on to innovative technical fabrics that offer breathability, lightness and freedom of movement. Game shoes have also changed a lot. They now have rubber soles, cushioned EVA midsoles and uppers made of mixed synthetic materials. All of this has been designed to improve traction, responsiveness and joint support. An aesthetic that communicates performance and lifestyle is the result of this attention to functional details. This meets the expectations of a modern audience that purchases sports products both on and off the court.

However, the impact of the NBA brand on clothing is not limited to the realm of the game. Since 2005, the league has imposed an official dress code on players and coaches and enforces a formal style during meetings and press conferences. Although initially controversial, particularly due to its distance from the hip-hop culture that many players

represented, this choice has helped to consolidate the NBA's image as a stylish and institutional institution capable of representing values of discipline, professionalism and prestige. At the same time, NBA fashion has become more expressive, transforming players' arrival in the arena into a veritable showcase of luxury streetwear, often amplified by digital media and the league's official social media profiles.

In conclusion, the growth of the NBA brand's visual elements demonstrates that sports aesthetics are now a strategic part of brand management, rather than just a functional representation of the game. The league has been able to build a consistent, iconic image that is deeply connected to contemporary cultural dynamics through uniforms, footwear, dress codes and collaborations with leading fashion brands. The NBA does not limit itself to advertising a sports product: it builds a visual imagery that combines performance, territorial identity and global aspiration, consolidating its position as one of the most influential sports brands in the world.

2.1.1.3 Development of the brand's communicative and value elements

The National Basketball Association is the perfect example of how a sports organisation can use multifaceted and integrated communication to build a strong and culturally relevant brand identity in contemporary sports brand management. The National Basketball Association brand is by no means a driving force behind a company or organisation; rather, it is a form of social communication that shares meaning. The league has adopted a socio-semiotic brand strategy as a form of communication that encompasses verbal, visual, symbolic and narrative motivations. These factors work simultaneously to strengthen brand visibility, identity adherence and the spirit of belonging among fans around the globe. The ability to shift focus from sporting performance to the narration of values is among the most innovative and distinctive features of the National Basketball Association's communication.

Gradually, NBA athletes are being represented not only as excellent players, but also as advocates of universal values such as inclusion, resilience, integrity, leadership and activism. The symbolic transformation is achieved through a series of campaigns and initiatives aimed at supporting the cultural relevance of the brand. Examples include

institutional campaigns such as “This is Why We Play” and “NBA Cares”, as well as social initiatives sponsored by both the league and individual players and teams to support educational, humanitarian and civic causes. Through these actions, the NBA positions itself as a social actor, going beyond the traditional boundaries of sports entertainment to promote reflection, participation and mobilisation. Visual and symbolic elements are fundamental in the value-building process.

The league's logo, the famous silhouette of Jerry West, has gradually established itself as a global symbol, comparable in terms of symbolic power to Nike's “swoosh”. It has become an easily identifiable and meaningful emblem because it symbolises values such as dynamism, elegance, movement and aspiration. The visual continuity of the brand is reinforced by its constant presence on official uniforms, merchandising, online content and promotional campaigns. It also creates a deep emotional identification among the public. From an axiological point of view, the National Basketball Association uses a polysemic narrative through a variety of approaches to symbolic enhancement that allow viewers to experience different degrees of involvement and meaning. In particular, there are four main approaches:

- *Practical enhancement*, which manifests itself through an emphasis on athletic performance, individual skills and technical improvement. This is clear from content such as Player Highlights, Mic'd Up and Player Workouts, which emphasise the performative and meritocratic aspects of the game.
- *Critical valorisation*, based on stories of perseverance, sacrifice and effort. This method is commonly used to tell the stories of Rising Stars, Undrafted players or those from difficult backgrounds, providing a committed and ethical view of the sport.
- *The promotion of the game*, which now presents itself in lighter, more creative and engaging ways. Behind-the-scenes events, content created on platforms such as TikTok, and collaborations with digital creators, streamers and influencers are all examples of methods to make the brand more accessible and engaging, particularly for younger generations.
- Lastly, the *representation of sport* as a tool for social and cultural transformation shows utopian enhancement. Initiatives by the NBA Foundation, support for

initiatives such as Black Lives Matter, Pride Month and other initiatives that support inclusion and social justice present this type of narrative.



Figure 3: NBA players' initiative following the death of George Floyd

The NBA can distinguish itself from other sports brands that focus on product promotion (such as Adidas or Asics) by using this value-based approach as its ideological and cultural foundation. From this perspective, sport is not just a sporting spectacle; it is also a means for cultures to meet and learn about each other. The National Basketball Association's digital strategy is another important factor in creating an identity discourse.

The league can convey personalised, emotional and culturally appropriate content through the strategic use of social media. This allows fans around the world to get involved and actively participate. The National Basketball Association's social community is never neutral: its appearance is a dynamic enunciative system in which all content derives from careful discursive design that promotes the brand's core values. In summary, the NBA's ability to create and sustain a coherent, multisensory and value-driven narrative that is capable of interacting with diverse audiences in global contexts is what constitutes its communicative strength. As such, the league continues to be a leader in the media and cultural community of the digital age.

2.1.2 Strategic positioning and brand identity of the NBA

The National Basketball Association (NBA) stands out not only as one of the most spectacular professional leagues in the world, but also as one of the strongest brands in sports marketing today. The NBA brand identity has grown over time and is now an example of value, cultural and commercial construction that has an impact beyond the boundaries of sport. The NBA brand's strategic vision has successfully combined spectacle, storytelling and technological innovation with a strong awareness of its commercial potential. This is the secret to the strength of the NBA brand.

The merger with the ABA in 1976 and the arrival of David Stern, the commissioner who transformed the NBA from a league into a global brand, were the turning point in this evolution. Stern's foresight allowed the NBA to fully exploit the narrative potential of the game and its protagonists, taking on a pioneering role in the managerial management of the sports product and in globalisation. The league used a positioning strategy based on a thorough review of the identity of the basketball product: no longer just a sport, but a narrative platform promoting values such as inclusion, empowerment, resilience and performance.

Furthermore, the league has pioneered a new style of sports league. In fact, with the introduction of structural rules such as the salary cap and the draft lottery, all teams have been given the opportunity to remain competitive and contribute to the overall quality of the championship. These rules have circumvented the competitive paradox that generally affects most professional sports competitions and guidelines have been drawn up to ensure the sustainability of NBA franchises.

Despite these innovative reforms, the American league managed to enhance its reputation after choosing to “think global, act local”. In fact, after opening international offices and organising games outside the United States, international players perceived the NBA as a more accessible and closer environment, and their numbers have steadily increased over the years. The most notable example is the signing of Chinese basketball player Yao Ming, which marked the beginning of a brand glocalisation strategy implemented with the aim of not only exporting American basketball, but also adapting the brand narrative

to the cultural specificities of different markets. This proved to be a winning choice, thanks in part to the league's ability to forge local partnerships, collaborate with regional influencers and engage celebrities in different countries, thereby building a shared narrative while maintaining its core identity.

In addition, the NBA has succeeded in reaffirming its values reputation by using careful communication and public relations tactics. Its clear desire to position itself as a forward-thinking and responsible brand is exemplified by initiatives such as NBA Cares, its readiness to tackle social issues such as diversity, inclusion and anti-racism, and the league's prompt response to controversial incidents, such as the racist remarks of former Clippers owner Donald Sterling. To this extent, such positioning efforts are not a simple marketing ploy but a powerful and active stance that contributes to the construction of brand identity. The players themselves are at the center of the complex narrative web forming the identity of the National Basketball Association. Their lives have been carefully crafted into stories of redemption, talent, and hard work, and the athletes have become cultural ambassadors and genuine modern myths, a position occupied by the likes of Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Allen Iverson, and Kobe Bryant. The league has promoted the celebration of individual personalities, exploiting the emotional impact of their stories and encouraging direct identification by a variety of audiences, particularly young people and those from challenging socio-economic backgrounds. Not surprisingly, the NBA has managed to reach the so-called “mass niche”, a diverse demographic group united by a strong symbolic and emotional connection. The NBA is part of a cultural universe that goes beyond the court due to the influence of hip-hop culture, its proximity to urban fashion and the active participation of celebrities in arenas and on social media. Consumption of the brand goes beyond watching the game and becomes a shared cultural experience, reinforced by merchandise, online content, advertising campaigns, and activities with international brands such as Nike, Adidas, McDonald's, and Gatorade.

The NBA has also been able to compete in emerging markets such as China and India, as well as in markets more traditionally “distant” from basketball, such as the United Kingdom. The league has been able to connect with increasingly large and diverse audiences through the organisation of special events, the participation of local celebrities

and a highly localised online presence. The creation of the WNBA, the professional women's league, has expanded the commercial value and target audience of the brand.

In summary, the strategic position of the National Basketball Association stems from a comprehensive vision that incorporates social responsibility, marketing, communication and cultural identity. The NBA brand has managed to become a world-renowned brand by maintaining a strong, recognisable identity and adapting it in local and adaptive ways. The NBA's success depends not only on the skill of its athletes but mainly on how their exploits are recounted. The National Basketball Association serves as a model for all other sports associations that want to become a true international cultural network, becoming more than just a league in an increasingly crowded sporting landscape.

2.1.3 The key distinguishing features of the NBA brand

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has become one of the most advanced, vibrant and influential names in the world of sports business. This is due both to the quality of its sports products and its ability to establish itself as a cultural and communicative phenomenon. The NBA brand identity is based on a consistent set of characteristics that make it distinctive, meaningful and attractive to an increasingly diverse audience. The ability to continually review the NBA's sports product to adapt it to today's technological, social and cultural circumstances is one of the distinctive features of the National Basketball Association.

The NBA “bubble”, organised during the Covid-19 pandemic at the Disney World complex in Orlando in 2020, is a prime example of this. At a time of severe global crisis, the league managed to keep the championship safe and turn it into an unprecedented narrative and engagement opportunity. This approach reflects the NBA brand's determination to remain at the service of its fans and anticipate market needs without ever preparing for change. The priority given to digital content is another distinctive feature. The ability to create and distribute content with high engagement rates is what determines a brand's value today, as the National Basketball Association discovered early on. The league has transformed itself into a powerful content hub that attracts millions of users across all major digital channels using video, highlights, narrative formats, emotional

moments and user-generated content. Projects such as the @NBABubbleLife Twitter account demonstrate the brand's focus on maintaining relationships with its community even when things are not going well or things are not going well.

The ability to create consistent and strategic expansions of the NBA brand is another factor contributing to the brand's strength. An important step in this direction was the launch of the women's WNBA in 1996. Taking a cultural stance on gender equity and inclusion was not just an increase in the target audience. The WNBA is not simply a reproduction of the men's league; rather, it is an organisation with a distinct and separate identity that can attract sponsors, fans and media with its own stories. In addition, the NBA's clear ambition for marketing and communication stands out. The league has never been content with traditional communication; instead, it has continued to seek new ways to communicate with its audiences.

Some of the tactics used to broaden the audience and increase the cultural relevance of the brand include collaborations with Nike to create clothing collections, the creation of a community on Reddit, and the creation of customised content for emerging markets. The role that players play as true representatives of the league is also particularly important. The NBA has been able to appreciate the unique characteristics of its athletes, not only for their athletic performance, but also for their charm and ability to create independent stories. Some players have become famous in films, others in memorable advertising campaigns, and still others have become the stars of entire product lines.

The strategy is well defined: the strengthening of the entire NBA brand ecosystem depends on the symbolic potential of individuals. Social responsibility cannot be ignored, which is why the NBA Cares programme was developed in 2005, gradually increasing the league's social commitment, thus focusing on the need to make social responsibility an essential part of the brand strategy rather than a simple commitment to improving its reputation. This approach has been reinforced through clear and courageous stances on important social issues, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has become not only an example of corporate social responsibility, but also a benchmark in global public debate thanks to the strong and public commitment of its players, coaching staff and the league itself.

The National Basketball Association has finally achieved its goal of promoting shared values and becoming a symbol that unites sport, culture, fashion and generational identity. Taking part in a collective experience that transcends the game is equivalent to wearing an NBA jersey, following a star on social media or attending league events live or online. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has gained the ability to emotionally engage its fans by developing a brand identity based on participation, belonging and aspiration.

2.2 NBA social media content strategies

The National Basketball Association has finally achieved its goal of promoting shared values and becoming a symbol that unites sport, culture, fashion and generational identity. Taking part in a collective experience that transcends the game is equivalent to wearing an NBA jersey, following a star on social media, or participating in live or online league events. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has acquired the ability to emotionally engage its fans by developing a brand identity based on participation, belonging, and aspiration. The NBA's digital strategy is based on an approach strongly focused on creating original content that aims primarily to entertain, excite and build loyalty, as well as providing information.

The first level of this editorial activity is represented by the league's official website and those of the individual franchises; this level is updated daily with highlights, interviews, statistics, reports and themed columns. However, this approach works best on social media. The distinctive feature of the National Basketball Association's communication is storytelling: the league can create a coherent and engaging narrative image of teams, players and sports seasons using short emotional videos, biographical stories and behind-the-scenes moments.

The goal is not simply to show the game; rather, it is to present it as a social and valuable experience, creating content that directly touches viewers' emotions and strengthening the emotional bond between the brand and its fan base. The viral dimension is also important, the kiss cam, dance cam or comedic content featuring mascots are now true media objects designed for social sharing with the aim of increasing engagement outside the context of the game. The NBA has demonstrated its ability to use entertainment as a means of

increasing brand awareness, reaching audiences who are not necessarily interested in the competitive aspect of the sport. The NBA uses a platform-specific approach, modifying content, tone and format for each channel. For example, Instagram predominantly uses immediate and dynamic visual language, utilising a large number of stories and reels that capture significant moments in real time. Facebook, on the other hand, continues to be a useful medium for disseminating organised information such as match schedules and links to live streams. Twitter is used to stimulate sports debate by engaging a more knowledgeable and analytical audience thanks to its conversational and informative nature. Finally, YouTube is the preferred channel for long-form video content, such as short documentaries, best-ofs and extended highlights.

Although not coincidental, this diversification follows a precise audience segmentation logic: the National Basketball Association uses customised editorial design to capture the different socio-demographic and behavioural aspects of each platform. The ability to adapt to international markets while maintaining a strong core identity is one of the most innovative features of the National Basketball Association's digital strategy. In this sense, social media are fundamental tools for creating a glocal positioning that takes into account the cultural characteristics of different places.

The official accounts of the NBA and individual teams pay particular attention to foreign players, using them as representatives in their home countries. With the help of this identification mechanism, it is possible to produce localised content and strengthen connections between global audiences and NBA brands. China and India are two strategic markets where fanbase growth has been accelerated by local athletes and promotional events. The NBA League Pass streaming service also allows games to be viewed in real time from almost anywhere in the world, increasing the visibility of the sports product and sponsors. In addition, the NBA has experimented with video formats designed for an international audience, offering dubbed or subtitled content in multiple languages and promoting digital initiatives that could reach non-English-speaking audiences.

NBA players are seen not only as players, but as real personal brands, and this is recognised and valued in the National Basketball Association's communication strategy. In this model, the player becomes an extension of the NBA brand, which can generate

value through partnerships, sponsorships and collaborations. The league helps its athletes develop their personal brands off the court as well, collaborating with technology, fashion and lifestyle companies and utilising social media platforms. Public appearances, advertising campaigns, custom shoe collections and supported social initiatives, such as NBA Cares, strengthen the players' public image while also bolstering the reputation of the entire league. One of the most significant features of the NBA model is the combination of individual and collective brands. Players' personal stories, which often feature elements of sacrifice, redemption and aspiration, become unique narratives that fans can relate to, promoting a deep and lasting identification with the league.

2.2.1 Types of content and analysis of their effectiveness

The National Basketball Association has proven to be a benchmark in the world of digital sports marketing when it comes to creating, disseminating and managing digital content. In fact, variety, creativity and consistency with brand identity are distinctive features of the National Basketball Association's content strategy. The goal is no longer just to promote games or results, but also to create a narrative environment in which the audience can interact with content ranging from pure entertainment to the promotion of players as individual brands. Social media is the preferred venue for the league to exert its commercial and cultural influence in this context. Allowing fans to freely record, share and comment on videos, highlights and match clips has been one of the most significant strategic decisions made by the league in recent years.

This approach, in contrast to the more restrictive methods used by other professional leagues in the United States, has greatly increased the viral circulation of content, promoting a decentralised and participatory logic that has fuelled large-scale engagement. Fans' desire for “full meals”, an example watching live games, increases when they receive free “snack” content, according to Commissioner Adam Silver. It is a model that uses fragmentation as a lever of attraction and transforms short content into tools for reader loyalty. The range of material produced and disseminated on official and unofficial channels is extraordinary.

A wide range of formats are available, including memes and GIFs, live streaming on Instagram and ironic threads on Twitter, as well as technical content and match highlights. The content is tailored to the dynamics of each platform: the most popular videos on YouTube are narrative videos and technical montages; emotional posts and stories thrive on Instagram; instant commentary prevails on Twitter, often characterised by irony, provocation and sarcasm. The NBA has developed and maintained a digital subculture called #NBATwitter, which is an informal but powerful environment where irony, gossip, sports news and participatory storytelling mix. Players, journalists and independent creators thrive in this ecosystem.

Athletes such as Joel Embiid, Draymond Green and Damian Lillard are known for their ability to “inhabit” social media in an authentic, ironic and provocative way, building a narrative that fits their personal brand. In these cases, the content is not limited to recounting what happens on the court, but shows and amplifies the athlete's personality, reinforcing their symbolic and commercial dimension. The adherence of the digital content produced and disseminated by the NBA universe to the brand identity, understood as a league and group of personalities, is what makes the content so effective. Creativity and originality are never ends in themselves: content only “works” if it respects and enhances the narrative consistency of the athlete or franchise publishing it. The concept of being on brand is guided by this logic: a message, image or post is only effective if the audience sees it as authentic and in line with the expectations that the brand has built over time.

Therefore, the online communication of the NBA is shared storytelling with teams, players and the league collaborating to construct meaning, initiate conversation and create interactions in a fluid and connected way. Even seemingly trivial or inflammatory material, such as GIFs, cyber wars, in-jokes among team mates, or internet memes, contributes to the accumulation of a shared imaginary that underscores the NBA's ubiquity in the contemporary sporting and popular culture landscape. Conflict and turmoil are never in short supply, of course. Visibility of stars is accompanied by polarizing psychological tensions and psychological distress, wherein each action is decoded and amplified to the extreme. Look-at-me culture, a concept that captures a constant tendency towards self-spectacularisation and self-advertisement, is an underlying feature of social

communication. But it also challenges critical examination of the limits of authenticity and social pressure dynamics, particularly among young players.

However, it is difficult not to acknowledge that the National Basketball Association has been able to translate content into symbolic capital, capitalizing on a communication model where social media are real sites for relationships and stories, rather than as mere channels for distribution.

Content is a strategic asset for brand growth because it has the ability to generate engagement, virality and authentic conversations. Adam Silver himself stated that ‘all the noise on #NBATwitter is good for business,’ and not without reason. One of the most significant characteristics of the National Basketball Association's effective communication lies hidden in this seemingly disordered and chaotic noise: the ability to incorporate all content, regardless of its size, into the overall brand narrative.

2.2.2 Visual content: highlights, iconic moments and graphics

Visual content has become increasingly important in sports communication strategies in a digital environment dominated by moving images, vibrant colours and mobile-first consumption. In the case of the National Basketball Association, the visual element serves as a strategic tool for meaning-making, engagement and brand promotion. The league has been able to anticipate the evolution of digital platforms, adapting its visual identity to increasingly interactive, immersive and dynamic languages.

Fluid visual communication, able to move nimbly between different formats and platforms, is the first significant transformation. In the past, eye-catching graphics were enough to gain visibility on Facebook or a neat feed on Instagram, but today, competition for user attention requires a more sophisticated approach. The National Basketball Association's visual content comes in many forms: from Instagram videos to viral TikTok videos, YouTube Shorts to LinkedIn documentary carousels, and content optimised for Pinterest, X (formerly Twitter), Threads and WhatsApp Business. Mastery of brand identity translates into custom graphics, consistent stylistic overlays, distinctive colour palettes and copywriting integrated with visual aesthetics, all to ensure visual consistency.

Short vertical videos (9:16) are now the standard format for engaging younger generations. Image quality and fast editing are not the only factors that determine the effectiveness of this content; the ability to maintain readability and visual impact in a crowded environment such as social feeds is another important factor. The NBA invests in the creation of customised content, where text is never placed in areas covered by interfaces, graphic overlays are consistent with the tone of the franchise or athlete involved, and customised covers ensure recognisability over time, helping to build orderly and visually memorable feeds.

However, the importance of visual content goes beyond the most popular sites such as Instagram or TikTok. Today, even sites such as LinkedIn, which in the past were mainly dedicated to text, are open to new visual languages through carousel documents. Using clean graphics, short but incisive texts and visual elements that reinforce the professional and cultural identity of the NBA brand, these formats allow you to tell stories, share strategic insights or celebrate sporting achievements in a more authoritative and immediate way.

Furthermore, transmedia adaptability is another aspect of visual communication. Each platform has its own aesthetic language, and the National Basketball Association has been able to adapt to this: For example, visual content on Pinterest is more refined and persistent, with images optimised for visual discovery and vertical infographics designed to increase usability. In contrast, X and Threads offer greater immediacy, with short, viral images and messages, often related to current sporting events or iconic moments. Today, WhatsApp Business is also used to convey product graphics, promotional offers and visual catalogues that perfectly match the brand identity, demonstrating how the visual dimension has spread to every aspect of communication.

The NBA does not simply recount its matches; instead, it transforms them into an all-encompassing visual experience in which every image is a promise of belonging, identity and spectacle.

2.2.3 Narrative content and storytelling: behind the scenes, personal stories and team storytelling

Narrative is fundamental to defining and strengthening a league's identity in the context of contemporary digital sports brand management. The National Basketball Association, in particular, has been able to transform storytelling into a strategic tool capable of amplifying the symbolic value of its players, teams and the entire sporting ecosystem. If the game is the beating heart of the brand, it is storytelling that shapes the identity of the game, creating public opinion that goes beyond the court.

Sports storytelling is an art form that combines narrative structure and emotions, projecting a simple sporting event into an epic and shared dimension. Sports storytelling, far from technical reporting, aims to evoke feelings of belonging and connection. In this context, the National Basketball Association stands out for its ability to create content that is not only informative but also deeply engaging, transforming athletes into symbols and games into representations of universal challenges. One of the most influential features of this narrative strategy is the personal storytelling of the players, the league tells the stories of athletes through documentaries, digital mini-series and unique social media content: facing problems, achieving success, falling down and getting back up.

Stories such as those of Giannis Antetokounmpo, who overcame economic hardship in Greece, or Jimmy Butler, who went from a homeless childhood to a successful career, show how the brand's value is based on resilience and sacrifice. Not only are the protagonists of these stories inspiring, but the audience is able to establish deep emotional connections with them. This demonstrates that the National Basketball Association also focuses on team storytelling, emphasising collective identities, city histories and local cultures.

Moreover, narratives that highlight the social and cultural significance of historic rivalries, such as those between the Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers or the Chicago Bulls and Detroit Pistons, are continually revived. In this way, the National Basketball Association creates not only content, but also authentic narrative universes in which the audience can feel involved and engaged over a long period of time. Behind-the-scenes

footage, which offers fans a more intimate view of the game, is an important part of the National Basketball Association's storytelling.

Furthermore, the audience is taken to the sidelines and into the locker rooms through formats such as “All Access” or “Mic'd Up”, which take them through the pre-game ceremonies and post-game emotions. The sense of authenticity and closeness is reinforced by this immersive storytelling, which creates an engaging experience that increases audience loyalty. The intelligent use of transmedia strategies is at the heart of the National Basketball Association's effective storytelling. In fact, stories are created across a variety of platforms, including themed podcasts, narrative threads on X (formerly Twitter) and mini-documentaries on NBA TV. Each channel is part of a coherent system in which content amplifies and complements each other. Thus, NBA storytelling is distributed and convergent, in line with today's narrative marketing principles. The use of visual storytelling, in which images such as iconic photos, infographics and cinematic highlights become narrative tools in their own right, is even more important.

The National Basketball Association has distinguished itself for its ability to transform data into stories in this context: so-called data storytelling. When statistics, records and athlete performance are translated into exciting stories, enhancing the athlete's personal history and making each number meaningful.

Finally, emotional and value-based marketing is closely related to storytelling. Great adverts such as “This is Why We Play” or “Everyone's on the Clock” go beyond advertising events or products; they also convey a perspective and a value system. According to this view, sport can convey messages of diversity, inclusivity and solidarity. The NBA's ability to spread these stories that have a significant impact on society increases the perceived value of the brand and positions it as a global cultural leader, contributing to its strength. This means that storytelling is closely related to emotional and value-based marketing. Great advertisements such as ‘This is Why We Play’ or ‘Everyone's on the Clock’ go beyond promoting events or goods; they also convey values and a perspective. According to this view, sport is capable of promoting diversity, inclusion and solidarity. The strength of the National Basketball Association stems from

its ability to spread stories that have a significant impact on society. This increases the perceived value of the brand and positions it as a global cultural leader.

2.2.4 Strategic collaborations with influencers and celebrities

The use of influencer marketing has become essential to the communication strategies of sports organisations in contemporary sports marketing, which is characterised by the predominance of social media and the transformation of audiences into dynamic digital communities. The National Basketball Association (NBA), which has always been a pioneer in adapting to changes in the media ecosystem, has effectively integrated collaborations with celebrities, athletes and digital creatives, transforming them into real vectors of engagement and cultural diffusion. The increase in the use of influencer marketing is a response to an established dynamic: the gradual abandonment of traditional advertising channels, which are being replaced by a communication paradigm based on perceived authenticity, shared values and the influencer's ability to relate to their audience.

NBA athletes, who have very emotional personal stories and are famous all over the world, present themselves as natural and authoritative testimonials in this context. Their influence extends to values, culture and behaviour, not just technical skills or sporting performance. They are, to all intents and purposes, digital role models capable of guiding opinions, tastes and consumption. Many key factors determine the strength of these partnerships: first and foremost, a high level of engagement. The National Basketball Association's fan base consists of a young, globalised and interconnected audience that constantly interacts with content created by athletes or the league. Brands can collaborate with famous players such as LeBron James, Steph Curry and Giannis Antetokounmpo to increase their visibility and establish relationships with highly active and loyal communities. Secondly, there is authenticity.

Athlete influencers stand out from traditional endorsers because of their sense of authenticity and spontaneity, which increases the perceived credibility of campaigns. When a player promotes a product or value through a post, live stream or campaign, they do so through consistent personal storytelling, which makes the message more compelling

and less perceived as forced or artificial. Another strategic advantage of these collaborations is brand internationalisation. The National Basketball Association (and the companies that collaborate with it) is able to penetrate international markets more successfully by leveraging the emotional capital and identity that players represent in their home countries. The deliberate choice of collaborations in specific locations, such as Europe, China or India, allows for the expansion of the message at a local level, tailored to local cultural and linguistic specificities. For influencer marketing to have a real impact, a professional and strategic approach is required. First and foremost, influencers must be carefully selected based on their alignment with brand principles, the type of audience they reach, and their ability to establish lasting relationships.

The goal is not simply virality, but the creation of authentic and ongoing relationships that strengthen the brand's positioning over time. Designing engaging content, which can combine entertainment, information, and storytelling, is another key factor. The most profitable topics include Instagram Stories, behind-the-scenes content, athlete purchases of corporate accounts, live broadcasts on YouTube or Twitch, and the use of custom filters and stickers on TikTok and Snapchat. Creativity and the ability to use multi-platform capabilities consistently and synergistically are required.

Another essential element is performance evaluation. Engagement rate, impressions, organic reach, and conversions are KPIs that allow you to evaluate the effectiveness of campaigns and optimise your strategy in real time. Influencer marketing is therefore a complex technical field that requires in-depth analysis and communication skills. In this context, the NBA does not limit itself to promoting itself; instead, it helps companies, athletes and fans collaborate to embrace topics such as fashion, music, art and social engagement, which are often overlooked in the world of sport. An excellent example is the collaboration between NBA players and musicians or streetwear brands, which give rise to campaigns that engage a wide audience and generate both profits and cultural value. Finally, the importance of inclusivity and representation should not be overlooked.

In this terms, companies, as well as the NBA, are required to engage athletes and teams from diverse backgrounds in order to promote messages of equality, empowerment and

social cohesion. Consequently, the influence of influencers in sports marketing is a means of promoting visibility and spreading values and identities.

2.3 Adaptation and personalisation of NBA content for global markets

One of the most important strategic challenges for a sports brand is the ability to communicate with geographically and culturally diverse audiences in the context of digital globalisation. To respond to the specificities of international markets, the National Basketball Association has developed a sophisticated approach to adapting and personalising its content. The league is able to maintain a fundamental identity consistency while reducing localised and culturally sensitive communication in a fragmented and competitive media ecosystem.

Market data confirms the international dimension of the National Basketball Association: According to recent forecasts, the league will reach a value of approximately £13.5 billion by 2030 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.42% between 2025 and 2030. These figures show the strength of the US market and its strategic expansion into important areas such as Asia, Europe and Africa. In particular, markets such as China, India and the Middle East are high-potential areas where the NBA has already begun to take action to increase its presence. Localised digital content is one of the main tools for this expansion. A globalised communication model is used by the league to integrate centralised content production with territorial distribution adapted to the habits, linguistic preferences and cultural sensibilities of different markets. The NBA has many official social media accounts in many languages that promote not only games and events; these accounts also promote the stories of international players, iconic moments related to specific countries and collaborations with local influencers.

The National Basketball Association has expanded its network of commercial and media partnerships to support this strategy. The agreement signed in November 2024 with Warner Bros. Discovery strengthened and expanded the previous collaboration, allowing NBA content to be more widely distributed across the group's global channels. Added to this are initiatives such as the agreement with SoFi in February 2024, which strengthens the financial dimension of the brand by involving the NBA G League, the NBA 2K

League and USA Basketball with a view to creating cross-synergies between sport, eSport and education.

The success of the personalisation strategy also depends on the intelligent use of digital consumer data. The NBA tailors its content and distribution channels based on fans' online behaviour. For example, the league favours short, easily shareable vertical formats (such as Shorts, TikTok and Reels) in markets where mobile connectivity is more popular than desktop. Similarly, to ensure accessibility and inclusion, editorial strategies include the creation of subtitles or localised dubbing for non-English languages. Content adaptation is not just about linguistic translation; it also concerns communicative tone, cultural references and even when it is published. Content is published in countries with time zones significantly different from the United States in order to reach local audiences when they are most active online.

The National Basketball Association is able to maintain a constant, effective and culturally relevant conversation with its fans around the world thanks to this type of micro-geographic optimisation. Organising physical and digital events abroad is another pillar of internationalisation: regular season or preseason tournaments in major cities (such as London, Mexico City or Abu Dhabi), basketball centres for young athletes, immersive events and advertising campaigns in collaboration with local brands.

These initiatives not only improve the global perception of the brand, but also create links with local communities, strengthening fan loyalty and stimulating engagement that goes beyond the game. From a commercial perspective, global expansion also has an impact on merchandising. The growing demand for content and items with strong identity value is met by the availability of official NBA products tailored to various markets, including packaging, design and local testimonials.

Similarly, the NBA League Pass platform, which is accessible in a variety of languages and offers a variety of viewing and subscription options, is an essential tool for ensuring access to premium content even in non-English-speaking areas or areas with low purchasing power. Finally, one of the most advanced and strategic areas of NBA brand management is the adaptation and customisation of content for international markets. A

league's ability to combine its core identity with local sensibilities is a distinctive competitive advantage in a world where cultural relevance is key to competitiveness.

The NBA does not just sell a product; it builds cultural and commercial relationships by adapting its voice to the languages and needs of an increasingly interconnected, demanding and engaged global audience.

2.3.1 Cultural adaptation of NBA content in key markets

The NBA has understood that the internationalisation of its brand requires a profound and strategic cultural adaptation in the context of an increasingly globalised sports and media environment. This cannot be achieved simply by exporting products. The ability to adapt brand communication to the socio-cultural characteristics of individual target markets is crucial in this scenario. In other words, the National Basketball Association has followed a 'glocal' approach, in which brand centrality is combined with distinctive local sensibilities.

First and foremost, this approach is implemented through a multilingual content marketing strategy. This strategy considers content as its true cultural localisation in addition to linguistic translation. The goal is not only to make content understandable, but also to provide the local audience with an emotional and symbolic meaning. This requires adapting the communicative tone, cultural references, images used, and even editorial formats according to the cultural standards of the target market. The data clearly shows how important this technique is: In 2022, only 25.9% of Internet users spoke English, according to Statista. However, most users prefer to access content in their native language. The NBA has therefore chosen to create a multilingual online presence with official social media accounts in Chinese, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, managed by local teams experienced in the relevant cultural dynamics.

However, cultural adaptation goes far beyond language. It also involves the ability to understand local symbols, values and preferences. For example, the league has leveraged the presence of Asian or national players as brand representatives in markets such as China and India, building narratives that encourage audience identification with the product. The NBA has been able to create vibrant communities in countries such as Brazil

and the Philippines thanks to its ability to integrate local sporting cultures, often linked to football, in a spirit of discussion rather than rivalry.

The league has used a structured methodology to create a careful cultural marketing strategy. The first step is the cultural and geographical division of the audience. This is done to determine the preferred languages, media consumption habits and demographics of each market. With this type of analysis, it is possible to create local individuals to whom specific messages can be directed, without using generalisations or stereotypes.

The second element is qualitative market research. This research aims to uncover the content desires of the target audience, cultural sensitivities, communication codes, and values. To avoid localisation errors such as inappropriate use of humour or misinterpreted cultural references and to construct authentic and respectful messages, this step is essential. In this sense, the National Basketball Association has adopted specific visual and narrative codes for each local situation, demonstrating a strong focus on cultural representation. Customising formats and channels is an operational aspect of cultural adaptation. Access to content in certain geographical areas, such as Southeast Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, is mainly via mobile devices.

As a result, the National Basketball Association focuses on creating vertical, short, easily shareable content (such as Shorts, Reels or Stories). In other areas, such as the United States or Europe, storytelling can allow for greater complexity and enable long-form content, documentaries or technical insights shared on LinkedIn, YouTube or podcasts. The localisation of websites and apps is a further extension of this strategy, as they do not simply translate content, but offer interfaces, sections and graphics designed to suit the aesthetic and functional tastes of different cultures.

To maximise communication effectiveness, homepages, promotional images, dominant colours and even performance metrics are all modified. In addition, CMS platforms with sophisticated localisation capabilities centralise multilingual content management, ensuring brand consistency and enabling personalisation. The true value of cultural adaptation lies in building trust, not just technique.

When a brand takes an interest in the culture of an audience, it recognises its dignity, respects its specific characteristics and creates a sense of belonging with it. In international contexts, where competition is fierce and differentiation often depends on listening to and respecting otherness, this mechanism is the basis of brand loyalty.

2.3.2 Language strategies and localised content

The adoption of targeted linguistic strategies and the implementation of localised content are fundamental to the success of an international organisation such as the NBA in the process of internationalising sports communication. In an increasingly fragmented market where fans have different media experiences depending on their language, culture and geographical location, adapting the message to the local audience is crucial to brand management. It is not enough to simply translate content to find it. Instead, localisation is a complex and layered process that requires adapting the message at cultural, linguistic, visual and even functional levels so that it fully resonates with the identity, values and habits of the target audience.

Recent studies have shown that over 40% of online users are unwilling to purchase or interact with content that is not available in their native language. Therefore, it is clear that language strategy is a structural part of international growth and trust, rather than simply a means of communication. The National Basketball Association's language policy involved the creation of customised multilingual content that was disseminated through websites, social media, video platforms, apps and technical documentation. Professional translation is the first step towards this goal, with qualified native translators who not only translate texts but also rewrite them with the local culture in mind. With this method, it is possible to maintain the tone, register and narrative consistency of the brand while retaining the accessibility and familiarity of the brand.

Cultural localisation is as important as translation. It is necessary, for example, to adapt images, references, symbols and celebrations to local characteristics in order to avoid confusion or culturally inappropriate representations. For example, when broadcast in an Asian or South American market, content designed for a US audience may seem out of place. Therefore, cultural mediation is necessary to allow the message to retain its

meaning while changing its form and references. The use of consistent stylistic guidelines, which ensure uniformity and recognisability of the NBA brand in every language, is an additional strategic element.

Stylistic guidelines, which include recommendations on tone, vocabulary, formatting, use of Anglicisms, etc., help maintain consistency in the brand's voice, even when expressed in different languages. However, localisation cannot be considered effective without a testing and validation phase. In order to verify actual understanding, emotional resonance, and consistency with local expectations, localised content must undergo usability testing, focus groups, and qualitative feedback. Engagement rates, bounce rates, and other performance indicators that are difficult to measure but equally significant from a strategic perspective are all elements that the National Basketball Association has created using a data-driven approach. Localisable content in digital marketing can be found in a variety of formats. These include web and mobile content, such as websites, apps and blogs; marketing materials, such as commercials, social media posts and banners; and technical documentation, such as instructions, regulations and official announcements.

Each of these requires specific adaptation that takes into account usage patterns, user interface and local preferences for visual and verbal language. The NBA League Pass search, the league's official streaming service, is a practical example of a successful language strategy. League Pass, which is available in a variety of markets and languages, not only allows users to watch matches with commentary in their local language, but also provides interfaces, graphics, notifications and features tailored to each market. This type of linguistic and experiential customisation has proven to be key to building international audience loyalty, making the user experience more fluid, immersive and relevant. In addition, the linguistic aspect is combined with multilingual SEO strategies, which are essential for increasing the visibility of the NBA brand in local search engines. Optimisation includes the use of culturally appropriate keywords, multilingual URL management, the creation of customised editorial content, and the use of tags and meta descriptions consistent with the language and context.

This method allows the brand to improve its organic positioning in each market by increasing traffic, conversions, and awareness. Finally, the search for multimedia content

such as videos, images, GIFs, and infographics has become essential. Again, this is not simply a matter of translating subtitles; it also involves editing the visuals, using culturally neutral or relevant colours and symbols, replacing unshared cultural references, and adapting the narrative pace to meet the expectations of the local audience. The National Basketball Association has been very careful about how its promotional videos, institutional announcements and value campaigns are calibrated to have a universal visual and symbolic impact, but never a generic one.

CHAPTER 3: Empirical analysis of research findings

3.1 Detailed research methodology

This chapter aims to elucidate the methodology employed to analyze the social media management dynamics of the NBA brand. This chapter focuses on digital content marketing strategies, user engagement, and the perception of authenticity as a means of brand loyalty. It was decided to adopt a methodological approach in line with the subject and objectives of the research, considering the growing role of social media platforms as fundamental tools for communication, relationship building and positioning for sports brands. Specifically, the work was based on a quantitative approach that involved structured data collection through a questionnaire, with the main goal of measuring the opinions, perceptions, and behaviors of a sample of users in an exploratory manner.

The choice of a questionnaire as a medium enables the description of observable phenomena and the testing of theoretical hypotheses by examining the interdependence among selected variables. In this specific instance, the primary factors of engagement identified were authenticity, content relevance, and perceived gratification. Specifically, the study measured how fan engagement and brand loyalty are influenced by social media platforms, communicative personalization, and perceived relevance. With this standardized questionnaire, it was possible to collect a heterogeneous and sufficiently large sample of digital users who actively follow official social channels of sports organizations, specifically the NBA brand, allowing for the measurement of the quality of the measurements and the testing of relationships between different variables.

This research structure was developed to concretely address the primary research question, namely: How does a sports brand's content differentiation strategy on social media help create consistent and growing engagement among digital fanbases, affecting their perception of authenticity and brand loyalty?

Subsequently, the structure of the questionnaire will be analysed in detail, examining the theoretical constructs investigated, the composition of the sample, the methods of administration and the statistical analysis conducted for the interpretation of the data.

3.1.1 Description of quantitative method: the questionnaires

A quantitative method, primarily utilizing structured questionnaires, was employed to investigate the relationship between social media brand management strategies and engagement, emotional connection, and brand loyalty in the NBA. It was found that this methodology was suitable for the research objective, which is to measure the relationships between complex variables that are conceptually defined but cannot be directly observed, such as user engagement levels, perceptions of authenticity, or the relevance of social content as perceived by the audience. In addition, the main scales used in marketing and digital communication were taken into account, and the questionnaire was based on theoretical constructs and hypotheses to be tested. In addition, the questionnaire was tailored to the language of social media and the sports context.

The items were carefully crafted with attention to semantic clarity and consistency with the research objective, and were distributed on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("totally disagree") to 7 ("totally agree"), to gradually gauge the participants' level of agreement. The survey consists of three main sections. The first section concerns participant profiling: initial information is collected, such as the social media platform used to follow NBA content, the average weekly time spent consuming this content, and the duration of engagement with the brand on social media. In addition, this section has filtering and segmentation features useful for secondary data analysis.

The analytical core of the tool is the second part, which consists of a series of statements referring to key theoretical constructs for the research. In particular, the questionnaire investigates the perception of content differentiation by the sports brand depending on the platform used (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube), paying attention to the consistency between the formats and languages adopted. According to the first research hypothesis, this variable plays an independent role and is important for understanding how users perceive content depending on the channel. This is followed by a section on how to measure digital fan engagement, divided into three fundamental components: behavioural, cognitive and emotional. With this division, we can measure not only the user's visible actions, such as likes or shares, but also the attention, reflection and emotional involvement generated by social content.

The concept of engagement, as a dependent variable or critical juncture in the hypothesised relationships, plays a fundamental role in the structure of the theoretical model. In addition to these factors, the questionnaire assesses users' perceptions of content personalization and perceived relevance, specifically the extent to which they believe that digital content holds real value in relation to their preferences, linguistic or cultural environment. These are important variables for judging how well a communication strategy works and for seeing how the message's form, tone, and impact are related to each other. In particular, perceived relevance is thought to be a mediating variable that can explain the impact of content differentiation on engagement.

Finally, the questionnaire addresses the issues of emotional connection and brand loyalty, understood respectively as the ability of digital content to establish an emotional bond between users and the degree to which users continue to follow the brand, recommend it to others or participate in concrete actions to support it. These parts are the final output of the digital strategy, and measuring them allows us to assess the impact of social communication on the long-term relationship between the user and the sports brand. The questionnaire is a complex but accessible tool designed to rigorously and consistently measure users' perceptions and behaviours in the context of athletes' social media branding. The data collected through this tool will provide the empirical foundation for the quantitative analysis of the results and the validation of the hypotheses proposed in the conceptual model.

3.1.2 Sample selection and data collection

The questionnaire was administered anonymously and self-administered, via an online link distributed through personal channels and social media, adopting a non-probabilistic sampling strategy for convenience. The aim was to reach active social media users with a specific interest in digital sports content, particularly related to the NBA or other sports leagues with high visibility and online communities. The gross sample collected was 156 respondents, meaning all subjects who completed the questionnaire in its entirety, right up to the last question. However, 35 participants were excluded from the analysis, labelled as NO-NO, i.e. people who stated that they did not follow either the NBA or any other sports league with more than one million followers on social media. Although these

individuals completed the questionnaire, they were deemed irrelevant to the research because their exposure to digital sports content was absent or marginal.

Therefore, the net sample used for the analysis is 121 valid responses. Of the 121 participants included in the analysis, 85 actively follow the NBA, while the remaining 36 refer to a different but equally relevant sports league in terms of presence and digital audience (labelled as “League X” in the dataset). This allowed us to include sports users with a high but heterogeneous interest in the sample, initially offering a potentially useful comparison to extend the results beyond the single NBA case study, and subsequently allowing us to compare them. From a demographic point of view, the sample is characterised by a good variety of ages, although the 18-24 age group predominates (64% in the NBA group; 53% in the League X group). There are also adult participants (25-34 and 45+), which helps to diversify the analytical base. The NBA sample consists of 52 men and 33 women, while in the other group the gender ratio is more balanced (20 men and 16 women). As for the preferred social media platform, Instagram emerges as the most used in both groups (51 users in the NBA group and 22 in League X), followed by YouTube and TikTok. This confirms Instagram's central role in the consumption of digital sports content, but also highlights the presence of active users on emerging or less conventional platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook. Overall, self-perceived intensity of social media use is high, with most participants describing themselves as having a “high” or “very high” level of use. Although the sample is not statistically representative of the global population of NBA users or online sports fans, the total number of valid responses (n=121) can be considered adequate for exploratory research at an academic level, especially considering the targeted and profiled nature of the sample.

Furthermore, the presence of heterogeneous subgroups by age, gender, preferred platform and level of engagement allows for a comparative analysis that can offer interesting insights for future studies, despite the limitations of non-probabilistic sampling. The composition of the sample, therefore, provides a solid basis for analysing the dynamics between social content, user perceptions and brand value construction in the sports sector.

3.2 Quantitative findings related to the first hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: “Different social media platforms influence the level of fan engagement with the NBA brand in different ways.”

VARIABLES	(1) OLS Engagement
TikTok	0.359** (0.151)
YouTube	-0.103 (0.147)
X	0.664** (0.276)
Facebook	-0.146 (0.205)
Young	0.0385 (0.126)
Gender	-0.0292 (0.106)
Costant	0.327* (0.196)
Observations	89
R-squared	0.151

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 1: OLS regression of the engagement variable

The results presented are derived from the OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) regression analysis, which substantiate the initial research hypothesis aimed at determining whether the social platform utilized by users to follow the NBA brand significantly impacts the level of fan engagement. To test this relationship, an OLS linear regression was performed, with the overall engagement score as the dependent variable and the various social media platforms used (TikTok, YouTube, X, Facebook) as the independent variables, using Instagram as the reference category. Two socio-demographic control variables were also included in the model: age (dummy "young") and gender, in order to assess the potential influence of these individual characteristics on levels of engagement.

The analysis was conducted solely on the responses of participants who indicated they follow the NBA, thereby excluding those responding to an unidentified sports organization, whose heterogeneity and lack of reference to a specific sports reality would have rendered a homogeneous comparison virtually impossible. The results of the analysis show that the platform used has a big effect on engagement levels. For example, users who follow the NBA mostly on TikTok have an average engagement level that is about 0.36 points higher (p value < 0.05) than users who follow the NBA mostly on Instagram. For users who use X (formerly Twitter), the increase is even bigger, at +0.66 points (p value < 0.05). These effects are statistically significant and indicate that certain platforms, due to their structural characteristics and interaction dynamics, can foster more active and engaged user participation. In contrast, YouTube and Facebook platforms do not exhibit significant effects compared to Instagram. Their respective coefficients, although slightly negative (-0.10 for YouTube and -0.15 for Facebook), are not statistically significant, indicating that user engagement on these two platforms does not significantly differ from that of Instagram users. Concerning the control variables, neither age (variable "young") nor gender seem to significantly affect the level of engagement.

The estimated coefficients are very low and do not reach levels of statistical significance. This suggests that users' behavior in terms of how much they are interested in NBA content does not depend directly on these individual traits. The overall model has an R^2 of 0.151, which means that the variables included explain approximately 15% of the variance in engagement levels. Even though this value may seem limited, it is actually in line with what is expected in the fields of social and behavioral research, where user engagement is a multidimensional phenomenon that is affected by personal, cultural, and situational factors that are often hard to capture fully with just a few predictive variables.

The analysis partially supports the initial hypothesis, confirming that social media platforms are not equivalent in generating engagement with the NBA brand; specifically, TikTok and X appear to be particularly conducive to engagement, possibly due to their direct, immediate, and participatory communication style. These results provide valuable insights for both theoretical contemplation regarding the role of digital media in sports branding and the formulation of more targeted operational strategies by the NBA and other stakeholders in the sector. While acknowledging that user engagement levels cannot

be deemed an automatic or exclusive consequence of the utilized social platform, the analysis results strongly indicate significant differences in perceived engagement based on the preferred platform.

Moreover, thanks to the t-test built into the OLS regression and the statistical significance of the TikTok and X coefficients, we can say with reasonable certainty that NBA fans who follow the brand mainly on these two platforms are more engaged than those who follow it on Instagram. This does not necessarily imply a direct causal relationship between platform type and engagement, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that the structural and communicative characteristics inherent to TikTok and X such as increased interactivity, rapid content dissemination, and an informal, immediate tone facilitate more engaging user behaviors compared to more stable or passive platforms like Facebook or YouTube. In addition, the observed effect is not negligible from a quantitative perspective: the average increase in the engagement index is approximately 0.36 points for TikTok and 0.66 points for X. These values, even in the presence of a model with a relatively low R^2 (0.151), are significant for behavioral research. So, even though we can't say for sure that "the platform" is what makes people engage, we can reasonably say that TikTok and X are better places for creating engaging digital experiences than other social media sites. This empirical evidence provides significant initial support for the hypothesis formulated, serving as a solid starting point for further analysis and investigation, both in academic and practical contexts.

3.2.1 Theoretical reflections in support of the results

The results of the quantitative analysis are also reflected in the most recent scientific literature, which emphasises the importance of content, platform and communication format in determining the level of user engagement. In fact, social media platforms do not generate the same type of engagement, but present different interaction dynamics based on factors such as interactivity, vividness of content, type of post and ability to stimulate immediate responses. Platforms such as TikTok and Twitter (now X) stand out for their greater ability to activate participatory behaviour (comments, shares, likes), thanks to the type of visual content, informal tone and speed of communication.

These elements seem consistent with the results of this research, which show that active users on TikTok and X report significantly higher levels of engagement than those who use more traditional platforms such as Facebook or YouTube, the vividness or the sensory richness of content, and perceived interactivity are two key determinants of online engagement. This data reinforces the notion that engagement is influenced not solely by the content itself, but also by the manner in which the content is conveyed and experienced on the platform. The difference in engagement levels among the various platforms in this study should not be seen as a simple technical effect, but as a sign of a different quality of interaction between the brand and the user, mediated by the structure of the social network itself.

This means that a conscious and strategic use of the communicative features offered by each platform can enhance the relationship between the user and the brand, fostering emotional and behavioral engagement that results in increased participation and, potentially, greater loyalty. The results of this research are consistent with the most recent studies on digital branding and confirm the importance of differentiated and strategic management of social content to increase the effectiveness of communication and stimulate user engagement.

3.3 Quantitative findings related to the second hypothesis

Hypothesis 2: “Greater engagement on various social media channels increases loyalty to the NBA brand.”

Table 1: OLS Regression Results

Variabile	(1) OLS Brand Loyalty
Engagement	0.621*** (0.235)
Young	0.237 (0.262)
Gender	-0.260 (0.233)
Constant	5.605*** (0.403)
Observations	89
R-squared	0.102

Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table 2: OLS regression of the engagement variable related to Brand loyalty item

The second hypothesis of the research proposes that a higher level of digital engagement is positively associated with NBA brand loyalty, regardless of the social platform used. To test this hypothesis, an OLS regression analysis was conducted, in which the dependent variable is represented by brand loyalty and the main variable of interest is engagement, accompanied by control variables such as age (dummy “young”) and gender. Dummy variables for platform were also included in the model, considering Instagram as the reference category. The results of the analysis, shown in the table, show that the engagement coefficient is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.621$, p value < 0.01). This means that a higher level of digital engagement among users is linked to a higher level of brand loyalty. Summarizing, this means that people who are more interested in the brand's social media posts are more likely to become loyal customers. They are also more likely to recommend it, follow it over time, or show their support by buying things or going to events.

The socio-demographic control variables (age and gender) are not significant in the model, suggesting that brand loyalty does not substantially vary between generational subgroups or between men and women. Similarly, none of the social media platforms that compete with Instagram (TikTok, YouTube, X, Facebook) show a strong connection between engagement and brand loyalty. This means that the type of platform used doesn't change the connection between the two.

These results are even more supported by the graph that shows the average brand loyalty levels of "engaged" and "non-engaged" users on each platform. No matter what social media platform they use, people who are very engaged always have higher average levels of loyalty than people who aren't. The data is consistent with what was hypothesized and supports the notion that engagement is a key factor in building brand loyalty, enhancing emotional connection, participation, and the willingness of fans to provide active support.

However, it is important to note that, despite some variations among the platforms, the confidence intervals are broad and frequently overlapping, indicating the absence of statistically significant differences between the loyalty means across the various channels. In other words, there is insufficient evidence to say that one platform is more effective than another in creating loyalty, but it can be said that engagement is a good indicator of loyalty in any social context.

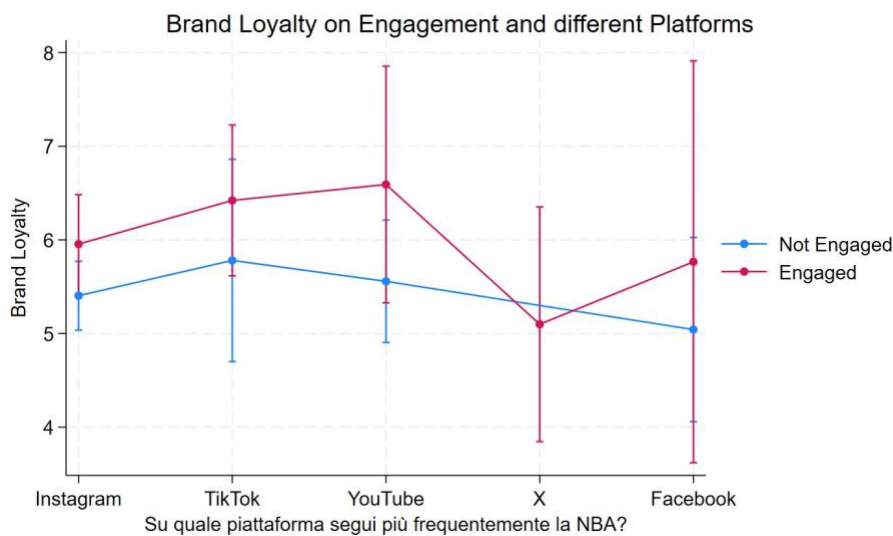


Figure 4: Confidence intervals of the relations between Brand Loyalty Engagement and different Platforms

An additional observation concerns platform X. In the sample analysed, there are no “non-engaged” users who use it as their main channel for following the NBA. This data can be interpreted in light of the results of the first hypothesis, which showed that the use of X is strongly associated with a high level of engagement. It follows that, in this case, it was not possible to make a comparison between engaged and non-engaged users for this platform. Overall, the output of the analysis fails to confirm hypothesis H2, but supports the claim that engagement is a predictive factor in generating loyalty in the context of the NBA brand, regardless of the social platform used.

3.3.1 Theoretical reflections in support of the results

The results obtained in support of the second hypothesis, namely that greater digital engagement is associated with a higher level of brand loyalty, are also supported by the most recent scientific literature on sports marketing and digital engagement. In the sports world, the idea of customer engagement becomes even more interesting. It changes into fan engagement and shows itself through both transactional behaviors (like wanting to buy something and buying it again) and non-transactional behaviors (like sharing content, joining a community, and publicly supporting the team). This dual behavioral approach reinforces the connection between engagement and loyalty, illustrating that active fan participation extends beyond mere interactions to foster genuine preference and brand loyalty over time, the study referenced indicates that engagement within the sporting context exhibits positive and significant correlations with all primary variables of consumer behavior, including brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand image association.

These data reinforce the findings of the current research, where the regression coefficient for engagement is positive and highly significant ($\beta = 0.621$, p value < 0.01), indicating a direct and robust relationship between user engagement levels and NBA brand loyalty. The literature emphasizes that fan engagement is a significant catalyst for enduring relationships, as it not only elicits sporadic attention but also enhances emotional connection, brand identification, and long-term support. In this context, brand loyalty is no longer seen as simply repeat purchases, but as an expression of deep and ongoing engagement, reinforced by the digital experience and personalised content conveyed

through social media. These are precisely the elements that represent a key lever for relationship marketing in sport, as they promote forms of two-way, personalised and authentic communication that create value for both the user and the brand.

Digital platforms make it possible for fans to have ongoing conversations with each other, which helps build loyalty and turn them from passive observers into active members of the brand community. The findings of this research are consistent and well-supported due to these theoretical contributions. Furthermore, digital engagement is a key variable in generating brand loyalty in the NBA context and is a crucial element for sports branding strategies in the digital age.

3.4 Managerial implications and future research for NBA brand management

Like any empirical research, this study also has some methodological and conceptual limitations that should be critically acknowledged in order to define the scope of validity of the results and suggest possible directions for future studies. The first major limitation concerns the definition of the alternative comparison group to the NBA, generically identified as “League X”. Although this group allowed users interested in other digital sports contexts to be included in the sample, the lack of a precise and homogeneous reference did not allow for a systematic comparison between different brands, making it very difficult to clearly isolate the dynamics of engagement and loyalty linked exclusively to the NBA, thus limiting the comparative analysis as well as the analysis for certain variables.

A further constraint is the nature of the sample: it was selected using non-probability sampling for convenience, through the autonomous dissemination of the online questionnaire. Although the final sample size (n=121) is adequate for an exploratory study, its composition does not allow the results to be generalised to the entire population of digital sports users. Furthermore, it is possible that the questionnaire was completed mainly by users already involved or interested in the topic, generating a potential self-selection bias that may have affected the average level of engagement reported.

The structure of the research, based on a cross-sectional design, constitutes a further limitation since the data collected provides a snapshot of a single moment in time and does not allow for the evolution of the variables considered to be detected, nor for certain causal relationships to be established, whereas longitudinal research, on the contrary, could provide more solid indications of the actual impact of engagement in the long term. Furthermore, although the main social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X, Facebook) were considered, the 'platform' variable was treated in an aggregate manner, without an in-depth analysis of the specific communication and content dynamics of each. For example, no distinction was made between forms of content (short videos, stories, text posts, etc.) or the frequency or quality of interaction. This represents a limitation, as the content published plays a key role in activating or not activating user engagement. In light of these considerations, future research could develop in several directions. In fact, it would be desirable to use larger and more representative samples, possibly segmented by geographical area or sports culture, to test the robustness of the results in different contexts.

A comparative analysis of clearly delineated sports brands (e.g., NBA vs. UEFA Champions League) would facilitate the examination of distinct variations in positioning, strategy, and audience engagement. Despite these limitations, the study provides an initial empirical contribution to comprehending the dynamics connecting digital engagement to brand management in the sports sector, facilitating future advancements that are more targeted and methodologically rigorous. There are three main parts to the survey.

Conclusion

This thesis examines the National Basketball Association (NBA) as a quintessential example of a global sports brand that has adeptly adapted to the digital ecosystem, particularly emphasizing its communication and engagement strategies across social media platforms. Based on new online content marketing, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty theories, the study formulated a conceptual model to investigate the impact of social media on influencing the relationship between a brand and its online followers. A structured online survey was used to test three broad hypotheses through a quantitative methodology. The findings suggest that various social media platforms have varying effects on the extent of fan involvement. TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) were especially apt to make people engage with their material more than YouTube or Facebook. The research also found that higher levels of engagement are connected with higher levels of brand loyalty across platforms. This supports the fact that engagement is a key motivator for the creation of long-term consumer-brand relationships. Last but not least, perceived personalization and authenticity of the content strengthen the emotional bond with the brand, and therefore culturally sensitive and targeted communication strategies create user-brand relationships. Although there are some methodological flaws, including the fact that a non-probability sample was used and no well-defined comparison group was involved, the results are still an important addition to what we know today about brand management in digital sport marketing. The results indicate the imperative for international sport brands to use differentiated and platform-specific approaches that catch people's eyes but also bring about genuine engagement, emotional attachment, and longer-term loyalty.

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Figure 2.1: <https://turbologo.com/it/blog/nba-logo/>

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Figure 2.2: <https://www.si.com/nba/2020/08/30/lebron-james-bucks-protest-jacob-blake-plan>

Appendices

Grazie per aver accettato di partecipare a questo sondaggio. Si ricorda che le domande sono anonime e i dati saranno utilizzati solo a scopo di ricerca.



Segui attivamente i profili ufficiali della NBA su almeno una piattaforma social?

Sì

No



Quali social media utilizzi per seguire la NBA? (puoi selezionare più opzioni)

Instagram

TikTok

YouTube

X (Twitter)

Facebook



Su quale piattaforma segui più frequentemente la NBA?

Instagram

TikTok

YouTube

X (Twitter)

Facebook



Quante ore a settimana dedichi a guardare contenuti NBA sui social?

- Più volte al giorno
- Una volta al giorno
- Più volte a settimana
- Una volta a settimana
- Meno di una volta a settimana



Valuta utilizzando la scala da 1 a 7 sotto illustrata, indicando quanto sei d'accordo con ciascun item e selezionando il numero relativo a ciascuna casella.

	1 Per niente d'accordo	2 Non d'accordo	3 Leggermente in disaccordo	4 Neutrale	5 Leggermente d'accordo	6 D'accordo	7 Pienam d'acc
I contenuti NBA variano in modo significativo da una piattaforma social all'altra.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I contenuti NBA su TikTok sono più divertenti, mentre su YouTube sono più informativi.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
La NBA adatta efficacemente lo stile dei contenuti in base alle caratteristiche di ogni social network.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Valuta utilizzando la scala da 1 a 7 sotto illustrata, indicando quanto sei d'accordo con ciascun item e selezionando il numero relativo a ciascuna casella.

	1 Per niente d'accordo	2 Non d'accordo	3 Leggermente in disaccordo	4 Neutrale	5 Leggermente d'accordo	6 D'accordo	7 Pienamente d'accordo
I contenuti NBA che vedo sui social rispondono ai miei interessi come fan.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il contenuto pubblicato è pertinente rispetto all'identità della piattaforma su cui viene diffuso.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trovo che i contenuti NBA siano aggiornati, autentici e significativi.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Per favore seleziona "4 Neutrale" per questa domanda. Serve solo a verificare l'attenzione nella compilazione.

1 Per niente d'accordo

2 Non d'accordo

3 Leggermente in disaccordo

4 Neutrale

5 Leggermente d'accordo

6 D'accordo

7 Pienamente d'accordo



Valuta utilizzando la scala da 1 a 7 sotto illustrata, indicando quanto sei d'accordo con ciascun item e selezionando il numero relativo a ciascuna casella.

	1 Per niente d'accordo	2 Non d'accordo	3 Leggermente in disaccordo	4 Neutrale	5 Leggermente d'accordo	6 D'accordo	7 Pienamente d'accordo
Metto like, commento o condivido spesso i post NBA sui social media.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seguo attivamente gli aggiornamenti e le storie dei profili NBA.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ho taggato amici o reagito ai contenuti NBA negli ultimi 30 giorni.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mi sento mentalmente coinvolto mentre guardo o leggo contenuti NBA.

(

Rifletto spesso sui messaggi condivisi dalla NBA.

(

Penso alla NBA anche dopo aver interagito con i suoi contenuti social.

(

Mi emoziono quando guardo contenuti NBA particolarmente iconici o narrativi.

(

Quando interagisco con contenuti NBA, sento un legame emotivo con il brand.

(

Mi sento più vicino alla lega o ai giocatori grazie ai contenuti digitali.

(



Valuta utilizzando la scala da 1 a 7 sotto illustrata, indicando quanto sei d'accordo con ciascun item e selezionando il numero relativo a ciascuna casella.

1 Per niente d'accordo 2 Non d'accordo 3 Leggermente in disaccordo 4 Neutrale 5 Leggermente d'accordo 6 D'accordo 7 Pienamente d'accordo

La comunicazione della NBA sui social è autentica e credibile.

I contenuti sembrano veri, non costruiti o troppo pubblicitari.

Mi sento emotivamente connesso alla NBA grazie alla sua presenza sui social.

Mi piacerebbe continuare a seguire la NBA anche in futuro

Raccomanderei la NBA ad amici o conoscenti appassionati di sport.

Inserisci la tua età

- <18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+



Indica il tuo genere:

- Uomo
- Donna
- Non binario/ terzo genere
- Preferisco non dire



Qual è il tuo livello di familiarità con i social media?

- Molto basso
- Basso
- Medio
- Alto
- Molto alto

