**A Descriptive Study of International Posts on the Official NBA Twitter Page**

**in the Last Five Years**

By: Tyler Freeburg, Benjamin Brackett, Dhruv Patel, and Natanya Hernandez

1. Introduction

As a group, we wanted to find just how important international players are in the world of the National Basketball Association (NBA). As viewers, we have seen the NBA grow since its creation in 1946. The fans and consumers have seen it expand, not only in the United States, but also across the oceans. This has been a key aspect for the NBA. The NBA has had the ability to increase their marketing dramatically, grow their number of players, and raise revenues exponentially. The NBA has grown into a multi-billion-dollar company and a component of that is the growing quantity of international players. The NBA released in 2018 that they had “108 international players from 42 different countries” (NBA). There were only 301 players in the NBA for the 2018-2019 season. With 108 international players, they make up nearly 40% of the NBA rosters. How much do international players and teams influence the NBA? The international players and fans play a massive role and have given the NBA the opportunity to grow as a whole.

II. Literature Review

When analyzing the NBA website, Adam Silver, the commissioner of the NBA, and Steve Aschburner, the Senior Writer of NBA.com, enlightened the world of the importance and growth of international players. After many years of international players moving to the United States to play in the NBA, Aschburner posted “The popularity and the play overseas both soared, and the NBA has been reaping profits from the investment ever since. There is a global flavor to the league now in what became a profound two-way impact” (Aschburner, 2014). International players have been an important factor for, not only the United States, but also international countries. It has allowed other countries to gain recognition and has given the NBA a massive fan base. Also, with the NBA continuing to showcase their talent through international basketball games, they have also found the importance of social media with their viewers. In the article, *NBA Continues International Expansion, Aims To Be No 1 Sport,* Adam Silver stated:

“I believe we can be the No. 1 sport in the world. When I look at the trajectory of growth, the fact that young people, boys and girls, continue to love this sport, are playing this sport, are engaged in the sport of basketball on social media or with online games, I don't know what the limit is” (Wheeler, 2018),

It is interesting to see the growth and positivity the NBA has brought to worldwide fans and players. Although the NBA is presently not the number one sport worldwide, they have began to catapult their way to the top with the growth of international showcases and employment of foreign players.

In the 2005 article *Show me the Money! The Globalization of the NBA* written by Tanner D. Gardner, the overall effect of globalization on the NBA franchise is massive. It is interesting to note that this analysis was written in 2005 and is therefore written in retrospect of the 20 years prior. What Mr. Gardner focuses on is the far-reaching impact that the NBA has and in turn, how countries aside from the United States are affecting the NBA culture. Because of this far-reaching effect, the economic implications have produced a great benefit to the NBA and large companies connected to the franchise. When the franchise changed hands from Larry O´Brien to David Stern in 1984, the direction of the NBA changed dramatically. Stern was able to make connections that benefited the franchise greatly and with those connections came the interest in international players. Since then, the number of international players drafted or contracted into the NBA has steadily increase (Gardner).

More recently, an in-depth look at the explosion of interest regarding the NBA in China is the topic of *The development of NBA in China: a glocalization perspective.* In this article, the authors look at the “ analyzing of its current promotional practices, investigating into its marketing strategies, and extrapolating practical references for other sport leagues aiming to penetrating into the Chinese marketplace” (Zhou, Weng, Chen, Lei, Zang, and Meng) in relation to the NBA. The biggest asset that the glocalization of the NBA provides is that of the inclusion of cultural differences to the NBA as a whole. Specifically, this article addresses how the NBA ¨brings authentic American cultural commodities while adding Chinese characteristics to accommodate local fans¨ (Zhou, Weng, Chen, Lei, Zang, and Meng). This also happens the other way around where the Chinese fans for example, will change the culture of the NBA because of their culture adding to the NBA´s existing culture.

In the last 5 years, there have been significant changes in the opportunity for foreign players and their popularity through social media. In the opening of the 2013-2014 season, the NBA consisted of 84 foreign players, with 31 international players entering the draft later that season. The growth of the international players continues to increase in the 2014-2015 season with a record breaking 101 international players in the season opening from over 39 countries. With the rise in international players there were also spikes of players and coaches mentioning them on twitter. In the next two seasons, the NBA would again break the record for the most international players in a season opening with a staggering 108 international players in both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 season.

During 1999 to 2000 season, the only two players from foreign countries to average at least 15 points per game were Dirk Nowitzki and Tim Duncan. These were two of the 24 international players in the league at that time (Reynolds, 2019). In the past two decades the amount of international players has increased by more than four times in a little under two decades with now 11 of them being all stars. This expands upon the idea that bringing international players into the NBA has shaped it with the increase of talent from several different countries (Reynolds, 2019).

III. Methodology

For this research we conducted a content analysis based on the rosters for international players. In addition, the NBA´s Twitter feed was data mined to find any reference of international topics. This was used to explain how many international players or international areas that are mentioned on the personal sites, while seeing the popularity of the post that they presented. All of the information we found was during a time period of the last five years. This time scale gave us a better understanding of the growth of international players and the importance of their existence in the NBA. During the time of doing the Social Media Analysis, we tallied up the amount of times international players are in the NBA’s Twitter post and which ones gained the most attention from the viewers. During the process of analyzing and assembling material, we also used individual sites which provided more context to the recent surge in numbers for both international players actively employed in the NBA and, in response, the marketing efforts on the NBA´s Twitter page.

IV. Findings

The findings include a comparison of the number of tweets published by the NBA per season and the number of international players contracted by the NBA. Taking these numbers, T-tests were run for the following:

Paired Two Sample- for Means

Two Sample- Assuming Unequal Variances

 These were calculated with an alpha value of 0.05 and both tests resulted in a P-value well under the alpha value. With this evidence, it can be assumed that there is a statistical correlation in the amount of international players in the NBA and the amount of Tweets relating to international affairs.

It seems there is an important exchange of athletic ability happening. This exchange appears to have an effect on the manner in which the NBA carries out the social media marketing in the sense that in the last three years, most of the Tweets have been directly from the NBA. Whereas before the 2016 season, there were more Tweets by international players themselves, These Tweets were those of which the NBA reposted to use on their own page as well.

Although the increase in Tweets by the NBA mentioning international players or teams could be due to other external factors, this correlation is interesting in determining the effect one aspect has on the other. This increase in Twitter activity could be due to a more valued importance with social media marketing and since the overall posts increased, the number of international posts would reasonably increase as well. However the overall correlation found seems to point to a more direct effort by the NBA to attract the attention of international players and leagues through their Twitter marketing specifically.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the quest to study the NBA’s Tweets as they relate to international players and foreign countries resulted in finding a link between the rise in international players in the NBA and the quantity of Tweets on their page relating to international affairs. This has therefore led to an exciting correlation. This correlation suggests that the overall marketing efforts to get the attention of foreign basketball players has increased in response to the growing importance these players have on the NBA franchise. The effect of the international marketing efforts for the NBA are far-reaching and include a variety of facets that, we believe will continue to shape the culture of the NBA in years to come.

VI. Suggestions for Future Research

In the future it would be beneficial to expand the search both in the aspects of time and content. Reaching to the time of the beginning of the National Basketball Association´s Twitter account as it relates to international marketing would provide more data. Including the NBA´s platform of Instagram as well as the social media of individual NBA teams and their efforts to market the international audience. The effects of this research allow for a better understanding of the influence the NBA´s Twitter, specifically, has on international recognition as well as how the Twitter page is affected. Impacts of this research include showing the positive effects both parties -the NBA and international players- have had on each other. Improving the efforts in marketing to international players will prove beneficial for both the league and the players and this research conducted shines a light on that, showing that the two are correlated.

CITATIONS

Aschburner, S. (2014, October 29). *'City game' now world's game; The changing face of the NBA*. Retrieved from NBA: <http://www.nba.com/2014/news/features/steve_aschburner/10/28/the-international-influence-mainbar/>

Gardner, T., & O’Brien, A. J. (2005). Show me the Money! The Globalization of the NBA.

NBA. (2018, October 16). *NBA rosters feature 108 international players from 42 countries and territories.* Retrieved from NBA Communications: <https://pr.nba.com/nba-rosters-feature-108-international-players-from-42-countries-and-territories/>

NBA Continues International Expansion, Aims To Be No 1 Sport. (2018, October 15). Retrieved from<https://www.legalgamblingandthelaw.com/news/nba-continues-international-expansion-with-goal-to-become-no-1-sport/>

Reynolds, T. (2019, January 2). *On Basketball: International Stars Leaving Mark on NBA*. Retrieved from The Seattle TImes: <https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/on-basketball-international-stars-leaving-mark-on-nba/>

Staff, T. N. (2015, January 14). International Influence. Retrieved from <http://www.nba.com/news/international-influence-index/>

Zhou, L., Wang, J. J., Chen, X., Lei, C., Zhang, J. J., & Meng, X. (2017). The development of NBA in China: a glocalization perspective. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 18*(1), 81-94.