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Social Climbers

Study reveals which properties are doing it right when it comes to engaging fans – and some of the findings may surprise you.

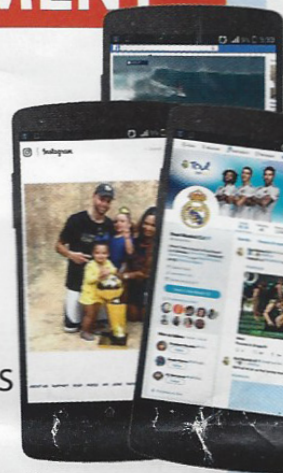
TOPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Leagues/federations

1. NBA
2. English Premier League
3. NFL
4. IOC
5. Indian Premier League (cricket)
6. MLB
7. MotoGP
8. La Liga Santander (Spain)
9. Formula One
10. World Surf League

Teams

1. Real Madrid
2. Barcelona
3. Manchester United
4. Chelsea
5. Golden State Warriors
6. Arsenal
7. India men's national cricket team
8. Bayern Munich
9. Liverpool
10. Cleveland Cavaliers



Source: Hookit

THE RESULTS: Who are the leaders among 1,255 teams, leagues and federations? **Pages 6-7**

NBA, Real Madrid tops in social engagement

BY ERIC FISHER

STAFF WRITER

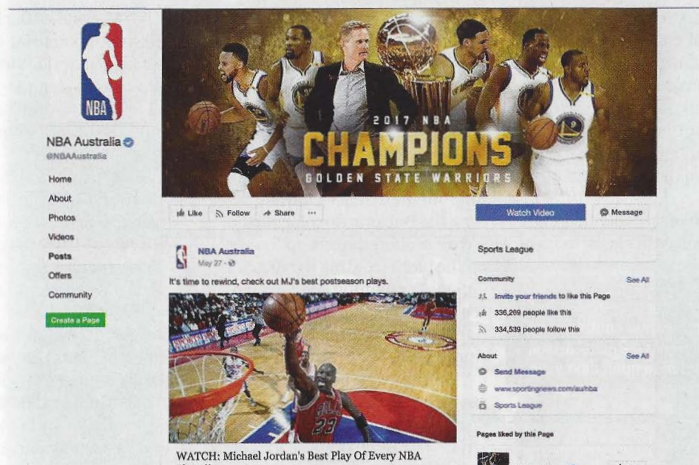
When it comes to social media, the NBA's got game.

An Instagram post showing Steph Curry celebrating his championship with family draws more than 738,000 likes on Instagram. A video on Facebook with a dunk performance gets more than 100 million views. Another video on Facebook featuring Michael Jordan's postseason highlights gets 23 million views.

Such results are why the NBA is ranked first among leagues globally in a new study exclusive to SportsBusiness Journal that examined social media engagement in sports. California-based analytics and valuation company Hookit looked at the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts of 1,255 leagues, teams and federations across the globe over the past year and ranked them based on a composite score that took into account factors such as views, shares, likes and number of followers. Real Madrid took top honors among teams globally (see charts) and had the highest overall score among all properties.

The study showed the NBA having a total global following of more than 82 million followers across its official league social media extensions. It added 14.7 million social media followers in the 12 months that Hookit study measured, which was a 21 percent year-over-year increase. Popular destinations on each of the established American social media platforms have been supplemented by global efforts on China's Sina Weibo and Tencent, among others.

The NBA has long been seen as an industry thought leader with regard to social media, as it has frequently been a first-mover on many social platforms and the league won the inaugural award for Best in Sports Social Media at last year's Sports Business Awards. When also including NBA team and player feeds, the league's social media reach actually surpasses 1.2 billion fans and followers.



A video of Michael Jordan's playoff highlights was one of many buzzworthy posts by the NBA.

But the league doesn't really have a separate social media operation. It devotes about a dozen staffers to manage activities on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. But rather than siloing those social media operations, they are intertwined with the rest of the NBA's digital media functions, which in turn are closely aligned with sales, marketing and other core NBA departments.

"These units are all now working in lockstep with the same basic goal of serving the right content to the right platform at the right time," said Melissa Brenner, NBA senior vice president of digital media. "There's a much clearer focus now to what we're doing on social, and nothing is really done in isolation."

Of course, the NBA has enjoyed some key advantages since the earliest days of social media: an active and engaged player base, a small playing surface easily allowing for close-in video views, and a decidedly liberal and global mindset from former Commissioner David Stern continuing to successor Adam Silver to prioritize social

media, innovate, and take risks.

Smaller and less established sports properties, too, have adopted similar strategies with regard to social media. The World Surf League, which had the most-watched video post (surfing dolphins) last year of any property and overall engagement levels surprisingly surpassing the English Premier League, generates more than 800 hours of live content per year.

Without the benefit of a traditional TV deal, the property has aggressively pursued efforts such as live streaming competitions on Facebook, developing drone-based content for Snapchat, and even crowdsourcing the development of a surfboard over social media.

"We have had to be a digital-first sport from day one," said Tim Greenberg, World Surf League chief community officer. Greenberg's role last year shifted from senior vice president of digital to his current following the creation of a community department focused on real-time marketing, with social media the fundamental piece of

that. A team of three dedicated to the World Surf League's social media operations is only a quarter of the size of the NBA's.

"A lot of this, obviously, is the nature of our sport and that we don't necessarily know day-to-day whether we're going to be able to run, if conditions are favorable, and what our start times are going to be. So it's always a challenge to manage tune-in. But our core audience is living on these social platforms," he said.

The World Surf League enjoys a fan base with an average age of 32, far younger than most other established properties. Greenberg acknowledges there is an accessibility to the surfing content that others can't necessarily claim.

"You don't need to really know surfing to appreciate our content," he said. "There's a fundamental connection with the ocean that people have, and we definitely lean into that."

Real Madrid, the world's most-followed team on social media and the top-ranked team in the Hookit research, bluntly believes the club is in fact a content creation factory.

"We're a football club; we dedicate our activity to football, but in reality what we are is a content company," Rafael de los Santos, Real Madrid's global head of digital, told Digiday. "The big challenge for us is to become content producers."

Technology has helped properties take their content around the world, increasing appeal and influence. The NBA began to work with Israel-based WSC Sports in 2015 to develop auto-generated video content that allows the league to create customized, country-specific player content more efficiently than devoting staff time to the effort.

"Content for players like LeBron [James] and Steph [Curry] are going to be popular anywhere. But in a place like Australia, content about Australian players is typically going to be just as popular, if not more so, and the same goes for many of our other territories," Brenner said.

How the research was conducted, surprises you may find

BY DAVID BROUGHTON

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

Hookit launched its data and measurement platform in 2013, and continuously tracks the posts, content and engagement of more than 500,000 entities. For this study, Hookit analyzed the more than 6.7 million social media posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that were made by 1,255 leagues, federations and teams from June 16, 2016, to June 15, 2017, and the 60.5 billion interactions and video views that resulted.

A first-of-its-kind composite score was then created that took into account a number of factors, such as how often fans viewed those posts, how often they shared them, average number of likes, the number of new followers that each property gained and many more.

The NBA had the highest score of the 225 leagues measured, leading the way in several key categories. For example, the study-topping 7.7 billion views and interactions that its posts generated were 1.5 million more than the combined similar

efforts of the NFL, MLB, NHL, UFC, PGA Tour, MLS, NASCAR and WNBA.

However, simply posting a lot of content did not guarantee the NBA a No. 1 ranking among leagues. Many other factors went into the calculations.

For example, the English Premier League (which finished No. 2 in the league ranking) has 66.9 million followers, more than every property measured except the NBA, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United. The EPL did not top any category measured but was consistently among the top-seven properties no matter how Hookit sliced the data. Similarly, La Liga (No. 8) averaged more likes per each Facebook post than the NBA.

At the team level, Real Madrid finished on top, with Barcelona No. 2. In terms of social media followers, the two clubs were evenly matched across the three platforms (177.9 million overall for Real Madrid, 174.3 million for FC Barcelona). But Real Madrid's 8,257 posts averaged 118,688 interactions. Barcelona's 15,017 posts averaged less than one-third of that.

THE STUDY, BY THE NUMBERS

- **No. of teams:** 1,000 (No. 1: Real Madrid)
- **No. of leagues/associations/federations/confederations:** 255 (No. 1: NBA)
- **Total posts:** 6.7 million (No. 1: Ecuador men's national soccer team)
- **Total interactions and video views:** 60.5 billion (No. 1: NBA)
- **Total comments:** 219.3 million (No. 1: NFL)
- **Total shares:** 604.5 million (No. 1: NBA)
- **Total followers:** 3.1 billion (No. 1: Real Madrid)

Domestically, the team rankings mirrored the recent NBA Finals, with the Golden State Warriors topping the Cleveland Cavaliers. The Warriors (who finished No. 5 overall in the team study) averaged 3.8 million Twitter followers during the study, compared to Barcelona's 21.5 million. However, the reigning NBA

champion's tweets averaged nearly 2,112 likes, 30 percent more than those made by the Spanish club.

You'll see smaller properties ranked higher than you might expect. The World Surf League, for example, enjoyed 1.4 billion Facebook interactions and video views, two and a half times more than the EPL, despite having just one-sixth of the followers that the EPL boasts. Plus, a WSF video shot near the organization's annual Western Australia event was the world's most-watched video over the past year, drawing more than 121.3 million views.

Likewise, USA Gymnastics may seem out of place until you look at how well it does on each platform in interactions per post. For example, the NGB averaged 5,460 interactions per post, more than triple what the PGA Tour received.

The measurements are based on activity from each organization's English-language accounts only. If a team or league has multiple accounts for various languages, only the English handle was used.

Social study: How leagues, teams stack up

SportsBusiness Journal and Hookit teamed up to see which teams and leagues have the most socially engaged fan bases. For this study, Hookit analyzed all Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts made by approximately 1,255 leagues, federations and teams from June 16, 2016, to June 15, 2017. Overall, nearly 7 million posts were captured from that period. A composite score was established by Hookit that took into account factors such as how often fans viewed the posts, how often they shared them, the average number of likes, new followers added and many more.

OVERALL GLOBAL FINDINGS

Most-engaged fans by league/federation

Rank	Property	Composite score
1	NBA	2.48
2	English Premier League	2.17
3	NFL	1.81
4	IOC	1.56
5	Indian Premier League (cricket)	1.45
6	MLB	1.43
7	MotoGP	1.40
8	La Liga Santander (Spain)	1.33
9	Formula One	1.29
10	World Surf League	1.28
11	NHL	1.27
12	International Cricket Council	1.23
13	UFC	1.16
14	USA Gymnastics	1.06
15	FIFA World Cup	1.05
16	U.S. Soccer	0.92
17	Street League Skateboarding	0.90
18	Supercross	0.88
19	Bundesliga	0.86
20 (tie)	ATP Tour	0.84
20 (tie)	USA Basketball	0.84
22	ONE Championship (Singapore-based MMA)	0.82
23 (tie)	Italian Serie A	0.80
23 (tie)	PGA Tour	0.80
25	USA Swimming	0.78

Top-ranked teams

Rank	Team	Composite score
1	Real Madrid	5.40
2	Barcelona	3.79
3	Manchester United	2.92
4	Chelsea	2.11
5	Golden State Warriors	1.84
6	Arsenal	1.83
7	India men's national cricket team	1.63
8	Bayern Munich	1.51
9	Liverpool	1.47
10	Cleveland Cavaliers	1.42
11	New England Patriots	1.38
12	Juventus	1.34
13	Borussia Dortmund	1.31
14	Manchester City	1.29
15 (tie)	Dallas Cowboys	1.25
15 (tie)	Besiktas (Turkish soccer)	1.25
17	France men's national soccer team	1.22
18	AC Milan	1.20
19	Chicago Cubs	1.19
20	Mumbai Indians (cricket)	1.18
21	Chicago Bulls	1.17
22	Galatasaray (Turkish soccer)	1.16
23 (tie)	Fenerbahce (Turkish soccer)	1.14
23 (tie)	Paris Saint-Germain	1.14
25	Los Angeles Lakers	1.11

Most interactions and views

Rank	Property/team	Total interactions, video views
1	NBA	7,678,772,267
2	NFL	3,509,746,696
3	Real Madrid	2,722,114,361
4	Manchester United	2,664,454,811
5	Barcelona	2,341,042,823
6	World Surf League	1,706,610,996
7	IOC	1,385,423,614
8	MLB	1,217,586,354
9	Golden State Warriors	1,019,017,974
10	Arsenal	1,004,299,267

Most posts

Rank	Property/team	Posts
1	Ecuador men's soccer team	44,086
2	NFL	36,888
3	NBA	34,188
4	Vélez Sarsfield (Argentine soccer)	30,202
5	NHL	28,278
6	PGA Tour	27,386
7	Monterrey (Mexican soccer)	23,047
8	NASCAR	22,112
9	MLS	21,871
10	MLB	21,557

Most interactions per post

Rank	Property/team	Interactions per post
1	Real Madrid	118,688
2	Barcelona	78,035
3	Manchester United	51,180
4	India men's national cricket team	37,280
5	NBA	30,272
6	English Premier League	25,891
7	Golden State Warriors	23,219
8	Chelsea	22,364
9	Bayern Munich	22,323
10	Arsenal	21,502

Total followers

Rank	Property/team	Followers
1	Real Madrid	177,953,982
2	Barcelona	174,300,600
3	Manchester United	102,805,279
4	NBA	82,349,549
5	English Premier League	66,935,354
6	Chelsea	66,202,710
7	Arsenal	57,671,145
8	Bayern Munich	55,945,650
9	FIFA World Cup	49,549,043
10	NFL	49,302,124

RESULTS FROM U.S. AND CANADIAN PROPERTIES

Most-engaged fans by league/federation

Rank	Property	Composite score
1	NBA	2.48
2	NFL	1.81
3	MLB	1.43
4	World Surf League	1.28
5	NHL	1.27
6	UFC	1.16
7	USA Gymnastics	1.06
8	U.S. Soccer	0.92
9	Street League Skateboarding	0.90
10	Supercross	0.88
11	USA Basketball	0.84
12	PGA Tour	0.80
13	USA Swimming	0.78
14	USA Volleyball	0.76
15	MLS	0.73
16 (tie)	NASCAR	0.70
16 (tie)	WTA Tour	0.70
18	WNBA	0.66
19 (tie)	USA Track & Field	0.65
19 (tie)	USA Wrestling	0.65
21	USA Baseball	0.64
22 (tie)	Lucas Oil Pro Motocross	0.63
22 (tie)	NHRA	0.63
24	Monster Jam	0.61
25	USA Softball	0.60

Top-ranked teams

Rank	Team	Composite score
1	Golden State Warriors	1.81
2	Cleveland Cavaliers	1.40
3	New England Patriots	1.38
4	Dallas Cowboys	1.25
5 (tie)	Chicago Cubs	1.18
5 (tie)	Chicago Bulls	1.18
7	Los Angeles Lakers	1.12
8 (tie)	San Antonio Spurs	1.04
8 (tie)	Seattle Seahawks	1.04
8 (tie)	New York Yankees	1.04
11	Pittsburgh Steelers	1.03
12	Green Bay Packers	1.00
13	U.S. women's national soccer	0.99
14	Los Angeles Dodgers	0.98
15	Chicago Blackhawks	0.96
16 (tie)	San Francisco Giants	0.94
16 (tie)	Pittsburgh Penguins	0.94
16 (tie)	Boston Red Sox	0.94
16 (tie)	Carolina Panthers	0.94
20	Oakland Raiders	0.93
21	Boston Celtics	0.92
22 (tie)	New York Giants	0.91
22 (tie)	Toronto Blue Jays	0.91
24	Houston Rockets	0.90
25	Oklahoma City Thunder	0.89

Most interactions and views

Rank	Property/team	Total interactions, video views
1	NBA	7,678,772,267
2	NFL	3,509,746,696
3	World Surf League	1,706,610,996
4	MLB	1,217,586,354
5	Golden State Warriors	1,019,017,974
6	NHL	940,435,718
7	UFC	679,301,066
8	Cleveland Cavaliers	674,350,727
9	PGA Tour	554,730,839
10	Chicago Cubs	441,525,440

Most interactions per post

Rank	Property/team	Interactions per post
1	NBA	30,226
2	Golden State Warriors	23,219
3	Cleveland Cavaliers	19,114
4	NFL	17,475
5	MLB	13,108
6	New England Patriots	12,716
7	World Surf League	11,106
8	Dallas Cowboys	10,562
9	Chicago Bulls	10,366
10	U.S. women's national soccer team	9,525

Most posts

Rank	Property/team	Posts
1	NFL	36,888
2	NBA	34,188
3	NHL	28,278
4	PGA Tour	27,386
5	NASCAR	22,112
6	MLS	21,871
7	MLB	21,557
8	Colorado Rockies	20,804
9	San Diego Padres	19,993
10	Seattle Mariners	19,952

Total followers

Rank	Property/team	Followers
1	NBA	82,349,549
2	NFL	49,302,124
3	UFC	35,098,235
4	Los Angeles Lakers	31,746,260
5	Chicago Bulls	25,696,899
6	Miami Heat	23,299,666
7	Golden State Warriors	21,240,657
8	MLB	17,780,396
9	Cleveland Cavaliers	15,551,972
10	Dallas Cowboys	14,108,473