

## CBA league marketing strategy status and optimization analysis

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### Abstract

After more than 20 years of development, the Chinese men's Professional Basketball League (CBA League), with a good social and cultural environment, keeps up with the trend of The Times, making the Chinese basketball market expand day by day. With the development of Internet and science and technology, more and more international leagues have been introduced by domestic media, which has brought major challenges to CBA League. Meanwhile, various factors such as backward management methods, less marketing means and low economic level of players have made it difficult for CBA League to enhance its influence and public acceptance in recent years. Based on a large number of cases and research, combined with products, prices, channels, promotion and other content, this paper makes a comprehensive analysis of the current situation of CBA league marketing and puts forward suggestions for optimization.

**Key words:** CBA league, marketing strategy, sports industry

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Overview

The Chinese Men's Basketball Professional League, referred to as the Middle Vocational Basketball League (CBA), is a multi-year home-and-away basketball league sponsored by the Chinese Basketball Association and the highest level of basketball league in China. The CBA League was officially renamed the China Men's Basketball Professional League in 2005<sup>[1]</sup>. Not only that, with the CBA league teams of autumn clothes, shoes, and related products sales are also increasing year by year, in 2000, with the support and encouragement of the CBA league, CBA brand of the same name came into being. In the past 20 years, due to the popularity and development of basketball in China, the public acceptance of CBA League and its derivatives has also increased year by year. In 2008, CBA League successfully jumped into the National first-class sports League. The progress and development of the league cannot be separated from the improvement of sports competitive strength, but to a large extent, the marketing of the league and its sponsors has also played a great role. With the development of China's social media and network, the resources of sports events are more and more abundant. The formulation and improvement of CBA's marketing strategy should be carried out and promoted from the aspects of product development, pricing strategy, and system innovation<sup>[2]</sup>. In addition to all kinds of domestic large-scale

leagues, China's TV stations and new media are also constantly broadcasting foreign large-scale leagues, such as FIFA, NBA, international marathon, F1, etc. All have a large share in China's sports market. Therefore, CBA must use effective marketing means, adopt effective marketing strategy, take customer demand as the core to adjust marketing strategy, in order to have its own place in the severe market competition.

## 2. CBA League marketing status

### 2.1 Current situation of CBA league products

There are many kinds of sports league products, for CBA league, its products mainly include league broadcast rights, tickets, and stars. Among them, league broadcasting rights are divided into three types, and their main sources of income also come from ticket income and team sponsorship, as well as the annual subsidies issued by CBA to clubs<sup>[3]</sup>.

(1) League broadcast rights: League broadcast rights are divided into three types, the first is the international nature of league broadcast rights marketing. That is, CBA league sells TV broadcasting rights to TV stations in other countries around the world. The second is the domestic TV broadcasting rights marketing, which means that CBA League sells the TV broadcasting rights to CCTV5, CCTV5+, and other domestic TV

stations; The third is the marketing of TV broadcasting rights in provinces and cities. It refers to CBA teams selling their own TV broadcast rights to their own provincial or municipal TV stations. As the revenue from international and national TV rights marketing belongs to each team, it has become the basis for the profitability of CBA League teams. The income obtained by the provincial and municipal TV broadcasting rights marketing belongs to their own teams, and this marketing method is also a very important marketing means.

(2) Tickets: Today's CBA League has A total of 17 teams. Due to the differences in team record, competition level, and team stars, the CBA League divides different teams into five grades A-E, so as to make a vertical classification of tickets. In addition, the CBA league will have 5-10 focus battles every year, and the ticket prices of focus battles are not the same. The CBA also divides the seating area into a number of different areas. Among them, the courtside seats of CBA League, for example, are not suitable for watching games due to the Angle of courtside seats, but they can provide the audience with a close contact with the stars. In this way, people's demand for sporting goods will be higher and higher, so the sporting goods market will be bigger and bigger [4] At the same time, Courtside seats have high television exposure and are generally areas where celebrities gather, which have become the unique value of courtside seats. In order to expand the audience participation of CBA league.

(3) Stars: Although the league has different products and arrangements for different groups, there is a product that is in demand by individuals and enterprises, that is, stars, because the stars not only have their own characteristics but also can become representatives of the team. This function of the star also brings a different experience and feeling to the CBA league game.

**2.2 Price status of CBA League**

(1) The price of CBA League broadcasting rights: For large-scale sports leagues, the economic sources are multiple and diverse, and the TV broadcasting rights of a league are the main component of the income of the entire sports league. However, the current development of CBA in this aspect is worrying. The CBA League's TV broadcast is still a "buyer's market". The entire CBA League's TV broadcast rights income in 2015 is only about 20 million yuan, but the NBA League's annual broadcast income can reach a staggering 200,000 US dollars. Similarly, the Chinese Super League's broadcast rights have also signed a five-year contract worth 8 billion yuan. CBA is also an excellent competition in China, but the commercial operation of the entire TV broadcasting rights is disappointing. In the TV broadcasting link, CCTV is in a strong position and buys the broadcasting rights by providing CBA League with a low broadcasting fee of less than 2 million yuan every year. On this basis, the number of games that can be broadcast is still limited. Due to the huge operational pressure of local TV stations, the broadcasting situation of CBA League is even more pessimistic. Because of this, in order to expand the fan market, most clubs need to pay up to millions of broadcast fees to local TV stations to broadcast club matches, even in a few large cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and so on. The number of fans in these cities is large, the local

consumption level is higher, but also the club needs to bear the cost of TV game production, and broadcast personnel, can not benefit from the broadcast rights.

(2) CBA League ticket price: CBA ticket pricing is now more reasonable, according to the different needs of the market, to take care of the needs of different income groups, the event tickets are divided into different levels, the lowest gear of the door does not exceed 100 yuan, and the highest gear of more than 1,000 yuan, and in the key games even the highest tens of thousands of yuan tickets, some venues also provide box and VIP services around, At the same time, in order to allow more consumers to contact the CBA league, the CBA has set up different ticket pricing schemes for different consumers, such as season tickets, student tickets, etc., such pricing methods allow more fans to successfully purchase tickets. In addition, the CBA league will now use a combination of marketing strategies, moderately increase the price of tickets, but at the same time give stars long clothes or aid, etc., this strategy makes more people buy tickets, improve the attention of the CBA league.

Table 1, taking the 20152016 season as an example, lists the ticket grades and prices of Class A matches of Liaoning Team, Shanghai Team, Xinjiang Team, Beijing Team, and Jilin Team. Due to different team records and opponents in each game, the intensity of the game, the viewing level, and the number of stars are different. Therefore, in order to make the ticket pricing of CBA League more scientific, The CBA League divides ticket prices into five grades, making ticket prices more flexible and allowing more consumers to participate in the activities of the CBA League. Although the price of each team is different, the overall classification follows the five grades.

Team	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D	Grade E
Liaoning	600	400	200	100	50
Shanghai	600	350	230	150	80
Xinjiang	600	360	200	160	120
Beijing	580	380	280	180	120
Jilin	550	400	300	160	110

**Table 1 Ticket Prices of some home regular-season CBA games from 2015 to 2016(Yuan)**

**2.3 Current situation of CBA league channels**

As an enterprise industry involving many fields, CBA League is different from ordinary enterprises. It takes CBA league games as its main products and supports CBA derivatives. At the same time, CBA League also makes profits by sponsorship and title of major enterprises. Therefore, when studying the channel strategy of CBA League, this paper also analyzes the strategy of various activities in order to enable target customers to get close to and get their products. At present, the main marketing channels of CBA League mainly include the following categories:

(1) Broadcast through national and local television stations: CBA competition is the main product of CBA League, and one of the main channels for broadcasting the competition is broadcast through national and local television stations. At present, the biggest TV station that CBA cooperates with is CCTV. In addition, it is also broadcast in the local TV stations of each province. However, because the TV stations of each province only broadcast the games of the home team, the commentary is also biased, and the audience scope is also restricted. Therefore, the viewers who choose TV channels mainly choose CCTV sports channel and CCTV5+ to live broadcast some games.

(2) Broadcast and publicize games through online platforms: CBA League attracts students and some social workers, and their age distribution is concentrated in the 15-35 age group, and people in this age group mainly rely on the Internet and mobile phone apps to obtain game information. Therefore, the CBA league's social influence and communication efforts mainly rely on the construction of network channels. Since 2008, CBA League has begun to cooperate with major video brands. Up to now, CBA League has reached cooperation agreements with Tencent Sports, PPTV, and other new media, and has carried out publicity and design for the broadcast mode of the game. With the continuous development of network channels, CBA League has been cooperating with other video brands. Watching CBA games on the network platform has become the most important way for people to choose. In recent years, although the CBA League has strengthened its channel construction through cooperation with major network platforms, it is far from enough to rely solely on this way to build the CBA League's channel. Compared with the NBA League's network channel construction and improvement, there is still a long way to go. We have been actively maintaining a good relationship with online media, actively promoting NBA's basketball culture and public welfare projects to major media, and actively cooperating with platforms in other countries around the world, so that the influence of NBA League continues to expand worldwide.

(3) Selling league derivatives through online stores: CBA's current derivatives involve many fields, including sports apparel, aid products, star endorsement products, etc. With the development of the Internet, the sales channels of CBA League derivatives are mainly concentrated in online platforms. At present, there are nearly 2,000 stores on Taobao and other online platforms selling CBA League derivatives. But even so, the current CBA league-related derivatives in quality, product appearance, production process, promotion channels, and other well-known brands Li Ning, Anta gap is still very large. Therefore, the CBA league's product sales are not high. If you want to increase the sales of products, CBA league needs to actively carry out the construction of network channels and improve the quality of its derivatives.

## 2.4 CBA League promotion status

(1) News: News is the most important public tool, with some advantages that advertising can not compare. First of all, news focuses on the publicity of the image of enterprises and organizations, and the focus of publicity is not on products and services, and its non-utilitarian nature will arouse people's good

feelings to a large extent. Secondly, the authority of news is more likely to make people feel authentic and credible, which is impossible for advertisements. For example, the news released by heavyweight media such as CCTV will be recognized by the general public. At the same time, television news, as a kind of news that is actively accepted by the audience, is different from the passive publicity mode of advertising, which is voluntarily learned by people. Therefore, the audience rating of news is generally high. Although the number of repeats is not as high as that of advertisements, the impression left on the audience is incomparable. With its unique advantages, news has been favored by many enterprises, and the new public relations means of paid news has also appeared.

The Guangdong Men's Basketball team successfully won the CBA championship in the 2020-2021 season, achieved the feat of three consecutive championships, and Zhou Qi successfully joined the Rockets and other news can be easily generated by its heat. If the producers and beneficiaries of such news are the league, the team, and the players themselves, then the effectiveness and benefit value of the news largely depends on the media. The previous analysis of the league has fully explained that the media and the league are closely related and have mutual benefits, so the media are also happy to hear the positive news of the league, and some will take the initiative to dig and assist the league to produce such news, and further elaborate reports and in-depth interviews.

(2) Special events: Special events are also a more commonly used public relations tool, which will be widely used in the public relations of the league, such as press conferences, fan activities, star meetings, and so on. Among these activities, the press conference is the most direct way for the media to contact the team and understand the inside story of the team. Therefore, the frequency of the press conference is also the highest in the league, followed by the special attention it receives from the league operator, team management, players, and coaches. All this proves the importance of the press conference. This way can not only let the media know more about the team but also enhance the visibility and influence of the league. At the same time, fans, as the consumers of the league, are an indispensable part of the league, and the public relations activities of fans are also indispensable in the league. As shown in Figure 1, CBA League will hold "Yao Charity" basketball game every year, inviting children from mountainous areas and celebrities from all walks of life to participate, and all profits will be donated to Project Hope. These special activities will fully publicize CBA League, build brand awareness, and establish corporate culture. Clear product positioning and target market can attract more people's attention<sup>[5]</sup>, let more people know about such activities, in order to achieve the purpose of public relations publicity.



Figure 1 Yao charity basketball game advertisement

(3) Promotional materials: CBA League will design slogans and promotional videos according to league content every year. With the development of the Internet and the popularity of short videos, CBA League's promotional videos have designed different promotional videos and slogans for people of different professions and ages, as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.



Figure 2 Children's CBA video



Figure 3 Youth CBA promotional video

Such a practice can not only expand the influence of the CBA League, but also allow different groups of people to understand the

CBA league through different channels and ways, which can draw the distance between the general audience and the general population, convey the attitude, responsibility, and responsibility of the CBA, arouse the general audience's sense of basketball mission, and enhance the publicity effect of the CBA League. In addition, the league is customer-oriented. In order to increase customers' sense of experience and cognition, the league will distribute free peripheral materials and some written materials or multimedia discs to fans and sponsors to enhance their understanding of the league. Compared with intangible service products, this kind of tangible publicity material has a more intuitive display of the league, so that it is more directly understood.

### 3. Existing problems of CBA league marketing

#### 3.1 Main problems in product strategy

The CBA League consists of 19 teams and is jointly organized by the clubs, the government, and relevant enterprises. Such cooperation mode enables the CBA League to have more abundant resources and publicity channels, but at the same time, the ownership of the property rights of the CBA League has become a big problem. However, the uncertain ownership of property rights has caused many problems in the development of league broadcasting rights. The most obvious is that CCTV has policy support and technical advantages, which makes CCTV occupy a monopoly position in the market. In a general sense, such monopoly mode slows down the marketing of CBA League broadcasting rights. In addition, the development and creation of CBA league derivatives is still in the early stage, similar to the sports products such as star-long clothes, sneakers, hoodies, there are insufficient characteristics, insufficient publicity, and other problems. Due to the increasing development of domestic products such as Anta and Li Ning, the market share of related derivatives of CBA League is also decreasing, and now the number of derivatives related to CBA league culture and league image is almost zero, and the efforts made in product innovation, promotion and marketing are far from enough.

#### 3.2 Main problems in product price

The biggest problem in the price of CBA League is that the tickets are affected by the team's record and are divided into five levels, and the prices of these five levels are quite different, as shown in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4:

CBA league Liaoning Bensteel club record ranking and ticket prices		
	Team record	Average ticket price
The 2015-2016 season	31-7	600
The 2016-2017 season	29-9	550
The 2017-2018	29-9	550

season		
The 2018-2019 season	38-8	600
The 2019-2020 season	32-14	500

**Table 2. CBA League ranking and ticket price of Liaoning Bensteel Club(Yuan)**

CBA League Bayi club record ranking and ticket prices		
	Team record	Average ticket price
The 2015-2016 season	8-30	300
The 2016-2017 season	10-28	250
The 2017-2018 season	7-31	350
The 2018-2019 season	10-36	300
The 2019-2020 season	12-34	300

**Table 3 CBA League Bayi club record ranking and ticket prices(Yuan)**

According to the team statistics of the 2015-2020 five seasons, Liaoning team and other first-class teams in the past five years have been among the best team records, ticket prices are far ahead, and the Eight-first team in these five years the team record has been countdown, so ticket prices have been in the lowest level of the league, and finally suffered league elimination, has now withdrawn from the ranks of CBA league teams. Such ticket pricing is lack of price elasticity, putting teams with low records in a vicious circle. It is correct to design and layout the national sports industry according to the development of different regions, per capita income, and other development characteristics, and to establish sports leagues based on the principle of maximizing regional interests [6]. In addition, since there is only one CBA team in most provinces, CBA clubs basically monopolize the local ticket market, lack fans' analysis and reference to the market, and have high barriers to entry and exit.

**3.3 Main problems in channel strategy**

The CBA league is currently facing an important problem is that the depth of the construction of the existing channels is insufficient, and it is too simple, and it involves the stars, the content of the game in front of the stage and behind the scenes is less and less. Not only that, NBA has accumulated a lot of popularity through years of development in China. Every year, NBA stars come to China to hold China tour and other activities, through close contact with the stars, feel the basketball culture of NBA, so that more people accept and get close to NBA. However,

similar activities of CBA League are few, and the offline publicity is insufficient, which makes the number of existing channels insufficient, and the lack of development and development of new channels.

**3.4 Main problems in promotion strategy**

At present, the advertising of CBA League is still mainly about the promotion of the league itself, but there are few propaganda about the connotation of basketball, CBA league culture, core value, and other content. In recent years, CBA League has also designed different advertisements according to the age and group of fans, but generally speaking, it is still too simple and has a big gap with the top league. At the same time, since Yao Ming became the president of the CBA League, the CBA League has held "Yao Charity" Cup and other public welfare competitions every year to improve the social image of the CBA League. However, at present, the CBA League's public relations construction and operation are not perfect, and a stable system and model have not been formed yet, and the publicity effect is too simple. Therefore, when the CBA League carries out the operation of social public relations, the CBA League needs to improve its public relations. The participation is not enough, which leads to the current CBA league's public relations operation can not achieve the expected effect, nor can it obtain enough social attention and social recognition.

**4. CBA League marketing strategy optimization**

**4.1 Product strategy optimization**

The CBA league now has three main products, namely CBA competition, league derivatives, and league brand. According to the marketing analysis of CBA League, the league has a huge potential market and a good overall development environment, but there are also some problems, such as the lack of competitive strength of CBA league players and the basketball culture is not perfect, and the creation of league products such as stars is not thorough enough. At the same time, NBA and other international well-known leagues also bring great competitive pressure to CBA league. Therefore, through analysis, this paper believes that the product strategy of CBA League will be optimized from the following aspects:

- (1) Build a more mature CBA League brand: The essence of marketing is to build and optimize the enterprise brand, the CBA league brand is a more competitive league strong support, which can be seen from the NBA league for many years to build and upgrade the league brand. For its brand building, CBA league can learn from the NBA league and other large leagues with successful experience to enhance brand awareness and even should sacrifice some existing interests from a long-term perspective to improve the construction and perfection of the brand.
- (2) Optimize the product mix of the league: the current product model of the CBA League is relatively simple, and the connection between products and

products is relatively small. Most of the products are still sold by single product. Therefore, it is the first task of CBA League to carry out in-depth analysis of the current consumer market at this stage. Through the full investigation and research on the sales situation, market share, and profit level of various products, the product optimization combination design is further carried out on this basis, and finally through the combination of product marketing, in order to obtain greater product advantages.

#### 4.2 Price strategy optimization

As for the ticket price, CBA club should pre-evaluate the price acceptable to consumers according to the team's record, competition level, venue location, and service conditions, and then subdivide the team's schedule, and determine the price of each game according to the opponent's strength, the number of stars, the team's state and the game time of each home game. Ticket prices are then further divided according to the area of different locations within the venue. For the competitive strength of individual teams is relatively different, poor viewing of home games, can be combined with discount strategy, through discount tickets and other forms to attract more consumers to enter the live game. In addition, league organizers and club managers can still use this idea when pricing league broadcast rights, CBA league brands, and other products. As for the peripheral products of CBA League, the current main consumer market is the middle and low-end consumer market. Therefore, for this kind of products, the product price can be reduced as far as possible, so that the product has a high share in the middle and low-end market. In addition, not only the low-end market, signed jerseys, customized souvenirs of stars, and other products belong to the high-end market products, such products, like the league brand, have unpredictability, through the demand-oriented pricing, that is, can become an important source of profits for the league; In addition, for the cost requirements and quality standards of low accessories, small decorations and other commemorative products, at this stage can take a combination of marketing methods, in the consumer purchase of game tickets and other high-end products through the way to promote the league, so as to expand the CBA league's current brand awareness, on the other hand, has important significance for marketing.

#### 4.3 Channel strategy optimization

In today's world, the usage rate of network is continuing to increase, so the construction and improvement of network channels should be the most important goal of CBA. Strengthen the update and maintenance of CBA official website, improve the information of players and teams, expand the consultation chain, and strive to build CBA official website into a basketball website that truly belongs to CBA fans; Increase the linkage of various sports websites, provide more abundant and comprehensive CBA news to such platforms, so that fans can understand more comprehensive CBA league; Create a complete CBA derivatives online store to provide a complete and convenient way for consumers to contact CBA products and buy CBA products. At the same time, for areas with online defects, it is still necessary to strengthen the construction of offline stores, TV shopping, and other channels,

and strengthen the construction of channels according to the local people's customs and consumption levels.

#### 4.4 Promotion strategy optimization

As mentioned above, the CBA League is not perfect in the shaping of social image and the establishment of public relations. Therefore, if you want to promote the CBA League, the image publicity is the basic content of the promotion. The league should build stars that can attract the audience, on the one hand, attract the attention of consumers, and on the other hand, build the culture and spirit belonging to the league. Improve social participation, promote its social significance, and with the help of high-quality advertising content and design, create a league image that can gain social attention and be recognized by the society. In addition to advertising, the offline activities of the CBA league should also be paid attention to, the interaction between fans and stars and teams and other activities, etc. By carrying out offline activities such as interaction with fans, fans can feel the CBA league more completely, and it is easier to generate interest and recognition of the CBA. In addition, the existing promotion strategy of CBA League also needs to be innovative. In order to improve the promotion level of CBA League, the promotion mode innovation will also be carried out from the following two aspects: First, since the current CBA league's handling of offline activities and public relations is not satisfactory, and the results achieved need to be improved, the CBA League should closely combine the basic national conditions of our country, and make innovations according to the needs and preferences of fans and the positioning of league derivatives in the market, so as to achieve better promotional effects. Second, the promotion strategy designed by the CBA league should be closer to the current situation of Chinese basketball, such as allowing children in poor mountainous areas to play in the CBA court and holding the CBA league into the campus activities.

## 5. Conclusion

As one of the most influential and well-known sports leagues in China, CBA League has made certain progress and development in its marketing in the past 20 years by improving its competitive level and innovating its mode. However, there is still a big gap between CBA league and world-renowned sports leagues. Therefore, CBA league should continue to improve league products, prices, channels, promotion, and other aspects, and continue to enhance its own league marketing ability.

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