NBA: Dribbling Through Politics

TEACHING NOTES

Introduction

These teaching notes aim to help the presenters of the case "NBA: Dribbling Through Politics" to efficiently carry out their presentation and facilitate good discussions around the case topics. The notes also include the key theoretical domains and learning objectives connected to the case, as well as useful guidance for helping the case participants to achieve those. Noteworthily, although this case's primary target group is master students of courses in corporate brand management, corporate reputation, and corporate communication, the case's connection to societal issues also makes it relevant for broader studies in management or corporate social responsibility.

The teaching notes start with a short case synopsis accompanied by an explanation of what makes the case evergreen. This is followed by the case's key learning objectives and an introduction to the theories that the participants may use to reach these objectives, stretching from corporate brand identity to external crisis management. There are also practical teaching advice and instructions attached, including teaching suggestions, a time plan, and supporting questions that may help the presenter get the discussion going and reach the learning objectives. Finally, the teaching notes end with a short reflection by the authors of the case.

Case synopsis

During the autumn of 2019, after nearly twenty years of investments in the billion-dollar Chinese market, the relationship between China and National Basket Association (NBA) took a sour turn when the general manager of the Houston Rockets team showed support on twitter for the ongoing pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong. With the NBA's help, the basketball sport had become one of the most popular sports in the country, contributing to a significant share of the NBA's revenue and fan base. In an instant, however, the Chinese government and Chinese companies quickly removed all NBA games featuring Houston Rockets from their state-owned sports channels. As the Chinese government started to pressure Houston Rockets and the NBA further, they quickly started sending their apologies and regrets. Although the NBA is known for valuing freedom of expression – letting members say whatever they want – its generous stance on political statements now suddenly compromises its Chinese relationships. Shortly after, the NBA received backlash on their apologies from U.S. stakeholders, which claimed that the NBA focused on their financial gain rather than upholding freedom of expression. At this moment, the organization finds itself in a conflict between the relationships with key stakeholders and their economic interests, and the values and policies they have stuck to for decades. This is a messy situation for an organization in the midst of their internationalization journey at a time where organizations are pressured to take political statements and de-globalization and polarization have become a reality. The question left to answer for the CEO Adam Silver and his team was: "How should the NBA work with political statements from now and moving forward? Consider players, teams, and the corporate entity."

Rationale for being an evergreen case

What makes excellent cases is their potential to be evergreen – that is, their timelessness and ability to continue being relevant year after year. Several aspects make this case evergreen.

Firstly, in this case, the main issue is the conflict between the organization and a major stakeholder and the conflicts between some of the organization's stakeholders. These stakeholder issues are relevant for any company, in any sector and market, at any time. Considering that the stakeholders let a company operate its business, balancing interests and managing stakeholder relationships is critical for any organization's survival and success. This is especially true in this case where the central conflict between the organization and a vital stakeholder challenges the brand's identity and values.

Secondly, the case illustrates the difficulties of operating in an international climate. Notably, it demonstrates some of the challenges that brands and businesses face due to the emerging macro-trend of de-globalization (Moyo, 2019), which challenges the often taken-for-granted megatrend of globalization. It shows that operating in markets that virtually oppose each other can be problematic and make case participants think about how they can prioritize issues and manage relationships.

Thirdly, the case covers the questions of how a brand should relate to politics and whether they should be engaged in political issues or not. This is a timeless and crucial question for any brand, and its importance is only expected to grow since businesses and CEOs are increasingly expected to take political stands (Bailey & Phillips, 2020; Moorman, 2020). By taking a stand in polarized political questions, a brand will, by default, distance themselves from some customers or stakeholders. This makes taking a political stance a risky endeavor, especially as there is an increasing trend of polarization (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). As a result, cases such as this one particularly helps educate decision-makers to manage these issues better.

Finally, the case presents some of the challenges associated with digitalization and the growing prevalence of social media and encourages participants to think about policies to manage them. While organizational members have always been able to say controversial statements, this issue has become exponentially more serious with social media. The reach and availability of social media can make these statements spread incredibly fast to a large audience. The statements members make can affect a brand's reputation; they can disclose confidential information, make controversial statements, and slander the organization and its stakeholders. Organizations need policies for managing statements from the brands, their sub-brands, and their organizational members, as well as plans for managing potential crises.

Overall, the case covers timeless dilemmas of branding and reputation management, stakeholder management, communication, and crisis management. Because of various macro trends, the case's relevance is only expected to grow in the foreseeable future.

Learning objectives

The case covers eight general learning objectives in the taxonomy of learning domains, initially organized by Dr. Benjamin Bloom in 1959 and further developed by Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths, and Wittrock in 2000 (Clark, 2015). The objectives are found in table 1, and an overview of theory and models that are highly relevant to these learning objectives is presented in the next section.

Table 1. List of learning objectives along six general learning dimensions.

Learning dimension	Learning objective	Manifestation in the case
Remembering	… the severe consequences of making political statements and the importance of having a policy and understanding its implications.	The underlying causes for the NBA's situation and the consequences of the management decisions.
Understanding	… how politics can influence corporate brands and celebrity brands.	Concepts mentioned in the teaching notes.
Applying	… key concepts from branding and reputation management, communication, and crisis management.	Corporate brand identity theory, brand architecture, stakeholder management, corporate communication, image restoration.
Analyzing	... the situation, its potential impact on the brand, business, and stakeholders. … which potential solutions there are to the problems.	For example, NBA's brand identity, mapping of stakeholders, identifying geopolitical macro forces, and so on.
Evaluating	… which solutions are the most suitable for handling political statements. … consequences of different actions.	For example, comparing advantages and disadvantages of a neutrality policy versus taking a stance as a corporate brand.
Creating	… an internal policy for handling political statements.	Construct a plan based on relevant course literature.

Relevant models, concepts, and theories

There are various theories and models that are useful for solving the case and essential for reaching the learning objectives. Overall, the learning objectives cover three major theoretical domains: 1) corporate branding and reputation management, 2) communication, and 3) crisis management. The case is, thereby, useful in courses covering any of these areas. Following are examples of models and theories for each of these domains, examples of how they can be used, and important aspects to consider when employing them.

Corporate branding and reputation

Profit or non-profit, all organizations have corporate brands, including the NBA (Roper & Fill, 2012). In its essence, a brand is a promise between stakeholders and the corporation (Roper & Fill, 2012), and strong brands have a clear positioning and are known for living up to their promises (Urde, 2021). In the end, this results in loyalty, trust, and legitimacy to the brand (Roper & Fill, 2012). Because branding is a long-term effort and the corporate brand is a rallying point for many stakeholders, decisions affecting the corporate brand should be made under careful consideration and with a holistic perspective (Roper & Fill, 2012).

How the NBA's current crisis is managed and what strategic policy they choose to adopt henceforth will affect its relationship to stakeholders and how they perceive the brand. It may even affect the core promise of the brand. Consequently, no matter what solution approach the case participants adhere to, they will have to consider the NBA's corporate brand, including careful consideration of its core values and stakeholders.

Brand Identity and Reputation

Because a brand is a promise, it acts as a point of reference that signals a specific proposition and values (Kapferer, 2012). To fulfill the function as a reference point, a brand needs to have a clear sense of itself – an identity (Kapferer, 2012). The identity provides direction for the brand (Kapferer, 2012). Therefore, it is valuable to consider the NBA's brand identity when assessing the seriousness of the current situation and mapping out solutions and the way forward. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) (Urde, 2021; see figure 1) can be useful in guiding this process. The matrix provides a holistic view of the brand's identity, consisting of nine internal and external elements (Urde, 2021).

At the center of the matrix is the brand core. While both internal and external forces influence the brand identity and meaning, some core values stay consistent (Urde, 2021). In the end, it is these values that define that brand and differentiates it from other brands (Roper & Fill, 2012). For the NBA, their brand core values could be said to be integrity, teamwork, respect, and innovation. While completely going against this core is probably ill-advised, it does not mean that they can be changed or adapted. By building on the organization's history, case participants could 'reinterpret' the core values or 'discover' latent ones. These could be used to mold the brand identity into something that better fits the current situation and future

challenges. After all, the brand was created in a national setting, so it could be argued that changes are needed to adapt it to the international stage, and the current situation might provide the opportunity and momentum for doing so.

Because the core is so very central to the brand, any other dimension in the matrix needs to be in line with it. As a result, Urde (2021) highlights four paths that can be explored in the matrix. These paths and elements provide a comprehensive overview of the current identity of the brand and can be used both to identify weaknesses and strengths and opportunities and threats of potential case solutions. For example, it could be argued that the culture of openness and tolerance is too risky for maintaining good relationships with international stakeholders. Thus, that good relationships with China are essential for maintaining the position and value proposition, so taking a stance in the Hong Kong issue goes against the mission and vision, that waiting to comment on the current situation goes against their personality, and so on. Whatever approach the case participants take, the identity elements and their alignment with the core values must be considered.

Value proposition	Relationships	Position
Deliver the excitement of basketball worldwide.	Be an active part of the community. Include and enable everyone who wants to play.	The major basketball league for men.
Expression	**Brand core**	**Personality**
Symbolic according to our American heritage with an open-minded approach.	Integrity, Teamwork, Respect, Innovation	Competitive, proud, intense, diverse with a passion for driving cultural inclusion.
Mission and vision	**Culture**	**Competencies**
Compete with intensity, lead with integrity and inspire play.	All employees are part of one big family.	The best basketball players and the best basketball teams.

Figure 1. An example of a filled-in Corporate Brand Identity Matrix for the NBA.

There is a strong relationship between brand identity and brand reputation, whereas communication and positioning serve as important links (Urde, 2021). These dimensions are essential to consider in the NBA case as well. The current reputation determines which actions are appropriate, and the actions taken will shape the reputation henceforth. The CBIM can be extended with two outer layers – communication and positioning, and reputation – to account for these dimensions (Urde, 2021).

The first layer is about communication and positioning, that is, to express the brand's identity and to make it stand out in the marketplace (Urde, 2021). When it comes to these dimensions, the situation at hand can serve both as a severe threat and opportunity; the situation puts the NBA in the spotlight. Their response to the situation may ruin or strengthen their position or let them build a new one. For example, the NBA is well known for staying neutral and having strong integrity when it comes to not censuring members in their organization, whatever they say. By censuring them now, they could harm this position they have built-in stakeholders' minds. Similarly, the NBA has a strong American heritage, and that might be something they could strengthen by taking a stance on the Hong Kong issue. Either way, the stories told within and outside the organization may serve as an essential input for the chosen communicated position.

The second outer layer is reputation, that is, what different stakeholders think of the brand. Here, the concept of 'reputational reservoir' (Greyser, 2009) is essential. The NBA has a good reputation for upholding freedom of expression, letting members say whatever they want, even if it is highly controversial. On the one hand, it can be argued this good track record has built up a reputational reservoir that could be exploited to make an exception this time and censor members of the organization. On the other hand, it can be argued that breaking such a track record would deplete their reservoir and ruin their reputation. As Greyser (2009) writes, perceived authenticity and positive reputation tend to go hand in hand. Either way, the established reputation needs to be considered. Urde's (2021) CBIRM provides eight reputational dimensions related to the identity matrix elements that can assist this evaluation and estimate the consequences of different actions. For example, deviating from the established practice of permitting full freedom of expression may affect NBA's 'trustworthiness' and 'credibility'. Furthermore, supporting the Hong Kong protests might increase 'willingness-to-support' and 'differentiation' in western markets, while doing the opposite in China, and losing the Chinese market would affect the NBA's 'performance' and 'relevance'.

Brand activism

The concept of brand activism has recently emerged in branding literature and is a value-based agenda for improving the world; and thereby differs from CSR or CRM, which have underlying marketing or corporate motivations (Kotler and Sarkar, 2017). Brand activism has become more critical in recent years with the rise of moments such as #metoo and Black Lives Matter. Some brands have adopted the approach to great success, see e.g., Ben & Jerry's (Beard, 2021), and some only face severe backlash, see e.g., L'Oreal (Cruse, 2020). Besides strengthening and living up to their brand values, brand activism can also help a brand generate brand equity through strong, favorable, and unique associations (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020).

Taking a stance in the Hong Kong protests, which the NBA faces pressure to do from both stakeholders in China and in the US, could strategically shape the brand's identity and build a unique position in these stakeholders' minds. However, since there are conflicts between these stakeholders, such a decision could significantly impair relationships and must be made under careful consideration. Since the brand

activism approach is value-based, the brand's core values would constitute the basis for such a decision. Nevertheless, a broader perspective should not be forgotten. For example, while supporting the Hong Kong protests would be in line with the NBA's core value of 'integrity' when it comes to freedom of expression, it might go against their core values of 'teamwork' and 'respect' concerning the Chinese stakeholders. Moreover, if the NBA would position itself as an activist brand, that would also affect how they should approach other situations. For example, if the NBA takes a stance in the Hong Kong protests, should they take a stance for protests in Venezuela as well? How about political issues in the US? Case participants going for the brand activism alternative will need to consider this broader perspective.

Stakeholder management

In navigating among societal and political issues, stakeholder theory allows a fruitful departure in understanding the impact of corporations' decisions on various affected parties, including the public, media, employees, governments, shareholders, customers, and more. In the NBA case, which arguably illustrates the interconnectedness between corporations and broader societal issues through stakeholders, this theoretical departure allows a shift from a company-centered approach to a stakeholder approach. This approach suggests that satisfying some stakeholder groups can simultaneously neglect others, which may negatively impact the company's reputation (Freeman 1984; Freeman & Gilbert, 1987). Therefore, to continue creating value for the broader array of stakeholders, it is essential to consider their interests when embarking upon new strategic directions (Ulmer, 2001).

The NBA case arguably illustrates a double-edged nature in facilitating strong stakeholder relationships. On the one hand, this enables support from stakeholder groups. On the other hand, this increases the pressure for providing high value to these stakeholder groups, although they can be opposing. Strong stakeholder relationships are beneficial in crises since they enable the corporation to get advocacy from these stakeholder groups (Ulmer, 2001). For example, the NBA has previously defended individual players' rights in working conditions and freedom of expression, so individual players supposed NBAs opinions and future directions. Besides, their relations to the American consumers remained stable during the crisis as they have supported the American ideals, although arguable in the long term when acknowledging the long-term effect. Another takeaway is how they seemingly upheld favorable perceptions with the Chinese citizens. They tried to bring the game back to the fans affected, and fans tried to find illegal ways to stream basketball games. They have also facilitated a strong relation with American politicians and companies. Simultaneously, the NBA has poured many resources into establishing a strong relationship with the Chinese government and Chinese businesses. Nevertheless, this case illustrates how their contradicting political views put a lot of pressure on the NBA in their strategic decisions and their need for stakeholder theory. Hence, it points to the notion that making every stakeholder satisfied is difficult and prioritizing among stakeholders is necessary when dealing with issues (see e.g., Harrisson & Wicks, 2019; Chandler, 2019). In this sense, one can discuss the NBA's different prioritization of stakeholders since they also affect how stakeholders react in the respective markets. Besides, if the NBA should allow all stakeholders to be freely approached, which is

interesting concerning their seemingly restrictive approach in later years. Nevertheless, in the short term, the NBA laid the foundation for supporting their employees as critical organizational stakeholders, which becomes interesting in discussing if this was a practical approach for them to stay through to their brand promise.

Brand architecture

The brand architecture illustrates brands' structure, which ultimately affects both the business model and the overall corporate strategy (Kapferer, 2012). Understanding the brand architecture can help interpret possibilities for separating the brand and allowing different entities to support each other in the overall structure. In other words, an adequate structure enables a better market coverage that captures segments' specific demands (Kapferer, 2012). This is, thereby, related to how stakeholders interact with the brand (Balmer, 2006).

Although an association, the NBA can be seen as a strong corporate brand and a mother brand. The thirty teams can then be considered daughter brands, which employ players with their celebrity brands. The architecture can be relevant to examine for the critical position in which the NBA finds itself. Although the tweet came from the owner of the daughter brand of Houston Rockets, this team's owner referred to the NBA's neutrality policy for political statements, rather than mentioning the team's policies. Furthermore, as the NBA commissioner responded to the crisis on behalf of the NBA, the corporate brand became directly exposed. As a result, a controversy that could have been limited to one team spilled over to the whole NBA brand. In this sense, the NBA might have been able to mitigate its brand's impact by letting the daughter brand Houston Rockets take their stands and the Chinese government's wrath. From this perspective, the NBA might have been able to continue operating in China while excluding the team. Nevertheless, it portrays the closeness in the relationship among the brands where the NBA brand, on the one hand, allows the individual players and teams to take political stands. On the other hand, the NBA always becomes involved in these controversies, although not expressing these political views. In this sense, the celebrity brands' policy incentives on political stands could be a way for the NBA to decrease spillover effects on the corporate brand. This especially since the NBAs long-term business strategy of spreading the interest in basketball globally would implicate more risks for opposing political views as it enters new markets globally.

Corporate communication

The NBA can also employ strategic communication strategies to bridge their internal values with external stakeholders (Urde, 2021). Corporate communication is about managing how stakeholders perceive the organization (Roper & Fill, 2012), making it a useful tool for the NBA that they could use to manage their relationships and reputation. For example, message framing (Roper & Fill, 2012) could be employed to draw attention away from negative aspects of the crisis in a way that helps to produce a favorable perception of the NBA.

Another way of using strategic corporate communication could be by analyzing what specific outcome that the NBA wants to achieve with their communication. According to Roper and Fill (2012), there are two levels of outcomes: functional and transitional. For example, functional tasks aim to improve the image of the brand's skills and competencies. An organization may attain these outcomes by profiling themselves, where their communication serves as the linkage between their identity and the internal and external stakeholders' perceived images. With this in mind, commissioner Silver's response can be seen as a clarification of the NBA's identity for all stakeholders, profiling them in a particular direction.

Rhetorical principles may also form a bridge between a brand's identity and reputation (Urde, 2021). These principles are: ethos that addresses trust and character, logos that address the reason, and pathos that address emotions. By identifying the right balance between these rhetorical principles, brands can form compelling messages to audiences. The NBA's core values of integrity could be communicated by standing firmly for the American values that the NBA has previously drawn from, appealing mainly to ethos. However, they could also use it to relate to reason and integrity to not meddle in politics and always remain neutral. Whatever they choose, one crucial aspect when forming this communication is to make sure that the whole organization communicates the same thing (Urde, 2021). Consistency can be achieved by, for example, creating internal policies like listing what kind of messages can be conveyed on players' jerseys can be seen to achieve this consistency in the NBA.

Crisis management

Case participants may interpret the situation as a crisis that needs to be managed. A useful theory to start this discussion could be the three phases of a crisis: pre-impact, impact, and readjustment phase (Roper & Fill, 2012). By using these phrases, participants could identify where in the course of events the NBA finds itself and what they could do to limit the impact of the worsening relationship with China. When the case starts, the NBA can be seen as about to enter the crisis's impact phase. It is suggested that participants make a crisis plan, identify the crisis's source, and swiftly neutralize it (Roper and Fill, 2012). The final readjustment phase handles the recovery of organizations and their stakeholders in the new climate that has been created after the crisis has taken place. While in this phase, the affected organization ensures that it meets key stakeholders' needs. Here, class discussions could touch upon how the NBA could readjust to please critical stakeholders. For example, one conclusion could be that policy exceptions need to be made regarding the association's stance on political

statements to ensure their neutrality and integrity while keeping good business relations with stakeholders like China.

To analyze the different essential stakeholders of the case, participants could use Nutt & Blackoff's four categories of stakeholders (1992, according to Roper & Fill, 2012). In their model, stakeholder roles are evaluated on the dimensions of their importance and whether they support the organization's stance on an issue. The four categories are problematic stakeholders, antagonistic stakeholders, low-priority stakeholders, and supporter stakeholders. For example, China could be categorized as an antagonistic stakeholder. They are an essential partner for the NBAs possibilities to achieve international growth and oppose their initial handling of the Houston Rockets general manager. After analyzing stakeholders, the categories may also be used to evaluate which actions could be taken to manage the relationship. Discussions may also explore what stakeholder role the celebrity players have in this issue, with many of them having financial interests in markets outside of the United States.

It can be fruitful to derive insights from the stakeholders and the crisis's nature when developing the strategic response. For example, Cornelissen identifies four types of responses: silence, accommodation, reasoning, and advocacy strategies (2008, according to Roper & Fill, 2012) may be used. Another set of responses to be used by the participants could be Benoit's theory of image restoration (1997), according to Roper & Fill (2012). These actions are connected to how a brand can restore its reputation after a crisis has taken place. These approaches are simple denial, evasion, reducing offensiveness, correcting action, and mortification.

Assisting questions

The case's main question is "How should the NBA work with political statements from now and moving forward? Consider players, teams, and the corporate entity." While this question was carefully selected to guide participants to achieving the learning objectives, it is recommended that the presenters prepare additional questions to assist this process. Table 2 includes a selection of examples of assisting questions connected to each of the learning objectives; that is, except of remembering and understanding, which are learned throughout the process, or by learning about the management decisions. Hopefully, these questions can guide the class discussion or help participants who are lagging in terms of a learning objective.

Table 2. Examples of assisting questions to help reaching the learning objectives.

Learning dimension	Learning objective	Assisting questions
Applying	… key concepts from branding and reputation management, communication, and crisis management.	What is the NBA's brand identity today?
		What reputation does the NBA have today?
		How serious is the current crisis and in which phase is it?
		How does the brand usually communicate in these situations?
		What rhetoric style does the brand usually adhere to in their communication?
		What stakeholders does the NBA have?
Analyzing	... the situation, its potential impact on the brand, business and stakeholders. … which potential solutions there are to the problems.	Which elements of the brand's identity are most relevant for solving the case?
		Has the crisis affected the NBA's reputation? In what way?
		Does the current reputation make some solutions easier or harder?
		Does the crisis affect all NBA's brands (corporate, teams, and players)? Which ones are affected the most/least?
		Which roles do the different brands (corporate, teams, players) have in shaping the NBA's identity and reputation?
		Which stakeholders are affected by the crisis and which are affected by different policies?
		What do the different stakeholders think the NBA should do in this situation? Are there any conflicts between them? Can these be resolved?
		How can the NBA minimize the damage or probability of similar crises happening in the future?
Evaluating	… which solutions are the most suitable for handling political statements. … consequences of different actions.	What are the most important actions to take in the upcoming 72 hours? How about after?
		What are the advantages and disadvantages for the NBA in taking a stance, supporting or not, in the Hong Kong protests?
		Is it reasonable to treat the current situation as an exception from how the NBA usually manages these things?

		Which solutions are in line with the brand's identity?
		Is the current brand identity adequate moving forward or are adaptations necessary? How could those adaptations be made?
		How do different case solutions affect stakeholders? Which stakeholders are the most important to consider?
		What are the long-term reputational risks of different solutions in terms of probability and impact?
Creating	… an internal policy for handling political statements.	Who is allowed to make political statements?
		Where should these statements be communicated? Which channels?
		Should any topics be disallowed?
		How many statements should be made?
		Should any situations be treated as exceptions?

Teaching suggestions

The teaching suggestions included in this section outline supplementary recommendations that the case presenters can use to enrich the teaching process. They include recommendations for engaging teaching methods, media use, and additional advice to create the frame for discussion and structure while nurturing these conversations. In doing so, they follow the Harvard Business School case method (Harvard Business School, n.d.), in which the pre-presentation phase enables the participants to read the case individually. In the discussion phase, participants discuss the case in smaller groups, followed by an open presentation among all the audience participants. Finally, in the concluding phase, are the participants able to reflect while taking part in the management decision, thus preparing them to take on the challenges illuminated by this case in real life.

Pre-presentation and introduction phase

In the pre-presentation phase, it is advisable that the presenters divide the responsibilities beforehand to enable an effective and structured case presentation and discussion. In terms of prominent roles, this would imply dividing the responsibilities between the presenters. We suggest two moderators and one administrator. The moderators take part in framing and moving the discussion forward during the case and are also responsible for keeping track of the time. The suggested time plan can be used. The administrator plays an essential part in writing down discussion topics of interest, preferably on a whiteboard, as the discussion and case develop. Nevertheless,

if only one presenter is available, this person can, with modification and a flexible approach, take both the moderator and administrator roles.

Furthermore, to prepare the participants for the case, the administrator should provide them with the outlined background information that contains the management question. The case can be held both digitally and physically, depending on the case discussion's objectives and physical location availability. It is advisable, although not necessary, to share the background information with the participants the day before the case so that they may prepare and read up on relevant theory. Overall, we recommend doing the case physically for full immersion. If an oral presentation is to be held, all the presenters may participate in the presentation. To make the presentation more immersive, we suggest staging a role-playing scenario where the presenters assume roles of key people at the NBA. For example, it may be a board meeting to create a new policy for political statements, and the presenters could portray NBA commissioner Adam Silver, Daryl Morey who poster the controversial tweet, and the NBA corporate brand manager.

To enhance the audience's engagement, provide support for the case presenters, and enable a structured approach for the audience of the case, it is advisable to use media and visual presentations (e.g., PowerPoint, digital whiteboards, physical whiteboards). We have prepared an example presentation that may be used for the role-playing board room scenario. Other than that, video material can also be found online. For example, several videos of NBA press announcements can be found publicly online. Both these options help set the case scene and enable the participants to think about the case when it comes actively to life. The speakers' notes in the PowerPoint presentation help the presenters easily access the case and include the presentation's relevant parts. It is advisable to seek out any unanswered questions at the start of the discussion. Furthermore, to obtain the same efficient structure during the discussion, the administrator can use the whiteboard or a digital alternative depending on the case discussion's location to note down ideas into focus areas to pursue during the discussion. The moderators may also lean on the discussion template's in the teaching plan section to structure the discussion and the assisting questions sections that highlight essential points during the discussion and enable a nuanced discussion.

It is advisable to review the main learning objectives in the pre-presentation phase. If other objectives are to be used, they need to be set during this phase as well. In doing so, the presenters can turn to the established learning objectives of this case to understand the desired objectives of the upcoming case discussion. In this case, it can be fruitful to use a whiteboard in the case discussion to summarize essential points throughout the discussion.

Discussion phase

At the beginning of the discussion phase, it is vital to continue to uphold the audience's engagement by asking them to assume a role. The default option for this case is to assume the role of NBA commissioner Adam Silver. However, an alternative approach could be to ask participants to assume one of the four roles: Silver, a board member, a representative from one of the NBA teams, and a celebrity basketball player. In this way, it enables the participants to consider the multiple actors involved in the strategic decision and allows them to put themselves in the shoes of both decision-makers and internal stakeholders influencing the decision. In other words, it is fundamental to put the audience as close to reality as possible to engage actively and remember the learning for the future.

The case presenter should remain neutral throughout the discussion, as not to influence the participants. Nevertheless, the presenter's role is to present and guide the discussion towards the learning objectives and making sure it stays within the time frame and does not go off-topic. In guiding the debate, the presenters must be maintaining a flow in the forum. The presenters can facilitate this flow by letting the main question remain on the visuals or on the whiteboard to remind the participants of the task. It can also be valuable to find a balance between the more active and passive participants. It can be advisable to ask passive participants to share their views to make the discussion more nuanced. The presenters can use the teaching plan section and divide either the discussion ideas or the student groups within the three areas: challenges, alternatives, and actions. In doing the latter, the presenters can randomly select a participant from the groups to summarize the main concerns and present their suggested managerial actions.

Concluding Phase

The presenter should be prepared to moderate the class discussion towards an end if the discussion is highly active since the presenter needs to have sufficient time to conclude the presentation with the managerial decisions. However, the presenter can ask one volunteer to summarize the key points made in the discussion if time remains at the end. Concludingly, the presenters once again express their gratitude towards the participants in the case discussion by thanking them for their time and engagement.

Teaching Plan

A couple of discussion templates can be used to make the administration of notes during the presentation and discussion of the case easier. It can also be used by the moderator to guide the discussion if necessary. The first template (table 3) helps structure the number of internal and external stakeholders that could be impacted by the decisions of the class. The class may also discuss what type of brand that they represent. The second template (table 4) contains three columns presenting what challenges that are identified in the case, alternatives for solving these challenges and what decisions that the NBA should make in the first 72 hours. The final template

(table 5) presents a similar plan but takes a longer perspective. Note that the stakeholders, challenges, alternatives, and actions mentioned below are examples and the case participants may find new stakeholders or challenges that need attention.

Table 3. Examples of how the internal and external stakeholders could be mapped.

Internal stakeholders	External stakeholders
NBA's commissioner	U.S. Senators
Shareholders	Chinese Government
NBA's executive board	Chinese society / American society (Citizens, Protestors, Community)
League teams	Chinese media / American media
League players	Chinese customers / American customers
	Chinese partners / American partners
	American unions

Table 4. Example of possible challenges, alternatives, and actions for the NBA first 72 hours.

Examples of Challenges	Examples of Alternatives	Examples of Actions
Uncertainty of what the communication should entail to minimize impact on NBA's relationship with Chinese stakeholders.	Sincerely Apologize for the fallout. Work with the Chinese government. Accommodation strategy to adapt to China's demands.	→ NBA should make the CEO express a statement that apologizes to the Chinese government and fans.
Uncertainty of who is responsible for commenting on the statement?	NBA's commissioner? The owner of Houston Rockets? The Houston Rockets General Manager?	→ NBA's CEO should comment on the statement following the reactions from U.S. stakeholders.
Uncertainty of what the communication should entail to minimize the impact on the brand and	An apology. Reason with stakeholders. Work with the U.S. government.	→ While apologizing, CEO Adam Silver should emphasize the NBAs neutrality and their integrity on the

reputation in the U.S.?		matter of freedom of speech.
Uncertainty to whom the communication should be directed to.	Chinese government? Chinese partners? Chinese fans? U.S. Senators? U.S. fans? Both countries? Internally?	→ NBA should use the press conference to openly declare their standpoint towards all stakeholders.
Uncertainty of when to communicate.	Wait for a few days until the debate is not as heated. Confront the problem head on.	→ NBA should immediately clarify their stance on the issue. Waiting may enable others to drive the question instead.
Can we and should we minimize the spillover effect from Houston Rockets to the NBA brand?	The NBA should incentivize the Houston Rockets to take back their statement including the NBA. The NBA should remain silent to not draw attention to the corporate brand.	→ The NBA should distance themselves from the issue and let the Houston Rockets take full responsibility.
Uncertainty of how to communicate internally.	Extensive internal communication to align everyone on the NBA stance. Communicate only to the teams, which in turn speak to the players. Combine the external and the internal communication to remain efficient.	→ Extensive internal communication to establish a sense of urgency if changing the values. → Moderate internal communication is re-establishing the current values.

Table 5. Example of possible challenges, alternatives, and actions for the NBA long term.

Examples of challenges	Examples of alternatives	Examples of actions
Negative impact on corporate reputation.	Ensure that the employees, players, are taking into consideration the NBA brand. CSR initiatives in China. Public relations events in China. Advertise in the U.S to relate to their American heritage. Fire/reposition the people who caused the crisis.	→ Build new basketball academies in China. → Make public relations campaigns in the U.S
Uncertainty of who should be allowed to make political statements.	NBA. The teams. The players. Everyone.	→ NBA, the teams and the players shall be able to make political statements but not without consulting the NBA league.
Decision about distancing NBA from the teams' brands.	Rebranding. Repositioning.	→ NBA should position themselves as an independent league.
Uncertainty about implementation of stance on political statements.	Establish an approval process. Establish a cross functional team of NBA employees, team leaders and players. Recognition, to pass on the values from NBA to all internal stakeholders.	→ NBA ought to recognize the players making a stance to stay true to their promise.
Evaluate financial impact based on the strategy going forward.	Evaluate the value of current deals and partnership. Keep track of the different markets. Evaluate consumers' usage of streaming sites.	→ Being transparent about the investments and losses in the Chinese market.

| How to keep up our brand promise while approaching new markets with competing views on freedom of speech. | Engage the legal team for regulating future contracts. Strike alliances with important stakeholders in markets aligned with our values. Become diversified and divide the teams between markets. | → Frame the sport of basketball itself as a means of exporting values like freedom of expression without engaging in political debate. |

Time plan

The default time plan for the case is 45 minutes in total. Because of this time restriction, it is essential to plan the time well to ensure to achieve the learning objectives. Figure 2. illustrates a schedule suggestion with this in mind. It consists of six time blocks: 1) presentation of the background and the NBA, 2) presentation of the problem, 3) the case question and overall instructions, 4) discussion in groups to come up with solutions, 5) class discussion where solutions from different groups are discussed, and 6) presentation of the actual management decisions. Because most of the learning objectives are related to applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating a solution, thus dedicating most time to the case discussion and the class discussion time blocks. Although not recommended because it limits the room for discussion, a vital element of the case learning process, we have prepared an additional time plan for a 30-minute case as well (figure 3).
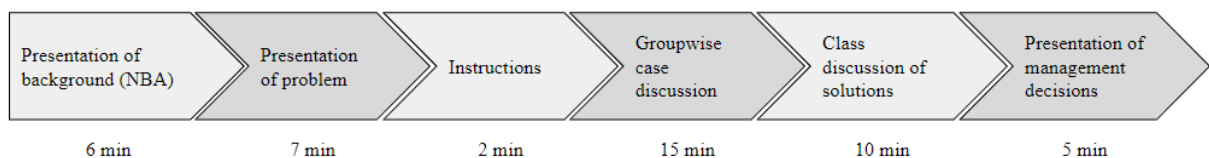
Presentation of background (NBA)	Presentation of problem	Instructions	Groupwise case discussion	Class discussion of solutions	Presentation of management decisions
6 min	7 min	2 min	15 min	10 min	5 min

Figure 2. The suggested 45 minutes time plan for the case.

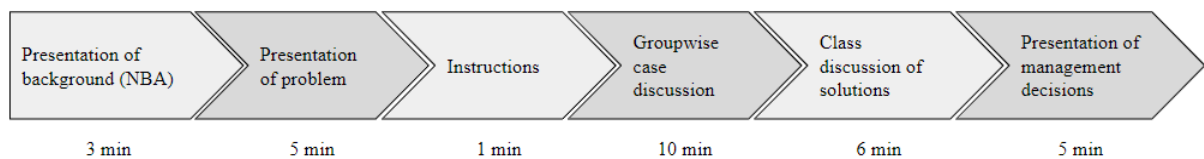| Presentation of background (NBA)	Presentation of problem	Instructions	Groupwise case discussion	Class discussion of solutions	Presentation of management decisions
3 min	5 min	1 min	10 min	6 min	5 min

Figure 3. The 30 minutes alternative time plan for the case.

Reflection

This case was written and presented as a part of the Corporate Brand Management and Reputation (BUSN35) course at Lund School of Economics and Management. The NBA case was selected among three outlined case proposals under the supervision of course teacher Mats Urde. It was selected over the other alternatives mainly because the problem and possible approaches to solving it were more nuanced than the other alternatives, prompting a more interesting case discussion. Also, the case was also deemed to be more timeless than the others, and its relevance is expected to grow over the upcoming years. Additionally, the case was easy to understand and did not require any familiarity with the company or industry compared to the other alternatives.

The nature of the case did, however, prove challenging for constructing it. Because the Hong Kong protests issue is a polarized and politically loaded question, it was, at times, difficult to find neutral information about it. Nevertheless, it proved particularly challenging to formulate the case, and the case questions to make them politically neutral, nuanced and avoiding putting participants in a corner. This especially since all of us and most of the case participants are from western cultures and share values that might frame the case in a biased direction.

Used to take the participant role in case solving, it proved challenging to switch from the case-solving mindset to the case writing mindset. This was particularly true for the learning objectives. Overall, the learning objectives' role was more significant than expected, and the formulation of them extra challenging. The learning objectives permeate the case and determine the relevant theoretical domains, the direction of the case, the time plan, the relevant questions, and much more. Never having considered learning objectives before, we now have more respect for this part of the process. It is easy to forget that cases are about learning, not winning. This case should help us remember that. Moreover, with the problem-solving mindset, the objective is to create the best solution. With the case writing mindset, it is mostly about making the participants learn as much as possible. This does not mean guiding them to the best solution because sometimes we can learn even more from mistakes. To encourage learning and reflection rather than optimization was a new and valuable perspective we have adopted.

Overall, we are thankful for having received the opportunity to write and present a business case. We have adopted new perspectives, learned to think more nuanced about cases and solutions, improving our writing and presenting skills, and, hopefully, become better at helping others learn – valuable skills in any sphere, professional and academic.

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