Brandwatch Crisis Social Listening:

NBA Gambling Scandal

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Sentiment and Emotion Analysis

Brandwatch data showed a sharp shift in conversation once the NBA gambling scandal broke on October 23. In the 30 days prior, online discussions were mostly neutral and focused on early-season play. After the first reports linking players to illegal betting and federal charges, negative sentiment surged, with nearly 10,000 negative mentions in a single day. This spike indicated how quickly the issue expanded beyond routine sports commentary and became a broader public concern.

In the days following the initial news break, negative sentiment remained dominant across social media platforms. Many posts expressed anger toward the players involved and growing mistrust toward league leadership, with some social media users criticizing the NBA for a perceived lack of transparency. Others questioned whether player performance may have been influenced by gambling activity, highlighting a direct threat to the league's credibility and the integrity of game outcomes.

By the second week, however, negative sentiment declined to roughly 500–600 posts per day, while neutral sentiment steadily increased. By November 18, neutral posts made up the majority of online conversation. This shift did not indicate a loss of interest in the issue; instead, it suggested that the discussion had transitioned from emotional reactions to information-sharing. As the initial shock stabilized, users increasingly focused on posting updates, sharing news articles, and offering general commentary while awaiting further developments from the league and invEmotion analysis added important context to these sentiment trends by revealing the underlying feelings driving online conversations. Neutral emotion was the most common overall, largely due to news summaries, article sharing, and informational posts. However, during the

peak of the crisis, disgust and fear emerged as the leading emotions expressed by users. Disgust appeared most often in posts that conveyed feelings of betrayal and disappointment toward the players involved and the league as a whole. Fear, on the other hand, was closely tied to reports of organized crime and federal investigations, which raised concerns that extended beyond basketball and into broader issues of corruption and integrity.

Notably, this sense of fear and uncertainty persisted longer than the initial anger or disgust. While emotional intensity gradually declined, uncertainty remained as audiences waited for further clarification and official updates from the league and investigators. Overall, sentiment and emotion trends followed a clear and predictable pattern: an initial wave of shock and anger, followed by fear and uncertainty, and eventually a more neutral but cautious tone. The early emotional intensity underscored the seriousness of the public reaction and highlighted the potential for long-term trust issues if the situation is not addressed with transparency and accountability.

Why Tracking This Matters

Monitoring sentiment and emotion during a crisis provides real-time insight into how audiences are interpreting and reacting to the situation. For the NBA, tracking these trends helped illustrate how fans, media, and the general public processed the gambling scandal as new information emerged and the investigation unfolded. This analysis made it possible to understand not only *what* people were saying, but *how* they were feeling at different stages of the crisis.

Sentiment data also indicated whether the situation was escalating or beginning to stabilize. The sharp surge in negative posts on October 23 signaled immediate concern, outrage, and loss of trust, showing how quickly the issue moved beyond routine sports discussion. In

contrast, the later rise in neutral sentiment suggested that the initial shock had decreased and audiences were shifting toward information-seeking behavior, such as sharing updates and waiting for official responses. This insight is essential for assessing whether communication efforts are aligning with public expectations and whether additional transparency, reassurance, or action is needed to manage the crisis effectively.

Emotion data identifies deeper reactions. Disgust reflects moral disappointment, which can damage long-term trust. Fear signals broader concerns related to corruption or safety. When these emotions dominate, organizations must respond with clarity, transparency, and consistency.

Tracking both sentiment and emotion guides crisis communication strategy. Because fear and disgust were the strongest emotions in the early stages, the NBA's response must focus on rebuilding trust, clarifying facts, and demonstrating control. This information helps determine whether audiences need reassurance, explanations, or accountability measures.

Overall, sentiment and emotion tracking supports informed decision-making. It shows what audiences care about, how concerns evolve, and what communication steps are necessary to limit further damage.

What Are Your Publics Saying About This Problem/Issue

The public is partly surprised, disappointed, and sad (shown in figures 1 & 2); the fans' and the general public's reaction is largely one of shock that well-known NBA figures have been caught in this scandal, mixed with disappointment because it threatens trust in game outcomes. This tone is reflected across major sports outlets covering the arrest and indictments. Multiple media outlets are reporting wrongdoing and legal actions. Outlets report detailed allegations (arrest, indictments, descriptions of schemes using insider NBA information and rigged poker

games) and quote prosecutors and law enforcement sources. The sports community is critical and demanding accountability. Sports analysts, commentators, and many fans are sharply critical of the people involved and the organization they represent; fans are demanding consequences and stronger safeguards to protect integrity. Reporting notes teams placing those involved on leave while investigations proceed. There's a broad public and industry expectation that the NBA will (or should) make its rules more strict, improve monitoring around betting access and information-sharing, and announce regulatory or procedural changes to restore trust. Coverage highlights league statements that the integrity of the game is a top priority, while investigations continue. The NBA received strong hits to its reputation, causing financial risks. Commentators and opinion pieces are already raising the risk to the league's brand and potential long-term legal and financial fallout, signaling a PR and policy problem that may require a sustained league response.

What keywords or hashtags are being used in these conversations?

The social media conversations about the crisis are formed by a combination of highly sensitive terms and hashtags that indicate public concern and extensive media coverage. The most common terms used in posts include scandal, #NBA, gambling, and #betting, which all indicate a clear link between the crisis and concerns about the league's ethics. Furthermore, keywords like troubling, media, Chauncey Billups, investigation, and criminal add to the overall negative tone and highlight the public's focus on potential misconduct. The discussion is also being driven by heavily retweeted content, particularly breaking news postings from major sports journalists and media outlets who were the first to report on the event. Commentary from sports personalities, analysts, and influential fan accounts is often widely shared, and these comments frequently convey surprise, irritation, or speculation, encouraging additional involvement. This

trend suggests that public mood is influenced not just by the facts of the issue, but also by sentiments found in highly visible posts. The recurring phrases, the emotional intensity of shared comments, and the spread of high-engagement retweets all contribute to a narrative that promotes criticism and drives the growth in online conversation.

What retweeted content is driving these conversations?

Retweeted content has played a significant role in shaping and sustaining public conversation surrounding the NBA gambling scandal. Analysis of high-engagement posts shows that the majority of retweets are driven by headline-style news articles, breaking updates from major sports media outlets, and emotionally charged commentary from fans and sports personalities. These retweets have amplified both factual reporting and speculative narratives, accelerating the spread of concern, criticism, and humor related to the scandal.

At the center of these conversations are breaking news posts from established media organizations such as ESPN, CNN, CBS Sports, and national newspapers. Tweets linking to articles announcing arrests, indictments, or federal investigations received high retweet counts, particularly in the first 48 hours after the story broke on October 23. These posts typically used urgent language, emphasized the seriousness of the allegations, and framed the situation as a threat to the integrity of the league. Because these outlets are widely trusted and followed, their posts became primary sources of information that users shared to keep others informed, reinforcing negative sentiment and concern across social media.

In addition to formal news reporting, sports journalists and insiders were major drivers of retweeted content. Individual reporters often shared short updates, clarifications, or behind-the-scenes context that was not yet available in full articles. These tweets were frequently

retweeted because they appeared to offer exclusive or developing information. As a result, journalists became key agenda-setters, shaping what aspects of the scandal audiences focused on—such as gambling regulations, player involvement, or league oversight—rather than allowing the conversation to remain limited to surface-level reactions.

Another highly retweeted category of content involved fan commentary and reaction threads, particularly posts expressing outrage, disbelief, or distrust. Many fans retweeted posts questioning whether player performance had been altered due to gambling or whether games could still be considered fair. These tweets often used rhetorical questions or bold statements, which encouraged engagement and sharing. This type of content directly reflected the fear and disgust emotions identified in the Brandwatch analysis, as fans grappled with the possibility that the integrity of the sport had been compromised.

Humor and sarcasm also emerged as a powerful driver of retweets. Numerous users created jokes, memes, and sarcastic posts about players "altering their performance" or "betting on themselves." While humorous in tone, these posts still contributed to reputational harm by reinforcing the idea that games may have been manipulated. Humor-based retweets helped extend the lifespan of the scandal by keeping it present in daily conversation even as breaking news slowed. This aligns with the sentiment shift observed in the data, where emotional intensity declined but discussion remained active through commentary and cultural references.

A particularly notable trend involved highly retweeted posts mentioning prominent NBA figures, especially LeBron James. Despite not being implicated in the investigation, posts calling for him to be "stripped of titles" or questioning the legitimacy of past championships gained traction due to his visibility and symbolic status within the league. These tweets were frequently

reposted not because of factual accuracy, but because they provoked strong emotional reactions and debate. This reflects how crises can expand beyond those directly involved and begin to affect the reputations of unrelated individuals and the league as a whole.

Thread-based tweets also played an important role in driving engagement. Users created long threads breaking down allegations, summarizing articles, or offering personal interpretations of what the scandal meant for the future of the NBA. These threads were often retweeted by other fans to endorse a particular perspective or to introduce their followers to the discussion. Threads allowed speculation and opinion to coexist alongside factual reporting, blurring the line between verified information and interpretation.

Overall, the most retweeted content combined high visibility, emotional appeal, and simplicity. Short, impactful headlines and strong opinions spread more widely than nuanced explanations. This pattern demonstrates that while accurate reporting initiated the conversation, emotionally charged reactions—whether outrage, fear, humor, or speculation—sustained it. The dominance of retweets centered on headlines and commentary suggests that public understanding of the scandal has been shaped as much by how information is framed and shared as by the facts themselves.

This trend reinforces the importance of proactive communication from the NBA. When official voices are less visible, media narratives and fan speculation dominate retweeted content, allowing criticism and misinformation to spread more easily. Understanding which posts gain traction provides valuable insight into how crises evolve online and highlights the need for timely, clear, and authoritative messaging to guide public discourse.

Suggestions for the Client

To effectively manage the NBA gambling scandal, the league should use its social media platforms as a central tool for transparency, accountability, and trust rebuilding. Because social media is where public concern, speculation, and misinformation spread most rapidly, the NBA must take a proactive and consistent approach rather than allowing outside media to control the narrative.

First, the NBA should issue clear and unified statements across all official social media platforms, including X (Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook. These messages should acknowledge the allegations, recognize public concern, and reaffirm the league's commitment to competitive integrity. Updates should come directly from the commissioner or official league accounts to demonstrate leadership and responsibility. Pinned posts and story highlights should be used to ensure accurate information remains visible as the situation develops.

Second, the NBA should provide periodic updates, even when there are no major developments. Brandwatch data shows that negative sentiment declined as the initial shock passed, but fear and uncertainty remained. Regular communication helps reduce speculation and prevents misinformation from filling information gaps. Short updates explaining investigative progress or reinforcing existing integrity policies can help stabilize sentiment and reassure fans and stakeholders.

Third, the NBA should use Brandwatch insights to identify and address high-impact misinformation. While responding to every negative comment is unrealistic, the league should correct false narratives that gain traction, such as claims that games are widely rigged or that uninvolved players are implicated. Addressing these narratives early can prevent further damage to the league's credibility.

Finally, the NBA should emphasize long-term corrective actions on social media. Communicating strengthened gambling regulations, enhanced monitoring systems, and cooperation with investigators shows that the league is focused not only on addressing the current crisis but also on preventing future incidents. This approach helps shift public conversation from outrage toward accountability and trust restoration.

Signals and Customs Alerts for Future Monitoring

To monitor ongoing risks and future developments related to the gambling scandal, the NBA should implement targeted Brandwatch signals and custom alerts.

One important signal should track sudden spikes in conversation volume related to gambling and integrity. Keywords such as “NBA gambling,” “illegal betting,” “rigged games,” “sports betting scandal,” and the names of players or officials should trigger alerts when mention volume increases significantly. These spikes often indicate breaking news or viral speculation that may require immediate response.

The NBA should also set up sentiment shift alerts to detect rapid increases in negative sentiment or emotions such as fear and disgust. Brandwatch emotion tracking can help identify when public concern is escalating again, allowing the league to adjust messaging before the issue intensifies. Another key alert should monitor posts from high-influence accounts, including major sports journalists, media outlets, and verified commentators. When these voices engage with gambling-related narratives, they often shape public opinion and drive widespread discussion.

Additionally, alerts should be created to identify recurring misinformation or conspiracy-related language. Early detection of these narratives allows the NBA to clarify facts and limit the spread of false claims. Finally, the league should monitor regulatory and

sponsor-related keywords such as “federal investigation,” “charges,” “integrity policy,” and betting partner names. Tracking these terms helps identify when the crisis begins to impact legal, financial, or partnership concerns, signaling the need for escalated communication or policy responses.’

Figure 1:

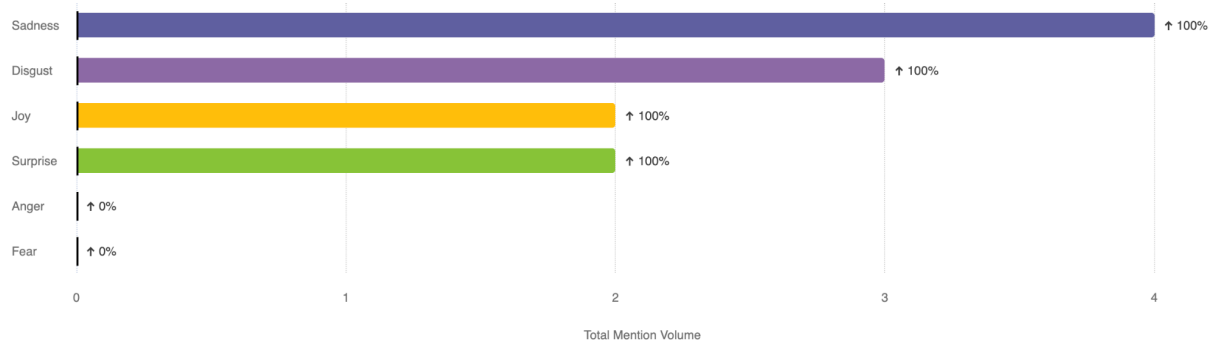


Figure 2:

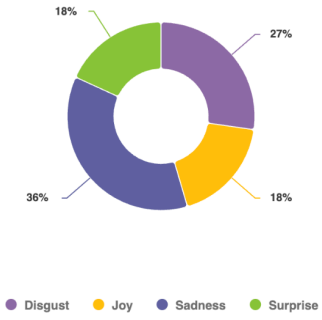


Figure 3:



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