

# *Analyzing the Impact of Barbie Movie on the Barbie Brand*

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**Abstract:** On July 21, 2023, Barbie, the intellectual property (IP) movie of the same name as the Barbie brand, triggered a worldwide pink storm upon its release and drove the Barbie brand's popularity along with its box office success, making Barbie, which is now 65 years old, once again gain a very high level of attention and gain a great deal of revenue. Based on this phenomenon, the purpose of the exploratory was to explore the reasons why the movie would have such a great impact on the brand early. This article mainly took the Barbie movie as a case study, combined the existing data to analyze the business of the Barbie brand, and concluded that the reasons for the success of the Barbie brand's popularity include the launch of the Barbie IP movie that conforms to the brand's tone, the implementation of the strategic policy of co-branding with a number of brands, and the recent explosion of the topic of "feminism." At the same time, this article put forward suggestions for these three reasons why the Barbie brand has been able to continue to be hot: the Barbie brand can continue to launch IP movie sequels; to strengthen the screening of brands that are consistent with the values of the Barbie brand for co-branding; and to expand the scope of brand association.

**Keywords:** IP Movie, Co-branding, Feminism, Barbie

## **1. Introduction**

With the progress of society and the awakening of people's awareness of gender equality, the topic of feminism has become more and more popular. As a result, feminist movies have emerged in recent years. For example, Little Woman released in 2009, Cruella was released in 2021, and so on. This type of movie has gained good results in terms of word of mouth and box office.

On July 21, 2023, Warner Bros. Pictures released a live-action Barbie movie globally. Greta Gerwig directs the fantasy-themed film, which stars Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling. The film narrates the tale of Barbie, who resides in Barbie Land and enjoys an idyllic existence. However, a series of unfavorable circumstances abruptly confront her, prompting her to question the meaning of her existence. In an attempt to uncover the truth, Barbie and her partner Ken embark on a journey to the real world. Following its release, the movie garnered \$337 million in its first week at the box office, igniting a global sensation. Despite only earning 2.4% of its opening day revenue in mainland China, the film managed to surpass \$100 million at the box office on the sixth day after its release, marking a significant deviation from the previous norm. Ultimately, Barbie generated a total of US\$1.442 billion in global box office revenue, with an additional US\$252 million from the mainland box office. This achievement secured the title of 2023 champion, placing Barbie in the top 10 highest-grossing films globally.

The live-action Barbie movie's success has made the once-forgotten Barbie brand popular again. The Barbie brand started out with an audience of girls aged 3–12 years old and gradually expanded to young and middle-aged women. However, after the release of the Word Barbie movie, Barbie and other brands began to collaborate, gradually becoming more popular, as well as gaining the attention of consumers across the country. Barbie's popularity is outside of movie theaters and frequently out of the loop. The movie inspired many viewers to wear pink, giving Barbie's representative color, once dubbed "Death Barbie Powder," a new meaning of "bravely pursuing oneself."

In addition, Barbie has not only received a lot of attention in real life but has also been extensively studied and explored by scholars in the academic industry, such as: Yang has come to the conclusion that "feminism" is a necessary value system in the process of promoting the Barbie movie, exploring the symbols that appear in the Barbie movie [1]. Scholars Zhang and Zhang used case analysis to come to the conclusion that the Barbie brand needs to persist in creative transformation so that brand products can be recognized by the world and accepted by the majority of consumers [2]. By analyzing the subtitle of Barbie, the scholar Jie Liu concludes that the translation of the subtitle should pay attention to the application of feminist translation theory [3]. By balancing the relationship between language and gender, gender equality awareness in subtitle translation can be improved [3].

Although there is a large body of literature related to Barbie, most scholars focus only on the movie field or the economic field alone. There is a lack of connection and exploration of the business model between the movie and the brand to address the question, "Why does the Barbie movie have such a big impact on the Barbie brand?" This question is analyzed in depth to discover the reason behind the positive feedback brought to the Barbie brand by the intellectual property (IP) movie, so this article will focus on the business impact brought to the Barbie brand by the Barbie movie to analyze and come up with a marketing model for the Barbie brand for other developing brands to learn from.

This article will first take the "Barbie" movie as a case study, provide a detailed analysis of the changes brought to the Barbie brand after the release of the movie, introduce and explain the phenomenon of business and consumer behavior after the release of the movie, and then combine the Barbie brand-related business data to argue the reasons for it. Finally, according to the analyzed reasons for the future development of the Barbie brand, I will give you reasonable suggestions so that it is further stabilized for the maintenance of commercial value.

## 2. Case Description

Ruth Handler founded the Barbie brand and first introduced it on March 9, 1959. Barbie is an American artistic image, movie, and television character. Its brand owner, Mattel Toys (Mattel), is a world-class toy company; she is not only leading the world in the design, production, and sales of doll products, but also the United States business brand and the symbol of the cultural industry. Barbie since its birth has been in a continuous process of exploration, improvement, and innovation; its design concept has always followed the mainstream concept of the times and the brand culture into the design of a number of stunning global "Barbies" so that she has more identity [2]. According to the data disclosed by the Economist in 2002, in the United States, 3 to 11-year-old girls have an average of 10 Barbie dolls per person; in 2009, the global sales of Barbie dolls were more than 1 billion, and nine out of ten American girls have Barbie dolls. Barbie, born 65 years ago, launched not only toys but also Barbie-animated movies, beauty, clothing, magazines, and other products [2].

Barbie's business path is not all smooth; with the development of time and change, today's video games are gradually replacing physical toys. According to Mattel's release of the fourth quarter of 2022, the full-year financial report shows that in 2022, Mattel shares fell 10%, Barbie sales fell 11%, and in the fourth quarter, there was a sharp decline in total sales, which decreased by 33% year-on-year [4].

However, the release of the "Barbie" live-action movie sparked a huge positive response, leading many viewers and consumers to perceive Barbie not just as a toy, but as an embodiment of the "independent woman" spirit. According to Statista, the toy maker's annual net sales fell from \$6.5 billion to \$4.5 billion from 2013 to 2018. With the official announcement of the Barbie movie's production in 2021, the brand's net sales reached their highest level since the 2013 downturn, reaching \$1.7 billion [5].

At the same time, Barbie's popularity has also attracted the attention of many brands, triggering individual categories of co-branding.

In terms of clothing, Zara co-branded Barbie, launched the Barbie capsule series, Crocs launched the Barbie series of shoes, Nike launched the "Barbie powder" Air Max Scorpion, and even the Chinese gold jewelry brand ZHOUDAFU launched the Barbie co-branded gold necklace. In the beauty sector, NYX revived the Barbie brand. In cosmetics, NYX restored Barbie cosmetics in the movie; BANILA CO launched Barbie co-branded makeup bags; about meals, Heytea and Holiland have launched Barbie pink drinks and desserts; according to statistics, after the release of the "Barbie" movie, Barbie and more than 100 brands have launched co-branding. These co-brandings also allow the Barbie brand to bring in a rich income. According to investment bank Stifelstifel's analysis, the Barbie movie, after the release of the Barbie brand, belongs to the company Mattel, which brought in \$100 million in revenue after the Barbie brand was released. Such performance has a direct impact on the Mattel share price. In 2023, Mattel's share price has accumulated about a 20% rise; Mattel's market capitalization of \$7.26 billion, from the beginning of the year, rose nearly \$1 billion. In the past month, the company's share price rose by about 20%, up nearly \$200 million in the last month [6].

### **3. Analysis on the Problems**

#### **3.1. Reasons on Launching IP Movie of Barbie**

IP movies are gaining increasing impact in today's market, characterized by the prevalent trends of cross-media communication and cross-border innovation. This is due to their distinct and inherent appeal. In this essay, the term IP specifically pertains to literary works in the cinema and television industry that are eligible for secondary or numerous adaptations and advancements. Regarding the term "Barbie," the majority of people may perceive it as merely a brand that markets plastic toys and has progressively lost prominence in the public eye. Barbie's sales have consistently declined over the past few decades. The Barbie brand targets the cross-media communication market by releasing a movie based on the same name in order to increase brand revenue. The Barbie movie's release brings the Barbie brand back into public consciousness. Furthermore, the Barbie movie's central principle of "feminism" has caused a change in the brand's target demographic, expanding it from young girls between the ages of 3 and 12 to encompass women and even men of all age groups. The success of the Barbie movie launch has significantly boosted the brand's recognition, resulting in more business partnerships and increased revenue for Mattel.

An article by Haoyu Gu and others looks at the development strategy of cultural communication in IP films. It demonstrates that, in today's diverse media communication background, releasing an IP film with the same name that shows current social phenomena and the spirit of the times is a good way to build a high-quality IP [7]. This further proves that the launch of the Barbie IP movie, which aligns with the brand's "independent" and "free" character, has helped the brand's popularity.

#### **3.2. Reasons on Brand Corporation Strategy**

Barbie's strategic policy of co-branding with a wide range of brands has further enhanced its commercial value, with a certain degree of popularity and awareness.

Since the introduction of the Barbie movie, Mattel, Barbie's firm, has co-branded with over 100 companies and retailers to produce Barbie variants, and the extent of co-branding is extensive. Barbie and Gap, Zara, and many other clothing brands have launched a Barbie co-branded series; in jewelry, Barbie and jewelry brand HEFANG launched Barbie dog necklaces and earrings; and Chinese traditional gold brand ZHOUDAFU launched Barbie gold necklaces; and in beauty, Barbie and NYX, O.P.I., Colorkey, and other brands co-branded makeup with Barbie elements, color cosmetics, and other brands. Barbie-inspired makeup, nail art, eyewear, and other products; in terms of food, Burger King, HeyTea, and other firms collaborated with Barbie to produce pink-themed burgers and beverages. Barbie's co-branding extends not only to offline physical things but also to online gaming platforms, with the release of the pink automobile driven by Barbie and Ken in the film Forza Horizon 5 under the banner of Microsoft Corporation. Barbie's co-branding is extensive, which not only generates a significant amount of income for the Barbie brand but also increases the popularity and objective sales of the products that co-brand with Barbie. For example, HeyTea introduced a new product co-branded with Barbie, "Barbie Powder—Narcissus," as well as a series of activities that drew a large number of customers to taste and visit after its launch. According to Xi Tea data, "Barbie Powder—Narcissus" sold approximately 3 million cups in the first week of the new year, placing #1 on the company's list of new goods for the year. Even with a live broadcast, "Barbie Powder—Narcissus" ranked first on the Jittery Voice food brand list and third on the national life services list.

Scholar Fan Yu's analysis of successful co-branding marketing cases demonstrates that brands prioritize high adaptability and comprehensive cooperation when opting for co-branding [8]. So that the Barbie brand can get more exposure and more objective revenue.

### 3.3. Reasons on the Rise of "Feminism"

As society evolves and progresses, feminism and diversity become increasingly important. The Barbie brand introduced a variety of jobs, skin colors, Barbie dolls, and Barbie movies to convey the fundamental theme of encouraging girls to be brave enough to be themselves, reflecting the contemporary popular topic of "feminism." The Barbie brand capitalized on "feminism" to generate a wave of traffic.

The Barbie brand's core message is to encourage women to live their own lives within the context of equal rights for men and women. This aligns with the recent surge in the topic of "feminism" and the content of the Barbie movie, which underscores the importance of girls constantly challenging gender stereotypes, adapting to changing times, pursuing their own interests, and spearheading a campaign to showcase the power of women. The slogan "Barbie can do anything" has empowered many girls. Under the wave of "feminism," more and more people begin to be brave enough to be themselves and show "self-confidence and beauty," and Barbie is the embodiment of "feminism." People dress in pink and head to the cinema to watch Barbie movies, or they upload videos featuring Barbie elements on TikTok and add the Barbiecore tag, which has garnered up to 60 billion views and continues to grow. Barbie has gained unprecedented attention, boosting her sales.

According to scholar Ruirui Li's article, through marketing, the brand effectively blends feminist ideas with its own brand concept, aligning with the evolving ideologies of today's women [9]. This approach aims to spark social discourse, promote feminist ideas, boost product sales, and foster the awakening of women's consciousness in society [9]. Thus, it further proves that feminism gives a certain commercial value to the Barbie brand.

## **4. Suggestion**

### **4.1. Suggest on the Continuous Launch of IP Movies**

Based on the analysis of how Barbie's launch of the IP movie has helped turn the brand around, it can be inferred that the Barbie brand has expanded the brand's audience by launching the IP movie of the same name, thus adding unprecedented heat to the brand. Therefore, this paper suggests that if the Barbie brand wants to gain sustained revenue through the launch of the IP movie of the same name, it should do so on a consistent basis.

After the Barbie brand released the live-action IP movie of the same name in 2023, the film not only matched Barbie's worldview in terms of story setting, but it was also appropriate for all ages. As a result, a large number of viewers who learned about the brand through the film have grown, and their perception of the company has shifted from "passersby" to "fans." To boost user stickiness, Barbie should release sequels to the movie for all ages at regular intervals, ensuring that the audience that enjoys Barbie movies continues to pay attention to the Barbie brand.

The "Lego" brand's strategy reflects Barbie's evolution in this regard. In terms of Lego's marketing approach, the IP movie "The Lego Movie" was released in 2014, resulting in a considerable jump in toy sales. As a result, Lego released the IP movies The Lego Batman Movie and The Lego Movie 2 in 2017 and 2019, respectively, and both were well received, boosting Lego toy sales. Lego also plans to release The Lego Batman Movie 2 in 2025, which would further boost the brand's popularity.

### **4.2. Suggestion on Selecting Brands that Match the Brand Tone for Collaboration**

By engaging in brand co-branding, Barbie increases its commercial value. The co-branding strategy of integrating the Barbie brand with other companies can be deduced to enhance the ongoing visibility of the Barbie brand, hence augmenting the company's objective revenue. Hence, this paper proposes that the Barbie brand should use a more stringent approach in selecting co-branding partners who align with its brand values in order to sustain revenue growth through brand co-branding.

The Barbie brand mainly emphasizes the values of independence and autonomy, so in the future, when the Barbie brand selects the co-branding target, it should pay attention to the audience for independent women and, at the same time, the brand with inclusiveness as the cooperation target. Additionally, Barbie should prioritize collaborating more with leading, well-known brands rather than solely focusing on co-branding revenue with unknown brands, as this could negatively impact the brand's reputation and lead to consumer dissatisfaction.

Scholars Di et al. state in their articles that, from an economic perspective, a brand's co-branding marketing strategy not only boosts the value of its own brand but also broadens its influence across various fields [7]. From a social perspective, co-branded goods not only circulate in the market but also cater to consumers' diverse needs and consumption concepts [7]. Designers use diverse needs and consumption concepts to enhance the brand and company's reputation [7]. As a result, this article suggests that Barbie brands should continue to co-brand with brands that match the brand's tone in order to maintain their popularity and gain sustainable competitiveness.

### **4.3. Suggestion on Expanding the Scope of Barbie's Brand Associations**

Based on the analyzed rise of "feminism" in today's society, it can be deduced that the Barbie brand and "feminism" have formed a brand association, and thus the Barbie brand is catching up with the "feminism" trend. This is the reason why the Barbie brand is catching up with the "feminist" trend, thus increasing traffic for the brand.



In this regard, this paper suggests that if the Barbie brand wants to continue to gain public attention through brand association and maintain a high frequency of public discussion, it should create more brand association terms.

Barbie can extend the buzz of the "feminism" craze by creating additional brand-associated words that will persist in conversations. For example, the Barbie brand can be extended with the brand association of "feminism" to establish the brand association keywords of diversified aesthetic standards, advocating bold self-expression, self-confidence, and health. Thus, in the future, when people see beautiful and confident women who are free from popular aesthetics and brave enough to live their own lives, they will assert themselves as "Barbie" and thus discover many "real Barbies" in their lives. This makes the Barbie brand not only represent Barbie dolls, such as plastic toys, but people clarify that Barbie can be associated with women's independence and self-confidence brand image, so that Barbie becomes a spiritual and cultural force, so that the brand has a subtle influence on consumers.

Scholars Shijian Deng et al. have proven in their article that brand functional associations significantly enhance consumers' brand attachment more than product functional associations [10]. Therefore, this article argues that by expanding the scope of Barbie's brand associations, the Barbie brand can continue to influence consumers with its culture, spirit, and lifestyle after the "feminism" craze has passed and thus accomplish greater commercial success.

## 5. Conclusion

In today's increasingly competitive market environment, Barbie, a brand whose revenues had once gone downhill, has succeeded in turning the tide by launching the Barbie IP movie. Therefore, this article analyzes the business aspects of the Barbie brand, discusses how the Barbie movie had such a great impact on the Barbie brand, analyzes the reasons behind it, draws conclusions and looks forward to the future development of the brand.

First, through the reading and exploration of related literature and the analysis of existing data, this essay systematically summarizes the background of the Barbie brand, its market positioning, and the substantial positive impact of the Barbie movie on the brand. Secondly, it combines the explore results of other scholars on IP movies, co-branding marketing, and the value of feminism to brand marketing, and concludes and demonstrates the main reasons for the Barbie brand's popularity. Subsequently, it combines the case of LEGO brand's sustained popularity through the launch of the IP movie; and other scholars explore literature on brand co-branding and brand association, and puts forward the suggestions for the sustained popularity of the Barbie brand.

The main contribution of this article is to analyze the reasons for the popularity of the Barbie brand in detail, and to make suggestions for the brand's subsequent marketing strategy, so as to provide a reference value for other brands in the same context as the Barbie brand.

At the same time, the shortcomings of this article are: the analysis of the Barbie brand business is only based on the existing data, phenomena on the surface of the analysis, the lack of internal management of the Barbie brand on the deeper level of the discussion. Therefore, in the subsequent related investigate can be carried out through in-depth interviews with employees employed in the Barbie brand, so as to obtain the Barbie brand's internal management system or product placement strategy, which can fundamentally analyze the Barbie brand's business, and give more comprehensive and detailed suggestions for the brand's future development.

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