

Analyzing the Commercial Success of the Film Barbie

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Abstract: The movie "Barbie" was released globally in 2023 and has garnered a large fan base worldwide, achieving significant artistic and commercial success. This article focuses on analyzing the reasons behind "Barbie's" commercial success, primarily covering the global influence of the Barbie IP, its alignment with current pop culture trends, the feminist core of the film, and aspects of its production, including the cast, music, set design, and scenery. Through this analysis, the article confirms Barbie's success in the global box office market. The success of "Barbie" has resonated with a wide range of social groups and has encouraged the spread of feminism. The social impact of "Barbie" is substantial enough to leave a mark on the milestone of film production for the movie and its production team. This commercially successful film with a feminist core is also set to spark a wave of thought in Hollywood and worldwide, encouraging and promoting the flourishing of feminism and feminist films.

Keywords: Film, Commercial success, Feminist, Barbie.

1. Introduction

In the past decade, filmmaking technology has been innovated, and along with the innovation of public thinking, filmmaking has ushered in new opportunities for its prosperity. The development of movies has become more diversified, and its core is also changing with the changes in modern popular thinking. Different ideological trends significantly influence movies, whether in terms of artistic techniques or narrative methods. Feminism, a topic that has received much attention online and outlined in recent years, has gradually appeared in public society in films. Barbie was published in 2023, directed by Greta Gerwig, and starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling. It is a film that combines the genres of comedy, fantasy, and satire. It is mainly about how Barbie and Ken are enjoying the time of their life in the colorful and seemingly perfect world of Barbie Land. However, as soon as they have the chance to travel to the real world, they discover the advantages and drawbacks of living among humans [1]. The film has received a lot of controversy since it has been published. Although the film received controversial reviews and comments from the outside world, it is undeniable that the film has achieved significant commercial success in the international market. In the United States, Barbie has grossed a total of \$636,238,421. Internationally, Barbie has grossed \$809,400,000. The global box office totaled \$1,445,638,421 [2]. As box office receipts are the easiest to obtain—a movie's lifecycle in a theater is significantly shorter than that of a rental store—they are frequently used to gauge a movie's commercial success [3]. In fact, Barbie is currently placed 15th in the world regarding total box office revenue. The difference between Barbie's global box office revenue and the current world's number one movie (movie with the highest global box office), Avatar,

which has a total box office revenue of \$2,923,706,026 and was released in 2009, is just \$147,806,760 [4]. Barbie is enough to prove its commercial success. Most of the existing essays on the movie Barbie are based on feminism and marketing strategies, but few essays systematically analyze the reasons why the movie achieved such commercial success. This essay examines the factors contributing to "Barbie's" financial success. It discusses the Barbie IP's widespread influence, how well it fits in with contemporary pop culture, the movie's strong feminist message, and various production elements like the cast, soundtrack, set design, and scenery. Through analyzing the factors behind Barbie's success, this essay provides an in-depth interpretation of the movie Barbie from a commercial perspective and responds to some of the outside world's controversies about the movie Barbie. Furthermore, using Barbie as a case study, this essay analyses the factors that are indispensable for making a commercially successful film, aiming to encourage filmmakers to consider how to improve the commercial value of films from multiple perspectives during film production. In addition, this essay also mentions the content related to feminism, pointing out the increasingly prosperous status of feminism in the current social environment. This article collects literature and materials and combines actual cases to deeply analyze the attractive and unique parts of the movie Barbie from the perspective of filmmakers and audiences. The main objective of this research is to identify and analyze the key factors that contributed to the commercial success of the Barbie film. This includes understanding how the film's alignment with contemporary cultural trends, the strength of the Barbie brand, its feminist narrative, and its artistic choices in music, dance, and casting all came together to create a landmark film. This study aims to explore the broader impact of the success of a feminist film on the international film market and international feminism.

2. Analysis

There are several reasons why Barbie has been so successful commercially:

1. The attention and traffic of Barbie IP
2. The theme of the film is in line with modern trends, that is, the feminist core of the film itself
3. The film production and production team: music, dance, set design and actors/actresses

The success of this movie is also inseparable from its attractive plot and professional shooting techniques. But these factors are very common in today's Hollywood movie model. This article tends to analyze the reasons outside the Hollywood movie model. The following will conduct an in-depth analysis of the above reasons.

2.1. Barbie IP's Popularity and Traffic

Barbie brand-specific intellectual property is estimated to be worth \$701 million by Brand Finance, a brand valuation firm that conducted calculations prior to the film's release [5]. Most people, girls or boys, ten-year-old boys, and girls or forty-year-old men and women, know Barbie. Since her 1959 debut, Barbie, the well-known doll, has consistently drawn critical attention. Barbie is an appropriate and primary child toy, but she also plays a secondary role in popular culture as a depiction of women. This has drawn a lot of attention to Barbie. Barbie isn't your typical toy. She imitates the feminine shape. In the make-believe games that kids play with her, she represents women. She serves as a tool for creative self-imaging. Barbie poses unique challenges for feminist aestheticians who are philosophical and cultural in origin because of her secondary status as a woman's image. The acting profession's impact on female representation, America's fondness for public figures, and the implicit roles iconic figures play in defining the qualities of female beauty are all examples of the former [6]. In fact, since its release in 1959, Barbie has brought new concepts to society and set off a wave of thought. The editorial's ("Raise now...pay later," a two-page editorial in the 1959 October issue of *Mademoiselle* magazine) economic perspective highlights the need for people to use credit and

installment plans while making financial plans, as well as the pressure women faced in the 1950s and 1960s to become mothers. During this time, marketing aimed to strengthen the position of women in the house. For this reason, Barbie's 1959 release stood in stark contrast to the way women had been depicted for almost ten years. In tandem with the feminist movement that was to gain momentum in the 1960s, Barbie alternated between subverting and embracing the sexist conventions of the 1950s and 1960s [7]. Barbie dolls are only one aspect of the Barbie IP. The Barbie IP also has its own animated series, animated movies, and a series of derivative peripherals. There are 40 Barbie movies in total. The first Barbie movie, *Barbie in the Nutcracker*, was released in 2001. The latest Barbie animated movie, *Barbie: Big City, Big Dreams*, was released in 2021 [8]. It can be seen that Barbie IP has a strong influence in the world. The marketing and commercial value brought by Barbie IP in the movie *Barbie* cannot be ignored. Let's take a simple example. An ordinary consumer wants to buy a pair of sneakers. In the same price range, there are two brands of sneakers: one is Nike, and the other is an unknown manufacturer. Most consumers will choose Nike. This is the impact of the brand. The decision-making process that consumers use to make purchases is influenced by the brand. Brands enlighten consumers about their products and establish connections in their minds that influence their decision to buy. Brand awareness is a crucial area of study for consumer behavior research. An effective marketing campaign can initiate a positive brand perception and positive brand associations, leading to positive brand perception and purchasing behavior. A brand, in the eyes of the consumer, stands for a certain value. There would be no way to differentiate one product or service from the other without the psychological connection [9]. This theory also applies to the film industry. Consumers will choose the movies they want to watch. Consumers' choices are also influenced by brands. A well-known brand like Barbie naturally attracted more viewers to the movie *Barbie*, thereby increasing its commercial value. The movie *Babie* incorporates the Barbie IP into the promotion and the movie itself. Therefore, the IP has a great impact on the box office of movies. It can be seen that creating a movie with great commercial value can rely on factors other than the movie itself to increase its popularity.

2.2. The Feminist Core of the Film

Feminist film - *Barbie*: *Barbie* is a feminist film. The production firm is dedicated to using movies as a means of empowering women. In order to start the production of *Barbie*, Margot Robbie partnered with Warner Brothers and Mattel Pictures. Head Executive of Mattel Films Robbie Brenner declared that she was adamant that a woman needed to write the *Barbie* movie since she thought a woman could best represent female empowerment. Brenner stated: "I think we felt pretty strongly that it needed to be told from a woman's point of view. Not to say that a man can't do it. But I think for 'Barbie,' this is the ultimate female-empowerment movie. It's in the DNA of the movie. I think we all felt like it should be a female". The *Barbie* movie's creators placed a high priority on telling a real female story that empowers women, as seen by their choice of a female director and their collaboration with a feminist film business on coproduction [10]. Not only in terms of production, the core idea conveyed by this film is also based on feminism. The popularity of fourth-wave feminism in bringing feminist discourse into the mainstream—or just another co-optation of feminist ideas—is best demonstrated by *Barbie*. They also investigate how the movie negotiates issues that affect modern women, such as intersectionality, the manosphere, women's limitations and aspirations, and cultural definitions of femininity [11]. One of the strongest feminist thinking that *Barbie* expresses is when women are no longer expected to only be dutiful daughters, devoted wives, or nurturing mothers; men are also freed from the pressures of traditional responsibilities. *Barbie* is also a film about possibilities. It presents Barbie in various roles—President, writer, narrator, and more—emphasizing the idea that Barbie can be anyone, and women can be anything they aspire to be. This message is pretty important in a world where women are often constrained by societal expectations.

In recent years, with the feminist movement and the liberation of women's thoughts, feminism has ushered in a new opportunity for development. Feminism has become a "correct thought" widely accepted by the public. Although many people are not feminists, the influence of feminism is gradually showing up in people's lives and work, such as the equal working mechanism for men and women and more female national leaders. Feminism has become a popular culture nowadays. This has also made feminism an increasingly popular subject among filmmakers. More feminist films have appeared on the big screen, which has also attracted a large number of female audiences and feminist supporters to the cinema. For now, feminist films are different from traditional Hollywood films. There are significant differences between the two regarding shooting techniques and storylines. And this just highlights the uniqueness of feminist films. Now, movies of this type are novel and unique enough to increase their commercial value. In addition, Barbie movies have a wide audience. The feminist concepts conveyed in it, such as Barbie being everyone and encouraging women to pursue different careers, are very direct and clear. Because of the popularity of the topic of feminism itself, the audience's expectations for the film will increase. During the release of this film, its feminist core was also promoted many times. Let most of the audience understand the feminist concepts conveyed in it, thereby increasing the dissemination and popularity of the film.

2.3. The Production of Film

The production of the Barbie movie is also an essential reason for its huge commercial success. From the audience's perspective, good movie images are more attractive. The Barbie production team is undoubtedly competent. The background design with blue, pink, and white as the primary colors to echo Barbie makes the movie images more distinctive. This color combination reflects the dreamy color of the picture and creates a real Barbie fantasy park. In addition, the musical performances interspersed in the movie also make the movie more vivid and exciting. This musical performance form is very common in animated films, especially Disney films. Among them, "I'm Just Ken," which was performed by Ryan Gosling in the film Barbie, won the Best Song at the 2023 Critics' Choice Awards [12]. In addition to the film's production team, the actors of Barbie also attracted many audiences for the film. Barbie's females lead and producer, Margot Robbie, has won 34 awards and 180 nominations [13]. Her most well-known role is Harley Quinn in Suicide Squad. The actor who plays Barbie's boyfriend Ken in Barbie is Ryan Gosling. He is also a well-known actor. Elberse finds that a star participation indeed positively affects movies' revenues; specifically, stars can be "worth" several millions of dollars in revenue. Moreover, the author shows important determinants of the magnitude of that effect: stars' prior performance in an economic and artistic sense and the number and prior performance of other star cast members [14].

After analyzing the above reasons, it can be concluded that the commercial success of the movie Barbie is due to many factors. Professionalism and uniqueness are indispensable in film production. The analysis angle of this article is limited and does not cover the professional fields of marketing and film production. The evaluation of a movie is bound to be controversial. As people discuss it, the popularity of the movie also rises. More discussions and research based on this movie can promote the development of the film industry and feminism.

3. Conclusion

After research, this article found that the original popularity of the Barbie IP, the feminist ideas conveyed by the movie, and the film's production team and actors are all important reasons for Barbie's commercial success. As the result, filmmakers should learn from and draw on the successful model of the movie Barbie. Moreover, society should support the production of more such artistic and popular movies. Finding and evaluating the critical elements that influenced the Barbie movie's

commercial success is the primary result of this study. This entails realizing how the movie's female story, adherence to current cultural trends, power of the Barbie brand, and artistic decisions in dance, music, and casting all combined to make a historic motion picture. The main contribution of this article is to effectively fill the gap in the academic community in the systematic analysis of the case of Barbie as a commercially successful movie, which is conducive to film creators finding new goals in future film production. At the same time, this article also provides a new direction for other researchers to study the movie, Barbie. It is hoped that the academic community can summarize the factors of movie success through the analysis of specific cases to promote the development of the global film industry.

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