

Research on the Influence of Marketing Strategies of Wicked on Its Box Office and Word-of-Mouth Success

Yehao Zhang

*International Education College, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, China
1325706870@qq.com*

Abstract: In recent years, marketing has become a crucial factor in driving both box office success and positive reviews in the film industry. A prime example of this is the movie *Wicked*, an adaptation of the classic Broadway musical, which achieved both commercial success and positive reviews through well-designed marketing strategies. This paper analyzes *Wicked's* marketing methods from the perspectives of integrated marketing communication, social media involvement, and fan culture. Using the 4P marketing mix model combined with data analysis, the study investigates how *Wicked's* marketing efforts contributed to brand awareness, audience reach, and word-of-mouth promotion. The findings reveal that *Wicked's* brand visibility and market penetration were significantly enhanced by its integrated marketing communication strategy, which facilitated efficient collaboration across various promotional channels. The fan economy played a vital role in expanding the audience through word-of-mouth effects and community engagement, which strengthens audience loyalty. Additionally, digital social media marketing, involving targeted content delivery, topic guidance, and user-generated content (UGC), fostered emotional connections and increased audience participation. These strategies collectively led to higher box office revenue and positive reviews, offering fresh insights into innovative marketing practices for promoting cultural products.

Keywords: marketing strategies, *Wicked*, integrated marketing communication, fan economy, social media marketing

1. Introduction

Since its global premiere, *Wicked* has done incredibly well since its global release, shattering box office records in a variety of categories. The movie earned \$164.2 million on its opening weekend worldwide, with North America contributing \$114 million. It not only broke the box office record for movie adaptations of musicals but also became the third-highest-grossing opening film in North America for the year, following *Deadpool 2* and *Inside Out 2*. As of December 29, 2024, its North American box office has exceeded \$411.3 million, and its global box office total has surpassed \$600 million. Furthermore, the picture received remarkable opening ratings of 96% on Rotten Tomatoes and 99% on Audience Score. Over time, as positive word-of-mouth accumulated, its Rotten Tomatoes Fresh score has remained at 90%, with an IMDb rating of 8.1 based on nearly 5,000 user ratings, a Metacritic media score of 72, and a user score of 8.5. It has become one of the most popular musical film adaptations in history [1].

Existing research shows that integrated marketing communication [2-7] and fan economy [8-12] have a significant impact on the market performance of films, especially in the era of digital marketing [13-17]. Social media and interactive platforms have greatly enhanced brand influence and audience engagement through integrated marketing and personalized promotions. These studies reveal how social media platforms, short video platforms, and UGC (user-generated content) promote brand awareness and loyalty through interaction and community-based communication. However, the majority of existing literature focuses on single marketing strategies or platforms. This approach omits a comprehensive examination of how a musical film such as *Wicked* effectively employed a blend of various marketing strategies, particularly social media and digital marketing, to achieve both box office success and high ratings.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the successful global marketing strategies of *Wicked*. Also, this study explores how it effectively integrated marketing communication, fan economy, and social media marketing to improve its market performance. Furthermore, this study employs a case study approach, integrating the 4P model and social media interaction data analysis. It not only helps to understand the best practices of film marketing in the digital age but also offers valuable insights for future film and brand marketing. Particularly, this study gives suggestions on how innovative digital marketing strategies can drive audience emotional engagement, foster brand identity, and increase market penetration.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Application and Effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in the Film Industry

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has shown significant value in the film industry, and its success relies on consistency across channels, message coherence, and synergistic effects [2]. In an environment where both digital and traditional media coexist, effectively integrating media mixes is key to enhancing brand communication effectiveness [3]. By coordinating online information dissemination with offline immersive experiences, IMC improves brand recognition and attracts more audience [4]. Creative strategies, as the primary driving factor behind IMC, transform brand concepts into attractive content, further increasing market penetration [5].

Celebrity endorsements are very essential in film marketing. Audience emotional attachment to stars can transfer to the brand. As a result, it enhances brand appeal [6]. Additionally, entertainment-based content marketing triggers emotional resonance, whereas practical material increases consumer confidence [7]. *Wicked* used star power, integrated media mixes, and original content to achieve both brand communication and market penetration. It provides valuable insights for film marketing practices.

2.2. The Role of Fan Economy in Driving Film Marketing

Fan economy plays a critical role in film marketing because fans' emotional attachment, community interaction, and content creation significantly enhance the effectiveness of brand advocacy [8]. *Wicked* is widely recognized for its adaptation of a famous intellectual property. It benefited immensely from the emotional engagement and interaction of its fan base, which played a key role in driving the film's marketing efforts. Studies show that fan emotional investment not only increases brand endorsement but also positively impacts box office performance and word-of-mouth [9]. Emotional labor has a substantial impact on fans' purchasing decisions and brand support, and long-term emotional involvement brings sustained benefits to the movie's brand [10].

The platform characteristics of tools like TikTok and Instagram, with their interactive features and content display methods, enhance the utility and emotional investment of user-generated content.

This leads to an increase in *Wicked's* marketing effectiveness [11]. The aesthetic quality of social media content positively affects brand likability and loyalty, and high-quality social media content helps boost brand appeal and fan loyalty [12].

3. The Role of 4P model in *Wicked's* Box Office Performance and Public Reception

The 4P model — Product, Price, Place, and Promotion — serves as a crucial framework for film market analysis. Each element of the 4P model is very important in the success of *Wicked's* box office performance and public reception.

3.1. Product

Wicked, as a film adaptation of the famous Broadway musical, inherently possesses strong appeal. First, the originality and fame of the original musical provide the foundation for the film's success. Since its debut in 2003, *Wicked* the musical has accumulated a large fanbase, and the film adaptation effectively retains the core elements and key plotlines of the original, while also offering more detailed explanations of crucial storylines. Therefore, it attracted loyal fans. Furthermore, the star-studded cast, especially the inclusion of Ariana Grande, has attracted the attention of her vast fanbase. The high-quality production of the movie, especially its stunning visual effects and musical performance, enhances its artistic and entertainment value. More importantly, the movie's storyline is well-paced. It mainly focuses on Elphaba's growth and highlights values such as friendship, courage, and loyalty. These common values resonate deeply with viewers and elevate its cultural value and brand identity. This emotional connection has made the movie highly repayable.

3.2. Price

Wicked adopted a flexible pricing strategy combining standard and premium ticket prices. This pricing structure met the needs of different audience groups. For premier and premium tickets, the film employed slightly higher prices to attract early viewers and maximize initial box office revenue. Simultaneously, the film used differentiated pricing to attract audiences in different markets by setting prices for various countries and regions. The aim is to secure the maximum global market share. For special screenings and versions (such as IMAX), premium pricing was applied to further boost revenue. As a powerful brand with established recognition and star power, the film benefited from reduced price sensitivity among viewers, which is also a factor of driving higher box office earnings.

3.3. Place

In terms of distribution channels, *Wicked* ensured wide global coverage through a combination of traditional theaters and digital platforms. The film was released in major markets around the world, such as North America, Europe, and Asia. In this way, it maximizes its market penetration. Furthermore, partnerships with key cinema chains ensured high exposure during both the premiere and subsequent screenings. Later, streaming platforms like Amazon Prime released the film, allowing audiences who couldn't attend theaters to watch it online. This is a good strategy for expanding the audience base. This combination of offline and online distribution channels helped *Wicked* reach a broader market and ensure the film's box office growth through its global distribution strategy.

3.4. Promotion

For promotion, *Wicked* used several avenues to strengthen its marketing efforts. The film conducted extensive promotional activities on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, especially

around the movie's premiere. Ariana Grande, for example, shared behind-the-scenes footage and chatted with followers to improve her social media exposure. Through the use of celebrity influence and fan interaction, the film successfully sparked viewers' interest. The film also partnered with other brands, offering limited-edition goods and joint marketing initiatives that raised visibility while also encouraging audience participation. Additionally, the film expanded its reach through online advertisements and public relations campaigns. All the efforts ensured the film's wide circulation across various platforms, ultimately driving box office and word-of-mouth success.

4. The Effectiveness of Social Media Interaction for Brand Communication

Short video content proved to be particularly effective in content dissemination. Nine of the film's videos exceeded 10 million views, and 57 surpassed 1 million views, indicating broad audience appeal and significant reach. Furthermore, viral marketing and topic-based campaigns successfully attracted attention on short video platforms, sparking interest and increasing emotional engagement. This interactive and personalized approach allowed *Wicked* to stand out in a competitive market, enhancing both brand awareness and consumer loyalty [13,14]. Active social media marketing further bolstered the film's brand image, encouraging consumer purchase behavior and reinforcing loyalty [15].

Moreover, personalized digital marketing strategies, such as precise market targeting and data analysis, enhanced customer engagement and boosted *Wicked*'s box office performance [16,17]. Emotional involvement among fans further amplified brand communication effectiveness. TikTok videos featuring hashtags like “BOQ” (12,700 posts), “Elphaba” (148,800 posts), and “Glinda” (149,000 posts) reflected fans' deep emotional ties to the characters. This deep engagement created a strong identification with the film's brand, effectively driving word-of-mouth marketing.

Social media and digital marketing played a critical role in the marketing campaign for *Wicked*, contributing significantly to its outstanding market performance. By effectively leveraging its official TikTok account and fan culture, the film achieved remarkable results. As of December 29, 2024, the film's official TikTok account had 984,000 followers and posted 118 short videos, totaling more than 34.79 million likes. These statistics highlight the film's extensive influence on social media, showcasing the power of digital platforms in reaching and engaging audiences [18].

In addition to official content, user-generated content (UGC) and social engagement significantly amplified the film's social media presence. Videos labeled with “*Wicked*” and related keywords garnered 1.6 million posts, reflecting active audience participation in content creation. Fans contributed their own videos, such as recreations and reinterpretations of famous movie scenes, fostering strong social interaction and a fan-driven effect. For example, the “Wicked Challenge” hashtag generated over 50,000 posts, showcasing fan creativity and emotional connection to the film. Iconic songs from the movie, including Elphaba and Glinda, accumulated up to 202,500 mentions during the pre-release phase, while other tracks like Popular (89,900 mentions), Defying Gravity (86,600 mentions), and Dancing Through Life (10,600 mentions) became trending topics post-release. These musical elements became not only key points of engagement but also crucial drivers of content dissemination and societal appeal [18].

Through its exceptional use of interactivity, personalization, and immediacy, *Wicked*'s social media marketing achieved widespread dissemination, heightened brand recognition, and a loyal fan base. By combining official content, viral campaigns, and UGC-driven engagement, the film not only strengthened its emotional connection with audiences but also established an exponential brand communication effect, ultimately boosting both its box office performance and positive word-of-mouth.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates how the picture *Wicked* achieves both box office success and favorable word-of-mouth via integrated marketing communication (IMC), fan economy, and social media marketing methods. According to the findings, IMC boosted brand awareness and market penetration by using conventional and digital media synergy. The fan economy, which focuses on establishing emotional ties and community participation, has increased word-of-mouth and broadened the audience base. Social media marketing improved audience engagement through targeted content delivery and user-generated content (UGC), resulting in increased box office growth and positive word-of-mouth.

The study identifies numerous crucial aspects that contribute to the success of movie marketing. The IMC strategy utilized both traditional and digital media. It produced a strong synergistic impact, ensuring widespread media coverage and exposure. Fan economy used emotional marketing and community participation to increase audience loyalty and brand awareness, hence encouraging word-of-mouth. Social media platforms' interactivity and tailored content increased audience participation, and user-generated content (UGC) sharing considerably increased film visibility.

However, issues persist regarding the allocation of resources between conventional and digital media, as well as the customization of fan economy techniques to specific cultural contexts. These concerns are critical to optimizing movie marketing techniques.

Future research could concentrate on the following topics: how emerging platforms, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, can improve audience interaction and emotional connection; and how to use precise market positioning and cultural adaptation in various markets (such as Asia, Europe, and Latin America) to drive global distribution strategies.

This study fills the gap in the literature on marketing strategies for musical-adapted films by demonstrating how IMC, fan economy, and social media marketing drive both box office success and word-of-mouth in the digital age. The research gives valuable marketing insights for the film industry and offers implications for promoting other cultural products.

References

- [1] Box Office Mojo. (2024). *Wicked box office performance*. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com>
- [2] Juska, J. M. (2021). *Integrated Marketing Communication: advertising and promotion in a digital world*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780367443382>
- [3] Kelley, L. D., & Jugenheimer, D. W. (2022). *Advertising media planning: a brand management approach*. *Choice Reviews Online*, 41(06), 41–3527. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.41-3527>
- [4] Chen, Y., Cheung, C. M., & Tan, C. (2018). *Omnichannel business research: Opportunities and challenges*. *Decision Support Systems*, 109, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2018.03.007>
- [5] Blakeman, R. (2023). *Integrated Marketing Communication: Creative Strategy from Idea to Implementation*. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL7925084M/Integrated_Marketing_Communication
- [6] Özer, M., Özer, A., Ekinci, Y., & Koçak, A. (2022). *Does celebrity attachment influence brand attachment and brand loyalty in celebrity endorsement? A mixed methods study*. *Psychology and Marketing*, 39(12), 2384–2400. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21742>
- [7] Geng, R., Wang, S., Chen, X., Song, D., & Yu, J. (2020). *Content marketing in e-commerce platforms in the internet celebrity economy*. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 120(3), 464–485. <https://doi.org/10.1108/imds-05-2019-0270>
- [8] Hung, K. (2020). *Celebrity and influencer in a fan economy*. In *Advances in religious and cultural studies (ARCS) book series* (pp. 323–340). <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3323-9.ch018>
- [9] Rubin, D., Mohr, I., & Kumar, V. (2022). *Beyond the box office: A conceptual framework for the drivers of audience engagement*. *Journal of Business Research*, 151, 473–488. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.07.021>
- [10] Li, Z., & Qu, Z. (2023). *A study of the value of emotional labor in the fan economy*. *Journal of Education Humanities and Social Sciences*, 19, 283–288. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ehss.v19i.11145>

- [11] Zhuang, W., Zeng, Q., Zhang, Y., Liu, C., & Fan, W. (2022). What makes user-generated content more helpful on social media platforms? Insights from creator interactivity perspective. *Information Processing & Management*, 60(2), 103201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2022.103201>
- [12] Bazi, S., Filieri, R., & Gorton, M. (2023). Social media content aesthetic quality and customer engagement: The mediating role of entertainment and impacts on brand love and loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 160, 113778. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113778>
- [13] Khanom, M. T. (2023). Using social media marketing in the digital era: A necessity or a choice. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* (2147-4478), 12(3), 88–98. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i3.2507>
- [14] Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2020). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>
- [15] Wibowo, A., Chen, S., Wiangin, U., Ma, Y., & Ruangkanjanases, A. (2020). Customer behavior as an outcome of social media marketing: The role of social media marketing activity and customer experience. *Sustainability*, 13(1), 189. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010189>
- [16] Antczak, B. O. (2024). The influence of digital marketing and social media marketing on consumer buying behavior. *Journal of Modern Science*, 56(2), 310–335. <https://doi.org/10.13166/jms/189429>
- [17] Arshad, M. S., Ahmad, T., Qasim, M., Ajmal, N. F., Saleem, M., Imran, A., Rehman, I., & Munir, U. (2024). The impact of digital marketing on consumer buying behaviour. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4675400>
- [18] TikTok. (2024). Wicked official account statistics. Retrieved December 29, 2024, from <https://www.tiktok.com/@WickedMovie>