

Innovative Strategies in Movie Marketing: A Case Study of the Barbie Movie

Ruixi Wang *

Annie Wright Schools, Tacoma, Washington, 98004, United States

* Corresponding Author Email: ruixi_wang@aw.org

Abstract. With the rise of the digital media age, there has been a significant shift in viewer behavior, prompting television content producers and networks to actively seek out opportunities to better connect with and enable more active engagement with their digital focus groups. High-profile marketing examples from the movie industry include *Scream* and *Glee 3D*, which highlight the movie industry's innovative approach to engaging audiences in the digital age. Using the movie *Barbie* as a case study, this paper examines traditional and new movie marketing strategies and their application in a changing media landscape. The study finds that digital marketing strategies offer the advantages of broad reach, higher audience engagement, real-time feedback, cost-effectiveness, targeting, and long-term impact, but there are also some limitations. This study provides new ideas about digital marketing for the movie industry and discusses its long-term sustainability, diversification strategies and limitations. Finally, the paper emphasizes that movie marketing in the digital era will provide an important reference for future movie marketing strategies.

Keywords: Movie marketing strategies, Digital media age, Barbie movie.

1. Introduction

Modern Research on TV Audience Behavior shows that between 2011 and 2016, traditional TV viewing (i.e., “linear TV viewing, viewing via a set-top box, whether live or DVR time-shifted viewing”) among viewers aged 18 to 24) dropped by nine hours per week, which reflects a significant decrease of 38%. This new media landscape is forcing TV content producers and networks to find ways to actively leverage social media platforms, which offer greater opportunities to better connect with this digital focus group and achieve more active engagement. Some high-profile marketing examples in the movie industry include *Scream*, which allowed fans to call a mystery number to find the release date, and *Glee 3D*, which allowed selected fans to choose which movies they wanted to watch. Content to watch [1]. These examples highlight the movie industry’s innovative approach to engaging audiences in the digital age.

This new media era has not only changed the behavior of television viewers it has also affected the marketing strategies of the movie industry. Traditional television advertising and promotion channels are no longer sufficient, and movie producers and distributors need to actively leverage digital platforms such as social media to achieve deeper audience engagement and interaction. This article will explore traditional and newer strategies in movie marketing and how they adapt to the changing media environment to attract better and retain audiences [2-3].

2. Case Analysis of Barbie movie

The case study used in this paper to demonstrate an example of digital marketing in the movie industry is the *Barbie* movie. Greta Gerwig directs it and stars Margo Robbie and Ryan Gosling as Barbie and Ken.

2.1. Traditional Marketing Strategy

The plot revolves around Barbie, who travels to the human world to fix things in Barbie Land but coincidentally discovers her identity and purpose in life. Ken follows Barbie into the human world and eventually realizes that his identity comes from within and doesn’t have to depend on Barbie.

The movie is known to be very feminist and acknowledges the body image issues that might be caused by the very unrealistic body proportions of the Barbie doll.

The Barbie movie was launched through Mattel Films, which is under the company Mattel - a toy company known for their creation of the Barbie doll. This movie is their attempt to expand the company to other industries under the supervision of the current CEO, Ynon Kreiz. Kreiz said in an interview that the goal of the Barbie movie is not just to sell Barbie dolls but to create an experience with a societal impact that people would want to watch. The budget for the marketing expenses is estimated to be about \$150 million, and the budget for the movie production is \$145 million. This is unusually high because studios usually spend approximately one dollar more for every two dollars spent producing a movie [4].

A series of Barbie movie posters were released to announce the cast of Barbie. All the posters have a glittery circular background and the word *Barbie* in different colors in front of the person. There is a sentence introducing the celebrity as a doll. For example, the poster with Emma Mackey had the quote: This Barbie has a Nobel prize in physics. Most female celebrities, or the Barbie dolls, have quotes about a career or academic achievement in a male-dominated industry. However, the quotes for the male celebrities, or the Ken dolls, are different. For example, Kingsley Ben-Adir's poster has the quote, "He's Ken too." These poster displays the movie's feminist stance in that all the Barbies get professions while the Kens are just Kens.

Something really interesting about the main trailer is that it displayed the text "If you love Barbie/ This Movie is for you/ If you hate Barbie/ This movie is for you". This shows that the target audience for this movie is not just people who already love Barbie but also people who might not have positive feelings towards Barbies right now. It makes sense since Marttle has faced controversy about their Barbie dolls, and this movie might change some people's attitudes about the company. This movie is also for both the children and adults who love Barbies. Adults might feel nostalgia and get the deeper meaning behind the movie, while kids enjoy one of their toys brought to life by the movie.

There has been a lot of excitement about the movie ever since paparazzi photos were released of the cast filming Barbie in the summer of 2022. Fans tried to guess the movie's plot from the costumes and photos they saw. It was released to the public that Robbie was starring as Barbie with a photo of her in a matching blue dress and headband. The movie has a lot of buzz as the audience anticipates what it will be like.

The first teaser of the Barbie movie was published on December 15, 2022, on Barbie's Instagram account. On that post, the account *barbiethemovie* was tagged. The post had the quote Teaser Trailer Tomorrow in pink text on a blue background. It got 76,683 likes as of today (8/30/2023), and the actual trailer received 436,978 likes. These posts got significantly more likes than the other posts during that period, which averages around 20,000 likes per post. This shows that the movie generated a lot of excitement from audiences from the beginning.

2.2. New marketing strategies

The three new social media strategies discussed in this paper are social media campaigns, user-generated content, and Influencer partnerships.

2.2.1. Social Media Campaigns

Research how platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok were utilized for promotional content. The definition of social media by Kaplan and Haenlein is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Social media marketing has taken huge importance as the number of users is increasing rapidly. "As of January 2020, there are 2.96 billion active social media users worldwide while the number was only 0.96 billion in 2010". "72% of Americans say they ever use social media sites" and are also used more by younger audiences: "some 84% of adults ages 18 to 29 say they ever use any social media site", 81% of "those ages 30 to 49" say this, 73% of "those ages 50 to 64", and 45% of those who are 65 or older say this [5]. The percentages of older people and significantly less on social media mean social media posts are more likely to reach a younger

audience. Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are newer social media platforms that are different because users are very active on these platforms. 70% of Facebook users use the site daily, and 59% of users on both Snapchat and Instagram say they use it daily [5].

2.2.2. User-Generated Content

Encouraging fans to create content related to the movie and sharing it on official channels. User-generated content is a form of earned media, which is 'media activity that a company does not directly generate,' an example of online earned media is reviews and ratings [6]. This is especially important in the 21st century, which is an "era of social commerce", which means that "customers are no longer passive receivers of information from marketers, but they instead interact with each other and the company to influence consumer purchasing and company decision making" [7]. The huge growth in user-generated content (UGC) has a huge impact on current marketing. It means that brand managers can't control the whole image of the brand since they can't control what people say about it [7]. This supports the interactive communication models instead of a linear model, which means both the sender and receiver affect each other and communicate together [8]. Ketter and Avraham state that audiences can play three types of roles in communication. The first one is the audience as a message creator, meaning the audience creates content for people in their social network, and it is beneficial because people will trust information from people they know. The second type is the audience as a distributor, in which case the audience distributes information the brand provides to their social circle. The third type is the audience as a distributor and a message creator, where the audience creates and spreads their content.

2.2.3. Influencer Partnerships

Collaborations with influencers to promote the movie, perhaps using exclusive interviews or behind-the-scenes content. Online influencer marketing (OIM) is a strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, ultimately enhancing firm performance [9]. The definition of influencers in this paper includes celebrities.

2.2.4. Barbie movie - new techniques they used

Some marketing techniques that the Barbie movie used that are new and uncommon in marketing are collaboration with Google, having a color representing the movie, and emphasizing feminism in promoting the movie. The Google page adds special effects when users search for the word "Barbie" or the names of the main actors and directors. The page will turn pink along with the Google logo, which is a sparkly pink, and pink sparkles will fall from the top [10]. This is not commonly done for movies and is a unique strategy used by the marketing team of the Barbie movie. The color pink is so important to the advertisement of the movie that in an interview with the president of global marketing at Warner Bros, Josh Goldstine, he said: "Barbie Pink has been such a part of the brand. This movie has a wonderful girl-power element, and pink became the color of the movie. The concept of Barbie-core coming to life in fashion kept going".

3. Discussion

Digital marketing plays an increasingly important role in the modern marketplace. Firstly, it can reach a wider audience, and digital strategies can more easily reach a global audience than traditional marketing methods. Researchers Stephen & Galak provided strong evidence of the potential of digital strategies by experimenting with data from the microfinance company Kiva and finding that content on social media was more effective in generating additional sales than traditional marketing.

Secondly, digital marketing also has a higher rate of audience engagement. Social media platforms are more likely to reach "highly engaged consumers who want to discuss topics of common interest with like-minded people and are more inclined to buy [11]. This further emphasizes the advantages of digital strategies in interacting with audiences.

Thirdly, digital marketing is also characterized by real-time audience feedback, which allows for more flexibility in adjusting marketing strategies. Online marketing allows companies to track customer behavior more easily, often directly through the platform on which the content is published. They can track the number of views and clicks on online content. Social media posts also allow them to see the level of interaction on each post, such as likes, comments, and shares. Businesses can use this feedback to adjust their marketing strategies to employ the most effective tactics.

Additionally, digital marketing is often more cost-effective, especially if the content spreads quickly. Digital marketing, especially campaigns on social media platforms, only requires companies to invest a little money. Anyone can post content on social media for free, and if the posts become popular, they can attract a large audience.

Another advantage of digital marketing is its ability to pinpoint specific audience segments. Social media platforms have algorithms to recommend relevant content to users based on their interests and behavior. For this to happen, the algorithms must track users' views to know what content they will likely enjoy. The algorithm will automatically recommend its content to the company's target audience. These audiences are already interested in the product and are more likely to purchase it.

Lastly, digital content is persistent; it can remain influential long after a movie is released. Content on social media may be viewed even after the movie is released. For example, people may watch clips of a movie even after it leaves the theater. They may still be interested in interviews with actors, behind-the-scenes footage, and other content related to the movie. Movie studios can continue to make money this way. This long-term impact of a digital strategy is a valuable resource.

4. Conclusion

The movie's digital marketing strategy has positively impacted multiple fronts, thus profoundly impacting the marketing strategies of films in the same comedy/drama genre. This point has implications for the world of movie marketing, as these strategies may become a blueprint for other films, especially within the same genre.

Additionally, marketers must consider whether digital strategies are more sustainable in the long term than traditional approaches. The cost-effectiveness and real-time feedback of a digital strategy bring huge advantages. Still, its sustainability in the long term also needs to be considered, especially in the highly competitive movie market.

Another important aspect is the diversity of movie marketing strategies. While digital strategies have many advantages, more than one strategy is needed. Based on audience feedback, diverse strategies are needed to ensure optimal results. Audience feedback is important because it can guide which strategies to choose and when to adjust.

However, the limitations of this study should also be recognized. First, this is a preliminary or novel study and needs more data and existing literature to support it. Second, the oversaturation of digital content can make audiences feel overwhelmed or overly informed. At the same time, over-reliance on one platform can carry risks, especially if that platform's algorithm changes or loses popularity. When producing content, quantity and quality must be balanced to ensure audience satisfaction.

Additionally, while real-time feedback can be very beneficial for improving your strategy, it can only be clear to your audience if too many strategy corrections occur. Finally, the wrong positioning can alienate potential audiences or waste resources on an audience unlikely to watch the movie. These limitations need to be explored more deeply in future research.

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