

Research on the Marketing Strategy of Barbie Based on the Chinese and German Markets

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Abstract. “Barbie”, a film about women’s awakening, was released this summer. It stimulated discussions regarding women’s independent thinking among internet users and encouraged the economic growth of connected companies. Several well-known brands, including HM, Zara, and other apparel retailers, have seen the development of numerous ancillary products. However, domestic and foreign cinema markets should use distinct marketing strategies due to various cultures and concepts. As representations of Asian and European cultures, China and Germany have diverse historical backgrounds. In order to discover a more effective marketing strategy for the Chinese market and raise Barbie’s box office in China, this essay compares the different methods of marketing used in China and Germany and analyzes the factors that contributed to the lower box office in China. This will not only reduce the pressure but also concentrate the audience, choose to promote the film around the university, increase the sales of the female audience, and attract some male audience simultaneously.

Keywords: Barbie, China, Germany, Marketing strategies.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In recent years, more and more women have become independent. They refuse to accept other people’s descriptions of who they are; they are attempting to shed their identities and make their lives more exciting and diverse. The long-awaited film *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie, promises a feminist reimaging of the iconic Mattel doll [1].

Because countries have various customs and ideas, film distributors use a variety of methods to promote Barbie abroad. As representations of Asian and European cultures, China and Germany have diverse historical backgrounds, and the differentiation of social practices causes the two countries to have significant disparities in values and ways of thinking, resulting in various approaches to Barbie promotion [2].

Based on the 4P marketing theory, this article examines Barbie marketing in China and Germany in light of cultural differences between the two countries. Finally, using the empirical results of the two nations’ box offices, it reviews the main elements influencing the box office and gives specific recommendations for boosting the box office of Barbie in China.

1.2. The Content of Barbie

In *Barbieland*, all sorts of Barbies and Ken live a fairytale 100% perfect life every day. But one day, Barbie notices that her life is changing - her day is no longer smooth sailing, she begins to wonder about the meaning of death, and even her feet are no longer in the shape of flawless high heels - she lands on the balls of her feet. One flaw after another shatters Barbie Land’s calm, and realizing her existential dilemma, Barbie is obliged to journey to the real world to seek the truth, accompanied by Ken, and a tremendous adventure starts. Ken restores human patriarchy by transforming *Barbieland* into an all-male kingdom, mirroring the position of women in the real world. Barbie escapes back to *Barbieland* with the help of her two human friends, only to find that her *Barbieland* has been turned into a *kendom*. This state of affairs nearly breaks Barbie, but with the encouragement and help of her friends, she regains the right to rule *Barbieland*. Gained the dominion of Barbie Land, but after this storm, Barbies and *Kendom* together again to build a new world of mutual respect and tolerance. The

protagonist, Barbie, wants to become a real human with her right to choose and live a different version of herself [3].

1.3. The Marketing Theory of 4Ps

The 4P marketing model was established in 1967 by American marketing management scientist Philip Kotler. The model is based on the marketing mix theory, from the product, place, price, and promotion, four aspects of the system combining the key elements of the success of enterprise marketing. Product marketing focuses on the function of development, requires products to have unique selling points, and puts the functional appeal of the product in the first place. The goal of place marketing is to expand the scope of product marketing by using tangible and intangible channels, such as logistics, information flow, capital flow, etc.; Price marketing is to formulate different pricing strategies according to different market positioning; And promotion marketing is to improve the retention rate of the user by virtue of the concession strategy based on the interaction between the subject and the client of the marketing [4].

1.4. Cultural Differences between the East and the West

In the past, most women were gentle, virtuous, and attached to men. In the Chinese film “Hua Mulan”, Hua Mulan, who made a name for herself by disguising herself as a man, returned to her family in the end, no matter how impressive she was on the Warfield, because only in this way could she comply with the moral norms of the society of that time regarding women’s belonging. The image of Mulan in Chinese tradition also reflects a certain sense of feminism in the pursuit of equality between men and women. In the end, it is still a compromise with reality. This also reflects modern women, who need to work hard in the workplace and take care of their own families. However, although Mulan returns to her family in Disney’s “Mulan”, the transformation of male and female roles in the film and the banter all reflect the more mature feminist consciousness of modern Western culture. The center of Western feminist consciousness is equality between men and women, and women should rely on their own self-improvement and self-struggle to achieve emancipation and development [5]. The different degree of emancipation of women in China and the West is also the reason for the different box office of “Barbie” in China and the West.

2. Description of China and Germany

2.1. The Significance of ‘Barbie’

When Barbie is mentioned this summer, people can always think of it as a pink wave at a time when feminist voices are rising. The emancipation of women’s thinking and the emergence of a large number of Barbie co-branded new products reflect the significance of “Barbie”.

2.1.1 Emancipation of the Female Mind

In the film, it is said that all women’s voices: “We must always be impeccable, but contrary to what we wish, we are always wrong again and again you can never get old, never lose your temper, never show off, never be selfish, never be depressed, never fail, never be timid, never stray from the norm. It’s so difficult. There are contradictions everywhere” This anxiety of suffering in a patriarchal society resonates strongly with most female viewers. Despite the difficulties, it is comforting that Barbie meets Ruth, the real founder of Barbie, in the real world, escapes from the horrible human world and also chooses to be a real human being at the last moment instead of an exquisite and perfect doll manipulated by humans, which is not the current situation of the majority of women in the modern society [6]. They are not willing to continue to do successful men behind the women but bravely come to the front of the stage to be the protagonists of their own lives and live out a different life.

2.1.2 The Market Set off a “Pink Storm”

“Barbie has cured me of my pink shame!” became the most commonly heard words after the release of the Barbie film, and wearing pink clothes to the cinema has also become a trend. Barbie’s representative colour, once dubbed “Death Barbie Pink”, has now been defined as “bravely pursuing oneself” by this film [7].

2.2. Analysing the Chinese market

On July 21, the film Barbie, produced by Warner Bros. Pictures, was released in mainland China. With a high reputation of 8.8 points from Douban’s opening score, the box office reached 8.1 million on the first day. This creates the highest Douban score record of this year’s imported films and the current high reputation of all domestic and foreign summer blockbusters. Seven days after its release, the film has risen from the first day of 2.4% to 10.2% [8].

After a week, there is negative growth; the August box office has only 61.01 million so far. According to the Cat’s Eye professional version of the statistics, “Barbie” total box office is 251 million. Meanwhile, “Legend of the Gods”, released simultaneously, is a magnificent male film with a total box office of 2.545 billion yuan and continues to grow, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2 [6].

Table 1. Barbie’s first-day box office in China

Area	Release Date	Opening	Ending
China	July 21, 2023	\$ 8,100,000	\$251,000,000

Table 2. Barbie in China in July box office

Date	Weekend	%
July 21-23	\$8,100,00	
July 28-30	\$7,200,000	-11.1%

2.3. Analysing the German market

Although the first day in Germany was only around 6.71 million, he was on the positive trend for the next two weeks, even after it fell in August, but still available in cinemas, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3. Barbie’s first-day Box Office in Germany

Area	Release Date	Opening
Germany	July 20, 2023	\$ 6,712,904

Table 4. Barbie in Germany in July and August box office

Date	Weekend	%
July 20-23	\$ 6,712,904	
July 27-30	\$ 8,753,523	+ 30.4 %
Aug 3-6	\$ 7,486,954	- 14.5 %
Aug 10-13	\$ 4,420,679	- 41%
Aug 17-20	\$ 2,873,147	- 35%
Aug 24-27	\$ 2,902,759	+ 1 %
Aug 31- Sep 3	\$ 1,859,678	- 35.9 %

3. Comparison of China and Germany

3.1. 4Ps’ model

The Marketing Theory of the 4Ps is nowadays one of the most popular models for market economic analysis. Therefore, this paper will also use this model to ze the’ Barbie’ marketing strategy in China and Germany. 2.1 the significance of Barbie as a product has already been discussed. Not

only did it create a wave of female liberation, but it also generated a large number of related products. Next, the similarities and differences between Chinese and German marketing strategies will be analyzed from the perspective of Place, Price, and Promotion.

3.1.1 Place

Tickets for Barbie can be easily purchased in China's big cities, where they have a larger schedule, but in smaller cities, it's rare, and many people don't even know about the film. On the other hand, Germany schedules the film in every city, and even offers it in German or with the original English soundtrack so that people can get tickets even in small villages.

3.1.2 Price

The difference in film ticket prices between Germany and China is very large because of the exchange rate. The average price in Germany is 15 euros per ticket, but in China, it is only about 4-5 euros per ticket. Because of the low price of tickets, many Chinese university students are willing to go to see the film, and the film's main audience is also this group of university students. This is also one of the reasons why Germany promotes cinema in university towns. Cinemas in German university towns sometimes offer special screenings, which are later in the day but also relatively inexpensive.

3.1.3 Promotion

1) Similarities

First, a marketing campaign about the expanding wardrobe of this beloved doll has bathed the entire world in bright pink. Billboards and cosmetics, fashion collaborations, frozen yogurt, trailers, and TikTok trends are almost everywhere to see this most popular doll and her companions. With the glamorous marketing campaign, all signs indicate that this movie will succeed. The Barbie doll brand's unique "shopping ability" and browsability on social media give movie audiences the power to dare to wear pink clothes.

Second, promote on social media and release trailers in advance to attract viewers.

Third, discuss the issue of women's independent thinking on social media and attract attention.

2) Differences

First, provide targeted influencer marketing in Germany: Mattel has successfully partnered with well-known influencers to showcase Barbie dolls on social media and increase brand awareness. By responding to modern trends and issues, Barbie dolls still have practical significance in the digital age [9, 10]. Even in movies, the German favorite Burken shoes appeared, greatly increasing the sales of Burken shoes worldwide.

Second, it also held a highly anticipated premiere in the German market.

3.2. Problems in the Chinese market

Barbie's popularity is gradually increasing in major cities in China. Firstly, its duration is less than two hours, which is very friendly for cinemas. The second is that it has captured female users. According to Cat's Eye data, the proportion of women wanting to see users is as high as 79.2%, while the proportion of women wanting to see users in the Lighthouse Professional version is as high as 86.3%, even higher than the summer box office leader "Disappearing She" (the latter's Cat's Eye Professional version data is 76.4%, while the Lighthouse Professional version data is 76.6%). It is far ahead of other summer films.

Although the film has become a hot topic on platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, in addition to its box office performance, the female topics involved in its content have repeatedly made headlines on Weibo. But the box office of "Barbie" was far below expectations, especially in small cities where many cinemas did not go online until it caused a sensation online. However, even so, the production rate was still not high, and it even went offline by the end of August.

3.3. Reason Identified of Problem

Barbie's counter-trend performance is certainly a pleasant surprise. Still, at the same time, the low screening on the first day of release and the reversal of the trend by word-of-mouth has also revealed that its pre-promotion and distribution were not as effective as they should have been.

3.3.1 Outdated marketing strategies

Lighthouse Pro shows that of all the marketing tactics for Barbie, the proportion of trailers is as high as 61.5%, and the proportion of special features is 23.1%. On the other hand, another film, *Gone with Her*, released in the summer and was highly popular with female audiences, had only 14.3% of trailers and 38.1% of featurettes. In addition, the film has used a variety of marketing methods such as music videos, bloopers, launches, announcements, roadshows, and spot screenings. In contrast, the marketing means of "Barbie" is too single, which makes it easy for the audience to lose the sense of freshness [8]

Cat's Eye Pro, on the other hand, shows that the main marketing platform for the filmmakers of Barbie is Weibo, while the main short video platforms for *Gone She* is Jitterbug and Xiaohongshu. In recent years, the number of views of short videos in China has been much larger than that of Weibo, and the audience group is also much larger, so Barbie's attention is much smaller than that of *Gone with Her*.

In addition, the film also held a much-anticipated premiere in overseas markets without arranging for its creators to come to China, which also reduces its presence and can cause some viewers to become dissatisfied.

3.3.2 Inappropriate time period

Barbie was released in mid to late July, traditionally the most competitive summer, and many famous Chinese directors choose to release their films during this period. As a foreign-language female-oriented film, Barbie is difficult to stand out among the many blockbusters. A cinema manager said, "This year's summer slot into July, the blockbusters were released one after another, and the proportion of films that can be given to the schedule is naturally lower than that of ordinary weekday and weekend screenings" [8].

3.3.3 Low film scheduling rate

The low film scheduling rate is also one of the most important reasons for the low box office in China. Many small third- and fourth-tier cities have only 1-2 shows per day in the initial stage, which is much lower than expected.

3.3.4 The toys themselves

In addition, Barbie dolls in China are not hot, especially in recent years when the Chinese toy market began to seek new development. "Previously, as long as the toys can be placed to see, hold, and play is enough, people's expectations of toys are on the rise. Can play a role in communication, communication role of the toy is more meaningful, this is the future trend of toy design." Attend the Canton Fair toy sales industry Li Xinxin said toys before are "dead", later will be more and more "live" [9]. According to the Baidu index, compared with the same toy IP film and television Transformers, Barbie toys Baidu search index "Barbie" before the release a long time behind Transformers, only about a quarter of the latter. This is also the reason why Barbie had to seek other outlets.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Outdated Marketing Strategies

4.1.1 Multi-tool promotion

According to the information, Barbie mainly relies on trailers and special features to promote, but these marketing means are too single to attract the attention of the audience for a long time, so multiple means of promotion are essential, such as the use of music videos, bloopers, conferences, announcements, roadshows, point of view sc.

4.1.2 Multi-channel promotion

With the progress of current network technology, new media has become an important way of information dissemination, and also, more people can not leave the life and work tools. The new media itself has a strong influence, so it has also become an important channel for film marketing, and many film marketing with the help of new media to create a box office myth [11].

The loyalty of the current audience to the marketing platform is gradually declining. For example, the popularity of jittery voice is gradually rising, the popularity of microblogging is gradually beginning to lose, and the main promotional channel for Barbie is microblogging. At the same time, because of the frequent updating of technology, the audience can not maintain permanent interest in any of the new media platforms, so multi-channel promotion has become essential. China's hottest new media platforms are Weibo, Jieyin, and Xiaohongshu.

4.1.3 Generate a topic of discussion

It can generate a sense of empathy by capturing the current pain points in society. Generate multiple topics, not only the liberation of women's thinking but also the suitability of male and female friends.

4.1.4 Stimulate audience participation

Film marketing should be able to guide the audience topic effectively, let the audience speak within a certain framework so as to achieve the phenomenon of both word of mouth and box office, to mobilise the audience's emotions before the release fully, but also need to ensure that after the release of the sufficient amount of topics, and thus create a quality impression of the whole film. Therefore, you can use WeChat Xiaohongshu Shake Yin and other platforms to launch the corresponding topic activities, to stimulate the audience to participate in them, and to the audience's viewing of the film for a good guide!

4.2. Inappropriate Period

The advantage of this film is that its main audience group is young adult women, and this part of the population is the main force of the current moviegoers. According to the survey, female moviegoers accounted for about 61.11% of the total number of people [12]. Their time is relatively free, so there is no need for this film to be released in the summer slot. This will not only cause too much competitive pressure but also, in a way, will cause audience loss because most of Barbie's viewers are female college students. If it is during the holiday period, they are too widely distributed but not conducive to cinema scheduling. As mentioned, Germany likes to promote films in cinemas in university towns, and China can also refer to this strategy. If the film is aired after the start of the school year, it is believed that a lot of female college students will go to see the film together, which is far greater than if they go to see the film in different cities.

Although this part of the audience is female, but still can take measures to increase the male audience. Such as couples buying tickets with discounts or in the online topic "Barbie" male audience survey: do not see is not a real man", "Barbie, couples must see the film" and so on. When the film starts to appear in the discussion topics of men, more men will be attracted to watch it.

4.3. Low Film Scheduling Rate

Nowadays, after the release of a popular movie, there will be a first day of record-breaking news, scheduling this word in these years into the life of every audience, the audience's autonomy to choose the film is also affected by the cinema schedule, and the scheduling rate is mainly affected by the network popularity, film ratings, pre-sale of tickets, etc. [13].

The scheduling rate is mainly affected by network popularity, film ratings, pre-sale of film tickets, etc. [13]. These factors are related to the pre-promotion of the film, only to increase the popularity of the film itself in order to make the film stand out.

Also, the film's distributor choice is one of the main factors. Choosing a big-name distributor is often beneficial to the scheduling of the film, especially because China is very much a humane society, so films from big-name distributors are often taken care of.

In addition, film distributors can also send people to visit the Chinese market and choose local distributors in third- and fourth-tier cities, which is more conducive to penetrating small and medium-sized cities and expanding their share of the Chinese market.

5. Conclusion

Barbie's audience is the main audience in today's society, and from this point of view, the film is destined to get a lot of attention. However, the research in this paper shows that the box office in China is much lower than the German market, and the reasons why it is not as good as the overseas market are: outdated promotional methods, inappropriate release time, low screening rate, and the value of the toys themselves. Apart from the value of the toy itself, which is not easy to change, the other three factors can be improved by adopting some means.

The use of multiple means of promotion, such as music videos, footage, press conferences, announcements, roadshows, screenings, etc.; multi-channel promotion, such as in Weibo, Shake, and Xiaohongshu at the same time to promote; grasp the pain points, cause people to resonate, generate multiple topics; and stimulate the audience's degree of participation, so that they can be well expressed in the pre-viewing and post-viewing of their own ideas, these methods can improve the single and outdated means of publicity—factor of publicity tactics.

Since the film's audience is young adult women, who are relatively free with their time, the premiere should be adjusted to stagger its release during the summer months. This will not only reduce the pressure but also concentrate the audience, choose to promote the film around the university, increase the sales of the female audience, and attract some male audience simultaneously.

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