

The Impact of Empathic Marketing on movie Promotion: A Case Study of the Movie Barbie

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Abstract:

In movie marketing, the establishment of emotional empathy has always been the key to success. This study explores the concept of empathy marketing and its application in movie marketing, focusing on how *Barbie* successfully attracts audiences through empathy marketing strategies. Through the case study of the movie *Barbie*, this study firstly analyzes how empathy marketing stimulates the audience's interest and clarifies the target audience of Barbie through STP analysis (market segmentation, target market selection, and market positioning). Secondly, this study proposes specific suggestions for applying empathy marketing in the production and promotion stages of the movie. The study shows that empathy marketing can effectively enhance a movie's marketing effect by capturing the audience's psychological needs and emotional resonance, expanding the movie's scope, enhancing word-of-mouth communication, and thus promoting the movie's successful release. Future research can further explore the specific mechanisms and necessary conditions of empathy marketing and the systematic categorization criteria of the target groups of movie empathy marketing.

Keywords: Empathic Marketing; movie Promotion; Audience Engagement; Barbie.

1. Introduction

Marketing strategies evolve all the time. How to deeply understand and connect with consumers' emotions, psychological needs, and demands has become an important question that has driven marketers' attention [1]. In recent years, empathic marketing has gradually become a popular and noticeable concept in movie marketing, where creating a strong emotional connection with audiences has always been the key for a movie to succeed [2]. What is empathic marketing? Why should combine them? How can use this strategy to market the movies to targeted audiences successfully?

To answer these questions, first, it needs to find out the definition of empathy and its connection with marketing. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, empathy means sharing *someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation*. Eisenberg, N. suggests that empathy is an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition, is congruent with the other's emotional state or condition, and involves at least a minimal degree of differentiation between self and other [3]. When it comes to movie marketing, it can say that empathy plays an important part, as movies always want to impress audiences with

their themes and are rooted in storytelling. The success of marketing determines whether can deliver the main idea want to convey to a larger audience. Meanwhile, due to the rapid development of short video platforms, competition intensifies to catch people's attention, and traditional marketing strategies are failing. This situation has prompted movie producers and marketers to explore new strategies that can attract people back to theaters again, and that is why empathic marketing has gradually come into their sight. Empathic marketing means that marketers will not only focus on the power of celebrities or movie stars but also mirror and express their target audiences' experiences, emotions, and values in marketing to create a deep resonance [4, 5]. Previous research has established that the elements in the movie, such as fictional characters, significantly influence people when they feel empathy for the character. Broom. Timothy W. points out that during narrative experiences, identification with a fictional character can alter one's attitudes and self-beliefs to be more similar to those of the character [6]. Hall and Bracken find that tendencies to experience empathy have been proposed repeatedly as contributors to individual differences in viewers' responses to movie and television programs [7]. Thus, this study believes that empathic marketing can foster the connection between the movie and its audiences,

ultimately enhancing the marketing effect.

By combining the concept of empathy with movie marketing, this study will find out how to present audiences with the context they want to see, catch on to current hot topics, and convince them that they will be satisfied with the movies produced. In the cases Barbie has had, using this strategy was a great success. This study will focus on Barbie to find out the influence of empathic marketing on the marketing effect of movie. Firstly, this study will analyze how Barbie used the strategy of empathic marketing. Secondly, this study will discuss how empathic marketing arouses people's interest. This study will also use STP analysis to find the target audience of empathic marketing and list specific methods of empathic marketing. Finally, this study will suggest how empathic marketing should be applied in movie production and marketing periods.

2. Case Description

Directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, Barbie is a fantasy movie released on July 21, 2023. By bringing the famous Barbie doll into the real world, this movie has won a lot of appreciation and achieved a worldwide box office of \$1,445,638,421, 9.6 times its production budget. It has also won Best Original Song at the 81st Golden Globe Awards and Best Original Song at the 96th Academy Awards. Barbie has received high acclaim on the Rotten Tomatoes website, with a freshness score of 88%. Many critics spoke highly of Barbie, and can see some of them at Rotten Tomato. Sheri Flanders from the Chicago Reader said: *Greta Gerwig serves up a frothy confection of fashion and fun and a searing social critique of the iconic doll in the movie Barbie*. Sergio Burstein from the Los Angeles Times also said: *One of the best movies of the year in cinematic terms, probably the best comedy that we have seen in a long time, and an extraordinarily entertaining product that promotes the value of searching for a more cohesive society*. Barbie also received a high rating among the general audience. It can see reviews on Rotten Tomatoes like this: *A masterpiece from start to finish. Greta Gerwig knocked it out of the park, making a well-known but controversial figure like Barbie relatable, especially today. This movie won't be a slice of cake for everyone & that's okay. This movie is meant for viewers who always have a child-like view but are too afraid to express it*.

In this movie, Barbie and Ken live in the colorful and seemingly perfect world of Barbie Land. However, after Barbie notices some changes in her body, they get a chance to go to the real world, based on the advice of the Weird Barbie, and soon discover the joys and perils of living among humans. By telling this adventure story,

Barbie explores the theme of self-discovery and identity, advocates the power of embracing individuality and authenticity, and focuses on feminism. Barbie's adventure from the fantastical Barbie Land to the real world starts a journey to find her true self; the growth she experiences in the real world lets her transcend the long-held stereotype of Barbie doll, and the difficulties faced by Barbie in the movie also echo the dilemma of today's women. According to the statistics, 66.2 percent of moviegoers of Barbie are females, which reflects the primary target audience of this movie-women and girls.

Therefore, Barbie's empathic marketing revolves around these aspects. One of the most important elements is Barbie pink. You can see this color almost anywhere in Barbie Land, and it has become an integral part of this brand. Not only did this color bring back memories of Barbie for generations, but it also represented the theme of female power this movie wanted to convey to its audiences. *The first electric moment was at CinemaCon in 2022. We put a single image of Barbie in her Corvette in Barbie Land. It was one of those moments that took on a life of its own. About a month later, they were shooting in Santa Monica, and we knew people would be able to take pictures on the street of Margot and Ryan in their multi-color Dayglow outfits on the beach*, Warner Bros, president of global marketing Josh Goldstine said. The colorful shirts remind people of playing with Barbie dolls when they were kids and driven by familiarity and nostalgia; they began to spread these pictures. By doing things like this, Barbie got the opportunity to generate earned media, which was perfect publicity for the movie. After that, partners start to be attracted, and promotional partnership deals can be made. From luxury brands such as Prada and Balmain to daily supplies, merchants quickly began to catch up with the pink tide brought by Barbie. People can see Barbie-infused merchandise everywhere.

Meanwhile, pink represents girl power in the movie, and the feminist themes expressed in the movie resonate with many women. It has attracted many of Barbie's biggest fans to wear pink to the cinema and become a new fashion wave. This multifaceted approach created a sensation for the movie and fostered a global discussion of feminism. Ultimately, Barbie used pink to express its theme, break the boundaries of traditional marketing, and create a successful example of empathic marketing.

3. Case Analysis

3.1 Empathic Marketing to Boost movie Interest

Firstly, this study will talk about why empathic marketing can significantly raise people's interest in a movie. This

is deeply connected with the essence or connotation of movie. Different from other tangible goods such as food and daily necessities, entertainment products like movie can not give their audiences any tangible things. Millions of people paid for the movie tickets and walked into the theater, and when they came out of the theater two hours later, they were still empty-handed. It is strange to realize that paying money for a movie can not get anything but the experience of sitting in a theater and watching a movie for two hours, and there are still many people who are glad to do so. However, this is what movies are all about. What movies give the viewers are spiritual and emotional experiences, not material physical commodities. The point of a movie is to convey to the audience the emotions, principles, and everything else that the production teams want to express. As Sergio Benini said, *Connotation is essential in cinematography, as in any other art discipline. It is given by the set of conventions (such as editing, music, mise-en-scene elements, color, sound, lighting, etc.) that influences how the meanings conveyed by the director are transmitted to persuade, convince, anger, inspire, or soothe the audience* [8]. This essence gives the movie industry an easy way to do empathic marketing. People go to the movies for entertainment and relaxation. When they watch a movie, they expect to empathize with the characters and be moved by the story in the movie. Thus, it can extend this process of impressing the audiences from movie play to marketing, try to get people interested in the movie through marketing, and connecting marketing to the movie itself.

Meanwhile, with society's development, people's leisure and entertainment ways are gradually increasing. Short videos, dramas, reality shows, and other programs compete with us for viewers' attention because people's time and energy are limited, and they can only watch one program at a time. In this case, traditional marketing strategies are becoming ineffective due to a lack of competitiveness, and filmmakers must find new ways to attract people to focus on their movies. Take Barbie, for example. When people see the familiar Barbie dolls appearing in the movie teaser, they are pleasantly surprised and reminisce about their own experiences playing with Barbie dolls as a child. This makes them want to focus on this movie and forward the teaser to their friends. Since Barbie dolls have been popular worldwide for decades and have become a shared memory for many generations, the number of viewers this spreading process could attract would be enormous. After that, many co-branded products were launched, using the iconic color of Barbie Pink to attract attention and bring the movie's marketing into people's daily lives. As soon as the movie was released in cinemas, many of the classic lines and dialogues of the characters, especially those that

are relevant to the social realities faced by women today, began to circulate on social media, resonating with women all over the world and attracting more people to come to the cinema to watch the movie.

3.2 Targeting Demographics for Empathic Marketing in Barbie

Next, this part will discuss how to determine the target demographic for empathy marketing in the context of Barbie using STP analysis. The first step is to segment the movie's audience. Traditional segmentation is usually based on demographic, psychographic, behavioral, or geographic features, but the art audience's segmentation is different. As Daniel Ashton points out, *audience segmentation is not a stable or uncontested area of practice* [9]. In 1974, Nielsen, McQueen, and Nielsen defined *arts audience segmentation analysis as a systematic method of studying how art forms are related to people's characteristics, needs, wants, beliefs, preferences, and how art forms fit into arts, entertainment, and leisure markets in the process of satisfying what people need in relation to what they want, and what is good art* [10]. Since then, many scholars have made their studies and interpretations of the segmentation of art audiences. Eric John Kolhede and J. Tomas Gomez-Arias combined art audience segmentation with marketing in 2016 and wanted to find *a viable differentiated marketing program and positioning approaches that would appeal to each group* [11]. In this case, if one wants to create emotional resonance with the audience and thus practice empathic marketing, one must determine their psychological needs and the emotions they expect from the movie when they enter the movie theater. The segmentation will be based on these.

Because the theme of the movie Barbie is about embracing diversity, pursuing dreams, and exploring feminism, young women, girls, and those interested in Barbie dolls may be the target audience for the movie. Young women may first be attracted to the fashionable and popular elements of the movie, then they will be able to relate to the realities women face that are reflected in the movie as they experience them in their daily lives. They will also be inspired by the movie's theme of female empowerment and personal development. People emotionally attached to Barbie may be delighted to see this classic IP reappear on the silver screen after many years. Meanwhile, the movie's visual design and scene arrangement contain many elements and features of Barbie. This will have a strong appeal to them, too. These target groups cover a huge range of people, which can provide a lot of box office revenue for the movie. It also shows that the movie has a very wide audience, which is good for the movie to get a high level of attention. The final step is positioning.

As an adventure movie, Barbie has a very wide potential audience. Whether the audience is a young woman, a devoted Barbie fan, or a child interested in the world of Barbie, chances are they will choose to walk into a theater to see this movie during the holidays. The movie is also a frequent form of entertainment choice, with many people entering the theater with friends or family once the holidays come. Barbie has a great cast, with well-known actress Margot Robbie and actor Ryan Gosling playing the lead roles of Barbie and Ken. The director of the movie is also a household name, Greta Gerwig. At the same time, the movie utilized a lot of special effects in its production and built many sets. Thus, Barbie is a wide-audience, affordable, and high-quality movie, which is very competitive with other movies released simultaneously.

4. Strategy Suggestions

Finally, this part will discuss the methods of empathic marketing, many of which have already been mentioned in the previous article. How can the empathic marketing of a movie work satisfactorily? This section will analyze and give suggestions from both the production and distribution sides.

First is the production side of the movie, which is the foundation of the empathic marketing. Only if the movie's content can arouse people's interest will empathy marketing have a trigger that can be grasped to achieve satisfactory results. At the same time, marketing serves the movie itself. Suppose the plot and theme of the movie do not meet people's preferences and expectations, even if they go into the movie theater because of all the marketing at the beginning. In that case, they will be greatly disappointed when they come out and express this emotion to their families and friends, thus causing the word-of-mouth of the movie to drop drastically. Any amount of marketing will pale in the face of bad word of mouth.

So, what should people look for when creating a movie so that the movie is easy for the audience to empathize with? Movies are based on storytelling. A good story is always an essential part of a movie's success. If researchers want audiences to empathize with the plots and characters while watching the movies, they have to ensure that the stories told in the movies are close to people's lives and can resonate with reality. This does not mean that the genres of movies will be limited or that can only focus the creativity on realistic movies. Barbie is not a severe and realistic movie but a fun and adventurous fantasy movie that is great for all ages. Even so, in the movie's light-hearted narrative, the researchers can still see the connection between the movie and life. While laughing, they can deeply empathize with and think about the dilemmas faced by the

contemporary women that Barbie represents.

Next is the marketing side. Marketing plays a huge role in the success of a movie. In today's society, where people are receiving tons of information every minute, how to get people interested in watching a movie amidst the sea of entertainment through effective marketing is a major challenge for movie makers. In this case, empathic marketing is critical. When the company markets a movie, it should capture some triggers, such as a color, an object, or a scene, so that people can feel familiar with the triggers as soon as they see them and thus associate them with the movie. In this way, they can more easily evoke people's associations and memories related to the triggers and make them interested in the movie, thus achieving the effect of empathic marketing. That's exactly what Barbie's producers did with their marketing: they found several precise and household triggers and used them as a starting point for the movie's empathic marketing. Barbie is a highly recognizable product in its own right, and Barbie's iconic color, Barbie Pink, has been popular around the world for decades. Through these two triggers, Barbie has managed to capture the attention of people around the world and has made people look forward to the outcome of the cinematization of an IP that has accompanied millions of people through their childhood.

5. Conclusion

Through the research above, it can be found that empathic marketing has a significant impact on the marketing effect of movies. It is a helpful strategy that allows us to successfully show the movie's highlights to the people, explore the potential audience, expand the reach of a movie, and prevent it from disappearing in the mass of entertainment information available on today's social networks. As the nature of storytelling in movies and the need for audience empathy in successful movies, this marketing strategy can play a great role in marketing movies. Through the STP analysis, it can pinpoint the target group suitable for empathic marketing for movies, so that the marketing can achieve results in line with expectations. By choosing triggers, focusing on hot topics in people's lives, and other empathic marketing methods can draw attention to the movie and increase word-of-mouth about it through social media, which will drive the creation of a successful movie.

This study on empathic marketing will greatly help practitioners in the movie industry, especially movie producers, choose their marketing strategies. In today's world, which is full of fragmented information, how to capture people's attention amidst the plethora of entertainment options has become an important concern for the movie industry.

Through the flexible use of empathic marketing strategies, producers can quickly attract attention and guide more people into the cinema to watch their movies. From the producers' point of view, this will help them successfully present their movies to people, and from the audience's point of view, this marketing approach will help them discover more movies that match their preferences, thus improving the movie-going experience.

Regarding the impact of empathic marketing on movie marketing, the exploration and research in this paper are still in the preliminary stage, and the future research prospects are very promising. This study has not discussed in depth the detailed mechanisms and necessary conditions for the concept of empathy to work, nor have fully summarized and outlined the possible ways in which people can engage in empathic marketing. At the same time, there still needs to be systematic methodology and categorization criteria for the segmentation of the target group of empathic marketing in movies. Future research could focus on these points in conjunction with existing marketing theories. Due to the need to attract people's attention in the movie industry as an entertainment industry, the theory of empathic marketing will have great potential in the future, which can promote the continuous innovation and development of movie marketing.

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