

Barbie Pink Fever

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Principles of PR

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Spring 2022, fans are introduced to the generation's newest Barbie, Margot Robbie. Famous for her roles in popular films, *The Wolf of Wall Street* and DC's *Suicide Squad*, Robbie brought the role of Barbie to life. Pictured in Barbie's classic pink Corvette in Barbieland, a single image displayed at CinemaCon showed Robbie smiling. *Barbie* was announced, starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling as a real life Barbie and Ken from Barbieland. It was brought to theaters everywhere Summer of 2023 by Warner Bros. Studios.

Mattel Inc. was founded by the original creator of Barbie dolls, Ruth Handler. Handler created "Barbie" in 1959 and revealed the doll at the International Toy Fair in New York City. Mattel, known for their creation of popular children's toys, brought the idea of making a Barbie movie to Warner Bros. Studios years before the film was announced. This decision came after a decline in sales in the early 2000s and 2010s.



Barbie had become this idea of "perfection" and was thought to have set an unrealistic expectation for young girls and women. Barbie soon became more than a fashion icon and chic role model for children. Mattel created Careers Barbie, known for the tagline, "We girls can do anything". The line had Barbie become a pilot, President, doctor, and much more. In 2016, Mattel shifted their focus to diversity and created dolls to better reflect Barbie's "vulnerability"

as expressed by Lisa Mcknight, global head of Mattel's doll portfolio to Insider. They released dolls with hearing aids, prosthetics, and more recently, a person with Down syndrome.

Warner Bros. ultimately chose popular filmmaker Greta Gerwig, who directed Oscar-nominated films *Lady Bird* and *Little Women*, to direct the *Barbie* movie. This decision had fans questioning the way their beloved childhood toy would be portrayed. Gerwig, however, took the opportunity to create a film that shares the glamorous life of Barbie, all while giving fans a modern take at society's expectations for women.

Mattel's and Warner Bros.' patience with creating the Barbie film proved to be worth the wait. Following their announcement, there was no place to disappear to where one could avoid Barbie's iconic pink. From a real-life Barbie Dreamhouse in Malibu to a spirited competition with the film *Oppenheimer*, which was set to be released the same day as *Barbie*, fans could not get enough of Robbie and her Barbie friends. The marketing efforts of Warner Bros. and Mattel could be seen everywhere on social media and globally. *Barbie*'s release announcement prompted brands to hop on a pink bandwagon. Marketing elements were displayed in the way the film was promoted and raved about for months before its premier.

Barbie Campaign Examples

Malibu Barbie DreamHouse - Airbnb

One of the biggest campaigns brought by *Barbie* was the collaboration with Airbnb, a vacation property rental company. The film partnered with the company and listed a mansion in Malibu that had been remodeled to resemble Barbie's iconic DreamHouse. The home was able to be booked for a stay as a way to promote the



upcoming film. Airbnb decorated the home with Barbie's iconic pink color and gave it a slight

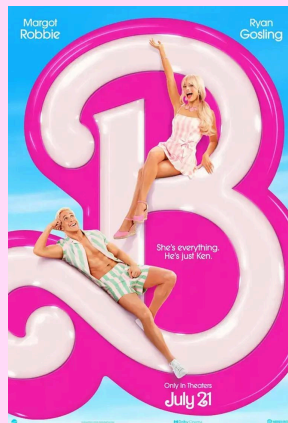


twist by revamping it with *Kenergy*. The home had hints of cowboy decor, items that were prevalent in the movie but were still unknown to fans at the time of the announcement. This collaboration gave fans the full DreamHouse experience, filled with beach fits, line

dances, rollerblades and surfboards. The days it was made available to be booked was made to be July 21st and 22nd, to line up with the premiere of the film.

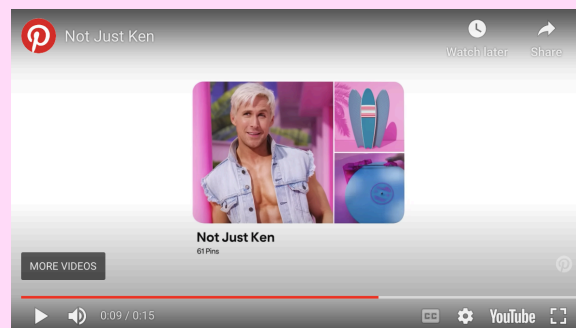
'She's everything, he's just Ken' - Pinterest

After the release of one of the first posters for the film, the tagline “She’s everything, he’s



just Ken” became a popular meme that trended on social media. Soon, users began making memes of “incredible” women with “unremarkable” men. Some popular posts included images of *Legally Blonde* star, Reese Witherspoon, as her character Elle Woods next to a picture of actor Matthew Davis who played Warner Huntington. Davis’ character left Elle to pursue a “better” future at Harvard Law School. Reese’s character

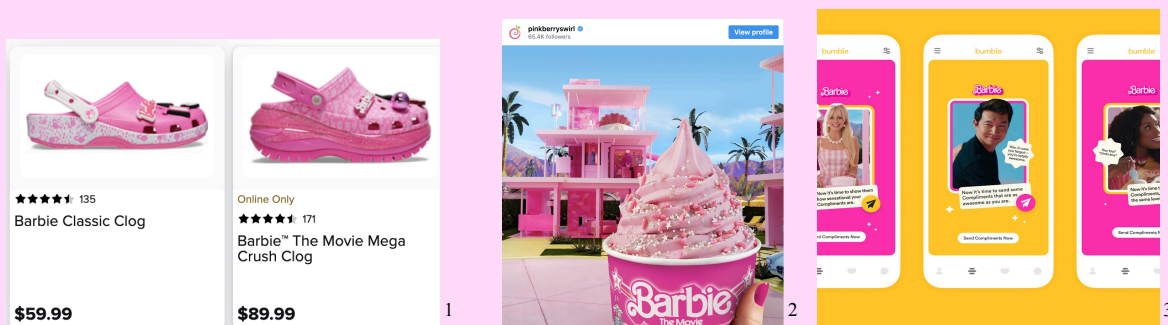
ultimately prevailed when she chose to also pursue a law degree at Harvard and succeeded. The success of these posts prompted Pinterest to create an ad leaning into Ken’s brand. In the ad, they created a moodboard called “Not just Ken” where they pinned images that represented Ken.



PESO Elements

Paid Media

The paid media for the film comes from the partnership deals created by Warner Bros. and other brands. There were many brands and companies jumping to join the *Barbie* bandwagon and this earned millions for Warner Bros. Brands like Crocs, Pinkberry, and even Bumble partnered with Barbie to promote their products and the film. Each with their own take on the film, incorporated the spirit of Barbie into their collaborations. Crocs released Barbie pink clogs. Pinkberry created a new flavor that was Barbie’s signature color. Bumble released an update where stars of the film would appear and provide dating advice to users promoting kindness and compliments.



Earned Media

An example of the earned media produced by the film can be seen in its reviews. Movie critics, fans, and those who didn’t enjoy the film all had something to say about the movie. Reviews could be found on X (Twitter), The New York Times, The Guardian and many more. Manohla Dargis, a journalist from The New York Times shared a lengthy review about *Barbie*. Describing the scenes in the movie, Dargis shares her opinion on the film and its “weight” in our world. Alongside this, fans raved about the film after its premiere, taking to X and praising

¹ Barbie Classic Clog and Barbie™ The Movie Mega Crush Clog / Credit: Crocs

² Barbie Land Berry Pink / Credit: Instagram @pinkberryswirl

³ Dating Advice from Barbie and Ken / Credit: Bumble



Gerwig for her way of tackling society's expectations of women. Fans were happy that Barbie became more than just a doll, she became human and captured the essence of humanity during her time in the Real World. Calling the film, "insightful and creative, funny and existential, full of heart and empathy", the reviews only grew the popularity of *Barbie*.

Shared Media

In the twenty-first century, social media has transformed the marketing industry and has created a playing field for everyone to get promoted. Barbie isn't an exception. Memes, Tiktoks, and trends were posted, reposted, tweeted and grammed. Excitement surrounding the friendly competition between *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* grew on social media when fans created a series of conversations asking which film would be a bigger hit. Trends began on Tiktok where fans were announcing their plans for seeing both films on release day. One such video shows a woman dressed in a black suit and dark sunglasses and then changing into a pink bodycon dress and white sunglasses with the caption, "barbenheimer fans clock in".⁴ Social media powered the marketing behind *Barbie*.



Owned Media

Campaign Success

I believe that *Barbie* had a very successful marketing campaign. More than just utilizing the PESO model, the team behind the *Barbie* campaign promoted the film and brand in a way that was in the consumers' face. In an interview with *Variety*, Josh Goldstine, Warner Bros.

⁴ Credit: Tiktok @tessdonatello

President of Global Marketing, expressed his thoughts on the marketing aspect of the film. When asked how much of the marketing was manufactured vs. organically obtained, Goldstine explained how Warner Bros. only intended to give media and fans “breadcrumbs”, to give people small elements to create curiosity and buzz. I can safely say that it worked. Growing from a single image of Robbie’s Barbie in her pink corvette, fans were excited and brands couldn’t wait to get their hands on the iconic pink.

With that said, there is always more that can be done. *Barbie* had its limitations, as does every film, and a part of that comes from its mother company being Mattel. Most of the promotions for the film came from Warner Bros. announcements and collaborations but Mattel failed to fully take advantage of the buzz from the *Barbie* film. Mattel ultimately waited for the film to generate buzz to ensure that it would be a success before doing more to promote the toy responsible for the movie’s creation. This move could come from its past difficulties managing its image in regards to the Barbie doll, but Mattel should have stood as tall as 1959 Barbie did in the beginning of the film. *Barbie* was a successful film thanks to the efforts of Warner Bros. marketing efforts.



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