

Article Group Newsletter Issue 3 - Barbie Movie Marketing Analysis and Product-Identity Connection in Consumer Culture (July 2023)

Human Conditions

ISSUE 3 — July 2023

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and Earring Magic Ken side of creativity

This Marketing Agency Can't Stop Getting

Existential

Summer 2023. Wildfires! Record heat! Submersibles! Picket lines!

Barbie pink.

We've made it (we think) to the end of a months-long marketing fever pitch that unrecognizably blurred the lines between art, commerce, and monoculture. To celebrate, one AG-er went to a Malibu Barbie Cafe popup in Manhattan, where an overpriced ticket granted you the opportunity to wait in line to take a picture inside a beautifully-branded doll box. Another sailed on a boat covered in pastel pool toys through the murky Boston harbor. Another — despite not playing video games — debated the purchase of a Barbie Xbox that looks like the classic Dreamhouse. It's been a summer of product/protagonist tension that's kept us with one eyebrow raised and one hand on our wallet.

In the middle of it all, we asked our staff what products made them...them. We heard about geometric colored blocks that showed the sum of something is greater than its parts. A Fender Telecaster that delivered a desperately-needed stamp of cool. A Sit n' Spin that became a metaphor for controlled chaos. A Sony Handycam MiniDV Camcorder that sparked eventual applications to film school. Tellingly, perhaps, there wasn't a single AG-er who responded to our prompt with a product they had received after the age of 10. As marketers, we get how intrinsically connected things and emotions are. And we've seen franchises spin major cultural moments from dust before. So what is it about the

breadcrumb marketing strategy from Warner Bros. and Mattel that feels different?

One answer, maybe, can be found in one of the very first crumbs: the teaser trailer , both parody and homage to Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Instead of apes, a bone, and a mysterious black monolith, there's children, smashed doll heads, and a towering Margot Robbie in heels.

Here, Barbie isn't a toy. She's a presence and a force for human change. The fact that she's wrapped in a vintage bathing suit matters less than how the children around her respond — by getting rid of the "baby dolls" they've played with since the dawn of time and (we presume) swapping them for the powerful, otherworldly figure looming over them.

#Barbiecore has gone beyond paid social, brand partnerships, and licensing deals (btw, special shoutout to the movie's promotions team — y'all are working overtime). It's become a stark reminder for all of us in our field that even as the way we reach our audience gets more complex, there's something fundamentally inescapable about the 1:1 relationship between person and product. And in our frantic, oversaturated digital world, consumers still return to their connections with a bygone analog age. The teaser trailer showed us how easily Pantone 219 C-colored medicine goes down when served with a spoonful of nostalgia, no matter your connection to the franchise.

And with that, we're going to go play. See you next month.