



# Were Mattel's Efforts Enough?

AN EXPLORATION OF THE HISTORIC  
REPOSITIONING OF THE ICONIC BARBIE BRAND



# Abstract

Mattel's iconic Barbie doll has been a cornerstone of American pop culture since its launch in 1959. However, controversy over Barbie's lack of inclusivity and unrealistic standards for women have cast a dark shadow over the doll's reputation. This case study provides an analysis of how Mattel's live-action "Barbie" movie strategically repositioned the brand in the minds of consumers. It demonstrates how Mattel regained control over Barbie's cultural narrative and pivoted the doll into the feminist figure the brand wanted her to be. It also assesses the impact of the campaign on stakeholders, as well as evaluates it in accordance with the Page Principles.



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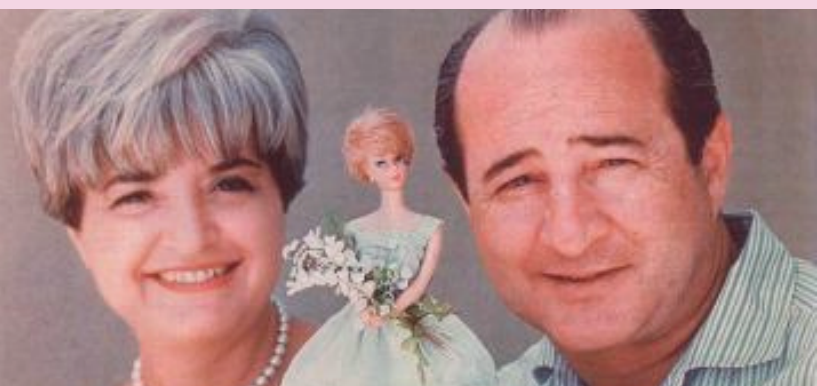
## **References**



# It's a Toy's Story

## Mattel Company Profile

Mattel, Inc. is an American toy manufacturing and entertainment company with over 25,000 employees and customers in 150 countries. It was founded by husband-and-wife duo Ruth and Elliot Handler, and Harold Matson in January of 1945 out of a garage in the industrial district of Los Angeles (Mattel, 2023). The Handlers and Matson started out by selling picture frames and using the leftover materials to produce and sell dollhouse furniture; the company began selling toys in 1947, with the launch of the "Uke-a-Doodle," a children's ukulele (Funding Universe, n.d.).



Barbie is a children's fashion doll that was created by Ruth Handler in 1959.

Matson later sold his share of the company to Ruth Handler due to poor health, giving the Handlers control of the company. In 1948, Mattel was incorporated in the state of California, and in 1960, it became a publicly traded company (Mattel, 2023). Today, the company is separated into three segments: North America, International and American Girl. Mattel is home to a wide portfolio of children's and family entertainment franchises, including American Girl, Hot Wheels, Fisher-Price, Thomas & Friends, Monster High and Barbie (Mattel, 2023).

Mattel marketed Barbie with a slew of clothing and accessories, all sold separately. Over the years, Barbie has held over 250 careers, such as an astronaut, a CEO, a nurse and even President of the United States, to show young girls they can achieve anything. Barbie's ever-changing career serves as a pillar of the Barbie brand (Dellatto, 2023).

# History of Barbie

**1959**

Barbie is created by Ruth Handler after she observed her daughter favoring adult-looking paper dolls over more traditional babydolls.



**1961**

Mattel introduces Ken, a male doll that would be Barbie's companion.



**1962**

The first Barbie DreamHouse is released.



**1968**

America loved Barbie so much that official fan clubs for the doll were created and garnered 1.5 million members.



**1991**

Mattel reported that about 95% of American girls ages 3-11 owned several Barbie dolls.



**1998**

Barbie is inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame.

**2001**

Barbie enters the entertainment space with the release of the animated movie, "Barbie in the Nutcracker."

**2021**

Barbie is named the number one toy in the world by the NPD Group and generated \$1.7 billion in sales, a record-breaking high for the brand.



# Mattel's Mission, Goals and Values

Mattel's purpose is to, **"create innovative products and experiences that inspire, entertain and develop children through play"** (Mattel, 2023). The company prides itself on producing products that offer intrinsic value to customers with emphasis on quality, safety and innovation; it coined this concept as "purposeful play" (Mattel, 2023). On top of creating high-value products, Mattel's core brand value is **trust**. The company takes its history as a trusted family partner seriously, describing its commitment to trust with the following statement: "Our relationship with our people, consumers, customers, business partners and communities is built on their belief that we will do the right thing and live up to our commitments" (Mattel, 2023).

Mattel's commitment to trust drives all of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives:

Sustainable design  
and development

Responsible sourcing  
and production

Thriving and inclusive  
communities

As part of its **sustainable design and development** initiatives, Mattel is focused on creating high-quality, safe products by using sustainable materials in its products and packaging, and innovating its business model to extend product life. By 2030, Mattel aims for all of its products to be made of recycled, recyclable and/or bio-based plastic materials and to reduce plastic packaging by 25% per product (Mattel, 2023).

As for its **responsible sourcing and production** initiatives, Mattel is working to reduce environmental impact while promoting ethical sourcing practices and working conditions. The company's Responsible Supply Chain Commitment (RSCC) is a set of standards it upholds to maintain responsible factory working conditions, environmental protections and compliance with local labor laws.

By 2030, Mattel aims to achieve zero-manufacturing waste and reduce absolute Scope One and Two GHG emissions by 50% (Mattel, 2023).



Finally, Mattel's commitment to fostering **thriving and inclusive communities** shines through in its diversity, equity and inclusion practices. For instance, the company's Play Fair program defines the ways in which it is advocating for the Black community and advancing racial equality. Mattel also has policies in place to protect children's safety online and responsibly market to children. The company does not collect personal information from children without the consent of a guardian, and it takes steps to prevent students from posting their personal information online (Mattel, 2023). One example of Mattel's child safety efforts is its "Privacy by Design" process; this refers to the meticulous way in which Mattel constructs its websites to comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)(Mattel, 2023).

Barbie's purpose is to  
"inspire the limitless potential in every girl."

It aims to achieve this through three pillars: **representation**, **empowerment** and **environmental impact** (Mattel, 2023). Barbie claims to be the most diverse and inclusive doll line, and aims to use its power in the industry to advance access to equal opportunities and support girls from all backgrounds. Mattel's CSR initiatives pair well with Barbie's purpose, the difference being that Barbie is focused specifically on young girls.

# Beyond Plastic Perfection

## Situation Analysis

Barbie has historically been criticized for being a symbol of misogyny and setting unrealistic beauty standards for women.

Mattel's iconic Barbie doll has been the subject of controversy since its inception. To begin, Barbie's physical appearance is based on an X-rated German cartoon character, Bild Lilli,



Bild Lilli & Barbie

whose adventures in pop culture revolved around maintaining her lavish lifestyle by engaging in sex work (Monteil, 2023). The appearances of the dolls were so similar that the manufacturer of Bild Lilli sued Mattel in 1961, claiming the brand "falsely and misleadingly represented [itself] as having originated the design" (Monteil, 2023). They ended up settling out of court, but the similarities remain striking. Additionally, a 1958 Mattel-sponsored market research study conducted before the doll's release found that mothers felt Barbie had "too much of a figure" and were worried about what that implied for their daughters (Lord, 2023). In 1963, Mattel sold problematic Barbie accessories that promoted unhealthy relationships with food, such as a book titled "How to Lose Weight" with the advice, "Don't eat" (Monteil, 2023). On top of that, third-party research conducted in 1994 found that if Barbie were a real person, she wouldn't have enough body fat to function normally and would have to walk on all fours due to her unrealistic proportions (Lord, 2023). An article by NPR cited this as problematic due to the fact that studies have linked playing with very thin dolls to negative body image and increased risk of eating disorders in children (Treisman, 2023).



# RESEARCH BY HARMONY HEALTHCARE FOUND THAT **69%** OF WOMEN BELIEVE BARBIE CAUSES DANGEROUS BODY IMAGE ISSUES FOR YOUNG GIRLS (KNIGHT, 2023).

People have also criticized Barbie for lacking diversity and perpetuating the white beauty standard. For the first 10 years of its existence, Barbie was exclusively a tall, skinny white woman with straight blonde hair, blue eyes and an exceptional figure. Through the years, this is the image of Barbie that has persisted. Consumers, especially people of color, have felt that this stereotypical Barbie served as a constant reminder of an American beauty standard they could never meet (Knight, 2023). Mattel attempted to remedy this by diversifying Barbie with the introduction of the first Black doll, Christie, to the Barbie brand in 1968. In 1980, Mattel released its first line of diverse dolls actually named Barbie, including African American and Hispanic Barbies (Mattel, 2023). Despite creating a more racially inclusive line of dolls, Mattel kept the same tall and slender figure Barbie is known for.



Christie, 1968



Barbies, 1980

Despite Mattel's efforts, it seemed consumers had enough of Barbie as the brand reached its lowest sales in 25 years in 2015, generating only \$900 million (Dellatto, 2023). "Her (Barbie's) personification of perfection became out of date," said Mattel's former Chief Operating Officer (COO) Richard Dickson of the rapid drop in sales in the early 2010s (Dellatto, 2023).

In 2016, Mattel overhauled the Barbie brand with Barbie Fashionistas.



This new line of Barbie dolls included:

**4**

body types

**7**

skin tones

**22**

eye colors

**24**

hairstyles

This marked the first time in history that a Barbie doll had a different body type than its typical figure. Mattel has continued to develop the Barbie Fashionista line, including the April 2023 addition of a Barbie with Down syndrome (Holland, 2023). However, even with these attempts to reform Barbie's image, criticisms of her classic form have persisted through time and questions of what Barbie truly represents to young girls have remained.

# Lights, Camera, Action!

## The Barbie Movie

A live-action Barbie movie has been in the works for Mattel for decades, but previous iterations with stars Anne Hathaway and Amy Schumer never made it past the writers room due to various casting issues and creative differences between Mattel and studios such as Universal Pictures and Sony Pictures (Farley, 2023). This changed on July 9, 2021, when Mattel officially announced it would be making a live-action Barbie movie backed by Warner Bros. with Greta Gerwig as the film's director and co-writer, and Margot Robbie as the film's lead and one of the producers (Jackson, 2021). The first trailer for "Barbie" was released on Dec. 15, 2022.



# Marketing Campaign

In the months leading up to the film's summer release, Mattel and Warner Bros. worked in unity to execute a massive marketing campaign that consisted of over 100 brand partnerships and an estimated spend of \$150 million (Pasquarelli, 2023). The two companies hold licensing agreements across various industries, including toys, fashion and insurance, and were able to use this crossover to create a slew of brand partnerships (Yale Insights, 2023). Given Barbie's focus on clothing, shoes and accessories, fashion brands like Forever 21, PacSun, Crocs, Kendra Scott and Loungefly found a natural way into the frenzy of Barbie collaborations. However, there were plenty of Barbie brand collaborations that audiences may classify as unlikely. One example is Barbie's partnership with vacation rental service Airbnb; the two companies worked in tandem to create a life-size replica of Barbie's Malibu DreamHouse, featuring Ken-themed decor, and ran sweepstakes where people could enter to win a one-night stay at the house for themselves and a guest (Airbnb, 2023).



Even restaurant chains like Coldstone and Burger King created unique pink offerings with Barbie branding as part of the upcoming movie's marketing campaign (Dockterman, 2023).

Barbie also partnered with Progressive Insurance, an American insurance company that shot a commercial at the movie's Dreamhouse set and made multiple joking references to Barbie (Adekaiyero, 2023).



In its article about the campaign, the Hollywood Reporter called the marketing for "Barbie" "one of the most extensive and impressive campaigns in recent memory" (McClintock, 2023). According to Women's Wear Daily (WWD), "Barbie" received over 100,000 paid and earned media placements, and conversations about the film generated \$474 million in media impact value (Fraser, 2023). With that said, it is evident "Barbie"'s massive marketing campaign set the film up for equally as massive box office success.



# Release and Themes

"Barbie" was released in theaters on July 21, 2023, and generated \$162 million in its opening weekend. The film was met with mostly positive reviews, scoring 88% overall on Rotten Tomatoes (Massabrook, 2023). The film earned over \$1.4 billion in theaters worldwide and made history as the highest-grossing film in Warner Bros. 100-year history. "Barbie" also became the highest grossing film of all time by a female director and the largest worldwide film release of 2023 (Warner Bros., 2023). Based on these metrics, it is clear "Barbie" was a huge success.

## Why Make a Barbie Movie?

While "Barbie" was a financial triumph for Mattel, the film serves a greater purpose to the company – regaining control over what Barbie stands for culturally by redeeming her to the generation of women who rejected her (Hallett, 2023).



To accomplish this, Mattel employed a series of self-aware jabs at the company and the famed fashion doll throughout the film. For example, there is a scene where Barbie meets a group of girls in the real world and waits to be thanked for all the good she has done for women. Instead, the girls call her a “fascist” and say, “You’ve been making women feel bad about themselves since you were invented” (Kostrzewa, 2023). There is another point in the movie where Barbie is worried about not being “stereotypical Barbie pretty” enough, and the narrator breaks the fourth wall to make fun of how ridiculous that line sounds coming from the actress, who is clearly conventionally beautiful (Kostrzewa, 2023). Both scenes make light of Barbie’s history of promoting unattainable beauty standards.



The film even made jabs at Mattel’s executive board, which many regarded as a risky move for the brand. The CEO of Mattel in “Barbie” is played by actor Will Ferrell, and he is portrayed as over-the-top, panicky and somewhat villainous as he spends the film trying to prevent Barbie from reaching self-actualization (Graham-Lowery, 2023). Mattel’s willingness to acknowledge the weaknesses in its executive suite in its own movie is a strategic move that helps its repositioning efforts.

Aside from the jokes, “Barbie” tackles some rather mature themes in its nearly two-hour runtime, most notably through the film’s critique of the patriarchy and its exploration of feminism. “Barbie” is set in Barbieland, a matriarchal society where Barbies hold positions of power and Kens do not.



One of the main plot points of the movie is when Ken, played by Ryan Gosling, ventures to the real world and discovers the patriarchy, which he uses to overthrow the Barbies and put men in charge.

With this plotline, “Barbie” critiques the patriarchy by showing how everyone suffers from it in different ways while simultaneously challenging the matriarchy by having Kens’ exclusion from positions of authority lead to the film’s greatest conflict (Beverly, 2023). In the end, “Barbie” champions inclusivity and self-acceptance by promoting egalitarianism - the notion that everyone deserves equal rights.

Gerwig as the director and co-writer of the film proved to be a valuable addition to the project because she gave voice to the nuanced perception consumers have of Barbie. She explains in an interview with news and pop culture publication The Guardian that she was not encouraged to play with Barbies growing up because her mother felt the doll was an inaccurate representation of real women (The Guardian, 2023).

With this in mind, Gerwig sought to humanize the doll in her script, saying that the movie “is about Barbie, an inanimate doll made out of plastic, but the movie ends up, really, about being human” (The Guardian, 2023).





The themes addressed in “Barbie” are the same issues that have faced the brand since its inception. Through “Barbie,” Mattel recognizes its history of ignorance, and crafts a compelling brand story that pokes fun at its flaws without creating a piece that comes off as an advertisement (Kostrzewa, 2023). In a thought leadership piece for Bryant University, Sukki Yoon, a professor of marketing at the university, explains that by tying its brand activism to a social cause like feminism, Mattel is “selling the movie, and Barbie, like it is part of an ideology” (Yoon, 2023). Yoon argues that even criticisms of the film’s themes have a positive impact by bringing more eyes to the brand (Yoon, 2023).



# Barbenheimer



While much of “Barbie”’s promotion was strategized, one event that contributed to its success came about organically. “Oppenheimer,” a World War II biopic about the invention of the atomic bomb, had the same release date as “Barbie.” Like “Barbie,” the movie featured an acclaimed director, Christopher Nolan, and a star-studded cast, with Cillian Murphy, Robert Downey Jr., Florence Pugh and Emily Blunt (IMDB, 2023). This and the shared release date set the

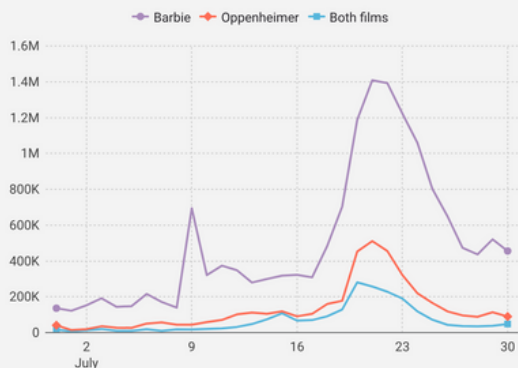
“Barbenheimer” trend in motion. “Barbenheimer” referred to moviegoers seeing “Barbie” and “Oppenheimer” in theaters on the same day. There was no marketing overlap for the two films, making the “Barbenheimer” trend completely consumer-driven. Although both movies were expected to perform well on their own, interest rose around the two because of the trend. Michael O’Leary, president of the National Association of Theatre Owners, stated in an interview with CNN that the anticipation was “unprecedented” (Darcy, 2023). He believed people enjoyed being involved with “an exciting cultural event” like “Barbenheimer” (Darcy, 2023).



## Barbie and Oppenheimer's mention volume in July

Source: Brandwatch Consumer Research

Chart compares mention volume of Barbie, Oppenheimer, and both films together between 1 July – 31 July 2023 across social media, blogs, news sites, and forums.



According to Brandwatch Consumer Research, mentions on social media were high for both films, and a large spike was reported on release day (Smith, 2023).

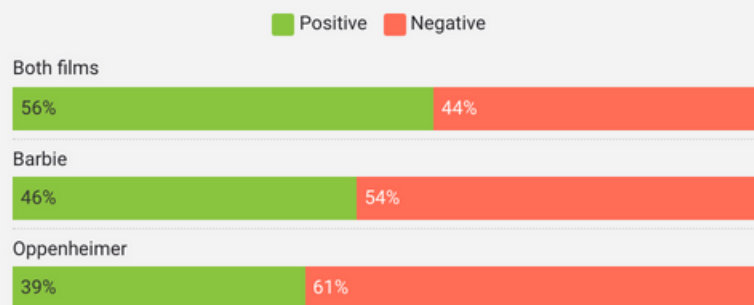


Mentions of both films together on social media garnered more positive sentiments as opposed to the films being mentioned separately from each other (Smith, 2023).

## Attitudes towards Barbie and Oppenheimer

Source: Brandwatch

Chart shows sentiment-categorized mentions about Barbie, Oppenheimer, and both films together between 1 July – 31 July 2023 across social media, blogs, news sites, and forums.



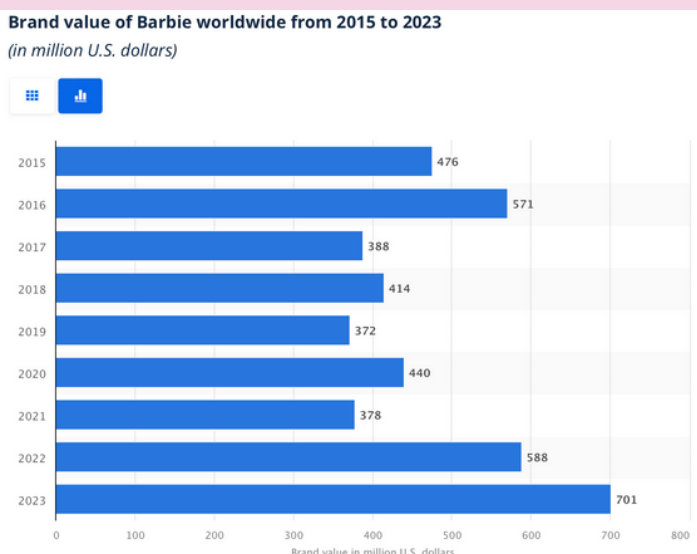
This social data demonstrates the cultural impact of the organic phenomenon with consumers, which also contributed to "Barbie"'s success (Ma, 2023).

# Life in the Dreamhouse

## Financial and Reputational Impact

### Revenue

The financial effects of the Barbie movie were evident in Mattel's third-quarter earnings. According to its earnings report for that quarter, Mattel's sales increased by 9.3% to \$1.92 billion, performing above the \$1.84 billion projected by Wall Street; by Oct. 23, the company's earnings per share rose to \$1.08, exceeding the expected 86 cents per share (Buckley, 2023). In its third-quarter earnings presentation, Mattel stated, "Consumer demand for our product increased, and we continued to outpace the industry" (Mattel, 2023). The earnings report attributes this to having the largest box office opening weekend of 2023 with a "comprehensive marketing campaign and positive film reviews" (Mattel, 2023). An increase in profits led to greater brand momentum, which the Harris Poll defines as the combination of a company's position in the market and its ability to outperform competitors (Feichtmeier, 2023). In 2023, an estimated \$125 million in sales from the movie will go to Mattel (Buckley, 2023).



According to a Statista report, Barbie's brand value nearly doubled from 2021 to 2023, increasing from \$378 million to \$700 million respectively (Statista, 2023).

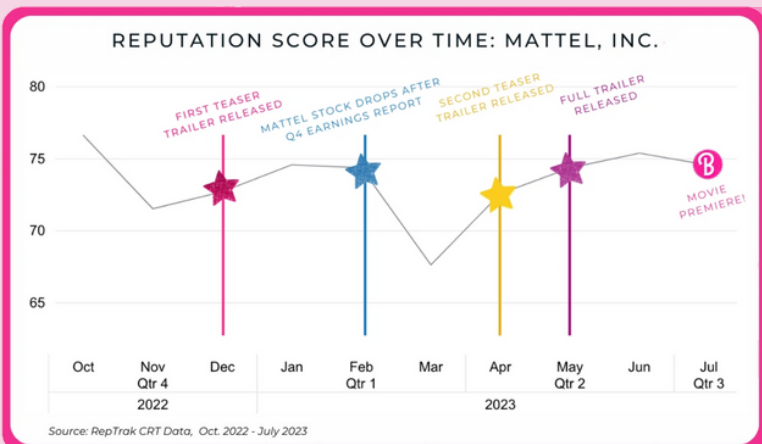
# Share Price

Mattel's stock price was lower for 2023 than the previous year. With a decrease in consumer spending on average, low stock prices are hard to avoid for companies like Mattel that sell non-essential goods (Saul, 2023). Mattel is one of many children's toy companies that have seen the effects of supply chain issues and high post-pandemic living costs (Saul, 2023). Despite being lower overall, Mattel's stock price increased with every Barbie announcement. For instance, when the first trailer was released on Dec. 16, 2022, the stock price increased steadily. A similar trend is evident in the weeks leading up to the movie's release on July 21. Mattel's higher stock prices remained steady until its decline when the Barbie movie left theaters at the end of September (Google Finance, 2023).



**Mattel's Share Price, Jan.-Sept. 2023**

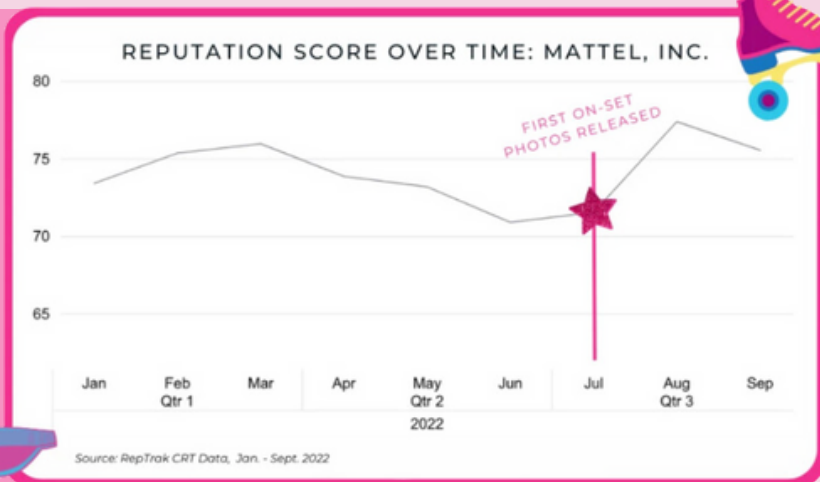
# Reputation



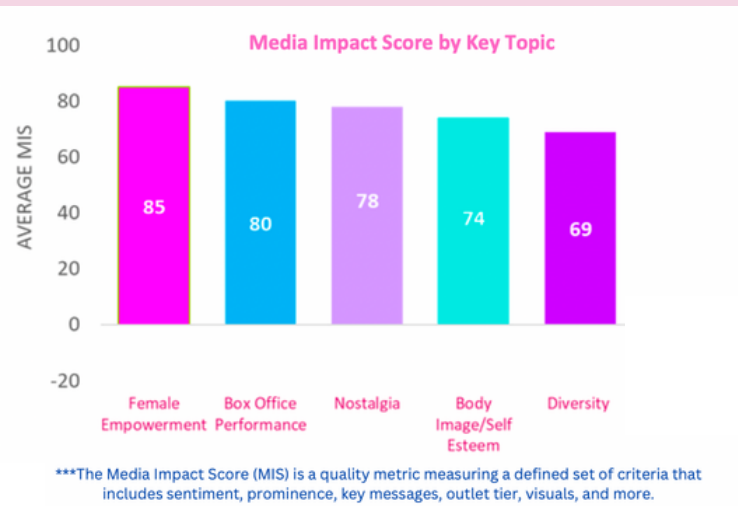
Mattel's reputation score increased with major mentions of the Barbie movie in the news. Mattel also saw a decrease in its reputation score in the month following the premiere of the movie (RepTrak, 2023).

Mattel's executives were portrayed as the villains of the movie, which RepTrak says could have led to the slight score decrease.

RepTrak connected Mattel's jump in reputation score from 71.5 to 77.4 with the first photos released that hinted about the movie (RepTrak, 2023).



Following the release of "Barbie," the brand received overwhelmingly positive media coverage that linked the brand to values like female empowerment, body positivity and diversity (Dwyer, 2023). Fullintel, a media research and services firm, analyzed "Barbie"'s reputation in the media using its Media Impact Score method (MIS). This system aggregates measurements such as sentiment, prominence, key messages, outlet types and visuals into one score.



This figure displays the media impact score of the top five topics “Barbie” was associated with in the media (Dwyer, 2023).

The scores – and topics themselves – are overwhelmingly positive, which shows that Mattel’s decision to make a live-action Barbie movie effectively changed the way people view the doll (Dwyer, 2023).

Mattel took a reputational risk by granting Gerwig lots of creative freedom over the movie. CEO Ynon Kreiz supported this decision and favored telling a more nuanced version of the company’s story (Hussey, 2023). Viewers particularly appreciated the acknowledgment that the Barbie brand was not always inclusive; RepTrak’s Environmental Social Governance score for Mattel, which is calculated based on a company’s influence, business practices and economic contributions, increased by one point because of its efforts to communicate improvements through the film (RepTrak, 2023). At the end of 2023, Mattel had a reputation score of 72.5 and ranked at 61 in RepTrak’s list of the top 100 most reputable companies list for the year. Additionally, the 2023 Brand Keys Customer Loyalty List ranked Mattel at 42, increasing by 46 places from the previous year’s ranking (White, 2023). The ranking is determined by consumer reactions to a brand when making purchasing decisions (White, 2023). Overall, Mattel’s reputation greatly benefited from the movie’s success.

# This Barbie is a Stakeholder

## Stakeholder Engagement

### Mattel Employees and Leadership

As previously established, Mattel employs about 25,000 people and has an executive leadership team of 11 (Mattel, 2023). Prior to the current CEO, Mattel struggled to fill the role; the company had four CEOs in the span of four years, which led to inconsistency in the company's direction (Dellatto, 2023). When Kreiz took over as CEO in 2018, he reoriented the company so that it placed greater emphasis on intellectual property (IP). Kreiz wanted to diversify Mattel's brands by shifting their focus from toy manufacturing to IP-management and entertainment. With that said, Mattel's overall business strategy moved towards growing its IP-driven entertainment business and expanding offerings related to it; "Barbie" was a direct result of this shift in objectives (Coleman, 2023).



Mattel's CEO, Ynon Kreiz



More specific to the “Barbie” movie, it has been established through the case that Mattel allowed itself to be portrayed poorly in the film as a way of making fun of its past shortcomings. Executives were originally apprehensive of this, as the company is extremely cautious of its image and even more protective over Barbie’s image. There was even a point during filming where Dickson flew to the film’s set to oppose Robbie and Gerwig’s decision to shoot a scene he thought was “off-brand” (Northrup, 2023). After watching Robbie perform the scene, Dickson changed his mind and agreed with Gerwig’s decision to film it, but the incident conveys how seriously the company’s C-suite takes its image – the decision to poke fun at itself was not made lightly (Northrup, 2023).



Audience reactions to Mattel’s portrayal were both positive and negative; one perspective appreciates Mattel recognizing its controversial past by poking fun at the fictional executive team, while the other asserts that Mattel’s actual executives do not differ enough from the movie’s, so the company cannot benefit from the irony.

When looking at Mattel's current executive suite in 2023, there are eight men and four women, all of whom are white or white-passing. Of the four women, three were hired in 2017 or later, meaning Mattel only recently gave more women a seat at the table (Mattel, n.d.). Despite the differing perspectives, Mattel's CEO took the movie's criticism in stride, saying the following about the film's portrayal of his team: "There are so many elements of humor and self-deprecation in the movie, and we embrace that. We take our brands very seriously. We take what we do very seriously. But we don't take ourselves too seriously" (Graham-Lowery, 2023). With all of this in mind, the criticism of Mattel's leadership team in "Barbie" brings it into the public eye and places more pressure on the brand to increase the diversity of its executive board. Audiences view the company's leadership as representatives of the company's values, so it is responsible for living out a commitment to its values.

## Real Suite



**Ynon Kreiz**  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer



**Jonathan Anshell**  
EVP / Chief Legal Officer and Secretary



**Robbie Brenner**  
President of Mattel Films



**Anthony DiSilvestro**  
Chief Financial Officer



**Catherine Frymark**  
EVP / Corporate Communications



**Sven Gerjets**  
EVP / Chief Technology Officer



**Roberto Isaias**  
EVP / Chief Supply Chain Officer



**Lisa McKnight**  
EVP / Chief Brand Officer



**Josh Silverman**  
EVP / Chief Franchise Officer



**Amy Thompson**  
EVP / Chief People Officer



**Steve Totzke**  
President and Chief Commercial Officer

## Movie Suite



# Gen Z and Millennial Customers

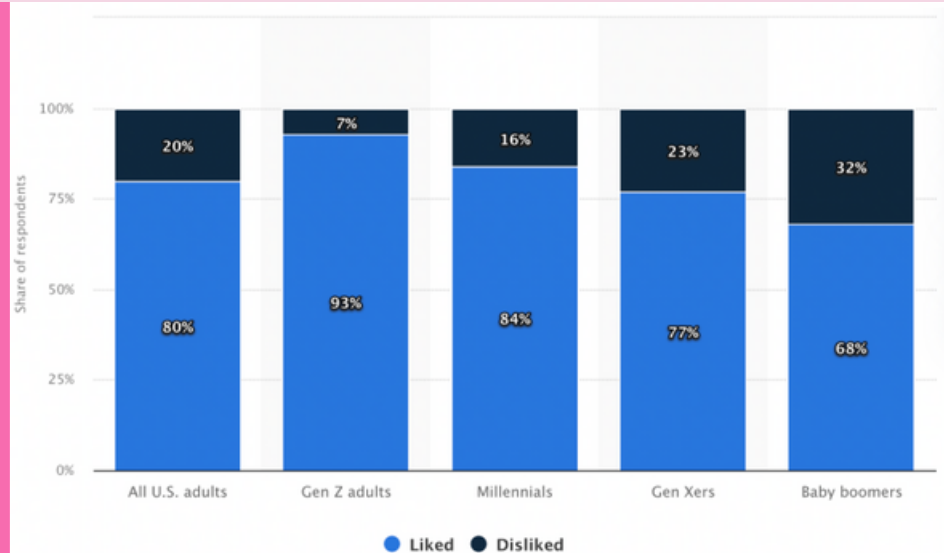
As Mattel moves in a new IP-focused direction, Mattel seeks to capture Gen Z and millennial fan bases by capitalizing on the element of nostalgia to boost sales for and interest in the Barbie brand. According to PRWeek, the promotional campaign for “Barbie” strategically targeted a wide range of audiences, but mainly focused on appealing to the nostalgia of Gen Z and millennials who played with Barbies as kids (Daniels, 2023). The article quoted Adam Smith, president of United Entertainment Group, who said the following of the film’s lengthy list of brand partnerships leading up to the movie: “The partnerships have created mass appeal, because they range from high-end to low-end brands, to those targeting kids to millennials and older adults. It is something we haven’t seen a film in recent years be able to do” (Daniels, 2023).

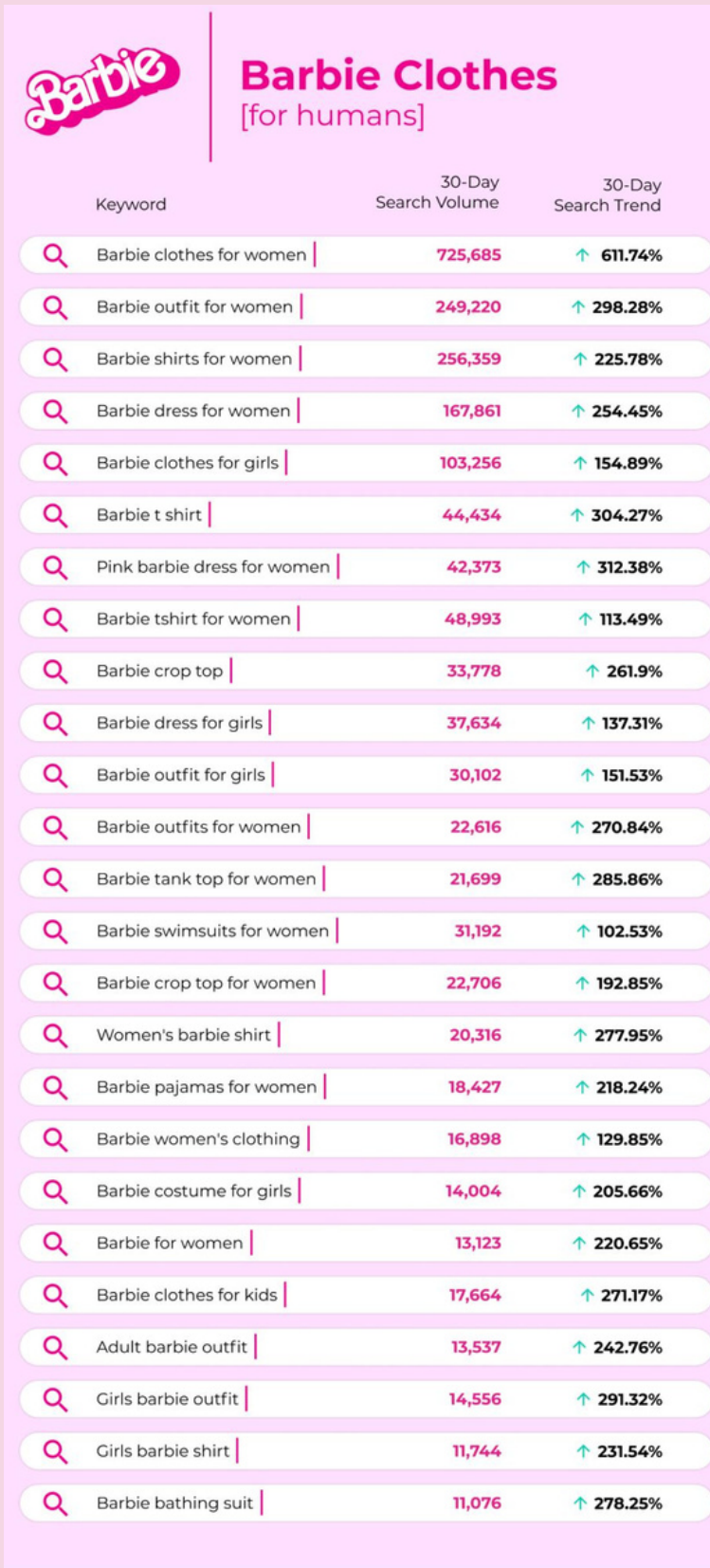




Further research demonstrates Mattel's massive marketing campaign for "Barbie" resonated with adult consumers. A study by Statista found that 80% of surveyed American adults found "Barbie"'s marketing appealing; Gen Z adults found it particularly appealing, with 93% of survey respondents finding the campaign compelling (Statista, 2023). Additionally, a poll conducted by FilmThreat revealed that 24.4% of Gen Z respondents were interested in the movie because of nostalgia and the fact that they played with Barbie dolls as a kid (Shaw, 2023). The marketing campaign proved to be effective for Gen Z and millennials, as 81% of those who saw "Barbie" on its opening weekend in the U.S. were under the age of 35 (Trent, 2023).

Percentage of adults finding the "Barbie" movie marketing appealing in the United States as of July 2023, by generation (Statista, 2023).



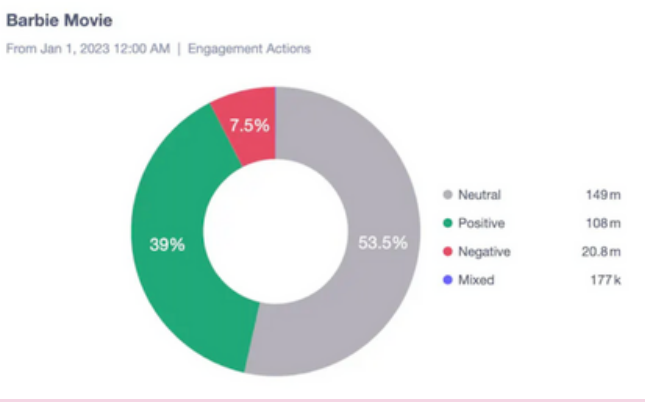


**Barbie** | **Barbie Clothes**  
[for humans]

Keyword	30-Day Search Volume	30-Day Search Trend
Barbie clothes for women	725,685	↑ 611.74%
Barbie outfit for women	249,220	↑ 298.28%
Barbie shirts for women	256,359	↑ 225.78%
Barbie dress for women	167,861	↑ 254.45%
Barbie clothes for girls	103,256	↑ 154.89%
Barbie t shirt	44,434	↑ 304.27%
Pink barbie dress for women	42,373	↑ 312.38%
Barbie tshirt for women	48,993	↑ 113.49%
Barbie crop top	33,778	↑ 261.9%
Barbie dress for girls	37,634	↑ 137.31%
Barbie outfit for girls	30,102	↑ 151.53%
Barbie outfits for women	22,616	↑ 270.84%
Barbie tank top for women	21,699	↑ 285.86%
Barbie swimsuits for women	31,192	↑ 102.53%
Barbie crop top for women	22,706	↑ 192.85%
Women's barbie shirt	20,316	↑ 277.95%
Barbie pajamas for women	18,427	↑ 218.24%
Barbie women's clothing	16,898	↑ 129.85%
Barbie costume for girls	14,004	↑ 205.66%
Barbie for women	13,123	↑ 220.65%
Barbie clothes for kids	17,664	↑ 271.17%
Adult barbie outfit	13,537	↑ 242.76%
Girls barbie outfit	14,556	↑ 291.32%
Girls barbie shirt	11,744	↑ 231.54%
Barbie bathing suit	11,076	↑ 278.25%

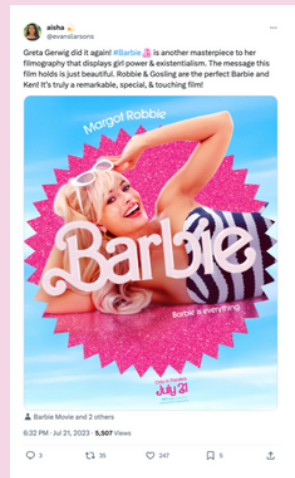
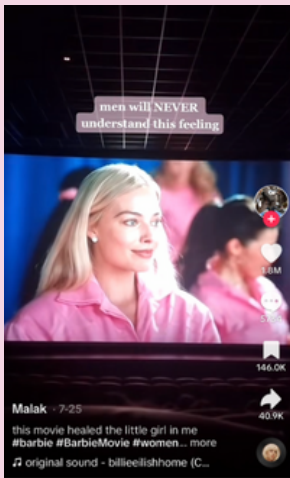
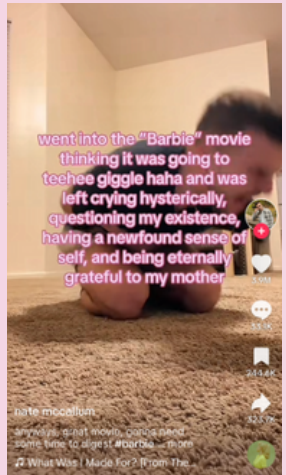
Evidence that audiences were receptive to “Barbie”’s arrival can be seen when looking at different trends the movie inspired. For instance, People Magazine reported on a fashion trend called “barbie-core” ahead of the film’s theatrical release; the article quoted Etsy trend expert Dayna Isom Johnson, who described the trend as being “all about embracing vibrant hues – particularly the doll’s signature hot pink – in everyday life” (Caruso, 2023). Along with this trend, there were significant increases in online searches for Barbie-themed clothing. The term “Barbie merchandise for women” experienced a 611.74% increase in search frequency on Amazon the month prior to the film’s release. Additionally, the search term “Barbie clothes for women” saw a 220% increase and “Adult Barbie outfit” had a 242.76% increase (Hart, 2023).

On top of being extremely receptive to the marketing campaign, Gen Z and millennial audiences overall enjoyed the film; they praised the performances of the actors and described the film as “emotional” and “inspiring” (Gariano, 2023). This sentiment translated on social media, where the movie has reached nearly 7 million posts across platforms (Ann-Derrick Gaillot, 2023).



According to Meltwater, 58% of the posts were uploaded by women ages 18-24; the sentiment of the posts was generally positive, with 39% of posts conveying positive sentiment and only 7.5% of posts with negative sentiment.

# Social Media Posts



# Shareholders

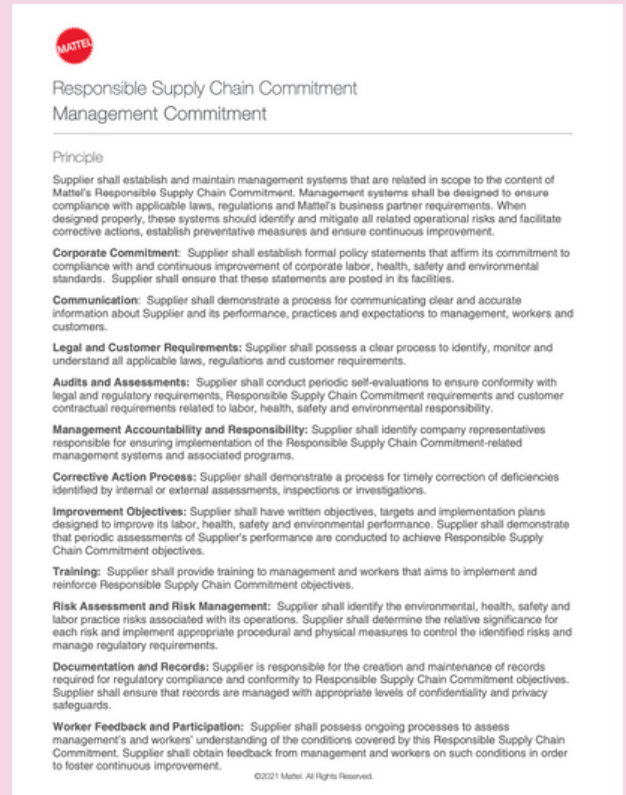
Mattel prides itself on maintaining open communication with investors, and on “creating long-term shareholder value” (Mattel, n.d.). Mattel’s website includes a page dedicated to investor relations with sections related to events, presentations, financial information and corporate governance. The financial results Mattel reported in its 2023 third-quarter report have received an overwhelmingly positive response from shareholders, with the consensus being a strong sense of hope due to the success of the Barbie movie (Mattel, 2023). However, despite this sense of hope and the fact that the company exceeded its sales expectations in 2023, its stock price did not change. Financial services provider the Motley Fool explains the Barbie movie’s impact on Mattel’s stock with the following: “The stock isn't likely to soar overnight and reach its peak levels, but the movie could offer revenue a lift. And, amid today's vast selection of toys, it could help Barbie stand out. So, ‘Barbie’ may add to Mattel's positive long-term picture”(Cimino, 2023).

To increase share value, Mattel began buying back its shares for the first time in nine years (Cimino, 2023). This decision by Mattel executives is a sign they are confident in the company’s future. Between the buybacks and its strengthening consumerbase, Mattel anticipates continued financial growth in the coming years.



# Suppliers

Mattel's supply is produced in either company-owned facilities or third-party manufacturers. In order to cut costs, Mattel produces the majority of its products, including Barbie, in company-owned facilities. Facilities exist around the world with its main production in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico and Thailand (CSI Market, 2023). As previously mentioned, Mattel is committed to ethical sourcing for the manufacturing of its products and holds its suppliers to high standards, which are detailed in its Responsible Supply Chain Commitment. Mattel expects its suppliers to maintain communication to management and workers. The document outlines how a supplier should "demonstrate a process for communicating clear and accurate information" (Mattel, n.d.). Employees at Mattel communicate with suppliers by routinely monitoring facilities to ensure they are upholding company standards. Inspections measure quality and security in accordance with its documented commitments (Mattel, n.d.).



## Responsible Supply Chain Commitment Document



Following the increased attention to the Barbie brand, supplies related to Barbie were in high demand, which resulted in shortages. The most notable of these shortages was with Rosco, the paint company responsible for supplying the Warner Bros. set with its signature pink shade (Valdez, 2023).



The demand caused by Barbie resulted in an international pink paint shortage, which affected manufacturers who were using the same color to produce Barbie products.

Consumers would buy items coated with the signature color to find them out of stock the next day. Lauren Proud, Vice President of Marketing and Digital Experience for Rosco, confirmed the shortage that resulted from “Barbie”'s film set (Kolirin, 2023). However, Rosco did not blame Warner Bros. or Mattel for this issue. The company was content with the product being used to that extent, saying the following in a statement: “We delivered everything we could, they got it all. We can’t wait to see how it looks in the film” (Kolirin, 2023).

# Warner Bros.



Warner Bros. and Mattel have a partnership that has existed for two decades prior to “Barbie.” In this partnership, Mattel holds Warner Bros.’ toy license to “create products for fans featuring their favorite Warner Bros. characters and storylines” (McDonald, 2023). Together, the two companies use the power of storytelling to create products their audiences would enjoy (Goldsmith, 2023). It was this partnership that helped the “Barbie” movie come to fruition.

“Barbie” became Warner Bros.’ highest-grossing global release in its 100-year history (Maruf, 2023). The film also earned recognition from Hollywood’s top awards programs, which reflected well on Warner Bros. It received the most nominations of any film at the 2024 Golden Globes with nine and won the Cinematic and Box Office Achievement Award and the award for Best Original Song for “What Was I Made For?” by Billie Eilish and Finneas O’Connell (Nolfi, 2024). Additionally, the film’s soundtrack received 11 Grammy nominations (Faguy, 2023). With this massive success, Mattel renewed its licensing deal with the studio, meaning the toy company will continue to serve as the official licensee for toys, dolls, vehicles and games for Warner Bros. franchises (Weprin, 2023).

The partnership’s renewal was described by Pam Lifford, President of Warner Bros. Discovery Global Brands, Franchises and Experiences, as “a testament of the power of storytelling and innovation” (Weprin, 2023).

# Let's be Ken-did

## Looking Forward, Corporate Character and Ethics

### Looking Forward

"Barbie" became available to stream on Max, and available to rent and buy on all digital platforms in September 2023 (Muhammad, 2024). Currently, there are no announced plans for a "Barbie" sequel. According to the Hollywood Reporter, Gerwig, Robbie and Ryan Gosling, who played Ken, are not contracted to participate in a sequel and the 2023 strikes by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) have made negotiating contracts increasingly difficult (Kit, 2023).

Mattel will continue riding the high of "Barbie" through awards season with nominations in major categories at the Grammys, SAG Awards

and Golden Globes. Publications such as Forbes, Variety Magazine and Entertainment suspect nominations at the Oscars are to follow (Faguy, 2023). In the future, Mattel plans to continue its new IP-focused



entertainment strategy with 14 upcoming movies based on some of its other popular franchises, such as Hot Wheels, Polly Pocket, American Girl, Uno and the Magic 8 Ball (Coleman, 2023). Kreiz described the company's upcoming direction with the following: "We are here to build film franchises. We don't say that every movie will be as successful as 'Barbie,' but we intend to apply the same methodology, the same approach, the same capabilities" (Coleman, 2023).

Barbie's successful year marks more than just a new direction for the brand. It indicates an even more significant phenomenon – the power of women on the US economy.

In August 2023, The Wall Street Journal published an article titled "Women Own This Summer. The Economy Proves It," where the author showcased "Barbie's" impact on the economy in conjunction with Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour (Krouse, 2023). The Washington Post published an article with similar sentiments, dubbing 2023 as the year of the economic woman and citing multiple instances where women drove economic growth (Sarin, 2023). "Barbie" was included in this article, accompanied by other huge events like the Women's World Cup, the Eras Tour and the Renaissance World Tour. Jody Gerson, chairwoman and CEO of Universal Music Publishing Group, said the following to explain the phenomenon: "Barbie, Taylor Swift and Beyoncé tell stories of female empowerment in authentic ways at a time when many women feel powerless. These are strong women who are not afraid to be in charge, and I think we're responding to that. We subconsciously have rallied around them because their power gives us power" (Krouse, 2023).

Economists predict this trend will continue to grow. Lifestyle and demographic changes among women, such as having children later in life, female wage increases and shifting household gender roles, has led to women having more disposable income. University of Kansas professor Misty Heggeness described this further, saying, "Instead of women making decisions about purchasing traditional goods that are in some sense a public good for the family, they're actually using their resources to purchase goods and experiences that bring them joy. They're controlling the household purse but a lot of that income is coming from the women themselves" (Krouse, 2023). This new trend in consumer spending showcased by "Barbie's" success provides an opportunity for brands to capitalize on the female dollar by creating products and experiences that resonate with them.

# Corporate Character and Ethics

Mattel's "Barbie" directly aligns with the company's mission to **create innovative experiences that inspire the limitless potential in every girl** (Mattel, 2023). With over 100 brand partnerships (both likely and unlikely in nature), a marketing budget that exceeded the cost of the film's production and a compelling narrative that humanized the Barbie doll and its parent company, Mattel completely changed Barbie's reputation in pop culture (Pasquarelli, 2023).

Industry leaders share the sentiment that "Barbie"'s seemingly infinite reach accomplished something very few brands have been able to achieve – marketplace domination (Daniels, 2023).

Instead of ridiculing the doll for her overly feminine attributes, audiences around the world embraced Barbie by dressing in pink to watch the movie, participating in "Barbie"-inspired trends and even getting the movie's song "I'm Just Ken" on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, where it debuted at 87 with 5.2 million streams in the U.S. (Zellner, 2023). For the first time in a long time, audiences embraced the brand's message of supporting young girls and found there is more to Barbie than what she looks like.

"I'm Just Ken"



# The Page Principles

Mattel adhered to the Page Principles through powerful storytelling that authentically shared Barbie's purpose with its stakeholders. Mattel **told the truth** about its brand and **listened to its stakeholders** (specifically its consumer base) when they voiced criticisms. In fact, Mattel's risky decision to poke fun at itself and the criticism it has received prevented the film from coming off like a puff piece; this serves as an example of how **remaining calm, patient and good-humored** throughout the campaign worked to Mattel's advantage (Graham-Lowery, 2023).

The company's receptiveness to criticism also captured Mattel's ability to **"prove it with action."** The Barbie brand has been making efforts to live up to its promise of being inclusive since 2016 when it launched Barbie Fashionistas. "Barbie"'s diverse cast and theme of self-acceptance shows the company is continuing to demonstrate its commitment to inclusive messaging. However, Mattel struggles to reflect the notion of change within its own enterprise. As mentioned previously, its 12-person executive suite consists mostly of white or white-passing men. This call for inclusivity by the company has yet to be realized, as **an enterprise's true character is expressed by its people.**

Mattel also **conducted public relations as if the whole enterprise depended on it** because, in the case of Barbie specifically, it does. Barbie's reputation is extremely valuable to Mattel, and they are very protective over the brand as a whole; "Barbie" is one of its riskiest moves yet, but was essential to drive the business' new IP-focused direction and **manage for tomorrow.** Mattel's strategic release of a live-action "Barbie" movie accompanied by an impressive marketing campaign effectively transformed Barbie into a positive symbol of feminism for girls of all ages and improved the overall reputation of the brand.



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[mattel/#:~:text=Mattel%20buys%20back%20shares,for%20buybacks%20of%200%24169%20million](https://www.fool.com/investing/2023/07/13/could-barbie-movie-be-game-changer-for-mattel/#:~:text=Mattel%20buys%20back%20shares,for%20buybacks%20of%200%24169%20million)

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