

## Painful Barbie in a Global Marketing Perspective

Patrick Sim MM\*

Capital Advisors Partners Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore

### Abstract

The essay discusses the American doll, Barbie within a global marketing perspective. It will summarize the main points of the case and explain how the material in the global marketing review relates to the case. The issues to be discussed will involve Mattel's global marketing strategy for Barbie and its success. This will be negotiated with its brand strength as well as its icon status and how to create more marketing opportunities and turn the sales around in the US. These issues will also be taken from the perspective of the local Middle East culture when Mattel goes global in search for a befitting cultural nuance from its customers as well as seeking the perfect media response. The essay will also highlight the future suggestions for the product and the company.

**Keywords:** Global marketing; Barbie branding; Sustainable efforts; Cultural nuance; Iconic marketing

### Introduction

#### Global marketing strategy

Global marketing as defined by Doyle [1] suggests "marketing on a worldwide scale reconciling or taking commercial advantage of global operational differences, similarities and opportunities in order to meet global objectives". Global marketing is expansive, extensive, and complex. It can be seen as both a business strategy and an operation. It can be embodied in companies or perceived as a phenomenon. One view of global marketing is as a giant supply chain management system or an added value system. Global giants such as Toyota, VW and DaimlerChrysler source their raw materials, semi-processed and processed materials, finance, and human inputs from all over the world and deliver the results of the combination of these, i.e. vehicles, to numerous market segments, adding value as they do so. Barbie adopts such added value activities to a certain extent, such as its partnerships with Bandai, an international based firm that produce these toys, which Barbie can thus be addressed as a global firm. This had proved that Barbie has embraced a global perspective, but can it act local? It has entered into many continents from Middle East, Europe and Latin America to suggest that that it can. According to David [2], there is a proactive willingness to adopt a global perspective instead of a country-to-country or region-by-region perspective in the development of a marketing strategy.

Mattel will move its resources from country to country to achieve its goals and maximize marketing value by globalizing its marketing activities towards worldwide efforts, the research of domestic and foreign markets, the pursuit of international partnerships, as well as the cosmetic customization of its products, for instance changing the Barbie's eyes from blue to brown. However, it was shown in the case that a customized Barbie in Japan did not favor Mattel, because the Japanese would be seen to prefer the original version of the American Barbie instead of a localized Barbie. In this sense, Mattel operated as if the world were one large market, ignoring superficial regional and national differences while making sure that marketing activities fit the products and services to the practices and cultural characteristics of different markets. But this would seem very superficial as not every culture would prefer localization of foreign products. Some cultures are bound to be more receptive of original products without any form of modification, whereas girls from other cultures would prefer dolls that look like themselves.

#### Branding and key success factors for sustainable efforts

Mattel is a big, successful brand, which has good brand strength, financially and through its strong customer based loyalty. It can be analyzed that Mattel/Barbie must maintain these success factors and be sustainable in marketing efforts to be able to increase their future opportunities:-

- Economies of scale in production and distribution;
- Lower marketing costs and reducing external product frills;
- Consistency in brand image and activities which fit the needs of customers;
- Good customer and business retention;
- Uniformity of branding practices rather than brand customization;
- Retail and internet branding.

#### Cultural Nuances

Culture is the norm and mores which are acceptable to a culture. It is based on artifacts that describe and communicate what a culture is [3]. In making strides to success, a company must understand its local culture and subculture. The Latin American economies are making notable macroeconomic advances, although much remains to be done in order to improve the long-term growth rate, which is far lower than required, in order to reduce the high level of unemployment [4]. In Iran, Barbie has shown to be a success even if it costs so much more than the Iranian's average salary. However, this does not mean that Iranians would not purchase Barbie's competitors dolls.

Additionally, in order to be able to develop successful customer-driven global marketing strategies, organizations need to take into account changing consumer demographics and expectations. Changes

\*Corresponding author: Patrick Sim MM, Capital Advisors Partners Asia Pte Ltd, Tel: 65-6632-0480; E-mail: [edulearner.sg@gmail.com](mailto:edulearner.sg@gmail.com)

Received July 29, 2015; Accepted September 28, 2015; Published October 10, 2015

Citation: Patrick Sim MM (2015) Painful Barbie in a Global Marketing Perspective. J Account Mark 4: 142. doi:10.4172/2168-9601.1000142

Copyright: © 2015 Patrick Sim MM. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

in global consumer demographics, especially in terms of their increasing life expectancy and wealth, are constantly shaping the expectations of how consumers needs should be served [5]. In this instance, Middle Eastern children needs to be served and not their parents. The target customers naturally would be children since they are more vocal and any slight error in marketing research would result in a failure. Children are more sensitive towards their toy products since western media has profligate to an extent that either shows a western country in a positive or negative light, which is confusing and will hurt any western based company. Will this mean that consumer culture will always be affected by media? It is however certain that the Barbie brand with its boyfriend, Ken and his Cadillac continue to prove to be welcomed and distanced.

### **Brand Icon in Marketing Matters in Sales Turnover**

An iconic marketing effort reflects its principles of brand strength, customer-focus, and its willingness to innovate and adapt to new visual identity when required [6]. An icon will only be as such, an icon. It does not always reserve the right to be an icon perpetually. It takes several stages to evolve into a brand icon. Western dolls that are produced, marketed, and consumed throughout the world have been put on a par with Hollywood's idols back in the 80's. Being competed by Iranian's Bratz for instance has agitated Barbie to roll a new line called Flavas, in order to prevent further drop in market shares. However, brand extension would need convincing and persuasion. Brand positioning and rejuvenation is also key to sustainable sales, especially so in more developed countries, which may grow tired of the usual Barbie look.

### **Conclusion**

Barbie and its global outlook can be discussed from many facets, and it can be seen that a sustainable global marketing strategy with good key success factors will allow it to continue its success globally as well as in America. It is therefore vital to assess the cultural factors in each market, as each market can highlight different needs of the product lines. It would also help if the brand has achieved iconic status as this is a competitive edge against other competing products. Mattel and Barbie have to constantly find ways to reposition and rejuvenate its brand to keep its icon status.

### **References**

1. Doyle P (1995) Marketing in the new millennium. *European Journal of Marketing* 29: 23-41.
2. David FR (1986) *Fundamentals of Strategic Management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
3. Prahalad CK., Hamel G (1990) The core competence of the corporation. *Harvard Business Review* 79-91.
4. United Nations (2000) *World Population Prospect: The 2000 Revision*. Population Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York.
5. Grönroos C (1994) From marketing mix to relationship marketing: towards a paradigm shift in marketing. *Management Decision* 32: 4-20.
6. Zairi M (1996) Competition: what does it mean? *The TQM Magazine* 8: 54-59.