

Marketing's Long-term Impact on Societal Behaviors

Submitted by

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Abstract

Through this project, I will analyze different ways societal and individual behavior is influenced by marketing materials and how those materials are interacted with. My research aims to explore how marketing has long-term impacts on the behaviors exhibited by a target audience and how that has the potential to spread to large-scale societal behavior changes. Through this study, various industries would be better equipped to utilize the marketing tactic of shifting the culture of a large demographic and their societal behaviors in reaction to the marketing material in order to promote and sell products, services, people, and ideas over a large period of time. This will likely lead to an overall industry shift in how things are marketed with the introduction of this relatively new concept of shifting how a large-scale demographic interacts with a piece of marketing material and generates a culture surrounding that material.

Current Research

It is a proven fact that marketing has an impact on the behavior of its audience through research conducted on the use of the theory of stimulus-organism-response, utility evaluation optimization, social marketing, prospect theory, and the framing effect.

Social media is a prominently used tool within the marketing industry to reach potential consumers. Firms utilize social media content marketing to publish content intended to reach their target market and encourage engagement through consumer behaviors such as liking, sharing, or commenting on a post made (Dai & Wang, 2021).

In 2021, scholars Yonghui Dai and Tao Wang conducted a study researching the predictability of consumer behavior when engaging with a company's social media posts. Within their research, they analyzed how beneficial machine learning algorithms are to predict human behavior in response to marketing material.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory served as the theoretical framework for their further investigation. The SOR theory proposes a relationship between stimuli and responses based on the environmental psychology assumption that people assess their environment before responding to a stimulus (Dai & Wang, 2021). The SOR theory states that stimuli presented within one's environment impact their unique organismic experience and drive their behavior response (Dai & Wang, 2021). Within the study conducted by Dai and Wang, the various features of a social media post are determined to act as stimuli that generate different behavioral responses such as likes, comments, and shares from the post's audience (Dai & Wang, 2021).

Internal processing of perceptual, physiological, feeling, and thinking activities occur automatically when a user views a post made on social media (Dai & Wang, 2021). This process

is viewed as a utility evaluation. When interacting with a post, users go through the process of utility evaluation before choosing the behavior that best increases their utility satisfaction level (Dai & Wang, 2021). The study conducted determines if consumer behaviors influenced by the SOR theory and utility evaluation are predictable based on the features of a post.

The research conducted by Dai and Wang concluded that human-designed features of a social media post when coupled with features designed by machine learning algorithms, produce higher accuracy in consumer behavior predictions in their engagement with that post through the use of the SOR theory and utility evaluation optimization.

Additionally, in 2022, further research to add to the discussion of the behavioral impacts of marketing was done by Maleki et al.. The study determined how to use marketing to potentially increase the use of sunscreen in adolescent Iranian males to decrease the rate of skin cancer. The study's foundation lies in the belief that through social marketing, behaviors of the target audience are able to be analyzed and insight could be offered into current opinions and beliefs of the demographic.

Maleki et al. designed the process of how to create a social marketing-based intervention using both qualitative and quantitative studies to analyze the audience. Both forms of research are necessary to fully comprehend the participants' views on the promotion of protective behaviors and the marketing channels used to convey information about sun protection. The study followed the process of creating an intervention through a qualitative study, systematic review, development of appropriate tools, a cross-sectional study, design of the intervention, and a feasibility study. Once the intervention is created, its components and promotional material would be developed, tested, and revised. This social marketing intervention is predicted to yield results that offer insight into the current behaviors of the target group to be further investigated.

Through their study, Maleki et al. were able to demonstrate that through social marketing, the behavior of the target group could be shifted. To further convey the success social marketing has in shifting audience behavior, they found another study based on the practice that implemented the social marketing method to raise public awareness to the dangers of ultraviolet rays and the best methods of sun protection in Australia. This was accomplished through the use of nurses informing their patients and employing a community-based marketing method through vocal information spread.

Furthermore, to add to the discussion of marketing on consumer behavior, in 2020, Gionfriddo et al. analyzed how the marketing of sustainability efforts towards European football fans right before a typically popular match had affected their behavior and attitude towards such efforts. Their research was founded on prospect theory which is often used to explain how individuals make decisions when under uncertain conditions (Gionfriddo et al., 2023). This theory was used to aid in interpreting the value participants expect to receive from their behavioral choices after exposure to positive, neutral, and negative messages about their favorite team in relation to sustainability efforts. The participant's reactions are based upon the framing effect which is a cognitive bias that results in the specific way information is presented (Gionfriddo et al., 2023). Through their study, participants were shown graphics that related their favorite team or fellow fans to environmental sustainability. A positive, neutral, and negatively connotated graphic was shown to each participant and both their behavior and attitude towards the graphic and sustainability efforts were then analyzed.

The results of Gionfriddo et al.'s study concluded that the participants who shared the same values as their favorite team were more receptive to the graphics shown. More specifically, the participants responded better to the positive graphics rather than the negative or neutral

graphics. This is because when in a football stadium, which is an emotionally charged environment, fans join a collective identity with other fans of their team, making marketing materials that resonate with the culture and values of the group identity more effective. However, the attitudes that were expressed towards environmental sustainability did not correlate to the behaviors shown within the stadium, aligning with other research that demonstrates an attitude-behavior gap (Gionfriddo et al., 2023). The research done by Gionfriddo et al. also concludes that marketing messages in stadiums where groupthink is prevalent does not translate to the same reaction when used outside of this environment where that social collective does not exist.

Aims and Objectives

Introduction

This research aims to question how consumer behavior is influenced by marketing materials and how this shifts how those consumers interact with that material. This study dissects the long-term impacts on a large demographic's change in societal behaviors that stem from the impact of the marketing material. The culture of the demographic, as well as how they interact with marketing materials that are intended to have a social impact, will be analyzed with this research to determine how marketing has an impact on consumer behavior.

Aims

1. To investigate what marketing and environmental factors influence a behavior shift within the target market

2. To analyze what successful examples of a behavioral or cultural shift through interaction with a piece of marketing has occurred within the industry

Objectives

1. Determining what marketing and environmental factors of a marketing material influence behavior changes within the target audience will help marketers to better understand a relatively new form of marketing to consumers. This new method consists of changing how a larger demographic interacts with marketing materials and shifts their cultural behavior in reaction to the marketing material presented and must be analyzed to better understand its driving forces

2. By investigating existing examples of marketing campaigns that have found success in shifting their consumers' behavior and interaction with the campaign, marketers are better able to comprehend how to replicate this success. This analysis helps to better understand the overall marketing industry shift towards active participation in marketing campaigns from consumers

Methodology

The methodology of this research will follow the analysis of the marketing methods of the characters Barbie and Spider-Man in order to better understand various methods of impacting consumer behavior through marketing. An analysis will be performed of the marketing strategies employed by the movies Barbie (2023) and Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse (2018). Through the analysis of the marketing tactics performed by the topics chosen, investigation can be done to determine what marketing and environmental factors influence a behavior shift within their individual target demographics as well as allow for an analysis of successful examples within the

marketing industry that have occurred of a behavior or cultural shift through interaction with a piece of marketing.

To begin, articles will be found that relate to the marketing strategies employed by the chosen subjects. These articles will provide the foundation for understanding how that subject typically employs marketing material towards their target market. This must be done to establish a baseline understanding of the subject's marketing strategy.

Then, various forms of social media that became popular such as TikToks and Instagram posts made by consumers interacting with the marketing material will be analyzed. The analysis will include detailing the specifics of how the consumer is interacting with that piece of marketing material as well as how other users of the social media platform then interact with that post. The analysis will include information on if consumers are encouraged or actively partake in interaction of the marketing material outside of the social media platform and in their personal social interactions offline.

The study will conclude with an analysis of how long the consumer interaction with the marketing material lasted, measured in months. This will determine the long-lasting impacts of the marketing campaign on societal behavior and determine if a culture shift did in fact occur because of the consumer interaction.

The Unification Phenomenon

Social Identity Theory

Barbie

Fandom derives from fan culture stemming from the enjoyment of a piece of media with participation from individuals that includes material culture, commercial culture, and community engagement (Hills, 2017). Fan culture is the creation of one overarching group called a fandom

for a piece of media that includes subcultures of interdependent and independent interactions with that piece of media and other fandom community members (Hills, 2017).

Ruth Handler, the cofounder of Mattel Inc. introduced Barbie in 1959 (Lord, 2024). Barbie was the first three-dimensional doll that featured an adult woman in a time-period where the only other three-dimensional dolls were baby dolls (Lord, 2024). Barbie was eleven inches long, made of plastic, wore a black and white bathing suit, and was depicted as a woman with blonde hair and blue eyes (Lord, 2024).

Barbie was originally marketed as a fashion doll for teens and young girls but gradually came to symbolize the standard “American girl” who represented independence (Mishra and Bakry, 2021). The doll allowed those who played with her to use their imagination and creativity extensively. This allowed individuals to identify with Barbie as they had the ability to imagine her as similar to themselves. As society in the United States grew to be more diverse and consumers encouraged products that represent people to reflect this diversity, the Barbie doll line introduced more dolls beginning in the 1980s that represent different, ethnicities, skin tones, hair types, body types, disabilities, and career paths (Mishra and Bakry, 2021).

The introduction of Barbie dolls that more accurately represented those who played with them created a further connection to the user’s social identity in tandem with the doll they played with. Research has shown that consumers use brands, products, and marketing campaigns to develop their individual identity (Mishra and Bakry, 2021). As more consumers began to identify with the Barbie doll line, they began to identify with the brand itself and join the Barbie fandom that was created through this widespread identification.

A case study conducted by Mishra and Bakry on the release of the first hijab-wearing Barbie doll in 2018, concluded that relating a product to a consumer’s social identity through

marketing further facilitates consumption and impacts the consumer-brand relationship (Mishra and Bakry, 2021). The study demonstrates that the consumer's relationship with a brand is ever-evolving as products change and new products are released and can elicit either a positive or negative response within the consumer as the product shifts its connection to the consumer's identity (Mishra and Bakry, 2021). This follows the social identity theory which is an individual's perceived membership of a social group (Mishra and Bakry, 2021).

Through the use of the social identity theory, Barbie successfully marketed the movie Barbie (2023) by impacting the behavior of those belonging to the social groups: adult females, female children, and the Barbie fandom. The second official trailer for Barbie (2023) was released on April 4, 2023, and featured different Barbie characters such as Barbie, Physicist Barbie, Dr. Barbie, President Barbie, and Writer Barbie saying "hi Barbie" to one another (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023). The social groups identified began to interact with the media through social media posts, consumption, and human interaction with many companies joining in on the consumer behavior shift shortly after the release of this trailer.

Consumer interaction with Barbie (2023) was first noted within the trend of "hi Barbie" soon after the release of the second trailer. Through this trend, users of the social media platform TikTok lip-synced to the audio from the trailer of the various Barbies saying "hi Barbie" while wearing pink (Mollie Daniela, 2023). Companies also joined in on this trend to market various pink products of theirs. One example is found within the social media platform Instagram where the user "thefoundcottage", the Instagram account for the company The Found Cottage, posted an Instagram reel video of their employees wearing different pink dresses that can be found within their product catalog (The Found Cottage, 2023).

This online trend soon transferred into an overall cultural shift that transcended the online world and impacted interpersonal connections among those with established relations and strangers. Through the trailer's marketing, those involved in the Barbie fandom began to partake in the social identity theory and adjusted their behavior to align with the group identity. They began to say "hi Barbie" or "hi Ken" to girls and guys wearing pink respectively to replicate how the characters in the Barbie (2023) trailer greet each other (Beck, 2023). This is often met with a "hi Barbie" in response to further social engagement (Beck, 2023). This newfound trend within the Barbie fandom began to spread to both those intending to see the movie as well as those who just wanted to participate in the cultural shift being instigated.

Furthermore, the Barbie fandom initiated the cultural trend of wearing pink or dressing up as Barbie to see Barbie (2023) (Sun, 2023). Various social media platforms began to witness the trend of users showing off what they wore to Barbie (2023) (Sun, 2023) to interact with the Barbie fandom. This further enhanced the cultural shift initiated through the movie's marketing and how the campaign was interacted with as well as created an influx in the consumerism of pink apparel.

With the rise in the consumption of pink apparel, Mattel Inc. experienced a substantial increase in the sales of the Barbie doll line. On June 1, 2023, Mattel Inc. launched a new collection for the Barbie doll line which featured Barbie and Ken dolls that replicated the fashion looks shown within Barbie (2023) (Kavilanz, 2023). The first wave of products related to the movie quickly sold out after their release and the company showed an increase in sales by 16% within their third fiscal quarter of 2023 (Kavilanz, 2023) (Richardson, 2023). This increase was generated by the cultural trend of individuals purchasing a Barbie doll that aligned with their social identity after watching Barbie (2023). For example, one user of the social media platform

TikTok posted about how after they saw Barbie (2023), they went to Target with their mother where they each purchased a Barbie that looks like them and represents their social identity (Mary Kathryn Design, 2023).

After societal culture had been largely impacted both online, at the box office, and within personal interactions, social media platforms began to see a rise in the “this Barbie is a...” trend where users mimicked the character movie posters to convey what job they have. Within the Barbie (2023) marketing campaign, the character movie posters included the tagline “This Barbie is a” followed by what career that character has. Through this marketing, the target demographic was compelled through the social identity theory to share their own career path with other members of the social group they are part of in the format of the media they resonate with. One TikTok user, Phoebe Rustin, recreated the movie’s intro of the movie where Barbie is getting ready for the day (Rustin, 2023). Rustin portrayed her own identity within the video and represented herself as a trauma nurse while still aligning with the social collective’s culture of creating a video for this established trend.

Despite Barbie (2023) leaving theaters on August 19, 2023, members of the Barbie fandom continued to interact with the newfound culture established through social identity marketing. Halloween is a holiday where participants dress up as their favorite characters within the media and monsters from folklore. These participants are typically children who knock on adults’ doors and ask for candy. As this holiday began to approach, individuals participating in the culture shift instigated by Barbie (2023) chose to dress as Barbie or a version of Barbie for the holiday. Many users on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram posted content showing off their Barbie Halloween costume and encouraged others to dress as Barbie for the holiday as well. One user used the “hi Barbie” trend to show both their Barbie Halloween

costume and their friends that they coordinated to have what became known as “Barbie Halloween” among participants of the Barbie fandom culture (Kiva, 2023). Retail stores were selling Barbie costumes that replicated the ones shown in the movie and began to post content on their social media platforms to market to their followers who wanted to take part in “Barbie Halloween”. The company Caulfield Novelty made a cheeky joke about how everyone would be dressed as Barbie for the holiday in a TikTok video they posted while showing their audience the cowboy Barbie costume that they offer (Caulfield Novelty, 2023). Both individuals who engaged with the marketing of Barbie (2023) as well as companies who wanted to engage in the ongoing culture shift happening because of the social identity theory, posted content on their social media platforms in anticipation of the Halloween holiday and chose to dress up as the iconic character to celebrate, thus furthering the interaction of the marketing material for the movie beyond when the movie left theaters.

Interaction with the marketing campaign of Barbie (2023) through the use of the social identity theory began with the release of the second trailer in early April 2023 where fans first interacted with the trailer using the “hi Barbie” trend on social media. This lasted until early November 2023 when the Halloween season of individuals dressing up as Barbie came to an end. Engagement with the marketing materials for Barbie (2023) lasted about seven months and shifted the societal culture of how users behave with social media, their interpersonal interactions, consumption habits, and the Halloween holiday.

Spider-Man

Another form of media that perpetuates the idea that the social identity theory is accurate in impacting consumer behavior when used through marketing materials is the character Spider-Man.

The character originated in Marvel Comics' *Amazing Fantasy* No. 15 in 1962 (Martin and Sanderson, 2024). Writer Stan Lee and illustrator Steve Ditko created Spider-Man with the intent that the character only be included in the one comic issue (Martin and Sanderson, 2024). Spider-Man was introduced as an American teenager living in Brooklyn named Peter Parker who was bitten by a radioactive spider which gave him superhuman strength, speed, and the ability to cling to walls (Martin and Sanderson, 2024). Spider-Man originated with comics but quickly transcended into other media platforms such as the first animated show in 1967, live-action series in 2002, and video games in 1982.

During the creation process of Spider-Man, Stan Lee hid any identifiable features such as skin tone or hair by the costume and mask stating to *Newarama* in 2015 "What I like about the costume is that anybody reading Spider-Man in any part of the world can imagine that they themselves are under the costume" (Matter, 2018) (White, 2015). Stan Lee designed the character to be relatable to a larger audience by creating a plot where Peter Parker faces real-world problems, has personal dilemmas, and makes mistakes (Matter, 2018). Because of the design of the costume and the character's plot, anybody interacting with Spider-Man media can easily imagine themselves under the costume as the character due to Spider-Man's relatability in modern society (White, 2015).

Because Spider-Man is considered to be timeless as the character's origin story fits within any time period, every living generation since the invention of the story has a popular version of Spider-Man to identify with (Matter, 2018). The generations known as Boomers grew up with the Spider-Man shown in the comic books from which he originated, Gen X has the animated Spider-Man (1967) television series, Millennials have the live-action Spider-Man portrayed by Toby Maguire, Gen Z has Andrew Garfield and Tom Holland as their Spider-Man, and Gen

Alpha has Miles Morales and other Spider-Man personas from the animated movie Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018). Stan Lee has been quoted stating “people of all ages seem to love Spider-Man. Every generation seems to dig him, from the little kids to the parents of the little kids, to the grandparents” (JoBlo Superheroes, 2023).

Because Spider-Man is designed as a relatable and timeless character with the intention for consumers to envision themselves under the “spidey-suit”, Spider-Man is highly relatable and has become prevalent within various forms of media such as comics, books, television shows, movies, and video games. This resonance with a large audience coupled with the various forms of media the character is portrayed within, has aided in the creation of a Spider-Man fandom. As individuals participate in this fandom, they begin to follow the social identity theory and interact with the media within the overarching group’s social norms.

With the release of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) which featured many variations of the iconic character that featured different ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and disabilities for the audience to relate to, the “I am Spider-Man” trend was born into existence. The trend was primarily used on the social media platforms TikTok and Instagram where users created content alluding or outright stating that they are Spider-Man to interact with the movie in a hyperbolic way. One TikTok creator states within text displayed on their video “me the moment the sun goes down and the city needs me” and features the user in normal clothes before turning around and appearing in a Spider-Man costume (Skyyyyyy, 2024). Another user of the platform posted a video of them getting dressed into a Spider-Man costume with text displayed stating “me texting him goodnight before going to save the city because I’m literally spiderman” (Emily Skywalker, 2023). Because of the representation presented within the Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) film, users resonated with the character as part of a social identity collective.

Through this identity which includes members of the Spider-Man fandom, the hyperbolic trend of posting a video claiming to be another version of the character was created and continues to flourish among online social media platforms as consumers choose to engage with the social media culture of the Spider-Man fandom.

Additionally, the release of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) prompted those who saw either the movie or its marketing campaign to participate in the trend of creating what is known as a “Spidersona”. A Spidersona is an original character created by the social identity that intertwines the individual’s personality and characteristics with that of Spider-Man. This character is either expressed as art or as a physical entity through cosplay. Cosplay is the practice of dressing up as a character found within any form of media and can vary in how it is expressed.

One user is a digital artist who created what they labeled “jazzercise spider” as their Spidersona (Purantan, 2024). The original character is named Lisa and features workout gear from the 1980s, the time period in which they reside (Purantan, 2024). Because Spider-Man is a timeless character, those interacting with the trend are able to use their imagination when creating Spidersonas and are limitless in their design. This freedom allows for users of any background to interact with the social identity and the culture shift it presents through the release of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) which actively encourages creativity with the various art styles presented throughout the film.

Another digital artist Kit Noel, had created their Spidersona in 2019 using digital media but decided to create a cosplay of this original character in 2023 to represent their identity (Kit Noel, 2023). Their Spidersona is unique to their cystic fibrosis disability and incorporates respiratory tubes into the design of the character (Kit Noel, 2023). The ability to incorporate their medical constraint into their design further ties their personal identity into that of the collective

social identity and provides a sense of belonging through their continuous interaction with the Spider-Man media.

Fan conventions are conventions meant for multiple similar social identity collectives to join in similar activities enjoyed within those individual groups such as displaying cosplay or art, engaging in playing games, and interacting with creators of media presented such as actors or writers. Cosplay is often worn at these conventions both by hobbyists and professionals. With the rise of Spidersonas, many cosplayers wanted to exhibit their Spidersona while walking around the convention center. The trend of individuals who would typically dress as a popular version of Spider-Man instead choosing to dress as their Spidersona came to fruition as these original creations rose in popularity. One user on TikTok posted content of their Spidersona cosplay, "Spider-Bro", which they would later wear at a fan convention (Sabre, 2023). Another user of the platform posted a video they took at the Orlando Megacon 2024 fan convention where hundreds of fans dressed as their Spidersona or a popular version of Spider-Man interacting with one another (JoeyJames, 2024). In wearing the cosplay of their Spidersona, individuals engaged with the newfound behavior and social presumptions of displaying a Spidersona at a fan convention which had come to be expected within the social identity because of the popularity of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018).

Through the Spidersona trend, individuals and their personal identities became intermingled with those of the collective. This further enhanced each participant's engagement with the social identity of the Spider-Man fandom and changed their social media behavior as well as their behavior during periods of rest to interact with the collective through art.

With the introduction of Spidersonas to the social identity of members of the Spider-Man fandom, came the rise in a mainstream social cultural shift of people including

Spider-Man-themed apparel in their everyday clothing wear in anticipation of the release of Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (2023). TikTok user Jade posted a video explaining that “people were putting clothes over their Spider-Man costumes” in early June of 2023 when Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse (2023) was released (Jade, 2023). Jade displayed photos of the various apparel worn by individuals before showing their audience the Spider-Man-themed outfit that they intended to wear to school that day which featured jeans and a crossbody bag layered over top of the Spider-Man costume (Jade, 2023). In October of that year, a Russian TikTok content creator posted a video of themselves, and another individual wearing sweatpants and headphones overtop of their Spider-Man costumes while at school (Поля). The introduction of Spidersonas with the widespread global popularity of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) had evidently long-lasting impacts on the behavior of those within the social identity collective and their interactions and decisions regarding social media, art creation, apparel worn, and fan conventions.

Consumer engagement of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) in regard to the film itself and its marketing, has produced a long-term impact on societal behaviors through the use of the social identity theory, beginning with the film’s release on December 14, 2018, and lasting to the present day. The film made the character of Spider-Man relatable to every person who watches or engages with the movie. This relatability caused a shift in societal behaviors such as social media trends, art creation, cosplay and fan interactions, normalcies at fan conventions, and apparel worn.

Industry Evolution

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) made a drastic impact on the modern animation industry and the creativity now expected of future animated films. The film strayed from less

conventional visuals and character designs in favor of evolving the animation industry from a generic and overdone art style into a creative and expressive form (King, 2023). *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) conjoins animation techniques commonly used within three-dimensional computer-generated films with techniques found within hand-drawn two-dimensional animation, making both the images and character movements less photorealistic to instead take on a more impressionistic form (Zuckerman, 2023).

The film grossed more than four times its budget, accumulating \$384 million in revenue and received a 97% Tomatometer score, and 94% Audience score on the popular movie critic site Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes, 2024). The film went on to win a multitude of awards in 2019 such as the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature, the BAFTA Award for Best Animated Film, and the Golden Globe Award for Best Animated Feature Film. With how well received the art styles expressed by the media and movie critics were, many animated films began to adapt their art style to follow suit with the industry evolution. Films such as *The Mitchells vs. The Machines* (2021), *EnterGalactic* (2022), *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* (2022), and *Nimona* (2023) all emulated the color, unpredictability, and rhythm to the animation demonstrated within *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) to continue the advancement of modern animation (King, 2023).

The overall societal behavior exhibited by producers and animators of animation styles and techniques used within the animated film industry has taken on a shift over the past six years and continues to grow due to the evolutionary impact of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018) and its influence on other animated films.

Therapy and Trauma Program Practices

The established widespread relatability of the public to the character Spider-Man through the character's marketing and consumer interactions with marketing materials has allowed trauma therapists and awareness groups to shift their behavior in regard to how they best help children find aid when victimized. The implementation of popular and relatable media in the form of print, television, and workshops into sexual abuse awareness programs has aided in the number of case findings for child sexual abuse (Garbarino, 1987). Children who are victims of child sexual abuse began to come forward with their personal accounts after being exposed to such programs (Garbarino, 1987).

A study was conducted in 1985 with two special issues released by Marvel Comics in collaboration with the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse of the Spider-Man comic, that had a plotline centered around child sexual abuse (Garbarino, 1987). In the first comic, Spider-Man interacts with a young boy who is being molested by his teenage female babysitter. Spider-Man then shares his own personal experiences of childhood sexual abuse with the young boy to comfort him through relatability. Through this relation, the young boy feels comfortable coming forward with his story. Within the second comic released, the Power Pack Kids, a group of children with "super powers" find a young girl who ran away from home after telling her disbelieving mother that she was being sexually abused by her father. The Power Pack Kids with the aid of their own parents then help the girl with her predicament.

36 boys and 37 girls in the second, fourth, and sixth grades participated in the study. After receiving parental consent, the children were each provided a copy of the comics and after reading the comics were interviewed to assess their comprehension and response to the material. Within the interview, six sexual abuse related questions and four incidental detail related

questions were administered in the quantitative study. The children were then individually interviewed to better understand their reaction to the material presented within the comics as part of a qualitative study.

One direct testimony from the case study is of a fourth-grade boy who stated “this is just like what happened to me” after the qualitative interview had concluded (Garbarino, 1987). The boy then details that over a period of a year and a half, he was being molested by a teenage neighbor and that he was too afraid to come forward before having read the comics (Garbarino, 1987). The boy was then asked, “if having had the Spider-Man comic at the time the molestation began would it have made a difference?” to which he responded, “Yes. I would have told my mom about it... I would have known it was right to tell” (Garbarino, 1987).

The data collected conveyed that the children had a higher accuracy for the six sexual abuse related questions in comparison to the four incidental detail related questions (Garbarino, 1987). These results confirmed that in presenting a difficult topic, such as sexual abuse, within the medium of a comic centered around a relatable character, sexual abuse awareness programs are able to better provide materials at a comprehensible level, as each grade level within the case study demonstrated clear signs of understanding the difficult subject matter. Anecdotal reports of parents and professionals who have supplied the comic to children predict that through this provision, children will be more likely to report sexual abuse (Garbarino, 1987).

Once a child reports having experienced child sexual abuse, they are able to join a support program. Within such programs, superheroes and comics are able to be used within the processing of a trauma narrative for children who have experienced child sexual abuse through the integration of play in therapy (Shuman et al., 2022). The superhero characters and their stories, which follow the archetype of a victim turned into a survivor, can be used as metaphors

to help young clients process their own trauma through the objectification of any painful emotions they may be feeling (Shuman et al., 2022).

Child sexual abuse support groups utilize a role-play strategy when working with clients. They have clients identify their own superhero persona and create a physical representation of that persona (Shuman et al., 2022). The group therapy leader then conveys a scenario related to child sexual abuse that the children within the group must solve through the use of their superhero persona and in doing so are able to challenge negative schemas related to their traumas (Shuman et al., 2022). Many child sexual abuse support groups have utilized the Spider-Man comic from 1985 which deals with child sexual abuse as a form of group discussion. When discussing the comic and the different character's experiences with child sexual abuse, the members of the support group are able to examine the story while not feeling pressure to disclose their own personal experiences (Shuman et al., 2022). Spider-Man in particular has been used as a discussion topic within child sexual abuse support programs to provide clients with a gradual trauma exposure as Spider-Man battles progressively tougher villains within his comics (Shuman et al., 2022).

Through the many marketing campaigns for the character Spider-Man, the character has become renowned for his universal relatability. Through the character's established large target audience, trauma therapists and support groups are able to utilize the character within their practices. Once the 1985 comic was released that depicted the character's experience as a victim of child sexual abuse and other traumatic hardships, trauma therapists and support groups began to initiate new methods into their practices such as using superhero roleplay to challenge negative schemas, host discussion of the 1985 Spider-Man comic, and provide clients with increasing trauma exposure through the character's storyline.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the marketing materials of Barbie (2023) and Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse (2018) and the societal reaction and interaction with these materials, it can be concluded that marketing materials can have long-lasting impacts on societal behaviors exhibited by both individuals and specific groups.

The social identity theory provided a framework for understanding how individuals begin to identify with a collective and form groupthink surrounding a marketing campaign. This established social identity with a piece of media then encourages engagement of the group with the marketing materials of that media. Through interactions with marketing materials, widespread behavioral shifts that extend over a relatively large period of time can occur. These interactions have the power to influence how individuals behave in regard to social media, their interpersonal interactions, consumption habits, holiday celebrations, art creation, cosplay, normalcies at fan conventions, and apparel worn.

Additionally, this study can deduce that promotional material and the success of a campaign have the power to cause an industry shift. The success of Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse (2018) brought about by its extensive marketing, arose a change in the techniques used within the animation industry and what consumers now expect of modern animation.

Furthermore, after an analysis of the character Spider-Man's universal relatability and large target audience as a result of many successful marketing campaigns, the character's impact of trauma therapy and support groups can extrapolate that the successful marketing of a character can have impacts within industries of which that character does not naturally exist.

Through determining the factors involved in a marketing campaign's influence on societal behaviors over an extended period of time, the current marketing shift towards active

participation from consumers with marketing campaigns can be better understood and these successful outcomes can be better replicated.

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