

Article

# Beyond gender: The evolving significance of pink in the contemporary marketing

Rui Ma<sup>1</sup>, Xi Wang<sup>2,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry, University College London, London WC1E 6BT, UK<sup>2</sup> School of Culture and Creativity, BNU-HKBU United International College, Zhuhai 519085, China\* **Corresponding author:** Xi Wang, [xiwang@uic.edu.cn](mailto:xiwang@uic.edu.cn)

## CITATION

Ma R, Wang X. Beyond gender: The evolving significance of pink in the contemporary marketing. *Sustainable Economies*. 2024; 2(3): 168. <https://doi.org/10.62617/se.v2i3.168>

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 28 May 2024

Accepted: 30 June 2024

Available online: 9 July 2024

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the influence of pink in marketing, focusing on its impact on female consumer behavior, particularly in light of the Barbie movie's recent popularity. It analyzes the psychological and historical significance of pink, and its economic implications in marketing strategies. This study conducts an in-depth literature review and case study analysis to explore the cultural and psychological significance of the color pink in marketing and its influence on consumer behavior beyond different genders. The originality of this study lies in its multifaceted exploration of the interplay between the color pink and female consumer behavior, particularly through the lens of cinematic imagery. By focusing on the cultural and psychological significance of pink in films and its subsequent impact on fashion trends and marketing strategies, this research uniquely bridges the gap between color symbolism and contemporary consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** pink marketing; femininity; color symbolism; cinematic imagery

## 1. Introduction

The increasing prominence of the color pink in contemporary markets has solidified its status as a significant symbol within consumer products and popular culture, particularly resonating with female consumers [1]. This trend is evident in the widespread introduction of pink-themed products, especially within categories such as cosmetics and other daily necessities targeted at women. Empirical studies indicate a notable preference among women for these pink-colored items, suggesting that the color not only appeals aesthetically but also influences purchasing behavior [2].

In the film industry, the color pink serves as an equally intriguing and significant classification. Recent trends have seen the emergence of a series of feminist films prominently featuring the color pink, reflected in various elements such as posters and costumes [3]. These films have had a profound impact on female audiences, suggesting that the visual representation of pink may influence their consumption behaviors. This study analyzes the depiction of pink in these films and investigate whether these images stimulate female viewers' propensity to purchase pink-themed products. By focusing on the imagery of pink within these films, this study aims to elucidate how cinematic representations can shape and influence the consumption choices of female audiences.

In this case, the film of Barbie is selected as a focal point for analysis due to its emblematic status within contemporary pink-themed cinema. As a cultural icon, Barbie embodies the color's branding and market influence, offering a pertinent case study for examining the impact of pink on consumer behavior. Therefore, this paper

analyzes the film of Barbie alongside other films and TV series that utilize pink as a thematic color for their main characters, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of pink cinematic imagery in influencing women's shopping behaviors in contemporary society. By examining the symbolic meaning of pink within the framework of feminism, the impact of pink film imagery on social media, and the implementation of pink marketing concepts in the marketplace, this paper aims to demonstrate how women identify with pink images on a societal level. Despite a growing body of literature on color psychology and marketing, there remains a significant gap in understanding how specific colors, such as pink, are leveraged in contemporary media to influence consumer behavior, particularly within the context of evolving gender norms and consumer demographics. Hence, this analysis will further illustrate the role of pink film imagery in promoting women's purchasing behaviors of pink products. Consequently, it suggests that the depiction of pink in films positively influences women's propensity to buy pink-themed products.

## **2. Social identity and feminine symbol of pink color screen images**

Different colors are generally attributed unique gendered characteristics. As Zarei and Kharajo [4] define, "Pink is the color of femininity," suggesting that pink can be considered a symbol of feminine culture. The act of purchasing pink products has become a significant approach for women to express their identity in society. Previous studies have consistently shown that pink is strongly associated with femininity, imbued with extensive feminine symbolism. The color pink is easily linked to traits often stereotypically attributed to girls, such as softness, delicacy, and innocence [5]. For adult women, pink often signifies youthfulness and femininity, which explains its popularity in the cosmetics industry [6].

In the context of female consumer behavior, the color pink plays a multifaceted role. It serves not only as a marker of gender identity but also as a means of emotional and psychological expression. Women's preference for pink products is rooted in deep-seated cultural norms and societal expectations that associate pink with femininity and beauty [7]. This cultural conditioning begins early in life, with pink being a predominant color in children's clothing, toys, and accessories, thereby reinforcing gender norms from a young age [8].

For adult women, the appeal of pink extends beyond mere cultural symbolism. The cosmetics industry, in particular, capitalizes on the association of pink with youthfulness and beauty. Products packaged in pink or featuring pink tones are marketed as enhancing feminine qualities, thus attracting female consumers who wish to embody these traits [9]. This marketing strategy taps into the psychological aspects of color perception, where pink is perceived as nurturing, calming, and aesthetically pleasing.

Moreover, the preference for pink is not just limited to personal use but also extends to lifestyle and luxury products. The fashion industry's embrace of pink as a trendy and stylish color further solidifies its status as a symbol of femininity. High-end brands often use pink in their product lines to appeal to female consumers seeking to make a statement about their identity and social status [10].

The association of colors with gender also includes a common juxtaposition of

men with blue and women with pink. Zotos and Grau [11] discusses that in American culture, pink and purple symbolize tenderness and femininity, whereas blue represents toughness and masculinity. However, some women challenge this binary association and avoid pink due to gender equality concerns, as the color may emphasize gender differences [12]. Despite this perspective, pink remains a significant color in discussions about women's issues and continues to be closely associated with femininity.

Building on the theories regarding the association of pink with feminism, numerous studies have demonstrated that pink can be represented as a symbol of feminism in pink-colored cinematographic images. Zotos and Grau [11] argues that stereotypes of gender roles can be effectively visualized. Similarly, Khan [3] observes that the notion of gendered colors can subtly influence viewers' perceptions through the visual presentation of film posters (refer to **Figure 1**). Classic Hollywood posters serve as illustrative examples of this phenomenon. Such as the *Legally Blonde* in the early 2000s, and the more recent blockbuster *Barbie*. These film posters have subconsciously reinforced the audience's perception and recognition of the feminine attributes associated with the color pink through their visual presentation.



**Figure 1.** Pink film posters [13].

Furthermore, the portrayal of pink female images in film can serve as reflections of societal expectations and ideals regarding women. Barbie stands out as an example of this phenomenon, showcasing the diversity of female professional identities in cinema. Barbie, portrayed by Margot Robbie assuming various roles and presenting a wide spectrum of images. Havrylenko [14] indicates Barbie's remarkable ability to

reinvent herself, embodying a diverse representation of women. Similarly, Verde and Maizonniaux [15] analyze Barbie's past portrayals in DVDs, noting her depiction as capable, self-confident, innovative, and intelligent, thereby highlighting the independence of women. Consequently, Barbie's imagery conveys significantly positive values to female audiences.

This sentiment is further exemplified in the narrative of *Legally Blonde*, where the protagonist Elle Woods (portrayed by Reese Witherspoon) boldly wears conspicuous pink attire at Harvard Law School. Elle's journey involves diligent study, striving for excellence, and ultimately overcoming adversity, including retaliation against her ex-boyfriend who once dismissed her. In this context, Dole [12] observes that *Legally Blonde* effectively navigates the intersection of femininity and power anxieties. Thus, it becomes evident that the portrayal of pink women on screen generally embodies modern femininity and contributes to the portrayal of diverse and positive characterizations of women.

In light of the social images portrayed by the pink characters discussed above, female consumers demonstrate a willingness to engage with this social identity by selecting pink products associated with these pink images. As Fluckiger [16] discusses, one of the most crucial functions of cinematic color is its capacity to establish a connection between a character's emotions and the audience's own perceptions. Additionally, Liebes and Katz [17] explicitly highlight that audience identification with a media character often leads to the emulation of the character's role. Consequently, the identification with film characters can enable audiences to broaden their emotional horizons and social perspectives [18], fostering resonance with the characters.

Thus, the color pink serves not only as a symbol of women's culture but also as an essential element in effectively expressing the identity of the female group in society. Through their choices to purchase products associated with these pink images, female customers can unmistakably convey their participation in this social identity and find a unique expression of their self-identity.

### **3. PINK characters reputation influences and fashion trend on social media**

Based on the pink film images mentioned above, these films play an essential role in entertainment culture. Because of the tremendous popularity they generate in today's social media platforms, they lead modern society's fashion and cultural trends, which leads to the purchase intention of related pink products as a way for the female audience groups to follow the cultural and fashionable trends.

Pink occupies a vital place in fashion and trends, as Dole [12] defines pink as part of the fashion trends of the new century nowadays, representing a brighter and more sensual style, implying a powerful femininity as well. Thus, the identity symbol of pink has prompted customers to connect fashion with these pink film images. Again, using the classic Barbie as an example, the image of Barbie has always been associated with fashion style in popular perception [13], and with the visual representation of the film, the main character's backgrounds and outfits are always made up of pink colors, which further contributes to the audience's linkage of fashion and pink and adopting

these pink images as a fashion trendsetter.

The influence of pink film images extends beyond the realm of fashion to encompass today's social networks. Miyatake et al. [19] conducted a study on the correlation between pink preference and fashion tastes, revealing that the application of pink in fashion and cosmetics products undergoes new changes under the influence of trends. This finding is exemplified by the phenomenon observed in 2023, where the trending pink color dubbed Barbie Pink emerged. The release of the Barbie film in the same year saw the film team leveraging TikTok as part of their promotional strategy. Twigg [20] indicates that the Barbie film team orchestrated various exciting and designed challenges, dances, and other engaging content on TikTok, leading to the rapid proliferation of Barbie's pink image across social media platforms. This highlights the vital role of pink film images in shaping contemporary social media trends and influencing consumer preferences in fashion and cosmetics.

Similarly, Burgos [21] also claims that Barbie's advertisements on social media platforms attract thousands of people to enter the Barbie world. This impact can even extend to the popularity and reputation of the actors. Havrylenko [13] points out that Margot Robbie, the performer of Barbie, is an iconic figure in real-life fashion. Due to her striking resemblance to the Barbie character, she is widely recognized as the real-life embodiment of the Barbie image. Hence, this adds an extra layer of authenticity and appeal to the film's promotion, further reinforcing the association between pink and fashion.

The interpretation of the fashionable aspect of pink imagery and its significant influence on social media indicates the preference of female audiences for purchasing pink products to align with current trends and fashion. As mentioned by Nannini [22], women are often more active on social media platforms and tend to avidly follow fashion trends depicted in the media. Nurhandayani et al. [23] further emphasize the role of social media influencers in disseminating information to consumers and fostering interest in purchases, exemplified by the creation of the “

Barbie Pink trend by Margot Robbie in 2023. Consequently, the popularity of pink film imagery on social media serves as a guiding force for women in their fashion pursuits, thereby stimulating their inclination to purchase pink products.

The fashionable nature of the color pink, coupled with the prevalence of pink film imagery, establishes a strong connection with the concept of fashion. This connection extends to the social impact of pink film imagery, ultimately leading to its widespread recognition as a fashion trend on social media platforms. This recognition serves as one of the driving factors motivating female audiences to choose pink products.

#### **4. Stimulation of PINK advertisement and color marketing**

Understanding the psychology behind women's pursuit of fashion, as elucidated earlier, businesses recognize the importance of the female demographic in consumer purchasing behavior. Consequently, they have endeavored to capitalize on the intersection of pink film imagery and the symbolic significance of pink. Companies have developed numerous pink marketing strategies aimed at strengthening the brand image of pink products, thereby garnering increased attention and purchases from the female audience. This strategic alignment between film imagery, color symbolism, and

marketing initiatives reflect the effectiveness of leveraging pink as a means to appeal to female consumers and enhance brand recognition and loyalty.

Many previous cases have also reflected the influence from different colors to the product design and marketing strategy. In the conceptual collaboration between Nike and Marvel's Avengers, the Spider-Man themed Air Max 270 sneakers exemplify the pivotal role of color red and blue in brand product marketing [24]. Adorned with Spider-Man's iconic red and blue color scheme, the design not only reflects the character's visual identity but also establishes an emotional connection with consumers through the symbolic meaning of color, stimulating fans' sense of identification and desire to purchase. The spiderweb pattern on the upper, side panel design, and the Spider-Man logo on the tongue enhance the product's association with the superhero's image, enriching the design's depth and increasing its appeal. Hence, this design strategy demonstrates the impact of color in shaping brand image, conveying cultural values, and evoking consumer emotions, proving the importance of color consistency in brand products and marketing strategies [24].

Also, another effective case is based on Disney's film Aladdin in the year of 2019. The strategic partnership between MAC Cosmetics and Disney to launch a special-edition collection inspired by the live-action adaptation of Aladdin exemplifies the convergence of cinema, color, and marketing [25]. This collaboration capitalizes on the film's vibrant visual aesthetics, particularly the color purple, which rich hues and metallics that mirror the story's magical and exotic setting. This collection features a spectrum of playful bright colors and neutral tones, aligns with the character of Jasmine and her embodiment of self-assurance and authenticity. The packaging design, itself a visual treat, further enhances the allure of the collection, inviting consumers to engage with the brand and the film on a deeper level. MAC Cosmetics' integration of social media tagging encourages user-generated content, fostering a community around the collection and amplifying its market reach [25]. Therefore, it illustrates the power of color in cinematic storytelling and its translation into product design and marketing strategies, creating a synergistic brand experience that resonates with consumers' emotional connection.

However, as to the pink color marketing, the influence of the female demographic in driving purchasing decisions has led to the emergence of pink marketing, as highlighted in previous studies. The increasing engagement of women across various spheres of daily life indicates the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to cater to this demographic, given their significant societal roles [26]. Moreover, Fayyad and Shehata [27] reveal a striking statistic indicating that up to 85 percent of purchasing decisions are either directly made by women or strongly influenced by them, underscoring their substantial impact in the marketing realm.

In product marketing, color is recognized as a crucial element in evoking pleasurable responses through product appearance [28]. This recognition, coupled with the established connection between women and the color pink, as elaborated earlier, has paved the way for one of the most effective marketing concepts of the twenty-first century: pink marketing [26]. This targeted marketing strategy tailored specifically for women leverages the inherent appeal of the color pink to resonate with female consumers, effectively influencing their purchasing decisions and driving brand engagement and loyalty.

The concept of pink marketing has permeated various sectors of today's market, appealing to women across different age groups, from young girls to adults. Mileti et al. [2] observe that pink is a prevalent color used extensively in advertising and promoting children's clothing, accessories, toys, and other products. Previous studies suggest that the roots of pink marketing can be traced back to children's demographics. Even before a child is born, the traditional practice of associating girls with pink gradually becomes entrenched as a predominant gender marker [3]. Moreover, Fine and Rush [29] indicate a significant gendered aspect in the marketing of children's toys, with a widespread design of girls' toys and products as pink items. This phenomenon may be attributed to the influence of the Disney film industry, as detailed analysis of various Disney princesses' on-screen portrayals reveals a prevalence of pink or purple clothing and accessories. These depictions significantly contribute to reinforcing the association of pink with femininity among teenage girls [3]. Given that children are recognized as active consumers in the contemporary film industry, the inclusion of pink imagery in these films further bolsters the efficacy of the pink marketing strategy.

For adult women, the scope of products under pink marketing is notably extensive, encompassing cosmetics, luxury goods, and various lifestyle products. As highlighted by Khan [3], a multitude of products targeted towards women, from Unilever's Fair & Lovely fairness product to Axe's body spray, are predominantly pink in color. Unlike children, the purchasing behavior of mature female consumers is linked to their willingness to purchase pink products and the associated brand concepts. Massoudi [9] explicitly delineates significant motivational and psychological distinctions between men and women in purchasing behavior, resulting in distinct shopping behaviors among women.

For example, Burgos [21], in an analysis of Barbie marketing, suggests that female customers exhibit a preference for pink products and associate them with the Barbie image, a phenomenon possibly rooted in color psychology and brand memorability. This observation is corroborated by Havrylenko [13], indicating that the Barbie marketing team's recognition of the mature and loyal fan base, particularly among female audiences. These consumers often develop emotional attachments to products associated with the pink Barbie image. Building upon this foundation, the Barbie team has forged partnerships with well-known brands, ranging from small items like pink cotton candy ice cream to larger products like Chevrolet cars with pink exteriors [21]. Numerous other brands have followed suit, adopting this approach and reinforcing the influence of pink marketing and Barbie films throughout society.

Despite the considerable success achieved by the pink marketing strategy, some scholars have voiced criticism against this phenomenon. Uncu and Calisir [1] argue that pink bombing represents a consumerist approach, with all pink products potentially fostering unrealistic desires and exerting a detrimental impact on women's lives. Moreover, this phenomenon may exacerbate conflicts pertaining to gender equality, as male consumers might avoid pink products due to the consumer environment shaped by pink marketing and associated gender stereotypes, leading to a phenomenon termed pink bias [2]. Consequently, it is evident that this marketing approach and the prevalence of pink products encounter skepticism within society.

Given the fundamental role of female groups in contemporary social activities

and women's unique affinity for pink, pink has effectively emerged as a hallmark color in brand marketing. Moreover, the portrayal of pink in films has contributed to the distinctiveness and recognition of these pink products. The pink marketing strategy seamlessly integrates film narratives with brand promotion, thereby stimulating the purchase intentions of female audiences.

Although the color pink has traditionally been associated with femininity, its influence is no longer confined to female consumers. The modern design of fashion and consumer culture has witnessed a shift where men are increasingly embracing pink as a color of choice [30]. This trend is exemplified by brands like Pink in London, which caters to a masculine demographic, and Ralph Lauren's popular pink polo shirts, which have become a staple in men's fashion. The growing acceptance of pink among men challenges the historical gender binary associated with colors and reflects a broader societal move towards gender inclusivity. The color's versatility and its adoption by male consumers signify a cultural evolution where color choices are becoming less gendered and more personalized [31]. This shift in perception suggests that marketing strategies should adapt to recognize and appeal to the diverse preferences of consumers, regardless of gender. Thus, the color pink serves as a vibrant example of how societal norms are evolving and how the marketing industry can leverage this change to engage with a more inclusive consumer base.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explores the social phenomenon of female consumers' preference for purchasing pink products. By analyzing the portrayal of pink women in films, it elucidates how these cinematic depictions influence the purchasing intentions of female groups. Through an examination of three key aspects—the cultural identity of pink and feminism, the influence of pink film imagery in fashion and social media, and the effectiveness of pink marketing strategies in today's commercial landscape—the study elucidates why “women use pink to attract women” [3]. It posits that the imagery of pink films positively influences the purchase intentions and shopping behavior of female audiences.

It also has some limitations, particularly regarding the analysis of pink images primarily centered around Barbie. It suggests that a more comprehensive examination covering diverse characteristics of pink movie imagery would enhance the generalizability of the arguments presented. However, despite these limitations, the study holds significance in the realms of film color and marketing.

In essence, the study of pink imagery illuminates the dynamic relationship between film, fashion, and consumer behavior, offering valuable insights for film industry professionals and product designers alike. Directors can leverage the evolving symbolic meaning of pink to craft diverse characters that resonate with audience perceptions, reflecting societal changes. Similarly, merchants can harness the profound impact of color on cultural dynamics and consumer choices by integrating pink into marketing strategies.

In conclusion, pink emerges as both a symbol and a cultural trend-setting force, acting an important role in shaping women's shopping behavior. Despite its limitations, the study underscores the enduring significance of pink imagery in influencing



consumer preferences and behaviors.

**Author contributions:** Conceptualization, RM; methodology, RM; software, RM; validation, XW; formal analysis, RM and XW; investigation, RM and XW; resources, XW; data curation, RM; writing—original draft preparation, RM; writing—review and editing, XW; visualization, RM; supervision, XW; project administration, RM; funding acquisition, XW. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This study is funded by the Department of Education of Guangdong Province with NO. UICR0400019-23.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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