

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1 Background of Research

A cultural icon, Barbie made by Mattel has gained their own name on what they represent. The doll is not only a doll, but it has become part of many children's lives in the world. From 1945, the doll was born from the mind of Ruth Handler and her husband and her husband's colleagues, inspired from her child's interests towards paper doll (Tulinski, 2017). From that onwards, Ruth decided to create a three-dimensional adult doll on her own and the doll later named as Barbara Millicent Roberts or Barbie (Tulinski, 2017). Barbie's identity soon became a beautiful woman whom children wanting to dress up with a high quality and designer clothes (Tulinski, 2017).

Since then, Barbie has set her foot in the toy industry and she started to stand firm and became the market leader. The great influence of the doll can be seen from the sales. Although there is no exact amount told by Mattel, the statement of three Barbie sold within a second is enough to prove her power (Lau, 2017). Not only that but Barbie as a fictional truth able to create a sense of attachment through her human-like figure (Wright, 2003). This sense of attachment is a psychological attachment where they will see Barbie as something they closely relate to and something real (Wright, 2003). Because of that tendencies, Barbie as an imaginary friend is not just an ordinary doll, but Barbie does depict a girl and what a girl should be (Wright, 2003). Making Barbie has the

power in creating the standard of what a poised lady supposed to be and putting a representation of gender within the doll (Tulinski, 2017). By having that responsibility, Barbie supposed to give a positive representation. However, Barbie failed to accomplish that responsibility and the representation has earned her to be an object for cultural criticism (Tulinski, 2017).

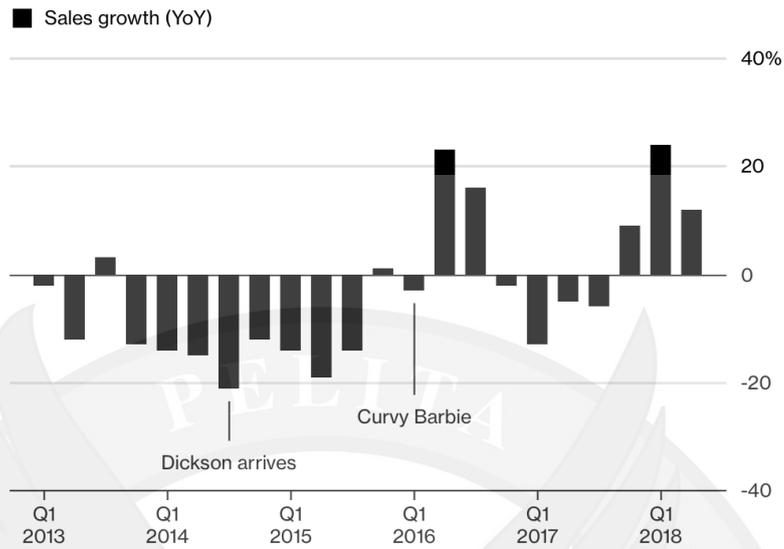
Even from the start, the inspiration of Barbie's figure from Bild Lilli has put many people in skepticism, as Bidi Lili presented as sexual doll used by men (Driessen, 2016). Since then, parents have dislike Barbie very much because of its sexiness, adult figure and flashy image it gives (Driessen, 2016). Making Barbie have the tendencies towards sexualized image and dramatizing girls' gender role (Kuther & McDonald, 2004). Another problem lies in its perfect and unattainable physical attributes of Barbie that was used by many young girls to compare it with themselves (Rogers, 1998). Since they see Barbie as their role model and attempting on being just like her (Rogers, 1998). Even the femininity it portrays is too extreme along with the absence of masculinity, or gender-neutral tendencies (Rogers, 1998). Thus, the brand's feminine image portrayed by the doll had gained negative connotation with a terminology such as 'Barbie doll', 'plastic' and 'fake' used to portrays a surpassed qualities from the expected norm (Whitney, 2013). One of the examples is the attempt of many celebrities' plastic surgery in trying to achieve a Barbie doll form (Whitney, 2013). And this representation soon becomes the 'somatic' consumerist view of how it enables people to believe that they are able to achieve those ideal qualities by putting a great amount of money (Rogers 1992 in Toffoletti, 2007).

Another famous controversial of Barbie happened when the first talking Barbie's statement was, "Math class is hard" (Wolf, 2013). This controversy has made Mattel taking away all the dolls from the store and sent a spokesperson to Oprah to subdue the matter (Wolf, 2013). The talking Barbie has unconsciously creating a limitation on what girls can be and their competencies in STEM that was subjected for critics by Wood (1994).

Since then Barbie has put themselves in the spotlight for a toy that supporting women as dolls, sex, housekeeper or objects (Tulinski, 2017). Barbie also promotes the understanding of male's view about girl's body as something that can be photographed and girls as an object with the toy camera she possessed (Tulinski, 2017).

Not only researcher feminist but a photographer and an activist, Sheila Pree Bright opposes the unrealistic proportion of Barbie doll through her artwork in combining strangers' body in Baltimore and Barbie's body (Banks, 2017). Not only that, but in 2013, when Mattel decided to put a real-life size Barbie dreamhouse in Malibu, that attempt causes an uproar; that Barbie yet again promoting the traditional stereotypes for the young girls (Goyette, 2013). The ongoing relationship between feminist and Barbie is never been aided.

Until lately, Barbie proposed the idea of becoming the platform in empowerment and this movement proven successful through the rising sales of the dolls to increase in 2016 as can be seen from the graph posted by Bloomberg (Townsend, 2018):



Picture I.1 Barbie's Sales Growth Chart taken from Bloomberg.com

What happened is Mattel introducing a new concept of the doll by generating a new body type that includes; curvy, shorter legs and also the availability of different skin tones (Townsend, 2018). The approach of Barbie was well received by the media such as TIME, as not only does the physical figure of Barbie changes, but the content as well (Townsend, 2018).

The content Barbie wanting to promote can be seen from the emergence of Barbie vlog in 2015. The vlog started to gain popularity when Barbie addressed mental issues such as depression through her video called "Feeling Blue? You Are Not Alone" in 2016 (Scott, 2017). The content has received praises from the media as they acknowledge the relevancy in the messages and how Barbie has encouraged other kids in not suppressing their sadness, and instead they should celebrate and recognize it as normal behavior (Scott, 2017). Not only mental issues, but Barbie has also addressed a feminist issue on her video such as "Sorry

Reflex” that was posted in 2018 (McKenna, 2018). In that video Barbie explaining how women are victims of constantly saying sorry even though they have no fault (Mccowan, 2018). Because of this tendency, Barbie is believed to give powerful messages and was recommended to all the girls for all ages (McKenna, 2018). The strategy uses by Mattel is by identifying more closely towards what Barbie is not in the first place.

However not only does the messages that are getting more relevant with the audience, but Mattel also trying to gravitate more sense of attachment towards the brand, or the Barbie herself more than before. The hypothesis made in Media Equation Theory proves technology has created a culture in which audience see the technology as an alive object (Griffin, 2014). The response given to computers are equivalent with what people will give in face-to-face interaction (Griffin, 2014). Hence, even animation has the power in making people reacting to it as the reality itself, although the conscious mind believes it as a representation (Griffin, 2014). From the theory, it can conclude how Barbie as a vlogger who does self-representation might be seen as more realistic than its doll. How she portrays this issues will be seen the reality itself by the audiences. The issue that used to criticize about how she is the perpetrator of girl’s stereotypes is now part of herself, her as a feminist in the vlog. Seeing how the feminism portrayed by Barbie will become the main goal of this research, to understand the way how Barbie saved herself from the acquisition from feminist critics and changes her identity once again.

I.2 Identification of the Problem

The origins of feminism trace back from the saturated gender roles that have happened in society. Gender is fluid where there is no definite accusation for what it supposed to be and depicted as (Butler, 1990). According to that, gender is always shifting and it will keep on changing. The role of women can differ in certain countries as economic plays a big determinant (Guiliano, 2017). Technology in agriculture also plays a role in creating how women should be perceived (Guiliano, 2017). Its relationships lie in the fact that agriculture has allowed man to work outside while women stay home (Guiliano, 2017). The role has created women's domestic perception along with their low participation in labor force (Guiliano, 2017).

Cultural belief that persists until today such as paying the bride in some countries has an impact towards husband superiority applied within the marriage (Guiliano, 2017). Roles in family structures also become a strong benefactor towards inequality in gender (Guiliano, 2017). "Male breadwinner hypothesis" creating the stereotypes for men to work for material needs while women stayed at home (Guiliano, 2017). Because of the constant inequality experienced by women, they started to be awake and realizing the needs of a movement to defend themselves as a group called feminists. Dated back in 1792, the very first feminist movement done by Mary Wollstonecraft from her writings, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and the most rewarded event by the feminists, The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 creating the *Declaration of Independence* (Bieniek, 2015).

The declaration promising something powerful about the confrontation of tyranny by men in all these years (Bieniek, 2015).

Feminism started to be acknowledged and the collectivity of creating revolutionary work and putting them into a theory has strengthened and received a deeper understanding regarding the act of feminism (Bieniek, 2015). Since then, feminism cannot be seen with side eyes anymore. In modern feminism, the identity of feminist became even more trendy and cool in the pop culture view (Vagianos, 2016). Inviting even more people in joining the march and adopting the ideology one wishes to join as feminists where Zeisler (2016) sees this as the birth marketplace feminism. Marketplace feminism is a type of marketing that gives the new experience of honesty and personal politics, making the marketing relevant with the social situations that people are experiencing now such as feminism issue (Cohen, 2015). Since the business industry has finally recognize the number of women as their benefactor in business, they wanted the support of the girls through feminism (Zeisler, 2016).

Changes also made by Mattel by using the marketplace feminism. With the feminist critics, changes have been made by the doll from the original identity as a fashion icon and housewife in 1959, shifting towards Barbie in offering varieties of career (Tulinski, 2017). Another attempt of Mattel in fitting Barbie as an object away from feminist criticism was by its new slogan, '*Be Anything*' where Barbie promotes girls to achieve whatever they want (Tulinski, 2017). Another attempt by Mattel is to change the body of the Barbie, where it has been cited by the feminist. And towards changing it, there were contemplations as some parents

disagree on the decision when Mattel juxtaposition opinion just wanted to derive from the critics (Tulinski, 2017).

However, Mattel still decided to generate towards the empowerment path of feminism. With curvy Barbie in 2016 and 22 eye colors, 14 face shapes, 24 different hair styles, 30 different hair colors and 7 kind of skin tones allowing more multicultural view regarding the representation by Barbie (Tulinski, 2017). Not only that, Richard Dickson, Mattel COO proclaimed the new way of taking Barbie to be more closer and relevant with the audiences is through the emergence of Barbie vlog (Townsend, 2018). Just like the empowerment, the content of Barbie vlog also displays the same philosophy where it wanted to encourage her audiences in believing they can be anything through one of her videos in episode 10 by promoting multi-dimensional global careers, or careers in many fields (Gregory, 2016). The messages itself seems wanting to tackle her past and create a new identity, of Barbie as a feminist. Because of this strategy by Mattel, Barbie vlog's messages are seen to be more relatable than ever to the younger audiences (Scott, 2017). The messages given by Barbie vlog in episode 61 can be seen an effective approach towards children and seen as a powerful message of how self-degrading language can unconsciously hurt people, especially girls (Tate, 2018). The feminist Barbie from the vlog is the new trend where Barbie vlog also part of the savior from the slumping sales in 2014 (Castle, 2018). By putting some of the feminist issues within the vlog, Mattel has applied the marketplace feminism and uses it as the campaign. The team behind the creation of Barbie vlog also has been strong where there are children psychologist and how they help to create the

messages to be appropriate (Castle, 2018). Seeing how the portrayal of feminism from the vlog to evaluate how Mattel creates this representation and made it into a popular discussion in the media realm.

I.3 Statement of the Problem

To be able in narrowing the identification of the problem within the research, researcher will use a specific question. The question will helps the researcher to keep focused on the problem and uses it as a guideline when conducting the research. Following is the questions intended in explored within the research:

1. How does feminism portrayed in Barbie vlog?

I.4 Research Purpose

Purpose in the research is trying to identify how the representation made by Barbie, a social actor known as the contradiction in the feminism realm. By understanding how feminism portrayed by Barbie, researcher able to analysed the reflection of feminism within the modern society.

As it is prevalent that Barbie is an important social actor within children and how her views of feminism gave the representation towards young girls future understanding about feminism and about gender representation.

1.5 Significance of Research

Academic

Applying semiotic analysis in analysing virtual vlogger and seeing from the context of feminism. Seeing how does the non-verbal communication supporting the portrayal of feminism in the vlog. It will be beneficial in the academic realm with the use of posthuman instead of human as the social actor in portraying the real life situation in the world. As the researcher will sees in the ways posthuman portraying it.

Practical

It is prevalent that the uses of feminism is a commercial act by Mattel and how the marketing of Mattel in producing content that is close with audience's belief. This research able to give insight on the perspective from Mattel in using feminism to promote their products and how another commercial company might uses it in promoting feminism concept and determining gender representation as part of publicity. And provide relevant strategy about marketplace feminism.

1.6 Organization of the Study

CHAPTER I: In this chapter, researcher will introduce what the research is about and the question researcher trying to answer through the analysis. Also, this chapter wanted to unleash the urgency in doing the research. Giving a glimpse to the reader about what will be expected in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II: Researcher describe the research object and what it constitutes of. In this research, the object used will be Barbie vlog where it is the

CHAPTER III: In this section, researcher describes which theories and concepts will be used in the research. Through the literatures, researcher can use them as a basic guidelines on what theory does the research based on.

CHAPTER IV: Researcher explains what kind of methodological approach will be used to analyse the data and findings.

CHAPTER V: Researcher breaks down the finding and researcher will analyse the findings. As researcher later will discuss the result one by one.

CHAPTER VI: Telling about the conclusion of the research and what can be made for an improvement later on.

1.7 State of the Art

Relevant research about the Barbie doll itself can be easily found since the establishment of Barbie has been long present and moreover Barbie has become a social icon. Hence, it is very reasonable in trying to understand cultural view from the icon itself especially the iconic role model for many young girls out there. However, it should be considered, the fact that Barbie has faced many feminism critics regarding its display of ideal body and prevalent ideal expectations for girls. Hence, the portrayal of Barbie as feminist itself has very little research and the fact that Barbie posted her opinion through her vlogs making it more relatable and real.

Addition to that, Barbie vlogs just recently promoted, therefore the research on the vlogs itself may be none. Though, there are several research on the

feminism portrayed in Barbie films. Here are the table in describing the previous researchers by its methodology and the findings:

Table I.1 State of the Art

Title/Writer, Source/Year	Content/Theory/Concept/Methodology	Summary	Differences
Barbie Tales in the Lives of Primary School-Aged Children by Réka Kassay in 2013	Seeing how Barbie as the main character or hero in the movie affecting the live of the Hungarian primary school-aged children with qualitative approach. The methodology will be done through text analysis using semiotics analysis. The text analysis divided by the empirical approach. For the triangulation of data, previous researcher uses observation and have an interview with the parents as well.	Depiction of the Hungarian primary school-aged children towards the movie is that they sees Barbie as a role model, something to play with and lastly as a commercial products. However, there is a distinguished in the findings according to the rural and urban area. Where the urban are likely to let the children in modelling the representation done by Barbie.	Current research will not determining how the movie or Barbie related media affecting the live of children as a whole, but seeing how does the portrayal depicted.
“Boys Can Be Anything”: Effect of Barbie	Researcher comparing the participants with Ms.Potato and Barbie	From the research it can be understood that girls who play	For these previous research has completely

<p>Play on Girl's Career Cognitions by Aurora M. Sherman and Eileen L. Zurbriggen in 2014</p>	<p>and how does the object they use to play can affecting the cognitive choices of the participants. in measuring the participant's activity, researcher uses qualitative methodology by observation. The activities done for an observation are Free Play Session, Workplace Photographs, Career Cognition Measure and Adult Questionnaire.</p>	<p>with Barbie has fewer occupational choices and selecting a likely girls related occupation. The attempt of producing Barbie as a Doctor have very few affect towards the choices made and it is closely related with Barbie's physical attributes and it created sexualized play activities.</p>	<p>different purpose towards the current question researcher tries to answer. From this previous research, it tries to undercover the gender stereotypes within career choice and how it is affected from dolls. While, the researcher focuses on Barbie as the vlogger instead of Barbie's form as a doll.</p>
<p>The Evolution of An Icon: A Comparison Of The Values And Stereotypes Reflected In The Original 1959 Barbie Doll And The Curvy 2016 Barbie Doll by Robin Driessen</p>	<p>Through the research, the previous researcher wanting to analyse and comparing the differences in values from the body of Barbie dolls from different time periods.</p>	<p>The doll from the 1959 have greater tendency in promoting beauty only. Meanwhile, Barbie in 2016 depicting more empowerment and diversity.</p>	<p>Research analysis relies by comparison, however in this research, researcher will have no comparison towards Barbie in the past. Instead it focuses on the current image Barbie depicting</p>

in 2016			and disregard the commercialization motive behind the existing value of feminism.
Tracing Puerto Rican Girlhoods: An Intergenerational Study of Interactions With Barbie And Her Influence on Female Identities by Emily R. Aguiló-Pérez in 2016	Previous researcher trying to unleash the impact of the doll towards adulthood life based on memories they held regarding the doll. And seeing the role of this doll in their life and how it became part of people's live. In answering the questions, the author uses qualitative approach through investigations using artefacts like Barbie in deploying the memories. As the process in gathering participants will be done through snowball sampling.	Through the research, the author able to gain three main aspects in generating its impact towards gender, race and class topics from the play. As Barbie regarded as an elitist dolls and determined the class of the owner. The result also explained the few usage of ethnicity through Barbie's skin color.	As previous researcher used Barbie doll as the main research object and trying to generate information from the interaction with the doll itself. While the new research implying on researcher interpretation towards the value of feminism it presented.