



License to Control: Analyzing Media Concerns Over Amazon's Creative Takeover of The James Bond Film Franchise

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Abstract. The creative takeover of the James Bond film franchise by Amazon is a critical phenomenon at the intersection of cultural and economic perspectives in the film industry. This shift of creative control has sparked widespread concerns about Bond's future, especially the potential for the IP to be compromised by transmedia storytelling and commercial expansion. Messages of concern are very apparent in international online media articles. Several articles highlight Amazon's tendency as a digital platform business to commodify the James Bond IP by prioritizing quantity and platform synergy over quality, sacrificing aesthetic aspects of the 60-year-old franchise. Through this article, I analyzed the events surrounding Amazon's takeover of James Bond's creative control and the concerns raised through online articles from international media. Using qualitative content analysis, this study shows that prevailing media concerns stemming from the tension between capitalist production logics and cultural-cinematic perspectives can create broader debate and skepticism towards cultural capitalization in entertainment industries among the public.

Keywords: creative control, film franchise, James Bond, transmedia storytelling, media concerns.

1 INTRODUCTION

As popular entertainment, film is not only a medium of personal representation, but also a crucial asset for the media's economic development. Adaptations, sequels, pre-quels, spin-offs, reboots, and remakes are steps taken by the film industry to commodify intellectual property (IP) assets in various narratives in order to maintain their position in market competition. However, technological developments have brought new challenges that often led to mergers & acquisitions (M&A) of creative copyrights into the hands of streaming platforms. Thanks to simple accessibility through online distributions, many streaming platforms have become huge fertile soil that are capable of producing films with greater commodification potential.

Recently, the transfer of the creative copyright of the popular James Bond franchise to the hands of mega-business Amazon has sparked discussions and debates regarding

further commodification in the film industry. According to Amazon's official website, this event is the culmination of negotiations that began with Amazon's acquisition of MGM studio in 2022. In the agreement three years ago, Amazon only managed to secure the distribution rights to the James Bond film franchise. However, Amazon finally expanded its role by securing creative copyright in an agreement approved on February 20, 2025. This deal came after nearly four years of uncertainty regarding James Bond film continuation following the release of *No Time to Die* in 2021.

The James Bond franchise is a series of films adapted from Ian Fleming's thriller novels in the 1960s. The stories introduced James Bond as a fictional MI6 secret agent involved in various international espionage missions. Development of the novel's film adaptation itself has a fairly unique concept. In 25 films produced over 60 years, 6 actors have taken turns playing Bond without any statement of absolute narrative connection or separation. This is notably different from the current franchise landscape—DC, Marvel, or Monster Universe—which emphasizes more on narrative connectivity. In addition to that, the production and creative rights of the films were held entirely by Albert Broccoli—later continued by his daughter Barbara Broccoli and his son Michael G. Wilson. For over 6 decades, the Bond franchise has succeeded only with big screen releases without any alternative story expansions nor cross-media storytelling as is common in the entertainment industry today. The last three James Bond films have worldwide gross over \$900 million in average: *Skyfall* (2012) with \$1,11 billion, *Spectre* (2015) with \$872 million, and *No Time to Die* (2021) with \$760 million [13]. Due to its historical value with audience and its popularity, the franchise is sought after by several media corporations.

The James Bond creative rights takeover by Amazon potentially transforms the franchise into transmedia storytelling. It is a process whereby integral elements of a fiction are systematically shared across various channels with the aim of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience [10]. These channels use their own medium and complements each other to create a whole meaningful content [16]. The term can be seen as a movement that seek to challenge cultural domination by amplifying the under-represented voices through more inclusive stories and platforms [7]. But on the other side—and the most common to refer—transmedia storytelling is understood as part of corporate strategy to gain more audience that spread across multiple platforms.

The second understanding is closely linked to the commercialization strategy of the industry. Transmedia storytelling benefits more to media conglomerates by coordinating various content production divisions and turning fan behavior into a source of profit [4]. These contents are seen as cultural capital which “embodies, stores, or provides cultural value, in addition to whatever economic value it may possess” [3]. Quantity has become the focus of content production as it is related to higher profits. This model of development often results in the fragmentation of intertextual meaning of each content that requires a lot of time for the audience to understand it across so many media [18]. The situation can also lead to alienation of text creators and the blurring of intertextual meaning because their work is created as corporate products sold on the wide and open free market [19].

Transmedia storytelling then becomes a ‘battle ground’ for cultural and economic perspectives as part of the cultural industry. Cultural industry consists of institutions

that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning [8]. Texts such as books, films, or music are seen as mass products that serve to reproduce culture and social meaning, while also profiting from their audience. The production itself involves compromises, as the foundation is based on audience metrics and cultural value efficiency [17]. Cultural production is carried out to reproduce the conditions of production in order to maintain their dominant position [1]. Therefore, popular culture continues to be in a field of negotiation between cultural and economic perspectives [11].

The *tug of war* between two perspectives generates debate and concerns surrounding the James Bond creative takeover. These are evident in news articles from several international media outlets. Deadline, Variety, and The Hollywood Reporter largely criticize Amazon's tendency to further capitalize James Bond IP through their various multimedia platforms. On the other hand, there are a small number of international articles that offer some potential for Bond films to grow after the takeover, albeit still hardly covered in reasonable concerns. The enormous influence of these media outlets to reach global audiences has become a crucial part of raising public discussions and critical perspectives towards the entertainment industry. They act as observers and gatekeepers which monitor various movements of each industry, providing insights that indirectly shape general opinions. Hence, this research is important to determine what messages are circulating in cyberspace, how the discussions developed, and what points need to be highlighted that can ultimately influence the success of James Bond film as an IP adaptation.

Using qualitative content analysis, I analyzed how message patterns in the news are interpreted and ideologically constructed across a broad range of globally accessed online news outlets. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the systematic categorization of a text to examine its meaning in a particular context [15]. These themes can serve as the bridge connecting the meaning of the text and the broader social structure of context. Intertextual analysis on global news can open up current perspectives of the industry, particularly in terms of creative copyrights, takeovers and future developments of classic IP in the age of streaming platforms. More specifically, this study attempts to answer how the dominant perspectives of international news outlets shape the meanings and collective response of concerns regarding the James Bond creative copyright transfer to Amazon.

On the other hand, research on transmedia storytelling has yet to incorporate a cultural industry perspective. This perspective is crucial for understanding how cultural and economic perspectives compromise with each other to produce a cultural text such as films. The James Bond's takeover phenomenon hasn't received much academic attention in the field of cultural industry. Several articles only attempted to examine Amazon's acquisition of MGM in 2022, which largely focuses on the merger process itself instead of public response. Therefore, this article is one of the first to present a new study related to James Bond's creative copyright through the lens of online media. I sought to identify the dominant messages in the articles that can reveal the turmoil behind the cultural production and narrative expansion of the franchise, which is a big part of the cultural industry dilemma. Through their articles, international news outlets assert themselves as an integral part in generating discussions that can potentially impact how future entertainment projects will be accepted by the public.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

Thematic qualitative content analysis (QCA) is used as a research method. It's a systemic analysis of meaning from material that needs to be interpreted by assigning categories [12]. The analysis involves an in-depth study of the content of information written or printed in the mass media [2]. The in-depth study is not only limited to manifest and descriptive aspects, but also latent and interpretive ones which ultimately resulted in further discussions of certain themes [6]. The theme itself is understood as the meaningful essence runs inside the data [14]. To extract the themes inside the data, coding is used specifically to analyze symbols or messages in a piece of information available. I collected several international media articles as information with the same theme, within a certain period of time. Through thematic qualitative approach, I proceeded to examine their latent meanings while investigating narrative patterns related to debates on cultural perspective and industrial interests.

The analysis of online articles was carried out through a systematic categorization process using deductive (theoretical) and inductive (data-based) methods. The meaning and interpretation of the findings in a qualitative approach are entirely in the hands of the researcher [5]. Thus, the software for this study served only to support the data organization process, while the analysis results were determined by the researcher. Due to the limited data coverage, this study did not use any data organization programs other than Microsoft Excel to create a list of articles, determine categories, and characterize it into particular themes. Furthermore, manual data analysis was also conducted in order to control the researcher's interpretations.

The data collection was carried out by examining several international media articles based on certain criteria, including: 1) released within one month from the initial James Bond copyright transfer agreement on February 20, 2025 (February 20 to March 20, 2025); and 2) directly discussing Amazon's acquisition of MGM that focuses on the transfer of James Bond's creative copyright. From these two criteria, 15 articles were found and which were then analyzed. Links to these news stories are attached at the end of this article.

The unit of analysis was determined at the level of quotations in the form of sentences or short paragraphs that contained specific meanings from the news writers. The quotations found were then analyzed using open coding techniques, or by labeling codes based on the primary meanings that emerged from the text. The code labels were thematically adjusted into broader meaning clusters: shifting production authority, audience resistance, franchise expansion, and transmedia storytelling strategies. At the final stage, I reorganized these clusters of meanings into main themes, including shifting creative authority and symbolic power, resistance to commodification, transmedia as ambivalence, negotiating cultural value in platform economic strategies.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Shifting of Creative Authority and Symbolic Power

Most of the online articles show a pattern that highlights the end of Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson's creative control over the James Bond film franchise. Writings from CBS News, CNN, and the New York Times emphasize the loss of the old producers, who were considered the guardians of the James Bond 'aesthetic tradition'. Quotations such as "*for the first time... a Broccoli won't be greenlighting...*" and "*hands over the creative reins control*" represent how Amazon's new dominance is shifting to a cultural production structure. The James Bond franchise, which was previously produced based on the 'aesthetic legacy' of Broccoli and Wilson, is now replaced by the logic of corporate production.

As reported by Reuters, CNN, and The Guardian, the transfer of creative copyright to Amazon indicates the centralization of content production by streaming platforms. Amazon is now the owner of James Bond creative rights, as well as the central figure that reproduces the conditions of production and cultural values of the related IP. Amazon's acquisition of MGM and transfer of Bond creative copyright are seen by the articles as a moment where cultural production power is now valued more in terms of its capital production and its profits, in the hands of the digital platform industry.

The changing logic and values of the James Bond future development inadvertently affected how the IP's narrative will be told across platforms. With the storytelling power lies in the hands of digital platform, it is possible that future James Bond films will just be a small slice of a bigger story arc with possibilities of many spin-offs on board. Though it might incorporate a bigger room for filmmakers with diverse backgrounds, it could also devalue James Bond as a legendary icon with its own lead story. The pattern of discussion leads to James Bond potentially losing its cultural power to the digital platform industry as the new creative authority.

3.2 Resistance to Commodification

Concerns regarding the excessive exploitation of James Bond as an IP have consistently appeared in several media outlets, particularly The Sun, The Conversation, and BBC. Quotations such as "*...tsunami of feeble spin-offs, merchandise...*" and "*... brand expansion... can cause long-term damage...*" show concerns regarding extreme commodification by the platform industry. The phrase "*... theme park*" particularly becomes a satirical joke used by The Sun to further emphasize the concerns. Many of these phrases show how the digital platform industry could potentially use James Bond merely as a sales commodity. A 'theme park' sold solely for profit instead of expression of art and cultural developments. In the past six decades, James Bond films had become a beacon of numerous cinematic achievements, such as The Academy Awards for Best Sound Effects (*Goldfinger*, 1964), Best Special Visual Effects (*Thunderball*, 1962), Best Original Song (*Skyfall*, 2012; *Spectre*, 2015; *No Time to Die*, 2021), and BAFTA Awards for Best Cinematography-Colour (*Goldfinger*, 1964) and Best Editing (*No Time to Die*,

2021). The phrases used in several media outlets imply that the cultural industry is again caught in a tension between cultural expression and the need for profit accumulation.

To further increase James Bond profitability, digital platform industry could expand the franchise through transmedia storytelling. Articles from BBC and Esquire express criticism and skepticism regarding franchise expansion across platforms. This transmedia expansion, frequently referred to cinematic universe concept, is seen as a threat to the more exclusive past James Bond adaptations. In the concept of cinematic universe, one single IP can be commodified by appearing in many other stories in the same narrative universe. James Bond might only become a featured character to appear in other characters' stories, instead of a single character in his own narrative. Hence, the IP is potentially facing further commodification as it loses its value due to profit calculation. The skepticism signal criticism toward commodification of popular culture, which highlights the loss of creative control when commercialization strategies are not managed carefully [10]. Articles collected in this research might become the message of resistance against industry's further commodification.

3.3 Transmedia as Ambivalence

On the other hand, articles from IGN, The Guardian, and The Conversation suggest that transmedia storytelling might actually be an innovative proposition for the James Bond IP. The authors acknowledge plenty of supporting characters in the Bond universe that can be developed in a deeper narrative through Amazon's multiplatform capabilities. It opens up many possibilities for the James Bond narrative universe to grow, offering untold stories to make the IP ubiquitous. By expanding the narrative, more room can be given to many writers across different backgrounds and also many characters that have previously existed only to assist Bond in his mission. These new stories, or as we call them spin-offs, can have their own audience and become a symbol of respect for diversity. This development isn't new in the franchise business. John Wick franchise *Ballerina* (2025) released as a spin-off story, DC Comics' Batman had the TV Series *Pennyworth* (2019-2021), while Amazon's original TV *The Boys* (2019-...) has released *Gen V* (2023-...).

However, the shadow of ambivalence remains looming over the loss of James Bond's originality. The strength of transmedia storytelling lies in the construction of a cohesive narrative, not in quantitative expansion [9]. Thus, the narrative expansion is a step that must be taken seriously, considering audience expectations towards Bond stories. As a six decade-old IP, James Bond has a cultural power among society. Constructing a cohesive narrative with a deep exploration of characters might be tricky for Amazon as a digital-based industry accustomed to metrics. The platform is now caught in a dilemma between developing a substantial universe, which could create opportunities for future expansion, but also risk diluting James Bond's identity as an IP.

3.4 Negotiating Cultural Value in Platform Economic Strategies

Many media outlets, *Esquire*, *The Sun*, *Variety*, and even the BBC, portrayed Amazon as a corporation that treats IP as a commodity instead of cultural expression and its development. Phrases like "*revenue-hungry executives*" or "*to maximize profit*" show that the cultural values of Bond have shifted to potentially exploitable return-on-investment (ROI) schemes. With this tendency, Amazon could further push its commodification based on economic reasoning, instead of cultural preservation and cinematic achievements. The authors of the articles worry that the new authority might prioritize these economic aspects of James Bond and neglect its narrative richness.

The industry's dominance over cultural perspectives puts Amazon as a representation of platform capitalism. The streaming platform becomes an entity that controls the means of production while regulating the conditions of cultural production according to distribution algorithms and economic logic. The James Bond franchise—once viewed as a cinematic work emphasizing narrative development and production achievements—now risks becoming a content distribution hub, driven by streaming demands and monetization. Many articles assume that the creative copyright takeover may be the moment in which cultural value of James Bond is no longer an issue worth preserving in future projects.

4 CONCLUSION

For themes of message emerge from articles surrounding the transfer of James Bond's creative copyright and Amazon's acquisition of MGM, including: 1) the shift in creative authority and symbolic power, 2) resistance to commodification, 3) transmedia ambivalence, and 4) the negotiation of cultural value from an economic perspective. These themes mainly express concerns regarding significant shifts in creative control and the development of the James Bond franchise post-merger. Amidst opportunities for narrative expansion, there remains a larger issue regarding the potential for further commodification that could lead to the cultural degradation of James Bond with many possible new stories planned. As previously argued, the articles pay particular attention to the logic of digital platforms which focus on content quantity and are profit-oriented, sidelining efforts to make James Bond a space for cinematic achievement and cultural preservation as it has been for the past six decades.

Using Hesmondhalgh's cultural industry approach and Jenkins' transmedia storytelling, we can examine the consistent messages of concern that emerge inside the articles. What's happening with the James Bond franchise represents a broader power struggle over who determines the meaning, identity, and direction of popular culture in the era of digital platform expansion. Concerns over the matter indirectly affected how the public sees the phenomenon. It shapes the audience's understanding on the transfer of copyright not only as the expansion of storytelling possibilities, but also part of corporate move to further capitalize their IP. This critical view could ultimately fixate public opinion not only on James Bond franchise, but also on other ongoing acquisitions in the industry. Research conducted shows growing skepticism fueled by news outlets,

which has the potential to impact audience reception of upcoming projects and the industry's profit.

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Attachment

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