

Breaking Down Bond

Kristen Wetovick

Department of Communications, University of Nebraska at Kearney

JMC 460: Mass Media and Society

Dr. Fletcher Ziwoya

December 10, 2021

Abstract

The focus of this paper is to determine if the character James Bond, throughout the entirety of the film franchise, creates an unrealistic standard for male audiences. The unrealistic standard for men created by James Bond highlights his mistreatment of women, excessive alcohol consumption, and intense violence. Several key concepts and issues are used to further understand and explore the issue, such as the Theory of Uses and Gratifications which is used to explore the ways dominant ideologies are transmitted by the media; the Medium Theory and the Cultural Analysis Theory is used to explore the issues that arise when media is distributed globally; finally, media concentration and vertical integration is used to understand the ways in which structural power constrains individuals and institutions. It was found that while James Bond does create an unrealistic standard for men throughout the film franchise, several plausible solutions to the issue were discovered including allowing more creative control to the individuals and institutions who are involved in the James Bond films and incorporating more modern ideologies within the medium.

Description of Media Text

The James Bond film franchise has spanned several decades from the 1960s to present day. The titular character was created by the author Ian Fleming in 1953 for his book that transcended into a series of novels which then merged into a movie franchise with *Dr. No* in 1963. Since the move to the big screen, there has been twenty-four different official movies and the character of James Bond has been played by six different actors including Sean Connery who played the character from 1962 to 1971 in six Bond films, David Niven who starred as the character in one movie in 1967, Georgy Lazenby in 1969 with one film, Roger Moore who also played the character for seven films from 1973 to 1985, Timothy Dalton starred as the character

from 1987 to 1989 in two films, Pierce Brosnan who played the character from 1995 to 2002 in four films, and Daniel Craig who starred in 5 Bond films from 2006 to 2021.

Within the film series, James Bond is seen as a hero who saves both Queen and country. Though the character is portrayed throughout the movie as a hero, he demonstrates several startling negative qualities and traits which include the mistreatment of women, excessive alcohol consumption, and scenes of intense violence. While the character James Bond performs heroic deeds throughout the course of the film franchise, dually saving the organization and those he cares about, he exhibits several questionable attributes and participates in numerous harmful activities. Bond's questionable behavior can be seen throughout the franchise, as in the 1964 released movie, *Goldfinger*, in which his mistreatment of women is displayed, "in that film, when agent Felix Leiter turns up for a chat while Bond is getting a poolside massage from a pretty blonde, the British agent slaps her posterior and orders her away with a curt aside: "Man talk." (Eric Deggans, 2021). Bond also engages in excessive alcohol consumption. In the 2008 movie *Quantum of Solace*, Bond consumes six martinis in the span of minutes. A study analyzing Bond's drinking habits found, "James Bond's level of alcohol intake puts him at high risk of multiple alcohol related diseases and an early death," (Davies, et. al, 2013). Bond also has a history of intense violence in the films, with "Auric Goldfinger's employee Jill Masterson who asphyxiated after being covered in gold paint," (Philip Etemesi, 2021).

Description of the focus of paper

The focus of this paper is to determine if throughout the span of the James Bond film franchise, the depiction of the titular character, James Bond, creates an unrealistic standard for male audiences. This issue will be explored through a variety of concepts and media theories including the Theory of Uses and Gratifications, the Medium Theory, the Cultural Analysis

Theory, and media concentration and vertical integration. The issue will also be further explored through concepts surrounding ways in which dominant ideologies are transmitted by the media, the way structural power constrains individuals and institutions that produce the media, and issues that arise when the media is distributed globally.

Application of the concepts/issues

Throughout the paper, multiple theories, concepts, and issues will be used to closely examine the media text; the Theory of Uses and Gratifications, the Medium Theory, and the Cultural Analysis Theory, media concentration and vertical integration.

The Theory of Uses and Gratifications is a theory which states users of a specific media actively select from among the media to satisfy their needs, instead of audiences being used by the media (Borchers: Theories of Persuasion, p.60). This allows media users to discern whether a certain media can satisfy their specific needs, and if that specific media can, the user will utilize it accordingly. There are several factors, or gratifications, that influence audiences to use a media. Those gratifications are surveillance, curiosity, diversion, personal identity, correlation, and cultural transmission (Borchers: Theories of Persuasion, p. 60). Key gratifications that will be applied later within this paper are the personal identity gratification and cultural transmission gratification. The personal identity gratification is used for audiences to regulate their self-esteem, social statues, credibility, and stabilize their position within society (Communication Theory). The cultural transmission gratification can be used to relate to other members of society, understand the societal norms, and have a common frame of reference in society (Communication Theory).

The Medium Theory is described by Croteau and Hoynes (2019), as “media as more than conduits for the transmission of messages; they argue that the very nature of the medium can be

the key to its social impact,” (p. 32). The theory explains that the very nature of the media and its technology can be a driving factor in society, “affecting how we perceive and understand the world,” (Croteau and Hoynes, 2019, p.32). This theory is broken down into two opposing views, McLuhan’s Optimism and Postman’s Pessimism. McLuhan holds the opinion that “the medium is the message” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019, p.32) and the medium shapes how audiences and users see the world. Postman’s Pessimism argues, “that the rise of television was the central cause of the decline in the seriousness of public life,” (Croteau and Hoynes, 2019, p.33). Though Postman’s Pessimism was largely centered to television it can be applied to other forms of media, like film.

Cultivation Analysis Theory is described as “heavy exposure to media causes individuals to develop an illusory perception of reality based on the most repetitive and consistent messages of a particular medium,” (Media Effects Theories). Those who frequently engage in media will believe that the depiction of the world through the media is how it truly is, creating a false sense of the world. Those who watch more of a media will likely perceive the world more through the view of the media than those who consume less media. Companies that produce the media have a large influence over the individuals who consume vast amounts of media since the companies are producing and distributing the media.

Media concentration has a large effect within the media industry. A small number of companies hold large amounts of control over every aspect concerning the media, creating a monopoly within the media. Vertical integration can play a large part in the concentration of media. Vertical integration, according to Croteau and Hoynes (2019), is “the process by which one owner acquires all aspects of production and distribution of a single type of media product,” (p. 74). Media companies can fully integrate by owning or controlling production studios, media

talent, or means of distribution like theaters or streaming platforms (Croteau and Hoynes, 2019, p. 74). This can lead to an unequal advantage within the media marketplace.

Critical analysis of the text in light of the application of the concepts/issues

When male audiences actively choose to watch James Bond movies, they are actively engaging in the media to fulfill specific needs within their lives as referenced by the Theory of Uses and Gratifications. When this theory is applied to the male audiences, they actively choose James Bond as a form of role model or character reference for how they should act in their personal lives. This idea can further be explained by the key gratifications of personal identity and cultural transmission. The personal identity gratification can be applied by male audiences trying to reassure their value of self-esteem, social position in society, credibility, and overall social status. Because audience members actively chose what media they consume, when male audience members watch the James Bond films, they are actively seeking reassurance from that character and seeing how the character's actions and values mirror their own. When they see the character participating in negative behaviors like mistreating women, engaging in excessive alcohol consumption, and acts of intense violence, the character is spreading that particular dominant ideology thus leading to the character setting a harmful standard and representation for male audiences to reference.

The cultural transmission gratification can also be applied to the character of James Bond and male audience members. The cultural transmission gratification employs that audience members use media to relate to other members of society, understand the societal norms, and have a common frame of reference in society (Communication Theory). When male audiences watch the James Bond films, they see how the character interacts with those around him and how he acts within society. Again, male audiences can use the character as a frame of reference for how they

should act within society and perpetuates the negative activities he engages in, thus further illustrating the harmful standard James Bond sets of male audiences.

Because of structural power within the media production of the James Bond films, the hurtful nature of the James Bond character is further perpetuated due to individuals and institutions being constrained to fit a certain ideal of James Bond within the films. According to Jaime Weinman, the Broccoli family have long been producers of the James Bond movies starting in the 1960s and continuing to present day. “Broccoli and Wilson choose the lead, the director and the locations,” (Weinman, 2021), the Broccolis then come up with a plot, villain, and a list of actors that the movie will be based on. The Broccoli family keeps much control over the content and creation of the Bond films, even more so over the studio, MGM, that produces the films, “while the studio, MGM, has influence over the final product, Broccoli and Wilson can often overrule or out-argue studio executives” (Weinman, 2021). Since the Broccoli’s have control over a good portion of the creation, production, and distribution of the Bond movies, they also play a direct part in James Bond setting a harmful standard for male audiences. Weinman states in his article that director Michael Apted, “recalls that he wanted Bond to talk to a woman about his past, but Broccoli and Wilson vetoed it, saying that Bond, “never reveals anything about himself,” (2021), and Broccoli’s strategy for having successful Bond films, “was to protect the essences of the character while adjusting the movies to keep up with recent trends,” (Weinman, 2021), which further continues the tread of Bond mistreating women, having excessive alcohol consumption, and participating in acts of intense violence which lead to Bond setting a harmful standard for male audiences.

Though the Broccoli’s aren’t one of the major business companies that have control over much of the media, they have gained almost complete concentrated control over the James Bond

film franchise and have become an integral part within the media. While MGM is the studio that houses the production of the films, the overarching decision process from creation, production, and distributing process falls to the Broccoli family. The Broccoli family uses their influence and financial position to impose their ideological views on the films – the mistreatment of women, excessive alcohol consumption, and intense violence – keeping the “essence” of the character. Recently, the company Amazon bought the MGM studio, leading to a more vertical integration of the film franchise. Amazon will now own the production company, MGM, while also having a key means of distribution, the streaming service Amazon Prime. The Broccoli family will stay on as producers for the film, keeping much of the control over the films. The production company will now be able to collectively create, produce, advertise, and distribute future films from within the company.

The James Bond film franchise is the second most successful film franchise in the world, and at least 20% of the global population has seen at least one James Bond film, according to Derek S. Young. The Medium Theory further describes the issue of James Bond setting a harmful standard for men when the media is distributed globally. The Medium Theory describes the importance of the medium, in this case the James Bond films, as being just as important to the social impact. When media is created and then distributed throughout the world as a movie, it often reaches a larger audience and has more influence than online videos and television due to higher budgets allowed for movies that can have a greater push for advertising and promotion of the movie. According to Tina Kubrak, “studies reveal the influence of films on people’s beliefs and opinions, stereotypes and attitudes. Movies can have significant impact on gender and ethnic stereotypes, changes attitudes toward certain groups of people and cause newly formed opinions on various issues,” (2020). Since the James Bond franchise is produced as movies, and not as a

television show or short series, it has decidedly more impact on society because of the high esteem generally given to movies, thus illustrating the key dynamic within the Medium Theory. Because there is more significance given to the medium, a greater weight will be placed on the content of the film, and if the content is harmful, like within the James Bond franchise, it will lead to a harmful standard for male audiences.

The cultivation analysis theory can also be used to further explore the issue. This theory is defined as, “heavy exposure to media causes individuals to develop an illusory perception of reality based on the most repetitive and consistent messages of a particular medium,” (Media Effects Theories). Since there have been twenty-four James Bond films, the repetitive nature and consistent messages of the content – the mistreatment of women, excessive drinking, and intense violence – helps to form the idea that the world is more dangerous and like the James Bond films than it actually is for those who watch the films. This idea further exemplifies that James Bond sets a harmful standard for men because, while he is considered the “hero” within the film franchise, he frequently engages in negative actions that perpetuate the harmful standard. If the world is as dangerous as the films lead male audiences to think, it leads male audiences to believe they need to act exactly as the character does to keep themselves and those they care about safe.

Engagement of possible solutions to a problem

If the character James Bond throughout the twenty-four-film franchise creates a harmful standard for male audiences, there are a few potential solutions to the problem. The first possible solution is to have studios executives, like the Broccolis, allocate more control over the creation, production, and distribution of future films to other members of the creative crew like writers, directors, the talent, and editors. Another plausible solution is to have more modern ideologies represented in the films. A combination of the two solutions would ensure that the content

reflects more diverse ideologies, not just those of the studio executives, and ease the constraining nature of the executives that would allow for new growth and standards within the franchise. These solutions allow for the character of James Bond to become a better standard for male audiences.

Borchers. (n.d.). *Theories of Persuasion*. (pp. 59-60).

Communication Theory (n.d.). *Uses and Gratification Theory*. Communication Theory.

<https://www.communicationtheory.org/uses-and-gratification-theory/>

Croteau, D. & Hoynes, W. (2019). *Media/Society: Technology, Industries, Content, and Users*.

SAGE Publishing, Inc.

Davies, et al. (2013). *Were James Bond's drinks shaken because of alcohol induced tremor?*

Thebmj. <https://www.bmj.com/content/347/bmj.f7255>

Deggans, E. (2021, October 9). *Coming to terms with James Bond's flawed past – as a fan and*

as a critic. NPR.org. <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/09/1044352399/coming-to-terms-with-james-bonds-flawed-past-as-a-fan-and-as-a-critic>

Etemesi, P. (2021, June 14). *10 Most Violent James Bond Movies (Ranked by Number of On-*

Screen Deaths). ScreenRant. <https://screenrant.com/james-bond-007-most-violent-movies-ranked-number-of-on-screen-deaths/>

Kubrak, T. (202, May 2). *Impact of Films: Changes in Young People's Attitudes after Watching*

a Movie. NCBI. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7288198/>.

doi: [10.3390/bs10050086](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10050086)

Media Effects Theories. (n.d.). *Media and Culture*. ER Services.

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-massmedia/chapter/2-2-media-effects-theories/>

Weinman, J. (2021, September 27). *The James Bond film franchise is actually a family business.*

Meet the Broccolis. Maclean's. <https://www.macleans.ca/culture/movies/the-james-bond-film-franchise-is-actually-a-family-business-meet-the-broccolis/>

Young, D., S., (n.d.). *Bond. James Bond. A Statistical Look at Cinema's Most Famous Spy.*

CHANCE. <https://chance.amstat.org/2014/04/james-bond/>