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5. Bond Rebooted: The Transnational Appeal of the Daniel Craig James Bond Films

Huw D. Jones and Andrew Higson

Abstract

The James Bond films starring Daniel Craig are amongst the most globally successful films of the twenty-first century. The transnational appeal of these films can only be partly explained by their textual attractions, such as the way they play out ideas of British identity. Much of their success depends on the business of Bond, from rights ownership to distribution. Focus group interviews with audiences in continental Europe also reveal an ambivalence about whether the Bond character and the Bond films are perceived as British or American. This ambivalence extends the appeal of the films to different audiences. This chapter therefore provides new insights into Bond's enduring transnational appeal.

Keywords: James Bond, audience research, British national identity, film distribution, film industry

James Bond may be a British agent, but the Bond film franchise is by any definition a global phenomenon. It is one of the longest running movie franchises, with 24 films dating back to the first release in 1962, and the second most lucrative franchise, amassing some \$7 billion at box-offices around the world (The Numbers 2016a). According to the American Statistical Association, “20% of the world’s population has seen at least one Bond film” (Young 2014).

The four most recent Bond films starring Daniel Craig as Agent 007—*Casino Royale* (UK/Czech Republic/USA/Germany/Bahamas: Martin Campbell 2006), *Quantum of Solace* (UK/USA: Marc Foster 2008), *Skyfall* (UK/USA: Sam

Mendes 2012) and *Spectre* (UK/USA/Austria/Mexico/Italy/Morocco: Sam Mendes 2015)—continue the pattern of global success. *Skyfall* grossed \$1.1 billion worldwide, making it the fifteenth most successful film of all time in terms of worldwide box office revenue (Box Office Mojo 2016a), and the most successful Bond film ever (The Numbers 2016b). Between them, the four Craig Bonds have taken over \$3 billion at the worldwide box office, with all of them in the 125 highest-grossing films of all time (Box Office Mojo 2016a).

The Craig Bond films were conceived as a “reboot” of the Bond film franchise. *Casino Royale* is set at the beginning of Bond’s career as Agent 007, and the story arc continues across *Quantum of Solace*, *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. At the time of writing, Craig is due to appear in one more Bond film—*No Time To Die* (UK/USA: Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2020), the twenty-fifth in the franchise, with a 2020 release—so that story arc is clearly not yet complete. There is a wealth of scholarly commentary on the Craig Bond reboot, but most of it is in the form of theory-led textual readings (Lindner 2010; Cox 2014; Hasian 2014; Dodds 2014; Anderson 2017; Murray 2017). This chapter sets out to do something different, to explore why this particular cycle of Bond films has been such a global success.

There is of course nothing particularly new about this success, since the Bond franchise has always achieved impressive international distribution and box-office success. What is new is the research about European distribution arrangements and audience reception on which we draw for this study of the most recent entries in the Bond franchise. We explain the transnational appeal of these films partly through their textual attractions, including their high production values, their formal and generic qualities, the way they play out ideas of British national identity, and the balance between continuity and change. We also consider how the appeal of the films depends on the business of Bond, from the ownership of the rights, to the distribution of the films. We focus in particular on how the Craig Bond film were distributed in Europe—a market which, as box-office figures demonstrate, represents about one third of the worldwide revenue for the Bond films, but also one which presents particular challenges in terms of negotiating access to different national and linguistic territories. Finally, we examine how the films have been received by audiences in Europe through the analysis of survey data and focus groups conducted in Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. Audience research of this kind is still relatively rare within film studies and (to our knowledge) has not previously been used in work on the Bond film franchise. One of the points that emerges from this research is an ambivalence about whether the Bond character and the Bond films are British or American—an ambivalence which actually extends the

appeal of the films to different audiences. This chapter therefore provides new insights into Bond's enduring transnational appeal in a global context, but especially within the context of Europe's changing film market and its diverse social, cultural and political landscape.

Bond's Formula for Global Success

Bond historian James Chapman (2003) suggested four key reasons for the sustained success of the Bond film franchise over several decades: consistently high production values; spectacular visual qualities—notably fast-paced action, dramatic stunts and special effects; the play on British national identity; and, most importantly for Chapman, the ability of the producers to “find the right balance between repetition and variation, between continuity and change.” As Chapman explains, this process of both maintaining and renewing the formula means that each film “provide[s] the sort of entertainment pattern which audiences expect while at the same time providing new thrills, new set pieces, new variations on old situations” (Chapman 2003, 94). The success of the rebooted Bond of the Daniel Craig era has depended precisely on this ability to update the formula, but also on the fact that, for all its apparent “Britishness,” the franchise is an integral part of the global business that is Hollywood.

With an average production budget of about \$200 million (26 times the budget of the first Bond film, even after taking inflation into account), the production values of the Craig Bond films have remained high (The Numbers 2016b). Both *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall* won the Art Directors Guild “Excellence in Production Design Award,” one of Hollywood's top creative prizes. Visual qualities also remain a key feature. From the free-running chase across the roof-tops and building sites of the Madagascan capital in the opening sequence of *Casino Royale*, to Bond's extended fist-fight with the mercenary Patrice on top of a speeding train at the start of *Skyfall*, the Craig Bond films are still packed with fast-paced action, special effects and sheer spectacle. As another Bond chronicler, John Brosnan (cited in Chapman 2003, 92), observed, such qualities have the capacity to appeal to “a large international audience because they are able to bypass language and cultural barriers and appeal directly to people of various nationalities and age groups.”

Chapman (2003, 95) argues that Bond's Britishness is an important part of his international appeal, partly because it serves as “a means of differentiating Bond from the all-American action heroes” that feature in so

many other Hollywood films. This illustrates Andrew Higson's (2010, 71) argument that "banal markers of national identity" can "become exotic signifiers of difference in the global marketplace." As Chapman (2003, 97) further notes, Bond's Britishness is "carefully packaged for the international market" through combining Britishness with elements of internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Thus, Bond is not parochially British, but "very much the Englishman [*sic*] abroad, a professional tourist whose job (saving the world from diabolical masterminds) takes him to exotic foreign locations" (Chapman 2003, 97).

In the Craig Bond films, Bond remains identifiably British—and indeed English. In *Skyfall*, for instance, during the psychological word association test which Bond must complete before his return to the field, he resolutely replies "England" in response to the prompt "country." And at the end of the film Bond appears on the rooftop of the MI6 building, facing the British flag, with the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben prominently positioned in the London skyline behind, visually symbolizing the British nation-state. At the same time, Bond remains a global, cosmopolitan traveler, and an imperialist adventurer: across the four films he visits Uganda, Madagascar, the Bahamas, the USA, Montenegro and Italy (*Casino Royale*); Haiti, Austria, Italy, Bolivia and Russia (*Quantum of Solace*); Turkey, Bali and China (*Skyfall*); and Mexico, Italy, Austria and Morocco (*Spectre*).

Bond's Britishness was further underlined when Daniel Craig appeared as Bond alongside Queen Elizabeth II in the short spoof film made for the opening ceremony of the London Olympics in 2012. The film culminated with the Queen appearing in person at the Olympic stadium after apparently descending from a helicopter with a British flag parachute in a scene which parodied the iconic opening sequence to *The Spy Who Loved Me* (UK/USA: Lewis Gilbert, 1977). As part of the build-up to the Olympics, Bond also appeared prominently within the government-backed "Britain Is GREAT" promotional campaign, which aimed to encourage tourism and inward investment to the UK (BBC News 2011).

According to the UK Government's (2014, 8-9) review of the campaign, "Over 20 Embassies and High Commissions held Bond-themed receptions and screenings to promote Britain as a world-class tourism destination to influential local audiences and highlight the strengths of the British film-making industry and Bond-related British products such as the new Jaguar." While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the values associated with these "hypotextual" materials in any detail, they nevertheless demonstrate the way in which Bond has become an important instrument of soft power, projecting an image of Britain to the world.

In presenting the Craig Bond films as a reboot, the process of renewing the franchise, balancing out continuity and change, became very evident. A key part of that reboot was the casting of a new actor, Daniel Craig, in the role of Bond, a decision which initially raised eyebrows when it was first announced in October 2005—Craig was chiefly criticized for not fitting Fleming's original portrait of Bond as "tall, dark and suave." The decision was eventually vindicated when critics widely praised Craig's performance in *Casino Royale* for combining "Sean Connery's athleticism and cocksure swagger with Timothy Dalton's thrilling undercurrent of stone-cold cruelty" (*The Times*, cited in BBC News 2006). The casting of Craig thus represented both a sense of continuity with previous Bond actors, and innovation, as a new actor who didn't initially seem to meet Fleming's requirements.

The reboot also took Bond back to the beginning of his spy career, thereby removing some aspects of narrative continuity with previous Bond films. But in other respects, the narratives of the Craig Bonds adhered to the well-established traditions of the franchise. Thus, they still feature many of the familiar Bondian plot elements—briefings at Headquarters from M and Q, numerous seduction scenes with often incidental female characters, high-octane chase sequences and fights, the showdown with the villain, and so on. Many of the same characters reappear across the Craig Bonds, including M, Q and Miss Moneypenny, as well as Bond's occasional CIA ally Felix Leiter and a series of more or less stereotypical "Bond girls" and villains. They also contain references to earlier Bond films, such as the Aston Martin DB5 that is bought back into service at the end of *Skyfall*, or the scene in *Casino Royale* in which an impressively muscled Bond emerges from the sea wearing a very snug pair of swimming trunks, an apparently "accidental" pastiche of the moment when Ursula Andress stepped out of the sea in *Dr. No* (UK: Terence Young 1962) (Singh 2008).

Other key characters have also received a makeover. Miss Moneypenny, for example, is reintroduced in *Skyfall* as a field agent played by Naomie Harris, a black female character with much more narrative agency than the desk-bound secretary who appears in the earlier Bond films. Similarly, Q, the MI6 Quartermaster, returns in *Skyfall* as a young computer "geek" played by Ben Whishaw—in an era of teenage hackers, perhaps a more apt depiction of the twenty-first-century technical expert than the ageing white-coated laboratory "boffin" played for many years by Desmond Llewellyn.

Another key aspect of the Bond "reboot" is the way in which the Craig films have brought what commentators have observed as a "more serious tone" to the franchise (Eisenberg 2014). This is not to suggest that earlier Bond films should not be taken seriously—as the academic literature on Bond

makes clear, the Bond films have always raised big questions about gender, sexuality, national identity, geopolitics, the film industry and so on (Lindner 2010; Chapman 2007). What is distinctive about the Craig Bond films is that they feature elements that, within contemporary film culture, are more often associated with character-based dramas and auteur-driven films within the arthouse market than with popular, mainstream action-adventure movies. In particular, the films explore Bond's character and psychology in greater depth than earlier films in the franchise. As *Variety*'s Todd McCarthy (2006) put it in a review of *Casino Royale*, "Dialogue requires Bond to acknowledge his mistakes and reflect on the soul-killing nature of his job, self-searching unimaginable in the more fanciful Bond universes inhabited by Brosnan and Roger Moore." The Craig Bonds also feature a number of actors more associated with "serious" drama or non-English language films, including Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen (as the villain Le Chiffre in *Casino Royale*); the Oscar-winning Spanish actor Javier Bardem (as the ex-MI6-operative-turned-cyberterrorist Raul Silva in *Skyfall*); and the Palme d'Or-winning French actor Léa Seydoux (as the "Bond girl" Madeleine Swann in *Spectre*). In addition, *Skyfall* and *Spectre* were directed by Oscar-winning director Sam Mendes, a recognized "auteur" also more associated with "serious" dramas than action-adventure movies. Once again, there is a complex process of repetition of elements associated with previous Bond films and the difference of the re-boot.

These attempts to make Bond appear more "serious" can be seen as a response to developments within the international film market, recalling Chapman's (2003, 95) observation that the Bond franchise has consistently "responded to and survived changes in the film industry, film culture and society at large," keeping pace with changing tastes and attitudes. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a series of highly successful comic films—most notably the Austin Powers movies and the Johnny English films—which lampooned the spy genre and the Bond franchise in particular (the Johnny English character was actually created by Neal Purvis and Robert Wade, the writers of the most recent Bond films). Meanwhile, action spy thrillers had begun to take on a more intelligent and realistic tone with the equally successful Jason Bourne films, directed by former journalist and documentary filmmaker, Paul Greengrass. The Jason Bourne franchise, which to date has grossed \$1.6 billion worldwide over the course of five films, an average of \$327 million per film (Box Office Mojo 2016b), featured a more complex and flawed hero and less of the jokey, tongue-in-cheek irony associated with the Bond films. The Craig Bonds seem to draw on some of the qualities of the Bourne films (e.g. the hero's soul-searching

vulnerability) while avoiding the clichés lampooned by the Austin Powers and Johnny English films.

To be sure, the Craig Bond films are still littered with spectacularly implausible and fantastic set-pieces, along with equally spectacular scenery and locations, copious sequences featuring violent masculine aggression, moments of tongue-in-cheek humor and overt displays of the conventionally beautiful bodies of a series of “Bond girls” who one way or another succumb to Bond’s charm. There is also nothing new about attempts to give Bond a more serious tone. As one 007 observer recalls, John Glen’s first outing as director of *For Your Eyes Only* (UK: John Glen, 1981) in 1981 was seen as “a turning point in the series,” introducing “a more serious side of Bond” (007 James 2016). Nevertheless, the Craig Bond films have gone much further than previous Bond films in terms of re-positioning them as “serious” drama, thereby seeking to renew the appeal of the franchise.

The Business of Bond: Exploiting the Rights in Europe

What this analysis of the films suggests is that the success of the Craig Bond films can certainly be put down in part to what we see on screen—the production values, the action and spectacle, the relationship between British national identity and global tourism, and the continuity and reinvention of characters, themes and scenarios. At the same time, the success of the Craig Bond films is also due in part to the business strategies exploiting the franchise.

The Craig Bond films were co-produced by London-based Eon Productions and the Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). Eon is a private company created in 1961 by two North American film producers, Albert “Cubby” Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, both by then resident in the UK and involved in the UK film industry. Eon is still owned and run by Broccoli’s daughter, Barbara Broccoli, and his stepson, Michael G. Wilson. MGM acquired a share of the copyright to the Bond film franchise from the United Artists Corporation in 1981, who themselves bought these rights from Saltzman after he sold his shares in Eon’s holding company, Danjaq, in 1975. The Craig Bond films also involved Japanese-owned Sony Pictures Entertainment, which acquired a 20 percent stake in MGM in 2005, and Sony’s studio subsidiary, Columbia Pictures, which co-produced *Skyfall* and *Spectre* with Eon after MGM’s bankruptcy in 2011. The twenty-fifth installment, *No Time To Die* (2020), will be a joint venture between Eon, MGM, Annapurna Pictures, and Universal, who will take over international

distribution. With the exception of *Casino Royale* (which was mainly shot in the Czech Republic), the films themselves were primarily produced in the UK, where they were able to gain additional financing through Britain's film tax relief system, which offers a 25 percent cash rebate on qualifying UK expenditure. They were also able to exploit production support in many other countries, notably the Bahamas. Thus, while Bond and many of the people who work on the films are British, the films are essentially transnational productions, formally registered as UK/US inward investment features, with 50 percent of the funding coming from Hollywood (Fritz 2011).

The distribution of the Craig Bond films also speaks to the extraordinary complexity of the global film business. Between 1997 and 2005, MGM owned the distribution rights for the Bond films. However, in purchasing a 20 percent stake in MGM in 2005, Sony secured the distribution rights for the Craig Bond films (Mendelson 2016). In the United States, the films were distributed by Sony's studio subsidiary, Columbia. In the rest of the world, distribution involved a veritable network of corporate subsidiaries, regional powerhouses and even small independents. Meanwhile, the home entertainment (DVD and BluRay) release was handled by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment for *Casino Royale*, and 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment in the case of the other three Craig Bond films.

The European market, which generated about a third of the global revenue for the recent Bond films, presents a particular challenge for the Bond franchise, as with all other Hollywood-affiliated films. Whereas the United States (which together with Canada forms the "North American" market) is treated as a single domestic market with one language, Europe is a highly fragmented market made up of numerous different territories and language groups, in some of which there are strong local or regional distribution companies. Within Europe, the theatrical release of the four Craig Bonds was handled by national branches of Sony Pictures Releasing in around eight territories, including the big five European markets of the UK, Germany, France, Spain and Italy. However, there were some exceptions: *Casino Royale* was released in France by Gaumont Columbia TriStar, while *Skyfall* and *Spectre* were released in Italy by Warner Bros. (Table 1). Sony also released all four films in Austria and Belgium, countries that share a language with one of the "big five" European countries (Germany and France respectively); for less obvious reasons, they also distributed three of the films in the Netherlands, two of them in Sweden, Estonia and Croatia, and one in Russia (jointly with Walt Disney).

By far, the majority of the European box-office income was derived from the territories where Sony released the Bond films (in particular the "big five"). In

Table 1. Cinema admissions and distributors for *Skyfall* in Europe.**Source: LUMIERE 2016.**

Market	Distributor	Release date	Admissions	Penetration rate
Austria	Sony Pictures (AT)	01/11/2012	792,022	9.77%
Belgium	Sony Pictures Releasing (BE)	26/10/2012	1,081,429	10.56%
Bulgaria	Forum Film (BG)	19/10/2012	158,653	1.94%
Croatia	Sony Pictures Releasing (HR)	01/11/2012	152,507	3.56%
Czech Republic	Forum Film (CZ)	26/10/2012	489,653	4.76%
Denmark	SF Film (DK)	26/10/2012	943,627	17.70%
Estonia	Acme (EE)	02/11/2012	99,023	6.88%
Finland	SF Film Finland [FS Film]	26/10/2012	647,440	12.51%
France	Sony Pictures Releasing (FR)	24/10/2012	7,005,962	11.83%
Germany	Sony Pictures Releasing (DE)	01/11/2012	7,779,852	9.47%
Greece	Feelgood		581,553	5.51%
Hungary	Forum-Hungary	25/10/2012	398,786	3.97%
Italy	Warner Bros. (IT)	31/10/2012	1,900,284	3.30%
Latvia	Forum Cinemas (LV)	02/11/2012	84,114	3.47%
Norway	SF Norway	26/10/2012	742,765	16.58%
Poland	Forum Film (PL)	26/10/2012	1,672,893	4.39%
Portugal	ZON Lusomundo Audiovisuais	25/10/2012	474,720	4.75%
Romania	Forum Film Romania	26/10/2012	305,445	1.36%
Russia	Walt Disney Studios Sony Pictures Releasing	26/10/2012	3,241,165	2.22%
Slovakia	Forum Film Slovakia	26/10/2012	155,612	2.88%
Slovenia	Continental Film (SI)	31/10/2012	111,929	5.63%
Spain	Sony Pictures Releasing De Espana	30/10/2012	1,486,293	3.77%
Sweden	SF Film (SE)	26/10/2012	1,087,546	12.27%
Switzerland	Walt Disney (CH)	27/10/2012	1,186,874	16.57%
The Netherlands	Sony Pictures Releasing (NL)	01/11/2012	288,367	1.81%
Turkey	Warner Bros. (TR)	02/11/2012	635,649	0.99%
UK	Sony Pictures Releasing (GB)	26/10/2012	16,147,235	25.66%
EUR EU			43,692,438	
EUR OBS(36)			49,651,405	

other, less lucrative European markets, distribution was handled by a plethora of other companies, including other major Hollywood studio subsidiaries (e.g. Walt Disney/Buena Vista, Columbia TriStar Warner, UIP and Universal) and independent distributors (e.g. Sena, Nordisk, Itafilm, Continental, Falcon, Intercom, Acme, SF, Feelgood, Myndform and Lusomundo). The distribution of the Craig Bond films in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) makes for an

interesting case study. Forum Films started out releasing the first two films in Bulgaria but, for the last two films, they also distributed to cinemas in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Forum Films has strong ties with Hollywood majors and is the distribution subsidiary of Cinema City International, the largest cinema chain in the seven CEE countries. Cinema City is itself part of Global City Holdings, which was absorbed into Cineworld in 2014, making it the second largest cinema chain in Europe, with a substantial share of the UK market, as well as Ireland, Israel and CEE. This is then no small local firm but a major regional and now European player with extensive interests and capital (Cineworld Group Plc 2016).

This set of arrangements demonstrates a number of key features of the global film business, including its complexity, but also the various ways in which the Hollywood majors maintain control over that business. Sometimes this is through their own direct actions, sometimes through subsidiaries and sometimes through arms-length arrangements with other large corporations but also with much smaller independent companies, especially in less lucrative markets such as Central and Eastern Europe. The success of the Craig Bond films is in large part due to the involvement of Hollywood majors that are able to tap into this network of distribution agents.

Despite the variety of different companies involved in the distribution of the Craig Bond films, the marketing campaign for these films had remarkable consistency across Europe and North America. The same trailers, posters and other publicity material were used in the majority of territories. One noticeable difference, though, was the language Bond spoke. In large non-English-speaking countries such as Germany, France, Spain and Italy, for example, the Craig Bond films were dubbed into local languages. In other non-English-speaking territories, the films were shown in their original version but with local language subtitles. Thus, to a degree, the Craig Bond films—like all major Hollywood films, including inward investment “British” blockbusters—were adapted to suit local preferences.

The Audience Reception of Bond in Europe

The success of the Bond film franchise is dependent not only on negotiating the complexities of the global film industry, but also on its ability to speak to audiences of different ages, genders, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds. In terms of reviews, responses to the Craig Bond films were mixed. According to the Rotten Tomatoes website, which aggregates film reviews in the English-language press, 95 percent of the reviews for *Casino*

Royale (out of a sample of 246) and 93 percent of the reviews for *Skyfall* (out of a sample of 347) were positive (Rotten Tomatoes 2006; 2012). However, in the case *Quantum of Solace* and *Spectre*, only 65 percent of reviews (out of a sample of 280) and 65 percent of reviews (out of a sample of 311) respectively were positive (Rotten Tomatoes 2008; 2015). Critics seemed to prefer the films when they delved into Bond's character and psychology rather than focus on the fast-paced action and humor generally associated with the Bond franchise. Thus *Casino Royale* was praised for "dispos[ing] of the silliness and gadgetry that plagued recent James Bond outings, and deliver[ing] what fans and critics have been waiting for: a caustic, haunted, intense reinvention of 007" (Rotten Tomatoes 2006), whereas *Spectre* was criticized for being "reliant on the established 007 formula" (Rotten Tomatoes 2015).

The "Audience Scores" on Rotten Tomatoes mirror the critics. Thus *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall* performed best with a 89 percent positive rating (out of a sample of 701,447) and a 86 percent positive rating (out of a sample of 371,828) respectively, compared with only a 58 percent positive rating (out of a sample of 431,021) for *Quantum of Solace* and 62 percent (out of a sample of 104, 678) for *Spectre*. However, these responses are restricted to internet users who choose to engage with a film website that is most prominent in the US and the UK, and do not necessarily represent the views of the cinemagoing population as a whole.

A more representative sample of the European audience for the Craig Bond films can be found in a recent report by the European Commission (2014) on film audiences in Europe. The survey polled 4,608 people aged 4-50 in 10 European countries (Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom) about their film viewing habits and interests. Respondents were asked whether they had "seen," "liked" or "heard of" a list of recent films, including *Skyfall*. Having secured access to the original survey data (some of which was not included in the final report), we have been able to build up a detailed profile of the European audience for one of the Craig Bond films.

Skyfall was one of the most well-known recent films included in the European Commission survey. It had been "seen" by 43 percent of respondents (the third most recognized title overall) and was "liked" by 38 percent of respondents (the fourth most popular title). *Skyfall* was most popular amongst British respondents (56 percent of whom said they liked the film), followed by French (46 percent), Croatian (50 percent) and Romanian respondents (45 percent) (Table 2). It was least popular amongst Italian respondents (26 percent of whom said they liked the film), Spanish (29 percent) and Polish respondents (35 percent). To a certain degree, this reflects the film's

Table 2. Proportion of Europeans (N=4608) who “have seen and liked” *Skyfall* by various social demographic variable. Z-scores indicate the amount each variable differs from the mean value (38%).

Source: European Commission 2014.

Social demographic variable	Liked “Skyfall”	Z score
British	56%	18%
Male	46%	8%
Watched many ‘US films’ in the last 12 months	44%	6%
Earns €2000 euros net per month or more	42%	4%
French	42%	4%
16-25 year old	42%	4%
Movie addicts	42%	4%
Movie selectives	41%	3%
Croatian	41%	3%
Romanian	41%	3%
Blockbuster lovers	41%	3%
Watched many films from ‘any other origin’ in last 12 months	40%	2%
Urban-dweller	40%	2%
Watched many ‘European films’ in the last 12 months	39%	1%
Earns €1000-1499 net per month or more	39%	1%
Danish	39%	1%
Graduate	39%	1%
26-34 year old	39%	1%
Watched many ‘country language films’ in the last 12 months	39%	1%
Mean value	38%	0%
Post-graduate	37%	-1%
Primary or Basic education	37%	-1%
Semi-urban dweller	37%	-1%
German	36%	-2%
Lithuanian	36%	-2%
Earns €1500-1999 euros net per month	35%	-3%
Polish	35%	-3%
35-50 year old	35%	-3%
Earns less than 1000 euros net per month	35%	-3%
Movie indifferents	34%	-4%
Rural-dweller	33%	-5%
Hit grazers	30%	-8%
Female	29%	-9%
Spanish	29%	-9%
Italian	26%	-12%

box office performance. In the UK, for example, *Skyfall* had a 26 percent rate of penetration (in terms of admissions per head of population); in France, the rate of penetration was 12 percent and in Spain and Italy the rates were 4 percent and 3 percent, respectively (LUMIERE 2016).

The high popularity of *Skyfall* amongst British respondents seems to corroborate Chapman's (2003) suggestion that British audiences are especially drawn to Bond because of the way the films patriotically celebrate a particular notion of Britishness. In a broader sense, it also confirms the cultural proximity thesis that audiences tend to prefer national stories and characters with which they are culturally familiar (Hoskins and Mirus 1988). The lower enthusiasm for *Skyfall* in Italy and Spain is harder to explain, but may be partly due to the fact that both countries have a strong market for their own domestic productions (e.g. Italy's *Benvenuti al nord* ("Welcome to the North"; Italy: Lucia Miniero 2012) or Spain's *Tengo ganas de ti* ("I Want You"; Spain: Fernando Gonzalez Monlina, 2012)), which occasionally outperform US blockbusters.

The survey confirms that *Skyfall* is significantly more popular amongst men than women (46 percent of men said they liked the film, compared with 25 percent of women) and also more popular with young people than older people (42 percent of 16-25 year olds said they liked the film, compared with 35 percent of 35-50 year olds). Higher earners (with a net income of €2,000 or more per month) tend to prefer *Skyfall* to lower earners, while the level of educational qualifications makes no difference one way or the other. Again, this seems to confirm the notion that the Bond films continue to appeal to "wild adolescent fantasies" about a "world of beautiful women, easy sex and consumer affluence" (Chapman 2003, 95).

In terms of their taste in films, *Skyfall* fans tend to watch a high amount of US films and are most likely to be what the pollsters call "movie addicts" (42 percent) or "movie selectives" (41 percent). The former are described as "the heaviest consumers of film and media" who "watch all sorts of film" (European Commission 2014, 69). The latter "watch carefully selected films, on the more 'sophisticated' end of the spectrum, rather than Hollywood blockbusters which they see as too stereotypical, or big-hit National comedies that they see as too commercial and sometimes lacking the intellectual sophistication that they are after" (European Commission 2014, 69). This suggests that the Craig Bond films appeal to not only fans of fast-paced action films and special effects, but also audiences who prefer more "serious" drama—which was apparently was precisely what the producers had hoped to achieve.

While the data from the European Commission report allows us to identify to whom *Skyfall* appeals (and to a certain degree why), it tells us little about what audiences actually think about the film. To learn more about how

European audiences have made sense of *Skyfall*, we conducted a series of focus groups involving 82 participants (23 in Germany, 17 in Bulgaria and 42 in Italy) from a range of different ages, genders, educational qualifications and (to a lesser degree) socio-economic backgrounds. Participants were recruited to discuss attitudes to contemporary European film in general rather than *Skyfall* in particular (the film was one of six “European films” discussed in each focus group). As such, their responses were not necessarily representative of the wider cinemagoing population. However, if we accept that fans of contemporary European cinema are more likely to identify with “serious” drama than most cinemagoers, then the focus groups do provide an opportunity to assess the appeal of the film’s more “serious” elements.

Skyfall was very well-known across all the focus groups. About half (52 percent) had seen the film while another quarter (27 percent) had heard of it but not seen it. The film was most well-known amongst the Bulgarian focus group participants (76 percent had seen it and 18 percent had heard of it) and least well-known amongst the Italian participants (40 percent had seen it and 29 percent had heard of it), which to some extent mirrors the findings of the European Commission survey. Most of the focus group participants were also aware of earlier Bond films. Even in Bulgaria, where the archetypal Bond films of the 1960s and 1970s were not officially available until the post-Communist era, there was a strong recognition of the Bond franchise.

Despite its high-level of recognition, only around two in every five focus group participants said they liked *Skyfall*. As with the European Commission survey, the proportion was higher amongst men than women, though older participants tended to be more enthusiastic about the film than younger ones, which may reflect the fact that the focus groups were less representative of the population as a whole.

Most fans of the film said they liked *Skyfall* because it took Bond “back to its origins” (Italian male aged 45-54), thus confirming the argument that a key part of the appeal of the Bond films is their sense of continuity. As another Italian participant put it, “What I really liked was that, in comparison with the other 007 films, which are always full of technological stuff, this one was like vintage, simple” (Italian male aged 25-34). For older audiences who were more familiar with the early Bond films of the 1960s and 1970s, Daniel Craig was seen as a worthy successor to Sean Connery, the first person to play Bond in the cinema. However, for younger audiences, whose main reference point was Pierce Brosnan, Craig was seen as a disappointment. As one German participant in his early 20s put it, “I don’t like the new James Bond. Our generation just grew up with Pierce Brosnan as James Bond. For me personally that annoyed me the most” (German male aged 18-24).

Others were drawn to *Skyfall* less by its elements of continuity and more by the newer aspects of the film. Thus, a handful of focus group participants suggested they liked the film because of its more “serious” tone. Often these participants (most of whom were Italians with a high level of knowledge of and interest in European film) were keen to stress they did not normally watch Bond films or action blockbusters in general. However, they made an exception with *Skyfall* because of the involvement of director Sam Mendes, whose films were described as “beautiful” (Italian male aged 65+) and “very well made” (Italian male aged 25-34). The involvement of the actor Javier Bardem (as Bond-villain Raoul Silva) was another reason for some audiences to watch the film, since he was seen as a “very good actor” (Italian female aged 35-44) and recognized for his Oscar-winning performance in *No Country for Old Men* (USA: Ethan and Joel Coen, 2007) (Italian male aged 25-34). Some also praised the emphasis which the film placed on Bond’s character development and psychology. As another Italian participant put it:

I have to admit that, apart from special effects, the shootings, the explosions, the bombings, which I hate, I found that the theme was very interesting. Actually the story is about a retired 007 [*sic*], so it’s a different angle on the character. He’s not the usual super cool 007, he’s retired and shows a more human, tender side of his character (Italian female, aged 35-44).

Thus, by introducing a more serious tone, *Skyfall* was to a certain extent able to cross over from a mainstream audience to a more middlebrow or even arthouse audience. However, the majority of focus group participants (most of whom were fans of middlebrow dramas and arthouse films rather than of blockbuster action films) said they disliked *Skyfall*, because they regarded Bond films as too predictable or formulaic. This attitude was particularly common among the Bulgarian focus group participants, and seemed to exemplify a wider cynicism towards Hollywood films. As one Bulgarian respondent put it, “It’s all the same, the [Bond] chick, the explosions” (Bulgarian male, aged 25-34). Others simply disregarded Bond as an “action movie,” a genre described as “exaggerated,” “stupid,” and “unrealistic.” As one Italian respondent put it, “I don’t like the genre. It’s all based on fantastic, imagined stories. There’s no link to reality” (Italian female aged 55-64). This would seem to indicate that, despite moves to add a greater degree of seriousness to the recent Bond films, there remains a lingering “un-seriousness” about the franchise in the use of fast-faced action and special effects that undermines their appeal with audiences who identify with “serious” drama.

The emphasis on action also affected how audiences perceived the national identity of the Bond films and, by implication, the Bond character. Many of the focus group participants suggested *Skyfall* “looks very American with all the action.” For one Italian participant, the film was described as “typical *americanata*, a film full of special effects that costs millions of dollars” (Italian female, aged 18-34). Another (Italian male, aged 25-34), who described *Skyfall* as “one of my favorite films ever” and a film he had seen “fifteen times,” said that he “totally forgot” that Bond was British until he was reminded by the interviewer of that fact. Even though some focus group participants recognized that “007 is British,” they still felt the film “looks American.” As one participant put it, “I know James Bond is English, but in terms of structure, and the presence of special effects, it’s really in the American style” (Italian female, aged 35-44).

The suggestion that *Skyfall* is an American film was particularly common amongst Italian and German focus group participants, for whom the film dialogue was dubbed into their local language, thereby erasing elements of Britishness (e.g. accents) that might have served to distinguish the film from other Hollywood imports. By contrast, Bulgarian focus group participants, who watched the film in English with Bulgarian subtitles, were more likely to regard the film as British. Nevertheless, they suggested the story and action was too far removed from reality to be seen as a realistic portrayal of British life. As one Bulgarian participant put it, “it’s a fantasy” (Bulgarian male, aged 18-24).

This would suggest that Bond’s national identity—even within a film like *Skyfall*, with its strong emphasis on British imagery and iconography—is not entirely clear from the perspective of mainland European audiences. For some audiences, especially UK audiences, Bond is clearly understood as British, and that is one of the appeals of the character and films for those audiences. For other audiences, Bond’s appeal to them (or his lack of appeal) is that, contrary to Chapman’s (2003, 95) assertion, he is not so easily differentiated in the international film market from “all-American action heroes incarnated by the likes of Mel Gibson, Bruce Willis and Sylvester Stallone.” To that extent, the apparent lack of cultural specificity, or at least the ability to read the recent Bond films as both British and American, and their frequent translation into local languages, enables the films to appeal to a wide range of mainstream audiences with an equally wide range of tastes and expectations. But that same aspect of the films also makes it harder for them to appeal to arthouse audiences, who tend to prefer films with a clear sense of identity.

Conclusion

As previous work on the Bond film franchise has argued (Chapman 2003), the appeal of Bond lies partly in the textual attractions of the films, their high production values, and their ability constantly to renew a well-established formula. While these are key features of the appeal of the Craig Bond films, it is clear that the business behind the Bond franchise is also absolutely vital to the success of the films. The involvement of Sony in particular ensured that the films not only benefited from huge budgets and heavy marketing, but were also able to negotiate access to the numerous national and linguistic territories which make up the global film market, as our case-study on the distribution of the films in Europe demonstrates.

As our audience research shows, the considerable box-office success of the Craig Bond films does not mean they were universally popular. They tended to appeal more to British audiences than film viewers in the rest of Europe, and were more popular amongst men, young people and high earners than women, older audiences and low earners. Moreover, while the films featured more “serious” elements than previous Bond films, this did not necessarily mean they appealed to audiences who tend to identify with “serious” dramas. Our focus group research also shows that, despite the numerous references to Bond’s British national identity in films like *Skyfall*, audiences in mainland Europe do not necessarily see Bond as a British character. The use of fast-paced action and special effects, qualities many associate with American blockbusters, and the fact that the Bond films are often dubbed into local languages, serve to dilute Bond’s Britishness. This would seem to undermine efforts such as the “Britain is GREAT” campaign” to use Bond as a way of projecting British national identity on the global stage. It also serves to remind us that audiences often read media texts in ways which are very different to their intended meanings.

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