

# License to Assemble: Theorizing Brand Longevity

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This study delineates the process of brand longevity: the achievement of social salience and ongoing consumer engagement over a sustained period. Our study contributes to branding theory by proposing a multilevel approach to understanding brand longevity through application of an assemblage perspective to answer the question: how do serial brands attain longevity within evolving sociocultural contexts? By applying assemblage theory, we scrutinize the enduring success of a serial media brand over the past 55 years. To address this question, a wide range of archival brand-related data were collected and analyzed, including: analysis of films, books, marketing materials, press commentaries, and reviews, as well as broader contextual data regarding the sociocultural contexts within which the brand assemblage has developed. Our findings empirically support the study of brand longevity in and of itself, and conceptualize brand longevity as relying on an evolutionary approach to assembling the brand, which looks outward from the brand in order to consider the potential of brand elements to prevail in contemporary contexts and to ensure both continuity and change.

**Keywords:** brand longevity, assemblage theory, culture, James Bond, serial brands, ethnographic content analysis

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*You seem to have this nasty habit of surviving.*

—Kamal Khan to James Bond in *Octopussy*

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Brand longevity refers to how long a brand has endured and this endurance, as conceptualized by [Smith \(2011\)](#), is due to the achievement of social salience and continued consumer engagement. As discussed by [Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala \(2014\)](#), brand longevity is often considered as a variable in studies on branding, yet there is still little understanding as to how it is managed and sustained. [Holt \(2004\)](#) demonstrates that stories that connect brands to wider sociocultural contexts are central to establishing ongoing consumer brand engagement. However, the literature lacks a theoretical model that accounts for the need for both continuity and change in order to secure brand longevity. We therefore pose the question: how do serial brands attain longevity within evolving sociocultural contexts? We adopt an assemblage approach to unpack this delicate balancing act between continuity and change.

Our article is positioned between two streams of literature. First, [Parmentier and Fischer \(2015\)](#) show how brands can be destabilized and undermined through the

introduction of new components to the brand assemblage. Second, Sood and Drèze (2006) focus on how the introduction of new elements can keep a brand fresh, leading to ongoing brand value. We know that brands can offer continuity within change (Türe and Ger 2016), the familiar in a new guise, but have little understanding of how this is achieved. Further investigation is needed into the process and dynamics through which brand components can be added or removed from the brand, the “fit” between various brand elements, and the ways that this can be managed, in order to understand how they relate to brand longevity. In order to explore the tension between continuity and change, we apply a culturally grounded, historical narrative understanding of brand longevity, building upon studies such as those undertaken by Brown and Patterson (2010), Holt (2004), and Parmentier and Fischer (2015).

Drawing on DeLanda (2006, 2016), we argue that brands are dynamic assemblages of sociocultural artifacts that occupy simultaneously discrete and interacting nests of association and meaning. We present the various elements that compose the internal brand constituents, as well as the external context within which the brand is assembled, as *nests*—conceptualized here as macro-, meso-, and micro-level nests comprising “individual emergent wholes operating at different scales” (DeLanda 2016, 16). These nests interact in assembling the brand in complex and manifold ways.

Our approach ensures an adherence to the tradition of assemblage scholarship as characterized by Canniford and Bajde (2016, 6) by acknowledging the “historical shaping of assemblages, as well as intersections with broader institutions and processes.” We illustrate the significance of a holistic, multilevel consideration of the brand assemblage to allow for variety while still ensuring the stability of the brand. According to DeLanda’s (2006, 37) notion of “redundant causality,” no element of the assemblage is irreplaceable. What ensures longevity is the achievement of novelty within a framework of familiarity, with each assembled iteration of the brand drawing together and prioritizing distinctly different brand assemblages. This recognition of the need to negotiate between continuity and change at various levels of the assemblage contributes to brand longevity by theorizing the dynamics of continuity and change.

To examine brand longevity we focus on serial brands, as they are episodic, needing to continually re-engage their audiences. The tension between continuity and change is therefore more acute in serial brands. Brown and Patterson (2010) and Parmentier and Fischer (2015) establish the need for internal congruence within serial brands so fans can interact at different levels and remain engaged. Parmentier and Fischer’s (2015) examination of serial brands illustrates the processes through which a once-powerful television show brand loses its audience over time, highlighting the precarious interrelationship between

brands and fans, and the difficulty of retaining interest over time. Brand elements may be changed and/or fans may tire of, or outgrow, the brand’s formula. Therefore, it is appropriate to extend their analysis to examine a brand that has both successfully sustained interest and retained and renewed its fan base over time, with a specific focus on how the producers assemble the brand.

While franchises have become increasingly popular in Hollywood (Sood and Drèze 2006), none has been more so than James Bond, currently comprising 24 films based on Ian Fleming’s novels written between 1952 and 1966. To examine the process of assembling brands for longevity, our article will transport you to exotic locales, from the beaches of Jamaica to the piazzas of Rome; introduce you to glamorous girls and devious masterminds; and present a world of intrigue set to the bold and brassy vocals of Shirley Bassey. Well, not really, but we do set the scene in order to offer an understanding of the context of the study, the appeal of the James Bond franchise over the past 55 years, and how the franchise has negotiated significant sociocultural changes over that period. Our examination of the multilevel Bond Brand Assemblage (hereafter “BBA”) develops a nuanced theorization of brand longevity by revealing the need for long-term stewardship at the meso-level, to ensure calibration of continuity and change at the micro- and macro-levels. Assembling the macro brand level requires producers to look outward to ensure adherence to the evolution of the broader sociocultural contexts in which the brand is situated, while reconfiguring the established brand elements that constitute the brand’s unique formula at the micro-level brand assemblage. This requires a delicate balancing act that allows for narrative change, keeping the brand fresh while preserving the fundamental heritage of the brand.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### Brand Longevity

Strategic brand management can be seen as a struggle to survive in the continually changing, even turbulent, business environment. A brand achieves longevity when it is able to deploy strategies that prolong its life in the face of entropy. A strong brand (Hoeffler and Keller 2003) survives and thrives over the long run, hence achieving longevity. As strong brands endure and consumers become familiar with the brand, they benefit from their heritage (Aaker 1996). Therefore, if properly managed, a brand’s history can provide a competitive advantage (for example, through increased credibility), as well as leverage for the brand in global markets (Urde, Greyser, and Balmer 2007).

Aaker (1996) discusses heritage brands as the oldest brand in their category, providing strong equity through a narrative derived from a meaningful and relevant past. However, as Urde et al. (2007) demonstrate, this requires

the protection and maintenance of heritage through brand “stewardship” to nurture, maintain, and protect it as a strategic resource. Longevity is a key element of heritage brands, signaling a consistent “demonstration of other heritage elements” (Urde et al. 2007, 9) by successive CEOs. Further understanding is needed of this stewardship and of how a brand’s heritage can be upheld so that the brand lives up to its past and continues to create value for new generations. This stewardship is required to ensure a sense of continuity in keeping with the brand’s heritage, in the face of change both internal and external to the brand.

Brand revitalization (Keller 1999) through strategic decision-making, aimed at reinvigorating the brand in light of a changing marketplace, is one response to the challenges of managing continuity and change. Dion and Mazzalovo (2016) develop the concept of “sleeping beauty brands” to reveal the centrality of brand heritage in reactivating dormant brands. They thus distinguish among managers copying old brands, drawing a clear association with the past of a brand, and establishing contemporary relevance for the brand through modernizing or revitalizing. All three approaches reflect the challenge of balancing continuity and change, without specifically accounting for how decisions about mobilizing this expressive potential are governed to maintain social salience.

Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) show that many brands have been revived and relaunched, becoming retro brands, through the use of nostalgia and heritage to evoke former epochs and former selves. Retro brands are thus reanimated by various stakeholders; the brand meaning is communally negotiated, and sensitive to the wider socio-cultural and economic forces that shape these stakeholder stories. Retro brands may therefore evoke a specific era, but must be updated to stay relevant to new audiences; this requires the development of a strategy that both balances the need for continuity and allows the brand to profit from historical brand associations, while still changing perceptions of the brand.

To understand the balance between continuity and change in a brand’s evolution, we look to Holt (2004) in considering the historical context from which brand meanings evolve and how it can best be leveraged. For Brown et al. (2013), the historical has expressive potential rather than simply a fixed historiography. Myths and archetypes are ideal source material for stimulating the collective memory (Brown et al. 2013), and are mediated, manipulated, and magnified by marketing intermediaries. Holt (2004) also notes the importance of myth in establishing the evolution of brand meaning, illustrating the need to tailor these myths to broader contexts. Although Holt demonstrates how a brand can achieve iconic status by connecting to sociocultural contexts, his focus is on drawing upon particular anxieties at fixed periods of time in telling stories about the brand. To study brand revitalization, Närvänen and Goulding (2016) adopt a sociocultural

lens, illustrating that such revitalization can be understood by examining the intersection of the brand actions, consumer actions, symbolic meaning, and national identity. Previous research, while acknowledging that brands evolve (Brown et al. 2003; Holt 2004), does not account for evolution internal to the brand or how to negotiate between continuity and change to achieve social salience.

## Serial Brands

In a general sense, all brands are serial brands, as they need to perform continually over time to secure the return on capital required by their owners. Serial brands, as defined in our study, face a particular challenge—namely, to produce another version of the same story that is both new and yet familiar, every two or three years on average (Sood and Drèze 2006). All the while, the ideologies that frame the cultural context may be undergoing change, necessitating a deeper understanding of the relationship between serial brands and their broader contexts (Holt 2004; Shepherd, Chartrand, and Fitzsimons 2015). This is particularly significant with narrative and cultural brands, like James Bond, as a story is at their core, and changing this story can be risky, as Parmentier and Fischer (2015) show.

Parmentier and Fischer’s (2015) conceptualization of brands as evolving highlights the relevance of conceiving brands as sets of components, pointing to the need for a fine-grained and holistic analysis of the brand. We respond to their call for further research to use assemblage theory to understand how audience engagement with serial brands is sustained. We examine the expressive (e.g., brand narratives, mythologies, and aesthetics, which all contribute to brand meaning and strength) and material (e.g., tangible, physical objects such as memorabilia) capacities of these brands, and consider how the intersection of brand assemblages contributes to brand stabilization or destabilization. This requires attention to the evolving heritage of the brand (that is, its previous iterations) in the development of its micro-elements, as well as positioning the evolving brand within wider macro-sociocultural contexts, thereby necessitating a multilevel perspective. Following Sood and Drèze (2006), each iteration of a serial brand or new installment of a franchise benefits from the balancing of the familiar and the new, meaning that attention must be paid to how such balance is achieved both from a micro (internal) and macro (external) perspective.

## Enabling Theory: Brand Assemblages

An assemblage approach to understanding brands can explain the stabilization and destabilization of practices (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Epp and Velagaleti 2014) that can result in the creation of brand meaning and therefore brand longevity. This approach has previously been applied to the study of heterogeneous consumption

communities (Thomas, Price, and Schau 2012) and of how meaning “emerges from networked associations established between diverse kinds of consumption resources” (Canniford and Shankar 2013, 1053). Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman (2017) demonstrate that this dynamic perspective, with both micro- and macro-levels of analysis, is useful in the examination of ever-changing networks and connections between actors. Building on such work, we apply this approach to examine the construction and continuing production of a serial brand assemblage.

Parmentier and Fischer (2015) identify three key benefits for applying assemblage theory to the study of serial brands. First, assemblage theory, drawing from DeLanda (2016), conceptualizes assemblages as agentic systems that can stabilize or destabilize. Second, DeLanda's theory draws attention to the potential contained within the material and expressive capacities of the assemblage, rather than an absolute meaning derived from these elements. And finally, Parmentier and Fischer argue that the components of the assemblage are not fixed and new components can be enrolled into the assemblage as it evolves. We introduce a further benefit in applying assemblage theory—namely, the capacity to take a multilevel perspective in analyzing brand assemblages in order to examine how they are organized on different scales. We argue that brand longevity requires a negotiation between continuity and change at various levels. An important element of DeLanda's theorization is the acceptance that elements are not fixed. This lack of fixity is viewed as deterritorialization, whereby entities' material forms and expressive identities can be destabilized. Understanding this process is key to the balance of the continuity–change continuum.

For DeLanda (2016), it is necessary to ask what an assemblage is and what it can do in order to understand its properties and capacity. DeLanda highlights the importance of looking at assemblages at three levels: the individual level, the group level, and the level of the social field. In our analysis, these three levels are conceptualized as micro-, meso-, and macro-constituents of the brand assemblage, respectively. DeLanda discusses assemblages as nested sets, and recognizes that there may be sets of sets, or nests, with elements of an assemblage linked to other assemblages through complex relationships. DeLanda's (2016) theorization offers a set of broadly associated brand elements, closely or loosely bound together, and, as a result, with the potential to create brand meanings. Elements are enrolled within the assemblage when appropriate. Each nested level of assemblage has its own parameters, history, and processes of interaction, as well as both bottom-up and top-down causal influences. Within this context, there are critical points of intensity, and to stabilize the assemblage, maintenance labor is necessary.

DeLanda (2016) extends Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theorization of assemblages through his conceptualization of double articulation. In the first articulation, “some

materials, out of a wider set of possibilities” are given “a statistical form” (2016, 162)—that is, territorialized. Territorialization relates to the assemblage's materiality and results in the assembling of a range of materials selected from a set of possible materials. In the second articulation this materiality is “coded,” which relates to the “material expressivity” (164) whereby solidifying the assemblage produces intended meaning. DeLanda (2016) offers a fine-grained approach, highlighting the need to distinguish between assemblages at “different scales” (163).

Double articulation is the merging of discrete parts to form a whole, so the macro-level contains various elements of the micro-levels, and the whole can be viewed as having “properties of its own” (DeLanda 2016, 165) rather than comprising a collection of the constituent parts. The whole emerges “in a bottom-up way, depending causally on [its] components” (21); however, there is also a top-down influence created by the whole on its parts. In scoping the micro and the macro, DeLanda (2016) emphasizes the importance of seeing these conceptualizations as relative, contesting any hierarchy between them. The importance of the relationship of constituent parts to the whole is central to his theorization. DeLanda (2016) urges a move away from looking at a scale from the perspective of a fixed micro- and macro-level, arguing that even the most significant entities can be more usefully broken down into their micro-entities.

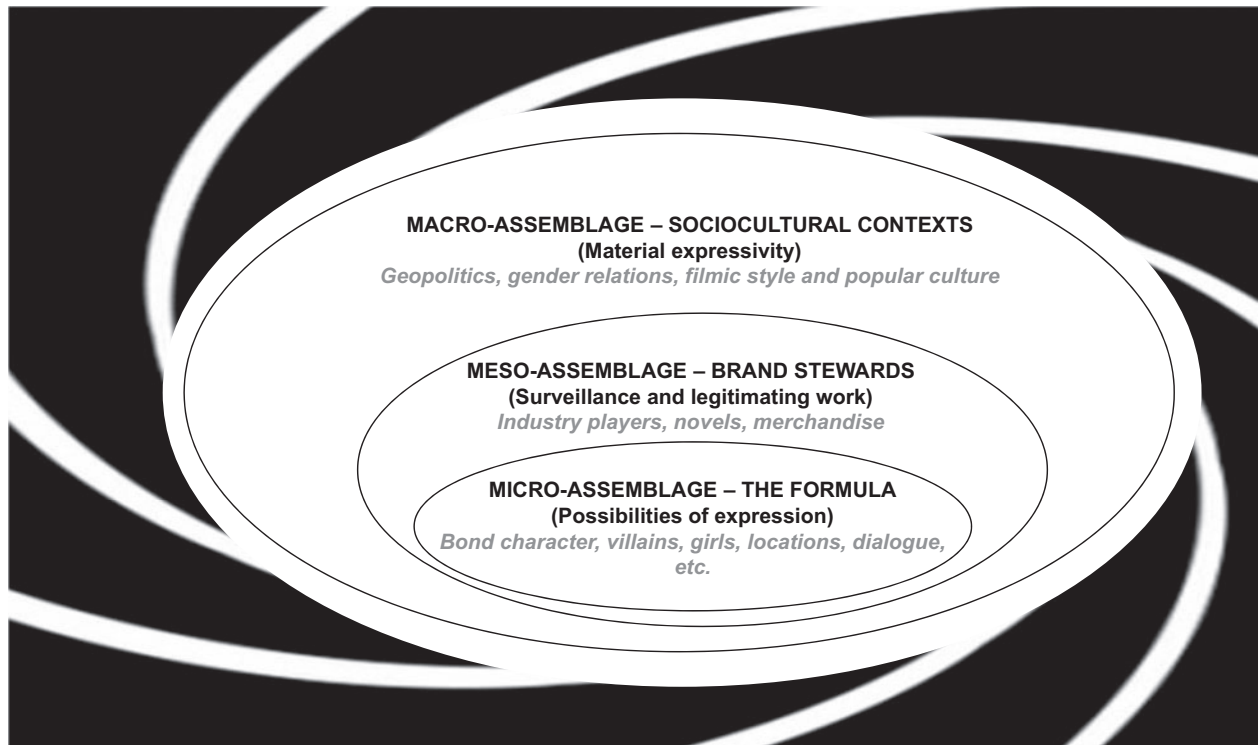
DeLanda (2016) argues for a broadening of scope in the study of the authority structure within which organizing takes place, noting the need to consider both questions of enforcement and of legitimacy. Enforcement practices, including surveillance, record-keeping, and creating disciplinary structures, are seen as the first articulation of the assemblage, with legitimizing practices seen as the second articulation. Thus, organizing the brand elements into structures is followed by practices that legitimize and validate such organization. In applying this idea to brand assemblages, key elements can be brought together, shaped, and ordered (first articulation) by actors seen as possessing the legitimate authority to do so, as we will show in our analysis.

We apply DeLanda's (2016) assemblage theory to address our research question: how do serial brands attain longevity within evolving sociocultural contexts? Our data include archival material related to the James Bond franchise, accessed from a number of sources. Our analysis reveals the importance of the authority structure in managing continuity and change to ensure brand longevity. We demonstrate that careful reconfiguration of established brand elements underpins the actions of territorialization, where some materials are selected from a wider set of elements (micro-nest level), through consideration of their potential. These loosely ordered materials are then coded (given material expression) by the legitimized forces of those active in the meso-nest; the brand stewards, namely



FIGURE 1

BOND BRAND ASSEMBLAGE AS A SET OF NESTED ASSEMBLAGES



the cast and crew, who are influenced by the macro-nest; the sociocultural contexts within which the brand is assembled. The encoded film is then offered to the fans within the broader context of their prior engagement with earlier films in the series and its contemporary sociocultural relevance.

In applying DeLandian assemblage theory, following [Parmentier and Fischer \(2015\)](#), we identify the need for a holistic approach to account for the complexities of long-term brand survival. Our findings are significant, as they demonstrate that the successful serial brand operates at various levels, enforced and legitimized by an authority structure that looks inward, toward the micro-level assemblage of possibility (developed from prior iterations of the brand), while also drawing from an externally focused macro-level assemblage (which entails considering sociocultural contexts). We establish the management of continuity and change through a multilevel perspective as a key theoretical contribution to brand longevity. [Figure 1](#) summarizes our conceptual model, highlighting the three levels—micro, meso, and macro—that must be considered in relation to one another to achieve longevity for serial brands. We will elaborate on this in our findings and discussion sections below.

## METHOD

### Context: The Name Is Bond, James Bond

The Bond franchise is one of the most successful projects in film history and has been called the “most valuable cinema franchise in history” ([Poliakoff 2000](#), 387). [Dodds \(2006, 118\)](#) notes the “extraordinary number of fans” who “engage in detailed analyses of the varied plots and characters.” These cultural texts, therefore, have considerable implications for consumer culture. Originating from Ian Fleming’s novels, the series now consists of 24 films produced by EON Productions, and associated paraphernalia, including video games and official merchandise. The novels are privileged historically: they came first. As our analysis demonstrates, the novels also serve as legitimators, as the production team frequently returns to the source, particularly when there is a dramatic change in the tone of the films—for example, when a new actor becomes Bond. For a Bond film to be authentic, both legally and socioculturally, it must, however loosely, be based on a Fleming source. Yet, although the films could be considered secondary to and derived from the books, they are clearly privileged in terms of the construction and circulation of the Bond phenomenon across the world. [Poliakoff \(2000,](#)

392) has said that half the world's population has seen a Bond film. Thus, our focus lies primarily with the films, as many more people have seen the films than have read the novels, and, for most readers, the films came first and the novels second (Bennett 1982).

Bond proves a rich case for analysis due to the well-developed brand elements that can be identified within this mature serial brand. Taking a DeLandian assemblage approach, we conceptualize these brand elements as the micro-level of the overall BBA. Bond relies heavily on the myth of the archetypal hero (Campbell 1949): he embarks on a dangerous journey, sent there by forces he does not fully understand nor dare refuse (e.g., the character M in the case of the Bond franchise); he encounters obstacles in the form of monsters (villains with physical oddities); he must enter the domain of evil to pursue the quest; he often has a helper (the Bond girls or the character Q who furnishes him with gadgets); although he may suffer along the way, he ultimately triumphs, and the conclusion of the journey is vital to the well-being of the world; and when he has succeeded, he returns to the normal world. Much like the case of *Titanic* (Brown et al. 2013), James Bond provides a type of master myth with something for everyone. Bond's escapist narrative reflects our fundamental human concerns.

By focusing on the BBA we can examine how the brand's social salience has been sustained and stabilized, allowing the brand to maintain its audience. We follow Holt (2004) in adopting a historic perspective, taking a sociocultural approach to consider how much—and what type of—change consumers will accommodate. This is in keeping with DeLanda's (2016) assemblage theory, which requires consideration of stabilization and destabilization processes. This leads us to our organizing research question: how do serial brands attain longevity within evolving sociocultural contexts?

## Research Procedures: Assembling the Data

We adopt DeLanda's (2016) assemblage approach, analytically and methodologically. Our research procedure allows us to assemble the data while giving consideration to how we conceptualize the different sets of data and to the different levels operating within our datasets. We draw upon established theory on text and representation (Bauer and Gaskell 2000) whereby films are seen as structured sets of signifiers communicating meanings decoded by their viewers. A film can be seen as doing discursive work, symbolically constructing a fictional reality that maps on to some consumers' realities. To fully account for the history of the Bond franchise and the evolution of the brand, a multilevel approach to collecting and analyzing the data was required. The first step was total immersion into the world of Bond, followed by a homing-in on key texts in

the evolution of the franchise, enabling a more fine-grained analysis and presentation of the data.

To do justice to the rich world of James Bond, we collectively read Fleming's original novels, watched all the official films,<sup>1</sup> and undertook a textual and discursive analysis of the films, marketing materials, press commentaries, and additional books/sources about the series to sensitize ourselves to the franchise. This approach acknowledges the work of Holbrook and Grayson (1986) and Hirschman (1988) in using films and television shows as texts containing insight into consumer behavior. We collected and analyzed primary, secondary, and auxiliary documents in keeping with Altheide and Schneider's (2013) ethnographic content analysis (ECA) approach. They note the importance of auxiliary documents in aiding the understanding of a particular aspect of study. Our examination of the Bond films and books (primary documents); of records about the primary texts, namely news reports, features in newspapers and magazines, film reviews, books, and films about the franchise (secondary documents); and of news reports covering key sociocultural themes and other forms of popular culture (auxiliary documents) provided us with a detailed understanding of the franchise.

The dataset comprised texts dating from 1953 until today, in which certain variables have been kept constant (a secret agent, action-adventure, sex and violence, an evil nemesis, use of technology, etc.), although their treatment has altered considerably. Bond has been presented in diverse and changing forms. This longitudinal perspective allows us to consider how the Bond films have been put into circulation and received in response to evolving sociocultural contexts. Brown et al. (2003) show that it is necessary to be attentive to the narratives surrounding a brand; in order to understand the brand longevity of the Bond franchise, we focus particularly on those narratives circulated by producers and cultural intermediaries such as the media. Adopting Altheide and Schneider's (2013) ECA approach facilitated this historical understanding, allowing us to draw from contemporaneous representations of production and consumption practices as they were reported on at the time, without relying on the mediation of individual memory that retrospective interviews sometimes produce. By using both industry-specific press (e.g., *Variety*, *Sight and Sound*) and general news sources, we were able to understand how the films were received by both experts and the general public. From spring 2012 to autumn 2017, we undertook extensive data collection of secondary sources related to the production and reception of the films (as listed in web appendix A). This included the films, archival data from EON Productions, promotional material such as posters and press releases, interviews with members of the

<sup>1</sup> Three unofficial films exist: *Casino Royale* (1958), *Casino Royale* (1967), and *Never Say Never Again* (1958). They are regarded as unofficial because they were not made by EON Productions.

production team and/or actors, critical reviews of the various films, data from visiting various Bond exhibitions, documentaries about Bond films, academic work, and more general press coverage of the Bond phenomenon.

## Data Analysis: Disassembling and Decoding the Brand

Our data-gathering approach necessitated deep immersion across multiple sources (film archives, film texts, reviews, news archives), but the sheer amount of secondary material available about James Bond required us to be purposeful in selecting and including data. This material was examined in detail, and coded by hand. The data analysis was an iterative process of interpreting, deriving new questions, and searching for and collecting new data, and rejecting, supporting, and refining our emerging interpretation until reaching sufficient interpretive convergence and theoretical saturation. All three authors compared individual data readings to ensure analytical rigor. This reduction of the datasets as the study progressed necessitated theoretical sampling, in keeping with [Altheide and Schneider's \(2013\)](#) ECA.

By moving continuously between primary, secondary, and auxiliary sources and reviewing them holistically to understand how each film was constructed, relative to the serial brand as a whole and to the wider sociocultural context, our focus on brand longevity as the achievement of social salience and ongoing consumer engagement emerged. We applied concepts from assemblage theory. Our analysis focused on how the elements of the brand were assembled over 55 years, successfully negotiating significant social and cultural changes to maintain ongoing relevance. This necessitated consideration of the evolving sets of elements comprising the Bond serial brand, and how they interact, as well as a specific historical dimension, in accordance with [Askegaard and Linnet's \(2011\)](#) idea of the context of context. In demonstrating the brand assemblage's territorialization and deterritorialization, we selected six films to focus on in more detail (as highlighted in web appendix B). These films were selected to show how continuity and change within the series has ensured enduring success for the Bond brand. Each film shows a different take on the Bond character, as he is played by different actors, from Sean Connery's charming but violent Bond to a more vulnerable and complex Daniel Craig. The final analytical component was an examination of the box office earnings for each film, as an indicator of its immediate popularity upon release.

The rationale for our choice of films follows: *Dr. No* (1962) has a special place in film mythology as the first Bond film. It also allows consideration of how the Bond brand was first set out filmically, and presents the first iteration of the Bond formula.

*On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969) represents the first change of Bond actor, from Connery to George Lazenby, who provided a darker characterization of Bond, and a move away from gadgetry toward narrative. It is one of the only films in the series with an unhappy ending (in fact, the only one until the Craig films), and these changes perhaps account for why the film did not live up to box office expectations. Indeed, it remains the least commercially successful Bond film (although it is still among the most successful films of 1969; [Duncan 2015](#)). The perceived failure of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* had highly significant consequences for the future direction of the Bond series, and the films that followed during the 1970s were very different in style, deliberately following rather than starting trends.

*The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974) typifies this 1970s style, showing topicality through a focus on the energy crisis, and a martial arts sequence reflecting the kung fu craze of the time, epitomized by Bruce Lee. The film is noted as a low point in terms of representation of women, and critics suggested it might be time to retire Bond ([Cocks 1975](#)). Subsequent films were careful to write more interesting roles for the heroines.

*Licence to Kill* (1989) represents a complete change of direction, and many of the expected conventions of the formula were absent—most notably, the Cold War themes present in previous iterations.

*Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) includes topical references to large media corporations, the Falklands Conflict and Gulf War, and Chinese military strength. Produced and released at speed, it follows the conventional Bond formula closely, but also features Wai Lin, arguably the most progressive Bond heroine to date.

Finally, *Skyfall* (2012), released in the 50th anniversary year of the Bond films, represents the most successful iteration of the franchise at the box office. This was once again seen as a crucial film in assuring the continuation of the franchise, both because the previous film, *Quantum of Solace*, had not performed well, and because the global economic crisis had presented financial challenges for the production company.

These six films represent what DeLanda (2016) calls critical points of intensity for the franchise, marking changes in the BBA. Upon selection of these films, we undertook a second round of analysis of the films, within the context of the overall evolution of the BBA and the wider sociocultural environment within which the brand has developed. As depicted in [figure 1](#), we examined the internal film elements (characterized as the formula) of the micro-level nest of the brand assemblage. We then explored the meso-level, which consists of the industry players associated with each film and the wider brand assemblage. Finally, we considered the macro-level nest, the broader sociocultural contexts within which the brand was assembled. This required the analysis of news stories, which

allowed us to map the evolution of sociocultural contexts. Our analysis accounts for the interplay between these three levels and acknowledges the need to understand these levels as interdependent. Our analysis also recognizes the development of the brand as an assemblage, while resisting the privileging of a fixed, linear evolution in the presentation of this brand.

## FINDINGS: DYNAMIC AND SUSTAINING ASSEMBLAGE(S)

This section dives deep into the world of James Bond to explore brand Bond as a set of nested assemblages, enriching our theorization of brand longevity. Each assemblage has its own parameters and history; however, there are also cascading effects when they interact. While we examine them separately, we must also consider them as a holistic set of emergent capacities that constrain or enable the possibilities of the BBA, presenting us with a “multiscaled social reality” (DeLanda 2016, 520) where “all three levels operate simultaneously and influence one another.”

### Micro-Assemblage: The Formula

*The James Bond movies have by now taken on the discipline of a sonnet or kabuki drama: every film follows the same story outline so rigidly that we can predict almost to the minute such obligatory developments.*

—Critic Roger Ebert (LTK, 1989)

By examining the evolution of the Bond films, we see the development of a filmic formula, initially grounded in Fleming's books, seen by many as what differentiates Bond from other entertainment franchises and accounts for its success. The evolution of the serial brand is understood only when one examines how the films respond to previous iterations. Umberto Eco writes that in the Bond novels “the reader's pleasure consists of finding himself immersed in a game of which he knows the pieces and the rules—and perhaps the outcome—drawing pleasure simply from the minimal variation by which the victor realizes his objective” (1979, 166). Indeed, reviews of *Dr. No* on its release confirmed that it fulfilled expectations, particularly commenting on Bond's engagement with women: “no matter how many murderous thugs are closing in on him, he always finds time to dally with an attractive female. And none of them, enemies or not, ever think of turning him down” (Mosley 1962). Screenwriter Richard Maibaum (1965) noted that when rewriting the *Thunderball* screenplay, four years after his original efforts prior to *Dr. No*, significant changes were made, as “now we know exactly what it is the public love about Bond and how they best like to see the stories treated in the cinema.” Indeed, in his review of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, critic David Austen (1970, 38) notes: “like Fleming's books, all this action

follows so predictable a pattern. But now, as with *Carry On* films, you're bound to know whether you like these things or not; if you do, you'll be pleased to learn that the end credits promise, yet again, that Bond will return.” This formula provides the producers and consumers with an entertaining puzzle to which there is a solution; it is, ultimately, a reliable product.

Our findings reveal that the formula is not fixed, as it is sometimes characterized; rather, it is a mechanism consisting of a particular set of elements—the character of James Bond, the lead actor, the hero narrative, the Bond girls, baddies, exotic locations, and iconic music, as well as specific set pieces, such as the opening credits, and even iconic dialogue. Following (DeLanda 2016), each of these elements is itself an assemblage, with material and expressive possibilities. From the start of the film franchise, the translation of the books into films was not intended to be literal. Instead, *Dr. No's* (not the first book in the series) expressive capability was derived from materials selected from a wider potential set. Alexander Walker (1962), film critic for the *Evening Standard*, observes: “Except for that accent which gets over those awkward English vowels that American filmgoers find too irritating—and except that he hasn't got the famous comma of black hair falling in his eyes, this is Ian Fleming's Secret Serviceman James Bond down to the 60-guinea tailor's label.”

As early as 1965, in *Weekly Variety*, critic Vincent Canby asked, “how long can James Bond go on in this fashion?” Two years later, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* said of *You Only Live Twice*: “Really no better and no worse than its predecessors, the fifth James Bond is rather less enjoyable mainly because the formula has become so completely mechanical.” Nearly 20 years later, Bergan (1986, 305) says of *A View to a Kill*: “Both the hero—as interpreted by the 57-year-old Roger Moore—and the formula were beginning to look somewhat old and tired.” Despite these charges by critics of “film-making by numbers” (Chapman 2007), deviations and modifications are apparent along the way. Producer Barbara Broccoli stated in an interview: “You know what's interesting, is everybody's always saying, ‘Oh there's so much formula. They're doing everything by the formula.’ Then when you change it, everybody's like, ‘Well, where's the...’—you know. You can't win” (Fischer 2008). Our analysis supports Neal Purvis, screenwriter of a number of the films, when he argues: “Bonds go through cycles, where they go big and they go small. *Die Another Day* had been extremely big and over-the-top and there was just a feeling that you needed to go smaller” (Naughton 2017).

Outliers in the series, particularly *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and *Licence to Kill*, are worth examining, as they do not fit into the overall direction of the series, illustrating that the evolution of the generic Bond formula is not a fixed, linear process. So, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* moved away from the technological fantasy of



*Goldfinger*, *Thunderball*, and *You Only Live Twice*, downplaying gadgets and hardware to focus on story and characterization, granting Bond his only serious romantic relationship. *Evening News* film critic Felix Dorker (1969) writes:

In the past, Bond couldn't see a girl without undressing her. No car was without its ejector seat. He never embarked on a foreign assignment without highly sophisticated equipment. But things are very different in [*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*]. . . Perhaps the producers agree with the critics who thought the films of Ian Fleming's books were becoming too like science fiction. Anyway, they've turned 007 into a predominantly muscular hero. He has to fight his way out of predicaments with both fists. This suits Mr Lazenby, the unknown Australian actor of TV commercials who has been rocketed into premature fame in the role which Mr Connery made so much his own.

Due to disappointing sales, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* was perceived by the producers as a failure. The following screenplays therefore moved away from the Fleming originals toward more outlandish spectacle, comedy, technological fantasy and gimmicks, and visual jokes. *Diamonds Are Forever*, coming two years after *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, is a complete narrative and stylistic change. Similarly, 20 years later, *Licence to Kill* provides, as Ebert states in his review, "some interesting surprises," albeit still being "recognizable as a successor to the first, *Dr. No*" (1989). This is reflected in changes in narrative ideology (foregoing the Cold War themes, seeing Bond disobey M and go on a personal revenge mission, and thus omitting scenes in which M briefs Bond with details of his mission) and visual style (more low-key cinematography, less distinctive music, a more casually dressed-down Bond). These deterritorialized offerings were considered largely unsuccessful by the producers; Broccoli (1998, 295) conceded that *Licence to Kill* "had lost some of the original sophistication and wry humor." However, they show how the brand balances continuity and change, by enrolling different brand elements into the assemblage in different combinations.

The power of the expected formulaic conventions is that the very continuity they provide allows for endless variations and change. As DeLanda (2016, 10) discusses, the parts retain their autonomy and can be "detached from one whole and plugged into another one, entering into new interactions." Moreover, the formula demonstrates the utility of the assemblage perspective: the franchise cannot be understood solely from a fixed, linear perspective. For example, although Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale* represents a prequel reboot, placing Bond at the start of his career as if events in previous films (such as *Diamonds Are Forever* and *GoldenEye*) had not taken place, Judi Dench continued as M. Director Martin Campbell admitted that it "made no sense on one hand, because she would obviously be much

younger than she is in previous Bonds. But the truth of the matter is, you've simply got to forget all that and say: 'Who better than Judi Dench?'" (Wise 2007).

Recognizable elements of the BBA identify Bond films as such and allow for continuity. This is particularly evident when the Bond actor is changed: the formula is used to demonstrate the new actor's "Bondness." In *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, Lazenby is introduced through a series of textual references that acknowledge the new lead actor while explicitly relying on the history of the franchise, so that when Bond pinches Miss Money Penny's bottom, her response is "Same old James—only more so!" The opening titles include images of heroines and villains from the five previous films, Bond finds props from earlier films (Honey's knife belt from *Dr. No*, Grant's watch-garrote from *From Russia with Love*, the underwater breather from *Thunderball*), and the soundtrack reprises the theme music from those films, firmly establishing this offering as rooted in the brand genealogy. Reflecting on this, composer John Barry remembers, "Well, we've lost Sean, and we've got this turkey in here instead. And so I have to stick my oar in the musical area double strong to make the audience try and forget they don't have Sean. . . do Bondian<sup>2</sup> beyond Bondian" (Fiegel 1998, 219).

Twenty-five years later, Pierce Brosnan is introduced (following the title sequence) driving a silver-gray Aston Martin DB5, explicitly locating him in the Bond heritage by invoking the memory of Connery, who drove the same vehicle in *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball*. These elements of the micro-assemblage are what critic Desson Howe (1989) calls the "checkoff list for Bond fans—some 'Dr. No' underwater action, casino games, aerial stunts (. . .), the requisite martini-preparation instruction and of course cameos from the alphabet people [M and Q]." This may be part of the reason *Skyfall* was so successful, as noted by Manohla Dargis's (2012) review in the *New York Times*: "Writers Neal Purvis, Robert Wade and John Logan have folded some 007 arcana into the mix" and Mendes, the screenwriter/director, "honors the contract that the Bond series made with its fans long ago and delivers the customary chases, pretty women and silky villainy along with the little and big bangs," bringing the necessary brand recognition. These elements are similarly used by production to get the attention of the trade press, so in 1986, when Timothy Dalton was unveiled as the new 007 at an international press conference, the Aston Martin appeared with him (Field and Chowdhury 2015).

Moreover, as DeLanda (2016) suggests, each nested level of the assemblage can be further dissected. So, for example, the character of Bond can be seen as its own assemblage: he has certain mannerisms, clothes, and skills that come together in different ways for different actors. For

<sup>2</sup> "Bondian" is a term used by the production team meaning "in the spirit of James Bond" (Woollacott 1983, 210).

the first Bond this meant “grooming” Connery for the part. Producer Cubby Broccoli explained how “the way Bond dressed was intrinsic to the character”; Connery also had to be taken “out to lunch and dinner a couple of times in the most exclusive restaurants, with the sole purpose of developing Bond’s pretensions as a wine and food expert” (Duncan 2015, 34). Despite this, Connery was not seen as a faithful translation from page to screen, with *Time* magazine’s Show Business column stating:

To Fleming fans, the dark hood looks of Scottish actor Sean Connery were somewhat disturbing; they do not suggest Fleming’s tasteful pagan so much as a souped up gigolo. Bond would never speak with a cigarette dangling from his urbane lips, for instance. But his lines are not contra-Bond: “It would be a shame to waste that Dom Perignon ’55 by hitting me with it,” says Doctor No. “I prefer ’53,” retorts Bond.

This is how the franchise has ensured a balance between continuity and change—the actor can change, as long as certain recognizable elements of the character remain. Seven years later, Lazenby, in preparing for his Bond audition, “found out where Sean Connery’s tailor was to get his suit and then went to Connery’s hairdresser and said, ‘Give me a haircut like Sean Connery’” (Duncan 2015, 172). In the next iteration, Roger Moore had to learn the “Bond walk” and was told: “You have to move like a cat (...). Once you move, it’s got to look like you could walk through a brick wall if necessary” (Dewson 1983). Thus, each incarnation of Bond has, through the enrollment of certain elements of the Bond style into the BBA, stayed true to the character yet changed significantly.

As expressed in figure 1, the assemblage of the formula, as well as the assemblages of the assemblage (or subassemblage) of the formula, ensures longevity by guaranteeing that the assemblage can be modified in line with current events, as illustrated later, while allowing the producers to retain power and authority. The elements of the assemblage cannot become bigger than the whole, so, if necessary, elements can be removed or changed. To understand how the assemblage is territorialized and deterritorialized, we must examine what we term the meso-level, which itself is another assemblage of cast and crew—most notably, producers, screenwriters, directors, designers, composers, and actors—all assembling from the assemblage originally created by Ian Fleming through his novels.

### Meso-Assemblage: Brand Stewards

*“Never Say Never Again,” I think, proved the point that a Bond film cannot exist with just one element alone, just having Sean [Connery] wasn’t enough.*

—Barbara Broccoli in *Everything or Nothing*

As shown above, the formula is central to the Bond franchise, and a clear understanding of how the BBA is

territorialized in each iteration is required. Perhaps the reason Bond films have been so successful is that creative ownership lies with the producers and not the studio. The franchise is owned by one family, which has been involved since the start and therefore has a great understanding of the formula. The original producers, Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman, were responsible for the first nine films. Once Saltzman left, Broccoli’s stepson, Michael G. Wilson, joined as special assistant to the producer, becoming a producer by *A View to a Kill*. Broccoli’s daughter, Barbara, similarly worked her way up the ranks, eventually joining Wilson as they took over production from an aging Cubby Broccoli. This family dynamic makes the Bond films a personal project, argues United Artists (UA) executive David Picker; indeed, the third generation is in the wings, being groomed to follow (Field and Chowdhury 2015).

Wilson characterizes his and Barbara Broccoli’s role as “guardians at the gate,” “carrying on the films as [Cubby] would see it” (Duncan 2015, 448), performing maintenance labor. Interviews with the producers show a clear long-term perspective. Barbara Broccoli discusses how “we feel like we have a responsibility and a desire to make these films as well as we can” (Fischer 2008); “when you see that Bond has become part of popular culture, that’s very rewarding, because it’s something our dad created. He always believed it would go beyond him, and I believe it will go beyond us” (McNary 2014). Gary Barber of MGM says, “There’s no one more hands-on from a producing standpoint than Barbara and Michael in every aspect of the process from cradle to grave” (McNary 2014). This sense of stewardship also means that they are very protective of the films and the Bond character. Barbara recalls how Cubby told her that “you’ve gotta take risks” but “[h]e wanted us to make sure that we were the ones that were making those decisions. ‘Don’t make changes that the studios or the outsiders [want]. Don’t let them force you into making changes.’ He always used to say, ‘they are temporary people making permanent decisions.’” (Lady Miz Diva 2012).

MGM executive Chris McGurk explains: “It’s their franchise, it’s their golden goose, and they want a lot of control” (Field and Chowdhury 2015, 515). Michael Apted, director of *The World Is Not Enough*, encountered these protective tendencies when, in one scene, he envisaged a romantic sequence where Bond would reveal something about himself to the Bond girl “and Michael and Barbara interceded. Bond never reveals something about himself. (...) I thought, ‘well, they’ve done 19 [films], so they know better’” (Screen International, 1999). Barbara notes how whenever a new screenwriter or director comes on board, “it always is a challenge (...). They say, ‘what about this?’ and we say, ‘we did that in *Live and Let Die*.’ There is a whole catalog of stuff you kind of have to avoid because it’s already been done” (McNary 2014). Thus, the

family engages in certain practices of enforcement to ensure longevity.

Legitimate authority over the assemblage is therefore firmly in the hands of the family. They decide the parameters of the film level assemblage; as Barbara explains, “we have a set of parameters as far as what we feel a Bond film is” (Jarzemsky 2012). These parameters, she continues, “are dictated, obviously, by the Fleming books and the novels, the characters, characterizations, the film history, and also the fans” (Billington 2012). In the 1960s, the screenwriter of *You Only Live Twice*, Roald Dahl (1967, 86), recalled how those parameters were made clear to him by Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman: “‘You can come up with anything you like so far as the story goes,’ they told me, ‘but there are two things you mustn’t mess with. The first is the character of Bond. That’s fixed. The second is the girl formula. That is also fixed.’” Both of these parameters are derived from the books. Barbara often repeats her father’s golden rule: “Whenever you get stuck, go back to Fleming” (Razak 2012).

As the source material, the Fleming novels inform what can be done (micro-level), and the producers decide how it can be done (meso-level). The structure of the earlier films is also routinely studied. When writing *For Your Eyes Only*, Cubby Broccoli advised Maibaum and Wilson to see “where are the bumps?” to establish suspense and excitement (Glen 2001, 110). In the production process it is clear that the films are the result of an assemblage process. To take just one example, by *Licence to Kill* the series had run out of Fleming titles to use, so Wilson assembled the list of possible film titles from the text of Fleming’s novels.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as Chapman notes (2007, 228): “Bond screenplays are best described as ‘constructed’ rather than ‘written.’” Screenwriter Tom Mankiewicz talks about how for *The Man with the Golden Gun*:

I made up the story, Cubby [Broccoli] made up the story, Harry [Saltzman] made up the story, Guy [Hamilton, director] made up the story. It’s always been a committee in the beginning; there’s already been a writer there to make up the story but so many people have ideas and especially when they’re old hands at Bond, they know how to write a Bond story correctly. Writing a Bond story correctly is a trick, like riding a unicycle or mixing together a perfect cake; you need this ingredient, that ingredient and people work at it (Schenkman 1980).

The Bond family understands the elements of the formula and their expressive and material capacity.

To keep their legitimate authority, the producers rely on a secure production base that has provided the franchise

with “a long-term technical and creative team who have worked towards perfecting the Bondian formula” (Street 1997, 87). This allows for a production ideology that constitutes a set of expectations about what a Bond movie should be like, what it should contain, how it should be made, and so on. For this understanding, it makes sense to rely on certain individuals, so we see relatively little changeover in the crew from film to film. The first 16 Bond films, for example, were made by five directors (Terence Young, Guy Hamilton, Lewis Gilbert, Peter Hunt, and John Glen). Other key members in assembling Bond include title designer Maurice Binder (14 films), screenwriter Richard Maibaum (13), composer John Barry (12), stunt coordinator Bob Simmons (10), cinematographer Ted Moore (7), and production designers Ken Adam (7) and Peter Lamont (18). Moreover, EON tends to promote within its own ranks, so John Glen, for example, had edited the earlier Bonds and therefore had “the enthusiasm and knowledge of the characters and the instincts for what it takes to pull one off” (Giammarco 2002, 175). Maintaining a core production team that has a shared language means that the studio does not need to worry too much, as McGurk states: “The Broccoli organization, with their line producers and everybody that’s been involved forever, almost ensure you’re not going to get a product that’s a complete wipeout. It limits the downside” (Field and Chowdhury 2015, 512). Territorialization at this level of the assemblage means that less maintenance labor is needed. However, it is worth noting that the production roles are more significant than any one individual; thus, changes in personnel are still possible, when necessary.

Although our central focus is on the films, the BBA also consists of the books, video games, exhibitions, auctions, and so on, that provide additional nests that operate alongside the films in connecting the overall brand to the fans. As discussed above, at a certain point, the producers ran out of original texts upon which to draw. The ongoing desire for all things Bond has seen other authors take up the story where Fleming left off. While the books are controlled by the Fleming estate rather than EON, there is a close relationship between the Fleming and Broccoli families in terms of retaining legitimacy for the brand (Chapman 2007). This brings further expressive capacity for the brand, through new elements enrolled into the assemblage. Equally, the video games accompanying the films reassemble the material and expressive properties of the brand, and allow fans to engage and reengage with them outside of the scope of the films. Indeed, Barbara Broccoli credits the *GoldenEye* game with bringing “a whole new audience to the Bond films” (Razak 2012). Further legitimizing actions are derived from EON-supported exhibitions, such as *Designing Bond*, developed in conjunction with the Barbican arts center in London, which subsequently toured globally. Here, the material elements of the brand assemblage were presented in the context of a

<sup>3</sup> Including “Time for Decision” and “Take It Easy, Mr. Bond” from *Thunderball*; “The Eye that Never Sleeps,” “The Job Comes Second,” and “The Pipeline Closes” from *Diamonds Are Forever*; “The Fuse Burns” from *From Russia with Love*; and “All to Play For” and “Writing on My Heart” from *Goldfinger* (Duncan 2015).



museum exhibition, allowing those attending to re-engage with the brand. Finally, the merchandise—ranging from dolls to lunch boxes, watches to jigsaw puzzles—allows audiences to bring Bond into their own lives for daily consumption, at whichever price range suits them.

We see that while many of the tactics employed by EON aim at assuring longevity, there is, nevertheless, a danger of becoming too comfortable. The key to the BBA's longevity, as we have shown, is the balance between continuity and change, familiarity and novelty. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how the producers ensure each Bond offering is current by looking inward to the broad set of options available based on the formula, from which they create an ephemeral form for each film. This meso-level assemblage is also created from a set of possible agents, who then collectively assert legitimacy on the micro-level assemblage. Yet, equally, in bringing together these elements of the assemblage, the meso-level draws on the wider macro-environment in territorializing the BBA, as discussed below.

## Macro-Assemblage: Sociocultural Contexts

*Maybe it sounds old-fashioned, but I believe he's a symbol of real value to the Free World.*

—President Ronald Reagan (1983)

Researchers have argued that the Bond series' longevity is due to the strategies of the producers to renew and refresh the Bond formula (Bennett and Woolcott 1987; Black 2004; Chapman 2007) by taking into account the macro-contexts. Barbara Broccoli herself says, "It's lasted fifty years because it's changed with the times. The films reflect the times" (Bowes 2012); and the challenge is to "keep with the tradition of Bond but continually refresh it and make it feel cutting edge" (McNary 2014). The critics also recognize this, as Andrew Sarris's (1971) review of *Diamonds Are Forever* shows: "The major positive virtues of the movie seem to originate from the cockily contemporaneous screenplay...which managed to relate to recent headlines without being oppressively relevant to the in-depth continuations on the back pages. This process can be described as having your cake and throwing it like a custard pie."

To demonstrate how the serial brand has retained social salience, we focus on how the production team considered the sociocultural context in enrolling elements into the films. In the case of the BBA, the most prominent sociocultural elements are: geopolitical changes, gender changes, and the evolution of popular films (see figure 1).

Attention to the sociocultural context has served to territorialize the films themselves as assemblages. These changes are given expressive capacity, most clearly through locations where the films take place; the villains' background, goals, and methods; the relationship between

the Bond character and the Bond girls; and the filmic style. Web appendix B traces the evolution of the franchise by showing the different sociocultural elements that have been enrolled and unenrolled from the wider set of the macro-brand assemblage, providing a map of cultural change (in the West). Producer interviews demonstrate the care they take in situating Bond in a contemporary context; for example, Barbara has said she likes to "start off with the topical aspect. What is the world worried about, now or in the next couple of years? And what is James Bond's position in that arena?" (Cinema.com 2002). As screenwriter Bruce Feirstein observes: "Bond lives in a world set 30 seconds into the future" (Duncan 2015, 454).

*Contemporizing Geopolitics.* Dodds (2005) argues that location in James Bond movies is central to establishing tension. The locations are not usually major powers themselves, but at the margins of the geopolitical order, where major powers battle for the fate of the world. The stories also reflect changing images of Britain, the United States, and the world from a Western perspective: depicting shifts in the Cold War and addressing themes such as the space race, nuclear confrontation, drugs, and, recently, cyberterrorism (Black 2004). Mapping key news stories to storylines and geopolitical positions within the films demonstrates the relevance of the assembled storylines to the external geopolitical context.

While casting is clearly relevant at the micro-level, its expressive potential is also significant at the macro-level, particularly in the villain, who is often the key focus of the plot as Bond is pitted against him. In each film the villain's characterization identifies the geopolitical positioning of the film: from the Soviet Union to North Korea to a broader global terror group, the villains mirror geopolitical shifts in order to provide contemporary relevance to the storyline. Michael Wilson explains the process: "We think, 'what is the world afraid of? Where are we headed?' Then we try to create a villain that is the physical embodiment of that fear" (Barnes 2015). At times, the films have foreshadowed current events, as with *Dr. No*, which anticipated the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>4</sup> (Chapman 2007). When the villain's characterization is unclear, the plot can serve up the necessary topicality. Screenwriter Richard Maibaum remembers writing the screenplay for *The Man with the Golden Gun* in November 1973, at the height of the energy crisis: "As usual, we were looking for a world threat and it came down to (...) solar power" (Rubin 2002, 383). Maibaum, having worked on many of the Bond screenplays, would often be part of the early preproduction discussions, responding to the question: "Who is the great Satan today?" (Altman 1989).

<sup>4</sup> The film was showing in UK cinemas during the crisis, and it is possible the very real danger of nuclear war between superpowers helped box office results (Chapman 2007).



By enrolling contemporary backdrops for the historically constituted micro-assemblage, the serial brand maintains relevance. Although the Bond films are often considered as ideologically rooted in the Cold War, examination of the brand series shows that the Bond formula considers a wider set of possibilities from which to create a nested assemblage, associated with a broader geopolitical assemblage in ideological terms. Reviews of the BBC archive *On This Day*, which contains the significant news stories of the Cold War period, illustrate the decline in news about the Cold War after the 1980s, which necessitated the enrollment of new geopolitical backdrops.

Following Glasnost, the Cold War background disappears and Michael Wilson explains how Maibaum came up with an answer to “who are the people that the Western World consider the bad guys?” by identifying the contemporary area of evil as “the drug lord!” (Altman 1989). Therefore Wilson took inspiration from real-life drug lords for the villain of *Licence to Kill*. For his villain, Maibaum was additionally inspired by General Noriega, “who I thought rather colourful and who was giving the US the two-finger salute over the Panama Canal while harbouring all the drug criminals, dealing in production and such like” (Russell 1989). Critics noticed these influences; Hal Hinson (1989) wrote in his review that:

The producers have given their hero's adventures a more realistic context, one sprung from newspaper headlines and real-world tensions. (...) This time out Bond's enemy is a Noriega-like drug lord headquartered in the made-up Central American capital of Isthmus City, and with the lizard-skinned Robert Davi in the role, they've matched the Panamanian heavy-hitter acne scar for acne scar.

Eighteen years later, it seemed equally plausible for the villain to be “a media baron—the only sort of figure in today's world that does seek global domination. (...) Just imagine what Murdoch and Ted Turner would like to do to each other and imagine either one of them doing it to the Chinese, and you'll get the idea” (Ebert 1997). Indeed, *Tomorrow Never Dies* is replete with topical references: screenwriter Bruce Feirstein had written for magazines owned by Murdoch and had firsthand knowledge of how media moguls operate (Duncan 2015). To pinpoint the source of the threat, the production team looked outward: there had been friction between China and Taiwan, and the film once again reflected the international political situation through references to Chinese military strength. Like many of its predecessors, the film also foregrounds technology, recalling the media coverage of the Gulf War in which smart weapons had been portrayed as the most efficient and clinical means of hitting enemy targets. A few years later, following 9/11, Barbara Broccoli thought “it didn't feel right” to have “a frivolous, fantastical Bond” (Bowes 2012), which led the screenwriters to focus on Bond's inner life in *Casino Royale* to “recalibrate” the

franchise (Lambie 2012). The latest film, she explained, is about “privacy and how much information should governments have control of. It's very current, very relevant to the issues of today” (Llewellyn Smith 2015).

*Contemporizing Gender Relations.* Just as the villains are links to the broader geopolitical environment, the Bond girls operate in a similar manner, revealing an evolution of gender norms over 55 years. The documentary *Bond Girls Are Forever* traces the 50-year evolution of the Bond girl, demonstrating how, as gender politics evolved, the role of the Bond girl broadened. The Bond girls of the early films (Luciana Paluzzi, Ursula Andress, and Honor Blackman) were seen as embodying “the sexy freewheeling spirit of the 60s” (Maryam d'Abo in Watkin 2002). They were primarily passive and two-dimensional—there to add a sexual context to the film rather than to aid Bond, commodities to be consumed by Bond and subsequently discarded. In *Dr. No*, actress Zena Marshall recalls approaching director Terence Young about how to play her part, asking, “What kind of girl is she?” to which he replied, “she's the sort of woman that men dream about, but doesn't exist” (Duncan 2015, 44). Indeed, the film follows the novel in introducing the main Bond girl, Honey (Andress), in a voyeuristic manner, whereby Bond gazes at her before she is aware that she is being watched, a textbook example of Mulvey's (1989) discussion of women on screen as “objects of to-be-looked-at-ness.” This depiction of women is reflected in the theatrical poster for *Dr. No*, where the women are presented in various states of undress, from a bikini to a towel to a shirt unbuttoned and draped off one shoulder, and, finally, to a dress with a thigh-high slit. The presentation of women in the early Bond films is summed up by Derek Hill (1962) in a review in *Scene* magazine: “Between bullets, tarantulas and cliff-tops he finds time to lay woman after woman as dispassionately as if they were foundation stones.”

This changed as Bond moved into the 1970s, when feminism was coming into play. While still not a feminist ideal, the Bond girls evolved through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, reflecting a recognition among the producers, screenwriters, and the actresses that the role of women in society was changing, and that female roles must shift with these social changes. The girls became more prominent as the franchise progressed, with later Bond girls getting greater screen time. For example, although Diana Rigg's Tracy in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* is introduced in a typically voyeuristic manner (Bond observes her through a telescopic lens as she walks along a beach), she performs an active role in the narrative, rescuing Bond and actually causing him to rethink his profession. In fact, the changing position of women in the films may be seen in terms of the differentiated remuneration between Rigg and Bond actor George Lazenby, reported in the *Daily Mirror* (1968) prior to the film's release: “Actress Diana Rigg will be paid

£50,000 for her plum film role as Mrs. James Bond. This is more than twice the salary that former male model George Lazenby...will get for taking over as the new 007 from Sean Connery. Bond producer Cubby Broccoli explained: 'Diana has more experience and, of course, she is a bigger name.'" So as not to be too radical, however, the more usual characterization of Bond girls as passive playthings was represented by the patients at Blofeld's clinic in the film. Moreover, while in the screenplay Tracy proposed to Bond, director Peter Hunt "thought Bond should always be the stronger character and should be the doer" (Duncan 2015, 188). Furthermore, in the wider franchise, there were still low points, one of which is in *The Man with the Golden Gun*, where Bond roughs up Andrea, played by Maud Adams. In fact, Adams noted, "I don't think Roger enjoyed playing a scene where he was actually hitting a woman. I don't think it sat very well with him" (Duncan 2015, 243).

Despite some hitches, an evolution is clear, as demonstrated in *Bond Girls Are Forever*. We see a move from Jill St. John, who starred in *Diamonds Are Forever* and argued that "Bond women are larger than life, they are not meant to represent real women, they are meant to represent almost a dreamlike quality (...) it is meant as entertainment, it is not meant as a social statement or a chronicle of how far women have come in life," to Lois Chiles, who noted that while women were "burning their bras" she celebrated the strength of her scientist character in *Moonraker*. By 1989 in *Licence to Kill*, Carey Lowell "portrayed Pam as gritty and tough. When she meets Bond at the bar, she's wearing a black leather vest and pants, and carrying a sawn-off shotgun. She's flinging men over her shoulder and smashing bottles on their heads. Quite different from other Bond girls" (Duncan 2015, 405). A former army pilot, Pam can actually help Bond. Ebert (1989) comments on her modernity, describing her as "more competent, intelligent and capable, and not simply [a] sex object." Indeed, much of the publicity discourse around the Bond girls has repeatedly suggested they are modern, liberated, independent women—an argument only slightly refuted by the fact that most of the Bond girls were contractually obliged to do a photo shoot for *Playboy* coinciding with the release of the film, the last being Daphne Deckers in 1999. Although Pam may be assertive at the start of the film, by the end she has adopted a more conventional nice girl-next-door role. Critic Caryn James (1989) notes how the producers cleverly "preserve, if only for old time's sake, some of Bond's traditional macho chauvinism" by forcing her to pose as Bond's secretary when they are "south of the border" where "it's a man's world."

The evolution of the role of women reflects the enrolling of relevant sociocultural elements as central to the BBA. *GoldenEye* is seen as a point of change in gender balance, as Judi Dench became James Bond's boss, which continued until her character's death in *Skyfall*. This was of the

times as, in 1992, Stella Rimington was made director general of MI5 (Field and Chowdhury 2015). Moreover, this evolution was set against changes in the Bond character, represented by the different Bond actors. By 1997, Michelle Yeoh (*Tomorrow Never Dies*) acknowledged that her character is a 90s woman, aggressive and confident, who could do anything that Bond could. Nudity was reduced, and the girls became tougher and more active. As the most progressive heroine of the series to date, her character is not subservient to Bond; as critic Todd McCarthy (1999) notes, she does not "for a moment fall (...) into the compliant-bimbo mode so common to the series." As Janet Maslin explains in the *New York Times* (1997), M and Moneypenny's dialogue counteracts and diminishes Bond's machismo, giving the film an "up-to-date sensibility," in that the audience is aware that they "could sue him for sexual harassment on the basis of his small talk." The film diffuses sexist criticism by voicing it through the female authority figures. Despite media intrigue about whether a female Bond could be possible, although the Bond films move with the times, they do not challenge the status quo. Barbara Broccoli confirms that: "When men change, maybe Bond will change. But let's wait—I'm not holding my breath" (Fischer 2008). However, some reviews have noted that Daniel Craig's Bond is presented as an object of spectacle, not least when he rises from the waves à la Andress in *Casino Royale*: "his toned and rippling musculature glistening in the tropical sunshine" (Sands 2006, 29).

*Contemporizing Filmic Style and Popular Culture.* As an entertainment brand, the films are culturally relevant in terms of reflecting the latest fads and fashions found in popular culture. The biggest laugh in *Dr. No*, director Peter Hunt claimed, came from having the recently stolen (1961) Goya portrait of the Duke of Wellington on Dr. No's walls. This was picked up by critics, such as Leonard Mosley of the *Daily Express*, who said, "There is one good joke that alone made the film worthwhile for me. When Bond and the blonde are marched into Dr. No's guarded fortress, they pass a familiar-looking picture on an easel. It is the Goya which was stolen from the National Gallery last year" (Mosley 1962). This idea was then re-enrolled 50 years later in *Skyfall* when Séverine is seen in front of Modigliani's painting *Woman with a Fan*, one of the world's most famous stolen paintings.

This assembling of popular culture is applicable not only in terms of entertainment, but also in terms of technology. Designer Ken Adam recalled how, for *Dr. No*, Harry Saltzman sent him to "the atomic-energy research center in England, [where] I got a great deal of technical advice from some of their scientists" to make the sets as accurate as possible (Duncan 2015, 46). This enrollment of technology into the assemblage was particularly obvious in terms of the gadgets used. Production Manager David

Middlemas paid tribute to Cubby Broccoli and Saltzman, who “were always on the lookout for new ideas, for example the jet pack in *Thunderball*. They heard about this and wrote it in” (Hendry 1983). This extended to cutting-edge film production technology. *The Man with the Golden Gun*, for example, is the first significant production to feature a computer-designed stunt. Illustrating the importance of relatable gadgetry to the BBA as a whole, EON collaborated with the Barbican arts center in curating an exhibition that showcased the production and set design of the films.

This assembling of popular culture is most notable in terms of following filmic trends. While Bond has been a British production, the films are underpinned by global film trends. This was clear from the start of the series. Reviewing *Dr. No*, Derek Hill (1962) observes: “*Dr. No* has the kind of rock-hard competence more usually associated with Hollywood.” Throughout the evolution of the BBA, EON illustrated an awareness of trends by coding the films in response to the competition. For example, and as mentioned previously, EON parroted the martial arts craze of the Bruce Lee period<sup>5</sup> with *The Man with the Golden Gun*. In the late 1980s, Timothy Dalton’s Bond responds to the tougher-edged action films of the time, *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon*, as well as the revisionist tendencies of 1989’s *Batman*, which presented its hero as a dark avenger far removed from the campy excess of the 1960s television series. United Artists publicist Don Smolen notes that “films were getting more violent. We had to get away from the gentlemanly spy. We had to toughen up the image of Bond, make him more contemporary” (Duncan 2015, 404). Critic Desson Howe (1989) disapproved of this turn, arguing that “*Licence* might appeal to those of you currently bored with your ‘Rambo,’ ‘Miami Vice’ and ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark’ videotapes. (...) With the injection of more and uglier violence, the filmmakers seem eager to put Bond in competition with other monosyllabic action movie heroes.”

More recently, critic Robbie Collin (2014) notes the latest version of this enrollment of popular culture in *Skyfall*: “Ian Fleming’s secret agent is something of a chameleon, either blending in with or cashing in on the movie craze du jour. Think of *Moonraker*, rushed into production after *Star Wars* took popular cinema into orbit, or *Live and Let Die*, exploiting Blaxploitation, or the twitchy, unsmiling *Quantum of Solace*, Bond’s latter-day Bourneification.” Indeed, *Die Another Day* director Lee Tamahori had warned the producers in 2002, after watching *The Bourne Identity*, that “this game’s changing fast. You’re going to have to rethink this. (...) I don’t think it should just be an update of the character, I think it should be a radical reinvention of what the Bond character is and what MI6 is.

(...). All they’ve ever done is update it. Now you’ve got to really reinvigorate it” (Setchfield 2002). His words were well heeded by the producers in their next installment, *Casino Royale*. Collin’s (2014) review goes on to call *Skyfall* “a Bond film for the Anonymous generation” to which the template is “Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, a film that has almost singlehandedly reconfigured the modern blockbuster since its 2008 release.”

Roger Moore reflected in 2008: “In 47 years, [the producers] haven’t made many mistakes with the Bond franchise. They’re clever enough to sense a trend. And the trend right now is for hard, gritty Bond” (Nashawaty 2008). Taking an assemblage perspective, we can see how the nested sets of assemblages interact. The formula provides a decoded micro-assemblage, which the production team can then assemble in order to reflect and respond to the wider macro-assemblage. There are cascading effects in both directions, bottom-up in terms of the structure of the films and top-down in terms of their themes. While we are not the first to note the significance of the role the James Bond films have in representing sociocultural contexts, we demonstrate how this topicality is necessary, but not sufficient, for brand longevity—it needs to be configured in the right way. As we have shown, the producers at the meso-level have been instrumental in this configuration, turning the brand into “an institutionalized ritual” (Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 127) that is “owned by the nation” (Barbara Broccoli in Naughton 2017).

Although the brand has been successful internationally, it has remained true to its British heritage, for example, through Bond’s service to the Queen. Indeed, Fleming deliberately titled his first book *Casino Royale*, as it was due to be published a few months before Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation and he wanted to cash in on royal fever (Duncan 2015). Since then, the royal connection has been emphasized at key moments, such as, famously, in the pre-title sequence for *The Spy Who Loved Me*, released in the year of the Queen’s Silver Jubilee (1977). More recently, *Skyfall* was released on the franchise’s 50th anniversary, the same year as the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics, culminating in a very special Olympic opening ceremony. As Manohla Dargis (2012) reported in the *New York Times*, “turning Britain’s royal octogenarian into a Bond girl was a stroke of cross-marketing genius that profited queen and country both, while also encapsulating the appeal of the 007 brand in the age of aerial drones.” In synching the BBA with the British royal family through a short film created for the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony, brand Bond was anchored within a vision of Britishness watched by a global audience of 900 million. Throughout their Olympic coverage, the BBC opened its highlights with “Good evening, Mr. Bond,” demonstrating the brand recognition of a “beloved cultural icon” (Ebert 2012). Bond has been enrolled into other brand assemblages, including various national branding campaigns, such

<sup>5</sup> *The Man with the Golden Gun* followed international box office hits *The Big Boss* (1971), *Fist of Fury* (1972), *Game of Death* (1973), *Five Fingers of Death* (1973), and *Enter the Dragon* (1973).



as the “Bond Is Great Britain” tourism campaign of 2012. In terms of generating brand meaning, since 1975 the transmission of a Bond film by ITV on Christmas Day has established a regular, meaningful place for Bond in the way of life of British people.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: VIEW TO MAKING A KILLING

*The only constants in life are death, taxes and the next James Bond movie.*

—Author Lee Pfeiffer (Coate 2013)

Our study enriches theories of brand longevity by delineating how the Bond franchise has been able to remain a “constant” in fans’ lives. We answer the question: how do serial brands attain longevity within evolving sociocultural contexts? Building on Holt’s (2004) cultural branding, we show how Bond has been put into circulation as a popular hero, and sustained as such over 55 years. Through our selection of six films, which represent specific ideological and sociocultural themes, we demonstrate how Bond has been continuously adapted in response to changing circumstances. While many cultural and media theorists have examined the Bond franchise, they have done so on a film-by-film chronological basis. We argue that the longevity of the serial brand cannot be accounted for in this manner; rather, there is a need to examine the franchise as an assemblage operating at multiple levels, where various elements are enrolled and unenrolled in different combinations to allow for continuity and change. In the next three sections, we explore how our theorization of brand longevity articulates the process of managing continuity and change in securing brand longevity, illustrate how this increases our understanding of past consumer research, and offer potential directions for future research.

### Assembling Brands

This study advances the use of assemblage theory in examining brands, particularly serial brands, by applying DeLanda’s (2016) concept of nested assemblages. Canniford and Badje (2016, 1) posit that “assemblage offers a range of tools for thinking about the social world as messy and ongoing interrelations between diverse kinds of things at various scales of life.” As a relational concept, assemblage provides us with a lens through which we can see how serial brands can be sustained, within a context of sociocultural change. Our examination of the BBA furthers our understanding of “temporary amalgamations of heterogeneous material and semiotic elements, amongst which capacities and actions emerge,” due to the part-to-whole relationships between them (Canniford and Badje 2016, 1). Our analysis offers a way to manage the brand assemblage to achieve brand longevity.

Parmentier and Fischer (2015) catalogue the decline of a serial brand when new components are enrolled into the brand assemblage, signaling consumer desire for continuity and the risks involved in changing an established formula. Contrastingly, Sood and Drèze (2006) found that a degree of change can positively influence the achievement of brand longevity within serial brands. Rather than seeing instances of stabilization and destabilization of practices as problematic, we theorize that such deterritorialization and reterritorialization is necessary to sustain the brand and achieve longevity. While endurance has long been a concern in branding studies (Aaker 1996; Brown et al. 2013; Fournier and Yao 1997; Holt 2004), there has, as yet, been little understanding of how change can be managed to ensure longevity.

Figure 1 outlines the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of the brand assemblage. Continuity comes not from retaining a fixed formula through which to assemble specific brand elements, but from seeing such elements as providing possibilities of expression that can be solidified into different configurations through a double-articulation process. In the first articulation, the producers select from the wider possibilities of expression (the micro-level, i.e., the various parts of the brand’s stories). These are coded in the second articulation, whereby the material expressivity is solidified (macro-level, i.e., the sociocultural contexts). This entails the need for brand stewardship (the producers and other key brand stewards at the meso-level), which looks both inward and outward.

The brand stewards facilitate the double-articulation process by ensuring a balance is achieved, allowing for continuity and change by selecting from various internal elements of the brand heritage and reconfiguring them in new ways, ensuring evolution in line with external sociocultural contexts. Each iteration of the brand requires new consideration as to how to achieve this balance by enrolling and unenrolling brand elements (as appropriate due to evolving sociocultural contexts). Such an adherence to contemporary sociocultural contexts provides relevance for contemporary audiences, while, at the micro-level, brand elements can be reconfigured, allowing the franchise to revisit and reinterpret earlier occurrences. This double articulation, by allowing for brand recognition, prevents the serial brand from becoming socially irrelevant or obscure. A brand assemblage is therefore fragile, yet flexible; key to its success is an understanding of how the assemblage system operates within a dynamic context at multiple levels of contextual analysis, and is thus open to change and can be reshaped as alternative elements are enrolled.

### Dealing with the Past

In examining brand longevity, our study contributes to the literature on brand heritage. Our multilevel analysis, facilitated by a multilevel assemblage approach, highlights



the role of brand heritage in achieving brand longevity. We show that the micro-level assemblage offers expressive possibilities with regard to the heritage, rather than a script to be closely followed. This assemblage perspective on how producers manage the brand reveals the repeated reterritorializations that occur. In the context of the Bond franchise, repeated strong performance of the films at the box office and high levels of fan discussion online indicate continued social relevance and audience engagement, not through rigid continuation of a fixed formula, but through a more nuanced selection of its possibilities. We argue that brands that rely solely on a fixed, linear progression in their story will eventually encounter difficulties when practical needs challenge their inflexible treatment of the brand's heritage (e.g., in filmic serial brands, when casting changes arise).

What we have identified is that not all familiar and valued elements of a brand's historical story must be included in each iteration, but that moving forward and backward through a brand's heritage is essential in order to keep the evolving serial brand in touch with its story of origin. Therefore, this approach applies to other serial entertainment brands, such as books or games. We can also see this in fashion brands such as Chanel or Barbour, where elements of previous products or promotional stories are revisited in order to indicate that the fundamental essence of the brand remains, even as it keeps pace with changes in the fashion industry as well as society. Similarly, car manufacturers such as Fiat and Volkswagen have used their design heritage to connect contemporary consumers to iconic models such as the 500 and Beetle, respectively. A flexible approach in reconfiguring and selecting from the various possible interactions of these brand elements is required to keep the brand fresh. Moreover, while our analysis of the BBA reveals that geopolitics, gender politics, and popular culture are the three most significant macro-level contexts that are drawn upon when articulating the micro-level assemblage, in other brand contexts this will differ. The sociocultural contexts of relevance will depend on the nature of the brand, but the general principle—of understanding how the stories told in and about the brand must be presented in alignment with current sociocultural norms to prevail in contemporary contexts—applies to brands more broadly. Brand stewards must monitor such sociocultural trends in order to understand when and how to enroll new elements into the brand assemblage.

Our findings show that the key to a brand's longevity lies in the balance of the continuity–change continuum. On the one hand, there is the need to offer a sense of familiarity and comfort, and to exhibit historical brand knowledge. On the other hand, there is a need to incorporate risk, excitement, and innovation in order to retain audience interest. Significantly, in assembling the various brand elements to create new iterations of the brand, no single

element of the brand is given expressive dominance over others.

If the audience can understand how the assemblage operates, it can become emotionally involved by finding comfort in the structure and by imagining other possible variations and/or predicting elements that will be enrolled in the assemblage's next iteration. This is also applicable to other cultural products with recognizable structures or narrative conventions—for example, whodunits, telenovelas, or even sports teams—where engagement with the brand is not linked to individual elements of the assemblage but rather to the narrative conventions.

Brown et al. (2013) discuss the malleability of powerful consumer myths (and therefore iconic brands) due to their ambiguous nature; this is what makes them successful, the authors argue, as they allow consumers to see what they want to see. It is clear that archetypes and myths are central to enduring brands, and we articulate this malleability through our analysis of the BBA. Indeed, consumers can pick and choose the elements they prefer, individualizing their readings, but the malleability is also contained, in that the brand producers carefully limit the boundaries around the brand. In understanding the boundaries, we have shown the importance of adopting a nested assembly approach, with the evolution of the brand being dependent on historical shifts in terms of sociocultural norms. Testing the boundaries of possibility at a micro-level relies on interpreting the macro-level contexts; therefore, the application of the formula is in keeping with broader sociocultural trends. For example, when it became time to counter views of Bond as a sexist institution, a woman became M. However, it could not just be any woman, it had to be a woman who merited such a position—in this case, Judi Dench, one of the most respected British actresses, and at that time already OBE and winner of a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award.

## Stewardship

Lastly, we contribute to studies of brand heritage by drawing attention to the stewardship of brands (Urde et al. 2007) in demonstrating how this heritage can leveraged within contemporary contexts to manage continuity and change. Through offering a multilevel analysis of the BBA, we highlight the essential role of the meso-level in providing what DeLanda (2016) terms an authority structure, engaged in both surveillance and legitimating work. The Broccoli family perceives themselves as acting as “guardians at the gate,” and our findings show that they use this guardianship to enforce their authority over the BBA through a production ideology. This production ideology is inspired by the source material in the form of the original Fleming books and other elements of the meso-level assemblage that have gained prominence over the course of the franchise, including cast and crew. We show

that, to ensure brand longevity, brand managers must be aware of the “spaces of possibilities” (DeLanda 2016, 115) of their brand assemblage and understand what defines their brand. Relying on certain familiar elements or tropes (in this case, for example, dialogue, logo, music, characterization) allows for instant recognition and familiarity, while still being able to move with the times.

Revitalization and rejuvenation—through, for example, new actors or locations being enrolled into the brand assemblage—are necessary for brand longevity, but are not a rebranding strategy. For the brand assemblage to remain intact, at least a few familiar elements must be present. We see this in the case of a brand like Barbour, which has retained its salience by switching its model on a motorbike from male to female, and the context of the waxed jacket from a country estate shooting party to a trendy music festival, thereby combining the familiar with the contemporary. Identifying these essential elements of the brand is challenging, as it requires a deep understanding of the brand’s origins, its evolution, and the types of stories that exist within its history.

Due to the nature of our case, where the film franchise is essentially a family business, our serial brand assemblage framework can also be applied to brands that span multiple generations of a family, and may eventually move away from family ownership. Where the original family owners have been closely associated with the brand, change of ownership can present a challenge to the brand assemblage. Understanding the need to delve back into the brand’s evolved story to connect with earlier motifs, storylines, and products, while keeping pace with sociocultural changes, can smooth this transition. This is a challenge that lies ahead for our serial brand.

The implications of this study are threefold. First, serial brand producers need to recognize the serial brand as comprising of nested assemblages and should develop the brand through a combination of continuity and change. What we know about enduring brands is that their strength is built not on individual concepts of brand loyalty, but from being embedded within culture (Holt 2004). This is particularly difficult for serial brands, where consumer engagement is episodic rather than continuous. As shown by Parmentier and Fischer (2015), when new iterations appear periodically, it is a major challenge. Our study follows this line of theorizing, providing fine-grained insight into the process of becoming socially salient and retaining this salience. The individual elements in the brand assemblage should be allowed to evolve in line with cultural and social evolution, yet within an acknowledged, flexible, fuzzy-edged boundary.

Second, we demonstrate the potential to refresh heritage brands through an understanding of the core micro-level assembly from which the meso-level can, as an authority structure or brand steward, draw on the macro-level assemblage, examining how it responds to culture at large rather than overtly focusing on the internal formula. While

Brown et al. (2013) recognize the benefit of the heritage brand as an open signifier, we illustrate that for brands with a clear story of origin, there are boundaries around the interpretive possibilities of that brand that come from the core text. Innovation can inject excitement into the brand, but can occur only in keeping with the spaces of possibilities. Understanding which elements of the brand are treasured by consumers is central to this. The boundary around such spaces of possibilities is set by the meso-level, in accordance with changes occurring at the macro-level.

Finally, as the micro-assemblage is central to the brand’s meaning, there is a risk in dismantling or ignoring it. Olsen et al. (2014) characterize brand longevity as being outside the control of the brand manager. Our findings dispute this, although we acknowledge that the brand manager does not operate in isolation and consumers must also be considered.

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

While our study focuses on a specific type of serial brand, we show that other types of brands with a rich heritage would benefit from understanding their assemblage and how they can use it to ensure longevity. Figure 1 provides a serial brand assemblage framework, which we argue has broader application beyond entertainment brands to incorporate other brands with a series of product releases—for instance in fashion or the automotive industry. The introduction of a new version does not negate earlier versions, but rather both can benefit from connecting to their heritage by referencing previous iterations and brand stories, achieving contemporary relevance by reflecting broader sociocultural contexts. Further research could shed light on what form this takes in different contexts and industries. Although this study only briefly touches on brand extensions and product placement, there would be significant worth in further qualitative research as to how these can contribute to brand longevity for serial brands. Moreover, while we show some of the limits of deviation—for example, in challenging the status quo—further fine-grained research into where the boundaries lie is needed.

Our multilevel brand analysis required us to collate, review, and analyze a very high volume of data. As a result, it has been difficult to do justice to the range and volume of data that informed our analysis. Each of our subthemes itself warrants further exploration—for example, in considering how audiences consume the assemblage, and especially how they perceive the history of the brand in line with their own life stories. This may provide further understanding of some of the negative aspects of brand heritage, which have, thus far, been largely overlooked; for example, does this heritage allow consumers to stay rooted in a racial and/or gendered sense of superiority? There is also considerable potential in studying the notion of comfort, a concept largely missing from the branding literature, yet we

find that it is significant for social salience. However, brand longevity emerged as the most compelling story from our data, and was, therefore, the focus of this article. The resulting certainty from this enduring brand assemblage is that *James Bond will return*.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

Engagement with the focal topic was prolonged and deep. All three authors watched all the films in the series and read the original Fleming books. This was followed with a textual analysis of the films as well as press commentaries and additional books/sources as a starting point in 2012. Following this, from spring 2012 to spring 2017, all three authors continued to undertake extensive data collection of secondary sources related to the production and reception of the films. This included the posters and press releases for the films, official archives approved of by the production company, interviews given by the producers and other cast and crew about the film, box office data, and reviews in key publications for the films at their time of release. The first and second authors also went to the exhibitions and took field notes. Additionally, all three authors mapped the films against key news stories and sociocultural events of the time by reviewing a news archive that curated key global news stories (from a British perspective, as this is a British brand). Following this first stage of analysis, the authors re-examined the films in more depth in 2017 by focusing on turning points or important cases from within the broader dataset. This led to a second stage of data analysis that focused more deeply on six films, in conjunction with the archival data, to identify the key findings of the study. The data were first viewed and analyzed separately by all three authors. All three authors met on multiple occasions to discuss the data and compare and consolidate their analyses.

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