



## FICTION AS A BRAND – A DISCUSSION ON APPLICATION OF POPULAR BRAND MANAGEMENT THEORIES IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** Many reports indicate that the creative industries are an important part of the global economy. While some examples of popular brands of movies, books or computer games, they are not widely discussed, and their specifics differ greatly from other goods and services. This article attempts to study the application of the concept of brand extensions, presenting different ways of brand building on selected examples from the creative industry. Author also highlights other issues related to brands in this industry that require further analysis.

**Keywords:** brand, brand extension, creative industry, film industry, video games, transmedia storytelling

**DOI:** 10.17512/znpcz.2017.3.2.13

### Introduction

Keller (Keller 2011) indicates that basically everything can be a brand, including people, organizations, ideas. In the field of entertainment, he gives examples of movie characters including Austin Powers, Batman and Harry Potter (additionally he presents the case of *Star Wars* franchise as a brand). The main implied reason for treating those fictional characters as brands is their general recognition, which causes the audience to follow movie sequels, referred in the book as “brand extensions”. In the Polish edition of his book, the editors try to give examples of Polish movie series in the form of *Vabank*<sup>1</sup> and *Sami swoi*<sup>2</sup>. While those movies clearly follow the idea of using known characters in sequels, something seems wrong with this comparison. Keller’s examples (maybe except Austin Powers<sup>3</sup>), are both cultural and commercial phenomenons. Aforementioned Polish movies, all filmed in the socialist Polish People’s Republic, had drastically lower production and marketing budgets, so there is no point in comparing their success with Keller’s examples. There is, however, one major difference. Keller

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<sup>1</sup> A 1981 comedy film by Juliusz Machulski, followed by a sequel in 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Released internationally as *Our Folks* and *All Friends Here*, a 1967 comedy film by Sylwester Chęciński, followed by two sequels (1974 and 1977).

<sup>3</sup> The least known character (which has been the protagonist of only three movies and a video game) pointed by Keller, which will be excluded from further discussion.

“brands” were “extended” to many different product types (two of them can be considered “extensions” themselves, actually). When it comes to *Vabank* and *Sami swoi*, calling their sequels “brand extensions”, or even referring to those movies as “brands” is debatable. It would be impossible to ultimately confirm or reject the idea of treating everything as a brand, at least given this article length restraints; there surely is room to discuss if it is possible to directly apply brand management theories to the creative industries.

The following discussion is based on a literature overview, some insights from netnographic analysis of brand communities<sup>4</sup> and Author’s own experiences with particular brands.

## The Creative Economy

The terms *cultural industries* and *creative industries*, which have different history in the context of theory and policy, are sometimes used interchangeably as they both refer to the question “how cultural goods are produced and disseminated in modern economies and societies” (Hesmondhalgh 2008). One of the early examples of official documents concerning this domain is UNESCO’s *Cultural industries. A challenge for the future of culture*, exploring the problem of globalization and industry-scale manufacturing, which could damage the cultural development. It stated that “creative industries held to exist when cultural goods and services are produced, reproduced, stored or distributed on industrial and commercial lines, that is to say on a large scale and in accordance with a strategy based on economic considerations rather than any concern for cultural development” (Girard 1982, p. 21). While the document focused more on the sociological and technological shifts in how culture is created and consumed, the importance of culture in a nation’s economy soon was discovered. The Australian *Creative Nation* initiative from 1994, which stated that culture generated 13 billion AUD<sup>5</sup> a year (Creative Nation 1994). UK’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS<sup>6</sup>) created the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* in 1998, in which it was calculated that creative industries accounted for 4% of UK’s GDP and earned 7.5 billion GBP<sup>7</sup> from exports, also creating nearly 1 million jobs. The document defined creative industries as “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (BOP Consulting 2010, p. 16). The document also defined a set of 13 creative industries (see *Table 1*). Howkins (Howkins 2001, p. 8) defined these industries as providing “an economic good or service that results from creativity and has economic value”,

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<sup>4</sup> The research included official and unofficial communities gathered around 23 video game brands, and was conducted in 2016 as a part of Author’s PhD thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Approx. 22.7 billion AUD in the end of 2016 considering the inflation (about 68.7 billion PLN and 16.4 billion USD, based on National Bank of Poland exchange rates).

<sup>6</sup> For a time renamed to Department for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (DCOMS).

<sup>7</sup> Approx. 12.1 billion GBP in the end of 2016 considering the inflation (about 62.3 billion PLN and 14.9 billion USD, based on National Bank of Poland exchange rates).

expanding the DCMS list with *toys and games* and *R&D* categories. He also uses the term *Creative economy*, which refers to any transactions related to creative industries. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development document TD(XI)/BP/13 (UNCTAD 2004) acknowledged creative industries as “upstream” activities, closely related to traditional art forms (literature, performing arts, etc.), and “downstream” activities, as more market-related (advertising, design, publishing, etc.), therefore seeing cultural industries a subset of creative industries, which themselves, together with *distribution-based industries* form the *copyright industries*.

As can be seen from above examples, the definition and approach to creative industries can differ in different institutions, or even countries. Some institutions (eg. DCMS) tend to change their understanding of creative industries over time, updating their agreed list. *Table 1* contains a comparison of defined sets of creative industries from different sources. The myriad of definitions and research methodologies used in different reports make it hard to determine the exact size and revenues of creative industries. Nevertheless, it can be agreed, that creative industries play an important role in global economy.

**Table 1. Comparison of categorizations of creative industries by different sources through the years**

DCMS 1998	Howkins 2001	UNCTAD 2004	DCMS 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Antiques</li> <li>• Architecture</li> <li>• Crafts</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Fashion</li> <li>• Film</li> <li>• Leisure software</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Performing arts</li> <li>• Publishing</li> <li>• Software</li> <li>• TV and radio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Architecture</li> <li>• Art</li> <li>• Crafts</li> <li>• Design</li> <li>• Fashion</li> <li>• Film</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Performing arts</li> <li>• Publishing</li> <li>• R&amp;D</li> <li>• Software</li> <li>• Toys and games</li> <li>• TV and radio</li> <li>• Video games</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording industry</li> <li>• Music and theatre production</li> <li>• Motion picture industry</li> <li>• Music publishing</li> <li>• Book, journal and newspaper publishing</li> <li>• Computer software industry</li> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Commercial art</li> <li>• Radio, television and cable broadcasting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising and marketing</li> <li>• Architecture</li> <li>• Crafts</li> <li>• Design: product, graphic and fashion design</li> <li>• film, TV, video, radio and photography</li> <li>• IT, software and computer services</li> <li>• Publishing</li> <li>• Museums, galleries and libraries</li> <li>• Music, performing and visual arts</li> </ul>

Source: (Howkins 2001, p. 88-117; UNCTAD 2004; BOP Consulting 2010; DCMS 2016)

### **Brands in the creative industries**

Probably the most commonly cited definition of a brand comes from American Marketing Association (AMA), which describes it as a “name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers”

(see eg. Kotler 2005, p. 410). It should be noted that this definition is usually cited only as an introduction to further discussion, and numerous researchers provide their own proposition. Brand is frequently perceived as a deeper construct, which reaches beyond the identification function. For example, Altkorn (Altkorn 1996, as cited in: Klama 1998, p. 239) sees it as “a composition of functional and emotional values in a subjective and/or objective manner”. De Chernatony and McDonald (1992, as cited in: de Chernatony 2002, p. 24) define the brand as “identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely”, which is quite close to Keller’s (Keller 2011) discussion suggesting that nearly anything can be a brand, since, as he implies, “a brand is something in consumers’ minds” (Keller 2011, p. 28). The idea of a brand as a mental construct, a set of associations, is one of the most influential in brand literature, and was heavily explored earlier by Keller (Keller 1993) and Aaker (Aaker 1991).

Successful management of a brand may have a significant meaning to the brand owner, resulting in (among others):

- legal protection,
- better awareness,
- consumer loyalty,
- reduced marketing costs,
- resistance to competitive threats,
- bigger company value,
- possibility of brand extensions,
- possibility to sale the brand (see for example: Aaker 1991, 2002).

On the other hand, brands provide important functions for consumers (Kapferer 2008, p. 22<sup>8</sup>):

- Identification – quickly finding the sought-after products, structuring shelf perception.
- Practicality – saving time and energy through identical repurchasing.
- Guarantee – confidence of the same quality of branded products.
- Optimisation – confidence of buying the best product in its category, the best performer for a particular purpose.
- Badge – confirmation of self-image or the image presented to others.
- Continuity – satisfaction created by a long term relationship of familiarity and intimacy with the brand over the years.
- Hedonistic – enchantment linked to the attractiveness of the brand, to its logo, to its communication and its experiential rewards.
- Ethical – satisfaction linked to the responsible behavior of the brand in its relationship with society (ecology, employment, citizenship, etc.).

The importance of brands in the creative industries may not seem obvious, yet it can be clearly seen when analyzing the top performing titles from the film and

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<sup>8</sup> While Kapferer’s list is one of the most complete, other researchers suggested similar functions of brands (see eg. Urbanek 2002, p. 24-25; Urbańska 2008, p. 77-78; Witek-Hajduk 2011, p. 33-38).

video game industries (see *Table 2*). The popularity of video game sequels was as evident over a decade ago (Taub 2004) as it is now (Sherr 2017), and only one title from the top 10 best selling games in 2017<sup>9</sup> (*Horizon: Zero Dawn*) was based on a new, original intellectual property (IP). In the list of top 10 highest grossing movies, there were none.

**Table 2. Top grossing movies and top selling video games in 2017 (January-  
-November)**

Rank	Movie title	Notes	Game title	Notes
1	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	Live-action remake of 1991 animated movie (based on 18th century fairy tale)	<i>FIFA 18</i>	25th installment of the <i>FIFA</i> game series, licenced by FIFA organization
2	<i>The Fate of the Furious</i>	8th installment in the <i>Fast and the Furious</i> series	<i>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</i>	18th major installment in the <i>Legend of Zelda</i> series
3	<i>Despicable Me 3</i>		<i>Horizon: Zero Dawn</i>	
4	<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	Part of Marvel Cinematic Universe	<i>Mario Kart 8 Deluxe</i>	Part of a massive <i>Mario</i> franchise
5	<i>Wolf Warrior 2</i>		<i>Pokemon Sun/Moon</i>	7th generation of video games in the <i>Pokemon</i> franchise
6	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy vol. 2</i>	Part of Marvel Cinematic Universe	<i>Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy</i>	Remastered versions of first three titles in the <i>Crash Bandicoot</i> series
7	<i>Wonder Woman</i>	Part of DC Expanded Universe	<i>Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands</i>	10th installment of <i>Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon</i> series, one of five main series licensed with Tom Clancy's name
8	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales</i>	5th installment in the <i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> series	<i>Splatoon 2</i>	
9	<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	Part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, 3rd <i>Thor</i> title	<i>Resident Evil VII: Biohazard</i>	11th main installment and 24th overall installment in the <i>Resident Evil</i> game series
10	<i>It</i>	Based on the 1986 novel by Stephen King; first of two planned movies	<i>Grand Theft Auto V</i>	

Source: Own elaboration based on the data from ([http://www.boxofficemojo.com/...](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/); [http://www.vgchartz.com/...](http://www.vgchartz.com/))

<sup>9</sup> As for November 2017.

Nearly all titles listed in *Table 2* can be treated as brands, since they carry a significant amount of recognition, awareness, and mental associations among the consumers, that was built over the years. The only exception is *Horizon...*, which is a rather new IP, however its commercial success already built enough awareness to transform it into a prosperous brand in the future.

An important factor of the listed titles, is the way they create the brand. Keller (Keller 2011), while referring to movies, was not giving examples of titles, but their fictional characters as “brands”. Sequels of *Sami swoi* do not share the same title (which could disqualify them as a brand using AMA definition), but share the same identifiable characters. The brand in fiction can be developed by the creative industries in many different ways that are hard to be explicitly treated as brand extensions.

### **Brand extensions in fiction – a discussion**

Tauber (Tauber 1988, p. 27) defined brand extensions as “using a brand in one category to introduce products in a totally different category. In some instances licensing is used, but in most cases a manufacturer is searching for ways to cost effectively enter new categories”, although in his previous work (1981) he referred to this practice as a “franchise extension”, also distinguishing a “line extension” – using an existing brand in the same product category. Farquhar (Farquhar 1989) sees these both practices as different types of brand extensions: a category extension and a line extension. He also mentions licensing (a way to gain revenue by providing a third party the right to use a brand) as a separate strategy rather than a form of extension. A similar approach can be seen in Clifton and Simmons (Clifton, Simmons 2003) book. Colucci, Montaguti and Lago (Colucci, Montaguti, Lago 2008) treat licensing as a way of extending the brand (which they call “stretching”). Discussions on successful use of different types of extensions can be easily found (Aaker 1990; Aaker, Keller 1990; Boush, Loken 1991; Bridges, Keller, Sood 2000), although they are rarely concerned about the creative industry.

The basic problem in applying the term “brand extensions” to creative goods, especially fiction, is the different way of their consumption. Regular consumer products can be produced and sold for decades without any major changes, while the lifecycle of a creative good is relatively shorter. Except for cases of changes to the medium containing the good (i.e. VHS to DVD and later to Blu-Ray or digital distribution) or its slight update (i.e. remastered or enhanced version), there is basically no reason to purchase the same product again. Therefore, as a way of keeping the brand “alive”, we can find:

- sequels – continuing the story – eg. *Vabank 2, Die Hard 4*;
- prequels – presenting the events that led to the original story – eg. *Star Wars Episode I* (released in 1999, 16 years after *Episode VI*);
- and spin-offs – telling a different story that is somehow related to the main plot – eg. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016, set between episode III and IV), *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010, story of a supporting character from the *Twilight* book series).

In addition to the above “extensions” there are also “shared universes”, eg. the “Marvel Cinematic Universe”, where different characters or their groups (Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, The Avengers) have their own series, yet they cross-over to from one series to another, creating a shared story.

If we still agree to call those products brand extensions, they would be “line extensions”, since they are based in the same category. A typical “category extension” would be adaptations, which try to retell the story in a form of different medium<sup>10</sup>, for example:

- from novel to a film – eg. *War of the Worlds* (novel 1898; film 1953, 2005);
- a video game to a film – eg. *Tomb Raider* (video game series since 1996; film 2001, 2003);
- a film to a video game – eg. *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (film 1982; video game 1982), etc.

Licensing, which can be a very profitable way of using brands from creative industries, can be easily identified in the case of non-fiction products, like toys, posters and all kinds of gadgets and consumer products bearing a brand name, logo, or one of the brands characters<sup>11</sup>; it is doubtful that creators of a series of (for example) animated movies are also skilled in creating all those things, therefore they must be produced by some other entity. On the other hand, the brand “extensions” sometimes also concern products carrying a story, which can be both in the same or a different medium as the original, and both produced by the brand owner or licensed to another company.

The categorization of different creative works as brand extensions gets really complicated in the case of “transmedia storytelling”, a term introduced by Jenkins (Jenkins 2003), who discussed the case of *The Matrix* film trilogy. Before the release of the third movie (*The Matrix Revolutions*, 2003), the story was expanded in the form of animated short stories (released as a collection titled *Animatrix*), comic books and video games. In this case (and many different, since *The Matrix* is not the only example of transmedia storytelling), the branded products differ in their form, and belong to different product categories (sometimes created by other entities), though they create one bigger story, a “brand” consisting of various smaller parts, and as such, the point of referring to the “parts” as “brand extensions” makes little sense. The idea of transmedia storytelling brands is well explained by Scolari (Scolari 2009, p. 600), who imposes that “[in transmedia storytelling] the brand is expressed by the characters, topics, and aesthetic style of the fictional world. This set of distinctive attributes can be translated into different languages and media: It is a “moveable” set of properties that can be applied to different forms of expression. In fan fiction, even consumers can participate in the

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note, that the use of different media, given its nature and limitation (duration, dynamic, form of expression), may force changes in the story and/or other aspects of the IP, the degree of change may vary greatly. The changes may also be a result of different interpretation of original work, as the creators of the adaptation and the source material are often different people, which may or may not cooperate with each other.

<sup>11</sup> The extents of licensing can sometimes go beyond reason, as the Author once found a pack of potatoes with an image from Disney’s *Frozen* animated movie.

expansion of the fictional world by applying this set of attributes to create new situations and characters”. These days it is usually a matter of time before a successful brand in the creative industry is moved to another media, so this definition can easily be applied even in the case of a single-medium brands.

The influence of fan fiction and other fan creations on brands is surely important and highly discussed (eg. Muniz, O’Guinn 2001; Shau, Muniz, Arnauld 2009; Christodoulides, Jevons, Bonhomme 2012), therefore intentionally omitted in this article as too extensive. It brings up, however, the topic of *canon* in creative works. The term *canon* in the creative industries is usually referring to the whole of creations contributing to the “official” storyline, which is important to keep track of if the number of brand products is growing, and produced by different creators (especially licensees). For example, the *Tomb Raider* movies are loosely based on the story presented in video games, and therefore *non-canon*, while most officially released<sup>12</sup> creations of *The Matrix* brand are canon. The *Star Wars* franchise was a great example of canon policy, as the canonicity of every licensed book, comic book, video game and other form of fiction was supervised and approved by Lucasfilm company as a part of “Expanded Universe” (EU), which story spans 4000 years before and over 130 years after the events of the six *Episodes*. After the acquisition by the Disney company, all creations except the movies and the *Clone Wars* animated series was rebranded as “Legends”, and considered non-canon (Taylor 2014). This controversial decision made “room” for filming a new sequel trilogy and additional material, which story would otherwise collide with the previously canon events covered in other media. This can be considered as a partial *reboot* of the brand, and a creation of an alternative *continuity*, which are both popular decisions in managing brands in the creative industry. The *Tomb Raider* video game series was rebooted twice, creating three different continuities of the story. The characters from Marvel Comics participate not only in a shared universe, but in dozens of different continuities, treated as alternative universes, which even can cross-over with each other. One of the universes is the “Marvel Cinematic Universe”, consisting of the movies – although some series produced by Fox and Sony are separate continuities. Similarly, movies based on DC Comics characters in the “DC Extended Universe” (started with *Man of Steel*, 2013) build a different continuity than the “Arrowverse”, consisting of TV series (started with *Arrow* in 2012), there are also numerous comic book and animated series continuities.

## Summary and further research

Such complex myriad of different approaches to brands in creative industries rise several issues with the application of brand theory, not only in terms of accuracy of brand extension definitions. Jenkins (Jenkins 2003, p. 96) implied that “A good transmedia franchise works to attract multiple constituencies by pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media. If there is, however, enough to sustain those different constituencies – and if each work offers fresh

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<sup>12</sup> Not to count any fan can creations (as they are part of the so-called *fanon*).



experiences – then you can count on a crossover market that will expand the potential gross”. Just a few paragraphs away, however, he highlights the problems *The Matrix* franchise had with a mixed audience reactions, since not every consumer invested the same amount of energy in the consumption of the brand, and how it’s different implementations were “trashed” by critics, when treated individually (see e.g. Brzóska, Jelonek 2015). Just a brief look at the aforementioned Kapferer’s brand functions rise several questions:

- Does the *practicality* function apply to creative industries, since every product is different, and rarely repurchased?
- Are different media equally appealing to all the audience? Are they equally easy to consume? (regarding *optimisation* function);
- Is it easy to identify the right continuity/canon of the stories? Where should one start experiencing the brand? (regarding *identification* function);
- Is the intellectual property owner in control over every product? Are they of similar quality? (regarding *guarantee* function);
- Does rebooting a series (or changing the canon) affect the long-term relationship with the brand? (regarding *continuity* function) (Brzeziński 2016).

The reports of different institutions clearly point out the importance of cultural industries in the global economy. It is also evident that brands play a major role in the consumption of fiction. There are, however, a lot of ways those brands are created, extended and consumed, and those ways differ greatly from typical consumer products. This creates a gap in brand-related literature, both as the lack of theoretical approach to brands in cultural industries, and research over different strategies of building and extending those brands.

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## **FIKCJA JAKO MARKA – DYSKUSJA NAD ZASTOSOWANIEM POPULARNYCH TEORII ZARZĄDZANIA MARKĄ W PRZEMYSŁE KREATYWNYM**

**Streszczenie:** Wiele raportów wskazuje, iż przemysł kreatywny stanowi istotny element globalnej gospodarki. Choć w literaturze niekiedy przywołuje się przykłady marek popularnych filmów, książek lub gier komputerowych, nie są one szeroko omawiane, a ich specyfika znacznie różni się od innych dóbr i usług. W niniejszym artykule podjęto próbę odniesienia się do koncepcji rozpowszechniania marki, przedstawiając rozwiązania w zakresie budowania marek na wybranych przykładach z przemysłu kreatywnego. Naświetlono także inne problemy związane z zarządzaniem marką w tym przemyśle, które wymagają dokładniejszej analizy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** marka, rozszerzanie marki, przemysł kreatywny, przemysł filmowy, gry komputerowe, opowieść transmedialna