

## **Call for Chapters 'Stars and Franchises' Edited Collection**

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### **CALL FOR CHAPTERS: 'STARS AND FRANCHISES' EDITED COLLECTION**

**Edited by Sarah Thomas (University of Liverpool) and Mark McKenna (Staffordshire University)**

**Deadline for proposals: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

This edited collection seeks to examine the intersections between two significant media systems: stardom and the franchise. It will explore the convergences, tensions and inter-dependences that star-driven texts and franchise cultures have constantly negotiated within the entertainment industry, on a global, historical and multiplatform scale. It aims to analyse franchise sites and strategies as significant nexus where an understanding of stars is created, managed and interpreted, and to analyse the place and value of the star to media franchise production.

Whilst not aiming to be exclusively contemporaneous in its outlook, the collection intervenes at a moment where *Variety* has argued that 'IP, not actors, is the main attraction' (Rubin & Lang 2021). A particularly Western-centric perspective, this statement is informed by – among other things – the increased dominance of Disney and the Marvel Universe and their pursuit of seemingly endless franchised, multiplatform entertainment that subsume countless Hollywood A-listers into those texts and contexts. From the digital de-ageing of established performers in the MCU, the rise of a young generation of stars (like Tom Holland) fluent in the fragmented media markets that often typify franchise cultures, to noteworthy conflicts around contract negotiations and image rights, and star ownership stakes in their franchise

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IP (Keanu Reeves and *John Wick*), significant shifts are occurring around star image, labour and agency in the midst of the asset value of media licensing and intellectual property.

The star-franchise intersection represents a tension between distinct forms of media marketing. Whilst these ‘two modes of product differentiation may converge [they] do not easily coalesce’ with contemporary stars ‘under pressure to support franchise world development, not supplant it’ (Lomax 2020: 188). In intellectual property networks like franchises, ‘stardom and celebrity persona take a back seat, replaced by character brands’ (Johnson 2008: 217). And yet star identities, where the actor-signifier is foregrounded over the character-signifier, have persisted across franchise texts, industries and cultures. In the contemporary era, stars like Harrison Ford and Jamie Lee Curtis stand as authenticating devices to anchor franchises, conveying ideas of legacy and nostalgia or as a means of negotiating digital aesthetics (see Knee and Fleming [2020] and Golding [2021]). The video game FIFA has integrated playable star ‘icons’ in its recent editions, like David Beckham and Dua Lipa. Hindi superstar Salman Khan stars in the popular Tiger franchise, while Shah Rukh Khan owns major stakes in international sports franchises. Historically, star-driven franchise properties include Bing Crosby and Bob Hope’s ‘Road to’ series, Peter Sellers and The Pink Panther series, and Tom Mix’s films, comics and radio shows. Cultural icons like Mexico’s El Santo, the UK’s Norman Wisdom or Carry On stars, and Hong Kong’s Kwan Tak-hing are all associated with a variety of franchised entertainment. These brief examples show the different relationships that can exist between star and property that the volume wishes to examine, each revealing how repetition, remediation and re-interpretation of stars through franchise properties work to extend a star’s economic and cultural value.

The proposed edited collection will be submitted to Edinburgh University Press (EUP) as part of the ‘International Film Stars’ series. While the subject matter will undoubtedly attract scholars interested in exploring the increased dominance of franchise cinema as Hollywood’s primary mode of production, and this is something that we wholeheartedly encourage, we are also keen to hear from contributors interested in exploring franchises and stars that fall outside of the Anglo-American experience. If you would like to discuss your ideas, please feel free to get in touch.

Our collection seeks chapters that investigate the star-franchise intersection, including (but not limited to):

- Case studies of specific stars or franchise properties.

- Star-driven franchises.
- Franchises where the franchise IP exceeds that of the star(s).
- The paradoxical relationship between star identities and franchise texts where to support ongoing lives as multiplatform, historical entities, franchise properties often celebrate *and* dismiss the central star brands that exist within them.
- The impact of star persona and character creation *over time* where franchises provide a sustained environment to construct performance, image and identity through core texts, branded marketing content and other multiplatform extensions.
- Franchises in non-cinematic contexts
- Ideological and cultural readings of franchise stardom and star image.
- Absent or underdeveloped franchise stars and spaces, especially in terms of race, gender and sexuality
- Research that engages with questions of media industries and labour, thinking about what it means for star performers to work in a franchise environment.
- The impact of this on wider conceptions of star power and systemic entertainment infrastructures, economics, and legislations.
- Franchise stardom as product differentiation and marking/branding strategy, including promotional personae.
- The consideration of these (and other) issues within global, multimedia/multiplatform and historical contexts.
- Research that explores to what degree the contemporary Hollywood moment reflects broader uses and cultures in industries around the world and through different decades of production and cultural history.

Please send abstracts of 300 to 500 words and a brief biographical note of 150 words to [s.k.thomas@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:s.k.thomas@liverpool.ac.uk)

- Deadline for chapter proposals: 30 July 2022
- Notification of acceptance: 31 August 2022
- Full chapter submission: 31 June 2023

Further dates to be confirmed as the collection progresses.

### Editor bios:

Sarah Thomas is Senior Lecturer in Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool. She researches screen performance and industrial approaches to stardom, with a current focus on digital and immersive media and franchise production. She is the author of the monographs *Peter Lorre - Face Maker* (Berghahn 2012) and *James Mason* (BFI Bloomsbury 2018), and co-editor of *Cult Film Stardom* (Palgrave 2013).

Mark McKenna is Associate Professor of Film and Media Industries at Staffordshire University. His research focuses on media marketing and distribution, censorship and regulation and global media industries. He is the author of *Nasty Business: The Marketing and Branding of the Video Nasties* (EUP 2020) and the forthcoming *Snuff* (Liverpool University Press), and co-editor of *Horror Film Franchises* (Routledge 2021).

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of Millennial Leading Men', *Variety*, 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

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