



# **Selling the Silver Bullet: The Lone Ranger and Transmedia Brand Licensing (Texas Film and Media Studies)**

*Avi Santo*

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Originating as a radio series in 1933, the Lone Ranger is a cross-media star who has appeared in comic strips, comic books, adult and juvenile novels, feature films and serials, clothing, games, toys, home furnishings, and many other consumer products. In his prime, he rivaled Mickey Mouse as one of the most successfully licensed and merchandised children's properties in the United States, while in more recent decades, the Lone Ranger has struggled to resonate with consumers, leading to efforts to rebrand the property. The Lone Ranger's eighty-year history as a lifestyle brand thus offers a perfect case study of how the fields of licensing, merchandizing, and brand management have operated within shifting industrial and sociohistorical conditions that continue to redefine how the business of entertainment functions.

Deciphering how iconic characters gain and retain their status as cultural commodities, *Selling the Silver Bullet* focuses on the work done by peripheral consumer product and licensing divisions in selectively extending the characters' reach and in cultivating investment in these characters among potential stakeholders. Tracing the Lone Ranger's decades-long career as intellectual property allows Avi Santo to analyze the mechanisms that drive contemporary character licensing and entertainment brand management practices, while at the same time situating the licensing field's development within particular sociohistorical and industrial contexts. He also offers a nuanced assessment of the ways that character licensing firms and consumer product divisions have responded to changing cultural and economic conditions over the past eighty years, which will alter perceptions about the creative and managerial authority these ancillary units wield.

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