The Fashion of TV Show Formats

Over the last years, a vibrant global market for TV show formats has emerged. Newly created game show, casting, magazine, soap, telenovela, documentary and other formats are often sold to broadcasting stations in dozens of countries, leading to a worldwide multi-billion dollar trading industry. Except for trademark protection, TV show formats are difficult to protect by intellectual property rights. While the industry has developed some tools to combat format “piracy”, both industry and some scholars are arguing to increase intellectual property protection for TV show formats. This paper raises doubts on these arguments. The TV show format market is subject to fashion cycles and difficulties in assessing the future success of a new format. This paper shows how an emerging industry can benefit from an environment of low intellectual property protection and exemplifies this with data drawn from a database of the global TV show format trade.