EDITORIAL

TV FORMATS AND FORMAT RESEARCH: THEORY, METHODOLOGY, HISTORY AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

1 TV Format History

The history of television programmes sold internationally for local adaptation—today commonly referred to as 'TV formats' in both industry and academia—can be traced back to the 1950s. Until the 1980s and 90s, when the franchising of US, Australian and Dutch game show formats became popular in Europe, only a handful of formats were licensed, though, and even then the growing, but still negligible trade garnered little attention. This changed when format sales accelerated during the first decade of the new millennium due to the success of the new reality genre (e.g. *Big Brother, Deal or No Deal, Come Dine with Me*).[1] The enormous popularity of reality programmes with audiences across the world was unexpected. International demand for these cost effective and easy to localise programmes grew quickly, and the format business—helped by a sustained format promotion campaign—picked up in earnest.

In 2000, *FRAPA*, the Format Recognition and Protection Association, was set up and during the ensuing years references to TV formats increased notably in industry trade journals (e.g., *Broadcast, Variety*). Some, including Television Business International (*TBI Formats*), World Screen (*TV Formats*) and C21 (*Formats Lab*), launched dedicated format publications. In 2003 FRAPA launched the *Format Awards* and in 2007, to increase format visibility moved them to Europe's largest programme market, *MipCom,* and rebranded them as *C21/FRAPA Format Awards*. In 2009 C21FormatsLab and Mip organiser Reed Midem jointly launched, *MipFormats*, a dedicated two-day international

1 Jean Chalaby, 'At the Origin of a Global Industry: The TV Format Trade as an Anglo-American Invention', *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol 34, No. 1, 2012, pp. 36–52; Albert Moran, 'Global Television Formats: Genesis and Growth', *Critical Studies in Television*, Vol 8, No. 2, 2013, pp. 1–19; Andrea Esser, 'The Format Business: Franchising Television Content', *International Journal of Digital Television*, Vol 4, No. 2, 2013, pp. 141–58.

TV format showcase preceding *MipTV* in April each year. Today, nearly all kinds of genres are formatted, both scripted and un-scripted. However, game and talent shows, reality and factual entertainment still dominate the trade.

Europe was at the forefront of developing reality and factual entertainment programmes (e.g. *Big Brother, I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!, Farmer Wants a Wife*) and as a result moved into the international spotlight during the defining decade of the format business, with lasting benefits. Throughout the 2000s European countries had a combined market share of over 60% of exported formats, both in terms of revenues and the number of formats sold globally.[2]

Scandinavian countries produced a few of the early international reality format sales, most notably, *Survivor*. Europe's outstanding position is based on the strength and early innovations of Dutch *Endemol* (today **Endemol Shine Group**), along with the early international sales successes of various small British independent production companies, many of which have subsequently grown into 'super-indies.' Most importantly these include **All3Media**, RDF Media (now **RDF Television** and part of the Zodiak Media Group), **Shed Media** (now owned by Warner Bros. Entertainment) and Shine Group.[3] Together with London-headquartered and broadcaster affiliated **FremantleMedia**, **ITV Studios** and **BBC Worldwide**, the super-indies are responsible for maintaining the UK's place as format market leader. In 2014, UK-based companies still accounted for 30% of all non-scripted formats launched in two or more territories. The US was in second place (13%), the Netherlands in third place (10%).[4]

With Europe's significant historical and still dominant role in the format business, it seemed apposite to dedicate a VIEW issue to formats. Moreover, with the business still growing it seems important that television researchers continue to explore format history, theory, methodology and current trends.

2 History of Format Research

The history of academic format research dates back to the 1990s.[5] But like in industry circles, academic attention truly turned towards (licensed) formats only in the new millennium. Especially during the past 10 years format scholarship has grown and developed into a field of its own, producing several monographs,[6] format anthologies,[7] a **special issue on TV formats in *Critical Studies in Television***, and a growing number of individual journal articles.

The most common approaches to format study include historical research,[8] political economy and media management,[9] and cultural analysis, with the latter usually taking the form of an exploration of how 'the local' finds expression in format

2 Andrea Esser, **'Challenging U.S. Leadership in Entertainment Television? The Rise and Sale of Europe's International TV Production Groups'**, *International Journal of Communication*, Vol 10, 2016, pp. 1–29.

3 Jean Chalaby, *The Format Age. Television's Entertainment Revolution,* Polity Press, 2015a; Andrea Esser, 2016.

4 Esser, 2016.

5 For example, Michael Skovmand, 'Barbarous TV International: Syndicated *Wheels of Fortune'*, in Michael Skovmand and Kim Christian Schrøder, eds., *Media Cultures. Reappraising Transnational Media,* Routledge, 1992, pp. 84–103; Anne Cooper-Chen, *Games in the Global Village: A 50-Nation Study*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1994; Albert Moran, *Copycat TV: Globalization, Program Formats and Cultural Identity*, Luton Press, 1998.

6 Albert Moran and Justin Malbon, *Understanding the Global TV Format,* Intellect, 2006; Michael Keane, Anthony Y. H. Fung and Albert Moran, *New Television, Globalisation, and the East Asian Cultural Imagination,* Hong Kong University Press, 2007; Jean Chalaby, 2015a.

7 Albert Moran, ed., *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, Intellect, 2009; Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, eds., *Global Television Formats. Understanding Television Across Borders*, Routledge, 2012; Janet McCabe, J. and Kim Akass, eds., *TV's Betty Goes Global. From Telenovela to International Brand*, I. B. Tauris, 2013; Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, eds., *New Patterns in Global Television Formats,* Intellect, 2016.

8 Jean Chalaby, 2012, 2015a; Albert Moran, 'Global Television Formats. Genesis and Growth', *Critical Studies in Television,* Vol 8, No. 2, 2013, pp. 1–19; Heidi Keinonen, 'Cultural Negotiation in an Early Programme Format: The Finnish Adaptation of Romper Room', in Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, eds., 2016, pp. 95–108.

9 For example, Jean Chalaby, 'The making of an entertainment revolution: How the TV format trade became a global industry', *European Journal of Communication*, Vol 26, No. 4, 2011, pp. 293–309; Jean Chalaby 2015a; Ted Magder, 'Television 2.0: The Business of American Television in Transition', in Murray and Ouellette, eds., *Reality TV*, pp. 141–64; Paul Torre, 'Reversal of fortune? Hollywood faces new competition in global market trade', in Oren & Shahaf, eds., 2012, pp. 366–381; Esser, 2013 and 2016.

adaptation,[10] comparing adaptations,[11] or evaluating formats.[12] Some scholars focus on particular markets and their context, often mixing economic and cultural analysis.[13] More recently format researchers have begun to focus on less frequently formatted genres, including scripted[14] and children's,[15] as well as format audiences.[16]

Theoretically no consensus has yet been found on what exactly is a TV format and how it should be understood. In his recent monograph, Jean Chalaby helpfully assembles four definitions to highlight different aspects: TV Format as *licensed remake, recipe*, *method of production* and *proof of concept*.[17] But scholars more interested in cultural analysis, like Joseph Straubhaar, Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, have argued that economic based definitions are too narrow.[18] For a more nuanced historical and theoretical understanding of TV programme adaptation and imitation, they contend, generic adaptations in the form of textual characteristics, production practices and audience address—all of which can also be found in unlicensed appropriations—also need to be considered.

Methodologically, too, formats, which are global in nature, raise challenges. The world is a big place. Markets and their contexts vary hugely in economic, cultural, technological and policy terms; and the enormous growth in distribution platforms and changing consumption habits, too, seem to make it ever more difficult to approach format phenomena holistically. The complexity is augmented by the fact that formats are highly commercialised television products, yet undoubtedly possess (often great) cultural significance, both locally and transnationally. Finally, there are numerous sites of negotiation and adaptation and countless reasons for making individual changes in the adaptation process. In short, if we truly want to understand formats there are a lot of things to be considered.

10 For example, Fien Adriaens and Daniel Biltereyst, 'Glocalized Telenovelas and National Identities: A "Textual Cum Production" Analysis of the "Telenovela" *Sara*, the Flemish Adaptation of *Yo soy Betty, la Fea*', *Television & New Media*, Vol 13, No. 6, 2012, pp. 551–67; several contributions in McCabe and Akass, eds., 2013; Neiger, Motti, 'Cultural Oxymora: The Israeli Idol Negotiates Meanings and Readings', *Television & New Media*, Vol 13, No. 6, 2012, pp. 535–550; and Joost de Bruin, 'NZ Idol: Nation Building Through Format Adaptation', pp. 223–241; Erica Jean Bochanty-Aguero, 'We Are The World: *American Idol*'s Global Self-Posturing,' pp. 260–281; Lauhona Ganguly, 'Global Television Formats and the Political Economy of Cultural Adaptation: *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* in India', pp. 323–45, all in Oren and Shahaf, eds., 2012.

11 For example, Lothar Mikos and Marta Perrotta, 'Travelling Style: Aesthetic Differences and Similarities in National Adaptations of *Yo Soy Betty, la Fea*', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol 15, No. 1, 2012, pp. 81–97; Bianca Lippert, *Telenovela Formats. Localized Versions of a Universal Love*, SV Sierke Verlag, 2012; Edward Larkey, 'Transcultural Localization Strategies of Global TV Formats: *The Office* and *Stromberg*', in Moran, ed., *TV Formats Worldwide*, pp. 187–201; Sharon Sharp, 'Global Franchising, Gender and Genre: The Case of Domestic Reality Television', in Oren and Shahaf, eds., 2012, pp. 346–365; Amir Hetsroni, 'The Millionnaire Project: a Cross-Cultural Analysis of Quiz Shows from the United States, Russia, Poland, Norway, Finland, Israel, and Saudi Arabia', *Mass Communication & Society,* Vol 7, No. 2, 2004, pp. 133–156.

12 For example, Eggo Müller, 'Unterhaltungsshows transkulturell: Fernsehformate zwischen Akkomodation und Assimilation', in Andreas Hepp and Martin Löffelholz, eds., *Transkulturelle Kommunikation,* UVK, 2002, pp. 456–73; in Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, 2012: Vinicius Navarro, 'More than Copycat Television: Format Adaptation as Performance', pp. 23–38; Eddie Brennan, 'A Political Economy of Formatted Pleasures', pp. 72–89; Michael Keane, 'A Revolution in Television and a Great Leap Forward for Innovation? China in the Global Television Format Business', pp. 306–323; Simone Knox, **Reflections from Media Across Borders: The Creative Potential of Adaptation,**' 2012; Claudio Coletta, 'The Hybrid Status of Global Television Formats', in Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, 2016, pp. 35–46.

13 For example, in Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, 2016: Keane and Ma, 'The Social Contexts of Format Adaptation: Remaking Formats to Fit in China', pp. 203–2016; Sharon Shahaf, 'Decentring Innovation: The Israeli Television Industry and the Format-driven Transnational Turn in Content Development', pp. 245–262.

14 Jean Chalaby, 'Drama without drama: The late rise of scripted TV formats', *Television & New Media*, Vol 17, No. 1, 2016, pp. 3–20.

15 For example, Aaaron Calbreath-Frasieur, 'Localizing Sesame Street: The Cultural Translation of the Muppets', in Andrea Esser, Miguel Á. Bernal-Merino and Iain Robert Smith, eds., *Media Across Borders. Localizing TV, Film and Video Games*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 99–112; in Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, 2016: Heidi Keinonen, 'Cultural Negotiation in an Early Programme Format: The Finnish Adaptation of Romper Room', pp. 95–108; Milly Buonanno, 'Medea's Children: The Italian Version of The War of the Worlds', pp. 81–94; Jeanette Steemers, 'Formats and Localization in the Children's Audiovisual Sector', pp. 157–170.

16 For example, in Karina Aveyard, Albert Moran and Pia Majbritt Jensen, 2016: Annette Hill, 'Sense of Place: Producers and Audiences of International Drama Format The Bridge', pp. 281–294; Andrea Esser, Pia Majbritt Jensen, Heidi Keinonen and Anna Maria Lemor, 'The Duality of Banal Transnationalism and Banal Nationalism: Television Audiences and the Musical Talent Competition Genre', pp. 295–310; Elisa Giomi and Marta Perrotta, 'The Voice of Queer Italy: The Politics of the the Representation of GLBTQI (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersexual) Characters in Italian Talent Shows and Their Reception in Online Discussions', pp. 311–326; Miriam Stehling, "From Localisation to Translocalisation: Audience Readings of the Television Format Top Model," in Critical Studies in Television, Vol 8, No. 2, 2013, pp. 36–53.

17 Chalaby, 2015a.

18 In Oren and Shahaf, 2012: Joseph Straubhaar, 'Telenovelas in Brazil: From Traveling Scripts to a Genre and Proto-Format both National and Transnational', pp. 148–177; Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, 'Introduction: Television Formats – A Global Framework for TV Studies', pp. 1–20; Tasha Oren, 'Reiterational Texts and Global Imagination: Television Strikes Back', pp. 366–381; Tasha Oren, 'On the Line: Format, Cooking and Competition as Television Values', *Critical Studies in Television*, Vol 8, No. 2, 2013, pp. 20–45.

3 This Issue

This issue hopes to make a further contribution to dealing with the methodological and theoretical challenges and to filling some of the gaps left in format research to date. The exploratory contributions by Heidi Keinonen and Edward Larkey, Landry Digeon and Ibrahim Er critically reflect on issues of format methodology. In "Television format as a site of cultural negotiation: Studying the structures, agencies and practices of format adaptation," Keinonen attempts to bridge the chasm between textual analyses of individual format adaptations, which often focus nearly exclusively on culture and cultural explanations, on the one hand, and research concerning the global format trade, which foregrounds economic arguments at the expense of cultural considerations, on the other. Drawing on structuration theory and media industry research she proposes that we should study formats as complex sites of cultural negotiation. This requires that we study the various levels of television culture with their multiple impact factors. Moreover, in order to be able to do so it requires a multi-method approach.

Larkey, Digeon and Er's innovative contribution to format methodology consists in a digital toolbox, which the three authors have developed for comparing TV Formats and measuring transnationalism. The tools they introduce are aimed at collating quantitative data based on temporal parameters of episode or genre structure, content, sequencing and narrative structure. Generating data this way allows us to compare the different dimensions of adaptations in a much more scientific, quantifiable way. It also allows us to establish adaptation typologies, useful for classifying all kinds of appropriations and detecting trends and deviations.

Jolien van Keulen's contribution looks at the glocality of programme aesthetics and the role that stylistic programme elements play in format localization. Textual format analyses, this young scholar rightly notes, often focus on content adaptation. However, there is little research into aesthetics. Using the Dutch and Australian versions of *Farmer Wants a Wife* for a comparative case study she explores and assesses competing theoretical arguments that have been made, on the one hand, for an inevitably transnationalising television aesthetic, and on the other, a persistent place-culture specific aesthetic.

Cecilia Penati attends to another gap in format research, the role of formats on digital niche channels. Exploring Italian digital channels targeting women, she finds that first they rely heavily on international factual entertainment formats and secondly there is an intriguing pattern and usage, involving the combination of UK, US and domestic versions. Using the reality documentary, *Don't Tell the Bride*, Penati demonstrates how international and domestic versions are used alongside each other and how they differ. This is a deliberate choice, to satisfy differing uses and gratifications: the international versions offer romanticism and escapism; the domestic adaptation both representations of Italy and self and practical advice on how to arrange a low budget traditional wedding. Moreover, the use of multiple versions helps fill programme schedules and promote the programme brand.

Two further exploratory contributions are concerned with business practice and branding. In "Meet the Predators: The Branding Practices behind *Dragons' Den, Shark Tank*, and *Höhle der Löwen*" Sabine Baumann and Ulrike Rohn use the popular *Dragons' Den* format to explore the intricate co-branding relations and extensive brand extensions that increasingly define international commercial TV programming. Michael L. Wayne uses *The Bridge* (the US adaptation of the Danish-Swedish series *Broen*/*Bron*) to argue that the brand identity of a cable channels is central to understanding the success or failure of European television formats with American audiences. The autistic, female protagonist of the show, he maintains, was a poor fit for FX, a channel whose target audience is 18–49 year-old white men. Even more than Penati and van Keulen, Wayne rightly highlights the significance of the target audience, which all too often is ignored in format scholarship.

In the 'discovery section,' Paola Savini and Merav Schiffmann both take an in-depth look at musical talent shows. Savini explores the popular Spanish music format *Operación Triunfo* (RTVE-Telecinco, 2001–2011), arguing that it worked well both commercially and socially and therefore can be seen as both "a shining example of a good communication project" and as possessing the perfect balance between the global and the local. Schiffmann's contribution focuses on the Israeli format *Rising Star*, which flopped in Europe and internationally in 2014 and 2015 despite great international interest and expectations.

Schiffmann, who is one of our two industry contributors, worked with Keshet Broadcasting, the home of *Rising Star*, for ten years as Head of Innovation, New Media Research and Global Audience. Keshet is an interesting company as it has shown how a company from a relatively small or marginal television market can, through a policy of developing format sales, become a global player. Keshet's drama *Hatufim* (Prisoners of War) was adapted into the Fox/Showtime hit *Homeland*, and more recently another drama, *The A Word*, was remade in a BBC version. Schiffman's critical, in-depth analysis of the development, rapid international rollout and eventual failure of *Rising Star* provides us with a rare insider account and fascinating insights into how much research and development (R& D) as well as promotion go into the creation and sale of an international format, and how easily commercial success can fail to materialise despite the best efforts and prospects.

Our second industry contribution sees Takeshi Murakoshi turning to Europe in search for explanations why his home country has only played a limited role in the global format business to date despite Japan's television market being the second biggest in the world. Asking industry executives by means of questionnaires and interviews, he finds that impeding elements include not just the unique 'variety show' presentation style of Japanese light entertainment, but also the lack of dedicated format personnel and Japanese-style business practices that hamper international sales. Changing business practices and structure, introducing flying producers, and learning by buying foreign TV formats, are the solutions he recommends.

John Ellis, Andrea Esser and Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano

Biographies

John Ellis is Professor of Media Arts at Royal Holloway, University of London and formerly a TV documentary producer. He leads the ERC funded **ADAPT** project. He is the author of *Visible Fictions* (1982), *Seeing Things* (2000) and *Documentary, Witness and Self Revelation* (2012). He is chair of the British Universities' Film and Video Council (BUFVC) and past vice-chair of both the subject association MeCCSA and the producers' organisation PACT.

Andrea Esser is Principal Lecturer in Media and Communications at the University of Roehampton, London, and Director of the AHRC-funded **Media Across Borders** (MAB) network. Her research interests revolve around media internationalization and transnationalization, media management, and the globalization of culture. Recent work considers transnational television audiences; transnational TV production networks; and the TV format phenomenon– the growth of the format market, patterns of flow, formats' role in production and scheduling, and the complexities of local adaptations. Before joining Roehampton University, she worked in media consulting and publishing, and lectured at Goldsmiths and other London universities. In 2014/15 she spent six months as a guest researcher at Aarhus University, Denmark.

Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Málaga (Spain). His recent publications include *El Encendido Analógico* (Ed. Alfar, 2014), and contributions to the edited collections *After the Break: Television Theory Today* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013) and *Popular Television in Authoritarian Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2013). He is principal investigator of the project: "Audiences abroad. Television memory and reception habits of Spanish emigrants and European migrants in Spain", funded by Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (2013–2016) and coordinator of the 'Production and Media Contents' Section of the Spanish Association of Communication Research (AE-IC).