



Localisations in TV Formats

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Practitioners' words...

- *'making American versions larger than life than their humble British original version'*
- *'keeping male and female contestants separately in Muslim countries'; 'accidental hand holding is edited out'!*
- *'changing the prize money to reflect the affordability of a smaller Chilean market'.*
- *'toning down the sense of patriotism in a linguistically and culturally diverse nations such as India'.*

Cultural Localisations

- A localisation which format franchisors failed to observe, in Russia for example, is the societal value attached to aspirational talent shows. In a developing country still emerging from the shadows of state control tempered by rampant corruption, there was less societal value attached to individual glory by competitively winning a game-show, as would have been a prevalent trend in a Western European country. Russian audiences did not empathise with a format where contestants worked their way up the ladder by working hard; they empathised more with the participants who had *blat* or 'connections' (Pomerantsev, 2011). And thus, whereas *The Apprentice* failed in Russia, *Survivor* did not – a show based on physical difficulties and humiliation at the hands of the establishment.
- Aligning gender roles as per culturally acceptable thresholds in a certain territory is an important localisation. E.g. Latin American telenovelas selling in Europe may need to change scripts! More difficult when the fictional format flow is reverse (due to lesser liberal religio-cultural moores in the Latin region).

Cultural Localisations

- Fremantlemedia's '*Hole in the Wall*' debuted in 2008. Franchised to more than 26 countries in its first year of production. Its origin was a daytime programme segment from Fuji TV of Japan and had developed it into a full-fledged light-hearted, '*played for laughs*' format which acted as a '*vehicle for comedy*' in which celebrities played for points in a non-competitive manner. Fox Studios bought the rights for the US franchise and created it as a serious played-for-money competition, '*a game of sport, athleticism and competition*', where audiences from the street could compete for a \$100,000 prize. The essence of the show was lost on audiences and the US audiences did not accept this localisation. The US version of this format lasted for only 3 episodes!
- The concept of prizes or prize money given to winners of competition based formats is different in different countries. '*Idols*', being a singing talent search at its core, usually awarded recording contracts from a group aligned music recording company (or a sponsoring partner) as the prize for winning a series of the show. But, in territories where recording companies do not exist, innovative prizes had to be instituted. Specifically, in the pan-Arab region, where there is a strong culture of singers singing at the parties of influential and rich people, the prize was modified – '*Superstar*' winners were put in touch with concert promoters and this acted as an incentive for format contestants.

Visual Localisations

- *“I have been in situations with third party formats where the owner’s format bible specified down to the pantone colour number and I went to Brazil and they said they didn’t do those colours – they were very yellow and very green. The format owner did not shift and it was one of the reasons why the format did not get made as the broadcaster did want to alienate their audiences”.* [Flying Producer of a large British format distributor]
- Many territories tend to translate format titles that they buy. For example, in China they do a part Chinese and part English title for the same format – this helps to explain the brand values of the format in the local Mandarin dialect while also indicate an association to the original format such that audiences see it as a rightfully franchised version. Further still, being seen by audiences as a rightfully franchised version from abroad can also work as a mark of quality in some territories.

Nationalistic Localisations

- *“We had to change things like the title as these were not suitable in some countries. In Russia, the word is still understood in religious terms. In Germany, the nearest translation to it was considered ‘Führer’. Plus we couldn’t use it in Arabic, hence it was called ‘Superstar’ in the pan-Arab region.”* [Flying Producer of a large British format distributor]
- The Arabic version of Idols ‘*Superstar*’ was made in Beirut by a Lebanese broadcaster but was shown across pan-Arabia, from Jordan to Saudi Arabia. There was no opportunity to use on screen nationalistic fervour, as available in other territories, as a tool to emotionally engage audiences across the region. On the contrary, the franchisees had to keep nerves in control and manage their PR efforts deftly when they had Iraqi and Kuwaiti contestants on the same show. At one point during this show, angry Lebanese protesters took to the streets when it emerged that the winner of the first series was a 19 year old Jordanian woman!

Operational Localisations

- The British format, Hell's Kitchen, was localised in the USA from a scheduling point of view. In the UK, there is an acceptability of the audiences to watch strip scheduled programmes where Hell's Kitchen was run for every single night for 2 weeks. The American franchise made it into a 'once a week' format over several weeks keeping in mind the viewing habits of Americans.
- 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' does not equate to a million in every currency! In some it is a relative small amount of money where the more acceptable version is 10 million!
- *"Flying producers accommodate changes which will suit the buyer's budget, their requirements, and their infrastructure and so on. In Estonia, which is a smaller market, with formats such as Farmer Wants a Wife, we allowed less number of farmers to compete or less number of intended wives to compete – that's got to do with the size of the television market and how many episodes we think the format will be sustained for. With shows such as 'Price is Right' we allow them to make a half hour show instead of a 1 hour show and so on."*
[Flying Producer of a large British format distributor]

Types/ Categorization

- Cultural
- Visual
- Nationalistic
- Operational

Open to an alternative form / nomenclature of categorization... any ideas?

Case Studies

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Case Studies

Presented here are interview based video case studies of the exploitation and protection strategies of three successful TV formats developed by FremantleMedia - Idols, Got Talent and Hole in the Wall.

Idols

'Idols' has been one of the most successful television formats in the world. Its local versions have aired over 129 series in over 42 territories. In the USA, American Idol is consistently the No.1 series with a peak audience of over 37 million viewers. Further, Idols is the highest rated series ever in the Netherlands since the start of commercial television in 1989. The final of Idols in the Czech Republic was watched by over one third of the population! The global number of votes for Idols has now exceeded three billion!

[The Exploitation of Idols: A case study](#) (Kretschmer & Singh, 61pp)

