



I Want to Change My Life: Can Reality TV Competition Shows Trigger Lasting Career Success?

Barrie Gunter

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Competition talent shows have been among the most popular on television in the 21st century. The producers of these shows claim to give ordinary people extraordinary opportunities to change their lives by showcasing a specific skill leading to a new career trajectory. Most participants will claim that they entered to get a big break and to develop a career they have always dreamed of. To what extent do these shows deliver on such promises? Following through what happens to leading contestants in singing, entertainment, modelling, cooking and business entrepreneur competitions, this book shows that few go on to achieve lasting success in their chosen career. Many return to obscurity or to their previous lives. Some enjoy a low level career in the new direction delivered by the competition they entered. Just a few become truly successful. The pop and entertainment themed contests have discovered just a handful of major pop stars and entertainers out of many hundreds who have taken part after the initial auditions. Turning to the cookery or business franchises, there are few who go on to achieve lasting success in their chosen career. In these it is equally likely that the winners go on to enjoy success with media careers rather than as chefs or entrepreneurs. The most successful franchise of all is the fashion model competition (Next Top Model), which has yielded a high hit rate in terms of career success. What the analysis here also reveals is that it isn't only the winners who ultimately benefit the most from their appearances in these shows. Moreover, television picks its own stars by recruiting contestants because they are telegenic or have a good backstory as much as for their relevant talents. In this way, a talent hungry medium has co-opted these franchises to replenish its own needs.

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