Intellectual property is the most pervasive yet least understood way we regulate expression. Despite its importance to so many aspects of the global economy and daily life, intellectual property policy remains a confusing and arcane subject. Intellectual Property: A Very Short Introduction clarifies both the basic terms and the major conflicts surrounding this area of law, offering an introduction to copyright, patents, trademarks, and other forms of knowledge that are subject to global law and regulation. It illustrates the powers and limits of intellectual property, distilling the complex tangle of laws, policies, and values governing the dissemination of ideas, expressions, inventions, creativity, and data collection in the modern world.

1. How to read Starbucks, or why intellectual property matters more than you think

Intellectual property is a core function of the cultural elements from which we build meaning and of the commercial ecosystem that fuels so much human activity. Global companies, such as Starbucks and Coca Cola, have mastered both dynamics. Understanding the intellectual property ecosystem demands a full acknowledgment of the justifications for these systems of law and practice and an account of their consequences—both positive and negative. “How to read Starbucks; or why intellectual property matters more than you think” considers the justifications of intellectual property and its globalization and explains the main branches of “intellectual property” law: patent, trademark, copyright, and trade secret law.

4. Trademarks and the politics of branding

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Control of trademarks is control of language. Trademarks, whether they are images, logos, names, or phrases, are ubiquitous in most of the world. They make up a significant set of the symbols through which we construct our identities, affiliations, and associations. But control of trademarks is also important to us as consumers. Consumer protection and convenience justify these restrictions on expression. Trademarks, like other forms of intellectual property, also regulate commercial competition. “Trademarks and the politics of branding” outlines what trademarks do and don’t do and explains how they are different to copyrights and patents. Trademarks operate very differently and exist for very different reasons.