Negotiated Hegemony and Reconstructed Boundaries
in Alternative Media Coverage of Globalization

JACOB GROSHEK
Erasmus University Rotterdam

YING HAN
Iowa State University

This study examines the mediated public sphere regarding globalization as a product of both mainstream and alternative media. Implicit in many arguments about alternative media is that they uniquely engage audiences and enable counterhegemonic public spheres because alternative content is substantially different from mainstream content. This well-understood assertion about alternative coverage was tested through empirical analyses of alternative and mainstream media coverage of globalization. Findings indicate that alternative media coverage was more open to nonlegitimated sources in terms of access and recognition than mainstream media, but that the discursive space of alternative media was fragmented, nonresponsive and even *more* exclusionary than mainstream media. Implications for critical theories of alternative media and conceptualizations of a unitary public sphere are discussed.

　　　　Many studies have suggested that mainstream media, public or private, are often apparatuses not of democracy, but of hegemony (Bennett et al., 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Harcup, 2003; Howley, 2005; McChesney, 1999). Indeed, research into news organizations and routines has well-documented that "instead of promoting a 'marketplace of ideas,' in which all viewpoints are given adequate play, media neutrality can tend to privilege dominant, mainstream positions" (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 33). The cornerstone of such critiques is often focused conceptually on a fragmented public sphere cultivated by mainstream media that sets boundaries on legitimate controversy and deviance (Hallin, 1986). Numerous scholars have presented evidence that in this regard, mainstream media have subtly but effectively diminished citizens' civic abilities, established parameters on discourse, and thus stifled the progress of participatory democracy (Bagdikian, 2000; Bennett, 2005; Gitlin, 1980; Goodman & Goodman, 2004; McChesney, 1999; Zinn, 2003).

Jacob Groshek: groshekcj@hotmail.com
Ying Han: yinghan@iastate.edu
Date submitted: 2011–01–19

A now-deepening body of scholarship often points to nebulous amateur, audience-produced, or otherwise "alternative" media to fill a democratic void in the public sphere through unique reportage, online interaction, and citizen mobilization (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Goodman & Goodman, 2004; Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox & Shah, 2010). While there is abundant scholarship detailing the deficiencies of mainstream media content through studies of framing and indexing (Bennett, 1990; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006; Entman, 1989, 2004, 2007; Groshek, 2008), few studies explicitly integrate and discuss both mainstream media and alternative media (see Eliasoph, 1997, for an important exception). Similarly, there is a relatively small body of research on the content or effects of alternative media (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2003; Fuchs, 2010; Harcup, 2003), which makes generalizations on practical outcomes quite difficult.

Still, the underlying logic of the academic, and public, shift toward forms of alternative media is rooted in normative considerations regarding media pluralism, and an authentic public sphere fueled by informed, evenly accessible citizen debate (Fraser, 1993). In the Habermasian tradition, such alternative media would facilitate respectful engagement among individuals and consideration of competing positions in an arena where all views would have ample space, rather than engendering binary or one-sided public discourse. As with any idealized conceptions of public spheres (Schudson, 2009), and specifically those concerning globalization, this argument presumes that resolutions to instances of discrimination, inequality, and injustices could be achieved if only rational actors would listen to one another. This model is problematic in instances where it fails to fully consider important institutional interests, including those of media organizations and individuals, as well as the dynamics that structure social dilemmas such as globalization.

Moreover, though the term *alternative media* first appeared in the 1980s, scholars are still grappling with a definitive framework for determining what alternative media are. Analyses directed toward this purpose have found a close relationship between social movements and alternative media, and reported that alternative media are often produced by actors or participants from within social movements (Armstrong, 1981; Downing, 1984). Building on the social movement dimension of alternative media, scholars broadened the definition and codified issues of power resistance (Downing, 2001). Additional aspects were developed by Caldwell (2003), who defined alternative media in terms of function, and Rauch (2007), who argued that audiences' interpretations were important factors in defining alternative media. As technological developments, especially the emergence and popularization of the Internet, allowed alternative media to become more user-reflexive and interactive, definitions also began to weigh "the organization of the media production, which blurred the line between audience and producer and held important implications for the alternative media content" (Atkinson, 2010, p. 17) in the Internet era.

While researchers can agree and have observed that the term *alternative media* is slippery and defies simple definition (Atkinson, 2010; Atton, 2003; Rodriguez, 2001), the most common and straightforward definition for alternative media remains that it is "not the mainstream" (Comedia, 1984, p. 95). This general approach of defining alternative media by what they are not, instead of by what they are (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 13), however, catalyzed different perspectives of definition based more specifically on jointly integrating considerations of content, distribution, processes, and ideology. Along these parameters, Rauch (2007) summarized previous efforts to define alternative media and thereby proposed

four dimensions. First, the content provided is devoted to oppositional issues, events, and opinions not regularly advocated elsewhere. Second, the channel through which content is provided is not necessarily wide-reaching or one-to-many, such as photocopied flyers, podcasts, blogs or handmade buttons. Third, the sources featured in that content focus on including unofficial, poor, minority, and dissident voices. Fourth, the modes and values the organization espouses align with citizen participation, direct action, and collective decision-making (cf. Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008; Haas, 2004; Hamilton, 2000; Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004).

Synthesizing a good portion of this work and thus also creating a clear point of comparative distinction to mainstream media, Tsfati and Peri (2006, p. 170) wrote:

> In sum, mainstream media are the largest economic (public or private) corporations aiming to reach the widest possible audience and representing the central national value system and *Weltanschauung* ("worldview"). Nonmainstream media are simply all other news organizations that are available to the audience in a given society (which differ from mainstream media to varying extents).

For the purposes of this study, any components of nonmainstream media as defined by Tsfati and Peri are subsumed under the *alternative media* term. Through an empirically based analysis and the lens of globalization, this study thus compares alternative and mainstream media content to examine an important and increasingly relevant question: Just how different are these mediated public spheres from one another, and by which dimensions?

Alternative Media: Audience and Influence

The first scholarly look at alternative media is Armstrong's *A Trumpet to Arms*, which positions the underground press as a participatory medium and an antecedent of alternative media (1981). Alternative media were often operated by activists and the content was sensitive to social issues that were not addressed in the mainstream media at that time. Generally, alternative media coverage contributed considerably to the antiwar movement, counterculture, the environmental movement, the resurgence of feminism, and other social movements. Armstrong saw these early forms of alternative media serving as the "central nervous system" in the adversary culture. Through these media, ideas, values, and visions were transmitted and a shared language was created so that radicals and dissidents could communicate with each other and engage dominant culture in dialogue.

Later, Downing (1984) examined alternative media and further explicated the relationship between social movements and alternative media. He found that movement upsurges appear both to generate and to be stimulated by alternative media. Conversely, at times when such movements are at low ebb, the presence of alternative media also subsides. Considered together, these scholars demonstrated the crucial role of alternative media in social movements and provided a preliminary understanding of what constitutes alternative media—namely, print and radio content developed by social movement actors. Since these early studies, Downing (2001) and other scholars have incorporated theories of power and hegemony into the alternative media construct and argued that these social forces

give rise to a broad "tapestry" of alternative media in a variety of different forms. This previous research has thus expanded alternative media's function from that of operating primarily as a voice for social movements to fulfilling a larger role in cultivating forms of resistance, mobilization, and change that act upon hegemonic structures in society. Often, a form of expression that emerges through these processes can reciprocally lead to increased and more diverse alternative media production (Atkinson, 2010).

In explaining alternative media production processes further, Atton (2002) proposed a model of alternative and radical media that is not limited to political and "resistance" media, but that may also account for newer cultural forms such as zines, blogs, and other hybrid forms of online communication. His model privileges the transformative potential of the media as reflexive instruments of communication practices in social networks. He suggested that alternative media "typically go beyond simply providing a platform for radical or alternative points of view: they emphasize the organization of media to enable wider social participation in their creation, production and dissemination than is possible for mass media" (p. 25). In this conceptualization, alternative media are usually more sensitive to existing problems in the contemporary world and heralded to stand up against the hegemons at the top of the social hierarchy (Armstrong, 1981). In the case of the antiwar movement in the 1960s, alternative media first publicized this sentiment among people (Armstrong, 1981), which was later picked up and normalized by the mainstream media (Gitlin, 1980; Hallin 1986).

Importantly, Sayre et al. (2010) demonstrated a similar phenomenon in which user-created YouTube videos actually influenced the agenda of mainstream media on a given issue. Thus, when Bennett and his colleagues wrote that alternative media reach "few opinion makers or average citizens" (2004, p. 451), there is historical and contemporary evidence that its influence can indeed be observed. Perhaps just as important, the alternative media audience has generally grown in size and influence over the last several decades. For instance, the Annual Report on American Journalism in 2008 showed that alternative news weeklies grew from an audience of less than 3 million in 1989 to an audience of 7.5 million in 2007. These figures only represent weekly newspapers from the parent Association of Alternative Newsweeklies but are indicative of similar market trends in other forms of alternative media as well as alternative media that originate in other countries (Kim & Hamilton, 2010; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). Moreover, a desirable demographic of "influential" individuals has been shown to use alternative media (Atkinson & Dougherty, 2006; Roper, 2004), which cultivates its legitimacy by involving well-known "movement intellectuals" such as Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, and Robert McChesney.

This era of generally sustained growth in alternative media has increased significance when taking into account the notable and continued decline of the many mainstream news audiences across media platforms. In America, such declines were observed in newspaper and newsmagazine readership as well as network television viewership (Annual Report on American Journalism, 2010), and there is evidence that news audiences around the world are shifting their media uses (Livingstone, 2004). Although the reach of alternative media remains quite modest when compared to that of mainstream media, there is nonetheless good reason to believe that the various forms of alternative media are more widely available and accessed than ever before. In turn, it is thus all the more likely that alternative media may create a viable counterpublic sphere, or perhaps more appropriately, more numerous and individually smaller counterpublic sphericules (Gitlin, 1998).

Weighing the role of these discursive communities, Downey and Fenton noted that "Habermas recognizes not only the existence of alternative public spheres but also their capacity for challenging domination" (2003, p. 187). This type of active contestation was demonstrated by Mathes and Pfetsch (1991), who found that an issue initially picked up by German alternative media was later covered by the liberal and conservative mainstream media and eventually became part of the policy agenda. Other instances of alternative media entering mainstream coverage, such as the Salam Pax blog (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006), demonstrate a level of influence and an integrative continuum from radical to mainstream (Tsfati & Peri, 2006) such that alternative media coverage warrants consideration in discussions regarding democratic debate, media and policy agendas, and the construction of contemporary public spheres. This is especially true given that individuals skeptical of mainstream media are increasingly likely to use both alternative and mainstream media (Jakob, 2010).

Globalization Coverage and Media Production Models

The term "alternative media" originated in social movements, which are a collective attempt to promote alternative options of social life and economic activity, and to carry out, resist, or undo a social change (Porta & Diani, 2006). One of the most famous social movement protests is the antiglobalization movement (Chossudovsky, 2010). Globalization therefore is a germane and vital issue with which to examine the construction of mediated public spheres. The initiatives of the World Economic Forum, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, as well as the political policies of countries demand the attention of policy makers, influential economists, and high-ranking government officials. However, globalization is not simply an issue with governmental or corporate interests. It is an openly contested public issue that has attracted many citizen-activists, and the ideological disagreements are readily noticeable (Bennett et al., 2004; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Two of the most evident symbols of globalization are the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) typically held in Davos, Switzerland, and the World Social Forum (WSF), which normally convenes simultaneously in Porto Alegre, Brazil, as a grassroots oppositional alternative to the industrial-capitalist WEF event.

The World Social Forum, which has generally attracted approximately 100,000 participants each year, considers itself "an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, to formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action" (World Social Forum, 2002). On the other end of the spectrum is the well-funded and corporately endowed World Economic Forum, which is self-defined as "an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world. The Forum provides a collaborative framework for the world's leaders to address global issues, engaging particularly its corporate members in global citizenship" (World Economic Forum, n.d.).

Altogether, globalization and the efforts of the WEF and the WSF clearly rest at the socioeconomic intersection of politics, media, and activism. This study therefore examined coverage of globalization in both mainstream and alternative media where an existing body of research offers a point to begin examining both. Previous work has found a strong relationship between alternative media and

activism for social movements, in that alternative media can inform and mobilize activists who often comprise a large portion of the audience for alternative media (Rauch, 2007). Additional research has likewise demonstrated that only alternative media coverage frames social protest sympathetically, casts a positive light on activists, and encourages activist activities (Hertog & McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Concerning globalization, Kim and Weaver (2003) found that mainstream media from several countries tended to provide information from elite, powerful sources. This was especially true of countries that participated in International Monetary Fund programs, and less so with coverage from Malaysia, which did not participate in IMF programs. Similarly, in their analysis of mainstream globalization coverage, Bennett et al. (2004, p. 452) found that "public sphere management created the thin appearance of inclusiveness as journalists granted access to different groups, yet initiated no dialog between them." This lack of responsiveness thereby positions different globalization actors as competing in a zero-sum game rather comparing points of ideological and practical departure.

On the whole, previous research has demonstrated that mainstream media often fail to provide citizens with a substantive basis for participating in public deliberation—even in instances of debate—and there is a long history of mainstream media marginalizing protestors and activists (Bennett et al., 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Groshek, 2008; Hallin, 1986). In addition, it is now well-established that increasingly concentrated corporate media ownership has had deleterious effects on democratic debate. Several scholars, including McChesney (1999) and Bagdikian (2000), have noted that mainstream media implicitly (or sometimes explicitly) advocate the goals and concerns of large profit-seeking corporations. The monitorial democratic function of the mainstream media can thus be understood as a commoditized byproduct upon which media organizations sell audiences to advertisers (Dustin, 1999).

Studies of alternative media practices and content have generally reached different conclusions, though none specifically focused on globalization coverage. In one study, Harcup (2003) found that alternative media content frequently cited eyewitnesses and other individuals from the community who did not have considerable power or influence, and as expected, mainstream media cited police officers, magistrates, and other influential figures while virtually ignoring other non-legitimated community members. In other words, alternative media "offer a perspective from 'below' and to say the 'unspoken'" (Harcup, 2003, p. 371). Similarly, Salazar (2009) explored how Mapuche media makers in Chile have used media to mediate the political public sphere and communicate with the state neglecting their political participation. The themes of alternative media content have generally been found to more clearly represent community concerns, and Harcup and others (cf. Howley, 2010) have suggested that alternative media do, in fact, offer a counterhegemonic public sphere unique from that facilitated by the mainstream media.

Platon and Deuze (2003) evaluated the practice, ideology, access, and process of alternative media, specifically the Indymedia website. They found that Indymedia was a nearly completely open forum, yet retained some collective editorial decisions. They also found that while alternative media organizations were subject to many similar pressures of mainstream news outlets, alternative media have a commitment to transparency and open publishing. Similarly, Atkinson (2005) found consistent depictions of traditional and hegemonic forms of corporate power in alternative media content that originated from horizontal activist-producers. Despite these efforts and those of Atton (2002), Downing

(2001, 2003), and Fuchs (2010), which make it clear that the aims, processes, and nature of alternative media are fundamentally different from mainstream media, there still exists a dearth of empirical studies of alternative media content itself and even fewer inquiries that systematically compare alternative and mainstream media content.

In order to begin bridging this important practical and theoretical disjuncture, this study compares alternative and mainstream media coverage of globalization. This analytic comparison was based on the same terms of access, recognition, and responsiveness that Bennett and colleagues (2004) measured in *New York Times'* coverage of globalization. Here, alternative media content of globalization is directly compared to mainstream media coverage of globalization. Based on previous research (Armstrong, 1981; Pickard, 2006a), this study examines patterns of alternative coverage and counterhegemonic information flows as a collective media product. Downing (2001), prominently among several others, has argued that alternative media is radical and typically subversive in nature, which suggests that alternative media content should challenge the status quo and enable a counterhegemonic public sphere. It is therefore predicted that:

H1:   Alternative media will devote a greater percentage of its globalization coverage to activist issues than mainstream media coverage. Should this hypothesis be supported, the findings will concur with other research that suggests alternative media pay more attention to grassroots social activism, such as the antiglobalization movement. For example, Harcup (2003) found alternative media to favor "the powerless and marginal" as news sources, thus:

H2:   Alternative media coverage will include a greater percentage of protestors as sources for activist issues than mainstream media coverage.

H3:   Alternative media coverage will give more formal recognition of protestors as sources for activist issues than mainstream media coverage.

Downing (2003) also suggested that alternative media create a dialogue within and around members of social movements. This dimension of responsiveness is crucial for alternative media to facilitate not only dialogue but also balance among unique issue positions, interpretations, and reactions. Through open access and user contributions, alternative media provide a platform for members of subordinated social groups and create and circulate counterdiscourses in a manner true to the Habermasian ideal (Fraser, 1993). In doing so, it is expected that alternative media will respond directly in its coverage to the criticisms lodged against antiglobalization activism, since this would not only clarify the ideological position of a movement but also initiate the exchange of ideas on specific points of contention. Moreover, such responsiveness would fulfill the inclusive and nonhierarchical mission that is important to the process and structure of alternative media production. The last hypothesis thus advanced the following:

H4:   There will be more responsiveness in alternative media coverage of globalization where opposing viewpoints are addressed and responded to than in mainstream media coverage.

Methods

The methods of Bennett et al. (2004) were explicitly reproduced for this study, to best construct an even comparison of alternative and mainstream media content (as represented by *The New York Times*). Details of their processes and how these steps were reproduced in this study by following the same timeframes, search terms, and coding scheme follow below in turn. Re-employing the Bennett et al. approach allows any variance between alternative and mainstream content observed here to be directly attributed to actual differences, not different methods. A copy of the Bennett et al. codebook was graciously shared, and the replication of their coding scheme helps to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. Importantly, all findings of *The New York Times'* globalization coverage are based on those of Bennett et al. (2004) and not independent coding beyond their work. The sample of alternative media was coded by the authors of this study based directly on the Bennett et al. coding guidelines to create an even comparison of mainstream and alternative media coverage of globalization.

Sample, Timeframe, and Unit of Analysis

The publication sample comprised articles from keyword searches of the phrases "World Economic Forum" and "World Social Forum" in the Alt-Press Watch in the ProQuest database, which includes more than 210 alternative newspapers, magazines, and journals. Though this database of course has limitations, such as not archiving online-only content or blogs, it remains the most complete alternative media dataset in terms of number of titles and geographic regions. One key benefit of relying on the Alt-Press Watch is that it stores content from actual alternative media organizations and not just single-person, self-published material. This feature is important because as Hamilton (2000) and Atton (2002) have noted, the organizational politics and what happens behind the scenes in producing alternative media is of particular importance when examining the actual alternative media product. As such, publications represented in the Alt-Press Watch generally adhere to more professional journalistic practices, such as accuracy and timeliness, but from a grassroots perspective and not necessarily with a profit initiative. As the description of the Alt-Press Watch database explains:

> Magazines and journals of the independent press such as *Broken Pencil*, which focuses on zine culture, *Dissent*, Solidarity's *Against the Current*, *The American Conservative*, *Left Curve*, *The Braille Forum* and *Earth First!* provide in-depth coverage of a broad range of critical issues confronting contemporary society, including environment activism, disabilities, public policy, and facets of the political spectrum. And alternative newsweeklies like *Eugene Weekly*, *Missoula Independent*, and *The Village Voice* offer non-mainstream perspectives on government, policy, and culture; report on local, national, and international issues; and cover hot-button topics like hunger, abuse, religion, and pop culture. (ProQuest, 2010)

The sample collected for this study was thus drawn only from titles archived in the Alt-Press Watch and was also limited to articles that appeared one week before, during, and one week after the World Economic Forum in 2001, 2002, and 2003. These are the exact same keyword search phrases and

timeframes used by Bennett et al. (2004), thereby constructing an alternative media dataset that can be effectively and evenly compared to their results of *New York Times'* (NYT) globalization coverage. Altogether, these keyword searches of the Alt-Press Watch yielded 54 articles from 26 separate publications. The unit of analysis was an article coded in its entirety, again following the methods of Bennett et al. (2004). Though this sample does not represent all possible alternative media content, nor does it account for all geographical or ideological disparities in coverage, it does constitute a topically representative sample of alternative globalization coverage using the same terms and timeframe as the data compiled by Bennett and his colleagues (2004). In addition, the Alt-Press Watch is the leading compilation of alternative media organizations that publish in both printed and electronic formats, and its full-text database features more than 670,000 articles dating from 1970 onward (ProQuest, 2010).

Coverage: Themes, Access, Recognition, and Responsiveness

Hypothesis 1 examined the various themes identified by Bennett et al. (2004) that appeared in each article. These themes were 1) organizational logistics, 2) activist issues, 3) business/economic development, 4) global civil society, 5) protest activity/police response/violence, 6) and style/culture/networking. Themes could overlap, and each article could include more than one theme. Hypothesis testing compared the number of themes in alternative media coverage, specifically activist issues, to the themes reported by *The New York Times* as determined by the Bennett et al. study.

Hypothesis 2 tested source attribution in coverage and expected alternative media to grant more access to nonofficial sources, specifically concerning activist issues. Here, coding was operationalized by examining "whether each activist issue reference was attributed to *WEF participants* or *protestors*. Sources not falling into either of the categories, such as academics or experts, were coded as *other*" (Bennett et al., 2004, p. 445). Participants at the World Social Forums that were held simultaneously in Porto Alegre, Brazil, were also coded as protestors, which is the same method used by Bennett and his colleagues in their study. The second hypothesis was tested by comparing the number of activist issues attributed to protestors in alternative media coverage to that of *The New York Times* reported in the results of Bennett et al.

Hypothesis 3 measured the extent to which protestors were recognized in alternative coverage of activist issues by any of these formal means of identification. All activist issue sources were coded for "the presence or absence of names, titles, or organizational affiliation" (Bennett et al., 2004, p. 446). This figure was then compared to similarly recognized protestors in mainstream coverage that Bennett and his collaborators found.

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 compared the extent of responsiveness in alternative media coverage to the amount that Bennett et al. (2004) observed in their study of *NYT* coverage—none. This measure was determined through close reading of all activist issues for instances of "exchanges in which one side's claims were presented to the other side for reaction" (ibid.). This coding process thus looked for any dialogue between WEF participants and antiglobalization protestors in alternative media coverage.

Reliability

Most coding techniques, such as those for access, recognition, and responsiveness, were straightforward ones that had virtually no interpretation. One author coded all of the articles in their entirety. The other author separately coded a random 26% of the articles. Intercoder reliability scores calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha are as follows: Theme = 0.77, Access = 0.78, Recognition = 0.78, and Responsiveness = 1.00. As noted by Frey, Botan and Kreps (2000), all of these figures demonstrate an acceptable level of agreement.

Findings

Before reporting on hypotheses, it is useful to observe some general trends and comparisons of alternative and mainstream (*NYT*) media coverage of globalization for the selected time periods. The search of the Alt-Press Watch in ProQuest for "World Economic Forum" and then separately "World Social Forum" from one week before to one week after the World Economic Forum in 2001 yielded nine articles. The same database search with the same terms and the corresponding timeframe for 2002 returned 28 articles, and the search for the relevant dates in 2003 resulted in 17 documents. It is thus rather clear that the alternative media sample used here provided fewer globalization articles than *The New York Times* over the same timeframes. When analyzed with identical search parameters in this study, one mainstream publication had far more articles concerning globalization (88) than did an alternative media sample (54) comprised from searching over 210 publications archived in the Alt-Press Watch.

There are other findings worthy of note when making this comparison. Although only 26 alternative publications had any articles concerning globalization, the search term results demonstrated some variance. As noted above, the databases were searched for the keyword phrases of "World Economic Forum" and "World Social Forum" separately. In the alternative media search reported here, 24 articles (44%) came up under *both* search terms. Compared to *The New York Times* search conducted by Bennett et al. (2004), where only two articles (2%) overlapped in this same fashion, it can be argued that alternative media were considerably more inclusive of both the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum in coverage. Along these lines, Bennett et al. reported that only eight articles were found when searching for "World Social Forum" in *The New York Times* via the LexisNexis database. In our search of alternative media, 35 articles were found using the same search terms. This noticeable shift between the samples presents some indication of different foci and viewpoints across *The New York Times* and alternative media coverage of globalization.

Hypothesis 1 expected that alternative media content would devote a greater percentage of its coverage to activist issues than *The New York Times*. Over all years, activist issues were a theme in 33 of the 54 (61%) alternative media articles included the sample. Compared to *The New York Times* coverage analyzed by Bennett et al. (2004), where activist issues were present in just 32 of their total sample of 88 articles (36%), this difference is statistically significant when analyzed with a simple difference of independent proportions test ($Z = 2.87$, $p < .01$). This hypothesis was therefore supported and it is apparent that when reporting on globalization, specifically the World Economic and the World Social

Forums, alternative media devoted a greater percentage of coverage (and more articles overall) to activist issues than did *The New York Times*.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that alternative media coverage would include a greater percentage of protestors as sources for activist issues than *The New York Times*. Following the analytical model of Bennett and colleagues (2004), coverage from the year 2002 was isolated for the purpose of constructing even comparisons along the specific conceptual lines of access, recognition, and responsiveness. This hypothesis specifically examined access and found that protestors registered 64% of all activist issues in alternative media coverage during that year. This percentage constitutes a significant increase ($Z = 2.57$, $p < .01$), in which protestors became a clear majority when compared to *The New York Times* coverage that similarly attributed activist issues to protestors (40%), as found in the Bennett et al. study.

This hypothesis was therefore also supported, but perhaps more interestingly, alternative media granted drastically less coverage on activist issues to WEF participants (5%) than did *The New York Times* (53%) as reported by Bennett et al. (2004). Altogether, the relationship between WEF participants and protestors in terms of coverage was strikingly distinct between *The New York Times* and alternative media, which was further shown by a statistically significant chi-square test (X^2 ($df = 2$, $N = 116$) = 32.48 $p < .001$). These results thus provide some evidence that alternative media coverage actually marginalized the access and voices of the elite and powerful WEF participants who dominated mainstream media coverage in favor of protestors who comprised a far less influential group. These relationships in coverage can be seen in Figure 1.
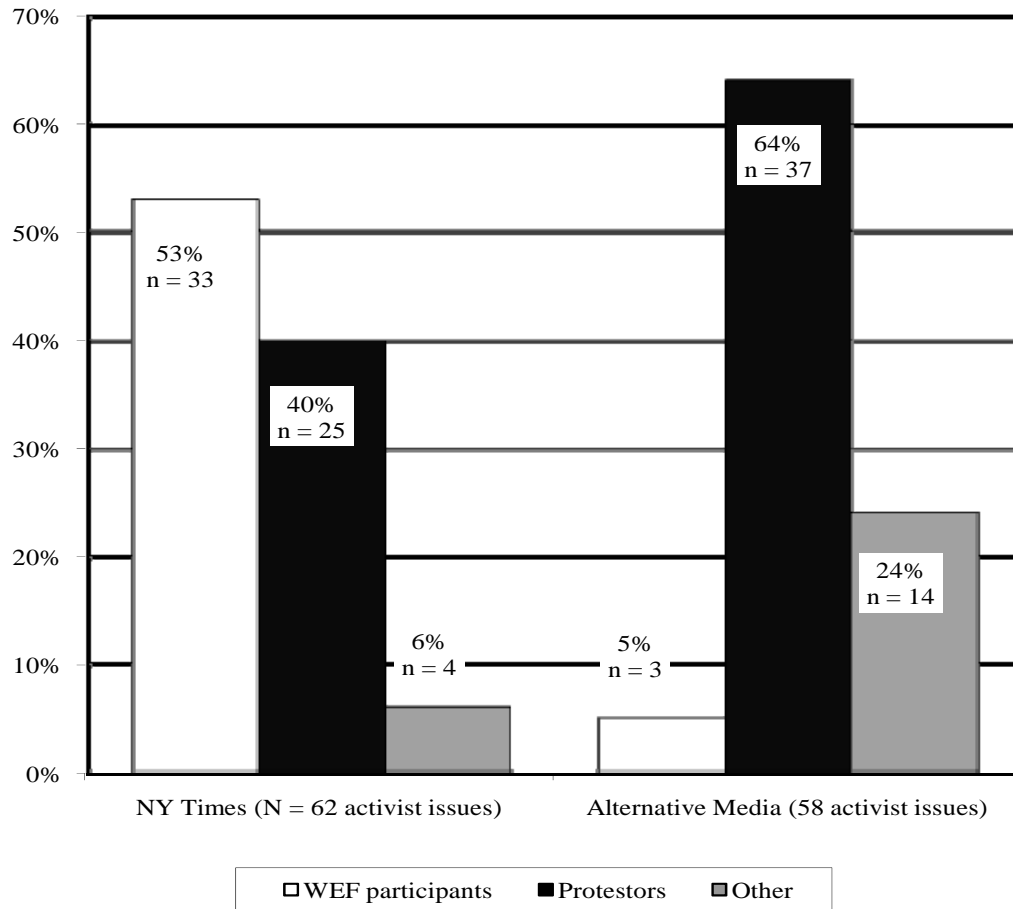
Figure 1. NYT and Alternative Media Source Attributions of Activist Issues in 2002 coverage.

Note: Four activist issues in the alternative media sample did not have a dedicated source type that could be identified.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that alternative media would give more formal recognition to protestors as sources for activist issues than *The New York Times*. The alternative media sample identified a name and a title or organizational affiliation for 65% of the protestors that were mentioned in activist issue coverage with an identified source; comparatively, the *NYT* identified protestors by name and title in just 23% of such coverage (Bennett et al., 2004). All but nine protestors were identified in alternative media coverage, which also adds support to this hypothesis. WEF participants were again shown to be quite marginalized in terms of frequency, but two out of three were identified sources. Altogether, alternative

media coverage recognized sources much differently than did the mainstream media, which was again statistically significant (X^2 ($df = 2$, $N = 78$) = 33.04, $p < .001$) and in the direction posed by Hypothesis 3. Figure 2 graphically charts these relationships.
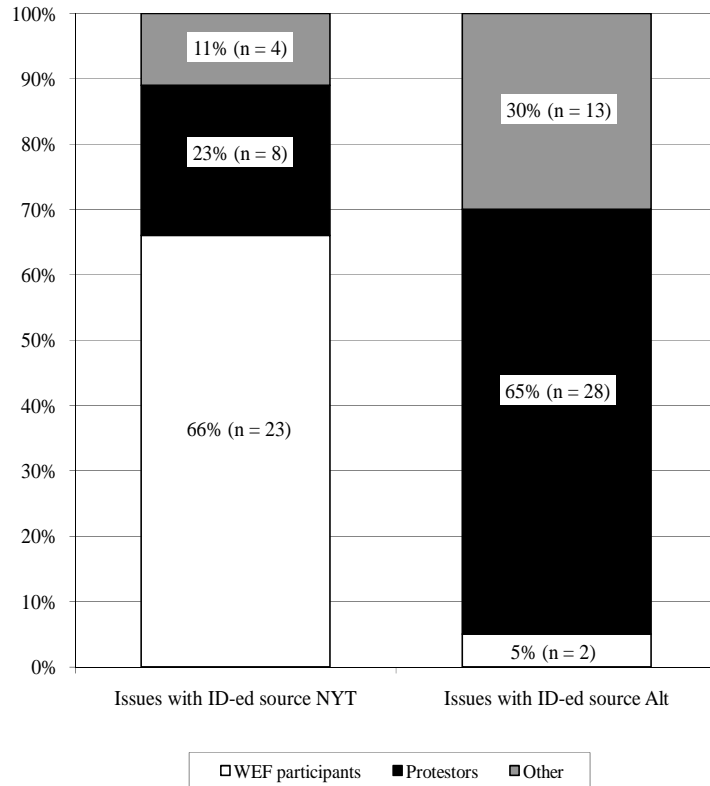
	The New York Times	Alternative Media
	(*N*=35 identified sources)	(*N*=43 identified sources)

Figure 2. **The New York Times** *Activist Issue Identified vs. Alternative Media Activist Issue Identified Sourcing Patterns in 2002 Coverage*

Based on these findings, alternative media seem to have presented an even more tightly bound sourcing pattern for activist issues than the *NYT* in terms of recognizable access, but in a manner that inverted the sociopolitical hierarchy regularly reproduced in mainstream media. Interestingly, the discursive public sphere constructed in alternative media coverage was even *less* balanced than that of the mainstream media.

The last hypothesis expected that there would be more responsiveness in alternative media coverage of globalization where opposing viewpoints are addressed and responded to than in *The New York Times.* Bennett et al. (2004) found no instances of responsiveness in *The New York Times*. In this sample of alternative media, we found no instances of responsiveness in coverage as well. This hypothesis was thus not supported and the notion of a more inclusive, ideologically diverse, and accepting nonhierarchical alternative mediated public sphere was somewhat diminished in a similar fashion to Pickard's findings of Indymedia (2006a, 2006b).

Discussion and Conclusions

To return to the key points of media pluralism and informed debate raised by Fraser (1993), the results of this study generally support the idea that alternative media create a viable counterhegemonic public sphere regarding globalization. This finding aligns with Harcup's (2003) finding that

> . . . alternative media may offer the possibility of subverting the dominant discourse by
> providing access to alternative voices, alternative arguments, alternative sets of 'facts,'
> and alternative ways of seeing, all of whose citizens may be able to use to engage
> critically with the output of mainstream media. (p. 371)

In this sense, alternative media were shown to offer an important venue for articulating the views, hopes, and claims of non-elite groups as well as contributing to a more robust exercise of democratic citizenship and civil liberties. The very distinct coverage of alternative media provided a much more diverse set of voices that are much more thoroughly covered than usual elite, powerful sources found in the mainstream press.

Of course, it has been well-documented that the close relationships between reporters and officials influence the tones and frames presented in mainstream media coverage (Bennett, 1990; Entman, 2004; Groshek, 2008). It is clear from this study that those reporting in alternative media sought protestors directly to compile information and accounts of protestors' views on globalization, which is starkly contrasted by mainstream media coverage and practices, much like Eliasoph's findings (1997). Not surprisingly, Bennett et al. (2004) found activist issues in *The New York Times* were addressed more frequently by WEF participants, and protestors themselves went unrecognized by name and organizational affiliation. However, though alternative media avoided an over-reliance on official sources, its coverage painted an equally one-sided version of events. While some issue diversity may have been present among the groups that were cited in alternative media coverage, they largely held similar antiglobalization goals, and since WEF sources were generally marginalized in alternative media coverage, no responsiveness between opposing parties, or ideas, was found. This phenomenon was also demonstrated in Atton and

Wickenden's (2005) research on *SchNEWS*, a UK activist paper that gives media access to "ordinary people," favors protesters, and challenges hierarchical sourcing routines. Much like this study, their findings raised concerns of overaccess of particular groups of sources.

The marginalization of official sources in alternative media is clearly a unique characteristic of alternative coverage that can be interpreted a number of ways. Given the large amount of coverage and deference that such powerful, influential sources have been shown to receive in mainstream media, additional representation in alternative media would be unwarranted even if framed oppositionally. This finding resonates with the work of Pickard (2006a, 2006b), who demonstrated the exclusionary practices of Inydmedia.org that silenced some opposing views that were primarily racist or sexist (though still archived as part of the Indymedia site). Given that his work was based on only one alternative media organization, but aligns closely with the findings offered here for some 26 alternative media outlets, there is good reason to extend his conclusions to a wider understanding of alternative media more generally.

Since most alternative media generally advocate a certain position that seeks to shift or subvert the dominant paradigm, objectivity and even-handedness are less of a priority. It may be argued, however, that news outlets—mainstream or alternative — should still cultivate democratic discourse on competing truth-claims so that citizens may be able to engage and understand issue positions (Fraser, 1993). Indeed, this mission is at the core of many alternative media organizations. Yet much like mainstream media, alternative media, as measured in the study on the topic of globalization, marginalized certain groups and provided *only* "nonresponsive" coverage. Thus, there seem to be few, if any, avenues for citizens to observe substantive debate about globalization policies between protestors and advocates.

One possible explanation for this somewhat unexpected finding is that both mainstream media and alternative media are ideologically constrained and thus fail to (re)construct any form of interactive discourse on competing claims between the protestors and WEF participants. Although the findings were largely expected and supported most of the hypotheses, this study delineates differences between alternative and mainstream media in terms of access and recognition that often have been taken for granted, or merely understood to be true. In so doing, the results observed here also found an identical lack of responsiveness in alternative and mainstream media coverage that was not only unexpected but also detrimental to most general conceptions of mediated discourse in the public sphere. As such, this study advances the understanding of how progressive elements of civil societies are constructed and how alternative media can support, inhibit, or, indeed, coincide with such self-determining public communication (Cunningham, 2001).

Some scholars have argued for a counterpublic sphere and rightly deduced that counterpublics must create their own communications when faced with a systemic exclusion from the mainstream media (Saeed, 2009). Indeed, the conceptualization of a unitary public sphere is difficult to sustain (Cammaerts, 2007; Huijser & Little, 2008). Gitlin (1998) conceived of numerous public "sphericules" interacting and competing with the dominant public sphere, which is an especially useful framework for dividing the counterpublic sphere into smaller and more viable units. These public sphericules act as a subset of civil society in which the logic of "democratic equivalence" is cultivated—and based on the patterns of globalization coverage observed in this study, alternative media provide precisely these crucial platforms.

Though not inclusive and possibly internally fragmented, counterpublic sphericules such as those noted here can be quite important to advancing competing ideas in societies (Kelly, Fisher & Smith, 2005).

Importantly, these findings should be delimited to debates and media coverage surrounding globalization in general and the WEF / WSF in particular. Different patterns of exclusion and fragmentation within alternative media content on this topic were key findings in this study. It remains to be determined, however, if these features are present only in alternative media organizations that publish both offline and online (such as those archived in the Alt-Press Watch) or if this is a more general pattern endemic to alternative media as a whole. Nonetheless, given the results reported here and the possibility for similar patterns of self-selection and bonding rather than bridging to take shape in other potentially alternative online and social media formats (Wojcieszak, 2010), circumspection is prudent regarding the political agency of alternative media content.

While the idealized Habermasian public sphere may not be easily achievable, evidence presented here suggests that competing and intersecting public sphericules may well advance important arguments upon which diverse actors can engage with one another. That is, through the practical integration of media consumers that monitor a spectrum of mainstream and alternative media content (Jakob, 2010), such as that facilitated by interpersonal networks and online media, it is increasingly possible that content fragmentation need not lead to audience fragmentation. When considering alternatives to overcome the limitations reported in alternative media coverage shown here, it seems clear that not one ideal source of news and information is readily available for citizens. That is, an informed citizenry remains an active effort that requires exposure to multiple media and information channels. Though the barriers for media participation have been lowered considerably (Bucy, 2005), there remains no democratic substitute for individual open-mindedness, civility, and a willingness to explore other viewpoints. Alternative media content thus fulfills an important role in expanding parameters for expression, debate, and mobilization, but its purpose is best served as a complementary rather than singular point of media access.

Mediated public information has now morphed into an even more contested and socially integrated arena for making sense of the world. Part of this process has resulted in increasingly more media producers and content, with smaller and more specialized audiences (Anderson, 2006; Tewksbury, 2005). In this study, there is evidence that the mediated public sphericules that proceed from these trends are not only *managed* but also *negotiated*. In addition, the results reported here identify that multiple public sphericules exist in media systems and publics at large. Considering the globalization debate as presented in alternative media, the parameters and participants of these public sphericules were differently organized than in mainstream media but the boundaries remained just as evident.

References

Anderson, C. (2006). *The long tail.* New York: Hyperion.

Annual Report on American Journalism. (2008). Circulation growth in alternative newsweeklies. Retrieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/2008/newspapers-intro/alternative-weeklies/#alternative-weeklies

Annual Report on American Journalism. (2010). Overview: Key findings. Retrieved from http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2010/overview_key_findings.php

Armstrong, D. (1981). *A trumpet to arms: Alternative media in America.* Boston: South End Press.

Atkinson, J. (2005). Towards an understanding about complexities of alternative media: Portrayals of power in alternative media. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication, 6*(1), 77–84.

Atkinson, J., & Dougherty, D. S. (2006). Alternative media and social justice movements: The development of a resistance performance paradigm of audience analysis. *Western Journal of Communication*, *70*(1), 64–88.

Atkinson, J. (2010). *Alternative media and politics of resistance: A communication perspective.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative media.* London: SAGE Publications.

Atton, C. (2003). What is 'alternative' journalism? *Journalism*, *4*(3), 267–272.

Atton, C., & Wickenden, E. (2005). Sourcing routines and representation in alternative journalism: A case study approach. *Journalism Studies, 6*(3), 347–359.

Bailey, O., Cammaerts, B., & Carpentier, N. (2008). *Understanding alternative media.* New York: Open University Press.

Bagdikian, B. (2000). *The media monopoly.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Bennett, W. L. (1990). Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of Communication, 40*(2), 103–125.

Bennett, W. L., Pickard, V., Iozzi, D., Schroeder, C., Lagos, T., & Caswell, C. (2004). Managing the public sphere: Journalistic construction of the great globalization debate. *Journal of Communication, 54*(3), 437–455.

Bennett, W. L. (2005). *News: The politics of illusion.* New York: Pearson Longman.

Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2006). None dare call it torture: Indexing and the limits of press independence in the Abu Ghraib scandal. *Journal of Communication, 56*(3), 467–485.

Bucy, E. P. (2005). The media participation hypothesis. In M. S. McKinney, L. L. Kaid, D. G. Bystrom, & D. B. Carlin (Eds.), *Communicating Politics: Engaging the Public in Democratic Life* (pp. 107–122). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Caldwell, J. (2003). Alternative media in suburban plantation culture. *Media, Culture & Society*, 25, 647–667.

Cammaerts, B. (2007). Jamming the political: beyond counter-hegemonic practices. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *21*(1), 71–90.

Cammaerts, B., & Carpentier, N. (2006). The Internet and the second Iraqi war: Extending participation and challenging mainstream journalism? In N. Carpentier, P. Pruulman-Vengerfeldt, K. Nordenstreng, M. Hartmann & B. Cammaerts (Eds.), *Researching Media, Democracy and Participation* (pp. 159–177). Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press.

Chossudovsky, M. (2010, September 26). "Manufacturing Dissent": The anti-globalization movement is funded by the corporate elites. Retrieved from http://www.countercurrents.org/chossudovsky260910.htm

Comedia (1984). The Alternative Press: The development of underdevelopment. *Media, Culture & Society, 6*, 95–102.

Couldry, N., & Curran, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world.* Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield.

Cunningham, S. (2001). Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 4*(2), 131–147.

Downey, J., & Fenton, N. (2003). New media, counter publicity and the public sphere. *New Media & Society, 5*(2), 185–202.

Downing, J. (1984). *Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication*. Boston: South End Press.

Downing, J. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Downing, J. (2003). Audiences and readers of alternative media: The absent lure of the virtually unknown. *Media, Culture & Society, 25,* 625–645.

Dustin, W. K. (1999). *Toward and ethic of citizenship: Creating a culture of democracy for the 21st Century.* Lincoln, NE: Excel Press.

Eliasoph, N. (1997). Routines and the making of oppositional news. In D. A. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Social meanings of news: A text-reader* (pp. 230–254). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Entman, R. (1989). *Democracy without Citizens: Media and the decay of American politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Entman, R. (2004). *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Entman, R. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 163–173.

Fraser, N. (1993). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In C. J. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109–142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (2000). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Fuchs, C. (2010). Alternative media as critical media. *European Journal of Social Theory, 13*(2), 173–192.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the New Left.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gitlin, T. (1998). Public sphere or public sphericules?. In T. Liebes & J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual, identity,* (pp. 168–175). London: Routledge.

Groshek, J. (2008). Coverage of the pre-Iraq War debate as a case study of frame indexing. *Media, War & Conflict, 1*(3), 315–338.

Goodman, A., & Goodman, D. (2004). *The exception to the rulers: Exposing oily politicians, war profiteers, and the media that love them.* New York: Hyperion.

Gurevitch, M., & Blumler, J. (1990). Political communication systems and democratic values. In D. Graber (Eds), *Media Power in Politics* (pp. 24–35). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Hallin, D. (1986). *The uncensored war.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hamilton, J. F. (2000). Alternative media: Conceptual difficulties, critical possibilities. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 24*(4), 357–378.

Harcup, T. (2003). 'The Unspoken – Said.' The journalism of alternative media. *Journalism, 4*(3), 356–376.

Haas, T. (2004). Alternative media, public journalism and the pursuit of democratization. *Journalism Studies, 5,* 115–121.

Hertog, J. K., & McLeod, D.M. (1995). Anarchists wreak havoc in downtown Minneapolis: A multi-level study of media coverage of radical protest. *Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs, 151*, 1–48.

Howley, K. (2005). *Community media: People, places, and communication technologies.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Howley, K. (Ed). (2010*). Understanding community media.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Huijser, H., & Little, J. (2008). GetUp! For what? Issues driven democracy in a transforming public sphere. *Transformations Journal, 16.* Retrieved http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_16/article_06.shtml

Jakob, N. G. E. (2010). No alternatives? The relationship between perceived media dependency, use of alternative information sources, and general trust in mass media. *International Journal of Communication, 4*, 589–606.

Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2004). New media and Internet activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to blogging. *New Media & Society, 6*(1), 87–95.

Kelly, J., Fisher, D., & Smith, M. (2005). *Debate, division, and diversity: Political discourse networks in Usenet newsgroups.* Paper presented at the Online Deliberation Conference, Palo Alto, CA.

Kim, E. G., & Hamilton, J. W. (2006). Capitulation to capital? *OhmyNews* as alternative media. *Media, Culture & Society, 28*(4), 541–560.

Kim, S., & Weaver, D. (2003). Reporting on globalization. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies, 65*(2), 121–144.

Livingstone, S. (2004). The challenge of changing audiences: Or, what is the audience researcher to do in the age of the Internet? *European Journal of Communication, 19*(1), 75–86.

Mathes, R., & Pfetsch, B. (1991). The role of the alternative press in the agenda-building process: Spillover effects and media opinion leadership. *European Journal of Communication, 6*, 33–62.

McChesney, R. (1999). *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

McLeod, D. M. & Hertog, J. K. (1999). Social control, social change and the mass media's role in the regulation of protest groups. In D. Demers & K. Viswanath (Eds.) *Mass Media, Social Control and Social Change: A Macro-Social Perspective* (pp. 305–332). Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

Örnebring, H., & Jönsson, A. M. (2004). Tabloid journalism and the public sphere. *Journalism Studies, 5*, 283–295.

Pickard, V. W. (2006a). United yet autonomous: Indymedia and the struggle to sustain a radical democratic network. *Media, Culture & Society, 28*, 315–336.

Pickard, V. W. (2006b). Assessing the radical democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, technical, and institutional constructions. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 23*, 19–38.

Platon, S., & Deuze, M. (2003). Indymedia journalism. A radical way of making, selecting, and sharing news? *Journalism, 4*(3), 336–355.

Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social movement: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

ProQuest. (2010). Alt Press Watch. Retrieved from http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/alt_presswatch.shtml

Rauch, J. (2007). Activists as interpretive communities: Rituals of consumption and interaction in an alternative media audience. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29, 994–1013.

Rodriguez, C. (2001). Fissures in the mediascape: An international study of citizens' media. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Roper. (2004). Influentials and culture executive summary. Retrieved from http://aan.org/files/inf.pdf

Saeed, S. (2009). Negotiating power: Community media, democracy, and the public sphere. *Development in Practice, 19*(4-5), 466–478.

Salazar, J. (2009). Making culture visible: The mediated construction of a Mapuche nation in Chile. In C. Rodriguez, D. Kidd, & L. Stein (Eds.), *Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere* (Vol. 2). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Sayre, B., Bode, L., Shah, D., Wilcox, D., & Shah, C. (2010). Agenda setting in a digital age: Tracking attention to California Proposition 8 in social media, online news and conventional news. *Policy & Internet, 2*(2), 7–32.

Schudson, M. (2009). A family of public spheres. Social Science Research Council Essay. Retrieved from http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/schudson-a-family-of-public-spheres/

Tewksbury, D. (2005). The seeds of audience fragmentation: Specialization in the use of online news sites. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 49*, 332–348.

Tsfati, Y., & Peri, Y. (2006). Mainstream media skepticism and exposure to sectorial and extranational news media: The case of Israel. *Mass Communication & Society, 9*(2), 165–187.

Wojcieszak, M. (2010). "Don't talk to me"—Effects of ideologically homogeneous online groups and politically dissimilar offline ties on extremism. *New Media & Society, 12*, 637–655.

World Economic Forum. (n.d.). World Economic Forum homepage. Retrieved from http://www.weforum.org

World Social Forum. (2002). Charter of principles. Retrieved from http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=19&cd_language=2

Zinn, H. (2003). *A people's history of the United States 1492 – present*. New York: HarperCollins.