

## Alternative Media

The media is our link to the world. They are one of the main ways in which we understand what surrounds us. Being well informed is a necessity for all those who wish to live and act in an informed and responsible way. This is why the media have a fundamental role to play, both in terms of information and socialization. In the making of our thoughts, representations and social imagination, they occupy a place at least as important as school and family. And yet, the media sometimes tend to act as distorting mirrors. In some countries, they are clearly instruments in the service of power and are displayed as real propaganda tools. But in others, which nevertheless advocate media independence as a *sine qua non* condition for the freedom of expression that States must defend, information can also be undermined by other forms of control, much more insidious or unconscious.

Faced with hyper-media companies, which had become the central actors of liberal globalization through their economic and ideological weight, it became necessary to create a “fifth power”, making it possible to oppose a real civic force. The aim is to democratize the media by acting on their practices and the messages they convey, but also to implement new information and communication production mechanisms.



Inevitably, the number of alternative media has exploded in recent decades, proving that the need for multiple and different information is real. Information that reflects social movements and struggles, of course, but also detonates them. Alternative media focus on many topics from angles rarely covered by mainstream media, including online. These topics cover democracy, transparency, good governance, justice, freedoms and fundamental rights. They produce information, fund analyses and investigations through a variety of formats. Generally, their content is produced through direct contact in the field and through contributions from activists, whistleblowers and citizens involved in public affairs, especially when the latter suffers from dysfunctions. It is a democratic structure that presupposes a different organisational form from commercial companies, allowing more freedom of decision for editorial teams working collectively, horizontally.

Refusing to allow citizens' voices to be confiscated, alternative media seek to diversify their sources, take into account the local dimension and pay particular attention to those they never talk about, to the excluded, to the grey areas and to the subjects or geographical areas that are constantly forgotten. They take care to avoid the pitfalls of traditional media, for example with regard to male over-representation and the tendency to invite women only on the occasion of the international day dedicated to them once a year, relegating gender equality issues to the status of seasonal subjects... Alternative media aim to increase the power of media expression, unlike traditional media, which tend to invite the same people, the “good clients” considered as the only “experts” in the field, and to give NGOs few places, for example.



This concentration of power of expression in the public media explains in particular the phenomenon of “starification” of certain political elites, to the detriment of lesser-known elected officials or other civil society actors.

Alternative media are at odds with these dominant trends by relaying information that is not widely disseminated and sharpens critical thinking. The flow of information is intended to be multidirectional: the flow of ideas and opinions should not only take place from North to South, it should promote the dissemination of information from the South and stimulate North-South and South-South communication. Finally, some alternative media are intended to reflect social movements, relaying the demands and anti-globalization advances that are rarely covered by the media. This is the case of Nawaat, for example, which was originally created to defend fundamental freedoms, freedom of expression and democracy in Tunisia. Today, it constitutes an impressive cyberactivist network of decentralized citizen sites.

To conclude, the main argument justifying the creation of an alternative to central media (the monopolization of information and its distribution channels by professionals dominated by economic or political interests) has weakened because of the increasingly easy accessibility of people. The reality of online information practices is quite different, however, even if it is indisputable that the effects of the Internet on the information economy are significant. The development of new participation practices has made it possible to broaden the closed circle of authorized speakers, which nevertheless remains dominated by selective and socially unequal logics...



From this point of view, the media play a fundamental role. In some countries, they are clearly instruments in the service of power, happily relaying the speeches of political leaders and their propaganda. In others, media independence is considered essential but is not always respected and more insidious forms of control frequently threaten freedom of expression. More and more companies are becoming owners of multiple sources of information (newspapers, television, radio, etc.). As they have interests to defend, often economic, they do not easily allow analyses or information to pass through that would harm them. Certainly, such media will have little tendency to develop citizens' critical thinking skills or inform them about alternative lifestyles.

Fortunately, there are many different media - alternative, independent, associative - where you can find rich and plural information that still help to open minds and stimulate debate. From this point of view, the Internet offers a privileged space but, due to the digital divide, its use remains very uneven. Indeed, while an increasing proportion of people in the world have access to the new media, those who, due to a lack of resources or knowledge, cannot use them are still numerous.

