

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO ALTERNATIVE AND COMMUNITY MEDIA

The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media provides an authoritative and comprehensive examination of the diverse forms, practices and philosophies of alternative and community media across the world.

The volume offers a multiplicity of perspectives to examine the reasons why alternative and community media arise, how they develop in particular ways and in particular places, and how they can enrich our understanding of the broader media landscape and its place in society.

The 50 chapters present a range of theoretical and methodological positions, and arguments to demonstrate the dynamic, challenging and innovative thinking around the subject, locating media theory and practice within the broader concerns of democracy, citizenship, social exclusion, race, class and gender.

In addition to research from the UK, the US, Canada, Europe and Australia, the *Companion* also includes studies from Colombia, Haiti, India, South Korea and Zimbabwe, enabling international comparisons to be made and also allowing for the problematisation of traditional – often Western – approaches to media studies.

By considering media practices across a range of cultures and communities, this collection is an ideal companion to the key issues and debates within alternative and community media.

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Edited by Chris Atton

First published 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

ISBN: 978-0-415-64404-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-71724-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Goudy
by Taylor & Francis Books

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INTRODUCTION

Problems and positions in alternative and community media

Chris Atton

The focus of this *Companion* is on media that bypass the usual channels of commercial production and distribution, and that are most often organised and produced by 'ordinary' people, local communities and communities of interest. It is primarily interested in social and cultural practices that enable people to participate directly in the organisation, production and distribution of their own media, and how these media are used to construct and represent identity and community, as well as to present forms of information and knowledge that are under-represented, marginalised or ignored by other, more dominant media. However, rather than consider alternative and community media as entirely separate, it is also necessary to contextualise them in terms of those dominant, 'mainstream' practices and to examine hybrid and disputed forms of media that exhibit characteristics from both sets of media practices, such as the use of citizen journalism and user-generated content by professional media organisations.

The *Companion* addresses the social, cultural and political value of alternative and community media: how they offer democratic access to the media and how local and global notions of citizenship may be developed through them. It examines issues of social inclusion and community-building initiatives, and explores how amateur and non-professional media producers establish their own alternative frames of participation, political power and creativity. The *Companion* also addresses questions of epistemology and the construction of knowledge, the challenges to expert culture and professionalisation through alternative forms of social and cultural capital, and how alternative media contribute to critiques of media power.

The study of media power is concerned with discourse and with how discourses are constructed. Discourses matter because it is through them that we understand the world; they are social processes and as such are subject to the same conditions as other social processes: they are produced by people working together in groups, communities, organisations and institutions. Discourses are simultaneously ways of living in the world and modes of representing the world. One outcome of media discourse is the text: a news report, an interview, an analysis. Another outcome is the selection and arrangement of texts. A further outcome is the organisation and structuring of those engaged in media discourses: producers and audiences; journalists and readers; managers and consumers. Media discourses with the furthest reach (national and international broadcasters, global media companies) tend towards the hegemonic: their modes of representation have become naturalised and legitimated.