

KHAZAR UNIVERSITY

School of: Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of: Journalism

Specialty: International Journalism

MASTER THESIS

**Theme: Understanding of TED as an Alternative
Media**

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Baku-2013

Abstract

This study aims to examine the political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of TED as alternative media. TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is a non-profit global conference media organizer that curates formatted brief speech called TED Talk and presents it in its offline conferences as well as publishes in online platform. TED has a global network that has spread rapidly through TEDx, a replication of TED-like conference by local communities worldwide. This social phenomenon makes TED as the contemporary illustration of the latest development of alternative media.

Earlier literature studies on alternative media from Atton (2002) and Downing et al. (2001) focus on alternative media's role as civil society that radically opposes the dominant power of the state, market and mainstream media. This civic role is important in providing alternative voices in democracy. Castells (2008) argues that the advancement of communication technology in globalization process has extended alternative media's civic engagement to global level and empowered the community to higher access and participation in alternative media. Bailey et al. (2008) surmise these developments into four approaches that see alternative media: first, in serving the community; second, as an alternative to mainstream media; third, as part of civil society; and fourth, as a rhizome-like hybrid media. This study utilizes these literature references along with the four frameworks above to present holistic view in understanding TED as alternative media.

By studying TED, I seek to expand these theoretical discussions by looking at how alternative media build sustainable civil society movement through dynamically incorporating dominant values in achieving its alternative media goals. This hybrid approach also affects alternative media's ways in serving the community, promoting democracy and prompting social changes.

The methodology of this study is ethnography. Since TED has two social settings of offline conference and online media platform, the ethnographic approach of this study is conducted in both setting. I gathered field data through participation and observation on TEDx ‘Tehran, event and interview with the founders as well as online observation on TED.com, TED Talk videos, TED’s forums and third party documents on TED. I analyzed the data with the help of coding tools and discussed the findings within the framework of literature references.

The key findings of this study show that TED’s political, economic, social and cultural characteristics are contingent, rhizome-like and transhegemonic. These characteristics project TED as alternative media that adopts dominant practices such as commercialism and controlled editorial system and maintaining elitism to reach paradoxically its civic goals of democratizing knowledge sharing and making social changes. TED also builds flexible partnership with the market and mainstream media and is not entirely counter-hegemonic. Although TED maintains a centralized authority in policy making, its relationship with its communities is based on rhizome-like network which strives towards semi-hierarchical access and participation, multiple replications by community and heterogeneity of its community across geographical and cultural borders. However this hybrid strategy of alternative media brings up threats of over-commercialization, elitism within the community, and ideological bias.

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I. INTRODUCTION

TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is currently a social phenomenon within alternative media. It is a non-profit media organization that develops and curates global conferences, and represents an alternative to traditional channels for spreading ideas. TED gains popularity through TED talks, which is the core media product (called TED Talks) presented at its conferences. These talks are concise editorialized speeches by experts and inspiring speakers (who are known by the moniker TED Speakers). TED Speakers vary from world leaders, international dissidents, local heroes, and budding scientists; all of whom share diverse, groundbreaking, and empowering topics that raise cultural and social buzz, as well as intellectual enthusiasm.

Peter Aspden (2010, July 23) from the *Financial Times* titled his article on TED as “The Conference of Cool” to reflect the growing acceptance and prestige of TED as an alternative medium for people to connect, build networks, and spread ideas that can bring about positive changes to the world. Aspden interviewed TED’s European director Bruno Giussani on this subject. According to Giussani, TED’s success in becoming an alternative media platform is dependent on the failure of the mainstream media in promoting innovation and social change:

They are less and less relevant in most of their daily coverage. The news cycle is dominated by bad news, cynicism and looking backward instead of forward. I am constantly amazed by how much space is taken by what has happened in the past. (Aspden, 2010, July 23)

Giussani’s statement stems from TED’s main mission to realize its famous maxim “ideas worth spreading” by disseminating innovative and alternative ideas. Traditionally, the alternative ideas conveyed in TED Talks were only enjoyed by the selected audience attending the TED conference. Later on, TED

decided to launch the recorded TED Talks to the Internet so that wider audience could watch and spread these lectures for free. TED eventually decided to launch recordings of TED Talks on the Internet so that a wider audience could watch and spread these lectures for free. This move democratized access to the information in its knowledge product (TED Talks) to a growing global community. TED did this by leveraging the network society and Internet technologies in a public space that Manuel Castells (2008) describes as, “the new global public sphere” (p. 90). Since then, videos of TED Talks have become viral with more than 500 million views (“Is TED Elitist?": “Talks”, n.d.). Along with its other various humanitarian projects, TED aids its communities in replicating its production methods and culture, resulting in TEDx: a TED-like event that is independently organized by the public (“About TEDx”, n.d). Its acclaimed achievements also highlight the endless polemic debate of whether TED, as an alternative media, is an objective and democratic platform without conflicts of interest.

Posting these video lectures online and build a User-Generated Content (UGC) platform may have generate a democratic perception towards TED, but it is necessary to dissect critically the power struggle between TED and its community on the community’s access and participation.

Criticism of TED being commercial or elitist, and its adherence to “a certain uniformity of view – broadly liberal and occasionally self-congratulatory” persistently rises (Aspden, 2010, July 23). Since the content becomes free and publicly accessible, TED monetizes its TED Conference by exploiting its social differentiation (if not discriminatory) appeal of valuable networking between affluent and influential people who are being tightly curated to the conference. Sarah Lacy (2010, February 9) argues that it segregates TED according to social and economic class as it constructs “hierarchy of parties...a clique within a clique” in its community. TED’s main annual conference is still exclusive and

serves as a medium for social distinctions of the elites rather than simply an intellectual forum for learning and sharing knowledge. Similar antagonistic remark came from the former speaker and famous philosopher, Nassim Taleb. Taleb (2010) accused TED as a “monstrosity that turns scientists and thinkers into low-level entertainers, like circus performers” (p.336).

In the interview with *The New York Times*, Malcolm Gladwell, a favorite TED speaker admitted, “Certainly more people have read that story as a result of my talk being online. If I can get people to read my stuff more, that’s all a plus” (Tedeschi, 2007, April 16). In other words, TED is unapologetically a lucrative media business. Aside from being an alternative communication and educational channel, TED is a marketplace for the “specially selected” TED speakers to promote their ideas to the world as well as for the audience to connect with the right people for business opportunities.

TED also profits from the global sponsorship enterprise on its website and from TED conferences (Tedeschi, 2007, April 16). Even though TED is a non-profit organization with a social mission for enhancing democracy without commercial purposes – TED’s funding is heavily mixed with commercialism:

These critiques raise important questions on alternative media’s civic roles, and how its existence cannot be separated from the political economy of the state and commercial market systems, as well as the social practices of difference and domination.

I seek to explore this phenomenon surrounding TED and identify TED’s characteristics as alternative media in order to have deeper understanding of alternative media philosophies and practices. I surmise that a study on TED can make a crucial contribution to scholarship and activism addressing the latest development of contemporary alternative media in three ways. First, it provides understanding on how TED carries out its civic roles in serving community and democracy against its power play with the state, market, and mainstream media.

The findings can be political reflections on whether the alternative media mediate the democratic gaps and empower the marginalized, underrepresented, and underprivileged groups in their power struggles against hegemonic values.

Second, it examines how TED builds its sustainable, non-profit media organization using corporate-like management without compromising its social mission and alternative identity. The results on this subject could provide practical knowledge on the alternative media's operational and economic management.

Finally, it evaluates how TED's curatorship and rather centralized authority influence the democratization process of its media production, distribution and reception, as well as the level of access and participation enjoyed by its global network of communities. The outcome of this discussion can illustrate contemporary alternative media's power relationships with its communities, and the involvement of the community in defining alternative media's identity and works.

I developed these three ways of understanding TED as alternative media into the following research questions and sub-questions:

Research questions:

1. What are the political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics of TED as alternative media?
2. How do TED's characteristics and practices reflect the latest trends in alternative media?

Sub questions:

1. How does TED balance the power struggle between the state, market, and mainstream media in serving the community and sustaining its media organizations?
2. How does TED empower its global social network to access and participate, as well as facilitate communal identity building?

3. How does TED work as a civil society that is promoting social change?
4. What are the threats and challenges TED faces as alternative media?

The results of this study can provide positive supplements to scholarly research on alternative media by contributing new insight into alternative media phenomenon such as TED. It also provides a critical reflection for TED, its community and general public in understanding alternative media.

This study is comprised of five main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of TED as alternative media and the implications it brings to alternative media development on which I base the research questions. In this chapter, I explain that the goal of this study is to explore TED's characteristics as alternative media which will provide analytical empirical picture of contemporary alternative media.

On the second chapter, I present the literature studies around alternative media to build a conceptual framework that supplies theoretical guidance, substance and foundation in interpreting the findings I have gathered from the field. I correlate different literature works about the development of alternative media from Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008), Downing with Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) and Chris Atton (2002). Manuel Castells' (2008) works on global public sphere and network society complement this literature assemble by highlighting alternative media's role as global the civil society in network society. Bailey et al. (2008) also provides four frameworks I utilize to dissect TED as alternative media by looking at TED in serving the community, in opposing mainstream media, as part of civil society and the hybrid contexts.

In the third chapter, I explain the methodology of the study, how I collect and analyze data on TED. In the fourth chapter, I present the findings from the field and frame them into four aspects of alternative media from Bailey et al. (2008) as well as highlight the challenges TED faces as alternative media. In the fifth chapter, I discuss these findings further under the conceptual framework. Then, I

conclude the characteristics of TED and how these findings contribute to the trend of alternative media.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical framework provides an important scientific basis that complements the data I gather to analyze TED's characteristics as alternative media. It also helps me to ascertain whether TED manages to fuel and materialize its plethora of democratic ideas into positive social changes, despite the criticisms of TED as being elitist, a promoter of hegemonic values, and of its amalgamation with the commercial market system. I start this discussion by presenting the transitions of alternative media's identity in Western media history, and contextualize alternative media in the contemporary media ecosystem. Then, I summarize it into literature tools that I use to dissect TED as an alternative media phenomenon.

In understanding alternative media, Bailey et al. (2008) claim that it is imperative to perceive media in its economic, political and cultural settings. It supplies, "theoretical and intellectual support for their identities and practices" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 4). That is why they (2008, p.5) formulate multi-theoretical approach that sees alternative media through different political, economic, social and cultural perspectives.

I consider this multi-theoretical approach integral as a core conceptual framework in building a thick description analysis of TED's political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics. Not only does Bailey et al.'s approach provide a holistic and critical view on contemporary alternative media, but it is also rooted within the historical analysis of the latest developments in alternative media (especially from the Western history). Consequently, I include in the first subchapter the shifting definition of alternative media's characteristics over the years. This literature discussion is mainly referring to the works of prominent alternative media researchers such as Downing et al. (2001) and Chris Atton (2002). Both studies examine how initially alternative media can be defined based on its radicalism or its opposition against the mainstream media and

hegemonic power. But most importantly, they also introduce alternative media's shifting and fluid identity.

It is also imperative to see the changing identity of alternative media through its role as part of civil society, since providing an alternative platform for civic duties is a key justification for the existence of alternative media (Bailey et al, 2008). I refer to Manuel Castells' work on the network society to shed light on how the civil society works in the contemporary, globalized environment. Castells emphasizes how the emerging network society and the Internet influence alternative media's potential to become a global civil society that advocates democracy, levels down the hierarchy of power, and empowers the audience. Barber's (1984) examination on democratic participatory models also supports Castells' view on how alternative media like TED can provide a representative platform to voice a global audience's aspirations and real participation in democracy.

On the downside, Bailey et al (2008) warns of the danger of alternative media becoming another promoter of dominant discourses and cultures, which is reflected in social accusations over TED's plausible relation to elitism, commercialism and ideological bias.

2.3. FOUR APPROACHES TO ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The previous subchapters provide a preliminary background for dissecting Bailey et al.'s (2008) four theoretical approaches towards alternative media. Bailey et al. (2008) claim the complementary frameworks allow us to define different aspects of alternative media. This enables us to see a comprehensive picture of TED as alternative media activism, not only from a binary perspective of antagonism (alternative versus mainstream media) or a one-sided conversation on participation and community-based civil society, but also its complex

relationship as ‘trans-hegemonic media’ with both state and market (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 5).

The figure below maps the general perspectives in understanding the four approaches. The first two approaches are media-centered and discuss alternative media activities from the perspective of the media producers in relation to the community and mainstream media. The latter two approaches come from a society-centered perspective that sees alternative media’s potential for the betterment of society and democracy by being part of a civil society, and balancing the power play against/with the hegemonic institutions. The first approach provides analysis from an essentialist perspective where the role of alternative media is in building its own communal identity, and providing access and participation in media productions to the community. The second approach takes a relationalist perspective and defines alternative media’s identity in contrast with the mainstream media’s. The third approach combines both perspectives and dissects alternative media’s role as civil society through its media practices and socio-political goals. The final approach explains how alternative media develops into a rhizome-like hybrid media organization through its partnerships with hegemonic powers such as the state, market and mainstream media.

Approach One: Serving the community

Community and participation are two important aspects in describing alternative media roles in serving the community. Due to the emergence of the network society and globalization, it is necessary to refine these concepts from their traditional use in respect to geographic and cultural borders.

Redefining Community

In serving the community, alternative media deals with repositioning the

community's rights and powers. It aims to facilitate access and participation for ordinary people to voice their aspirations and "for distributing their own ideologies and representations"

(Bailey et al., 2008, p.15). These strong aspects of community – its access and participation in the contemporary media landscape –necessitate the re-conceptualization of traditional definitions. Bailey et al. (2008, p.9) suggest redefining community by "supplementing the geographical with the non-geographical" and "supplementing the structural with the cultural", as well as introducing the concept of active and contingent identity construction by a community beyond space (online and offline communities).

In the traditional sense, the structural factors defining community were geographic and ethnic ties, or more specifically, notions of collective identity and group relations (Liunissen as cited in Bailey et al., 2008, p.8). On the other hand, the non-geographic factors expanding community to virtual community are common interests and practices. The cultural factors also redefine community building as based upon collective interpretation, social constructions of meaning, and imagined community across the traditional borders.

Traditional:	Reconceptualization 1:	Reconceptualization 2:
	Supplementing the geographical with the non-geographical	Supplementing the structural/material with the cultural
geography ethnicity	community of interest community of practice virtual or online community	interpretative community community of meaning imagined community

Table 4. Redefining community (Bailey et al., 2008, p.10)

The definition of virtual community from Castells lends rich insight to Bailey et al.'s reconceptualization of community:

I conclude that community is not only built offline within geographical borders, but also develops in online open and un-clustered virtual worlds. Community is also constantly redefining its identity and structure through cultural means such as traditions, common goals and interests, language and ideology.

Participation in and through the Media

Bailey et al. (2008, p.11) divide two types of community participation in respect to the media into “participation in the media” and “participation through the media”. This division indicates the specific role and relationships between community and alternative media in social movements.

Participation in the media relates to non-professionals participating in the production of media output (content-related participation) and decision-making process (structural participation) and leads to active democratic civic attitudes and the strengthening of civic culture (Bailey et al., 2008, p.11). Participation through media, on the other hand, relates to “extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in public spaces” (Bailey et al., 2008, p.11). It focuses more on media as a domain for hegemonic struggles, and as the facilitator of both conflict and consensus oriented models for citizens’ “dialogue, debate, and deliberation” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 11). In addition to this categorization, Michael Traber (1985) stresses the importance of audience participation as social change agents, “in which the individual is not reduced into an object (of the media or the political powers)” (p.3).

The purpose of participation, according to Bailey et al. (2008), is about, “the context of reduction in power imbalances, at both the broad social, political and economic levels” (p.13). This power struggle indicates the different degrees of influence community’s have in determining media output, which Pateman (1970, p.71) describes as either partial or full participation. According to Pateman

(1970) partial participation happens when the involved parties influence each other in decision-making but a single party has the power and monopolizes the final decision. On the other hand, full participation occurs when the involved parties have equal power to decide (Pateman, 1970).

The table below summarizes the above arguments by classifying the level of access and participation of the community based on their ability to influence the media production and reception process:

Alternative media has potential as a platform for validating and strengthening the audience as a community by developing collective identity and relevant topics or activities (Bailey et al., 2008, p.31). Alternative media also opens “a channel of communication for misrepresented, stigmatized or repressed societal” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 31). But Bailey et al. (2008) notably warn that alternative media can impede its community service when it gets dependent on the community for survival, cannot develop two-way communication skills and interests with its community.

Carpentier (2011) also raises attention to the growing false assumption of full audience participation in media due to the rising assumptions that new media technologies democratizes audience’s access and participation to media. He argues the advancement of digital culture help us to see, “the changes that characterize the present-day media configuration with its strong emphasis on informally organized audience activity (translated as participation in the production process, and not necessarily as participation with the organization and its decision-making routines or structure)” (p. 207). This statement crucially shows the progress in ICTs does not necessarily correlate with strong audience participation in media’s decision-making and access to change media’s power structure. This threat can also looms in alternative media practices.

Approach Two: An alternative to mainstream

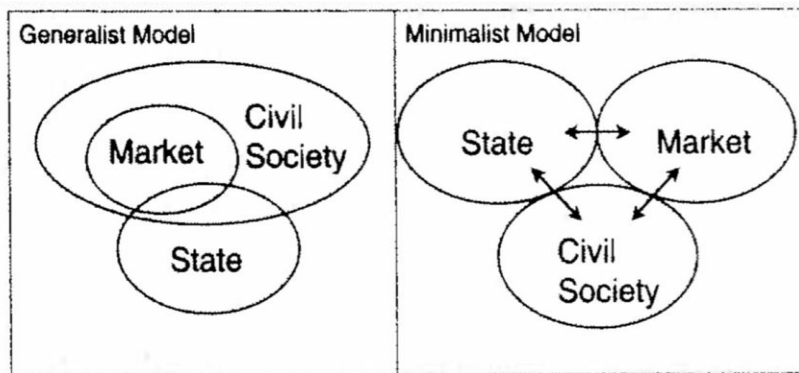
The antagonistic approach in defining alternative media opposed to mainstream media takes its roots in the dialectic of dominant power and representation. The historical development of alternative media is also derived heavily on this division between alternative and mainstream media as mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter (Atton, 2002; Downing et al., 2001). Carpentier (2011) warns on the growing inclination in present media world to take for granted the dominant mainstream media structure in which, “media products are still produced by media corporations, which are old top-down systems based on capitalist logics and not always in favor of the maximalist approaches toward participation and democracy” (p. 207).

Representation constructs reality and its meanings in alignment with the powerful dominant’s interest. Alternative media is therefore a medium for subordinates to contest mainstream media’s domination and its elitist interests by supplementing mainstream media at both the organizational level (more horizontal media structure) and the content level (ideologies and representations) (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 18). This approach aligns with Downing et al. (2001)’s description of alternative or radical media as “an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives” (p.v).

Therefore, alternative media present a possibility of a ‘third way’ or alternative way of organizing media by having “more balanced and/or horizontal structures” and offering “counter-hegemonic representations and discourses that vary from those originating from mainstream media” (Bailey et al., 2008, p.31). Alternative media promote self- representation, plurality and diversity of societal voices as well as in the formats and genres of content (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 31). But alternative media also have to be aware on the threat of giving low priority or fairness to the marginalized as well as limited space to experiment (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 31).

Approach Three: Part of Civil Society

This approach highlights the relationship between alternative media as a civil society and its integration with the state and market through a “generalist model” and “minimalist model” (Bailey et al., 2008, p.21). The generalist model is based on a Hegelian concept that shows the market as part of civil society and the state as a guard for balancing the private and public spheres. Marxists see civil society more critically, as the sphere where domination is managed and structured (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 21). Meanwhile, a Neo-Grancian perspective represents the minimalist model, and deems that civil society should be autonomous and independent from the state and market (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 21).



From these two perspectives, alternative media can have different relationships with the state, the market, and the mainstream media. According to a minimalist model, such an amalgamation can compromise a civil society’s objectivity and position as an alternative voice against the dominant state and market. Deeper insight into this concept is in the data analysis chapter addressing TED’s commercial and non-commercial partnerships with the mainstream media and market.

By becoming part of civil society, Bailey et al. (2008, p. 24) emphasizes alternative media’s competitive value in upholding democracy and “a complementary alternative to both public service and commercial media”, especially in relation to empowering audience for participation. In general, alternative media inherit the importance of civil society for “enabling groups and

individuals freely within the law to define and express their various social identities...and freedom of communication” (Keane, 1998, p. xviii). But Bailey et al. (2008, p.31) question the dependency of alternative media on the market for financial stability, as it makes it hard to reject advertising as prime source of funding. This issue can potentially compromise alternative media’s interest with the market interests.

Approach Four: Rhizome

The term “rhizomatic” is coined by Bailey et al. (2008) to describe the contingency and mobile nature of alternative media. It is an analogical concept of the network of ‘rhizome’ derived from Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

Bailey et al. explain the characteristic of rhizome as:

A heterogeneous, non-hierarchical and ever-changing network...connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, signifying rupture, cartography and decalcomania. The implication is that any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other point, but that the points are not necessarily connected, that in a rhizome there is no unity to serve as a pivot, that a rhizome might be ruptured, but will regenerate, that is an adaptable map with multiple entryways. (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 164)

Bailey et al. (2008, p. 27) further define the rhizomatic approach to alternative media on three main aspects: “their role at the crossroads of civil society, their elusiveness, and their interconnections and linkages with market and state”. This approach highlights alternative media’s capability to play the role of civil society and at the same time collaborate with state and market by assimilating them into the system without losing their “rebellious” identity. Bailey et al. (2008) describe it as the “trans-hegemonic” media: “These more complex and contingent positions bring them sometimes to violently critique hegemony and in other cases to playfully use and abuse the dominant order.” (p. 27).

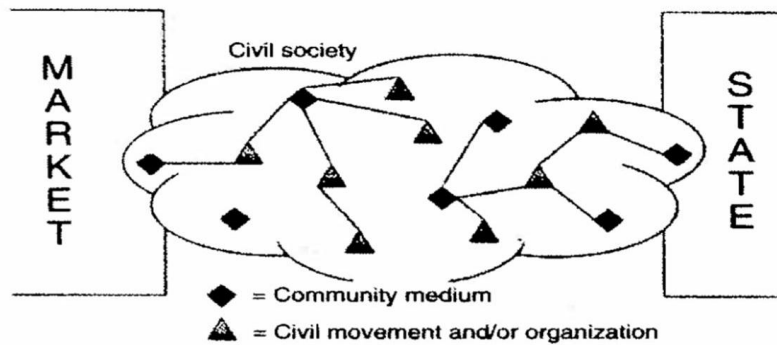


Figure 2. Civil society, state and market as rhizome. (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 28).

The above figure shows the trans-hegemonic relationship between alternative media as civil society and the state/market from the perspective of the community's access and participation in the system. Community members can access and participate in the diverse community media and civil society organizations. They can also replicate and build trans-hegemonic networks in the new public sphere with the mass-self communication approach, and enjoy less hierarchical access to media production and reception. The community media and civil society organization synergize with the market and state in a trans-hegemonic interaction dynamic that allows them to coordinate and collaborate in a complex and contingent way.

Optimistically, Bailey et al. (2008) declare that its fluidity and contingency as well as elusiveness make alternative media, "hard to control and to encapsulate – guaranteeing their independence" (p.31) from the hegemonic power. They (2008) also claim that alternative media serve as, "the crossroads where people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate" (p. 31). Its openness also strengthens democracy by connecting diverse civil societies, yet it can backfire since there is a possibility of "conflicting objectives with civic organization, threatening the medium's independence towards these

organizations” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 31).

This conceptual framework enables me to provide “a panoptic approach” to TED as part of an alternative media mosaic world, especially with its trans-hegemonic approach to its relationship with the state and market. It helps micro-analyze the dichotomies of “alternative/mainstream” and trichotomies of “civil society/state/market” that structures the social, cultural and political fields (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 153). As Servaes and Carpentier points out (2005:10), alternative media have the image of civil society organizations and activism with the flexible identity to coexist in different systems. This fluidity of alternative media may blur the distinctions between the dichotomies of alternative/mainstream and trichotomies of civil society/media/state.

Some critiques emerge on how alternative media can collaborate with the dominant powers without maintaining the status quo or compromising its independence, democracy and social justice. Bailey et al. (2008, pp. 150-151) mention constrain of low level of representation due to the dominance of the Northern world representatives and knowledge experts as well as the commercial pressures or state and media controls.

They propose two main strategies for alternative media to continue their role in these four approaches (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 155). The first strategy is to exploit the niche value alternative media have in positioning itself between the state and the market. This strategy applies well in the context of commercialism. It is in parallel with Christine Harold’s suggestion to work with, rather than oppose the logic of commercialism (2007). Harold (2007) argues alternative media collaboration with the market can provoke the commercial practices “ by taking market values more seriously than many free marketers themselves”(p. xxxii). This means, alternative media have the potential to change the logic of commercialism. They design business model of cultural production that shifts from the dominant individual ownership and private control to collective

ownership and social authorship (Toynbee, 2001). Such case can be seen in Creative Common project and open source movements whom TED is also following. The second strategy is to enlarge the rhizomatic network of alternative media. Both strategies are interconnected and focus heavily on the rhizomatic approach that enables alternative media to change the rigid structures of state, market and mainstream media.

METHODOLOGY

I attempted to identify TED's political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics as alternative media by gathering well-rounded data from the field and texts, as well as analyze and interpret the findings with the help of the conceptual framework I built. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a methodology that provides the right tools to unearth and dissect the data while supporting me in building a clear yet multilayered picture of TED.

Based on that rationale, this qualitative research study takes a critical realism approach. This approach's main goal is to unearth the relationship between "social and cultural structures and everyday activity" (Deacon, 1999, p. 10). It also helps to "explain how they work in order to encourage informed action aimed at eradicating barriers to equity and justice" (Deacon, 1999, p. 10).

The chosen research methodology is ethnography. In general, ethnography, according to David Silverman (1993, p. 60) seeks to understand the organization of social action in a particular setting. This critical ethnographic strategy guided me to describe, as accurately as possible, the topic in context. It leads to data production with a thick description that can illustrate the comprehensive multidimensional narrative I want to bring forward about TED.

Due to TED's ecosystem as a media organization whose activities encompass offline as well as online events and conferences, I conducted the study in two fields, online and offline. In both fields, I gathered data as a member of the social

setting or as a “participant-as-observer” (Bryman, 2008). However, it should be noted that online ethnography differs from the offline ethnography in terms of participating and/or doing observations as well as the settings.

Online ethnography on the TED.com and TEDx.com websites enabled me to collect and analyze data in an online environment, and “to look beyond amounts and distributions and to try to unearth the deeper reasons for behaviors or sentiment” (Skågeby, 2001).

In online settings, the data can be overwhelming and vast. Online data can also be beneficial as vast resources that I can retrieve anytime, anywhere, in any quantity, with traceable digital references or archives. Therefore, I defined closed parameters on what kind of data I should collect and analyze based on the research questions.

The offline ethnography (or what I refer to as traditional ethnography) also plays an important role in this study. Participation and observation were done in the traditional sense, and demanded my physical presence in a confined time and space. This approach was beneficial as I gathered data by attending a TEDx Tehran live event and interviewing TEDx Tehran founders. I produced field notes on the live event and interview transcripts. I argue this study would produce different results if I only reflected on the documentation of the live event without attending it personally, or if I had opted to do online interviews instead of physical ones. With this approach, I discovered how an offline social gathering like the TEDx event also influenced the way audiences accessed and participated in social activism and networking differently than in online settings. Thus, it is important to collect data in physical settings.

I took ethnographic actions such as offline interviews, offline participant observations, online observations, and the textual analysis of online content. Arnould and Wallendorf (as cited in Pettigrew, 2000) argue ethnography helps to explore “the symbolic meaning embedded in products”. Ethnography was

particularly useful in the case of TED Talks and the TEDx event, as it generated insights on the socio-political and cultural context of online media content and offline event related to TED, as well as the motives and representations of the data symbolized about TED's characteristics. It was also helpful in understanding the broader alternative to media production behavior.

Research Subjects

The research subjects in this study are TED and TEDx Tehran because both social institutions represent the complexity of TED's characters, organizational management, and growing network of communities in global and local levels.

TED

TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design. It is a global multimedia organization owned by the private, non-profit organization the Sapling foundation, and based in New York City in the United States. It mainly creates global lectures (called TED Talks) about ideas on technology, entertainment, design, and diverse fields of knowledge for positive social changes. TED.com broadcasts TED Talks as video streams on their website. TED has diversified its projects and subjects to various other media products related to its core offerings, the TED Conference and TED Talks. TED not only produces the TED Conference and curates TED Talks, but it also facilitates online forums, awards, and funding for the realization of ideas that matters, as well as offline activities to promote social changes and social activism. This study centers on TED's vast projects and features, especially the TED Talks.

Validity and Reliability

This study was validated through a "triangulation of sources, methods and theories" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 9) and reference to other literatures and similar

studies. Adding to this parameter, Jansen (2002, p. 259) proposes assessment towards the reliability of the findings “amount to knowledge which individuals and institutions are prepared to act on”. In order to ensure the study findings are a reliable reference for actions in the future by the public, activists, or government officials – I validated and clarified the interaction between the sources, methods, and documents.

I assessed and conveyed critical reviews on this study by getting constructive feedback from my peers, academic supervisor, and from the interviewees. Most of the feedback concerned the writing and presentation of the study, and how the findings are valid and reliable. In response to their input, I conducted proof reading and regular consultations with my academic supervisors to improve the structure and deliverance. I validated the analysis and study results by building arguments supported by facts, previous literature references, and reliable sources. I also crosschecked the arguments and initial findings with my interviewees and peers in order to get holistic insights. I committed the data gathering and analysis according to the study methodology I chose. Thus, readers can trace this evidence and produce arguments based on the validated findings.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

I am responsible for maintaining an ethical conduct and ensuring that the participants in this study are well informed and understand the purpose of the study, and any risks it entails. Since the online material is very dynamic and easily reproduced, I conducted the data gathering only on reliable sites and provided the time of data retrieval, as well as the electronic links as references. Regarding citations, I only cited statements made in the public arena for public use. I also have permission to use the private conversations and statements from the interviewees for this study. I do not have any intention to discriminate or

pursue commercial interests with these citations. Consideration of the socio-political and cultural approximation between my personal background and the study subjects, TEDx ,Tehran, was to avoid compromising my objectivity in gathering and analyzing data.

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I would like to divide the key findings of this study into four subchapters. The first subchapter examines TED's evolution as a hybrid alternative media by juxtaposing itself as a non-profit media organization that combines commercial and non-commercial business models. It also discusses TED's collaborative partnerships with the market and mainstream media used to sustain itself and reach its goals. I derived these findings mainly from Chris Anderson's TED Talk on revolutionizing TED into a non-profit organization, TED's mission statement, and TED's projects.

TED as Hybrid Alternative Media

The intent of this subchapter is to see how TED is an alternative to the mainstream media and ideologies. In this context, alternative infers being on the other side of the mainstream media in a binary or dichotomized relationship. I derived this position from the strict division between mainstream and alternative media (Bailey et al., 2008). At first, the alternative media concept I attempted to prove was that TED is a radical media organization that antagonizes and opposes the powerful structures of the mainstream media, the state, and the market. However, the findings in the field show a more complex story. I found the definition of alternative does not necessarily position the alternative media in a strict binary or antagonistic relationship against the mainstream media. Such alternative media traits are prominent in TED's non-profit goal to prompt social

change by disseminating “ideas worth spreading”. Unlike the rigid hierarchical structure of the mainstream media, TED is attempting to be more horizontal and give more access and participation to globalized communities, allowing them to set its agenda and present alternative views against the hegemonic perspectives. However, thicker description also shows that TED still applies the same practices as the mainstream media. It still maintains a unique semi-hierarchical structure in its idiosyncratic editorial process, embodied in the conference talk curators. The TED Headquarters’ team still imposes final authority and control on using TED’s brand or organizing projects under TED’s format, through the review and release of license to conduct TEDx event, for example.

Furthermore, in order to survive in the capitalist economy, TED utilizes – aside from the Sapling Foundation’s financial support – the commercial benefits of advertisements and sponsorships, thereby making profits by using TED global conferences as a source of funding. TED also collaborates with the mainstream media, the state, and the market as partners in reaching its non-profit goals. Thus, TED is a contemporary hybrid form of alternative media that blurs the distinction between itself and mainstream power structures.

In the following discussion, I elaborate on TED’s alternative media characteristics by looking at its relationship with the dominant powers of the state, the market, and the mainstream media in three sub-discussions. First, I examine TED’s decision to become a non-profit media organization while it paradoxically adopts a corporate-like business management strategy from the mainstream media. The second sub-discussion illustrates some case studies in which TED develops constructive partnerships with the mainstream media and the market, at both global and local levels. Third, it explores how TED’s projects provide alternative media channels and content that differs from the mainstream media in its spread of ideas.

Non-Profit Driven Business of Ideas Worth Spreading

When TED was established in 1984, it was designed to be an exclusive and prestigious commercial global conference where leading executives, celebrities, and innovators in the areas of technology, entertainment and design could meet (“About TED”, n.d.). They gathered and built networks by sharing TED’s “ideas worth spreading” theme. Its trademark medium of dissemination is the “TED Talk”, a lecture lasting 18 minutes or less focused on innovation from the brightest sources (often working within a clearly defined niche) – thereby building its prestige for networking and community development in the industries (“About TED: History”, n.d.). One of many landmarks of history made through TED Conferences is the first demonstration of the then revolutionary Apple Macintosh computer (Heffernan, 2009, January 23).

The historical turn in 2001 revolutionized TED from being a pure commercial conference organizer to a non-profit media organization. The management of TED was transferred to the digital media entrepreneur and ex-journalist Chris Anderson. He became the main curator and chief of TED, working under his non-profit foundation, the Sapling Foundation. This crucial change to TED emphasizes several of alternative media’s political and cultural characteristics. In his TED Talk addressing TED’s transition to a non-profit organization, Chris Anderson describes TED’s revised purposes: to be a non-profit organization, to be an open and sharing culture of ideas and education for anybody in any field, and to be uninhibited from its initial technology, entertainment, and design boundaries.

So, I gave myself the job title of TED Custodian for a reason, and I will promise you right here and now that the core values that make TED special are not going to be interfered with. Truth, curiosity, diversity, no selling, no corporate bullshit, no band-wagoning, no platforms. Just the pursuit of interest, wherever it lies, across all the disciplines that are represented here. That's not

going to be changed at all... Already, just in the last few days, we've had so many people talking about stuff that they care about, that they're passionate about, that can make a difference in the world, and the idea of getting this group of people together – some of the causes that we believe in, the money that this conference can raise and the ideas –I really believe that that combination will, over time, make a difference. (Chris Anderson, 2008, January).

This statement (or promise) defines what TED has become under Anderson's management. He sticks to the core humanistic and democratic values of TED, such as maintaining the pursuit of truth and all types of knowledge, the celebration of diverse perspectives, and being objective and neutral to any political or economic interest. Yet, in democratizing access to education and knowledge management, he also made a bold strategy decision: he combined the idyllic vision of a non-profit movement with a practical commercial approach.

Two strategic decisions Anderson made show how this business model works. First, he monetizes TED Global Conferences with its exclusive networks of affluence, influential people, sponsorships from big corporations, and funding from his Sapling Foundation. He uses these to finance TED's expansion to other humanitarian projects, and the development of TED's global network. TED's mission as an open culture of ideas does not necessarily mean that it rejects the established closed culture of mainstream corporations or the media. Instead, similar to an open market system, it embraces the best of advertisers and mainstream media that want to collaborate with TED and adhere to TED's values.

Currently the sponsorships –which range out beyond the industries of technology, entertainment and design – synergize their advertorial videos and campaigns with TED's format and vast content. Many of the corporations are Global Fortune 500 companies, including Coca Cola, IT Leaders, IBM, Intel, and even the fashion mogul Gucci (“Our Partners”, n.d.). Various individual

members, whose advice and influence TED solicits, are commissioned as the TED Brain Trust, which consists of influential leaders and game changers from wide spectrum of industries. Members include philanthropist Bill Gates, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Creativity Expert Sir Ken Robinson, and the chancellor of Kabul University Ashraf Gani (“TED Brain Trust”, n.d.). These strong household names also help TED brand itself as a non-profit media and conference organization, and helps attract people to pay large sums of money to attend its global conferences, and be inside its exclusive network (Wallace, 2012, February 26).

Yet TED’s ambitious commitment of “no selling, no corporate bullshit, no band wagoning, no platforms” (Anderson, 2008, January) have been contested by its critics. They perceive TED’s projects as another sell out to the cause of capitalism (Wallace, 2012, February 26; Jurgenson, 2012, February 15). Philosopher and blogger Mike Bulajewsky’s jab at TED summarizes the critical view of TED’s hypocrisy, “TED’s ‘revolutionary ideas’ mask capitalism-as-usual, giving it a narrative of progress & change” (2012, February 15). Further discussion on this subject will be provided in the section on the challenges TED is facing.

Anderson levels down the hierarchy of access to share ideas. Concerns that once limited TED’s content to the physical attendees of TED Conferences, including geographic, social, and economic factors, have been transcended by making TED talks available online, thereby helping to realize TED’s potential as an open culture that is accessible to localized communities (such as TEDx) all over the globe. By March 2012, more than 1100 TED Talk videos are available to be shared and discussed all over the world, and in many languages (“Talks”, n.d.). In its mission statement, the Sapling Foundation mentions that it distributes funds through TED Prizes that are worth an annual \$100,000 to realize individual’s social project (“Who Owns TED”, n.d.). Meanwhile, TEDx

has gone viral in the local communities that adopt TED's conference format and provide localized content and speakers. These communities are in more than 120 countries across the north and southern spheres ("TEDxTalks", n.d.). In anticipating this public accountability inquiry, TED describes its use of profits: "They are recycled to advance the mission of 'ideas worth spreading.'" ("Is TED Elitist?", n.d.).

These are the key sustainability issues in TED's hybrid business model. In many cases, other alternative media struggle, financially and politically, in supporting their alternative and non-commercial causes due to their rigid political affiliation and reliance on funding from fund raising or non-profit foundations (and subsequent dismal collaborations with the market) (Bailey et al., 2008). Thus, these boundaries limit their growth and mobility as networks, and are obstacles for alternative media in achieving their goals. By re-branding non-commercial and creating a more open culture of sharing ideas on top of already strong marketing and the established cultural image of TED as an elitist global conference, Anderson has built a sustainable political economy polity of alternative media in contemporary global capitalism.

Partnership with the Power Structures: the Market and Mainstream Media

TED establishes itself as a hybrid alternative media that combines commercial and non-commercial approaches in financing its non-profit goals, democratizing access and participation. In relation to power structures, TED playfully opposes and embraces the political economy of elites in achieving its goals, and supports itself as an organization.

TED is not a radical alternative media that strongly opposes or rejects relations with the powerful elites (albeit Anderson's above statement insinuated

TED's radicalism against the capitalistic profit driven system). In the Sapling Foundation's mission statement, it believes in the three factors that, "...can amplify the power of ideas: mass media, technology and market forces" ("Who Owns TED", n.d.). By linking the three powers together in collaborative works under its banner, TED concocts its value as alternative media together with other types of mass media by utilizing growing technologies and financial support from the market to advance its non-profit causes. It becomes a practical alternative media that favours the mutual benefits and constructive partnerships forged with the market and mainstream media, unlike for example, the extreme anarchist underground movement of the zone culture. (Downing et al., 2001).

This practicality is clear in three current examples. The first is how TED collaborates with online mainstream media (such as *Huffington Post*) in popularizing its content and making it more accessible. The second is how the newspaper the *Jakarta Globe* supports TEDx's sponsorship and marketing, and how this localizes TED's approach towards the media and the market. The third is TED's relationship with its sponsors, their advertisers' synergized marketing campaigns, content with TED's messages, and TED's Ads Worth Spreading Award, which rewards creative advertisements in line with TED's spirit of spreading great ideas.

Partnership with the Sponsors and Ads Worth Spreading

TED has been seeking funding through its partnership programs with a very direct and practical approach, one that is similar to a commercial media organization looking for advertisement revenues ("TED Partnerships", n.d.). It even creates options for the sponsors to fund big attractive socially responsible ideas, ranging from simply launching a big idea to growing a brand image to concrete exercises such as sponsoring TED Talks, engaging in TED community projects, or even applying to TED for sponsor's internal communication ("TED Partnerships", n.d.). The result is the seamless cooperation between TED's social

messages and the sponsor's branding and product placements. Under its "Start a Project" sponsorship banner, TED exclaims, "Use TED and the TED Community as a laboratory for growing a new project or direction, quickly moving thought into action." ("Start a Project", n.d.). It specifies three benefits for sponsors supporting TED's projects: "Amplify, Engage and Activate". Considering Blackberry's relationship with TED as a case study provides a clear illustration on how TED sells itself to the commercial market to obtain funding for its non-profit activities. TED amplified Blackberry's brand to its audience, and then activated a communication hub project at TED conferences where Blackberry, "showcased its tech leadership work and stewardship in the social networking space" ("Partner Case Study: Blackberry", n.d.). Blackberry ads also ran as "post-roll along side a rotation of TEDTalks". In the "Engage" phase, Blackberry had an opportunity to connect with influential "thought- leaders at the conference". TED also promotes its use of Blackberry's technology in TEDStudio and with content creation at the conference ("Partner Case Study: Blackberry", n.d.). The wordings in its copy are unabashedly in sync with a commercial business proposal trying to lure sponsors for mutual beneficial business relationships.

It once again shows TED's playful and business-smart strategy to integrate commercial means for non-commercial gains, an association that most alternative media (like IMC) would rather avoid.

TED's tolerance level toward converging with the hegemonic system, whilst still holding to its alternative and non-commercial views, can be seen in its campaign to change the system by being within it. It invented the TED "Ads Worth Spreading" motto, which resonates with its mission of ideas worth spreading. "The dream behind this initiative is to find companies that want to communicate ideas with their consumers in the same way that TED wants to communicate with its audience." ("Ads Worth Spreading", n.d.). TED expects

this initiative to prompt and leverage the standards of the commercial and non-commercial advertisement world (“Ads Worth Spreading”,n.d.). Every year, it curates international advertisements that inspire and send positive messages to the world into 10 TED “Ads Worth Spreading” (Carpenter,

2012, February 28). As they describe in their official site, this initiative is to “recognize and reward innovation, ingenuity and intelligence in advertising – the ads that people want to see, and share with their friends” (TED.com, 2012).

These ads are mostly commercial with positive message to make a better sustainable world, and come from innovative global companies like L’Oreal, Microsoft, Prudential, and even mainstream media organizations like Canal +. In its 2012 selection, only one advertisement is a PSA.

The introduction of one of the Ads Worth Spreading 2012 exemplifies the hybrid approach that TED applies towards the market. It publishes commercial, advertorial content as part of its justification for TED’s curatorship and recognition of innovative advertisement:

In 2012, L’Oréal Paris chose Aimee Mullins as their spokesperson -- an athlete, model, actor and an activist for women and the next generation of prosthetics. In this intimate talk created especially for Ads Worth Spreading, Amy explains why the brand's iconic tagline, ‘Because you're worth it,’ has always held great meaning for her. (“Ads Worth Spreading: Aimee Mullins”, n.d.)

Unlike alternative media such as Ad Busters’ (who represent a radical movement to “topple the exsisting power structures and forge a major shifts” by criticizing commercial advertisements and culture (“About Ad Busters”, n.d.), TED prefers to embrace and work together with its oppositions in order to change the status quo. As it states, “We are moving toward a future where advertisers and consumers are part of the same community, sharing ideas and engaging in a learning cycle, together.” (“Ads Worth Spreading”, n.d.).

Thus, collaboration projects like TED's media activism demonstrate a flexibility to see beyond the ideologies and the political-economic practices of the mainstream media and commercial institutions. Behind its distinctive rules, centralized authorization, and non-commercial mission, TED's strategy appears rather sensible and less radical in partnering with the hegemonic power structures to prompt social changes.

Alternative Means to Spread Ideas

In this sub-discussion on TED's position as alternative media (and its relationship with the dominant power of the market and mainstream media), I examine how TED's alternative core values and media content differ from the mainstream media.

On its website TED shares its and the Sapling Foundation's mission in becoming an open political and cultural platform for everybody to connect with, share free knowledge, and make changes across the borders of nations, ethnicities, beliefs, and social structures:

Based on its mission statement, TED searches for alternative ideas that it considers worth disseminating. Through these ideas, TED tries to represent the underprivileged, the misrepresented, and the marginalized. From gender inequality, human rights violations, and social injustices to the open source and freedom of information movement and the latest technology in graphic design or the food industry; TED attempts to provide ideas relevant to everyone.

TED's goal is to be the biggest franchiser of ideas. At its next TED Global Conference in 2012, with the main theme of "Full Spectrum": "It aims to be more multimedia than ever" (Wallace, 2012, February 26) by supplying the widest spectrum of relevancy in terms of audience, speakers, and ideas. These three interchanging, vital components of TED are the main ingredients in keeping it competitive with other, similar media or conference organizations. It

habitually lifts unsung local heroes such as previously unknown academics, social activists, or simple citizens to the international spotlight, and popularizes their agendas and causes to a global audience. It is crucial to keep in mind, however, that the market's interests and TED's own ideological bias polarizes these efforts to diversify the content, speakers, and audience. What TED considers diversity in quality turns out in many cases as plurality in quantity. The mushrooming numbers of TED Talks and audience views cannot provide an objective guarantee that all social groups' interests are represented at TED. The other issue is the potential for the popular TED's Speakers' activisms and social causes developing into simply another case of celebrity culture. Susan Cain (2012, April 27), a recent TED Speaker, remarks that TED Speakers have to refine their presentation and performance skills; similar to how a rock star works to get people's attention. She also admits that she is changing her style of presentation to reflect TED's speech style, and public speaking for TED and other media as way to promote her book (Cain, 2012, April 27). This phenomenon illustrates TED's potential to become a platform for self-promotion. I would explain further in the last subchapter about the threats and challenges of TED.

TED has generated versatile lines of projects from its core TED Conference. At its website, I have found significant changes in its project descriptions and updated project results over the past two years. They show the rapid growth of new projects and associated partnerships undertaken by both TED and its globalized network of local communities. The content and goals of these projects are very diverse, yet they all contribute to building an interconnected knowledge network. These projects carry the DNA of TED's motto 'ideas worth spreading' and links to TED's means of spreading ideas through TED Talk. Below are some illustrations I made of TED's latest projects, and how they emulate alternative media's focus on human, cultural, and educational ends:

The springtime TED Conference is TED's original main project, and first introduced TED's **TED Talk** formula of creative presentation less than 18 minutes in length. Both the speakers and audience, as well as the content of the presentations, are curated by the TED team to present, "breadth of content includes science, business, the arts and the global issues facing our world." ("About TED", n.d.). They are organized so that, "everyone shares the same experience. It shouldn't work, but it does. It works because all of knowledge is connected... where we see, to our astonishment, an intricately interconnected whole." ("About TED", n.d.). **TEDActive** is an extended version of this concept from the Long Beach TED Conference, and presented in a live simulcast. It is a good money churning as it taps the audience market that is not able to attend the TED Conference, yet wishes to enjoy the TED-like atmosphere and networking opportunities. In 2010, it was held in, "the swanky, mountain-framed and pool-dappled Riviera Resort in Palm Springs", where selected audiences that have \$3750 (USD) could build networks and enjoy conversations in the four-day workshop ("About TED", n.d.).

TED further capitalizes and internationalizes the exclusive networking and knowledge-sharing practices between the influential attendees and speakers of the TED Conference by expanding the market outside the U.S. with **TEDGlobal**, thereby creating potent, segmented audiences in geographic areas such as India (with **TEDIndia**) and social sectors such as women (with **TEDWomen**). TEDGlobal has themes that are more international but maintains the full format of a TED Conference, and also adds TED University that allows attendees to share knowledge with each other. "TEDGlobal was held in Oxford, UK, in 2005, 2009 and 2010, and in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2007.

TEDGlobal is now held annually in Edinburgh, Scotland." ("About TED", n.d.). Additionally, smaller events such as, "**TED Salons**, evening-length events with speakers and performers, and **TED@** events, exploring a topic or location"

(“About TED”, n.d.) are conducted worldwide, so that more people in TED’s community can brainstorm and interact offline face to face.

Despite these developments, the flagship conferences have been the subject of disputes and criticism over TED’s elitism, its self-congratulatory rhetoric, and its commercialized confab against its intention for open culture and significant social changes (Jurgenson, 2012, February 15). Thus, TED attempts to bridge the social economy gap by optimizing the online platform of **TED.com** into a market place for everyone. Its online communities get access to TED’s resources, including its massive collection of **TED Talks** videos, TED’s social networks, and opportunities to participate in conversations (“About TED”, n.d.). TED.com also helps TED in cultivating a collective identity with its members, and integrates its networks around the globe through its social media features such as **TED Community** and **TED Conversations**.

TED rewards its communities and members by giving an annual TED Prize of one hundred thousand dollars to an individual with "One Wish to Change the World" to realize high impact projects. Meanwhile, TED also recruits innovators and influential people from many disciplines to build rich member profiles: technology, entertainment, design, the sciences, the humanities, the arts, NGOs, business and more” to be part of **TED Fellows**, TED Global Fellows, and TED Senior Fellows (“About TED”, n.d.).

Another apparent movement towards reaching a wider audience is also present in TED’s e-book publishing enterprise. TED’s exclusive book club was introduced by Anderson (2008) in an early TED Talk. He advocated the use of additional curated books related to TED Conference topics and largely made by TED Speakers for the audience to read. TED now publishes **TED Books** online with a price of less than three dollars each. They cover global and daily issues with deeper insight, yet in less than twenty thousand words (“TED Books”, n.d.).

TED also realizes there is a language barrier in its resources, as their mostly

English content limits the audience's access. Therefore, **The TED Open Translation Project** has opened the gate for TED to reach a larger, non-English speaking public worldwide, as well as the hearing-impaired people and search engine (that can index the transcripts). TED launched the project with “300 translations, 40 languages and 200 volunteer translators; one year on, there are more than 21000 completed translations from our thousands-strong community” (“About TED”, n.d.).

Nevertheless, TED's most significant effort to bring down the level of hierarchy and exclusivity at TED Conferences is **TEDx**. It is an independently organized “TED-like experience” event organized by local communities to address local concerns and interests. Even though TED has the final say in releasing the license to organize TEDx events, and retains control over the general format to ensure adherence to TED's standards, TEDx has become an extremely popular non-profit tool for communities to spread ideas and voice themselves. TEDx has diversified and catered the TED format for events suited to often marginalized or under-represented audiences, such as communities from the developing world, women, kids/youth, university and even communities within corporations or institutions (“About TEDx”, n.d.). **TEDxChange** also benefits from the partnerships and sponsorships between TED and other powerful institution, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, by bringing together all TEDx organizers worldwide for “meaningful discussions” online, focusing on global health and development issues (“TEDxChange”, n.d.).

In responding to critiques on its elitism, TED claims to produce projects whose power and ideas flow not only from the elites' or leaders' initiatives, but also from activists and common people from the bottom of social pyramids. Activist Suraj Sudhakar organized TEDxKibera in one of the largest slums in Africa. His work inspired TED in launching TED Activators, a program training activists in organizing TEDx events and developing TED Communities in the

developing world and underprivileged communities, and even equipping them with TED-in-a-box start up toolkits (“TED Activators”, n.d.).

Despite these efforts, TED still faces criticism. TED ventures to juggle its projects between supporting or augmenting current hegemonic views, as well as challenging them. This causes waves of harsh critiques from the public and accusations that TED maintains the status quo instead of radically transforming power structures. A social media theorist, Nathan Jurgenson (2012, February 15) perceives TED’s diversity of representations especially on the marginalized groups (such as TED Women) as tokenism. This tokenism projects growing assumptions that TED caters all public’s causes and interests and disguises its real purposes of exploiting and monetizing the marginalized groups. He (2012, February 15) also argues that TED’s content is heavily editorialized based on its ideological bias and TED’s curatorship omits more important but less marketable issues. This critique is in parallel with other critiques on the commercialization and elitism of TED Conference and network.

TED’s Activism for Social Changes

In this section, I would like to explore several case studies of TED’s activism in prompting social changes. These case studies represent TED’s core focus as a civil society that spreads ideas for educational ends, which then branches out to other humanitarian and cultural works. As alternative media, TED also has the position to exercise its civil society function of watching the mainstream media in relation to keeping the power balance between the state, market, and mainstream media. Since its original incarnation, TED has been designed as an alternative medium for people to network and share ideas and innovations that aren’t covered in the mainstream media. TED is not a radical alternative media with an extreme political mission focused on toppling hegemonic powers. Instead, TED collaborates with those powers to empower the marginalized and

revolutionize the system from within. TED continues to find ways to connect the world and bring change by developing a robust platform for crowd sourcing and an interconnected knowledge network. Therefore, with its global network, resources, and collaboration with the rest of the players in the media, TED has the potential to live up to its ideal civic values of changing the world through spreading ideas.

TED for Humanitarian and Cultural Ends

TED's passion for promoting human welfare and social reforms through people's collaboration and spreading alternative and inspiring ideas has been projected in every activity. TED brings the collaboration to another level by making it open, global, and inclusive for working with the government, mainstream media, commercial and non-commercial organizations, and simple civilians. Recently, TED is moving further to serve the global community in an ambitious project, TED Prize 2012. Chris Anderson (2012, March 2) described a large collaboration project called City 2.0 in his blog in the *Huffington Post*. In this project, TED exercises its civil society role to catalyze, encourage governments, empower common citizens, and the market to redesign city planning and infrastructure into a sustainable and innovative urban living space through global collaboration and crowd sourcing:

TED is also gearing up to transform the rich skills and resources of its global network into real social actions that make differences. Through TEDxChange, TED collaborates with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to spread awareness about health and development issues to its TEDx communities, and help formulate action plans for social change.

According to Melinda Gates ([Gates Foundation](#), 2010, November 29), TEDxChange tries to transform TEDsters' mindset from "ideas worth spreading" to "ideas worth doing". It also emphasizes on the urgency to raise awareness and

take action for positive change. Gates (2010, October) does not shy away from adapting a profit-driven marketing strategy from Coca Cola to create a campaign about raising awareness and distributing condoms, sanitation and vaccinations.

In parallel with TEDxChange, TED Prizes also aims to produce significant social changes that are realized through TED Prize's winner's wishes. These results are updated a year after the wish to see tangible change. People can track the progress of these winners' projects in their blogs and on TED's websites, as well as participate according to their interest and expertise. For example, TED Prize Winner 2007 Bill Clinton's ambitious wish was to help the Rwandan Government through his foundation with "*high quality rural health system for the whole country*", and has so far resulted in new hospitals, holistic medical facilities, and community health worker training for all 30 districts requested by Rwandan government ("TED Prize: 2007 Winners", n.d.). TED Prize Winner 2008 Karen Armstrong's wish to create and launch The Charter for Compassion that promotes interfaith peace and freedom between religions was unveiled on November 12, 2009 with help from TED and also religious leaders, non-profit organizations, and commercial advertising companies such as Ogilvy to market the campaign ("TED Prize: 2008 Winners", n.d.).

TED for Educational Ends

In its recent initiatives to revolutionize the education world, TED launched its new project called TED ED, which is dubbed as "Lessons Worth Sharing" ("Introducing TED ED", n.d.). Following a similar format as TED Talks with a duration of less than 18 minutes, TED ED differentiates itself by making educational videos with graphic animations instead of live speakers ("Introducing TED ED", n.d.). TED is attempting to provide the public with more active roles as social change agents and more participation in content production. TED enforces its open collaboration culture through crowdsourcing

the search and match tasks for animators and educators ([“Introducing TED ED”](#), n.d.). With similar educational spirit, TED Prize Winner 2010 Jamie Oliver wishes for a food revolution through eradicating the junk food culture and educating people (especially children) to build a sustainable food culture and healthy eating habits. He plans to have a “traveling food theater” to teach kids and parents easy healthy cooking, building a network of community kitchens, and an online support community to fight against obesity ([“2010 TED Prize Winner”](#), n.d.).

Another eloquent illustration of TED’s mission for education is TEDx University, which puts TED-like conferences in traditional education environments. TEDx Kinnaird was organized in an all-girls college in Pakistan, and attendance was open for both sexes. It initially sparked controversy and considered as deviant from local norms, but it did not dampen the enthusiasm of a wide-range of speakers from students, teachers, political commentators, HR managers, and an audience of students and professionals to discuss the future of Pakistan ([“Events at Universities”](#), n.d.).

CONCLUSION

TED’s recent stratospheric rise to a social phenomenon in redefining global networking and ways to spread ideas is worth of academic and scientific attention for what it augurs. TED embodies the latest development of alternative media by juxtaposing itself as a hybrid civil society that balances the power dynamic between the state, the market and mainstream media in serving the community and supporting democracy. This hybrid approach signifies that TED is more of a revolutionary network-based global movement that willingly collaborates with other social agents. TED negotiates with mainstream hegemonic values and infuses its alternative counter-hegemonic views into the system. This amalgamation also reflects how alternative media have changed

from their classic framework of radical social movement with extreme opposition against the hegemonic power (Downing et al., 2011; Atton, 2002).

By transforming itself from an elitist commercial-based global conference for the powerful and affluent into a non-profit media organization dedicated to making an open world for free information and education through an offline and online global network, TED tries to break the institutional and established structures of power. But TED does not carry out this shift to non-profit by denying its past as a media organization that was confined to the dominant mainstream media and market driven practices. Instead, TED blends both ways into a hybrid form of collaboration between the mainstream and the alternative.

It is already very complicated to differentiate TED completely as part of alternative media against mainstream media. Or more precisely, TED is experimenting within the grey area of the dichotomy of alternative and mainstream. There are several contradictions that depict this complexity. First, TED identifies itself as part of alternative media through its rejection of commercial ends, thriving for humanitarian and democratic causes yet it adopts traditional values of mainstream media enterprise management such as advertisement or sponsorships and semi hierarchical agenda setting process. Second, TED values as well as criticizes the professional practices of mainstream media. It applies mainstream media's editorial system in its curatorship, advertisement as source of funding and employs dedicated professionals to its main organizations. But it also encourages crowd sourcing of local content and resources as well as voluntary participations from non-professionals and its community members in building its identity, best practices and network. Third, TED is not state-owned nor it is a private commercial company yet it cannot deny it is dependant financially on its commodification of its branding, exclusive networking, TED Conferences as well as sponsorships from commercial corporations. Fourth, despite of its strength in managing a

huge array of human resources – from different communities, professional staffs, curators and influential members to volunteers – by applying an open interconnected network culture; TED is still retaining semi structural and semi hierarchical decision- making and editorial authority with the TED Headquarter team. By still having a centralized authority, it wants to empower its community to be independent and free to localize TED’s content but too afraid to lose control on its branding usage. Thus, these contradictions lead to a concept of non-profit franchise which may sound very oxymoronic yet true about TED’s hybrid approach.

In the following subchapters, I connect this premise to answer my initial research questions and sub-questions. I elaborate in two subchapters to answer the research questions. First subchapter dwells on TED’s political, economic, social and cultural characteristics as alternative media. In the second subchapter, I summarize the key findings from the previous chapter to answer the research sub questions and provide illustrations of the latest trends of alternative media.

TED’s Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Characteristics

Initially, I positioned TED in the dichotomy of alternative and mainstream media to show how TED differs from the traditional established mainstream media in its organizational structures, operations, media activism, access to and participation from public. However, I later on discovered that TED’s media practices blurred the distinction between mainstream and alternative media. I also dissected TED as part of civil society and found that it partners with the market and mainstream media in serving the community. These results show that TED is a complex multilayered media with continual flexible interplay and collaboration with the mainstream media, state and market. I deduced them as evidences of TED’s hybrid and contingent identity as alternative media.

TED is Contingent and Rhizomatic

In attempt to conclude the key findings of TED's open, contingent and hybrid political cultural approach and answer the research question, the term 'rhizomatic' best describes these traits TED has. The terminology of rhizomatic can be understood based on Bailey et al.'s adaptation (2008) to decipher contingency and mobile nature of contemporary alternative as negotiating between conforming to and resisting the hegemony, rhizome- like network that endorses "A heterogeneous, non-hierarchical and ever-changing network... connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, signifying rupture, cartography and decalcomania" (p.164). But the findings exhibit that TED has modified significantly the non-hierarchical element. In its media practices, TED prefers to maintain a semi- hierarchical power structure, which allows TED to be the pivotal authority of the network. The following sections explain how TED embodies these elements of rhizome.

Heterogeneous and Contingent Network in Semi-Hierarchical Power Structure

In comparison with other relatively more radical alternative media like IMC (Independent Media Center, i.e. Indymedia), TED has quite similar type of network- based community that spreads across different country borders, cultures and social political beliefs. Philosophically, TED's network is supposed to be built with freedom of having different views and platform for dialogue (or debate) over any issue in a democratic fashion. This idea carries the spirit of what the TED Speaker Sheikha Al Mayassa (2012, February) poignantly says on her TED Talk on intercultural network, "We don't want to be all the same, but we do want to understand each other". Al Mayassa adds the more global the world becomes, the more different people want to be (2012, February).

On the surface, TED's network is non-hierarchical which builds assumption

that everybody is deemed as equal in expressing ideas and opinions. Even though TED Talk's format is a short monologue from the speakers and it is one-way communication of ideas; audience always seems enthusiastic and mesmerized (or inspired). This kind of atmosphere projects rather a self-congratulatory (and latently less critical) learning process and seminar. Thus, TED designs its online platform to help bridge the gap in access and participation by generating dialogues in its social media forums, TED Talk video comment posts and TED Conversations. TED also has been popularly known for generously giving away most of its content through publishing its TED Talk videos through the internet under the Creative Common license where people are allowed use TED's materials with attribution, unchanged and for non-commercial purposes. These online community features are expected to bring the ideas from TED Talk into another level of debate and hopefully can trigger social change.

However, a deeper look into the network finds that there is still a hierarchical structure of power that limits community's access and participation in TED. This finding shows a different picture of what on the surface a very democratic and non-hierarchical relationship between the members and TED as the main organization. The following illustration supports this premise.

Less than a decade, TED's network has expanded exponentially and globally through its global conferences and online platform. The popularity of these two means also spur growing independent initiatives from local communities to reproduce the TED format of idea sharing, serving the community and crowd source the right knowledge and skills in organizing a social movement. TED is quickly responding by licensing its TEDx event that makes it possible for TED to control the dissemination of information and the usage of its branding, filter the speaker lineup and themes, standardize meticulously the format of the event and give detailed directions regarding how the video should be shot into TED-

driven templates. TED's headquarters also have the right to select the best TEDx videos that meet TED's content and technical parameters. TED's team also moderates and manages TED Conversation and TED Community that enable them to delete comments they consider inappropriate and add or remove credit points of its members.

Here, certain practical and operational needs for hierarchy that endorses centralized authority cannot be completely avoided and separate TED from the non-pivotal Indymedia's network that is arguably more democratic in its radicalism. Victor Pickard's study (2009, p. 316) on Indymedia's shows that the radical democratic network known for its positive values in endorsing, "radical egalitarianism as defined by inclusivity, plurality, diversity, openness, transparency and accountability" would eliminate the hierarchical structures in the organizations.

But IMC also imposed certain defectiveness in everyday and policy-based executions of projects as the branch organizations have the right to veto any consensual decision made by IMC conferences of all its organizations without any authority from any main organization to rule it (Pickard, 2009). Pickard (2009) picks a delicate case of financial support plan from Ford Foundation for IMC global network that was vetoed by IMC Argentina partially as it saw taking the money from the foundation would undermine IMC principles. This decision singles out radical democracy's weak point in consensus decision making within a large global network and its lack of single point of authority to govern and apply the policy and procedures towards the whole network whether it's global or local (Pickard, 2009, p. 316).

TED historically was established as a one-time event and then a singular annual global conference in Monterey, California before Sappling Foundation took over the management and moved the headquarters to New York. Yet the basic premise of highest control in TED's headquarter is never contested whilst

TED's networks grow heterogeneously and relatively semi-hierarchical in its hierarchy of access and authorization. TED's HQ managed by Sappling Foundation team is the main brain and policy maker as well as the police of the whole online and offline media activism. Unlike IMC Argentina and other IMC's other local branches, TED's global communities cannot veto the decisions made by TED's HQ around the financial sources coming from Sappling Foundation, donors and commercial sponsors. In fact, TED's HQ can reevaluate TEDx organizers' decision in using certain sponsors.

Even though TED controls strictly the release of licenses (they have to be renewed for new event), monitors closely and has the final say in editing and publishing its related materials, it mostly have maintained transparency in its policies and given space for the local communities to creatively interpret its policy for the benefit of their interests. This tweak of hierarchy and authority revises the earlier more restrictive and theoretical concept of what kind of rhizomatic media organization TED is and distinguishes it from the rest of alternative media. By being semi-hierarchical, TED also denies full participation and equal power for the community in deciding TED's policy and changing its structure. In line with Pateman's categorization (1970), TED currently only allows partial participation from its community. This finding also proves Carpentier's notion (2011) of false sense of full audience participation caused by the impression of egalitarianism in Internet. TED.com with its social media features have nourish the conception that TED's community can access and participate fully. In reality, TED members have limited access to media production, consumption and distribution. TED's monopoly of power without any proper check-and-balance practice from its community can also lead to ideological bias and compromise its heterogeneous network.

Decalcomania or Replication of Shared Narrative

Hybridism in TED manifests through the combination of old school anarchic fanzine movement of distributing photocopied materials (Atton, 2002) with the new media approach that allows the traditional practice of “decalcomania” reinvented and shared in a rhizomatic network. Decalcomania is referred in art scene as a replication technique where a copy of engravings or print can be transferred to other material. In TED’s context, decalcomania can refer to TED’s philosophy in sharing the wisdom of the crowds through its signature template of monologue-based conference of innovative ideas that ignites further dialogues or actions with the audience and let others to replicate the platform locally based on their interests and social conditions. This particular emulation is less based on ideology than TED’s principles of “ideas worth spreading”. “Ideas worth spreading” is the shared narrative that binds the global network and local communities together in their different beliefs, interpretations and purposes. Whether you are in free TEDx event in the poorest slum in Africa or in a paid elite global conference in some northern sphere country with strict audience selection and curatorship process, you are sharing the common thread of narration and template.

TEDx is now a common global offline and online network sharing interests and ideas that make nation-state and geographical boundaries irrelevant. The Internet plays major role in supporting the offline event and connecting the groups through the website, TEDx Talk video sharing and online forums. With each region having its own representatives and high mobility of TEDx member in collaborating with other TEDx group, TEDx has become itself a global community initiated by the public itself, building its own best practice yet still incorporating without reluctance under TED’s wing. An example of how TEDx has become globalized is apparent in many cases such as TEDx people from Japan visiting a TEDx Jakarta event to give support and learn from the current

event. They came by their own self-funding and self-interest, unrelated to TED's headquarters, yet still carried the identity of being a TED enthusiast and practiced TED's ritual of networking and sharing ideas.

The question thus arises if TED's ideological coherence becomes the main bond that ties these diversified communities or simply TED's media format is providing an effective platform that public can use for their purposes of sharing ideas and networking. On this, Bennet argues that the ideological relation is a weak integrator of contemporary global activism (as cited in Pickard, 2009, p.320). Instead, Bennet (as cited in Pickard, 2009) points out that the integrative function is taken over by "...personal ties, recognition of common threats, pragmatism about achieving goals, and the ease of finding associations and information through the Internet... inclusiveness has become a strong meta-ideological theme" (p.320).

From users' perspective, TED members and the public are participating in TED's activities and being integrated through the bonds of personal interests in finding information online and offline and sharing it with their communities. Despite their political, social and economic differences or dissimilar ideological struggles, the public is continuously utilizing TED's media activism to achieve their shared goals of better education, innovation and social justice.

Due to its media activism, different communities are extolling TED for giving them a common public sphere where dialogues and exchange of knowledge among differences are conducted in a tolerant, pluralistic and democratic manner. These communities grow as a rhizomatic network in a global public sphere by replicating a decalcomania practice from one community to another whilst personalizing and customizing TED's template into their interests and goals. In the end, TED is another means to an end. These findings reconfirm Pickard's conclusion (2009) of the trends of contemporary activism as "non-hierarchical, less ideologically rigid and network-based" (p.326).

Nonetheless this proposition of ideology coherence as a weaker influential factor in an integration of a network should not impose TED as simply an innocent neutral mean that can be exploited for any kind of end. Neither should it overlook the importance of TED's ideological driven social movements and authorities in governing its rhizomatic network in the global public sphere. In point of fact, following this argument, I shall dwell to how TED's ideology drives strongly its social political characters towards manifesting the trans-hegemonic dynamic of serving the community as civil society and its fluid power play with state and market.

TED is contingent and rhizomatic in terms of advocating heterogeneity, diversity and plurality of innovative ideas through an open interconnected network and knowledge management of its online and offline platforms. This rhizomatic network enables TED and its global community to contingently reshape its collective identity by globalizing the local and localizing the global. Its local communities embrace TED's global identity and platform to amplify their causes whilst similarly, TED benefits from the local context, content, skills and resources for its further sustainability as global network and achieving its goal to spread ideas worldwide. Rhizomatic approach also levels down the hierarchy of decision-making to semi-hierarchical and supports the community to democratically access and participate in TED projects in which they can replicate, modify and crowd source the production and consumption process. TED with its communities construct what Bailey et al. (2008) consider as alternative channel and content that vary, supplement or/and contradict the dominant hegemonic discourse as well as alter the representations and policies.

TED is Trans-hegemonic

TED's social political characteristics also carry certain counter hegemony attempts in challenging and transforming the common dominant practice of mass

media. TED's counter-hegemonic subculture presents itself distinctively on the level of collaboration, commitment, participation and access for the public to its media compared to mainstream media. TED encourages citizen journalism and social activism as well as radically changes how media organizations work.

Through its rhizomatic network, TED reforms itself from an exclusive elitist global conference networks for industrial market to a non-profit organization touching more people from various social and political backgrounds. TED has become less vertical in its way managing its network, exercising its policy and governing its distribution of content. Similar to mainstream media, TED has uncannily strong editorial and curatorial leadership and power. Yet unlike mainstream media, TED is less rigid in innovating and evolving itself. It currently allows more participation from audience by giving them more power in editing and curating the speakers and content in the exclusive TED Global Conference and TEDx events. Thus, the ideas presented are the most mattered and significantly can address their interests, target the right people to connect and collaborate therefore improving the networking that will hopefully turned into concrete social actions and changes.

TED has become more democratic and more radical in terms of sharing their ideas and pushing the established boundaries built by the dominant political and economic elites to make an open society with equal social justice. The Anti-SOPA TED Talk from Clay Shirky shows exactly where TED stands against the state and market's effort to control the distribution and freedom to access of information. Like Shirky (2012, January) said candidly, "Time Warner has called and they want us all back on the couch, just consuming –not producing, not sharing –and we should say, 'No'".

Nonetheless, this counter-hegemonic practice could not simply be done without TED exercising some 'compromises' and collaborating with the state and market in the ecosystem. In order to survive and cultivate, TED has become

more trans-hegemonic in its practices as alternative media. For the sake of its sustainability in the competitive global environment of different types of imbalanced power and political systems, TED continuously reinvents its bargaining power with the state and market. It designs its business models to hybridize dynamically with the market. The TED Prize winner JR, an anarchist anti-establishment street artist may have different view and even opposite agenda than the capitalistic global companies sponsoring the TED Prize. But through TED's media vehicle, they collaborate in such fluid trans-hegemonic mechanism that allows the opposite parties to coexist and co-nurture in a symbiotic mutualism relationship towards achieving their highly probability of conflicting goals. In the website, such connection can be seen through the statement that JR is not officially related to the sponsors (Congratulations JR - The 2011 TED Prize Winner, n.d.). The sponsors via TED finance JR's project whilst JR can still maintain his independence as an artist. TED has tweaked its means and transformed its resources to facilitate different democratic struggles to share, unite and amplify together their best values in meeting their targets. TED has provided flexible interconnectedness.

Another illustration of similar finding is TED unabashed regular practice of presenting advertorial video from leading sponsors before TED Talk video stream begins. Advertorial video from Samsung accompanies TED Talk video of Open-sourced civilization from Marcin Jakubowski (2011, April) implicitly denounces the need to use expensive industrial products and promotes DIY sustainable cost-effective living. However in the advertorial, Samsung clearly depicts its product placement of Samsung Galaxy Notes tablets used by contemporary artists in real-life projects of reinterpreting emoticon culture and being curated by none other than the underground counter culture graffiti artist Shepard Fairey (New Hat, 2012, April 1). TED juxtaposes these videos probably more as the editorial agenda to put similar theme for the targeted audience who

love provocative, mind-altering ideas for an open society that enable them to share their art, creativity and technology into wisdom of the crowds. Yet, in parallel, TED undauntedly incorporates one of the biggest technology company to support the whole commercial commotion.

Its ease with the market also remarks the fluidity if not integration with the commercial world. TED as a non-profit alternative media has effortlessly reshaped commercialism by treating the big commercial brands as partners. Unlike radical social movement such as Greenpeace who criticizes and antagonizes completely these capitalistic institutions, TED prefers to build a constructive criticism instead, through public-private initiatives such as TED Ads Worth Spreading. Not only does TED cultivate financial support from big established companies, it also exhibits its strong branding as the leading global media organization to stand along the market's major players. This format of sponsorships is also being replicated to smaller local communities of TED and TEDx.

TED's trans-hegemonic partnerships is what Bailey et al. (2008) point out as the strength of alternative media in confronting and subverting the ironclad structures of public and commercial media organization as well as making consensus with them through mutual collaborations.

At the same time, TED's general open political and cultural stand towards democracy and social justice confirms what Bailey et al. (2008) say about alternative media whose elusiveness and flexibility make it hard to control and keep its independence by the nation states governments. Among TED's speakers are wide-spectrums of world and local politicians and leaders from different political beliefs: from the Democrats such as Al Gore and 2007 TED Prize Winner Bill Clinton to British Conservative Party's leader David Cameron. More radical personals such as Anti-SOPA activists and the notorious Wikileaks founder Julian Assange (2010, July) are also in the list of speakers. TED is not

explicitly condoning to political limits set by the state. Compared to more radical alternative media, TED occupies itself mostly as a NGO willingly collaborates with the states or criticizing its policies through non-violent dialogue and provocative talks rather than rallying street protests and more extreme social movements. TED's stance to be a global alternative media independent from nation-state borders and ideology defines its power play with the state. Many TED's activists develop their past, present and future portfolio of political career directly or indirectly through TED. For example, TEDGlobal 2009 Fellow Mallam Nuhu Ribadu was running in 2010 Nigerian presidential election and found TED as medium to empower his political activities and projects (Tedstaff, 2010, November 22).

Thus, TED is trans-hegemonic because it progressively challenges the hegemonic views and power of the state and market by providing an alternative platform while consequently collaborating for its causes. TED finances its activities as non-profit civil society through non-profit channels as well as corporatization such as advertisements, sponsorships and maximizing the commercial value of its assets (especially the prestigious TED Global conference) and public-private partnerships. This marketization strategy allows TED to synergize and expand various spin-off projects from its flagship conference as well as cross subsidize its humanitarian non-profit projects worldwide. TED still adapts certain traditional values and management of mainstream media. It also reforms the editorial and brand management process into semi-hierarchical power structure that mainstream media still rigidly refuse to do. TED maintains the final authority and controls the licensing and franchising of its brand without giving its communities a veto right to its policy-making. But TED is progressing towards decentralization and democratization of its curatorship and brand usage by leveraging its online and social media platform as well as providing its media content for free to flatten the hierarchy of

access and participation to its global network. Following Bailey et al.'s premises (2008), TED shows that an alternative way is still open for media organizations and more balanced power structure as well as less hierarchical access and participation are prevailing possibilities.

By being *trans-hegemonic* and not exclusively counter-hegemonic, TED demonstrates the contingency of alternative media in its power struggle with state, market and mainstream media. In its partnerships with the state and market, TED firmly states its independent and objective accountability against any commercial and political interests. Yet it also exhibits moderate rather than radical approach towards gaining its democratic goals. It prefers to shake the status quo from within the system rather than being a stand-alone fighter from outside because it believes in the interdependency and co-existences for sustainable growth as a global civil society. This social action affirms Bailey et al.'s premise of realistic reason of trans-hegemonic approach:

Resisting all hegemonies on all societal levels will only lead to a total detachment from the social or a collapse into solipsism. In this sense, alternative media are trans-hegemonic, and not exclusively counter-hegemonic, as they oscillate between acceptance and rejection, between resistance and compliance, between restriction and creation. At the same time, they remain rhizomatic, avoiding (or at least attempting to avoid) incorporation into the realms of state and market (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 153)

TED's convergence with the market is less probable to be shared by any other more radical alternative media or civil society organizations, yet in this complex democracy and market driven system, it compels to adjust. As Bailey et.al confirm civil society should not be seen separate from the state and market and follow the Neo-Grancian thinking, it should be engaging and overlap with both areas while being independent (2008, pp. 21-22). TED contests the hegemony of state and market that cause the political, social and economic injustice and

environmental destruction, by converging itself into the system and changing things from inside.

This casualness in dealing with the powerful and hegemonic economy and political institutions can be caused by TED's unconventional historical background. It was born as part of the industry and profitable organizations to promote the players and latest innovations in the industries. Yet its civic visions have surpassed the commercial business model and turned TED to trans-hegemonic media activism.

Based on these key findings and discussions about how TED develops into a hybrid alternative media with all its complexity, challenges and consensus (rather than compromise) with hegemonic powers in serving the community and enhancing democracy – I come to conclusion that TED's political and cultural characteristics are contingent, rhizomatic and transhegemonic.

TED and Trends in Alternative Media

In answering the second research question of how TED can reflect the general trend of alternative media, I revisit the related research sub-questions. I have explored them mainly in the Findings Chapter and I consequently surmise them to emulate similar trends in alternative media.

First, TED's dynamic power struggle with the state, market, and mainstream media in serving the community has displayed a trend of alternative media taking part in civil society with a less radical approach and incorporating itself into the system through constructive partnerships. In order to survive in the contemporary democratic system, TED's non-profit organization management is applying corporate-like strategy. This inclination towards the market shows that alternative media's media economy is less strict against corporatization and commercialism in order to build sustainable media organization.

Second, TED's rapid growth as a global community shows that it has

replicated its communal identity, cultural branding and TED-like form of idea dissemination. TED provides the public to access and participation in TED's media production (bigger role in curatorship process), consumption (free online forum and TED Talk videos) and distribution (for example, TED's media content under free Creative Common license and TED Activators program). The communities also contribute significantly in building TED's identity through TEDx events worldwide by giving local context, values and causes. However these achievements are critically compromised by the semi-hierarchical level of access and participation that exhibits TED's sole authority and veto power in the decision making process. This phenomenon could project grim general picture of alternative media's potential to be simply global social franchise chain rather than globalized open source social movement built and owned by the communities.

The third trend is regarding how TED works as civil society that promotes social change. By optimizing Castells' (2008, p.81) notion of three capacities (technological, institutional and organizational) of globalization process in global public sphere, TED aims to expand its role as a global civil society. TED's global network represents how alternative media endeavor to mediate the political gaps, level down the hierarchy of access and participation by local communities, as well as empower the marginalized, underrepresented and underprivileged groups in a global scale. TED also projects the hard implications of the trans-hegemonic approach and alternative media's amalgamation with the dominant power and discourse. This approach has high possibility to deter alternative media's role as civil society, spark conflict of interests as well as undermine democracy.

Fourth, several trending challenges cultivate from TED's trans-hegemonic approach that can hinder TED from achieving its mission for social change without compromising its values for democracy and its role as a civil society

organization. TED still maintains partially its commercial and elitist character (for example, TED Global Conference exclusive network of influential and affluent elites) for the sake of funding its non-profit projects. Other implicit commercialism and commodification are also evident in its strategic partnerships with commercial companies, influential NGOs and mainstream media. TED's autonomy and semi-hierarchical power structure as well as possible ideological bias towards the North sphere jeopardize its fight for democratic representations of diverse and plural groups and ideas. These challenges exhibit the trending threats alternative media generally face in relation to its power struggle with the state, market and mainstream media. Either being refused to be co-opted which result in radical social movement, or being cooperative and trans-hegemonic for the sake of financial stability and political sustainability, alternative continue to strive for their independence and alternative views.

Critical Reflection on the Study

In retrospective, some limitations occurred during the process of researching and analyzing the key findings. These limitations came in form of restricted research time and academic scope over vast amount of data. In a positive light, these limitations made me focused on more specific areas in characterizing TED as hybrid alternative media, such as level of access and participation of its community and its relationships with the state, market and mainstream media. This research can be beneficial as the general starting point, historical background and case study for academicians to base on in instigating more explorative future research on the latest development of alternative media. I suggest for deeper and longer-term research on TED's network development to see how alternative media evolve and survive. For the public, this research can provide academic and scientific perspectives in looking at TED more critically. For TED members and management, the results and findings in this research can

be used as feedbacks and reflections on how they form their global identity, improve their practices and serve the community better.

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