# THE OBSCURED NEWS

How does behind-the-scenes government interference and concealment of news on the Internet challenge the accurate dissemination of information?

**Abstract**

In the digital age, an enormous amount of news and information is being published on the internet, providing readers with easy access to information. However, the stability of digital systems does not protect information from behind-the-scenes interference, such as government manipulation and concealment. Some high-profile news on the Internet has been tampered with or hidden by behind-the-scenes government manipulation and interference. This raises concerns about the accuracy of the information we consume and the extent to which it is being influenced by external forces. Is the news we see actually true, or is it what they want us to see? How does behind-the-scenes government interference and concealment of news on the Internet challenge the accurate dissemination of information?

As a graphic designer, I am interested in exploring the interaction between experimental publishing and temperature-changing inks to address these issues. If the digitized news on the internet is transformed into a printed publication that carries the news content, how does the government's behind-the-scenes interference with the news appear in the printed publication? In my studio work, I investigated and translated a video of news on the internet that had been hidden by Chinese government into a publication and published a newspaper called 'The Obscured News'. The project also features voices from the masses in different sections of the newspaper, as the newspaper (the original form of the internet) carries the right of the masses to express themselves freely. To mask the information in the newspaper, special temperature-changing inks are used to produce an unreadable newspaper. The temperature-sensitive inks applied to the print produce a color change in response to the temperature of the contact. When the ink is exposed to temperature, the black ink becomes colorless and reveals the obscured news information. Conversely, when the temperature of the ink drops, the news is again obscured by the black color. In order to view the obscured information in the newspaper more clearly, the reader must either continuously touch the temperature-sensitive ink on the newspaper with their body heat or gather more readers to touch the newspaper at the same time. The interaction between the printed publication and the reader's touch simulates the behavior of the user clicking on the screen to view the news, but also indicates that the content of the news will gradually reveal more truth as the number of news clicks increases. Furthermore, when the temperature of the reader's finger is applied to the back of the publication, what the reader reads is manipulated by the movement of the finger. This phenomenon is akin to governments or powerful interest groups manipulating the presentation and concealment of news behind networks such as those without public scrutiny.

This issue is relevant to many audiences. On the one hand, this line of enquiry is relevant to anyone concerned about the role of governments in manipulating access to information and the impact of such interference on transparency and accountability. The 'Obscured News' project highlights the importance of preserving accurate and truthful news dissemination in the face of government interference and offers a critical perspective on the role of the internet in shaping public discourse. On the other hand, the issue is relevant to a journalist, mass media and independent media. This project encourages journalists and media organizations to operate freely and disseminate news by means of independent publishing and information hiding design, emphasizing the importance of media organizations in promoting independent and accurate journalism.

**Context**    The era of big data has provided great convenience for users to quickly access information and news on the Internet anytime and anywhere. More and more hot news events and free speech are being posted on the Internet by users through self-media and reaping a lot of attention. According to Herman and Chomsky, there is a growing problem of governments influencing the authenticity of news dissemination through behind-the-scenes interference and concealment of news.

In 'Manufacturing Consent', Herman and Chomsky argue that the role of the media is to shape public opinion and drive the dominant narrative. Rather than being influenced by government and corporate interests, as is the case in many US and Western democracies, it is used as a tool to promote powerful interests and manipulate the content of news and public opinion. (1988) The sourcing filter is used by governments to interfere with media coverage of news and to force the media to rely strictly on official government information. In addition, the media may be pressured to selectively report on certain news events or issues while ignoring other priority issues. Such selective reporting may create a distorted picture of reality and influence public judgement. Government interference in mass media platforms also undermines press freedom and the public's access to accurate and reliable information.

According to Salarelli (2014), the easiest way for a government to interfere with the content and dissemination of news is to create barriers and make it more difficult to access. Another key reference point for this work is that governments create barriers to make news more difficult to access and to interfere with news, which refers to the use of obfuscation, concealment, etc. to manipulate news content behind the scenes and to affect the authenticity of news dissemination. Some top stories disappear from the internet due to government interference, even blocking articles and free comments posted by the masses through their self-published accounts. The reason for this is that reducing access to news or making information more difficult to access on the internet can effectively inhibit not only the speed of news dissemination, but also reduce the exposure of news. Government concealment can affect the accuracy of news disseminated to the public, leading to violations of the public's right to know the news and freedom of expression.

In many countries, governments interfere with press freedom and manipulate news coverage behind the scenes on the Internet. The specific systems and networks involved in this enquiry include government agencies, intelligence services, and media organizations. Governments and intelligence services can use a variety of tactics to interfere with news dissemination, including censorship, blockades, and the harassment or imprisonment of journalists. As Karlekar (2008) reports in 'Freedom of the Press: A Global Survey of Media Independence', governments around the world have sought to control or manipulate news coverage to varying degrees through legal and political pressure, economic pressure, and other means. The Chinese government uses censorship and firewalls to screen and interfere with the news. On the one hand, artificial intelligence and digital technology are used to monitor and censor online news content, and to intervene and hide news content on sensitive topics. On the other hand, firewalls are set up to block websites from abroad and restrict domestic internet users from accessing information from foreign websites. This poses challenges to the public's right to equal access to information about real news and the accurate dissemination of news. A free and independent media is therefore essential to ensure that citizens have access to accurate and reliable information. In radical journalism throughout history, Morse code or coding has been an important way of transmitting secret information in war communications, where codes and ciphers have served as a way of hiding information from censorship. In my studio work, I translate and publish the news into a newspaper and publish the free comments of the public as a section of the newspaper. Newspapers as the original form of the Internet not only maintained the function of information exchange but were also able to successfully evade the online censorship of the Internet. Secondly, the black temperature-sensitive ink is used to obscure news information in publications in a way that mimics the Chinese government's behavior to block out the real content of news by setting up firewalls to restrict Chinese users' searches. When readers touch the newspaper with their hands, the black temperature-sensitive ink changes colour as the temperature rises, revealing the hidden information. At the same time the viewer's eye is manipulated by the colour change created by the movement of the finger over the newspaper, in a way that is analogous to the government's behind-the-scenes manipulation of the Internet to hide the news from view. This experimental publication is a call to action for readers to look critically at this government interference in the news. In this context of government interference in the accuracy of news dissemination, which is prevalent throughout the world, it is even more important that we maintain a questioning attitude towards the truthfulness of the news we can see.

Firstly, in my concrete practice of studio work, news hidden by the Chinese government on the internet is transformed into newspapers and publications by means of translations and attempts to escape the government's online censorship by means of independent publishing. In the first part of the project, the newspaper becomes a vehicle to carry news hidden by the Internet and free commentary from the public. The masking of news information in publications with black thermal ink alludes to the Chinese government's efforts to hide news through firewalls to restrict the search of Chinese users. The second part of the project looks at how, from the perspective of an independent media, news information is hidden in

publications by design to avoid censorship. Publications create an irreversible reading experience. The reader must break the cover of the publication and cut the joints of the pages when reading it, as the publication uses a French fold to hide the information within the pages. Each page is concealed in a different way, for example in the spine slit, in the folds of the pages, or by printing the same colour on the same colour paper. The aim of this publication is to make access to information more difficult by creating barriers to reading. From a theoretical perspective, this work draws on critical perspectives on the media and democracy. As scholars such as Herman and Chomsky (1988) have argued that the mass media is heavily influenced by corporate and government interests and is used as a tool to promote the interests of the powerful. Through an understanding of this theoretical perspective, the project was able to take a more critical look at the impact of government interference with the authenticity of news communication through the experimental design of printing temperature-sensitive inks on newspapers to obscure news information. In addition, professionally this work required an understanding of the ways in which the government intervenes in the dissemination of news. Experimenting with different printing materials and publications through iterative printing experiments, the project design was ultimately chosen to represent the impact of government intervention on news dissemination through newspaper and temperature sensitive inks. It also explores how information has evaded government censorship in the past through research into historical radical journalism, and is physically hidden in publications through independent publishing. This project aims to provide a critical analysis of how governments challenge the accurate dissemination of news through behind-the-scenes intervention and highlights the importance of media

## Projected contribution

In this project, the design of information concealment through temperature-sensitive inks and publications to represent government intervention and control of the press is of great importance to graphic communication design, both practically and theoretically. From a practical perspective, this project showcases the potential for innovative and experimental approaches in graphic design, as demonstrated by the exploratory design of temperature-sensitive inks and publications that reveal the government's covert control of the internet. It also underscores the importance of considering the design context and medium in the creative process. Theoretically, this project highlights the crucial role that graphic design can play in promoting social and political values such as transparency in government and freedom of the press. Professionally challenging the principles of graphic design to convey information, the project alludes to the government's artificial interference and deception of the news through information hiding design by how it makes information more difficult to read.

Beyond its academic merits, this project has the potential to contribute to the broader discourse on the importance of design in advancing societal values such as citizens' rights to information and freedom of expression. As I move forward in my project practice, this project will inspire me to approach design challenges more creatively and critically, with an eye towards promoting important social and political values. It will also encourage me to experiment with new and innovative techniques in my design work, and to continue exploring the potential of graphic communication design to create engaging and thought-provoking works that effectively communicate important messages such as the voice of the masses and social issues in a unique and memorable way. Ultimately, this project will equip me with the tools and inspiration necessary to make a positive impact in the dissemination of information and the promotion of societal values.

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