

Issue of google in the chinese media



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Media watch column

Why does a Chinese media keep covering the truth when facing the story from Google?

In China, everyone knows Google but nobody can use it, so when Google announces that they will re-enter China, it becomes big news. One of the biggest China foreign news website Ecns. cn reported a story on October 8th, 2018 said if Google returns to China, Baidu's ready to win. This is based on the fact that Google left China in 2010 and stopped most of its service to China after that. However, in 2018, Google declared that they are working on a particular search engine called "Dragonfly" for China and it will be available within this year.

After Google officially announced the closure of the Chinese version of its search engine, the majority of Chinese news institutions including Ecns. cn overwhelmingly supported the government's stance on Google due to the direction of public opinion in China's state media. Voice of America said that some of the mainland's leading news websites show what is good for the government only. Hong Kong's South China Morning Post reported that major websites and media in China had received the message from superior propaganda departments telling them to stay in line with the government on the Google issue.

This news story is essential for the government is because China now is in the stage of reform and opening up policy, as well as the globalisation with more and more foreign companies come to China. Google as a company which left China before, becomes particularly important. What is more, people in China are not satisfied with the reason that Google left China in 2010 which came from the government. The news that Chinese people have is that Google refused to accept the Internet censorship of the People's Republic of China and lost most of the market in China. Nevertheless, the truth is that after a cyber attack from China against Google and dozens of other firms, Google adequately shut down its operations in China. During the attack, Google also found out that some Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists had been hacked (The Atlantic, 2016).

As Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis said in Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online (2017, pp. 1), it is because of media's reliance on sensationalism, analytics and metrics, social media and clicks, the novelty over news value that makes them easy to be manipulated. So, in this condition, the news story from Ecns. cn has become the propaganda of the government to give the public the illusion that Google voluntarily withdrew from the Chinese search engine market eight years ago. Over time, too much media manipulation will inevitably lead to a decline in media trust, increased misinformation, as well as more and more serious problems. (ibid)

It is pointed out by David Randall in “ The Universal Journalist” (2016, pp. 9-10) that journalists tend to report what they have already known, and interviewed those people who are easy to find. This news story is not comprehensive, as the source only came from the Baidu co-founder and CEO Robin Li, which is lack of information from Google. However, as what has pointed out that this article is more like propaganda rather than a news story, it is not difficult to explain why there is only Chinese content in the report and no investigation on the opposite side.

One sentence in this news story reads “ Google retreated as its market share continued to fall, and at that time, Baidu had taken up over 70 per cent of the market.” It is untenable. The statistics showed that in 2007, China’s search engine market was about 2. 9 billion yuan. By 2008, it had grown to 5 billion yuan and finally reached 7 billion yuan in 2009. And according to a report from Stat Counter, a company based in the United States, by the second half of 2009, Google had 43% of China’s Internet search engine market, while Baidu had fallen to 56%. In general, Google maintained a rapid revenue growth in China from 2006 to 2009. (Stat counter, 2009)

What is more, the revenue of Google in China increased with the growth of market share and total market share of search engine in these three years. It can be seen that the author of this news tampered with the real data under the pressure of the government, this violates what Brian McNair said in “After Objectivity?” that news is objective, so, propaganda or influence from its producers can never be connected to it. As a reader, you can trust that the reporter’s description of the complicated reality that is contained in the book is honest and sincere. (2017□pp. 1318-1333)

Chinese scholar Hongju Shi points out that superficial reading is becoming more and more common among Chinese people. Many people scan the headlines before deciding whether to continue clicking on the news. (2017, pp. 5) This makes “winning by the title”, or so-called “clickbait” all the more popular. The title of this report goes “If Google returns, Baidu’s ready to win”. This heading was used in an exaggerated way, while curiosity prompted the audiences to read it, and the reporter earned clicks. There is no sufficient evidence that proves Baidu is ready to win in the competition with Google. If audiences are attracted by fake and exaggerated headlines, it will have adverse effects on journalists with professional ethics and firm stand against fake news, which may lead to a bad competitive environment. The title of this paper should express the fact that Google will enter China again more objectively, rather than repeatedly emphasise the attitude of Chinese enterprises towards it. Although this is more attractive to readers, it will also make the news less objective and less convincing.

However, at the same time several foreign media also reported this news, what is noteworthy is that the content they reported is entirely different. The BBC wrote that all Google had done right now is some exploration; no evidence can prove they are going to launch something to China in recent years. (BBC, 2018) And another report from BBC goes that Google suggests a product or service of some kind is on the way, though acknowledges the unpredictability of trying to re-enter the Chinese market, particularly at a time when the country is sparring with the US on trade. (BBC, 2018) It can be seen from the direct interviews with Google by foreign media that Google has no clear explanation on when it will enter China again. However, Ecns. cn's report has regarded the so-called "drawing game" as a "censored version of the search engine" before Google enters the Chinese search engine market. The main reason for this is that Ecns. cn lacks foreign correspondents, so they are unable to restore the full picture of the incident and can only report from one side (the Chinese side). It is pointed out by Kenneth Starck and Estela Villanueva in "Foreign Correspondents and Their Work" that Intercultural affairs journalism has always been with us. It is vital for foreign correspondents to go deep into the front line and investigate the truth of the news. This is how it differs from other forms of journalism, and why it is indispensable. (1992, pp. 17)

This is not the first time for Encs. cn to become the tool of government propaganda. Earlier in the case, when U. S. police had announced the arrest of Liu Qiangdong, Encs. cn was still posting that he might have been falsely accused. (BBC, 2018) The news media should report the truth and should not obscure or even ignore the fact because of the pressure from the government, and this is irresponsible to the audience.

There are two main reasons why media become the tool of government propaganda. The first one is by giving the people the same idea through the media so that people do not have any alternative information, and gradually get used to thinking in a directed way. The second reason is that due to the reform and opening up policy, controlling the news is the need for international communication. The main task for the media is to report the news that the Chinese government needs to present to the international community.

Chinese media, also known as the throat of the party, are unequal. Their status is not determined by the circulation of newspapers or the audience rating, but by the “ administrative level” set by the government, they almost monopolized the Chinese news market. On this basis, the Chinese government can no longer be silent about an issue but release some “ lies mixed with part of the truth” to the public, and such things frequently happen in recent years.

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