

# Faculty of Engineering of University of Porto



## Muted

### Multimedia Lab

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# Goals

The objective of this project is to raise awareness about the dangers that the practices of censorship and misinformation pose to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of speech. By placing the user in the role of a person who is responsible for bringing to light sensible information to an autocratic regime - which will do everything it can to stop the reveal of this information - the user can better understand the experiences of those who live under dictatorships, and also comprehend the challenges faced by the people who search for the truth behind the narratives created by such regimes.

# Innovation Points

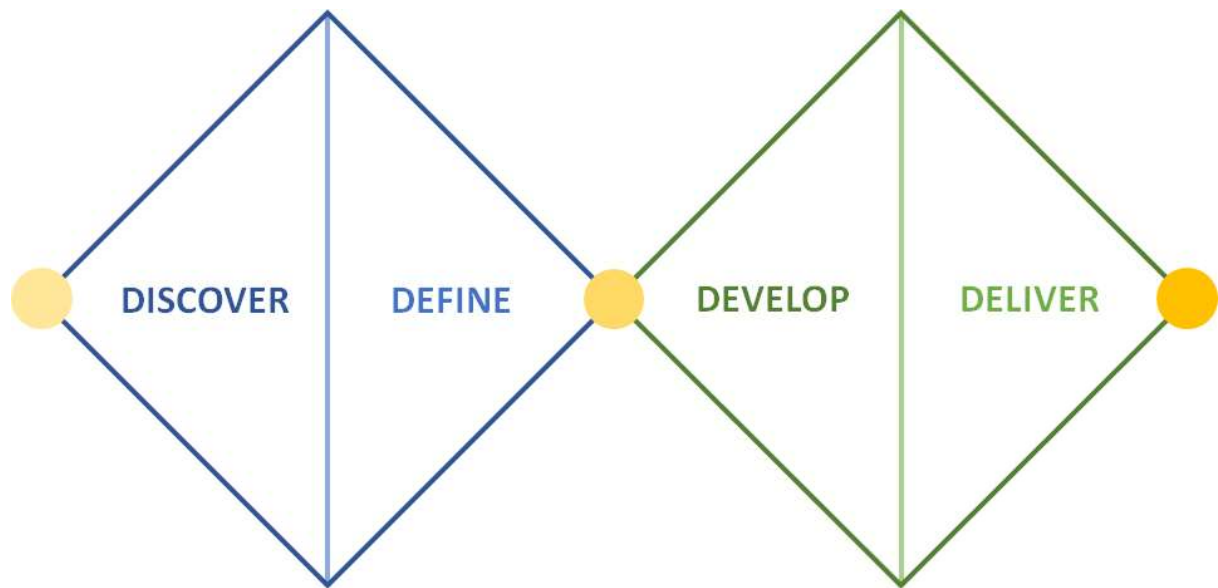
Muted is a thriller/adventure game that has both digital and physical formats that combined result in an innovative way of experiencing the game.

It is a game that stimulates the human and critical senses in a real environment, using a narrative that explores contemporary censorship, thus increasing its immersion factor and also giving it an interactive on an already explored theme.

The user is encouraged to explore physical spaces, like the journalist's office, looking for clues to further the narrative. Throughout the game, the user will also be in touch with technological and multimedia elements.

Immersion is achieved through an auto-reply system of emails, that the player has access to, and audio recordings from the diary itself. These elements give a higher sense of credibility to the narrative and user's experience.

# Double Diamond Process



- **Discover:** Analysing the best way to convey the impact that modern censorship can have on people's lives to the public;
- **Define:** Via a serious game, with the use of different types of digital media and physical objects, with the objective of simulating real life actions, achieving a greater sense of immersion.
- **Develop:** Recording audios that present the diary notes of a journalist before he was muted by the autocratic regime; using digital technology such as images and *QR codes* to indicate a certain location where the user must go next; using a pen-drive as way to transmit information and important files to the user; making use of real life e-mail services and its auto-reply features to simulate conversations between the user and story's characters, and to augment the sense of danger through email threats sent by the dictatorship.
- **Deliver:** The project will be shown in universities such as FEUP, with the intent of targeting primarily younger people, as they're generally the social group with less experience and knowledge about the effects of governmental censorship.

# User Experience

## 1. Intended

The user enters the journalist's office, where he will find his desk, an investigation board and paperwork all over the floor. In his desk he'll find the journalist's recordings and an open email interface asking for the password.

In the last recorded entry the user will be given a message in Caesar's code: "My Favourite Writer". After further exploring the office, the player will notice that most of the books were written by Agatha Christie, finding the password to the journalist's email. The user will open the email account and find an unread email from the informer referred to in the recordings. Attached to this email is a photograph of the place where the pen was hidden, which contains documents of high importance.

In this last step the user will browse through the content of the pen, and notice that there are a few newspapers where he can choose to spread and reveal the information he obtained. The first tries will be unsuccessful, since the documents are delicate. He will receive a few emails threatening him to stop, or else... If the user chooses to keep going, he'll eventually be able to find a newspaper willing to help him. After the newspaper posts his documents, they'll send a reply with the respective article, but, instead of showing something related to the documents, it shows an article about the disappearance of another person trying to bring to light delicate information, in this case, the 'another person' is himself. The game ends with the user being muted, transmitting a sense of helplessness and frustration.

## 2. Real

The user enters the journalist's office, where he will find his desk, his computer and annotations on a notebook, in addition to the journalist's mobile phone, which contains six audio recordings.

The annotations on the notebook include the journalist's e-mail address and password, and a table used for decoding Caesar ciphers. To progress in the narrative, the user must listen to the audio recordings saved in the mobile phone, which are diary notes recorded by the journalist. These recordings reveal the progress of the investigation up to the point of his disappearance. Also, the last recording includes a message encrypted with the Caesar cipher, which the user must decrypt with the use of the Caesar cipher table annotated on the notebook. This message, when decrypted, reveals the location where the journalist should have met his informant to receive secret documents about the case.

The decrypted message reads: "B305 BOARD TABLE", which refers a classroom in FEUP and a specific location in that room (the original idea was for the message to reference a different room from the one being used as the journalist's office, but, for presentation purposes, it was used the same room as the office).

After arriving in the indicated location, the user will find a book ("The Mysterious Affair at Styles" by Agatha Christie), which keeps, between its pages, a sheet of paper with a printed QR code. When scanning this QR code using a mobile phone, the user will receive

this another message, which reads: "B305 WINDOW". This message points to the next place where the user must go in order to proceed with their investigation.

In the location indicated by the QR code, the user will find a pen-drive, which must be accessed through the computer located in the journalist's office. When accessing it, the user will find a video file of a recording made by a security camera, revealing the moment of Meng Wanzhou's arrest. In addition, the pen-drive also contains a text file with a password, an email address and instructions for sending this password to the specified email.

The user must access the journalist's e-mail account - using the e-mail address and password noted in the notebook - and send the password to the e-mail address specified in the text file. After sending it, the user will receive an e-mail from the journalist's informant, with confidential documents attached. In this same e-mail message, the informant asks the user to send these documents to the American newspaper "The Washington Globe", where the murdered journalist used to work. For this purpose, the e-mail address of this newspaper is also informed by the informant.

After sending the documents to the newspaper and completing what would be their final task, the user is surprised by the e-mail reply he receives, in which representatives of The Washington Globe warn that they are working together with the Chinese government. With that, the narrative ends with the user being reported to the Chinese authorities, having failed in his task of revealing the truth.

## Technology and Interface

In order to make the narrative more immersive and closer to real life, we used different types of digital technologies.

As the starting point of our backstory we use phone recorded audio tapes from the personal journal of the journalist.

Also, the QR code was used to indicate the location of the pen-drive - that should be found by the user in a specific location- to achieve documents and important information to progress through the narrative.

Finally, we used auto-reply, which is a service from Gmail, that simulates a real mail exchange between the user and the fictional characters. Auto-reply was programmed with the intent of automatically replying to an e-mail containing certain keywords.

Finally, an automatic reply function from the Gmail service was applied in the game, to exchange messages between the user and characters in the narrative. To make this possible, the automatic reply was programmed to respond automatically when an email message was sent, containing a specific keyword.

# Communication

The communication of the project proves to be extremely important since it will allow us to expand Muted throughout the world. Since Muted is a serious game, we will use in our communication strategy both digital and traditional means of communication.

We aim to have an active presence in our digital tactic and, to achieve that goal, Muted will be present in various platforms, such as social media, blogs and the official website.

While, in traditional media, it would be interesting to be present on a page of FEUP's newspaper and distribute flyers with information of the project for all interested students to display the product and also give some extra information about it.

## 1. Communication strategy goals

- Increase brand awareness;
- Introduce a new game/product;
- Present the benefits of the project through experience;
- Appealing to the audience's senses to generate experience;
- Engage with our target, generating proximity to them.
- Expand the project;

## 2. Digital Media - Social Media Presence

Muted will be present in social platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. Also, it will serve to publicize the project through video teasers and daily content. Communicating the project through social media will generate buzz in those platforms and attract people to the place where they can try out the project.

Since Muted is a project that addresses a contemporary episode related to the commercial war between the US and China, it would be interesting to connect the real facts of that specific episode with the project's story and construction. To make this possible, we could write an article presenting the project and explaining the real facts behind the creation. This article can be published both on social networks or in the newspaper.

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