

Partie I : EXPRESSION ÉCRITE (12 points) - question 1 (4 points), question 2 (8 points).

Vous indiquerez avec précision à la fin de chaque réponse, le nombre de mots qu'elle comporte.

Partie II : THÈME (8 points)

Partie I : EXPRESSION ÉCRITE (12 points)

Google's days of monopolising the web may be numbered

It was a fearless female investigative journalist who ended the monopolistic empire of history's richest man, John D Rockefeller. So perhaps it is some kind of cosmic revenge that Rockefeller's modern-day equivalents in Big Tech are behind the collapse in investigative journalism, as cash-strapped publishers slash jobs.

Ida Tarbell was in 45 when, in 1903, she began a series of articles in *McClure* magazine uncovering criminality and bullying within Rockefeller's Standard Oil company. Tarbell grew up in northern Pennsylvania, a landscape dotted with oil derricks. But when Standard Oil moved in with illegal deals and unfair tactics in the early 1870s, her father's business and dozens of others went bust. For Ida, the story was personal. For America, it led to a Supreme Court ruling that Standard Oil's monopoly should be broken up, and to a new public scepticism about big business.

Over the past few weeks another American courtroom, this time in Virginia, has been considering another monopoly, as the US government's Department of Justice brings a case to break up Google's grip on the global digital advertising market.

I appreciate that sounds dull (that's why I had to use an intro about a swashbuckling journalist), but if you've ever griped about clickbait, or the collapse in regional news, or a title closing its office on your high street, or even a proliferation of typos, please read on.

Google controls 90 per cent of all online searches. On mobiles, it's 96 per cent. "To google" has become the verb for all digital discovery. The company allegedly also controls 91 per cent of publishers' ad servers (which generate the adverts that appear alongside content) and over 80 per cent of ad demand (from companies wanting to place ads). Google serves up 13 billion adverts a day, with nine out of ten global publishers dependent on it. Last year it made about \$238bn from online advertising.

The four-week trial, which was covered diligently by the journalist Ricky Sutton on his Substack "Future Media", heard how other advertising platforms had tried to compete but were bought out by Google, left to languish and then closed down. Meanwhile, publishers told of how they were unable to leave Google's clutches for fear of unmanageable losses. The News Corp employee Stephanie Layser told the court the company had wanted to innovate, but leaving Google would cost \$9m a year: "I felt like they were holding us hostage." It's enough to make Rockefeller blush. By taking the majority of ad revenues (not to mention directing what content is promoted to readers through its algorithm), Google is starving publishers of millions of pounds and hollowing out journalism. Hundreds of titles have closed, job losses increased and investment in costly investigative and foreign journalism slashed. Analysis by *Press Gazette* shows 2,500 media jobs have gone in the UK and US this year. The true number is probably far higher. Clickbait has worsened as publishers decide their only hope is to create more content to display more ads.

If Judge Leonie Brinkema concludes that Google's behaviour is monopolistic, it may be forced to sell parts of its business. That will help, but the damage is already done – to news organisations and to society, as trust in the media weakens while the polarising extremes of unregulated social media flourish. As Tarbell once said about Rockefeller: "Our national life is on every side distinctly poorer, uglier, meaner, for the kind of influence he exercises."

Alison Phillips, *The New Statesman*, October 2nd, 2024

1. What does Alison Phillips aim at showing by comparing Rockefeller's Standard Oil company with Google? *Answer the question in your own words. (80 words +/- 10%)*
2. Would you agree to say that we get the media that we deserve? *Illustrate your answer with relevant examples from English-speaking countries. (180 words +/- 10%)*

Partie II : THÈME (8 points)

Le ChatGPT fascine autant qu'il fait peur, comme un grand Autre qui nous invite avec insistance à dialoguer avec lui. C'est une machine compulsive à produire des énoncés. Il a réponse à tout. C'est une technique et un langage. Mais il n'a pas de visage, pas de corps non plus. C'est une bouche d'ombre qui débite à toute vitesse des réponses à des questions qui lui sont posées. Ce néo-Frankenstein tout droit sorti de l'Intelligence artificielle a l'ambition de venir en aide aux hommes, mais il suscite aussi les craintes d'une robotisation de la pensée et de l'imaginaire. Ses mots sont des emprunts qui suivent à la lettre les traces que nous laissons sur le Web. Son altérité n'est qu'une illusion. Il a des yeux de verre. Ce n'est qu'un miroir qui parle. Il a un certain style, à la fois personnel et impersonnel, cordial et mécanique, courtois ou intrusif. Dans la presse les chroniqueurs s'en sont amusés comme des enfants au zoo s'adressant à des animaux sauvages...

Christian SALMON, *L'Empire du Discrédit* (2024)