

Should digital monopolies be broken up?

电子垄断需要被打破吗?

European moves against Google are about protecting companies, not consumers

欧洲人反抗谷歌的运动实为保护自身企业，而非消费者

ALTHOUGH no company is mentioned by name, it is very clear which American internet giant the European Parliament has in mind in a resolution that has been doing the rounds in the run-up to a vote on November 27th. One draft calls for "unbundling search engines from other commercial services" to ensure a level playing field for European companies and consumers. This is the latest and most dramatic outbreak of Googlephobia in Europe. 虽然没有提及任何公司的名字,我们非常清楚哪些美国互联网巨头在欧洲议会中已经作为讨论对象,被放在于 11 月 27 日实行了几轮的投票决议中。有一项草案呼吁“解除搜索引擎和其他商业服务的捆绑”,以确保欧洲企业和消费者进行公平竞争。这是欧洲谷歌恐惧症最新和最戏剧性的暴动。

Europe's former competition commissioner, Joaquín Almunia, brokered a series of settlements this year requiring Google to give more prominence to rivals' shopping and map services alongside its own in search results. But MEPs want his successor, Margrethe Vestager, to take a firmer line. Hence the calls to dismember the company.

欧洲前竞争委员会专员阿尔穆尼亚,今年促成了一系列内容的解决,要求谷歌在竞争对手的购物和地图服务方面提供更多的显著内容,并将其内容一并放入自己的搜索结果中。不过,欧洲议会议员希望他的继任者玛格丽特采取更加坚定的策略。因此呼吁分割公司。

The parliament does not actually have the power to carry out this threat. But it touches on a question that has been raised by politicians from Washington to Seoul and brings together all sorts of issues from privacy to industrial policy. How worrying is the dominance of the internet by Google and a handful of other firms?

议会实际上并不具备实施这一威胁的能力。不过,议会倒是已经触及到了从美国华盛顿到韩国首尔的政客们所提出的问题,并汇集了各种争议,从私密政策到产业政策。互联网由谷歌和少数其他公司占主导的现状是多么令人担忧的现状啊?

Who's afraid of the big bad search engine?

谁害怕这个巨大的坏蛋搜索引擎呢?

Google (whose executive chairman, Eric Schmidt, is a member of the board of The Economist's parent company) has 68% of the market of web searches in America and more than 90% in many European countries. Like Facebook, Amazon and other tech giants, it benefits from the network effects whereby the popularity of a service attracts more users and thus becomes self-perpetuating. It collects more data than any other company and is better at mining those data for insights. Once people start using Google's search (and its e-mail, maps and digital storage), they rarely move on. Small advertisers find switching to another platform too burdensome to bother.

谷歌(其执行董事长埃里克·施密特,是《经济学人》的母公司董事会的成员)具有在美国网络搜索市场的 68 %和在许多欧洲国家 90% 以上的份额。像脸书,亚马逊等科技巨头,它们从网络效应中获利,由此一个服务的普及,吸引更多的用户,从而自我延续。谷歌收集比其他任何公司更多的数据,其探索这些数据的洞察力更好。一旦人们开始使用谷歌的搜索(以及其电子邮件,地图和数字存储),他们很少继续前进搜索。小广告客户找到切换到另一个平台则过于繁琐费心。

Google is clearly dominant, then; but whether it abuses that dominance is another matter.

It stands accused of favouring its own services in search results, making it hard for advertisers to manage campaigns across several online platforms, and presenting answers on some search pages directly rather than referring users to other websites. But its behaviour is not in the same class as Microsoft's systematic campaign against the Netscape browser in the late 1990s: there are no e-mails talking about "cutting off" competitors' "air supply". What's more, some of the features that hurt Google's competitors benefit its consumers. Giving people flight details, dictionary definitions or a map right away saves them time. And while advertisers often pay hefty rates for clicks, users get Google's service for nothing—rather as plumbers and florists fork out to be listed in Yellow Pages which are given to readers gratis, and nightclubs charge men steep entry prices but let women in free.

谷歌明显占主导地位，但是否滥用这一优势则是另一回事。它被指控在搜索结果中偏袒自己的服务，使得广告商在多个网络平台管理活动变得困难，并提出了某些搜索页面直接的答案，而不是向用户推荐其他网站。但其行为和微软公司在 20 世纪 90 年代末发起的反对美国网景公司浏览器的系统活动是同样的性质：没有电子邮件谈论“切断”竞争对手的“气源”。更重要的是，一些特点伤害谷歌的竞争对手从消费者中获益。给人们提供航班信息，字典定义或地图能够马上节省了人们的时间。虽然广告商往往支付高的点击率，用户可以免费得到谷歌的服务——而非水管工和花商掏钱被列在给读者免费阅读的黄页上，并且夜总会会给男人们提高入门价格，但让女人免费进入。

There are also good reasons why governments should regulate internet monopolies less energetically than offline ones. First, barriers to entry are lower in the digital realm. It has never been easier to launch a new online product or service: consider the rapid rise of Instagram, WhatsApp or Slack. Building a rival infrastructure to a physical incumbent is far more expensive (just ask telecoms operators or energy firms), and as a result there is much less competition (and more need for regulation) in the real world. True, big firms can always buy upstart rivals (as Facebook did with Instagram and WhatsApp, and Google did with Waze, Apture and many more). But such acquisitions then encourage the formation of even more start-ups, creating even more competition for incumbents.

也有很好的理由来解释为什么政府要较少精力充沛地去规范互联网垄断而非下线的活动。首先，在数字领域进入门槛较低。它从未如此简单推出一个新的在线产品或服务：考虑 Instagram, WhatsApp 或 Slack 的迅速崛起。建设一个对手基础设施到物理依靠更为昂贵（只是要求电信运营商或能源公司），并因此有比在现实世界中少得多的竞争（需要更多的监管）。诚然，大公司可以随时购买新的竞争对手（如脸书使用 Instagram 和 WhatsApp，谷歌利用 Waze, Apture 以及其他更多的软件使用等等）。但这样的收购则鼓励更多的创业企业的形成，从而创造更激烈的竞争。

Second, although switching from Google and other online giants is not costless, their products do not lock customers in as Windows, Microsoft's operating system, did. And although network effects may persist for a while, they do not confer a lasting advantage: consider the decline of MySpace, or more recently of Orkut, Google's once-dominant social network in Brazil, both eclipsed by Facebook—itself threatened by a wave of messaging apps.

其次，尽管从谷歌和其他网络巨头的转换不是没有代价的，他们的产品不锁定网页里的客户或是微软的操作系统。并且，虽然网络效应可能会持续一段时间，他们并没有赋予持久的优势：考虑 MySpace 的衰落，还有最近的 Orkut，谷歌曾经在巴西社交网络占领导地位，都是由 Facebook 而致衰落-而其本身也受到一波消息应用程序的威胁。

Finally, the lesson of recent decades is that technology monopolists (think of IBM in mainframes or Microsoft in PC operating systems) may be dominant for a while, but they are eventually toppled when they fail to move with the times, or when new technologies expand the market in unexpected ways, exposing them to new rivals. Facebook is eating into Google's advertising revenue. Despite the success of Android, Google's mobile platform, the rise of smartphones may undermine Google: users now spend more time on apps than on the web, and Google is gradually losing control of Android as other firms build their own mobile ecosystems on top of its open-source underpinnings. So far, no company has remained information technology's top dog from one cycle to the next. Sometimes former monopolies end up with a lucrative franchise in a legacy area, as Microsoft and IBM have. But the kingdoms they rule turn out to be only part of a much larger map.

最后，近数十年来的经验教训是，技术的垄断者（认为主机中 IBM 或是 PC 操作系统中的微软）可能一时占据主导地位，但他们未能与时俱进，或是当新技术以意想不到的方式扩大自己的市场，将其暴露给新的竞争对手，最终只能走向崩塌。脸书正在蚕食谷歌的广告收入。尽管安卓，谷歌的移动平台出现成功，智能手机的兴起可能会破坏谷歌的地位：用户现在花更多的时间在应用程序上而非网络，并且谷歌正在逐渐失去对安卓的控制，因为其他企业正在开源的基础上建立自己的移动生态系统。到目前为止，没有一家公司一直保持信息技术的顶峰，并从一个周期维持到下一个周期。有时候，前者垄断结束了在传统领域利润丰厚的专营权，微软和 IBM 都有这种情况。但他们统治的王国最终变成是一个更大的地图的一部分。

Looking after their own

照顾好自己的业务

The European Parliament's Googlephobia looks a mask for two concerns, one worthier than the other. The lamentable one, which American politicians pointed out this week, is a desire to protect European companies. Among the loudest voices lobbying against Google are Axel Springer and Hubert Burda Media, two German media giants. Instead of attacking successful American companies, Europe's leaders should ask themselves why their continent has not produced a Google or a Facebook. Opening up the EU's digital services market would do more to create one than protecting local incumbents.

欧洲议会的谷歌恐惧症查找两个关注热点，其中一个比另一个更具有价值。可悲的是，美国的政治家在本周指出，其实际是以保护欧洲企业的愿望。其中呼声最高的反对谷歌的游说是阿克塞尔·施普林格和布尔达传媒集团，两家德国媒体巨头。相比攻击成功的美国公司，欧洲领导人应该反问自己，为什么他们大陆还没有产生一个谷歌或脸书的公司。开放欧盟的数字服务市场会做更多的创建一个强大的公司，而非仅仅保护本地老牌。

The good reason for worrying about the internet giants is privacy. It is right to limit the ability of Google and Facebook to use personal data: their services should, for instance, come with default settings guarding privacy, so companies gathering personal information have to ask consumers to opt in. Europe's politicians have shown more interest in this than American ones. But to address these concerns, they should regulate companies' behaviour, not their market power. Some clearer thinking by European politicians would benefit the continent's citizens.

担心互联网巨头的的一个重要原因是隐私。限制谷歌和脸书使用个人数据的权限是正确的。他们的服务应该做到配备默认设置保护隐私权，因此公司收集的个人信息要问消费者自己的选择。欧洲的政客在这方面表现出比美国更多的兴趣。但要解决这些问题，就应该规范企业的行为，不是他们的市场力量。欧洲一些政客更清晰的思维将有利于欧洲大陆的公民。