

December 30, 2024

Bans, breakups and AI: Four digital frontiers for 2025

By: Adam Smith

From artificial intelligence changing jobs to social media bans and TikTok turmoil, here are four tech trends that could shape 2025.

From [internet blackouts](#) that hobbled farmers' protests in India to Romania re-running its presidential primary partly due to social media manipulation, 2024 has revealed both the expanding power and some of the frailties of Big Tech.

During the biggest election year in history, when more than 60 countries went to the polls, the role of technology in the democratic process moved decisively to the forefront.

Among the millions of people who faced [internet blackouts](#) this year were voters in Pakistan at the start of 2024 when the government cut off the internet.

Australia enacted a world-first ban on social media for children under 16 in November, setting a benchmark for global regulation.

In Romania, the initial results of the Nov. 24 presidential election - a victory for far-right, pro-Russian candidate Clujd Georghescu - were voided over concerns about Russian meddling and [TikTok's influence](#) in the campaign.

False or misleading claims by billionaire Elon Musk about the U.S. election in November amassed 2 billion views on the social media platform X, which he owns, according to [experts](#).

Beyond the democratic process, paramilitary forces were blamed for [taking the internet offline](#) in Sudan as families fled fighting in the civil war.

[Gig workers](#) fought sexist algorithms, the use of artificial intelligence programs prompted [strikes in Hollywood](#), and powerful tech tools were used to predict the ever more volatile weather caused by man-made [climate change](#).

The new year promises further digital shakeups. Here are four trends to watch:

Social media bans for young people

Australia enacted a [world-first ban](#) on social media for children under 16 in November, setting a benchmark for global regulation.

The Social Media Minimum Age bill, which will come into effect in 2025 and is seen as one of the toughest laws targeting multinational technology companies, had 77% public approval. But it also raised concerns among rights groups and privacy experts.

U.S. officials warn TikTok's management is beholden to the Chinese government. TikTok has denied that it has or ever would share U.S. user data.

Youth groups warned that LGBTQ+ and migrant teenagers could be cut off from support networks, while privacy advocates worried age-verification methods may lead to more collection of personal data.

The law requires technology companies, including Instagram, X, TikTok and Snapchat, to demonstrate they are taking reasonable steps to keep out young users. This [could include](#) using age-estimation videos, requiring documents be uploaded or age-inference through cross-checking email addresses through other accounts.

Other countries are considering similar bans, including Britain, where technology minister Peter Kyle said a ban is "[on the table](#)."

Florida also [passed a bill](#) to keep children under the age of 14 off of social media, but the Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA) and NetChoice, whose members include tech giants Google and Meta Platforms, filed a court [challenge](#) in October.

The Norwegian government has proposed [raising the age](#) at which children can use social media from 13 to 15, and Sweden is also considering an age-based ban to prevent [gang recruitment](#).

Time's up for TikTok?

The Supreme Court this week [agreed to hear](#) a challenge against a law that requires Chinese-based ByteDance to divest from TikTok in the United States by early next year or face a ban.

Artificial intelligence is likely to continue disrupting the job market next year, with workers employed in areas that have previously avoided automation, such as education and finance, more vulnerable.

U.S. officials warn TikTok's management is [beholden to the Chinese government](#). TikTok has denied that it has or ever would share U.S. user data.

Despite trying to ban the app during his first term, president-elect Donald Trump now says [he supports TikTok](#), making a sale, rather than a ban, more likely.

After the Romanian election, the European Union ordered TikTok to [freeze data](#) linked to the vote, issuing a "retention order" under its Digital Services Act, which regulates how the world's biggest social media companies operate in Europe.

Georgescu's campaign leaned heavily on TikTok, and researchers and politicians said the way the candidate's posts [went so viral](#) warranted investigation.

TikTok dismissed concerns about its role as "inaccurate and misleading."

Generative AI hits more white-collar workers

Artificial intelligence is likely to continue disrupting the job market next year, with workers employed in areas that have previously avoided automation, such as education and finance, more vulnerable.

A judge in the United States ruled in August that Google acted as a monopoly by spending billions of dollars to secure exclusive agreements with developers, carriers and equipment makers to be the default search engine...

Generative AI has the potential to alter a significantly [higher proportion of jobs](#), particularly in metropolitan regions, according to a November report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

AI tools have already impacted jobs in the [film industry](#), the [legal profession](#) and [media](#).

The World Economic Forum has warned that workers in low-income countries are [also vulnerable](#).

Tech monopolies probed

Legal wrangling over allegations that Alphabet-owned Google violated U.S. antitrust law could play out next year or into 2026.

A judge in the United States [ruled](#) in August that Google acted as a monopoly by spending billions of dollars to secure exclusive agreements with developers, carriers and equipment makers to be the default search engine, setting the stage for a second trial to determine fixes, as well as potential legal appeals.

Among the millions of people who faced internet blackouts this year were voters in Pakistan at the start of 2024 when the government cut off the internet.

The U.S. Department of Justice has [recommended remedies](#) that include the sale of Chrome, the most popular web browser, to prevent Google from using it to funnel traffic to its other products.

Microsoft also could face an antitrust investigation over its use of cloud computing technology, cybersecurity and AI products.

U.S. Federal Trade Commission head Lina Khan approved the investigation before her likely departure when Trump takes office in January. He is expected to appoint a Republican with a [more lenient approach](#) to business, putting the probe into doubt.

Adam Smith is the technology correspondent for the Thomson Reuters Foundation based in London covering the intersection of technology and power.

This [article](#) first appeared on [Context](#), powered by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.