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SUMMARY

CALIFORNIA'S INSURANCE CRISIS LEAVES NEIGHBORS FACING UNEQUAL RECOVERY AFTER WILDFIRES

Before a wildfire ravaged their street in northwest Altadena, Louise Hamlin and Chris Wilson lived next door to each other in nearly identical houses.

"I chose an old home in an old neighborhood because it has soul," said Hamlin, a 51-year-old single mom with a teenage boy, who bought her 1,500-square-foot home 10 years ago.

Today, gone are their charming English-style cottages built in 1925 with the welcoming porches and Palladian windows. Amid the rubble and ash, little is left of their historic neighborhood.

In the weeks since the Eaton wildfire took their homes, Hamlin and Wilson have been stumbling

through the layers of business, bureaucracy and emotional trauma of surviving a natural disaster, with their sights firmly set on rebuilding.

How they'll navigate rebuilding is a story of contrasting fortunes and unequal recovery that reveals the nation's growing home insurance crisis. Her insurance has already paid out nearly a million dollars and she is searching for contractors. He is contemplating loans, lawsuits and moving his family out of California.

"It changes the whole trajectory to your life," said Wilson, 44, who bought his house five years ago with his wife, who is six months pregnant with their first child.

Hamlin's home was privately covered by Mercury Insurance, but Wilson was forced onto the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements Plan — the state's bare-bones insurance program — when SafeCo declined to renew his policy last May. The FAIR Plan insures people who can't get private coverage but need insurance as a condition of their mortgage.

As wildfires, hurricanes and other natural disasters become more frequent due to climate change, many property owners find themselves struggling to find or afford private insurance. The issue is particularly acute in California, where some major insurance companies have stopped writing new policies altogether or are refusing to renew existing ones.

State officials recently started rolling out new regulations to entice insurers to stay in California, with the hope of getting as many homeowners as possible off the FAIR Plan.

FAIR, with its high premiums and basic coverage, was designed as a temporary safety net until

policyholders find a more permanent option. Yet the number of FAIR Plan residential policies more than doubled from 2020 to 2024, reaching nearly 452,000 policies last year.

For Wilson and Hamlin, their parallel rebuilding journeys serve as a cautionary tale. Wilson paid nearly 60% more in premiums related to the fire than Hamlin, for less than half the coverage.

"That's why a lot of people call it 'The Unfair Plan.'" said Amy Bach, executive director of the consumer advocacy group United Policyholders.

SafeCo's parent company Liberty Mutual said in a statement that it couldn't comment on any individual policies but acknowledged "difficult but purposeful business decisions" in California.

Mercury didn't respond to requests for comment.

Janet Ruiz, spokesperson for the Insurance Information Institute, which represents many major insurance companies, said California is fortunate to have the FAIR Plan, which is required to accept everyone. Ruiz said outcomes would be even worse if homeowners had no coverage at all.

Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara said California is working to make sure all claims are paid. He said in a statement that his office is working to get homeowners off the FAIR Plan and back to traditional more comprehensive insurance coverage.

A FAIR Plan spokesperson declined to comment on Wilson's case, and noted that it's difficult to compare policies and coverage.

Thousands of people lost their homes in the Eaton and nearby Palisades fires, which were among the most destructive in California history.

The FAIR Plan said it expanded staffing to meet the surging demand and has a funding mechanism in place to pay all covered claims. State data shows more than 31,000 wildfire-related claims had been filed as of last week, including roughly 4,400 claims under the FAIR Plan.

Hamlin had standard comprehensive home insurance, with an annual policy premium of $1,264 at the time of the fire. She can receive up to $1.5 million to replace her home, other structures and personal property, including up to $303,000 for living expenses while displaced. Her policy further entitles her to coverage that could add more than $200,000 to help her rebuild.

Wilson, meanwhile, pays a $2,000 premium for the FAIR Plan that sets his maximum payout at $686,000, including $100,000 for living expenses while displaced.

Wilson also had to buy "wrap-around insurance" for $1,500 a year for issues the FAIR Plan doesn't cover, such as burst pipes or falling objects. That supplemental plan doesn't cover fire damage.

Hamlin said Mercury's support has been exceptional, immediately sending her money and helping with next steps such as finding housing and getting contractor quotes. Within days, the company wired her tens of thousands of dollars to get started while the process fell into place.

"Being able to rest at night and wake up and deal with everything else is really important," Hamlin said.

Meanwhile, Wilson has struggled to even talk to a FAIR Plan representative. There was zero communication in the first two weeks, contact information was listed incorrectly,


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phone numbers had no voicemail and emails bounced back.

“Half the time, I feel like I’m doing something wrong,” Wilson said.

After The Associated Press reached out for comment, Insurance Department spokesperson Michael Soller said a representative would contact Wilson directly.

Wilson said he feels haunted by his choices. He thought he had bought property in a low-risk area, and had avoided looking for homes in another neighborhood further north after hearing that people there had been dropped by their insurers.

Hamlin, too, was aware of the fire risks when she moved in. She previously lived in Pasadena and was surprised that State Farm, her then-insurance company, would not offer her coverage in Altadena. She chose Mercury because it was the cheapest option, and was considering pursuing even more robust coverage.

“I could have been dropped when Chris was dropped. Any of us could be at any time. It’s just luck, really. It’s nothing I did or didn’t do,” Hamlin said, stunned by the comparison. “I had the same risk factors as everyone else.”

Stephen Collier, a professor of urban planning at University of California, Berkeley, said the seemingly random nature of who gets dropped and when has much to do with insurance companies’ complicated risk models.

“They’re all trying to manage their exposure,” Collier said. “If you think about wildfires, you don’t want concentrated exposure.”

Wilson said SafeCo requested an inspection of his property before deciding not to renew his policy. Panicked, he tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with them, offering to clear brushes, trim trees near the roof, and other wildfire mitigation efforts.

Wilson shopped around aggressively with his insurance agent but to no avail, and resigned himself to the FAIR Plan, assuming he would eventually find private insurance again.

There was another catch: Wilson said he couldn't get comprehensive replacement cost coverage on the FAIR Plan because his roof was too old. Instead, he ended up with what is known as "actual cash value" coverage, which greatly limits the payout based on the physical depreciation of what was lost.

"We're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars and that's very, very painful," said Bach of United Policyholders.

Citing rising fire risks and other problems, seven of the top 12 insurance companies either paused or restricted new business in California in 2023. State regulations give insurers more latitude to raise premiums in exchange for issuing policies in high-risk areas, including consideration of climate change in premiums and passing the costs of reinsurance to consumers.

But those are only short-term solutions, said Dave Jones, California's insurance commissioner from 2011 to 2018. He pointed to Florida, where officials have "done everything the insurers asked California to do" but yielded little success.

"We're marching steadily towards an uninsurable future in the United States because we're not doing enough fast enough to address the

underlying cause, which is climate change," Jones said.

Unless governments take on the financial burden of serious mitigation efforts, the price of California's fire risk will remain unequal and left to the homeowners, Collier of UC Berkeley said. That could be the underinsured — like Wilson — swallowing their personal losses, or all California homeowners collectively saddled with increased premiums, or both. State Farm, California's largest insurance company, this week urged the state to approve an emergency rate hike of 22% for homeowner policies starting in May after processing nearly 8,700 claims and paying out more than $1 billion to policyholders for the LA fires.

"There's a huge amount of risk in the system and there's a big question of who is going to pay for this," Collier said.

Wilson expects he'll have to take out loans to rebuild. He's considering joining a lawsuit against Southern California Edison that alleges the utility's equipment sparked the blaze, in hopes of receiving settlement money.

But with a baby on the way, Wilson said he can't fathom living in limbo on the FAIR Plan forever, and he's thinking about leaving California if private insurance remains out of reach.

"I don't want to have to be prepared to maybe lose everything again," Wilson said. "Stuck paying for an insurance that doesn't cover anything. You don't want to live in a risky area. You don't have the safety net."

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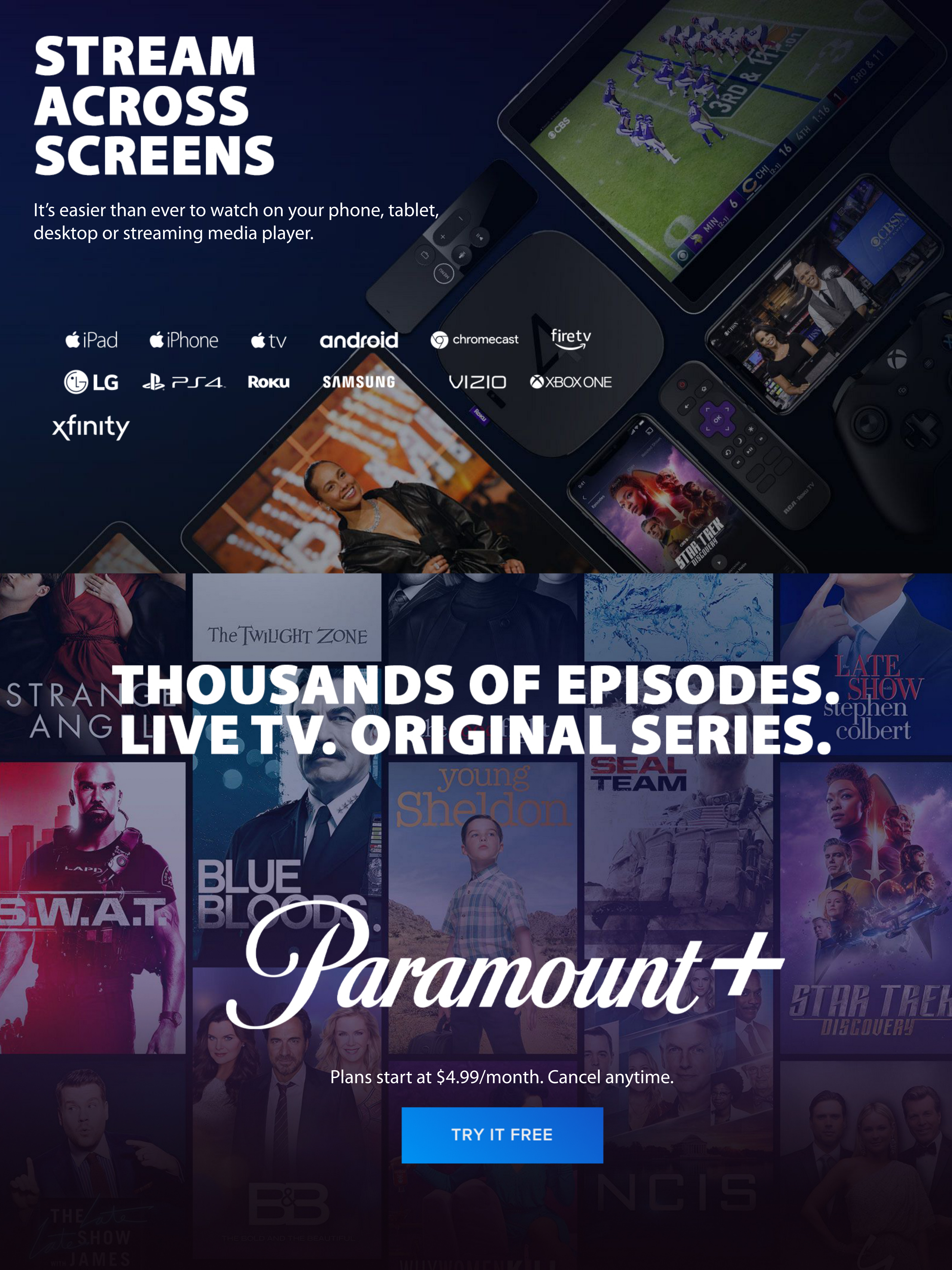
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GOOGLE'S RISING HOLIDAY'S SEASON AD SALES AREN'T ENOUGH TO EASE WORRIES ABOUT AI LETDOWN


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Google's digital ad sales continued to grow at a healthy clip during the holiday season, but that wasn't enough to offset investors' worries about whether its big bet on artificial intelligence will be lucrative as once envisioned.

The October-December results released Tuesday by Google parent Alphabet Inc. showed the company is continuing to reap even more profits from its dominant search engine and other peripheral services.

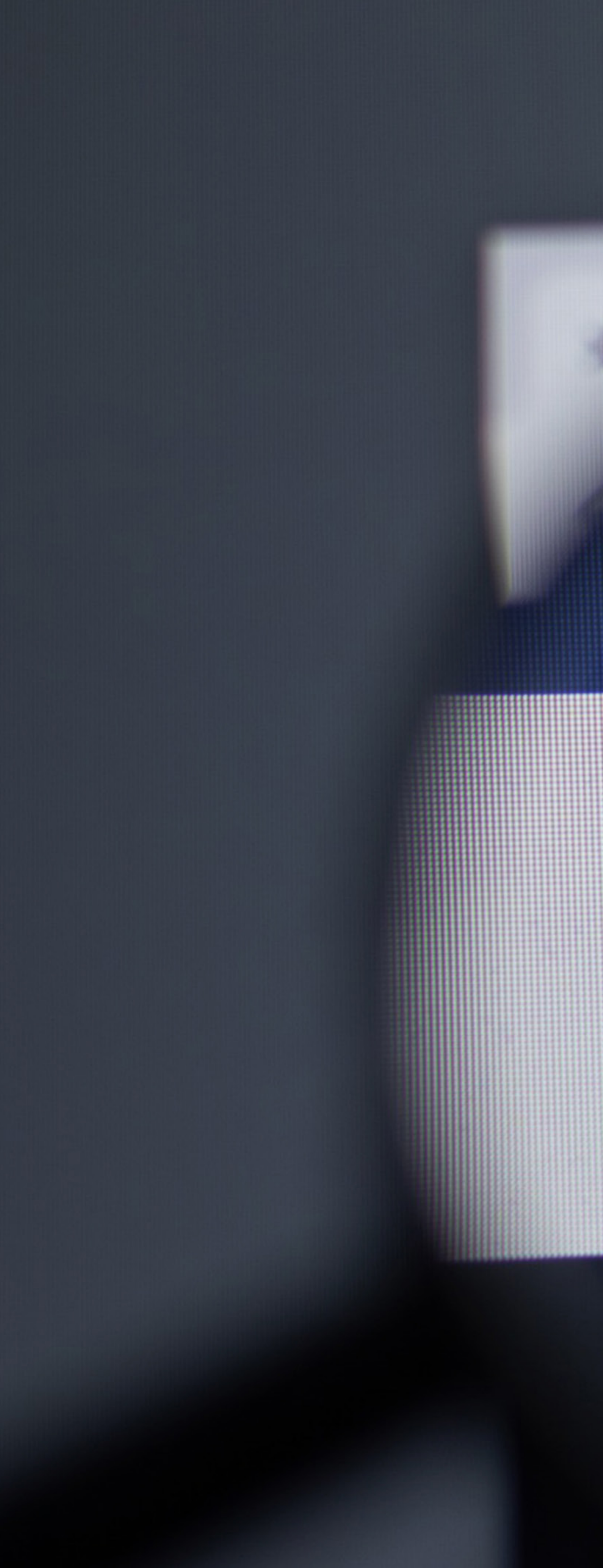
Alphabet earned $26.5 billion, or $2.15 per share, during last year's final quarter, a 28% increase from the same time during the previous year. Revenue rose 12% from the previous year to $96.5 billion. The earnings eclipsed analyst forecasts of $2.13 per share, but the revenue fell slightly below projections, according to FactSet Research.

More importantly, revenue growth in the Google Cloud division tethered to the AI craze wasn't as robust as had been anticipated.

That letdown contributed to a more than 8% drop in Alphabet's stock price after the numbers came out. The downturn reversed a recent rally that had elevated Alphabet's shares to a new all-time high earlier Tuesday during the regular trading session.

"The reaction underscores concerns that rivals like Microsoft, with its OpenAI partnership, are better positioned to convert AI hype into revenue," said Investing.com analyst Jesse Cohen.

But the AI-generated overviews that Google has been increasingly displaying in at the top of its search results appeared to be helping to bring in

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more advertising. Google's ad sales climbed 11% from the previous year to $72.5 billion to exceed analyst estimates.

"The early signs suggest that AI is working for Google," said Jim Yu, CEO of BrightEdge, which helps websites rank higher in search results. "What it does for Google is keep more of the digital experience happening within its search engine. And by the time they send someone to another site, shoppers and readers have already gotten further down their journey. So that visitor is worth a lot more to an advertiser."

But Google also has spending billions of dollars on its AI expansion, a huge investment that some investors are questioning after t he Chinese startup DeepSeek found an effective way to deploy similar technology at a fraction of the cost. Alphabet is expecting its ongoing AI expansion to increase its capital from about $60 billion last year to $75 billion this year.

Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai sought to reassure investors all that spending will pay off during a Tuesday conference call by emphasizing the way AI is helping to boost Google's fortunes by attracting more search traffic and making other services more popular.

"The company is in a great rhythm and cadence, building, testing and launching products faster than ever before," Pichai said.

Before the fourth-quarter results came out, Google made a change that in its AI principles signaling it may be more open to selling the technology in areas that it had previously indicated it would avoid. The revised principles removed previous commitments not to deploy AI in weaponry or surveillance that had been in place since 2018. Pichai didn't address the change during Tuesday's conference call and Google didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The uncertainty over AI isn't the only worry hanging over Google.

The Mountain View, California, company also is facing a regulatory crackdown in the U.S., by far its most lucrative market, raising the specter that its revenue could be undercut.

After weighing the evidence presented during a high-profile trial, a federal judge last year declared Google's search engine is an illegal monopoly — a decision that has opened the door for regulators to propose forcing the company to sell its Chrome web browser.

Court hearings on how Google should be punished for its abuses in the search market are scheduled to begin in April, with a decision anticipated before autumn.

Besides the legal assault on its search engine, Google also has been ordered to tear down the barriers protecting its Play Store for Android smartphone apps. That ruling is currently on hold while Google appeals. Google is also awaiting a ruling in antitrust trial in Virginia revolving around the technology underlying its digital ad network.

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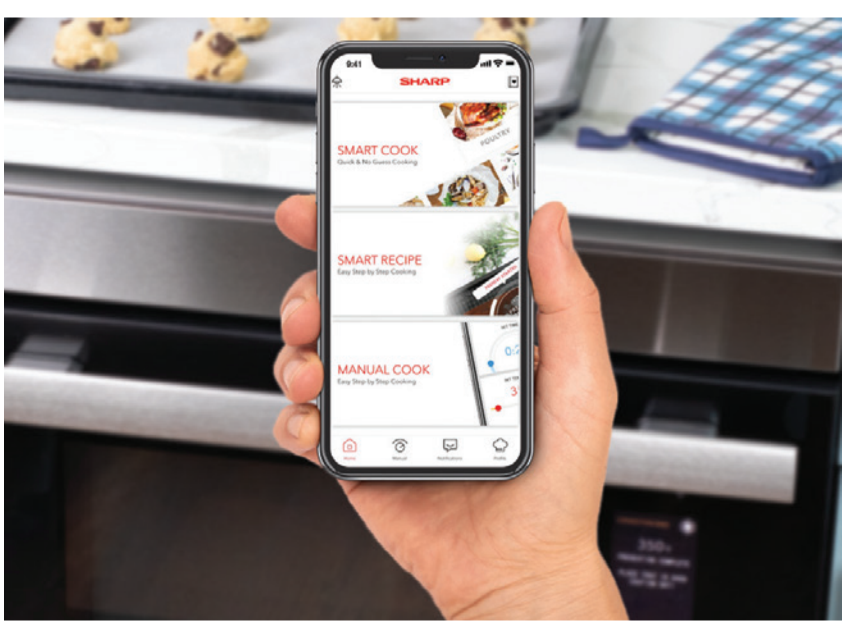

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APPLE'S IPHONE SALES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON SLIPPED DESPITE A HIGHLY ANTICIPATED AI ROLLOUT

Apple disclosed its iPhone sales dipped slightly during the holiday-season quarter, signaling a sluggish start to the trendsetting company's effort to catch up to the rest of Big Tech in the race to bring artificial intelligence to the masses.

The iPhone's roughly 1% drop in revenue from the previous year's October-December period wasn't entirely unexpected, given the first software update enabling the device's AI features didn't arrive until just before Halloween, and the technology still isn't available in many markets outside the U.S.

The countries still awaiting Apple's AI suite include China, a key market where the company continued to lose ground. Although he didn't mention China, Apple CEO Tim Cook told investors on a conference call that a software upgrade enabling the AI features in more European markets, as well as Japan and Korea will be rolling out in April.

But in the past quarter Apple also was only able to eke out a modest revenue gain across its entire business, although the results came in ahead of the analyst projections that guide investors. The Cupertino, California, company earned $36.3 billion, or $2.40 per share, a 7% increase from the previous year. Revenue edged up from the previous year by 4% to $124.3 billion.

Those numbers included iPhone revenue of $69.1 billion. In China, Apple's total revenue registered $18.5 billion, an 11% decrease from the previous year.

Part of that erosion in China reflected the iPhone's shrinking market share in that country, where homegrown companies have been making more headway. Apple's iPhone year-over-year shipments in China declined nearly 10% in the most recent quarter, while native companies Huawei and Xiaomi posted year-over-year increases of more than 20%, according to the research firm International Data Corp.

"While China is a potential risk, we think the appeal of Apple products as a luxury product and the potential of AI innovations will keep demand steady in the country," Edward Jones analyst Logan Purk wrote in a research note assessing the company's quarterly report.

The holiday-season results served to confirm bringing AI to the iPhone and Apple's other products may not boost the company's recently lackluster growth as much as investors initially thought it might after Cook unveiled the technology before a rapt crowd last June.

The anticipation that an AI-infused iPhone would prod hordes of consumers to ditch their current devices and splurge on an upgrade is the main reason Apple's stock price surged by 30% last year. But the sinking realization that an uptick in demand may take longer than expected has caused Apple's shares to backtrack by 5% during the first month of the new year. The stock initially slipped slightly in extended trading after the numbers came out, but later reversed course and rose by more than 3% after Cook said Apple is seeing a record number of people upgrading their iPhones.

"I could not feel more optimistic about our product pipeline," Cook said during the conference call. "So I think there's a lot of a lot of innovation left on the smartphone."

A management forecast calling for revenue that will at least match or exceed analyst projections for the January-March quarter also seemed to bolster investor confidence in the company.

The concerns hovering around Apple's weakening iPhone sales come against broader worries about whether AI will be as lucrative for U.S. tech companies as once envisioned after Chinese startup DeepSeek released a version of the technology that was built at a far lower cost than had been previously thought possible.

Unlike tech peers such as Microsoft, Google corporate parent Alphabet Inc. and Facebook corporate parent Meta Platforms, Apple hasn't been investing as heavily in AI – one of the reasons it has been seen as an industry laggard. But that restraint could work to its advantage if DeepSeek's early breakthroughs in driving down AI costs gains momentum.

Apple's services division remained the company's biggest moneymaker outside the iPhone, with revenue of $26.3 billion in the past quarter, a 14% increase from the previous year. Although the services division has been thriving for years, it generates more than $20 billion annually by locking in Google as the automatic search engine on the iPhone and other products. That deal is now under threat of being banned as part of the proposed punishment for Google's search engine being declared an illegal monopoly.


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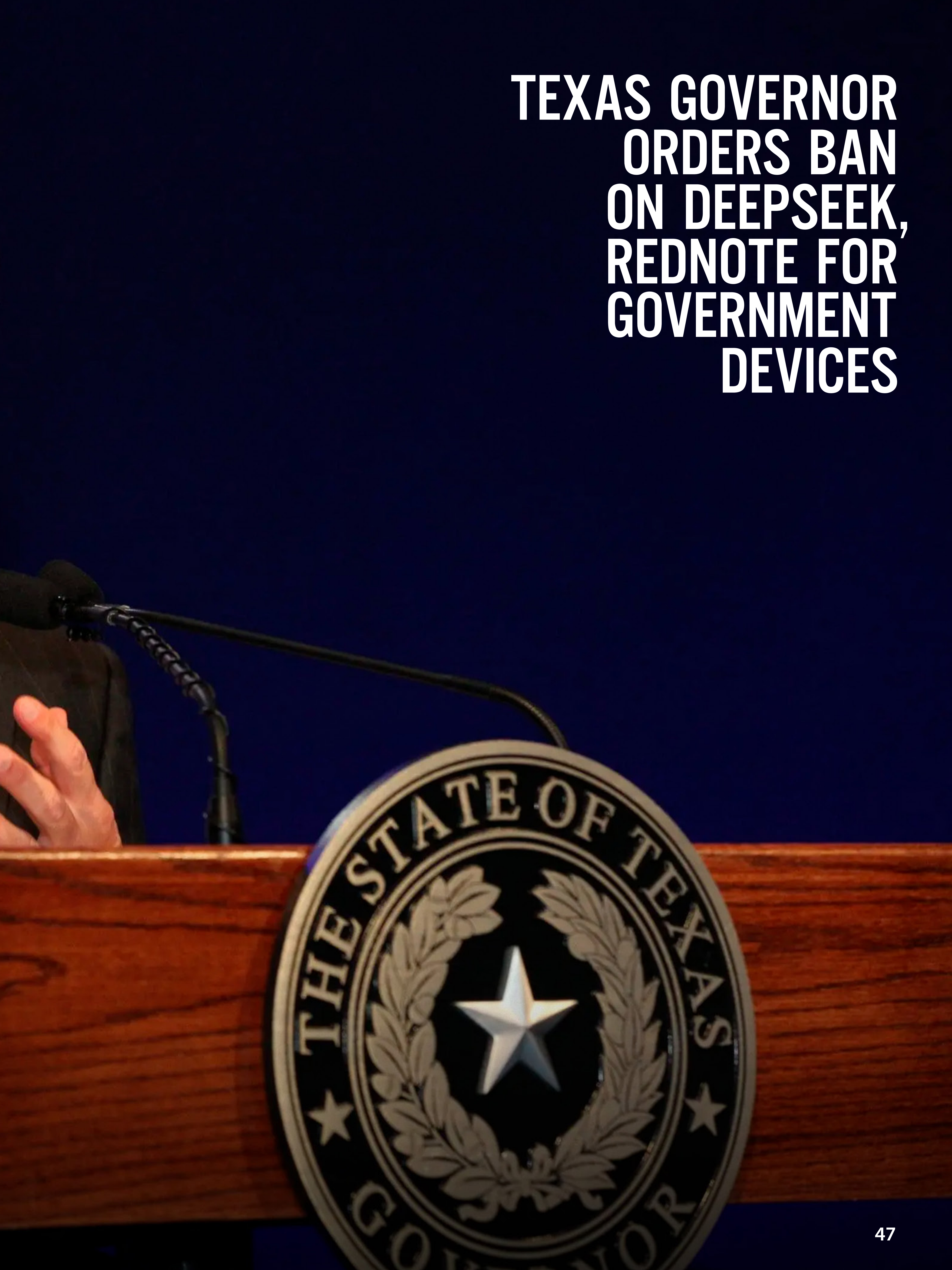
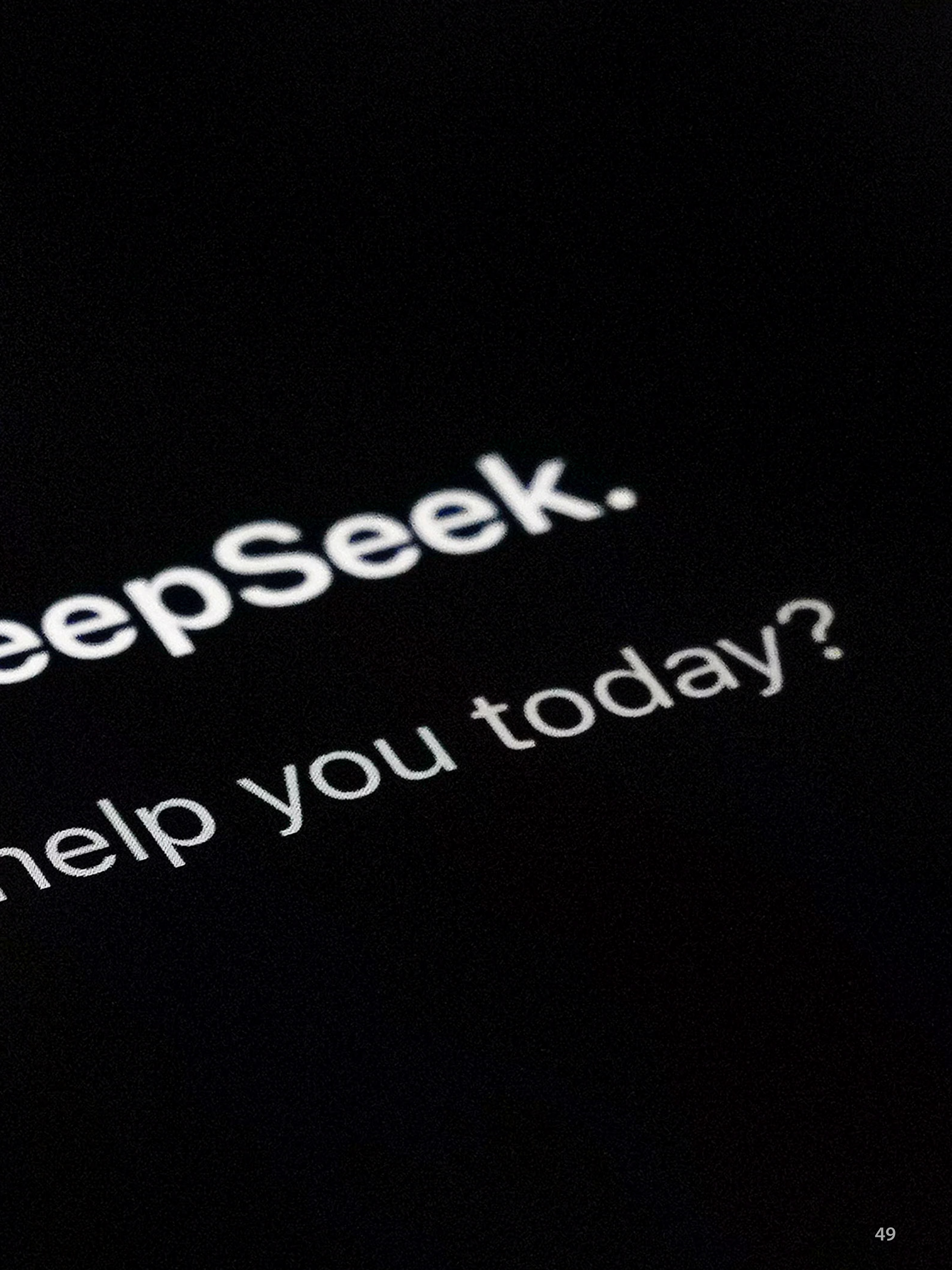


Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott issued a ban on Chinese artificial intelligence company DeepSeek for government-issued devices, becoming the first state to restrict the popular chatbot in such a manner. The upstart AI platform has sent shockwaves throughout the AI community after gaining popularity amongst American users in recent weeks.

The governor also prohibited popular Chinese-owned social media apps Xiaohongshu, or what some are calling RedNote, and Lemon8 from all state-issued devices.

“Texas will not allow the Chinese Communist Party to infiltrate our state’s critical infrastructure through data-harvesting AI and social media apps,” Abbott said in a statement. “Texas will continue to protect and defend our state from hostile foreign actors.”

The governor’s office declined to comment further for this story.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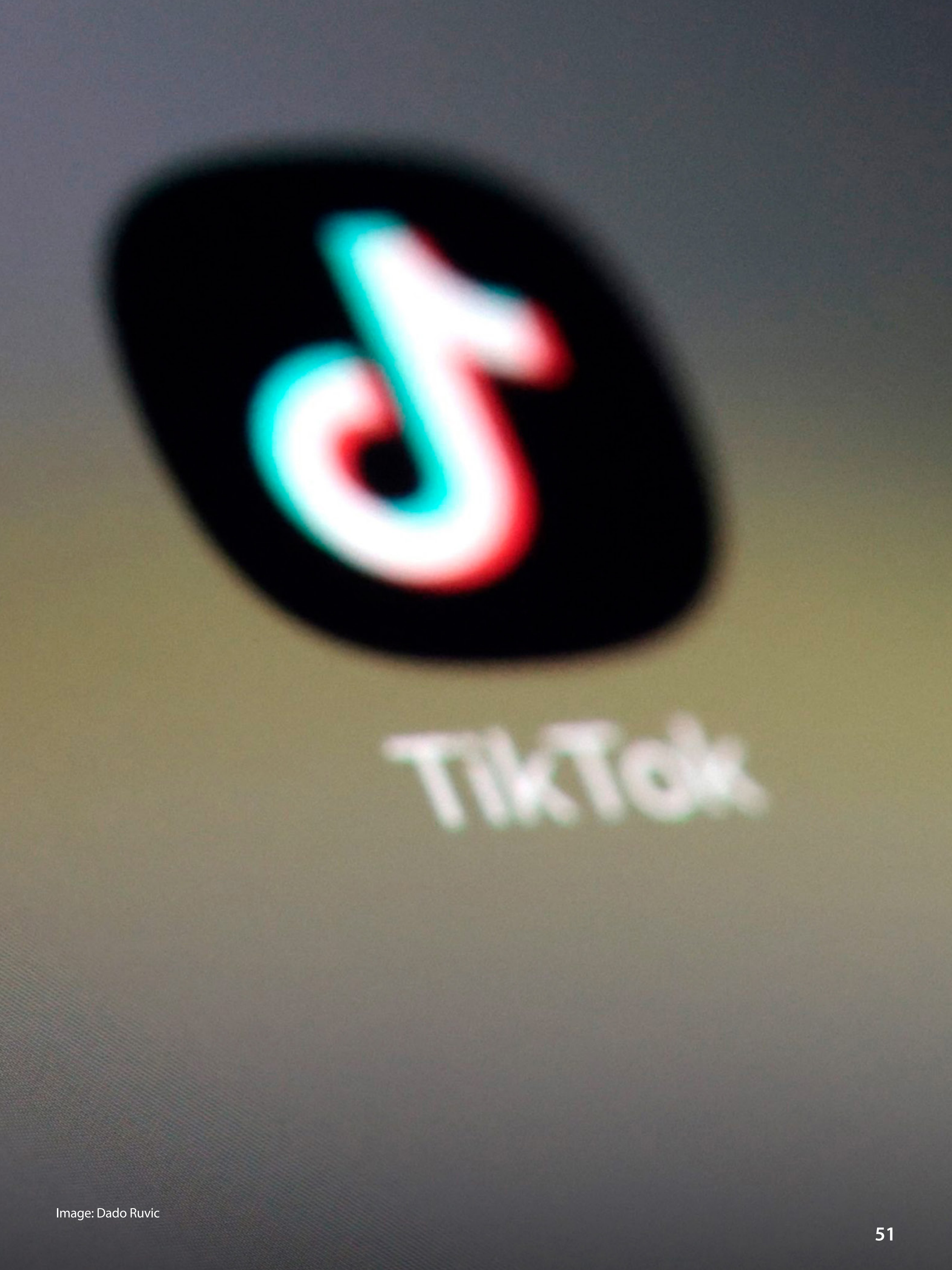

Image: Dado Ruvic

AI startup DeepSeek has rocked markets upon demonstrating its capacity to compete with industry leader OpenAI.

U.S. also users flocked to Xiaohongshu in the days leading up to TikTok's short-lived ban. It's a popular app in China and surrounding countries — such as Malaysia and Taiwan — with roughly 300 million active users that many Americans were using as a replacement doe TikTok, and as a form of protest against the ban.

Lemon8 is also a Chinese company owned by ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok. The social media app also gained traction in the days leading up to the original TikTok ban on Jan. 19.

Texas, along with many other states and the federal government, has banned TikTok on government devices. The app's future remains in limbo after President Trump issued an executive order to give ByteDance more time to divest TikTok's U.S. operations.

ByteDance did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

Image: Alex Wong

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DeepSeek

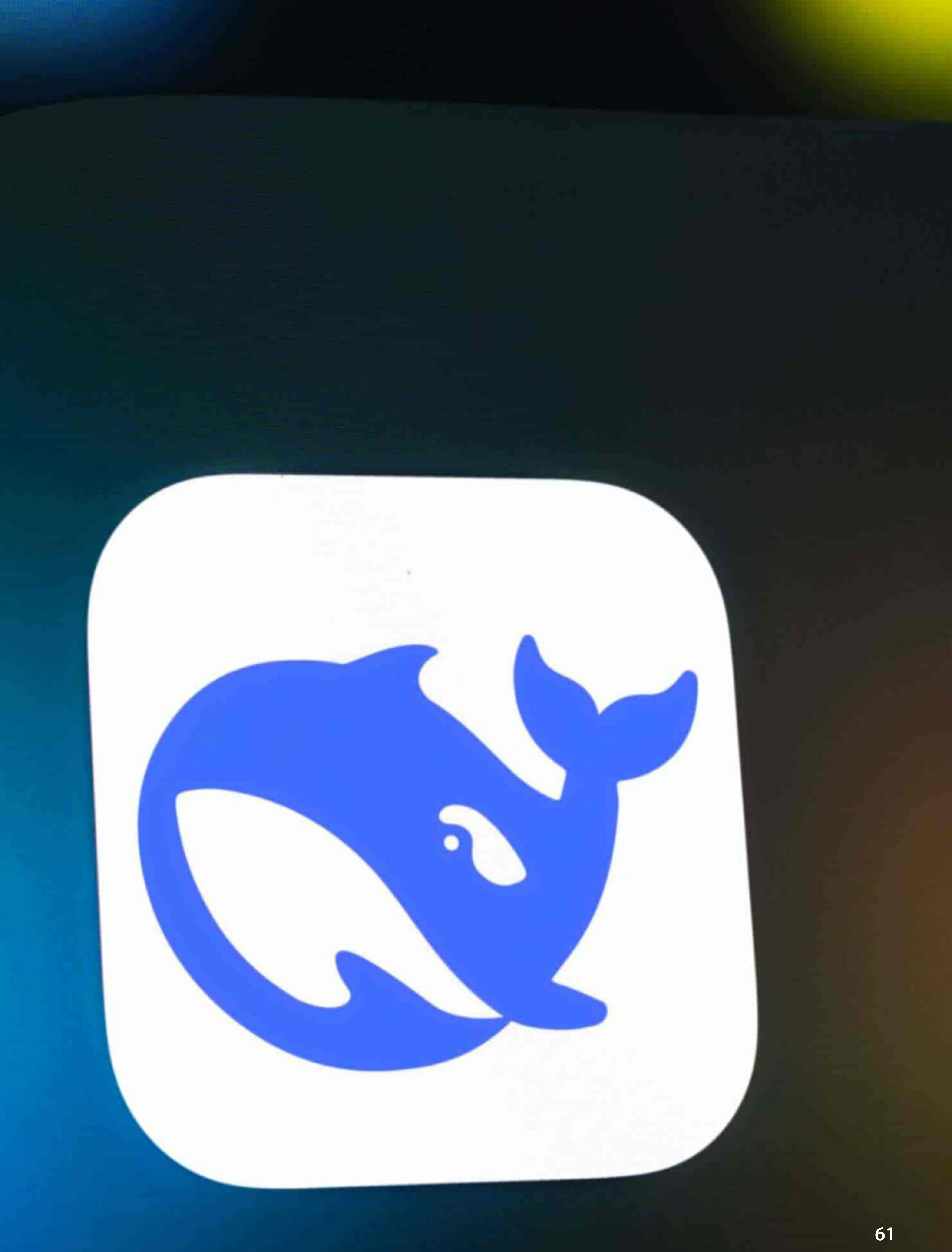
A NEW BIG PLAYER FROM CHINA TO SHAKE UP THE AI BATTLEFIELD

A new player has taken the tech world by storm, climbing to the top of the App Store charts and surpassing even established giants like ChatGPT. DeepSeek, developed by Chinese hedge fund manager Liang Wenfeng, has garnered significant attention for its unique approach to artificial intelligence. Experts think it could set the AI race on an entirely different path.

INTRODUCING DEEPSEEK

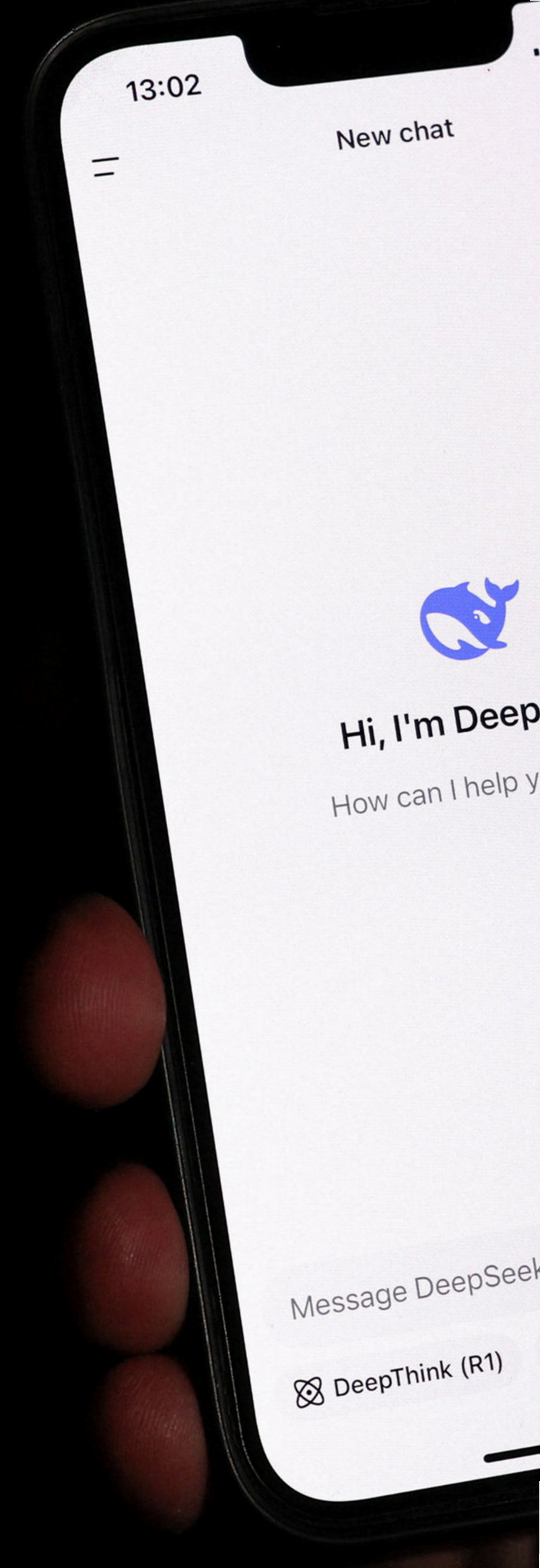
The growth of DeepSeek, particularly its chatbot underpinned by the R1 model, has taken the world by surprise. Out of nowhere, the app topped the download charts, overtaking even widely-known applications like ChatGPT and **causing market turmoil along the way.** This remarkable feat has raised eyebrows, particularly among those in Silicon Valley, where larger models with massive compute resources have long been considered the gold standard in AI development. The success of **DeepSeek's R1** model is especially significant because it defies the conventional wisdom that bigger is always better when it comes to AI. The traditional belief has been that the more hardware power behind an AI system, the better its performance. However, DeepSeek has demonstrated that efficiency and innovation in model design can be just as impactful. Rather than relying on the vast, expensive infrastructure that American competitors like OpenAI and Google utilize, DeepSeek has built a **significantly smaller yet equally effective model.**

The secret to DeepSeek's success lies in its approach to AI training. The company has created a model that uses far fewer chips, **only 2,000, compared to the 16,000** typically used by other AI labs to train similar systems. This cost and computing power efficiency have allowed DeepSeek to produce a highly functional AI system with a relatively low price tag. The model achieves this efficiency by prioritizing the quality of the outputs rather than simply increasing its size or the computational power behind it.



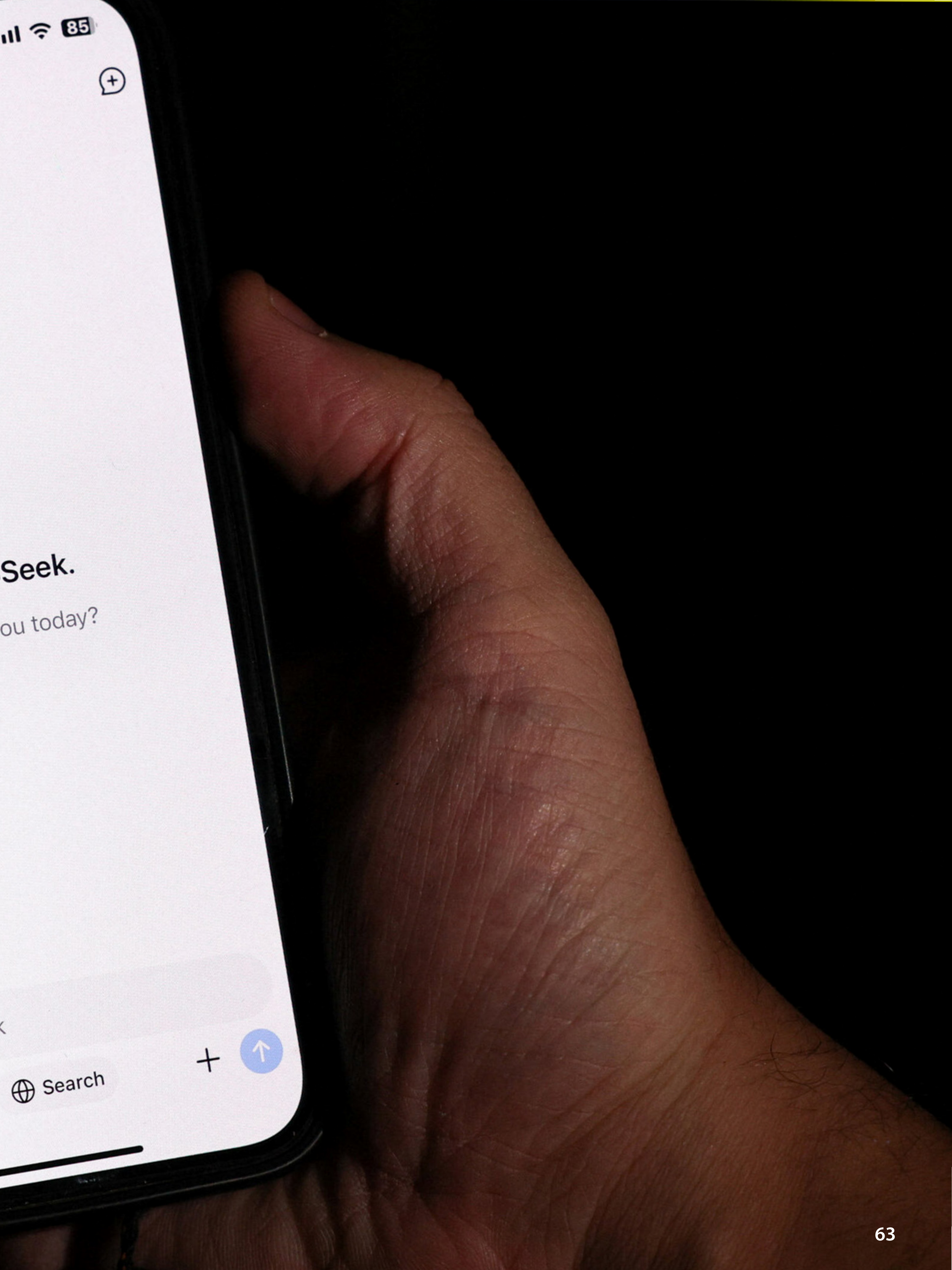
DeepSeek's R1 model, which powers the company's chatbot, is based on a "chain of **thought reasoning methodology."** This technique allows the model to simulate how humans think out loud, gradually refining its outputs in a way that mirrors the human thought process. By carefully considering each step before proceeding to the next, DeepSeek's model produces more accurate, thoughtful, and cohesive responses compared to other AI models that may focus solely on processing speed or sheer scale.

This **method of "thinking ahead" improves the chatbot's ability** to provide users with high-quality answers, making it more effective than other models that may simply generate responses without consideration of their broader context. It's a process that requires less computational power while still delivering a high output standard, marking a clear departure from the prevailing trends in AI model design.



EFFICIENCY MATTERS

DeepSeek's ability to create a smaller, more efficient AI model has important implications for the tech industry. **American AI labs, for example, have long focused on building larger models,** believing that sheer size translates to better performance. The belief in the power of bigger models has resulted in significant investments in AI infrastructure by tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon. These **companies have poured billions of dollars into creating vast data centers** filled with powerful hardware, including GPUs (Graphics Processing Units), to fuel their AI systems. However, DeepSeek has shown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that achieving comparable results with fewer resources is possible. The company's model challenges the American assumption that bigger equals better and suggests a **more sustainable path for developing AI systems.** By focusing on efficiency, DeepSeek has demonstrated that it's not just about raw computational power but about how that power is utilized.

APPLE'S INVOLVEMENT

DeepSeek's success could have profound implications for major tech companies like Apple. Historically, Apple has been known for its ability to combine cutting-edge technology with sleek, user-friendly products. The company has always prioritized design and efficiency, ensuring its devices perform exceptionally well without relying on the most potent, resource-hungry components. With the advent of DeepSeek's highly efficient AI model, Apple may be able to integrate powerful AI capabilities into its devices without the need for massive increases in hardware costs. DeepSeek's approach, which allows for high-quality AI without excessive power demands, could perfectly fit **Apple's ecosystem. It's no secret that Apple Intelligence is off to a rocky start,** with **users still criticizing its Siri intelligent assistant** and its reliance on third-parties like ChatGPT to answer even the most basic of questions. Moreover, Apple's relatively modest investment in AI, compared to its competitors, could be positioned as an advantage. As other tech giants continue to spend billions on AI development, Apple could take advantage of the efficiency demonstrated by DeepSeek to deliver high-performance AI without breaking

the bank. This could allow Apple to continue innovating in AI while maintaining its reputation for high-quality, cost-effective products.

Apple's strategy, up until now, has been one of measured, incremental progress rather than rushing to adopt the latest AI trends. While other companies have focused on building expansive AI models, Apple has emphasized integrating AI seamlessly into its products more. The success of DeepSeek's AI model could allow Apple to advance its AI capabilities without the need for costly, large-scale investments in hardware. This could have significant implications for the future of AI-powered smartphones. Apple is known for its emphasis on performance and efficiency, and DeepSeek's model aligns with these values. If DeepSeek's technology can be successfully integrated into Apple's devices, it could offer users an experience combining high-quality AI with the seamless performance Apple is known for.

Additionally, DeepSeek's approach could enhance Apple's commitment to privacy and data protection. Since **DeepSeek's models can run locally,** without requiring access to remote servers, users could control their data. This could be a selling point for privacy-conscious users wary of sharing information with cloud-based AI services.

THE FUTURE OF AI

While DeepSeek's rise has undoubtedly caused a stir in the tech world, it's important to remember that the AI industry is still in its early stages. The success of DeepSeek has sparked a wave of innovation, pushing other companies to rethink their approach to AI development. As


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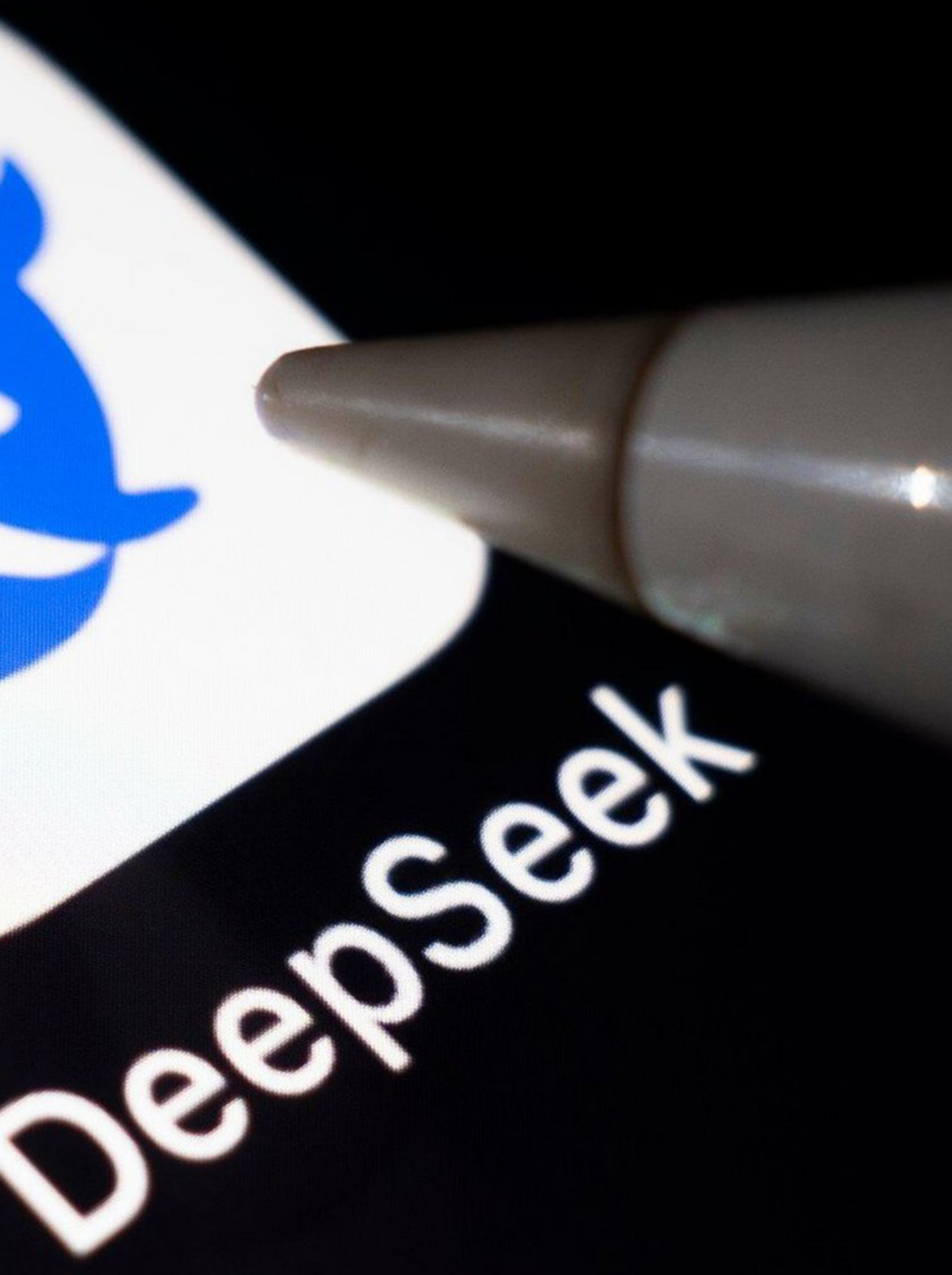
V2.5 Capabilities



more players enter the AI space, the focus will shift towards creating more efficient, sustainable models that deliver high-quality results without relying on vast, expensive infrastructure. This shift in the AI landscape could present challenges and opportunities for Apple. On the one hand, the competition from companies like **DeepSeek could drive Apple to invest more in its AI research and development.** On the other hand, the efficiency demonstrated by DeepSeek could allow Apple to leverage AI more effectively in its products, enhancing the user experience without compromising on the company's values of efficiency and performance.

DeepSeek's rise to the top of the app charts and its innovative approach to AI have already profoundly impacted the tech industry **and wiped billions off of the market values of brands like NVIDIA.** By prioritizing efficiency over scale, the company has proven that smaller, more nimble models can compete with the industry's largest players. As the AI landscape continues to evolve, DeepSeek's success will likely serve as a model for future developments in the field. With its ability to deliver high-quality AI at a fraction of the cost, the company has the potential to reshape the way AI is developed and deployed across the tech industry.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

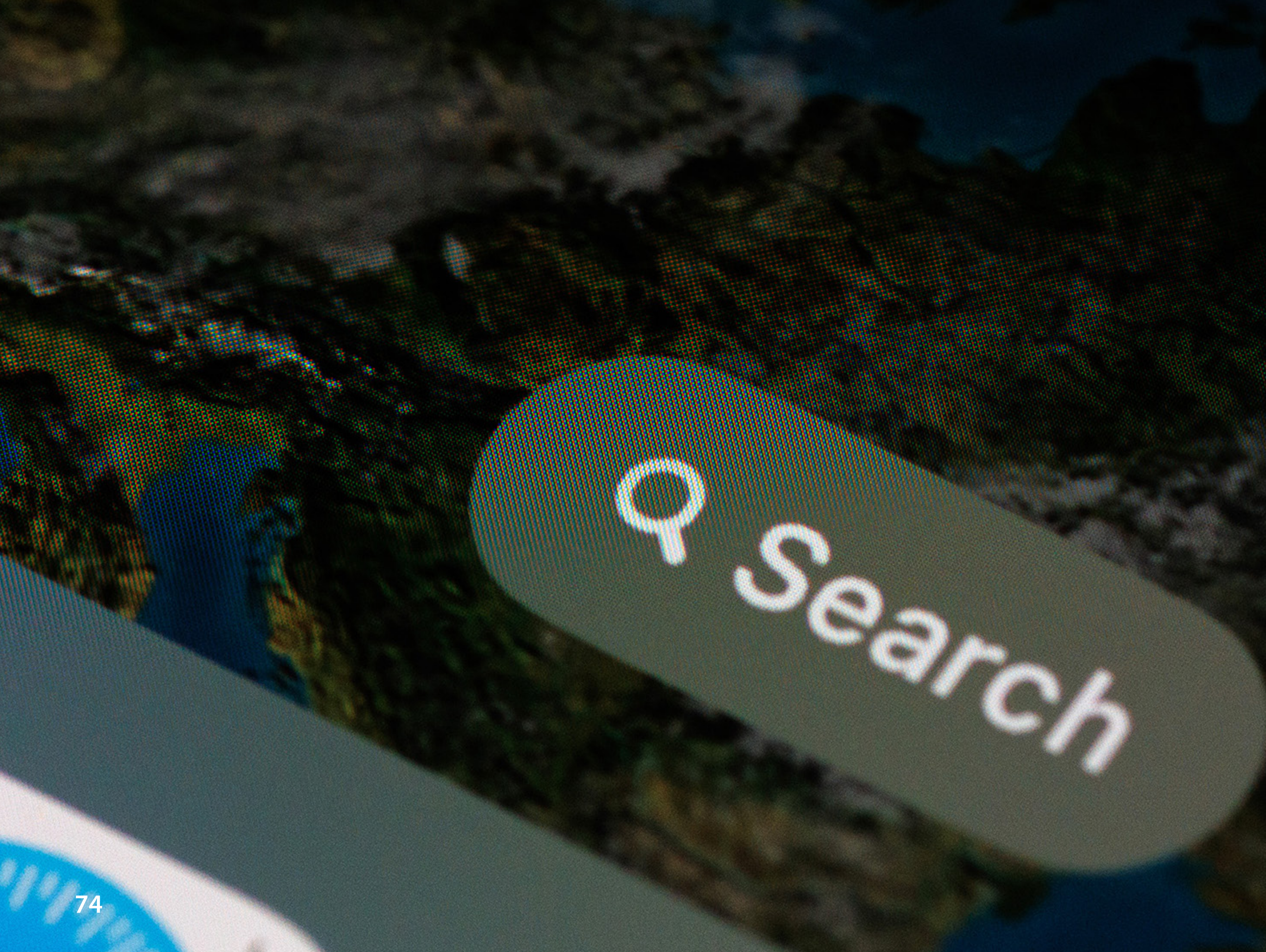
While excitement continues building for the platform, it's not plain sailing yet. A **security breach at Chinese AI firm DeepSeek has exposed over one million sensitive records,** raising serious concerns about data protection in artificial intelligence-driven companies. Cybersecurity researchers at Wiz Research


Message


Think (R1)

discovered an unprotected ClickHouse database on January 29, containing chat logs, API keys, system metadata, and other internal records. While DeepSeek secured the database within an hour of being alerted, the incident underscores the **risks associated with AI companies handling vast amounts of sensitive user data.**

AI-powered firms, especially those rapidly expanding in China, **are increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks, data leaks, and regulatory scrutiny.** DeepSeek's failure to secure its database raises questions about the security measures in place at AI companies racing to develop cutting-edge machine learning models. Without robust cybersecurity protocols, exposed data can be exploited for phishing attacks, credential theft, and corporate espionage. The breach also poses potential legal consequences for DeepSeek. If European or U.S. user data is compromised, the company could face regulatory action under the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** or the **California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA).** The incident fuels growing concerns in the West over China's handling of AI-generated data, especially as companies like DeepSeek gain traction in global markets. With AI shaping the future of global technology, ensuring data security must be a top priority. If companies fail to protect sensitive information, cybercrime, surveillance, and regulatory fallout risks will only grow.



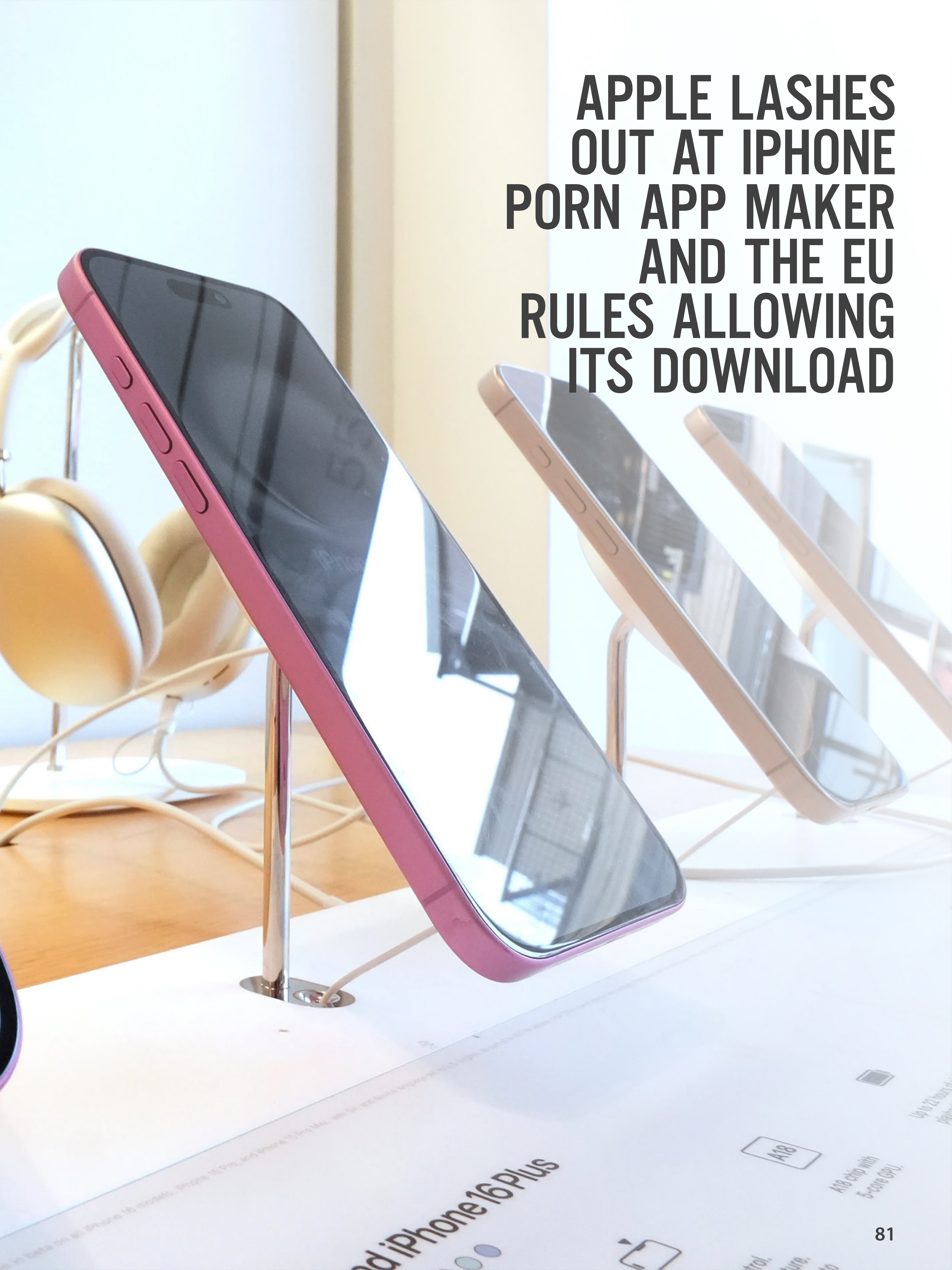

DeepSeek

In the long run, DeepSeek's growth and influence on brands like Apple could lead to a more accessible, sustainable, and innovative AI ecosystem that benefits consumers and tech companies alike and, ultimately, doesn't damage the planet.

Start Over
Give your Mac more! Let's help you out:
Smart Scan
Cleanup
System Junk
Mail Attachments
Trash Bins
Protection
Malware Removal
Privacy
Speed
Optimization
Maintenance
Applications
Uninstaller
Updater
Extensions
Files
Space Lens
Large & Old Files
Shredder
View Log
Well done!
Your Mac is in great shape.
8,57 GB
Unneeded junk removed
1 Threat
Potential issues resolved
3 Tasks
Mac's performance topped out
CleanMyMac X
Your Mac.
As good as new.
Learn More


Let's explore iPhone 16
From $799 or $33.29/mo. for 24 mo.[1]
Compare models
See pricing
Discover new features

APPLE LASHES OUT AT IPHONE PORN APP MAKER AND THE EU RULES ALLOWING ITS DOWNLOAD



Apple has chided a newly available pornography app available in the European Union, and warned that the bloc's digital rules opening the way for third-party app store downloads undermines consumer confidence in the tech giant.

AltStore PAL, an alternative app marketplace made possible under Europe's Digital Markets Act (DMA), unveiled the Hot Tub iPhone app this week, which is described as an adult content browser.

The digital rulebook forces Big Tech companies to open their services up to more competition, including allowing phone users to download from alternative app stores instead of being limited to the official app stores from Apple and Google, for example.

AltStore PAL said in a social media post this week that Hot Tub is "the world's 1st Apple-approved porn app."

Apple rejected that description, saying the availability of such an app would "undermine consumer trust and confidence" in its mobile ecosystem.

"Contrary to the false statements made by the marketplace developer, we certainly do not approve of this app and would never offer it in our App Store," the company said in a statement.

"The truth is that we are required by the European Commission to allow it to be distributed by marketplace operators like AltStore and Epic who may not share our concerns for user safety."

Under Apple's rules, apps on rival marketplaces still need to be certified by the company

through a “notarization” process but app makers aren’t allowed to suggest this means Apple gives its endorsement.

AltStore is backed by a grant from Epic Games, which has spent years battling Apple over the way iPhone apps are distributed and the fees for digital transactions that occur within them.

AltStore fired back at Apple, saying the iPhone maker “continues to use safety as a pretext to protect their monopoly power and evade compliance with the DMA.”

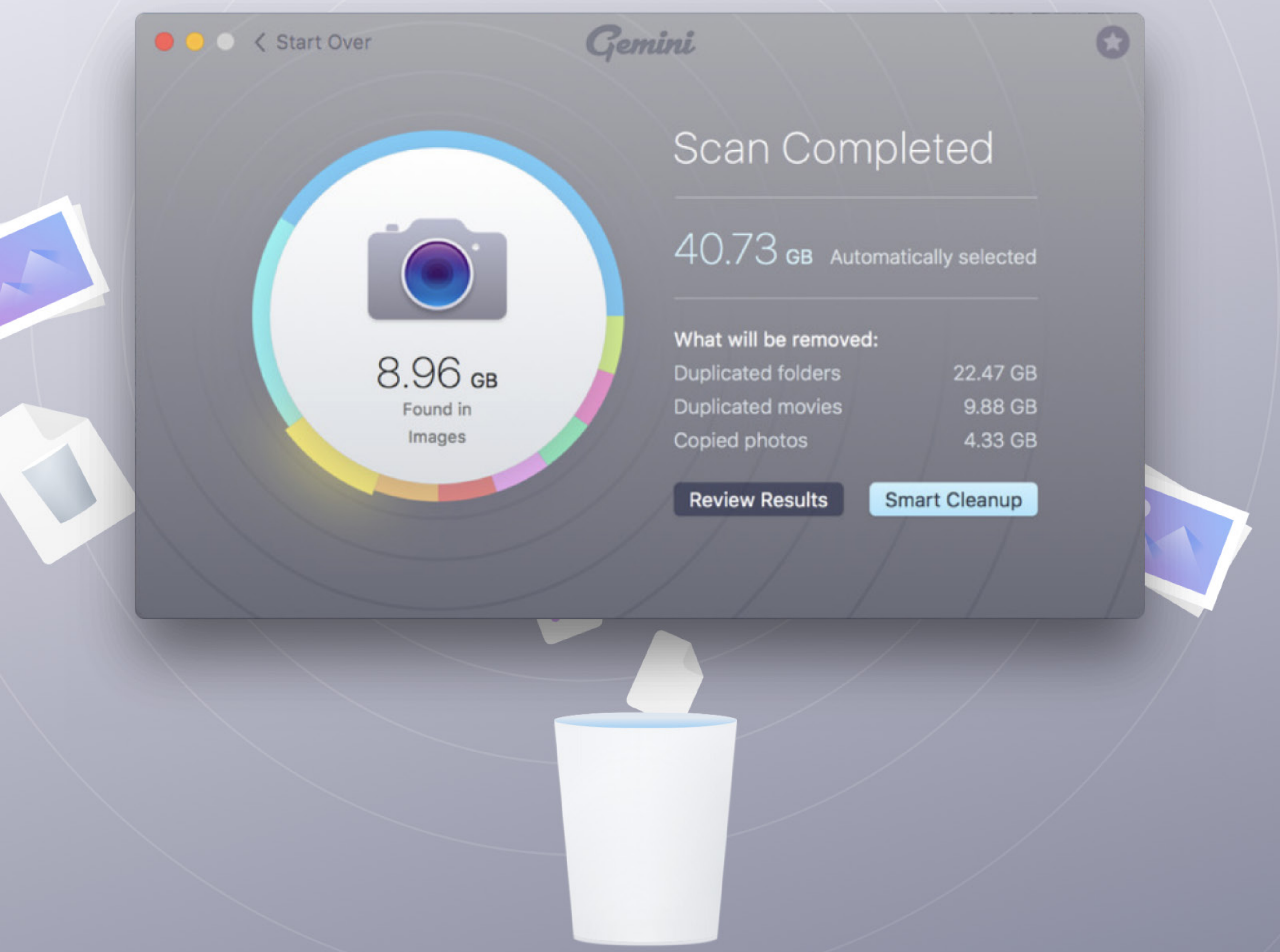
Epic Games CEO Tim Sweeney also took to social media to blast Apple, saying that on other platforms like Windows, Mac, and Linux, “developers can make and release apps without the platform maker adding junk fees and rendering moral judgments on their decisions.”

Under DMA, Apple had to make changes to its business practices starting last year. In one of the biggest changes, Apple was forced to relax restrictions on its App Store, by allowing people in the 27-nation bloc to download iPhone apps from stores that it did not operate.

Apple has criticized the new regulations, saying they expose Europeans to the specter of more unsavory services such as peddling pornography, illegal drugs and other content that it has long prohibited in its App Store.

The company lashed out again in its latest statement, saying it’s “deeply concerned about the safety risks that hardcore porn apps of this type create for EU users, especially kids.”

The European Commission, the bloc’s executive branch, did not respond to a request for comment.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Duplicated folders 22.47 GB
Duplicated movies 9.88 GB
Copied photos 4.33 GB
Review Results
Smart Cleanup

RESEARCHERS SAY CHINA'S DEEPSEEK CHATBOT IS LINKED TO STATE TELECOM, RAISING DATA PRIVACY CONCERNS


eepseek


中国移动
China Mobile

The website of the Chinese artificial intelligence company DeepSeek, whose chatbot became the most downloaded app in the United States, has computer code that could send some user login information to a Chinese state-owned telecommunications company that has been barred from operating in the United States, security researchers say.

The web login page of DeepSeek's chatbot contains heavily obfuscated computer script that when deciphered shows connections to computer infrastructure owned by China Mobile, a state-owned telecommunications company. The code appears to be part of the account creation and user login process for DeepSeek.

In its privacy policy, DeepSeek acknowledged storing data on servers inside the People's Republic of China. But its chatbot appears more directly tied to the Chinese state than previously known through the link revealed by researchers to China Mobile. The U.S. has claimed there are close ties between China Mobile and the Chinese military as justification for placing limited sanctions on the company. DeepSeek and China Mobile did not respond to emails seeking comment.

The growth of Chinese-controlled digital services has become a major topic of concern for U.S. national security officials. Lawmakers in Congress last year on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis voted to force the Chinese parent company of the popular video-sharing app TikTok to divest or face a nationwide ban though the app has since received a 75-day reprieve from President Donald Trump, who is hoping to work out a sale.


3:52
5G
New chat
Hi, I'm DeepSeek.
How can I help you today?
Message DeepSeek
DeepThink (R1)

The code linking DeepSeek to one of China's leading mobile phone providers was first discovered by Feroot Security, a Canadian cybersecurity company, which shared its findings with The Associated Press. The AP took Feroot's findings to a second set of computer experts, who independently confirmed that China Mobile code is present. Neither Feroot nor the other researchers observed data transferred to China Mobile when testing logins in North America, but they could not rule out that data for some users was being transferred to the Chinese telecom.

The analysis only applies to the web version of DeepSeek. They did not analyze the mobile version, which remains one of the most downloaded pieces of software on both the Apple and the Google app stores.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission unanimously denied China Mobile authority to operate in the United States in 2019, citing "substantial" national security concerns about links between the company and the Chinese state. In 2021, the Biden administration also issued sanctions limiting the ability of Americans to invest in China Mobile after the Pentagon linked it to the Chinese military.

"It's mindboggling that we are unknowingly allowing China to survey Americans and we're doing nothing about it," said Ivan Tsarynny, CEO of Feroot.

"It's hard to believe that something like this was accidental. There are so many unusual things to this. You know that saying 'Where there's smoke, there's fire'? In this instance, there's a lot of smoke," Tsarynny said.

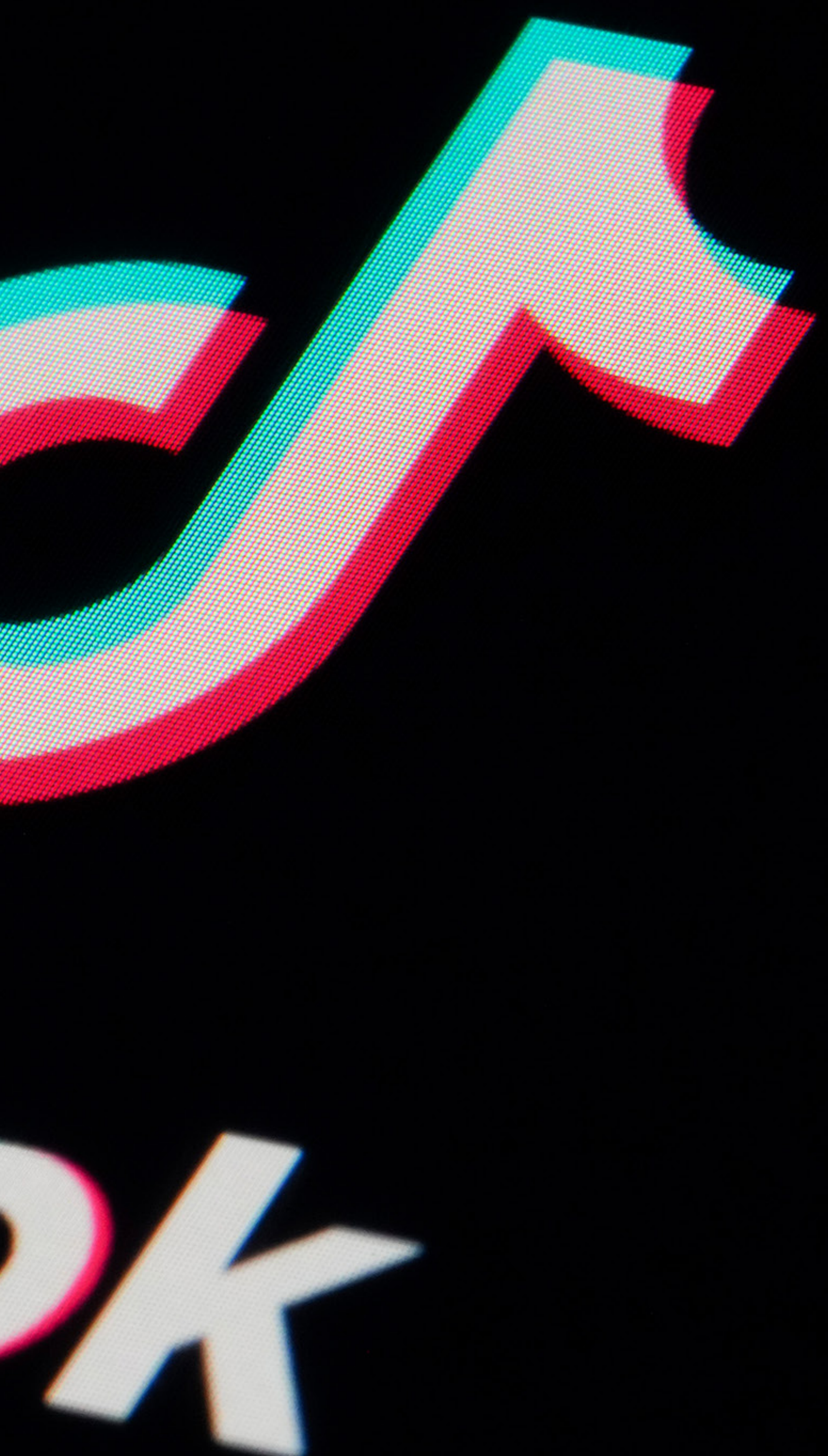
Stewart Baker, a Washington, D.C.-based lawyer and consultant who has previously served as a top official at the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency, said DeepSeek "raises all of the TikTok concerns plus you're talking about information that is highly likely to be of more national security and personal significance than anything people do on TikTok," one of the world's most popular social media platforms.

Users are increasingly putting sensitive data into generative AI systems — everything from confidential business information to highly personal details about themselves. People are using generative AI systems for spell-checking, research and even highly personal queries and conversations. The data security risks of such technology are magnified when the platform is owned by a geopolitical adversary and could represent an intelligence goldmine for a country, experts warn.

"The implications of this are significantly larger because personal and proprietary information could be exposed. It's like TikTok but at a much grander scale and with more precision. It's not just sharing entertainment videos. It's sharing queries and information that could include highly personal and sensitive business information," said Tsarynny, of Feroot.

Feroot, which specializes in identifying threats on the web, identified computer code that is downloaded and triggered when a user logs into DeepSeek. According to the company's analysis, the code appears to capture detailed information about the device a user logs in from — a process called fingerprinting. Such


ATIONS COMMISSION

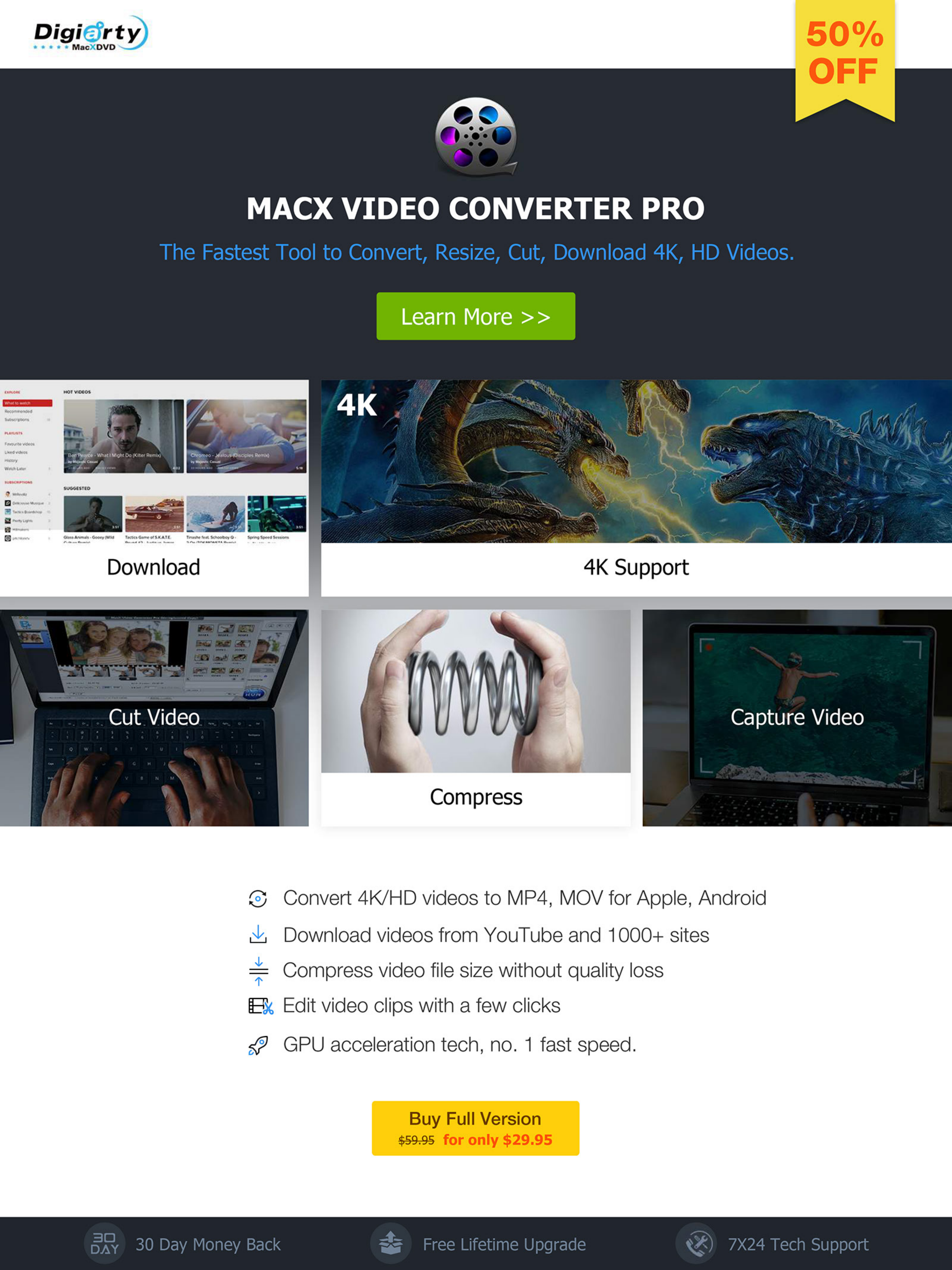


techniques are widely used by tech companies around the world for security, verification and ad targeting.

The company's analysis of the code determined that there were links in that code pointing to China Mobile authentication and identity management computer systems, meaning it could be part of the login process for some users accessing DeepSeek.

The AP asked two academic cybersecurity experts — Joel Reardon of the University of Calgary and Serge Egelman of the University of California, Berkeley — to verify Feroot's findings. In their independent analysis of the DeepSeek code, they confirmed there were links between the chatbot's login system and China Mobile.

"It's clear that China Mobile is somehow involved in registering for DeepSeek," said Reardon. He didn't see data being transferred in his testing but concluded that it is likely being activated for some users or in some login methods.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4K Support
Cut Video
Compress
Capture Video
Convert 4K/HD videos to MP4, MOV for Apple, Android
Download videos from YouTube and 1000+ sites
Compress video file size without quality loss
Edit video clips with a few clicks
GPU acceleration tech, no. 1 fast speed.
Buy Full Version
~~$59.95~~ for only $29.95
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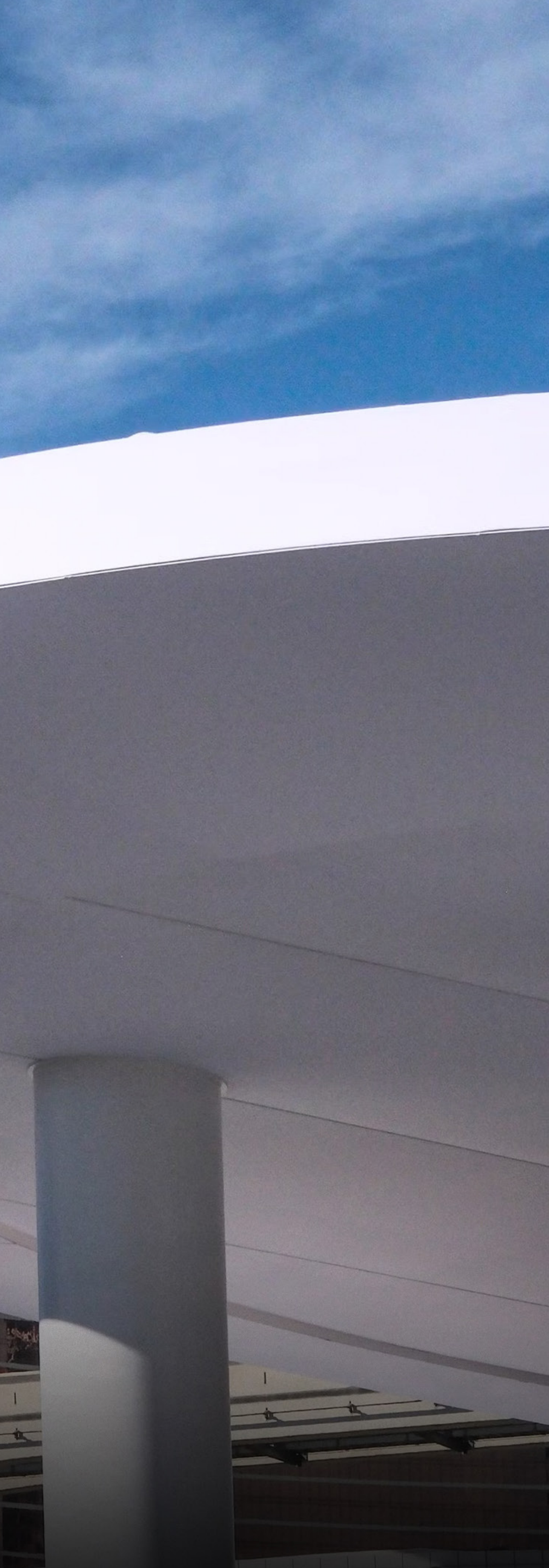
30 Day Money Back
Free Lifetime Upgrade
7X24 Tech Support


Google



GOOGLE MAKES ITS APPEAL TO OVERTURN JURY VERDICT BRANDING THE PLAY STORE AS ILLEGAL MONOPOLY

Google went to appeals court this week in an attempt to convince a three-judge panel to overturn a jury's verdict declaring its app store for Android smartphones as an illegal monopoly and block the penalties imposed by a federal judge to stop the misbehavior. Video game maker Epic Games, which brought the case alleging Google's Play Store has been abusing its stranglehold over the Android app market, countered with arguments outlining why both the verdict and punishment should be affirmed to foster more innovation and lower prices.

Image: Andrew Kelly

In a nearly hour-long presentation in San Francisco's Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Google lawyer Jessica Ellsworth explained why the company believes the judge overseeing a month-long trial in 2023 improperly allowed the market in its case to be defined differently than it had in a similar antitrust trial revolving around Apple's antitrust trial in 2021.

Ellsworth also asserted the trial shouldn't have been decided by a jury in the first place because Google exercised its consent to that process and demanded the case be decided by a judge instead, as had the trial by Apple.

Epic, the maker of the popular Fortnite video game, filed separate antitrust cases against Apple and Google on the same day in August 2020 and culminated in dramatically different outcomes. Unlike the jury in Google's trial in San Francisco, U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez-Rogers largely sided with Apple in an 185-decision that defined the Play Store and Apple's iPhone app store as part of a broader competitive market.

Image: Pavlo Gonchar


Play

Ellsworth told the appeals court that U.S. District Judge James Donato improperly allowed Epic to turn the Google trial into a "do-over" that excluded the Apple app store as a rival in the market definition that led to the jury's verdict in its case.

"You can't just lose an issue that was fully litigated the first time (in the Apple case) and then pretend it didn't happen," Ellsworth said. She said the competition that Google and Apple engage in while making the two operating systems that power virtually all of the world's smartphones "sufficiently disciplines" their actions in the app market.

But the appeals judges indicated they believed the market definitions could differ in the separate app store cases because Apple bundles all its software and the iPhone together — creating what has become known as a "walled garden" — while Google licenses the Android software that includes its Play Store a wide variety of smartphone makers.

"There are clearly some factual differences between the Android world and Apple world," Judge Danielle J. Forrest told Ellsworth.

Judge Gabriel Sanchez also sounded skeptical about Google's claims about being lumped with an improper market definition in its trial.

Image: Yasin Baturhan Ergin


EPIC
GAMES

“Even if Google vigorously competes with Apple (in smartphone operating systems), that doesn’t mean it can’t create a different ecosystem where it’s a monopolist,” Sanchez interjected during Ellsworth’s presentation.

Epic attorney Gary Bornstein painted Google’s arguments as a desperate and unfounded effort to preserve the system that boosts Google’s profits with price-gouging commissions ranging from 15% to 30% on in-app purchases flowing from software downloaded through the Play Store.

The penalties that Donato imposed in October and subsequently postponed while Google pursues its appeal would impose a series of sweeping changes that include making the Play Store’s entire library of 2 million apps available to potential competitors — a move expected to result in lower commission rates.

The appeals court hasn’t set a timeline for issuing a ruling in the Play Store case, but it typically takes several months before a decision is reached.

Google is also currently facing other potential penalties that could include being forced to sell its Chrome web browser after a judge in another antitrust trial ruled its ubiquitous search engine is an illegal monopoly, too.

In Monday’s two-hour hearing Bornstein contended that Google never tried to define the Android app market during the trial the way it presented it during its appeal and reminded the three-judge panel that the bar should be set high before reversing a jury’s verdict and the ensuing punishment ordered by a lower court judge.


EPIC
GAMES
STORE
SELECT
START

Image: Rafael Henrique

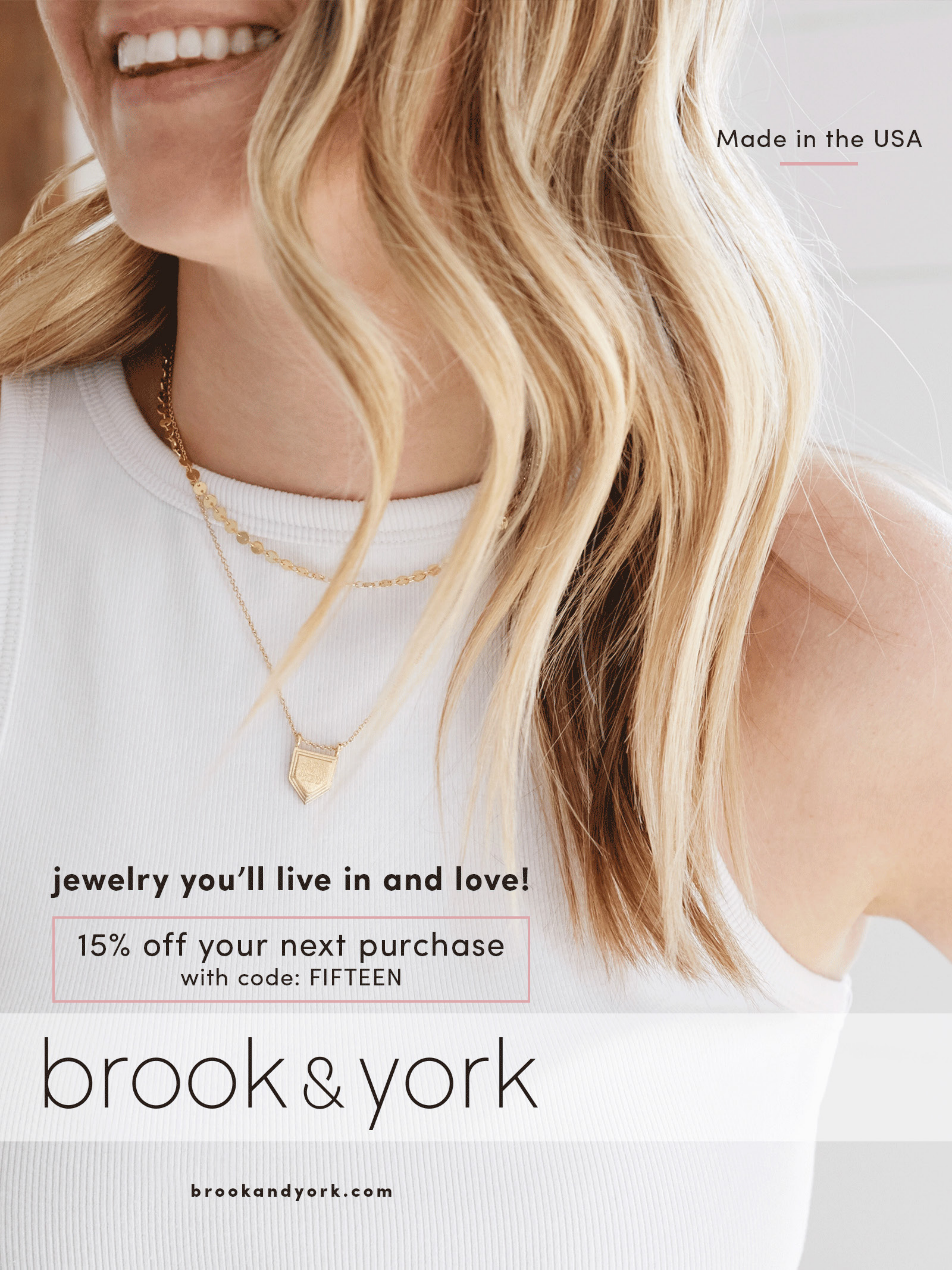
“The benefit of the doubt does not go to the wrongdoer,” Bornstein said.

The judges seemed more troubled by Donato’s decision to stick with a jury trial after the case changed shortly before the Epic trial when Google settled lawsuits brought by attorneys general across the U.S. and another prominent app developer, Match Group. An agreement for a jury trial had been reached when the attorneys general and Match cases were going to be combined with Epic’s, but Google wanted to revert to having a judge decide the outcome after settling some of the claims only to be rebuffed by Donato.

At one point during Bornstein’s presentation, Forrest openly mused about the possibility of declaring the verdict as a decision rendered by the equivalent of an advisory jury and sending the case back to Donato for a more lengthy ruling.

That is an approach favored by Ellsworth, who pointed out that the judge’s ruling in the Apple app store case spanned nearly 200 pages while the jury in the Google trial “were asked eight questions and they offered 14 words defining a relevant market.”

But Bornstein urged the appeals court to resort to giving Donato a “homework assignment” that would give Google more time to profit from its illegal conduct.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JAPAN'S TOYOTA ANNOUNCES EV AND BATTERY PUSH IN CHINA AND U.S., AS ITS QUARTERLY PROFIT SURGES

Toyota is developing and making electric vehicles and EV batteries in China, the Japanese automaker said Wednesday, under a new partnership with the Shanghai government.

Toyota Motor Corp. also announced it will start producing batteries for EVs, hybrids and plug-ins at a new $14 billion facility in North Carolina, with shipping starting for North American models in April.

The moves highlight Toyota's aggressive push in electric cars, a sector where some critics have said it's fallen behind rivals like Tesla and BYD at a time when the Chinese EV market is booming

and the world's concerns about sustainability are increasingly crucial.

Toyota is setting up a company in Jinshan district in southwest Shanghai for that effort, with production of the new Lexus EVs starting in 2027.

Initial production capacity there totals 100,000 vehicles a year, which will create about 1,000 jobs, the world's top automaker said. The battery plant in the U.S. will create some 5,000 jobs, according to Toyota.

Toyota's push also comes as worries grow around Asia about a potential trade war brewing after President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese goods and China retaliated with tariffs to take effect next week.

"We have always tried to be a company that will be loved wherever we do our business. That has never waffled," Chief Financial Officer Yoichi Miyazaki told reporters without addressing the tariffs.

Also Wednesday, Toyota reported fiscal third quarter profit jumped 61% from the previous fiscal year to 2.19 trillion yen ($14 billion), on 12.4 trillion yen ($81 billion) sales, up 3% on-year.

Toyota officials said sales were recovering from the drop earlier this fiscal year after some production was suspended over a certification scandal in Japan.

Last year, Toyota acknowledged wide-ranging fraudulent testing, including the use of inadequate or outdated data in crash tests, incorrect testing of airbag inflation and engine power checks. The wrongdoing did not affect the safety of the vehicles, and only affected production in Japan.


BRIDGESTONE

Toyota revised its profit forecast for the full fiscal year through March 2025 to 4.5 trillion yen ($29 billion) from the previous projection for a 3.6 trillion yen ($24 billion) profit, thanks to the positive effect of the foreign exchange rate and cost reduction efforts. The new projection still falls short of what Toyota racked up the previous fiscal year at 4.9 trillion yen.

The new company in China is part of Toyota's drive to meet the high demand for EVs in China, according to Toyota. Toyota already has China FAW Group Co. and Guangzhou Automobile Group Co. as its longtime partners in China, and those will continue unchanged, he said.

Toyota said it hopes to contribute to the Chinese government's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060.

"Local Chinese members will take the lead in planning and developing BEVs that match the unique needs of Chinese customers. Our goal is to become a company that is more loved and supported by the people of China," said Miyazaki.

JAPAN GAME MAKER NINTENDO REPORTS LOWER PROFIT AS DEMAND FOR SWITCH CONSOLES WANES

Nintendo’s profits tumbled as sales of its Switch console lost momentum, prompting the Japanese video-game maker to lower its full-year forecasts.

Kyoto-based Nintendo Co., which created the Super Mario franchise, reported an April-December profit of 237 billion yen ($1.5 billion), down 42% from the same period the previous year.

Nine-month sales dropped 31% to 956 billion yen ($6 billion), according to Nintendo, which did not break down quarterly results.


Nintendo®
Nintendo
TREEH


M

The company now expects to rake in a 270-billion yen ($1.7 billion) profit for the fiscal year through March, down from the previous forecast for 300-billion yen ($1.9 billion).

Sales of Nintendo machines for the nine-month period fell to 9.54 million units from 13.7 million last year.

Nintendo now expects to sell 11 million Switch consoles for the full fiscal year, lower than its initial projection of 12.5 million.

Game software sales in April-December declined to nearly 124 million from 164 million, although "Super Mario Party Jamboree," remained popular, with 6.17 million units sold.

The latest "Legend of Zelda" game software was also in demand, selling 3.4 million units globally after going on sale in September.

Nintendo said, while demand has dwindled for the Switch, now in its eighth year after its debut, it was still being purchased by a significant number of people. The number of Switch players remains above 100 million, it said.

Nintendo is banking on its successor, called Switch 2, which goes on sale later this year. Events where people can try it out are rolling out from April around the world.

Nintendo also noted the opening of Super Nintendo World, an amusement facility, in May at Epic Universe in Orlando, Florida will help woo people to its content.


NINTENDO
SWITCH


NFL

Image: Rick Osentoski

NFL OFFICIALS SPOTTING THE FOOTBALL ISN'T GOING AWAY DESPITE SEVERAL TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

The NFL will engage its Competition Committee on technology to take virtual line-to-gain measurements next season, but officials will continue to spot the football.

There's no current technology being considered that would help determine forward progress, which became a point of contention after Josh Allen was stopped short on a sneak on fourth-and-1 early in the fourth quarter of Buffalo's 32-29 loss to Kansas City in the AFC championship game.

The league tested Sony's Hawk-Eye tracking services for virtual line-to-gain measurements in the preseason and in the background during the regular season. The optimal tracking system notifies officiating instantly if a first down was gained after the ball is spotted by hand.

The key word is after. This technology replaces the chain measurement. The NFL has long used two bright orange sticks and a chain — the chain gang — to measure for first downs. That method would remain in a backup capacity.

"What this technology cannot do is take the place of the human element in determining where forward progress ends," NFL executive Kimberly Fields told last weekend. "There will always be a human official spotting the ball. Once the ball is spotted, then the line-to-gain technology actually does the measurement itself. So I think it's probably been a point of confusion around what the technology can and can't do. There will always be a human element because of the forward progress conversation."

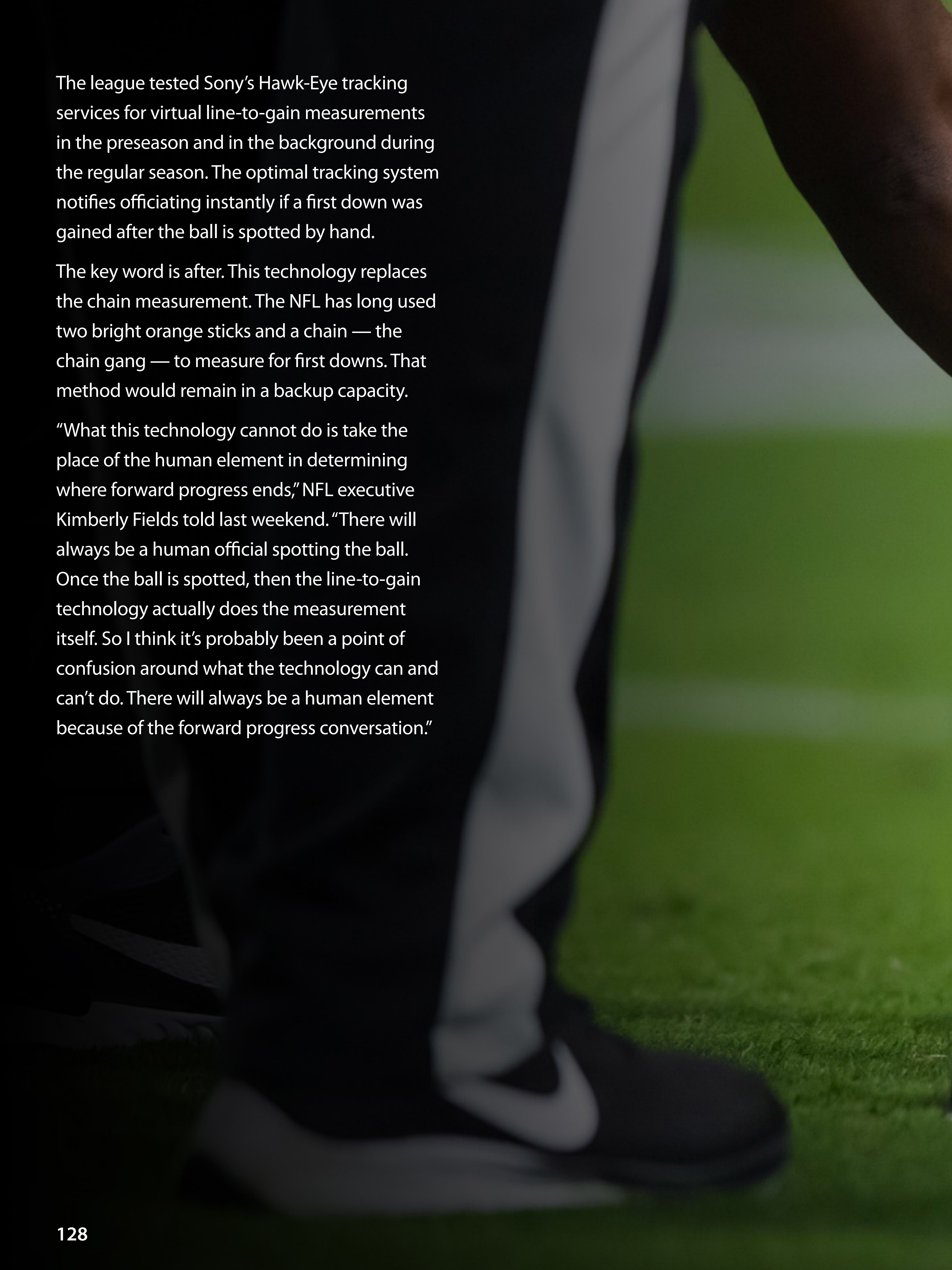

Image: Mark J. Rebilas


SONY
SONY


SONY
SONY
SONY


NFL

Fields said an average of 12 measurements took place each week during the regular season. The new technology would've dropped the time spent to measure from 75 seconds to 35 seconds.

NFL balls have been equipped with Zebra microchips since 2017, powering the NFL's Next Gen Stats data product. The chips are also affixed to players' pads. They provide various data and metrics that help clubs, media and fans with player evaluation and analysis of team performance. But these chips can't determine where a player was tackled, whether a player is down by contact or which team gained possession of a loose ball to the precision necessary for officiating use.

The league also began using boundary line cameras in Week 5 to assist with replay reviews. The cameras were installed in each of the 30 stadiums along the end line, goal line and sideline. Usage was limited to scores, plays with under two minutes remaining and turnovers.

Image: Jonathan Bachman


Microsoft

Discussion for expanding its use to coaches' challenges and replay assist is ongoing and would have to be approved by the Competition Committee.

Fields said the league also experimented with providing back judges smart watches to assist with objective information so they can make decisions faster, specifically as it relates to the play clock.

"We want to make the game efficient and more accurate," Fields said. "The things that we do around technology, if it's not going to make the process better, if it's not going to assist our officials, then we shouldn't be doing it. Everything that we do is going through a rigorous testing process to make sure we are making things easier and more efficient."

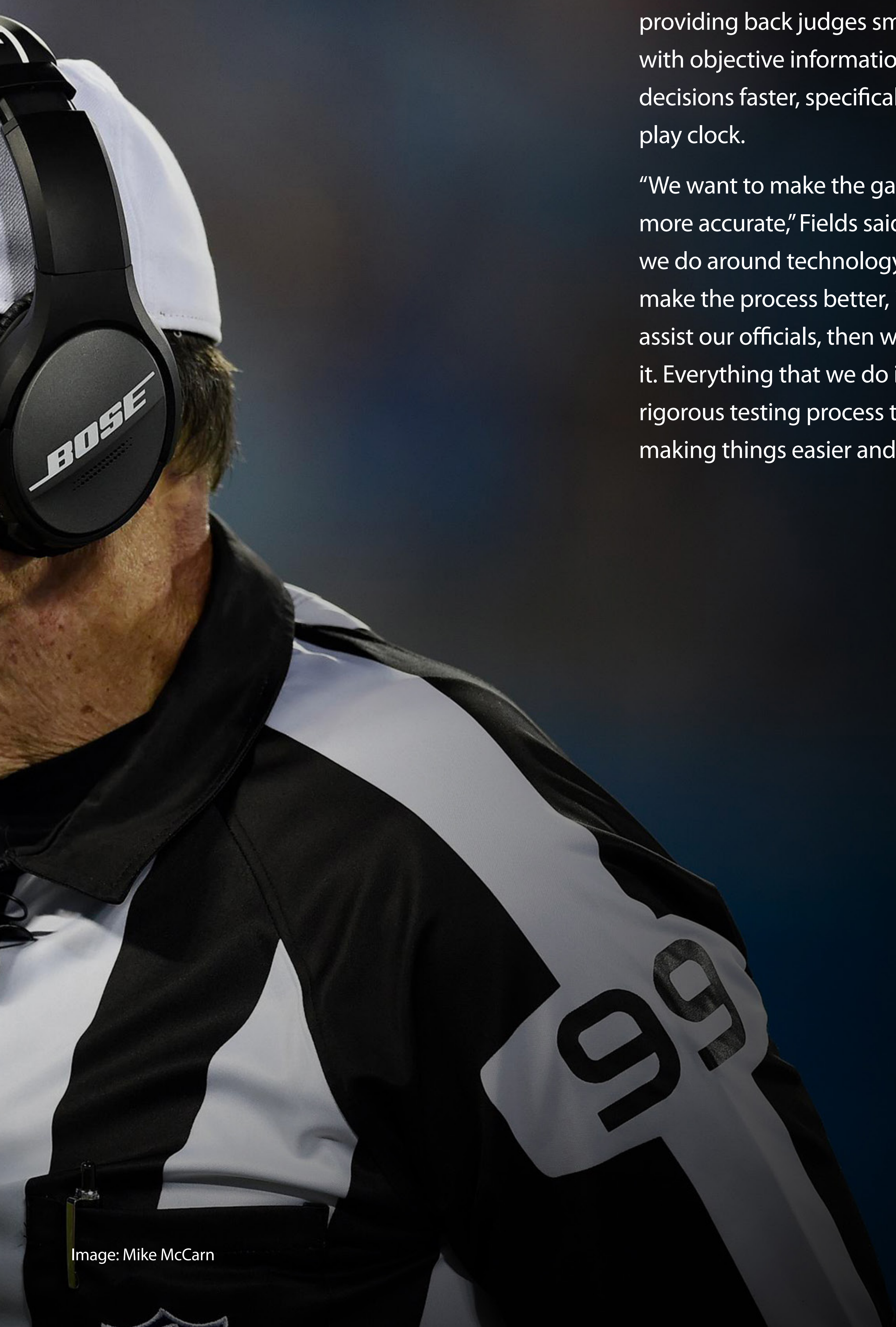

Image: Mike McCarn


PEGGY WHITSON
AX-4

A WEDDING NECKLACE AND POLISH DUMPLINGS WILL BE PART OF A MISSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

What do a wedding necklace, Polish savory dumplings and a photo of Hungary's first astronaut have in common?

They will all be among personal items taken by astronauts journeying to the International Space Station in the spring.

The four members of the Axiom Mission 4 hail from the U.S., India, Hungary and Poland and will travel on Space X Crew Dragon spaceship in a joint mission by NASA and the European Space Agency, ESA.

Three of the astronauts held a news conference on Wednesday and said they were having the time


PEGGY WHITSON
AXIOM
SPACE
AXIOM
SPACE


SŁAWOSZ
UZNAŃSKI-WIŚNIEWSKI
TIBOR KAPU
SPACE

of their lives training hard for their travel as well as preparing for the medical and technological experiments they will conduct during the nearly two weeks they will spend there.

ESA head, Josef Aschbacher stressed that space research was "strategic" for many reasons, including security.

Crew members will take items of national and personal significance.

Mission commander, U.S. astronaut Peggy Whitson, who has rich experience in space travel, is taking the necklace that she wore during her wedding, along with the pictures of the crew and her family.

Poland's Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski is taking Polish traditional pierogi, or dumplings, along with poems by Wislawa Szymborska, a Literary Nobel Prize Winner, music by Frederic Chopin a piece of amber and some salt from the historic Wieliczka salt mine. He will also have a small national white-and-red flag that Poland's first man in outer space, Miroslaw Hermaszewski wore on his suit in 1978.

Hungarian Tibor Kapu said he will take a photo of Hungary's first astronaut, Bertalan Farkas, who traveled into space in 1980, as well as family photos and his country's national flag.

The mission pilot, Shubhanshu Shukla of India, could not attend the media event, held at the popular Copernicus Science Center in Warsaw.


esa
SŁAWOSZ
UZNAŃSKI-WIŚNIEWSKI
TIBOR KAPU

Teen Mom: The Next Chapter

TOP 10 TV SHOWS

RDR LIVE!
RuPaul's Drag Race

DESIRE IS ALL YOU NEED
Yellowstone

COUNTING COUP
Yellowstone

THE APOCALYPSE OF CHANGE
Yellowstone

LIFE IS A PROMISE
Yellowstone

GIVE THE WORLD AWAY
Yellowstone

THREE FIFTY-THREE
Yellowstone

A STAR STUDDED AR-RIVAL
The Challenge: All Stars

RDR LIVE!
RuPaul's Drag Race: Untucked!

A WHOLE NEW ERA OF PARENTING
Teen Mom: The Next Chapter

Joseph Finder

TOP 10 BOOKS

ONYX STORM
Rebecca Yarros

FOURTH WING
Rebecca Yarros

THE LET THEM THEORY
Mel Robbins

IRON FLAME
Rebecca Yarros

BOOK LOVERS
Emily Henry

THE OLIGARCH'S DAUGHTER
Joseph Finder

PRESUMED GUILTY
Scott Turow

THE TEXAS MURDERS
James Patterson & Andrew Bourelle

HOW TO SOLVE YOUR OWN MURDER
Kristen Perrin

THE BIG EMPTY
Robert Crais

Benson Boone

TOP 10 SONGS

BEAUTIFUL THINGS
Benson Boone

PINK PONY CLUB
Chappell Roan

A BAR SONG (TIPSY)
Shaboozey

LOSE CONTROL
Teddy Swims

DIE WITH A SMILE
Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars

BIRDS OF A FEATHER
Billie Eilish

ABRACADABRA
Lady Gaga

I'M THE PROBLEM
Morgan Wallen

ESPRESSO
Sabrina Carpenter

NOT LIKE US
Kendrick Lamar

The Weeknd

TOP 10 ALBUMS

HURRY UP TOMORROW
The Weeknd

THE RISE AND FALL OF A MIDWEST...
Chappell Roan

ALLIGATOR BITES NEVER HEAL
Doechii

COWBOY CARTER
Beyoncé

FIREWORKS & ROLLERBLADES
Benson Boone

MY 21ST CENTURY BLUES
RAYE

I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING ...THERAPY (PART 2)
Teddy Swims

I'VE TRIED EVERYTHING... THERAPY (PART 1)
Teddy Swims

SHORT N' SWEET
Sabrina Carpenter

WHERE I'VE BEEN, ISN'T WHERE I'M GOING
Shaboozey

The Beatles

TOP 10 MUSIC VIDEOS

DISEASE
Lady Gaga

DIE WITH A SMILE
Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars

ABRACADABRA
Lady Gaga

PINK PONY CLUB
Chappell Roan

BEAUTIFUL THINGS
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NOW AND THEN
The Beatles

A BAR SONG (TIPSY) [VISUALIZER]
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APT.
ROSÉ & Bruno Mars

NOW AND THEN
The Last Beatles Song (Short Film) - The Beatles

ESPRESSO
Sabrina Carpenter

A SPINE-ZAPPING IMPLANT HELPED 3 PEOPLE WITH A MUSCLE-WASTING DISEASE WALK BETTER

Three people with a muscle-destroying disease destined to worsen got a little stronger – able to stand and walk more easily – when an implanted device zapped their spinal cord.

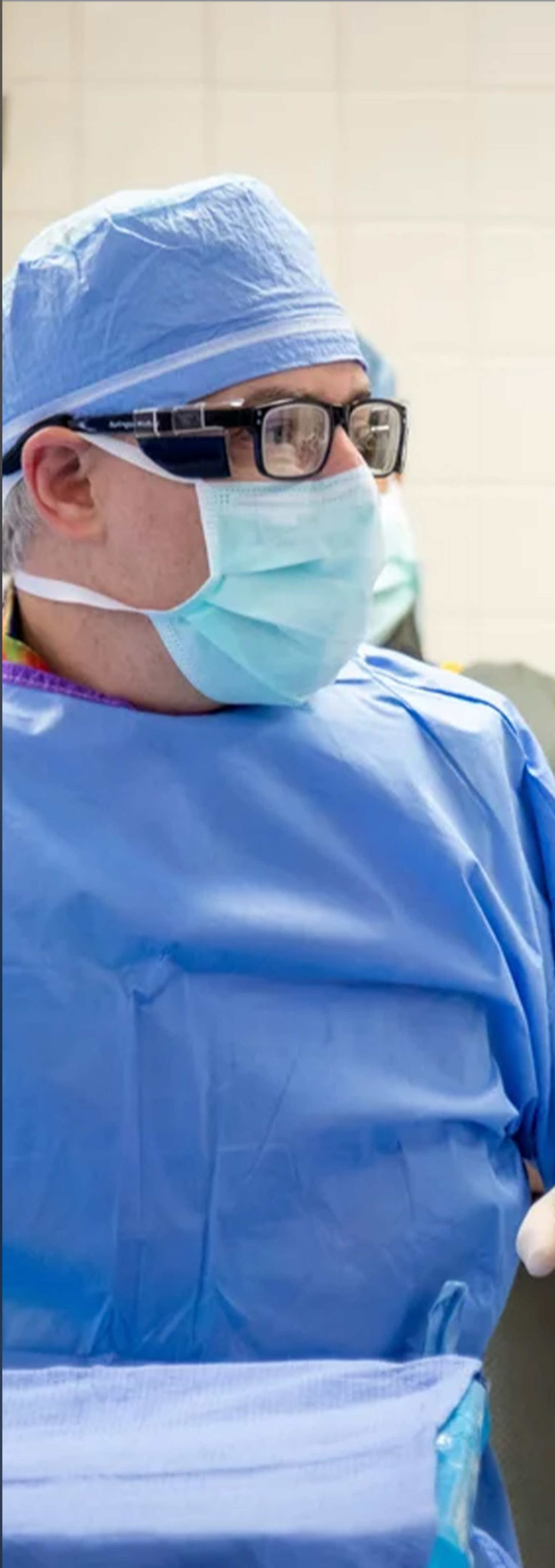
On Wednesday, researchers reported what they called the first evidence that a spine-stimulating implant already being tested for paralysis might also aid neurodegenerative diseases like spinal muscle atrophy – by restoring some muscle function, at least temporarily.

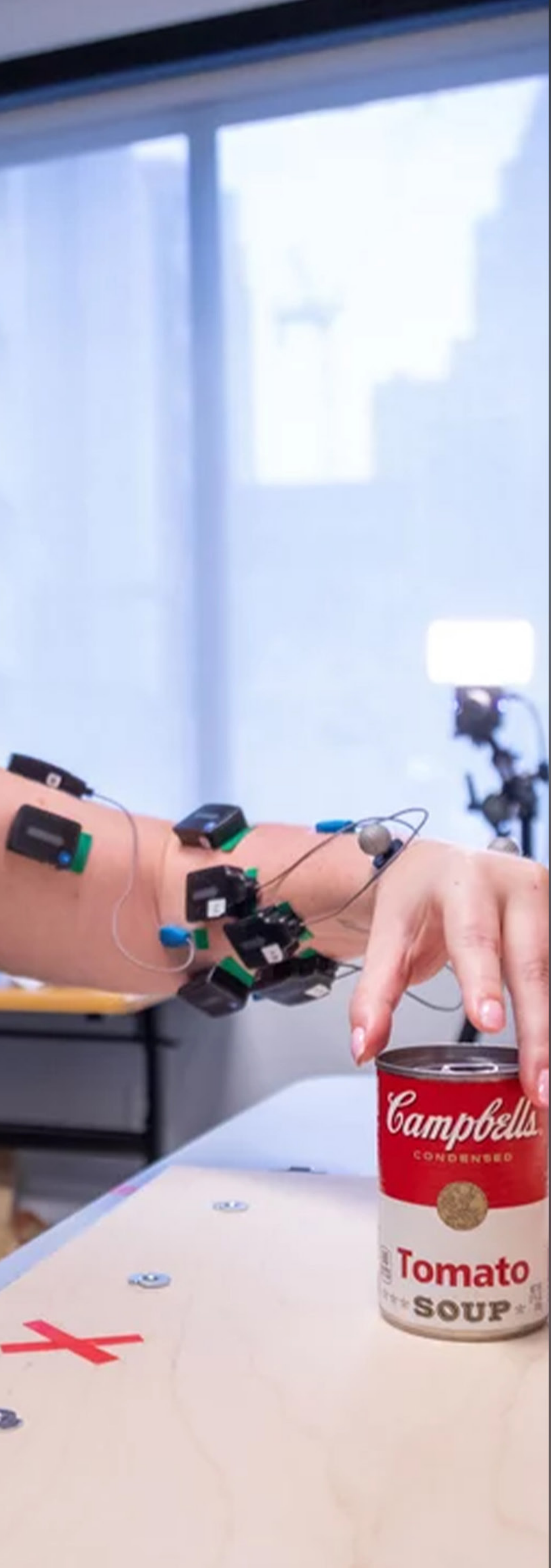
"These people were definitely not expecting an improvement," said Marco Capogrosso, an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh who led the research. Yet over the month-long pilot study, "they were getting better and better."

Spinal muscle atrophy or SMA is a genetic disease that gradually destroys motor neurons, nerve cells in the spinal cord that control muscles. That leads muscles to waste away, especially in the legs, hips and shoulders and sometimes those involved with breathing and swallowing. There is no cure. A gene therapy can save the lives of very young children with a severe form of the disease, and there are some medicines to slow worsening in older patients.

Stimulating the spinal cord with low levels of electricity has long been used to treat chronic pain but Capogrosso's team also has tested it to help people paralyzed from strokes or spinal cord injury move their limbs unaided. While turned on, it zaps circuits of dormant nerves downstream of the injury to activate muscles.

Then Capogrosso wondered if that same technology might help SMA in a similar way — by revving up related sensory nerves so they





wake up damaged muscle cells, helping them move to combat wasting.

The Pitt researchers implanted electrodes over the lower spinal cord of three adults with SMA and tested their muscle strength, fatigue, range of motion and changes in gait and walking distance when the device was firing and when it was turned off.

It didn't restore normal movement but with just a few hours of spinal stimulation a week, all quickly saw improvements in muscle strength and function, researchers reported in the journal Nature Medicine.

"With a progressive disease you never get any better," said study participant Doug McCullough, 57, of Franklin Park, New Jersey. "Either you're staying stable or getting worse. So having any improvement is just a really surreal and very exciting benefit."

All three participants significantly increased how far they could walk in six minutes, and one who initially couldn't stand from a kneeling position could by the study's end, Capogrosso said. And McCullough's gait changed so that each step was about three times longer.

"They get less fatigued so they can walk for longer," Capogrosso said. "Even a person this many years into the disease can improve."

Intriguingly, researchers found the improvements didn't disappear as soon as the stimulator was switched off, though they did fade as participants were tracked after the study ended.

McCullough said even when the stimulator was turned off, some nights his legs "would just feel supercharged."

While he understood that the device had to be removed at the study's end, he was disappointed. He said there were some lingering benefits at his six-week checkup, but none after six months.

Neuroscientist Susan Harkema, who led pioneering studies of stimulation for spinal cord injuries while at the University of Louisville, cautioned the new study is small and short but called it an important proof of concept. She said it's logical to test the technique against a list of muscle-degenerating diseases.

"Human spinal circuitry is very sophisticated – it's not just a bunch of reflexes controlled by the brain," said Harkema, now with the Kessler Foundation, a rehabilitation research nonprofit. "This is a very solid study, an important contribution to move forward."

At Pitt, Capogrosso said some small but longer studies are getting underway.


Neuro


Google
创业加速

CHINA LAUNCHES AN ANTITRUST PROBE INTO GOOGLE. HERE'S WHAT IT MEANS

The Chinese government's move to open an antitrust probe into Google is the latest development in a long and tangled relationship that goes back to the early 2000s.

The investigation was one of a flurry of Chinese retaliatory measures announced this week in response to a 10% tariff imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump on imports from China.

Others included tariffs on American liquified natural gas and other products, and the placing of two other American firms on an unreliable entity list that could bar them from investing in China.

Here is a look at Google's history in China and what the antitrust probe could mean for the company:

WHAT IS GOOGLE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA?

Google launched the Chinese-language search engine google.cn in 2006. It was censored to comply with Beijing's laws, and in 2009, was a major search engine in China with about 36% market share.

In 2010, in response to a cyberattack and an increasing unwillingness to comply with censorship rules, Google said it was no longer willing to block search results and shut down its Chinese search engine, redirecting users to its Hong Kong site instead.

Beijing later blocked Google services under its Great Firewall censorship system, including the email service Gmail, as well as the Chrome browser and search engine, making them inaccessible to users in mainland China.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China typically blocks most Western internet platforms, such as Google, as well as social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram.

DOES GOOGLE STILL OPERATE IN CHINA?

Although Google services are not accessible in China, the company still maintains a presence in the country, primarily focused on sales and engineering for its advertising business. It also has employees working on services including Google Cloud and customer solutions.

Google maintains offices in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

WHY IS CHINA INVESTIGATING GOOGLE?

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said it was investigating Google on suspicion of violating antitrust laws.

While regulators did not provide further details, the announcement came minutes after the new U.S. tariffs came into effect.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR GOOGLE?

With few details on what exactly Google is being investigated for, the impact on its operations is unclear, although its immediate status is unlikely to be affected by the probe, which could takes months.

Google did not immediately comment on the investigation.

Some experts believe that the antitrust investigation is likely to center around Google's Android operating system for smartphones and

to be used as a bargaining chip in the U.S.-China trade war.

John Gong, an antitrust expert at the University of International Business and Economics, said that Chinese smartphone makers have long complained about Google's market practices.

Virtually all brands apart from Apple and Huawei pay licensing fees to Google to use the Android system on their devices.

"Now, this time, Google is put on the chopping board. But I think it's still an investigation, right? It hasn't reached a decision yet," said Gong, adding, "I think it's very much negotiable."

Huawei developed its own HarmonyOS operating system after it was placed on the U.S. entity list — foreign individuals, companies and organizations deemed a national security concern — in 2019, which prevented it from doing business with U.S. firms including Google.

Google has been accused of violating antitrust law in other countries, including those in the European Union, South Korea, Russia, India and Turkey, for allegedly abusing its market dominance.

CHINA COUNTERS WITH TARIFFS ON US PRODUCTS. IT WILL ALSO INVESTIGATE GOOGLE.

China announced retaliatory tariffs on select American imports and an antitrust investigation into Google on Tuesday, just minutes after a sweeping levy on Chinese products imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump took effect.

American tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico were also set to go into effect Tuesday before Trump agreed to a 30-day pause, as the two countries acted to address his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. Trump planned to talk with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the coming days.


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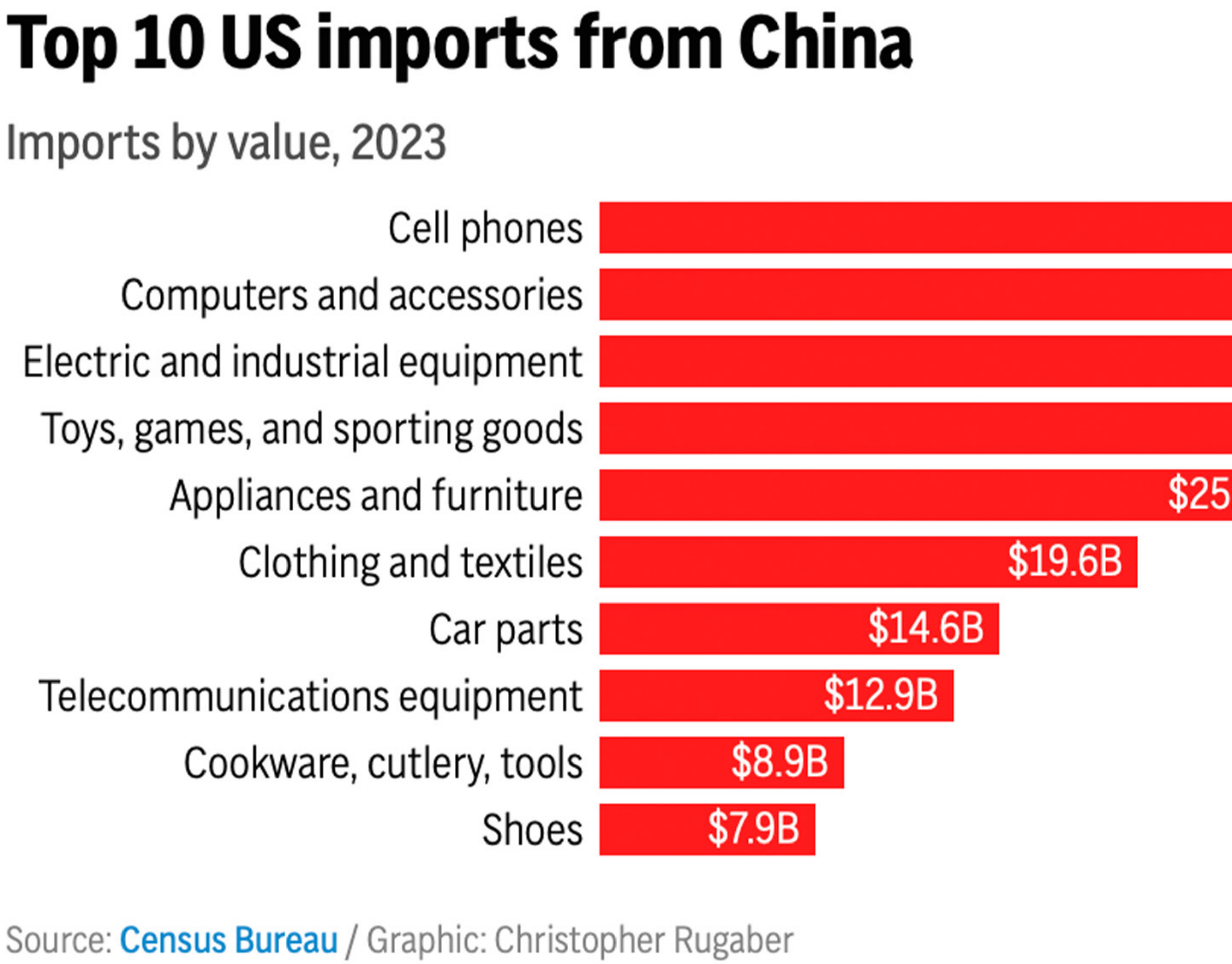
Top 10 US imports from China
Imports by value, 2023
Cell phones
Computers and accessories
Electric and industrial equipment
Toys, games, and sporting goods
Appliances and furniture
$25
Clothing and textiles
$19.6B
Car parts
$14.6B
Telecommunications equipment
$12.9B
Cookware, cutlery, tools
$8.9B
Shoes
$7.9B
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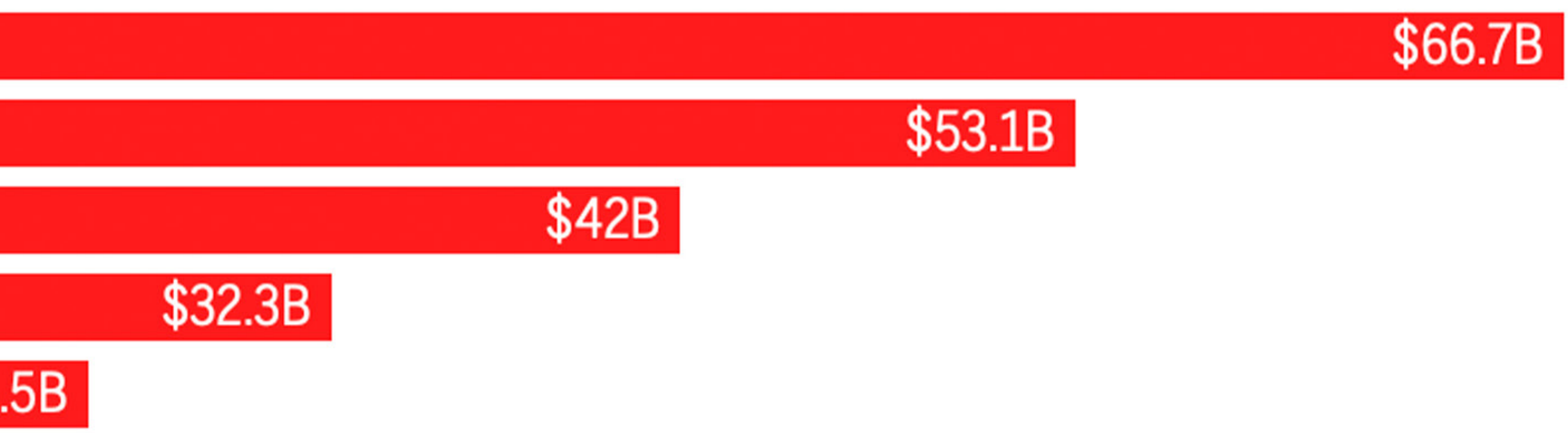
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"It is being scheduled and will happen very soon," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Screenshot 2025-02-04 at 9.01.02 PM.png

This isn't the first round of tit-for-tat actions between the two countries. China and the U.S. engaged in an escalating trade war in 2018, when Trump repeatedly raised tariffs on Chinese goods and China responded each time.

This time, analysts said, China is much better prepared, announcing a slew of measures that go beyond tariffs and cut across different sectors of the U.S. economy. The government is also more wary of upsetting its own fragile and heavily trade-dependent economy.

"It's aiming for finding measures that maximize the impact and also minimize the risk that the Chinese economy may face," said Gary Ng, a senior economist at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking in Hong Kong. "At the same time ... China is trying to increase its bargaining chips."

John Gong, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, called the response a "measured" one. "I don't think they want the trade war escalating," he said. "And they see this example from Canada and Mexico and probably they are hoping for the same thing."

COUNTER-TARIFFS

China said it would implement a 15% tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products as well as a 10% tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the U.S.

The tariffs would take effect next Monday.

"The U.S.'s unilateral tariff increase seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organization," China's State Council Tariff Commission said in a statement. "It is not only unhelpful in solving its own problems, but also damages normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the U.S."

The WTO confirmed Tuesday it received notice of China's request for consultations with the United States regarding the tariffs imposed on Chinese goods. The move sets off a 60-day period for the two sides to resolve their differences, and if not, the case can be brought before a three-judge panel at the Geneva-based trade body.

However, the WTO's dispute-resolution process has been stymied in recent years as multiple U.S. administrations blocked appointments of judges on its appeals court.

The impact of China's measures on U.S. exports may be limited. Though the U.S. is the biggest exporter of liquid natural gas globally, it does not export much to China. In 2023, the U.S. exported 173,247 million cubic feet of LNG to China, about 2.3% of its total natural gas exports, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

China imported less than 110,000 vehicles from the U.S. last year, though auto market analyst Lei Xing thinks the tariffs will be painful for GM, which is adding the Chevrolet Tahoe and GMC Yukon to its China line-up, and for Ford, which exports the Mustang and F-150 Raptor pickup.

The response from China appears calculated and measured, said Stephen Dover, chief market


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strategist and head of the Franklin Templeton Institute, a financial research firm. However, he said, the world is bracing for further impact.

"A risk is that this is the beginning of a tit-for-tat trade war, which could result in lower GDP growth everywhere, higher U.S. inflation, a stronger dollar and upside pressure on U.S. interest rates," Dover said.

FURTHER EXPORT CONTROLS ON CRITICAL MINERALS

China announced export controls on several elements critical to the production of modern high-tech products. The measure took effect upon announcement on Tuesday.

They include tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum and indium, many of which are designated as critical minerals by the U.S. Geological Survey, meaning they are essential to U.S. economic or national security that have supply chains vulnerable to disruption.

The export controls are in addition to ones China placed in December on key elements such as gallium.

"They have a much more developed export control regime," Philip Luck, an economist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and former State Department official, said at a panel discussion on Monday.

"We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others," he said. "They could put some significant harm on our economy."


Tommy
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GOING AFTER GOOGLE

China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it is investigating Google on suspicion of violating antitrust laws. The announcement did not mention the tariffs but came just minutes after Trump's 10% tariffs on China were to take effect.

It is unclear how the probe will affect Google's operations. The company has long faced complaints from Chinese smartphone makers over its business practices surrounding the Android operating system, Gong said.

Overall, Google has a smaller presence in China than many markets, with its search engine blocked like many other Western platforms. Google exited the Chinese market in 2010, after refusing to comply with censorship requests from the Chinese government and following a series of cyberattacks on the company.

Google did not immediately comment.

TOMMY HILFIGER IN THE CROSSHAIRS

The Commerce Ministry also placed two American companies on an unreliable entities list: PVH Group, which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and Illumina, which is a biotechnology company with offices in China. The listing could bar them from engaging in China-related import or export activities and from making new investments in the country.

The ministry says investigations show these two U.S. companies have "disrupted normal business with Chinese companies, taken discriminatory measures against Chinese companies and


美国

severely harmed the legitimate rights of Chinese companies”

Beijing began investigating PVH Group in September last year over “improper Xinjiang-related behavior” after the company allegedly boycotted the use of Xinjiang cotton.

Illumina competes with the Chinese biotech firm BGI in gene-sequencing.

In a statement, Illumina said it has a long-standing presence in China and that it complies with all laws and regulations wherever it operates. “We are assessing this announcement with the goal of finding a positive resolution,” the company said.

Putting these U.S. companies on the unreliable entities list is “alarming” because it shows that the Chinese government is using the list to pressure U.S. companies to take a side, said George Chen, managing director for The Asia Group, a Washington D.C.-headquartered business policy consultancy.

“It’s almost like telling American companies, what your government is doing is bad, you need to tell the government that if you add more tariffs or hurt U.S.-China relations at the end of the day it’ll backfire on American companies,” Chen said.

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