

Microsoft Bing, OpenAI, and the changing future of search on the Internet

SHRUTI DHAPOLA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE DAY after Google announced Bard, its new artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot to take on the challenge of ChatGPT — the AI chatbot developed by the Microsoft-backed startup OpenAI — the Redmond, Washington-based software giant unveiled plans to integrate its Bing search with more AI features, powered by a new and bigger language learning model (LLM) from OpenAI.

Based on what Microsoft showcased at the event, Bing, Microsoft's web search engine, will now be more conversational and interactive, almost like a smart AI assistant, rather than merely providing endless links, which is the case currently.

So how is Bing search changing?

In its new avatar, the search engine will give more conversational answers, in the form of essays and summaries. Yes, it will still show links, but will also give a "sum-

marised answer" on the right, which will be based on "consolidating reliable sources across the web", according to Microsoft's blog post.

The demos suggest that Bing's new chat experience will write poems and stories, and even provide helpful tips on what to do in a particular city — all of which will be designed to make the search seem more personalised.

As of now, this is a limited release — and users have to sign up on the waitlist in order to get access. Once it begins to be rolled out, the Bing search experience will be available on desktop computers and in apps.

Does this mean Bing search is turning into ChatGPT?

Not exactly. For one, Bing search will continue to show links — even in those essay-style answers — at the bottom of the answers. ChatGPT — which in the weeks after its prototype launch late last year was seen to have a semblance of human-like intelligence and appeared to present a sensa-



OpenAI CEO Sam Altman (second from left) watches a presentation introducing the integration of the Microsoft Bing search engine with OpenAI on Tuesday. AP

tional peek into both the potentials and the threat of AI — does not, for now, show links. But it would be fair to say Bing is getting a lot of help from OpenAI and the large language models (LLM) that helped create ChatGPT.

Microsoft's blog post notes that the LLM powering Bing is bigger than what is being

used to run ChatGPT, although it does not specify exactly how big. This also means Bing's AI chat will have more answers and a larger knowledge pool compared to ChatGPT — where the knowledge is limited to events before 2021.

But Bing's AI chat experience will cer-

tainly make it feel more like ChatGPT. Users will also be able to ask "follow-up questions" to their initial question.

The new AI features also apply a "Prometheus model". Microsoft calls this a "proprietary way of working with the OpenAI model" that ensures it can utilise these language models in the best possible manner to give "relevant, timely and targeted result...".

What about the accuracy of answers?

This was a shortcoming that almost all reviews of ChatGPT noted, and Microsoft has cautioned that not all answers would be accurate, given these features are still in early preview, and since the answers are based on information from the web.

The company asked users to rely on their judgment as well. Bing search will let users flag an answer as incorrect if needed, which it said will help in feedback.

According to Microsoft's post, the Bing search experience is designed "to keep humans at the centre, and we have developed a safety system that is designed to mitigate failures and avoid misuse with things like content filtering, operational monitoring

and abuse detection, and other safeguards". That's also the reason why the feature is being rolled out in a phased manner.

So will Bing search finally defeat Google?

It is too early to say, but no doubt Microsoft's announcement and the viral interest around ChatGPT likely has Google worried. Having announced Bard, Google was to host an event on AI in Paris later on Wednesday where it will showcase some new AI products. More details about Bard are also expected at this event. Google has promised to bring more AI-based features to its search.

Even so, it is fair to say Microsoft has taken the lead in AI-related developments and its announcement will have big implications for Bing, which has never been as popular as Google search. Google has comprehensively dominated the search market for decades — but with AI features that give exact, precise, and interesting answers, the nature of how people search is bound to change. Should Bing and OpenAI continue to improve and scale faster, Google has ample reason to be concerned.