

China's Baidu says developing AI chatbot

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Baidu has yet to announce a launch date for 'Ernie Bot', though the firm said it will carry out internal testing next month.

Chinese search engine giant Baidu on Tuesday said it was developing an AI-powered chatbot, as tech giants rush to match the success of ChatGPT, a hugely popular language app that has sparked a gold rush in artificial intelligence technology.

ChatGPT, created by San Francisco company OpenAI, has caused a sensation for its ability to write essays, poems or programming code on demand within seconds, sparking widespread fears of cheating or of professions becoming obsolete.

Microsoft last month said it was investing billions in the firm and Google this week said it was working on a rival called Bard.

While a number of smaller Chinese firms have begun developing a rival to the app, Baidu is by far the biggest to throw its hat into the ring, though the firm did not announce a launch date for the service, set to be called "Ernie Bot".

A company spokesperson told AFP that they are "likely to complete internal testing in March before making the chatbot available to the public".

Baidu's shares soared more than 15 percent on the announcement.

The Chinese tech giant has diversified in recent years into artificial intelligence, [cloud computing](#) and autonomous driving technologies as advertising revenue has remained sluggish in the face of tighter regulatory scrutiny.

Baidu is expected to integrate Ernie Bot into its main search service, allowing users to get a conversation-style reply to their [search results](#) instead of getting a list of links—similar to the experience of using ChatGPT.

With no barriers to creating AI-synthesized text, audio and video, the potential for misuse in [identity theft](#), [financial fraud](#) and tarnish reputations has sparked global alarm.

The Eurasia group consultancy has called the AI tools "weapons of mass disruption".

And Beijing has warned that deepfakes—which use technology similar to chatbots to create chillingly-accurate digital doppelgangers—present a "danger to national security and social stability".

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