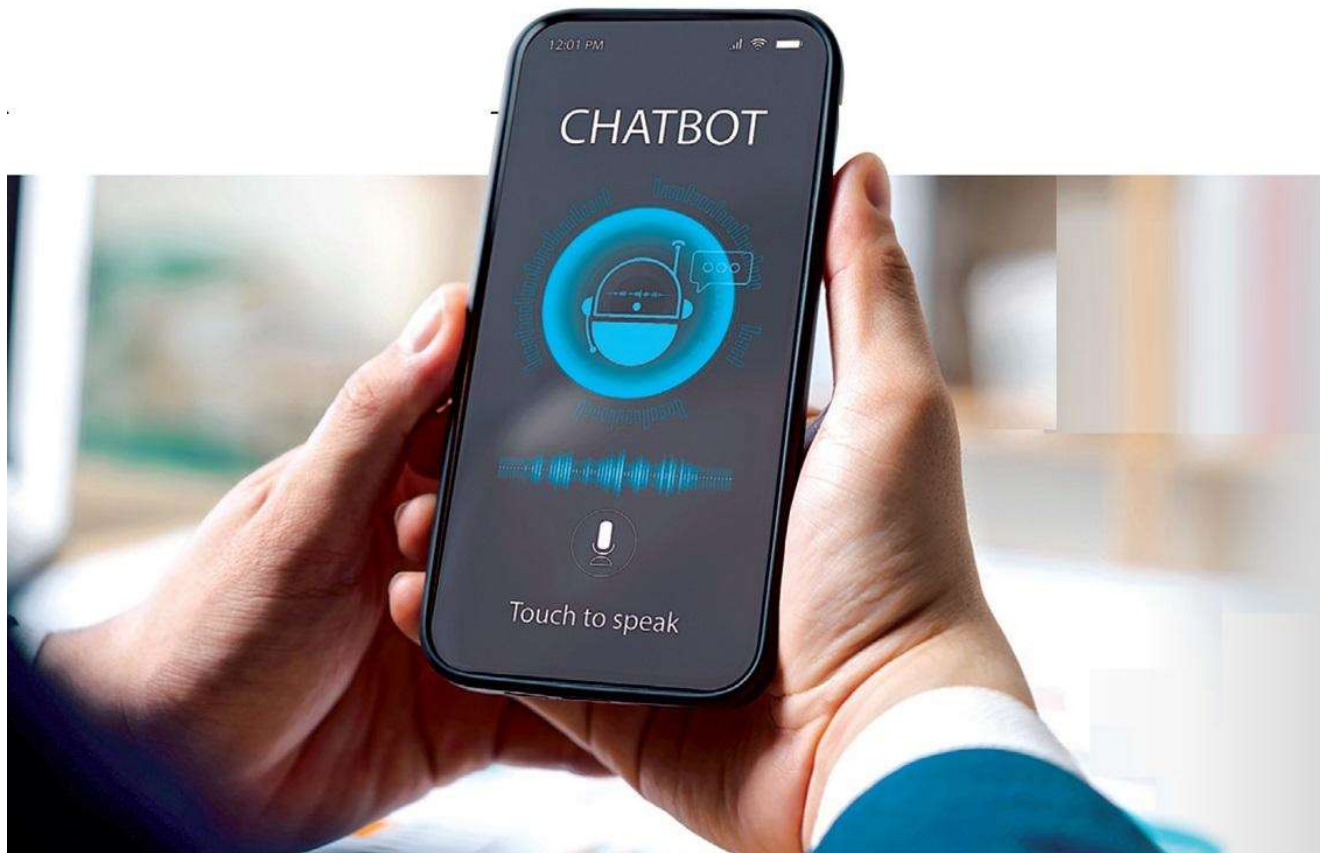


# Altman issue: What will AI's future be like?



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It looks like the month of November has a lot to do with Artificial Intelligence (AI). The start-up OpenAI, not much known at the time of its launch, introduced in November, 2022 the chatbot called ChatGPT. The buzz that ChatGPT set off and the reception it got from several quarters catapulted it into the limelight with the chatbot becoming a hot topic of discussions and debates by the people from all walks of life globally.

In the current month of November (2023), the news of sacking of OpenAI CEO Sam Altman broke out; subsequently Microsoft welcomed him warmly; yet he returned to his parent organisation with the support of OpenAI employees; in the heat of his triumphant moment, he ensured the ouster of the Board of Directors who had earlier fired him.... these back-to-back frenzied developments kept the AI world abuzz with excitement.

### **Firing of Altman**

When the Board of Directors of OpenAI announced the firing of Altman, the news set several people thinking aloud over the ironic tone and tenor of the news, wondering at the fate that befell a man who had created the start-up. The reasons for the sacking are analyzed, comparing the firing of Altman with that of Steve Jobs from Apple. While his slide was discussed frenetically, support for him was swelling. Particularly, the big shots of the Silicon Valley expressed opinions in defense of Altman and sensing his popularity and fame, the CEO of Microsoft Satya Nadella invited him to take charge of the AI wing of Microsoft. Meanwhile, most of the employees of OpenAI wrote to the company top brass, saying that if Altman was not recalled, they would en masse call it quits and also wanted the Board of Directors to be ousted. Their demands were at last fulfilled. All these developments bear a testimony to Altman's popularity and influence being hardly dented a tad. In fact, it is seldom a surprise.

Altman had crafted a highly influential image about himself when the roaring success of the ChatGPT established the indispensability and immense hold of Artificial Intelligence. He charted his corporate's future and had an easy access to world leaders with whom he had easy-going chats. It is noteworthy that he was the cynosure of attention at the AI safety summit held in Britain recently.

### **Who's Altman?**

A 38-year-old American, Altman is considered as one of the young successful start-up entrepreneurs. Having not completed his collegiate education, he launched a start-up called Loopt and later, held the top position at Y Combinator, a start-up school. He had played a vital role in shaping successful start-ups and also invested in many of them. The investments and experiences had endowed him with an administrative acumen needed to helm new ventures and also with a sharp intellect to predict and prepare for the future course of technology.

### **The titan of ChatGPT**

Under the circumstances, Altman floated OpenAI with the support of AI researchers, industrialists and trade corporates with the aim of accentuating the AI research for the welfare of mankind. The company's seamless research yielded the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) language-based model which evolved into ChatGPT. Then several software designs were introduced.

Though Microsoft, Google and Meta and several such companies have been involved in AI research and though many chatbots have been in use, it is ChatGPT which has amazed the users with its stupendous skill of conversing with humans and with its matchless style of functioning. So, no wonder, there is a hot competition apace in the world of AI, particularly in the chatbot category. At the same time, the unbridled growth of AI technology has triggered general grave concerns.

Fears over loss of job opportunities are starkly staring in the face of mankind owing to the emergence of chatbots such as ChatGPT. Moreover, researchers have expressed concerns over the imminent danger to mankind from the further growth of AI services in future. So, the proposal of clamping curbs on AI research has been gaining traction with emphasis being laid on AI laws and AI ethics.

### **AI's future**

Against this background, the issue of sacking of Altman can be understood as having several dimensions. Firstly, the question arises why there was a tussle between Altman and the OpenAI Board of Directors. Information on this count is less. But it is generally surmised that the Board of Directors sought a safe and secure approach to the growth of AI while Altman's approach was to formation of furthering AI technologies only. The directors had alleged that Altman had no transparency of functioning and was focussing on establishment of his own company. The fact that Microsoft had rolled out a red carpet to Altman had driven home several things. It is conjectured that a desire to go one better had motivated the Microsoft move. Yet it is noteworthy that Microsoft is one of the investors of OpenAI. It also assumes significance that the employees of OpenAI and the investor society support Altman. Of course, Altman is no great technocrat steeped in AI technologies. But he has technological foresight and administrative skill which have earned him a great deal of respect and good will from all quarters.

### **Big Tech's influence**

Meanwhile, some pundits have put forward a psychological perspective that Altman is being guided and directed by his own excessive faith in himself.

All said and done, still more twists seem to be in store to the issue of sacking of Altman. Besides, the question of what are the issues lurking behind this development is sharply doing the rounds. This is not only an intra-company issue of OpenAI but also a straw in the wind which suggests the future course of the AI world.

Already the dominance of what's called Big Tech that connotes big giants in the world of technology is being hotly debated. In this situation, the big corporates' ambitions, strategies and competitions are intertwined in the world of AI too. Sam Altman is now the pivotal point of the complex happenings tinged with the politics of commercial profit. His future being inseparably linked with that of AI has further ratcheted up his importance.

Beyond all these things, it is much more important to keep track of happenings that determine the future course of the AI research.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**