

Baidu to hit the road with self-driving bus

October 18 2017, by Glenn Chapman



Baidu chief executive Robin Li (R) says his company is working with a large bus maker in China to have a self-driving bus running a route next year

Baidu chief executive Robin Li on Tuesday said the Chinese internet giant will have a self-driving bus on the road soon as it races for a lead in autonomous vehicles.

Baidu is collaborating with an array of companies on autonomous cars, and is working with a large bus maker in China to have a self-driving bus running a route by next year, Li said in an on-stage interview late

Tuesday at The Wall Street Journal D.Live conference in Laguna Beach, California.

Most major automakers and technology titans including Google-parent Alphabet have been stepping up efforts on [autonomous driving](#) in recent years, convinced that these systems could eliminate most road accidents. Apple has a testing permit in California.

US-based Tesla boasts that its models are built with the hardware for self-driving in event regulators give the technology a green light.

US chip maker Intel has a partnership with Alphabet's autonomous vehicle unit Waymo, and plans for its own fleet of self-driving cars.

Li said Baidu has a "solid plan" to have its Apollo software platform in fully-autonomous production cars by the year 2021, and in semi-autonomous cars in two years.

Apollo software will provide smarts for navigating cars, with Baidu providing information, entertainment and other online offerings to passengers, according to Li.

"Our vision is that once a person is in the car, you never need to touch your phone anymore; everything in the car is a better experience," Li said.

Baidu last month announced a \$1.5 billion investment in autonomous driving projects over the next three years, as it seeks to diversify its portfolio and compete with rivals.

In July, the company launched an initial version of autonomous driving platform "Apollo."

While Apollo software is open and free, there are "lots of things" Baidu can do to make money, such as providing car map services, entertainment, or even insurance, according to Li.

AI under the hood

Baidu's search engine dominates the Chinese internet, and online ads are a key revenue stream.

But since a crackdown by authorities on Baidu's online advertising business after a much-publicized scandal over promoting a fake medical treatment, "China's Google" is seeking to focus on artificial intelligence and is investing heavily in the sector.

Baidu is pumping 15 percent of its revenue into research, with nearly all of that dedicated to artificial intelligence, Li said.

Software smarts are needed to safely navigate cars with humans at the wheels.

"We have entered a new age, the age of AI," Li said.

Fighting fake news

Baidu is also using AI in a fight against being used to spread "fake news."

"Typically, fake news travels faster than real facts," Li said.

"We want to provide the best way for people to find information."

Li acknowledged that Baidu needs "to do a lot more work," but said the

company is doing that "using technology and editorial control."

Steps Baidu has taken include extracting main topics from articles and providing readers with related entries from its online encyclopedia for fact-checking, Li said.

Baidu last month teamed up with China's cyber police to control the spread of rumors and [fake news](#).

Baidu said [artificial intelligence](#) tools would monitor and identify "rumors" on its services—search engine, forums and blogs—on a system linked to registered police agencies around the country.

Suspicious content will be sent to the police for review and to reference organizations, such as state agencies, science academies or media, who will then be able to produce articles refuting the rumors, the official Xinhua news agency said at the time.

"Rumors" are to be labelled as such in search engine results or on forums, accompanied by the articles offering corrections.

Chinese authorities closely monitor cyberspace activities through their "Great Firewall." Websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest have been blocked for years.

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