

COMPANIES

ALIBABA 'AIMS TO BE OPEN TECH PLATFORM'

E-commerce giant looks to provide support for AI innovation and transformation in various industries, CEO tells Wuzhen internet forum

Zhou Xin
zhou.xin@scmp.com

Alibaba Group Holding, the e-commerce giant founded by Jack Ma that changed the way Chinese consumers shop, is remaking itself as an "open technology platform", riding on a wave of rapid artificial intelligence (AI) innovation, new CEO Eddie Wu Yongming said yesterday.

Alibaba was "becoming an open technology platform enterprise to provide infrastructure services for AI innovation and transformation in thousands of industries", Wu told the audience at the World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, Zhejiang province, which is an annual gathering of the country's internet executives and government officials.

It was the first time Wu, an Alibaba co-founder who took the reins from Daniel Zhang Yong in September, spoke publicly about his vision for the 24-year-old tech giant, which is undergoing a sweeping restructuring to break its sprawling business into six units, including e-commerce, cloud computing and entertainment.

While Alibaba's e-commerce operations, Taobao and Tmall Group, remained the bread and butter of its business, contributing the most revenues and profits, the future of the company rested in AI, Wu said.

"Over the past two decades, China's digital transformation mainly took place in the consumer internet, and China has become one of the world's top consumer internet powerhouses," Wu said.

"As AI continues to unleash new productivity, it is key for China to seek new breakthroughs in the digital economy."

"In the AI era, Alibaba wants to be an open technology platform that serves the entire society in AI innovation and transformation, to adhere to its original mission of 'making it easy to do business anywhere'."

Wu's message mirrored a speech last week by Alibaba's co-founder and new chairman, Joe Tsai, that highlighted the

cloud unit's goal of turning AI into a major productivity tool, "especially for small and medium-sized enterprises".

Wu also said in a letter to employees in September, shortly after assuming the CEO role, that Alibaba would sharpen its strategic focus on two main themes: "users first" and "AI-driven".

Alibaba, owner of the Post, is not the only Chinese tech company betting big on AI, but Wu said the firm had developed strong capabilities in computing power, networking, storage, big data and large models to provide AI support to different industries.

More than half of China's large language models run on Alibaba Cloud, according to Wu.

**Alibaba wants to ...
[serve] the entire
society in AI
innovation and
transformation**

EDDIE WU, CEO, ALIBABA

He added Alibaba aimed to develop an open AI system to "help small businesses and developers innovate at lower costs with higher efficiency".

Alibaba Cloud released to the public its own answer to US start-up OpenAI's ChatGPT in China in September.

Named Tongyi Qianwen, the large language model is designed to support a wide range of apps and tools in a country where OpenAI's services, including the latest GPT-4 Turbo model, are officially unavailable.

"In the foreseeable future, all the products that we have taken for granted will change, and the next generation of smarter products will enter our lives," Wu said.

"I believe that, in the foreseeable future, AI assistants will be ubiquitous in everyone's work, life and study. Every enterprise will also be equipped with AI assistants to help it adapt to the market."