Search Engines & AI

Introduction

The topic I have chosen is *Search Engines*. Firstly what are search engines? Well they are essentially a big phone book. A search engine has to have an indexed list (of colossal size) that can be searched through. A search engines purpose is to take in a query (what a user is searching for) and output a list of responses that most closely could be what the user is looking for. The secret of a search engine is the algorithm that it uses.

The biggest search engine is by far Google, and they have their own engine, which uses their own SEO algorithm to get the best results. In recent years google has implemented something called *AI Overview*. The point of this is to collate search results (the contents of each web page), and show the user a summary.

Google has for a long time used AI to rank results but the focus of what I will be talking about is the AI overviews.

Has it been successful?

When this was introduced (~10 months ago), the feature was dangerous. It did not require a user to be logged in, meaning anybody can access it. But more importantly it would summarize false information as if it were true, 2 examples:

The question:

> "How can I make cheese stick to pizza better"

The answer:

> "Add non-toxic glue"

A different question:

> "How many rocks should I eat?"

The answer:

> "Geologists at UC Berkly recommend you eat 1 small rock a day"

I think it's pretty clear to see that it was a massive fail, a dangerous and potentially lethal fail. However Google responded by upping the requirements to use this, they made it so you not only have to be signed in to a Google account but you also have to be 18+. They also improved the algorithm they used to determine what is real/true and what is fake/not true leading to the amount of false summaries being reduced enough for a general release.

If you are a susceptible or young person this feature, at the beginning phase, would be harmful. I believe - even though Google used AB testing - it was not tested enough before they released it.

9 months later (today) and the feature is useful, it does pose some ethical and financial implications for people whose jobs it is to write blogs/articles, as they will not have users click on their page, which will mean ad revenue will go down, CTR will go down, viewership will go down, all leading to negative things for them.

But, thinking as a user of the feature - not as someone who provides content - I think the feature is now successful, it gives accurate summaries every time (for me), it overall must have saved me 24 hours of going onto a web page, scrolling past ads, clicking on cookie banners, dissecting the information all just to find one questions answers.

The Future

It is my opinion that Google did their due diligence and improved the service enough that is became usable. I also believe that it will only become *more* popular as time goes on.

At the moment the feature is limited to short form questions, it cannot answer questions with multiple answers. For instance, "List all the flags in regex", it is not able to list and summarize all of the flags, for this reason I know that it is still an addition to regular search instead of a rival.

However, I do believe that in enough time it will get even stronger and an advanced mode of the feature will appear, one that can takes long answers and create a simple web page for them, similar to what Arc does now.

Conclusion

In conclusion I think the feature is overall useful even though it does pose ethical concerns. I also think even though it is negative for blog writers and websites like Reddit (where regular people post answers) I still think it is a good and useful tool that saves the majority of people a lot of time and advert filled scrolling.