

Email to: bradsmi@microsoft.com

Dear Brad,

I am writing to you because of a deeply concerning [application of Microsoft genAI on Guardian journalism within Microsoft Start](#) - an auto-generated poll asking the public to speculate on the cause of someone's death. This is clearly an inappropriate use of genAI by Microsoft on a potentially distressing public interest story, originally written and published by Guardian journalists.

This application of genAI by Microsoft is exactly the sort of instance that we have warned about in relation to news, and a key reason why we have previously requested to your teams that we do not want Microsoft's experimental genAI technologies applied to journalism licensed from the Guardian.

Not only is this sort of application potentially distressing for the family of the individual who is the subject of the story, it is also deeply damaging to the Guardian's hard-won reputation for trusted, sensitive journalism, and to the reputation of the individual journalists who wrote the original story. Note the comments from Microsoft Start readers, who are clearly completely unaware that it is Microsoft that has created this poll, rather than the Guardian.

"This has to be the most pathetic, disgusting poll I've ever seen. The author should be ashamed."

"nice to know we can take a poll on how this woman died"

"what a disgusting, depraved society we have become in that a poll is conducted on how an individual has passed away."

"Polling the reason behind a persons death? What is wrong with you!!"

"Tamsin [the Guardian journalist] should be sacked for that poll. No community guidelines at play here obviously??"

There is an almost complete absence of clear or transparent labelling of these genAI powered outputs, and certainly no disclaimer or explanation to users that these technologies are owned and operated by Microsoft, and to the inherent unreliability of them. This has to change.

While we are pleased that escalation to various teams within Microsoft has eventually led to the removal of the poll from the article, many readers have evidently already seen the poll and believe that the Guardian created it. Given this fact, there is a strong case for Microsoft to add a note to the article taking full responsibility for it.

We would also like your assurance that a) Microsoft will not apply these experimental technologies on or alongside Guardian licensed journalism without our explicit prior approval; and b) that Microsoft will always make it clear to users of your platforms wherever genAI is involved in creating additional units and features as they apply to third party journalism from trusted news brands like the Guardian.

Your Microsoft colleagues have failed to substantively respond to the Guardian's request to discuss how Microsoft intends to work with publishers who invest in news to compensate us for the use of our intellectual property in the training and live deployment of AI technologies within your wider business ventures. The significant reputational damage caused by this incident with an existing licensee of our IP, demonstrates the important role that a strong copyright framework plays in enabling publishers to be able to negotiate the terms on which our journalism is used.

While the focus of this week's global summit is long-term safety, the time is right for Microsoft and other major technology platforms to outline clear principles for how they will prioritise a) trusted information, b) fair reward for the licensing and use of journalism, and c) provide more transparency for consumers and safeguards around what remain highly unpredictable technologies.

Your sincerely,

Anna Bateson

**Chief executive officer,
Guardian Media Group**