CCOMM

Proceeding of Creative and Collaborative Communication Conference 2025
https://proceeding-ccomm.petra.ac.id/

Generative Artificial Intelligence and Zero-Click Search

An Analysis of Online Media Traffic and Business Models

Tuhu Nugraha Dewanto,
Indonesia Applied Digital Economy & Regulatory Network (IADERN),
Post Graduate Programme, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Indonesia
Noprita Herari,
Postgraduate Programme, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transformative impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) and zero-click search on website traffic and the business models of online media. As AI-powered search engines shift from providing links to delivering synthesized answers directly on search engine result pages (SERPs), traditional metrics like click-through rates and site visits are rapidly declining. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach based on content analysis and literature review, this paper highlights the behavioral shift among users—from information exploration to instant gratification—and its implications for ad-based and subscription-driven revenue models. Findings show a significant reduction in both organic and paid CTRs, particularly for non-branded informational queries. The study also explores legal tensions around AI training on copyrighted content, as well as emerging adaptive strategies including entity optimization, premium content offerings, and direct audience engagement. The research concludes that media companies must redefine success metrics, personalize content through AI, and develop resilient business models to remain competitive in an evolving digital ecosystem.

Keywords: *zero-click search; generative AI; media business model; digital journalism; search engine behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

The digital search landscape has historically served as the primary gateway for consumers to access online information and media content. Traditionally, search engine results pages (SERPs) functioned as directories, guiding users to websites through organic and paid links. This model formed the foundation of advertising and subscription revenues for various media

Corresponding author :
Tuhu Dewanto - tuhu.nugraha@gmail.com

organizations. Users would type a query, receive a list of links, and then choose to click on the relevant one to obtain more detailed information. This reliance on clicks became the basis for digital content monetization.

However, the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, has fundamentally reshaped this ecosystem. AI-powered search has evolved beyond simple keyword matching toward contextual understanding and direct answer delivery, resulting in a significant shift in user behavior. This transformation marks a fundamental restructuring of information discovery, rather than just an incremental improvement. Previously, search engines acted as navigators, directing users to sources of information. Now, with the capabilities of generative AI, search engines have evolved into "answer engines" that can synthesize and present information directly on the search results page. This shift means users no longer need to click through to websites as frequently, as the answers they seek are already displayed upfront. As a result, the traditional value proposition of web traffic and the entire digital marketing funnel is being disrupted, compelling media companies to rethink their core points of interaction with consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the impact at hand, it is essential to define the key concepts driving this transformation.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI)

Generative AI is a subfield of artificial intelligence that utilizes generative models to create new content such as text, images, videos, or other forms of data, often mimicking human-created material. Leading examples include large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, as well as image generators like DALL·E and Midjourney. These models excel in understanding context, delivering nuanced responses, and engaging in conversational interactions with users, making the search experience more intuitive and responsive.

Zero-Click Search

Zero-click search refers to the phenomenon in which users receive information directly on the search engine results page (SERP) without the need to click on any external website links. This typically occurs when search engines provide instant answers, summaries, or rich snippets that fully satisfy the user's query at the top of the page.

There are several common types of zero-click results, including Featured Snippets (text boxes at the top of SERPs designed to answer queries instantly), Direct Answer Boxes (quick answers with no direct link), Knowledge Panels (encyclopedic summaries on the

right-hand side), Local Packs (lists of local businesses), People Also Ask (PAA) sections with related questions, and most recently, AI Overviews. AI Overviews are concise summaries generated using AI technologies that synthesize data from multiple sources and are prominently displayed at the top of SERPs.

Generative AI is not just another feature in the search ecosystem, it is a key accelerator of the zero-click trend, fundamentally shifting the search paradigm from "links" to "answers." While zero-click search existed prior to the rise of generative AI, through featured snippets and other SERP features, generative AI, particularly through AI Overviews, now delivers more comprehensive, synthesized responses directly on the SERP. These are not merely brief quotes but deeper, often interactive summaries. The increasing capability of AI to directly address complex queries has significantly raised the likelihood of zero-click results. This evolution transforms the search engine from a simple link aggregator into an interpreter and synthesizer of information, making "answers" the primary product rather than the links themselves. Consequently, media companies now find themselves competing not only with other publishers but also with search engines themselves as the primary providers of content.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach using content analysis and literature review methods to examine the impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) and the phenomenon of zero-click search on website traffic and the business models of online media. The research is designed as a narrative study based on secondary data, focusing on contemporary developments in the digital search landscape and media industry. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of shifts in user behavior, the technological implications for information distribution structures, and the adaptive strategies emerging among media stakeholders.

The data used in this study were collected from a variety of credible secondary sources. These include industry reports and scholarly articles from platforms such as Databox, Bain & Company, Forbes, IBM, Search Engine Land, and AI Hub. The study also draws on legal documents and news coverage related to copyright lawsuits filed by media publishers against AI development companies such as OpenAI and Microsoft. Quantitative data—such as the decline in Click-Through Rates (CTR)—were examined based on statistics from analytics providers like Ahrefs and Amsive. Additional information was sourced from technology blogs, SEO articles, and official documentation from Google regarding its Search Generative Experience (SGE) or AI Overviews.

The analysis was conducted thematically and interpretively. It involved identifying key issues within the literature, reviewing relevant data on digital media performance, and synthesizing the strategic responses of the media industry to the disruptions brought about by

generative AI. The objective was to provide a comprehensive understanding and to formulate evidence-based recommendations that could inform media practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available secondary data and does not involve the collection of primary data. As such, the generalization of findings should be approached with caution. Nevertheless, the chosen methodology remains appropriate given the fast-moving, disruptive, and dynamic nature of generative AI technologies that are actively reshaping the global ecosystem of search and information distribution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shifting Consumer Behavior and Its Impact on Online Media Traffic

The Zero-Click Search Phenomenon: Data and Growth Trends

The percentage of zero-click searches has steadily increased over the past few years. By 2024, nearly 60% of Google searches in the United States ended without a click to any external website. While some studies still show that organic traffic accounts for a larger portion than zero-click results, the growth trend of zero-click outcomes is undeniable and expected to continue.

Consumers are increasingly opting for fast and efficient access to information, with search engines delivering answers to their queries directly on the results page. This behavior is particularly relevant in a mobile-first world, where instant, easily accessible answers have become the norm. The rising reliance on zero-click results reflects a fundamental shift in consumer information-seeking behavior—from "exploration" to "instant gratification." Users clearly prefer quick, efficient responses, and zero-click search caters directly to this preference by providing immediate answers. As a result, users are less inclined to click through to websites. This shift is not merely about convenience; it represents a deeper psychological transformation.

Consumers are becoming accustomed to having answers delivered to them, rather than searching for information themselves. This change reduces the “curiosity gap” that traditionally drove clicks, making it more difficult for publishers to draw users to their websites for deeper engagement. Consequently, there is a pressing need for publishers to reevaluate how they create and present content in order to remain relevant in a zero-click environment or to offer unique value beyond the summaries provided by search engines.

The Role of Generative AI (e.g., Google AI Overviews) in Facilitating Zero-Clic

Generative AI, particularly through features such as Google AI Overviews (formerly known as Search Generative Experience or SGE), has significantly accelerated the zero-click trend. These AI Overviews synthesize data from multiple sources into easy-to-digest explanations, often occupying a large portion of the screen—especially on mobile devices. AI-powered platforms like ChatGPT, Bard, and Perplexity are increasingly being used by

consumers to obtain instant answers and engage in conversational interactions, bypassing traditional search results altogether.

The conversational nature of generative AI, combined with its ability to synthesize information, not only facilitates zero-click behavior but also subtly erodes direct brand trust by shifting it toward the AI interface itself. Since AI provides immediate, conversational answers, it acts as a direct intermediary between the user and the information. Users receive the answers they seek without clicking, which reduces their direct interaction with publishers' websites. As a result, opportunities for users to engage directly with a publisher's brand are diminished. Over time, users begin to place their trust in the AI interface itself, as it consistently delivers fast and relevant responses. AI becomes the “trusted answer provider.”

This dynamic creates a new "trust intermediary," where users rely less on specific news outlets or media brands and more on the AI platforms that deliver the content. This poses a significant long-term threat to brand equity and loyalty for media companies, as their content is consumed through third-party filters, often without clear attribution or direct engagement. Publishers must therefore develop new strategies to build trust and maintain direct relationships with their audiences beyond the confines of AI-driven search channels.

Decline in Website Traffic and Click-Through Rates (CTR)

The introduction of AI Overviews correlates with a measurable decline in organic visibility and clicks for traditional organic listings. Studies have shown a significant decrease in Click-Through Rates (CTR) across various scenarios:

1. Ahrefs reported a 34.5% drop in CTR for the first position when AI Overviews are present, based on an analysis of 300,000 keywords.
2. Amsive found an average CTR decline of 15.49%, with even greater losses—such as -37.04%—when AI Overviews are combined with featured snippets, based on a study of 700,000 keywords.
3. Overall organic CTR can drop by as much as 70%, falling from around 2.94% to just 0.84%, when Google AI Overviews (SGE) appear.
4. Paid search ads are also affected, with CTRs for paid listings dropping by nearly half—from 21% to 10%—when AI-generated answers are shown.
5. News sites, in particular, have seen traffic drops exceeding 34% due to AI-generated summaries. Some niche websites have lost up to 90% of their traffic.

Some niche websites have lost up to 90% of their traffic. AI Overviews are more likely to be triggered by non-branded informational queries, which experience the steepest CTR declines. In contrast, branded keywords are far less likely to trigger AI Overviews (only 4.79%), but when they do, they actually see an increase in CTR (+18.68%), likely due to higher user intent and brand familiarity.

This disproportionate impact on non-branded informational queries highlights a strategic imperative for media companies to shift away from broad, general content (which

can be easily summarized by AI) toward content that is unique, authoritative, and experience-driven. AI Overviews significantly affect non-branded informational queries, causing major declines in CTR. This means that content designed to deliver quick facts or definitions is the most vulnerable to zero-click outcomes.

As a result, content that can be easily summarized by AI is likely to lose direct traffic. Traditionally, media companies have relied on informational content for broad organic reach and ad impressions. Now, that content is being commoditized by AI. To remain viable, publishers must pivot toward content that AI cannot easily replicate—such as unique human experiences, in-depth investigative journalism, nuanced analysis, exclusive interviews, local insights, and strong editorial opinion. This type of content is far more difficult for AI to accurately or fully synthesize, maintaining the incentive for users to click through and engage directly with the source. This also aligns with the observation that branded queries are less affected, as they imply pre-existing intent or trust in a specific source.

Tabel 1: Comparison of Organic and Paid CTR Declines Due to AI Overviews

Metric	CTR before AI Overviews	CTR after AI Overviews	Percentage Decrease	Source	Specific Condition
CTR Organik (Position 1)	N/A	N/A	34.5%	Ahrefs	Kueri informasional, AI Overviews hadir
Average Organic CTR	2.94%	0.84%	Hingga 70%	Ahrefs	Google AI Overview (SGE) muncul
Organic CTR (Informational Queries)	1.41%	0.64%	N/A	Ahrefs	Kueri informasional, AI respons hadir
Paid CTR	21%	10%	Lebih dari 50%	Ahrefs	Jawaban yang dihasilkan AI hadir
Average CTR (All)	N/A	N/A	15.49%	Amsive	Rata-rata 700.000 kata kunci
CTR (Combined with Featured Snippets)	N/A	N/A	37.04%	Amsive	Kueri informasional, AI Overviews + Featured Snippets
Non-Branded CTR	N/A	N/A	19.98%	Amsive	Kueri non-merek, AI Overviews hadir

Metric	CTR before AI Overviews	CTR after AI Overviews	Percentage Decrease	Source	Specific Condition
Top 3 CTR (Non-Branded)	N/A	N/A	27.04%	Amsive	Kueri non-merek, posisi di luar Top 3
Branded CTR	N/A	N/A	+18.68%	Amsive	Kueri merek, AI Overviews hadir

Source: Data Processed by Author, 2025

"N/A" in Table 1 indicates that the data is not explicitly stated in the snippet as an absolute value, but rather as a percentage change. Table 1 quantitatively measures the impact of AI Overviews on website traffic. It presents specific percentages and contextual information on CTR declines from various studies. The table enables clear, side-by-side comparisons across different scenarios and study types (organic vs. paid, branded vs. non-branded, position 1 vs. lower rankings). This visual representation directly supports arguments about the severity and specific areas of traffic loss, providing concrete data for media executives to grasp the scale of the challenge and prioritize their adaptation strategies. It also highlights that even paid efforts are not immune, necessitating a comprehensive reassessment of digital marketing expenditures.

Deep Implications for Traditional Media Business Models

The Threat to Digital Advertising Revenue

The decline in website traffic directly translates to a loss in advertising revenue, which remains the financial backbone for many news organizations. Fewer page views mean fewer opportunities to display ads, significantly impacting ad-based income. Traditional digital marketing budgets—particularly those allocated to SEO and SEM—are becoming less effective, as zero-click search reduces the return on these strategies. For example, up to 40% of pharmaceutical marketing budgets spent on digital tactics may be significantly affected. The shift in how information is consumed diminishes the value of a "click" to a publisher's website, which has traditionally been a core driver of advertising revenue.

The erosion of ad revenue due to zero-click search creates a "tragedy of the commons" scenario in content production. The very act of producing high-quality, SEO-optimized content—designed to rank well in search engines—can inadvertently undermine its own monetization. Publishers, heavily reliant on ad revenue generated by website traffic, now face declining traffic as AI tools provide direct answers, bypassing the need to click. This leads to a distorted incentive structure, where the "best" content for search visibility becomes the "worst" for direct monetization. As a result, the sustainability of

content production—particularly informational journalism—is at risk, as the economic model that supports it begins to collapse.

Challenges to Subscription Models and Content Monetization

Beyond advertising, subscription models are also directly threatened. If users can receive summarized news and information directly from AI without visiting the publisher's site, their incentive to subscribe to specific news outlets diminishes. Publishers remain skeptical of AI companies' claims that their tools enhance traffic quality, citing a lack of credible evidence. As users feel less need to explore multiple perspectives—due to definitive answers being presented upfront—the perceived value of a comprehensive subscription further declines.

The commodification of information through AI-driven zero-click search forces subscription models to evolve from offering "access to information" to offering "access to unique value and experiences." AI now provides brief summaries of news and content, reducing users' motivation to visit publisher websites or subscribe for basic information. If such foundational content becomes freely and instantly available through AI, then the value proposition for subscriptions can no longer rest on information access alone. It must shift toward offerings that AI cannot easily replicate: in-depth analysis, exclusive content, unique perspectives, community engagement, interactive experiences, or a strong brand identity that resonates emotionally with audiences. This means media companies must invest more in content that delivers distinct human value—and less in generic news that AI can readily summarize.

Copyright Issues, Content Use, and Legal Battles

A major challenge lies in the alleged unauthorized training of AI models on copyrighted content without proper permission or licensing. Media companies and content producers—including The New York Times, Reddit, Disney, and NBCUniversal—have filed multiple lawsuits against AI firms such as OpenAI, Microsoft, Anthropic, and Midjourney, accusing them of copyright infringement.

AI developers often rely on the doctrine of "fair use" to justify the incorporation of copyrighted material into their training data without explicit consent. However, the legal boundaries of fair use in the context of AI remain unclear, making it difficult for publishers to effectively enforce their rights. This legal ambiguity exacerbates the risk that, without a sustainable revenue model to compensate news organizations, investigative journalism and high-quality reporting could see a steep decline—undermining the essential role of journalism in informing the public.

The legal battles over copyright are not merely about retroactive compensation for past usage; they represent a deeper struggle for control and value over human-generated content in an AI-dominated information ecosystem. AI models are trained on massive datasets that include copyrighted material. As publishers pursue legal action for alleged

copyright violations, AI companies continue to defend their practices under the fair use doctrine, further muddying the legal waters. This is not just a dispute over historical content usage—it is a fundamental conflict over who owns the "knowledge base" of the future and who stands to profit from its dissemination.

If AI companies are allowed to freely absorb and synthesize copyrighted material without adequate compensation or clear attribution, it devalues original human creativity. Such a precedent could lead to a systemic collapse in professional content production, as the economic incentives to create original, high-quality information are eroded. The outcomes of these legal disputes will ultimately define the economic relationship between content creators and AI platforms for decades to come.

Adaptive Strategies and Business Model Innovation for the Media Industry

Redefining Success Metrics (KPIs) in the Age of AI

Traditional metrics such as click-through rates (CTR) and raw website traffic are no longer sufficient indicators of success. The focus must shift from simple clicks to broader measures of visibility and engagement. New KPIs should include brand search volume, impression share, AI reach, on-SERP (Search Engine Results Page) visibility, and post-click engagement. As seen with AI Overviews, even without direct clicks, content can still drive brand equity and build credibility. Conversions (not just clicks) become the ultimate goal. Users who do click after viewing AI-generated summaries are often more informed and closer to taking meaningful action, potentially offsetting the decline in overall click volume with higher-intent visitors.

Redefining KPIs from “clicks” to “influence” reflects a shift from direct transactional engagement to a more nuanced approach to brand-building within AI-mediated information flows. While website traffic and click volume may decrease, brand visibility in AI-generated results (such as AI Overviews) can increase. As a result, traditional CTR-based metrics become less relevant for assessing overall impact. Media companies must now measure their influence not solely by who visits their websites, but by how frequently their content informs AI-generated answers and how prominently and credibly their brand is represented within the search ecosystem, even if users don’t click.

This shift requires investment in “entity optimization” and efforts to be recognized as authoritative sources by AI models, even in the absence of direct traffic. The goal moves away from monetizing every individual click and toward building long-term brand influence, which can ultimately lead to conversions through other channels or at later stages of the customer journey.

Content Strategies for AI Visibility and Zero-Click Environments

To remain relevant in the era of zero-click search and generative AI, media companies must adopt smart and adaptive content strategies:

1. Prioritize EEAT (Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust): Google increasingly values EEAT. Content should emphasize deep expertise, real-world experience, and proven authority to build trust with both audiences and generative search engines. Well-researched, insightful content is more likely to rank higher and be cited by AI Overviews and other AI-driven platforms.
2. Be Better Than AI: Produce original and authoritative content that cannot be easily replicated or commoditized by AI. Avoid relying on recycled definitions or generic AI-generated copy. Develop a distinctive brand voice and share original research, case studies, and insights from internal experts and guest contributors.
3. Create Multimedia Content: Generative search engines pull from a variety of content formats. Enhance your site with videos, images, infographics, and interactive elements (e.g., ROI calculators, quizzes). Video content, in particular, is becoming more prominent in AI search results. Podcasts and webinars can also help diversify your content offerings.
4. Optimize for AI Crawlability and Structured Data: Tailor content for semantic search by focusing on high-intent, conversational long-tail keywords. Use structured data markup (schema) and FAQ-style formatting to ensure content is machine-readable, aiding both traditional search engines and AI models in understanding context. Avoid PDFs and gated content, which are less accessible to AI.
5. Carve Out Your Niche: Develop a unique brand voice and perspective. Focus on a specific niche where your content can stand out and attract a loyal audience seeking trustworthy expertise.
6. Focus on Conversion: With potentially lower—but more targeted—traffic, optimize conversion pathways. Use compelling calls-to-action (CTAs) and personalize content for specific user segments to capture emails and continue the engagement journey.

The shift in content strategy from "keyword stuffing" to emphasizing EEAT and unique value reflects a return to the core principles of quality journalism and authentic storytelling—ironically driven by technological disruption. AI prioritizes content that is well-structured, authoritative, and distinctive. This means generic, easily replicated content will struggle to achieve visibility and monetization. Publishers must invest in content that demonstrates human expertise, originality, and depth (EEAT). This requires moving away from shallow, mass-produced material. While AI disrupts traditional SEO, it also compels content creators to return to the fundamentals of truly valuable, high-quality, and differentiated content production. The "arms race" of AI-generated spam content is likely to be countered by algorithms that reward authentic human insight and unique perspectives. In the long term, this could reinforce the importance of true journalistic integrity and creative originality—even as distribution mechanisms evolve.

Tabel 2: Key Content Strategies for the Generative AI and Zero-Click Search Era

Strategy Area	Specific Actions/Tactics	Rationale/Benefits	Relevant Snippet
Content Quality	Prioritize EEAT (Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust)	Build trust with audiences and search engines; increase the likelihood of being cited by AI.	
	Be Better Than AI (Original & Authoritative Content)	Avoid commodification, develop a unique brand voice, and deliver exclusive insights.	
	Carve Out Your Niche	Attract a loyal audience; make content stand out in a crowded marketplace.	
Technical Optimization	Optimize for AI Crawlability and Structured Data	Help AI understand content context; boost visibility in AI Overviews.	
Format Diversity	Create Multimedia Content (Video, Images, Infographics, Interactive)	Increase engagement, cater to diverse user preferences, and appear across various SERP features..	
Conversion Focus	Focus on Conversion & Personalization	Turn high-intent traffic into leads/customers and increase the value of each visit.	

Table 2 presents actionable strategies for media companies to adapt effectively. It offers a structured and digestible summary of complex content strategies, providing multiple strategic recommendations at a glance. This format enables executives to quickly grasp the multifaceted approach required—ranging from core content development principles to technical SEO adjustments and shifts in monetization models. The table directly links proposed actions to the challenges posed by AI and zero-click search, serving as a practical guide for adapting both content production and distribution in this evolving landscape

Revenue Diversification: Premium Subscriptions and Direct Audience Relationships
With advertising revenue in decline, publishers are compelled to explore alternative monetization strategies.

1. Premium Subscription Services: Emphasizing a subscription-based or freemium model allows publishers to offer exclusive, high-quality content to paying members, ensuring a steady revenue stream and cultivating a dedicated reader base.
2. Direct Audience Relationships: Strengthening direct engagement through channels like newsletters and personalized content delivery is essential. This approach bypasses search engine intermediaries, builds direct connections,

fosters loyalty, and potentially reduces reliance on search-driven traffic for user engagement.
3. Leveraging AI for Personalization: AI can enhance personalized user experiences, leading to higher engagement and satisfaction, which in turn supports subscription models. This includes customized content recommendations, dynamic advertising, and tailored email campaigns.

The push toward direct audience relationships and premium subscriptions represents a strategic departure from the "attention economy" (driven by mass traffic and ad impressions) to a "relationship economy" (driven by direct value and loyalty). As zero-click search significantly erodes ad revenue, publishers must identify new income streams that don't rely on traditional advertising models. Rather than competing for fleeting attention in an AI-mediated, search-dominated landscape, media companies are being driven to cultivate deeper, more meaningful relationships with a smaller but more loyal audience.

This shift prioritizes subscriber lifetime value over impression volume. It requires significant investment in customer relationship management (CRM), community building, and content that fosters strong reader identity and loyalty—rather than content that simply aims for broad informational reach. This is a fundamental transformation of the business model, not just a tactical adjustment.

Collaboration and Content Licensing Agreements with AI Companies

Despite ongoing legal battles, many publishers have signed content licensing agreements with AI companies such as OpenAI, Microsoft, and Perplexity. To date, more than seventy such agreements have been established.

1. Terms of Agreement: These agreements typically allow AI companies to use publisher content—including paid or premium material—to train their large language models (LLMs). In return, publishers receive attribution when their content appears on AI platforms, financial compensation (though often limited), and access to AI technology that can help them develop their own AI-powered products and features.
2. Benefits for Publishers: These agreements provide some immediate cash flow, the potential for greater control over how their content is used, and reduced legal risk from future copyright disputes.
3. Challenges: Publishers often enter negotiations with limited bargaining power, and the financial returns are frequently modest. The complexity lies in valuing the data being used to train AI models that improve across a wide range of tasks—not just in generating specific content summaries.

These licensing deals, while offering short-term relief, represent a complex and potentially Faustian bargain in which publishers trade immediate financial gain and legal peace for the risk of long-term dependence on platforms that fundamentally disrupt their core business models. Many publishers are simultaneously suing AI companies while also signing

licensing agreements with them, reflecting a pragmatic dilemma: they need compensation and a path to adapt to the AI-driven reality, despite unresolved legal and ethical concerns.

While these deals provide revenue and access to cutting-edge AI tools, they often come with limited financial upside and diminished negotiating leverage for publishers—indicating a structural power imbalance. By licensing their content, publishers are effectively "feeding the monster" that siphons off their traffic. Although this may offer a pragmatic short-term solution and mitigate legal risks, it also strengthens the dominance of AI firms as intermediaries of content. The long-term danger is that publishers become mere raw data suppliers for AI, losing direct relationships with consumers and control over how their content is presented and monetized. The themes of "limited financial benefit" and "weak negotiation power" underscore a power dynamic that may leave publishers increasingly marginalized in this emerging ecosystem.

Leveraging AI for Operational Efficiency and Personalized User Experience

While AI poses a threat to traditional revenue streams, its internal applications present critical opportunities for media companies to offset losses through improved operational efficiency and deeper user engagement—ultimately creating a more resilient and personalized offering.

1. Automated Content Creation: Generative AI can automate content-related tasks such as generating article outlines, product descriptions, and marketing emails, saving time and resources. This enhances the speed, volume, and diversity of content output.
2. Enhanced Customer Experience: AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can handle customer inquiries, provide product recommendations, and resolve issues quickly and accurately. This improves customer service while reducing operational costs, leading to higher customer satisfaction (CSAT) and faster response times (FRT, FCR).
3. Personalization: AI can analyze customer data to deliver highly personalized experiences, including tailored content, product recommendations, and targeted advertisements. This increases user engagement and conversion rates.
4. Operational Efficiency: AI can streamline a wide range of internal processes—from optimizing supply chain management to automating reporting and enhancing data analysis. It is also transforming programmatic display advertising by enabling more precise audience targeting and better budget optimization.

Using AI strategically within the organization becomes a vital countermeasure to the external threats it poses. By automating content production, personalizing user experiences (which can drive subscriptions), and streamlining operations, media companies can reduce their cost base and enhance the direct value they offer to consumers—thereby building a more sustainable business model that is less dependent on external search traffic. It is about using the same technology that causes disruption to build internal resilience and a lasting competitive advantage.

Case Studies and Lessons from Industry Adaptation

While concrete case studies of media companies successfully adapting to AI-powered zero-click search remain limited and often undisclosed, several broader examples of AI use in marketing and content creation can be extrapolated to illustrate emerging trends. Current "innovation" in this space often centers around leveraging AI for internal efficiency or entering licensing agreements, suggesting that truly transformative, revenue-generating business models in response to zero-click search are still in their early stages or not yet publicly detailed.

Examples of Media Companies Innovating

Some companies have begun integrating generative AI into various aspects of their operations, though not always directly in response to zero-click search challenges within their core media business models:

1. Using AI for Creativity and Marketing: Companies like Heinz have used generative AI to create innovative short-form video ads—such as "Heinz A.I. Ketchup"—to spotlight their iconic bottle design. Coca-Cola has also employed AI in its creative campaigns to generate "real magic." Beyond advertising, Atlassian utilizes AI virtual assistants to streamline teamwork and boost productivity, while Duolingo has introduced AI-driven practice partners to enhance user learning experiences. These examples demonstrate how AI can boost creativity, personalization, and user engagement—key elements for any media company.
2. Content Licensing Agreements with AI Companies: Many major publishers have entered into content licensing agreements with leading AI firms. Over seventy such deals have been signed, involving key players like The Associated Press, Axel Springer, Financial Times, News Corp, The Atlantic, Vox Media, Time, Condé Nast, Hearst, and Reuters. These agreements typically allow AI companies to use publisher content—including paid material—to train large language models (LLMs). In return, publishers receive attribution when their content appears on AI platforms, financial compensation (though often limited), and access to AI technology to develop their own AI-driven products and features. For example, Vox Media plans to use OpenAI's technology to enhance its first-party data platform and content discovery features. Financial Times and News Corp are reported to have signed multi-million-dollar licensing deals with OpenAI.
3. Focusing on Internal Efficiency: Several companies—including those in the financial services and manufacturing sectors—have invested in AI pilot programs to improve data security in chatbots, virtual assistants, and language translation, as well as to automate reporting and optimize supply chain management. While not directly related to media business models, these examples highlight AI's potential to improve operational efficiency and reduce costs—capabilities that could help offset external revenue losses.

Despite examples of AI implementation and licensing negotiations, there remains a noticeable lack of truly transformative, revenue-generating business models that directly respond to the zero-click search environment and are openly detailed. Most current adaptations focus on loss mitigation, internal efficiency, or securing compensation from AI

companies that consume their content. Deeper business model transformation—where AI is proactively harnessed to create entirely new, irreplaceable value beyond what zero-click search can replicate—is still an emerging area that requires further innovation.

CONCLUSION

The impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence and the phenomenon of zero-click search on the online media industry is both transformative and multidimensional. The shift in consumer behavior from "exploration" to "instant gratification" through AI-generated answers has significantly reduced website traffic and click-through rates, threatening traditional media business models that rely heavily on advertising and subscriptions. At the same time, legal battles over copyright and AI's use of human-generated content further complicate the landscape, underscoring a fundamental struggle over the value and control of original content in an AI-dominated future.

However, this disruption also drives innovation and adaptation. Media companies can no longer rely on outdated metrics or legacy content strategies. Sustainability in this new era will depend on their ability to:

1. Redefine Success Metrics: Media companies must shift their focus from raw click-based metrics to broader indicators such as brand visibility on SERPs, impression share, AI reach, and post-click engagement. Measurement should evolve to capture how their content influences and informs AI-generated answers and contributes to brand equity and conversions across multiple channels—not just through direct clicks.
2. Content Strategies Focused on Unique Value: Content must center on experience, expertise, authority, and trust (EEAT). This requires investment in deep investigative journalism, nuanced analysis, original perspectives, and human-driven stories that are difficult for AI to replicate. Diversifying content formats to include video, infographics, and interactive elements is also essential for AI visibility. Technical optimization—through structured data and AI-friendly formats—ensures content remains discoverable and citable.
3. Diversify Revenue Models Through Direct Relationships: As ad revenue declines, emphasis must shift to premium subscriptions and building strong direct relationships with audiences. This involves offering exclusive content, AI-powered personalization, and nurturing loyal communities through newsletters, apps, or proprietary platforms. The goal is to transition from the "attention economy" to a "relationship economy," where customer lifetime value takes precedence over ad impressions.
4. Take a Pragmatic Approach to AI Collaboration: Publishers must strategically evaluate content licensing agreements with AI companies. Despite risks of dependency and imbalanced bargaining power, these agreements can provide immediate revenue streams and access to AI technologies for internal innovation.

Negotiating clear attribution and fair compensation is critical to sustaining original content production.

5. Leverage AI for Internal Efficiency and Personalization: Utilizing AI to automate content creation, enhance customer service through chatbots and virtual assistants, and personalize the user experience is essential. These applications can offset external revenue losses by reducing operational costs and increasing the value and engagement offered to consumers—ultimately helping build a more resilient business model.

In summary, the future of the media industry in the age of Generative AI and zero-click search will be shaped by its ability to adapt, innovate, and reaffirm the unique value of its content and brand within a rapidly evolving information ecosystem.

REFERENCES

AI, D. (2025). 9+ Kasus Penggunaan AI Generatif dalam Pemasaran. Delve AI: AI market research + marketing software. https://www.delve.ai/id/blog/pemasaran-ai-generatif

Alvarez, S. (2025, July 2). The Vanishing Click: New Strategies For An AI-Driven Search Landscape. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2025/07/02/the-vanishing-click-new-strategies-for-an-ai-driven-search-landscape/

Barnes, O. (2024, October 30). How to optimise your content strategy in the age of zero-click search. Digital marketing agency for contract manufacturers | Equinet Media. https://www.equinetmedia.com/blog/content-strategy-zero-click-search

Bishop, M. (2025, June 30). The Age of Zero-Click AI Search Is Here and It's Redefining Digital Marketing. liveworld. https://www.liveworld.com/the-age-of-zero-click-ai-search-is-here-and-its-redefining-digital-marketing/

Butler, N. (2025, June 12). *Major Hollywood studios sue AI company over copyright infringement in landmark move*. Fox Business. https://www.foxbusiness.com/media/major-hollywood-studios-sue-ai-company-over-copyright-infringement-landmark-move

Campbell, C. (2025, February 26). *How AI is transforming programmatic display ads for smarter campaigns*. Enspire For Enterprise | Official Website. https://enspireforenterprise.com/how-ai-is-transforming-programmatic-display-ads-for-smarter-campaigns/

CMLabs. (2024, July 16). Zero click search: Definisi Dan Dampaknya Terhadap Praktik SEO. Professional and Reliable SEO Agency Indonesia - cmlabs. https://cmlabs.co/id-id/seo-terms/zero-click

Correa, S. (2025, May 1). *How to adapt your company for the era of AI search (or risk falling behind)*.

Medium. https://scorrea92.medium.com/how-to-adapt-your-company-for-the-era-of-ai-search-or-risk-falling-behind-271b4cb072bf

Efendy, A. (2023, May 4). *Makna AI Generatif bagi Industri media Dan Hiburan*. Google. https://blog.google/intl/id-id/products/cloud/2023_05_ai-generatif-untuk-industri-media-dan-hiburan/

Ferguson, M. (2025, August 3). *Latest AI news (August 3, 2025)*. Latest AI News (August 3, 2025) - OpenTools. https://opentools.ai/news/the-ai-search-revolution-how-zero-click-trends-are-disrupting-news-publishing

Goodwin, D. (2025, April 21). New data: Google AI Overviews are hurting click-through rates. Search Engine Land. https://searchengineland.com/google-ai-overviews-hurt-click-through-rates-454428

Guaglione, S. (2025, April 17). *2024 in review: A timeline of the major deals between publishers and AI companies*. Digiday. https://digiday.com/media/2024-in-review-a-timeline-of-the-major-deals-between-publishers-and-ai-companies/

Hirz, J. (2025, July 21). What is Zero-Click Search and How Does it Impact My SEO? Outerbox Design. https://www.outerboxdesign.com/articles/seo-services/zero-click-search-results-for-seo

IBM. (2025, April 23). *Contoh penggunaan teratas untuk AI Di e-Commerce*. https://www.ibm.com/id-id/think/topics/ai-in-ecommerce

Indrak. (2025). Ranking #1 Tapi Trafik Turun? Mungkin Kamu Kena Zero Click Google - YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzN4VMVZDuM

Lparsons. (2025, April 14). *AI will shape the future of marketing*. Professional & Executive Development | Harvard DCE. https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/ai-will-shape-the-future-of-marketing/

Medcom. (2024, March 7). *Studi IBM Temukan Penggunaan AI Generatif di Sektor Finansial*. https://www.medcom.id/teknologi/news-teknologi/ybDYgMpk-studi-ibm-temukan-penggunaan-ai-generatif-di-sektor-finansial

Neuron Expert. (2025, June 26). *Akhir Dari Dunia Penerbitan Seperti Yang Kita Kenal*. AI Company: Clients from Socials & Search on autopilot. No ads needed. https://neuron.expert/news/the-end-of-publishing-as-we-know-it/13790/id/

Panettieri, J. (2024, October 10). *Generative AI lawsuits timeline: Legal cases vs. OpenAI, Microsoft, anthropic, Nvidia, Intel and more*. Sustainable Tech Partner for Green IT Service Providers. https://sustainabletechpartner.com/topics/ai/generative-ai-lawsuit-timeline/

Rudan, N. (2025, June 10). Impact of generative AI & changing search habits in the SEO industry. Databox. https://databox.com/impact-of-generative-ai-changing-search-habits-in-the-seo

Sari, R. P. (2024, December 11). *10 Penerapan AI Generatif untuk Mendukung Bisnis Di Tahun 2025*. Indonesia Artificial Intelligence Hub. https://aihub.id/tren/ai-generatif-2025

Shetty, A. (2024, July 21). *Generative AI - The ultimate guide for [2023] - Yellow.ai*. Yellow.ai. https://yellow.ai/id/generative-ai

Simon, F. (2024, October 10). *We need clarity about the deals between AI companies and news publishers. Here's why*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/we-need-clarity-about-deals-between-ai-companies-and-news-publishers-heres-why

Social, A. (2025, March 26). *How AI-generated answers are changing search & SEO strategy*. Adapting Social. https://adaptingsocial.com/is-ai-decreasing-site-traffic-from-search/

Sommerfeld, N., McCurry, M., & Harrington, D. (2025, February 19). Goodbye clicks, hello AI: Zero-click search redefines marketing. Bain. https://www.bain.com/insights/goodbye-clicks-hello-ai-zero-click-search-redefines-marketing/

Stihec, J. (2024, November 25). How generative AI search will transform search forever. Shelf. https://shelf.io/blog/how-generative-ai-is-transforming-search-forever/

Syaftahan, P. (1024, October 27). Teknologi AI Terbaru Dan Dampaknya Di Berbagai Bidang. Indonesia Artificial Intelligence Hub. https://aihub.id/pengetahuan-dasar/ai-di-berbagai-bidang

Vizologi. (2025, April 8). *AI Generatif: Bagaimana AI Dapat Membantu Bisnis ANDA Berkembang?* https://vizologi.com/id/ai-generatif-bagaimana-hal-itu-dapat-membantu-bisnis-tumbuh/

Wikipedia. (2023, August 4). Generative artificial intelligence. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved August 3, 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generative_artificial_intelligence

Williams. (2024, February 10). *Understanding zero-click searches: Impact & optimization strategies*. Williams Media. https://williamsmedia.co/what-are-zero-click-searches

Wolfenstein, K. (2025, April 10). Menerobos lalu lintas melalui gambaran Google AI: Tantangan baru untuk operator situs web Dan pengembangan lalu lintas mereka. Xpert.Digital. https://xpert.digital/id/minum-oleh-google-ki-ikhtisar/