Institute for Public Policy Research

AI'S GOT NEWS FOR YOU

CAN AI IMPROVE OUR INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT?

Roa Powell and **Carsten Jung**

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SUMMARY

AI IS TRANSFORMING OUR NEWS ECOSYSTEM

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming our information environment and becoming a new front door through which the public access the news. Already, 24 per cent of people report using AI for information seeking every week (Simon et al 2025), while Google AI Overviews now appear under ever more Google searches, reaching 2 billion users every month (Joseph 2025).

There is widespread concern that the information provided will be inaccurate or biased *and* that the rise in AI will threaten news organisations' survival. As these risks materialise and undermine trusted information flows, we are missing opportunities for AI to become a positive force within the news ecosystem.

At present, AI acts as an opaque and at times unreliable interface for news, with AI companies making invisible editorial choices that reshape the public's access to information. We conducted a small-scale experiment, testing four AI tools' performance across 100 randomly generated news queries and analysing more than 2,500 links. Based on this experiment and wider research, we found the following:

- **AI draws on a narrow range of prominent news brands**, with the single most-cited news source accounting for 34 per cent of all journalistic sources in AI answers, and each AI tool concentrating heavily on just one news outlet.
- **The UK's most trusted news site – the BBC – only appears in half of AI tools' answers.** ChatGPT and Google Gemini returned answers with no BBC journalism cited. Meanwhile, Google AI Overviews and Perplexity seemingly continue to draw on BBC content, despite the BBC's objections.
- **AI creates new winners and losers**, with each AI tool prioritising news brands in different ways, in each case foregrounding a distinct selection of news outlets compared with those that are currently most popular across the UK.
- **Questions need answering around how financial relationships between AI companies and news brands shape AI answers.** If licensed publications appear more prominently in AI answers, there is a risk of locking out smaller and local news providers who are less likely to get AI deals.
- **AI sourcing behaviour can change overnight**, with significant implications for what information gets surfaced for users.
- **AI answers lack the necessary transparency and user choice** that would empower the public to understand and shape the information they consume. There is a high risk that users will take AI answers as fact, without considering how information has been curated.

At the same time, AI is beginning to erode existing financial incentives to produce news, without a clear sense of how high-quality journalism will be financed in the future:

- **Audiences are shifting to the use of AI gateways to access their news**, reducing the need to read news content directly. Early evidence points to dramatic falls in 'click-through'[1] to news sites following the introduction of Google AI Overviews, with users almost twice as likely to click on links if no

1 Click-through is where people click on a hyperlink or advertisement on a webpage or search engine they are viewing.

AI Overview is present (Pew Research Center 2025). Other AI tools are yet to have such a pronounced effect, but early evidence suggests that the impacts will be similar, as only a small proportion of users report that they click on links that AI presents always or often (Simon et al 2025). In this challenging context, publishers themselves expect search-engine traffic to fall dramatically (minus 43 per cent) in the next three years (Newman 2026).

- **Licensing agreements between AI companies and news providers** can fill the void of lost advertising revenues to an extent, but without intervention **will not support a healthy news ecosystem**. AI deals disproportionately benefit the largest, most prestigious publishers, they make news organisations dependent on tech giants for revenue and reach, and they could easily disappear should competition or copyright protections be weakened.

Given the information emergency we face – with disinformation on the rise, record low trust in public institutions and low media literacy – it is essential that the government incentivises robust information supply chains. This requires policies that make AI a more reliable interface for news *and* underpin the survival of quality journalism.

A POSITIVE DIRECTION FOR NEWS IN AN AI AGE

This direction for AI and news is not inevitable, and a more positive transformation is possible. If we act soon, this moment can in fact be an opportunity for a reset. The news sector has been struggling for decades in the face of low trust, declining readership and local news closures. AI can, in theory, help address some of these challenges – making news content more engaging, verifying information accuracy and empowering the public to curate the information they consume.

IPPR has made the case for policies that proactively steer AI deployment towards positive societal outcomes, which we call 'AI directionism' (Jung and Srinivasa Desikan 2025). The present report is a case study for how this could be done in the news sector, showing how AI could become a force for good in the news ecosystem, if supported via bold policies.

We argue that, for this to happen, three goals must be prioritised:

1. Improve AI as an interface for news.
2. Ensure AI tools draw on accurate and diverse sources.
3. Make the news sector less dependent on technology giants for survival.

First, **standardised 'nutrition labels' for AI news content** are needed to help ensure popular AI tools act as a **transparent and reliable interface for news**. This requires more transparency from AI companies about how sources are selected and more active user choice to shape AI answers.

Second, we need a **licensing market that supports a thriving news ecosystem and provides AI companies with access to diverse sources**. This requires action from the government so that news organisations are able to negotiate fair deals with AI companies:

- The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) needs to act to enable news providers to negotiate fairly with technology giants, most immediately Google. It already has the powers to do so, via the strategic market status designation, and now needs to specify conduct requirements that bring Google to the negotiation table with news providers.
- Copyright protections need to be preserved to allow the licensing market to grow. AI companies are beginning to pay for news data, showing that this market has potential, but it is at an early stage and could easily collapse. Long-term solutions on AI and copyright may be found through paying more attention

to how AI companies remunerate creators when their data is used to directly answer queries rather than to train new models.

- More collective approaches to data licensing must be promoted to ensure a wide range of publishers can participate in the AI licensing market. An **independent news licensing taskforce** should be created to help build consensus across the sector on the need for collective licensing and to develop licensing terms that support news sustainability.

Finally, the government needs to incentivise the emergence of **new business models for news** that are not dependent on the technology sector for survival. This will mean support for public service news, including support for the BBC to innovate with AI. In addition, the government should provide support for the independent sector, especially local news, with catalytic funding used to spur innovative new business models within this sector.

Now is the time for action – AI companies are beginning to pay for news data, but this licensing market is nascent and we are not yet harnessing the potential of UK news data as a sovereign AI asset. With the right policies in place, the government can shape this market so that UK news organisations transition their business models for the AI age *and* AI companies improve the reliability of their products by drawing on trusted sources.

1. INTRODUCTION: TRUSTED NEWS FOR AN INFORMATION EMERGENCY

THE INFORMATION EMERGENCY

Many countries, including the UK, now face an information emergency where it has become harder than ever for the public to trust what they see online. Several destabilising pressures are driving this crisis:

- **Digital platforms increasingly shape what information we see online**, with social media algorithms amplifying divisive content, rewarding engagement over accuracy and failing to moderate harmful content at scale (Krasodomski-Jones 2020; Milli et al 2025).
- **Misinformation and disinformation are on the rise**, with four in 10 adults reporting that they have encountered misinformation or 'deepfake'[2] content in a one-month period (Ofcom 2024).
- **AI makes it easier than ever to generate misinformation at scale**, with freely available AI tools helping to produce and distribute false information (Ryan-Mosley 2023).
- **Media literacy is low** and the UK has dropped in international indices (House of Lords 2025).
- **Trust in institutions is collapsing**, with trust in politicians and government institutions at a record low (NatCen 2024).

NEWS SHOULD BE A SOLUTION, BUT STANDS ON SHAKY GROUND

In theory, a healthy news ecosystem provides an essential antidote to the information crisis. Access to reliable information is a fundamental resource that underpins both a functioning democracy and a functioning economy (Kovach and Rostenstiel 2021; Farrell and James 2024; High-Level Panel on Public Interest Media 2025). The news media – which we define broadly as organisations that provide journalistic information to inform society – are essential to this. Their function is to:

- act as a watchdog against the abuse of power
- facilitate public debate
- represent the views of the public
- separate truth from falsehood.

Yet, in practice, UK news is struggling in the face of longstanding problems around concentrated ownership, unstable funding, low trust and falling readership.

2 Deepfake content involves AI-generated images, videos or audio recordings that misrepresent somebody.

LONGSTANDING CHALLENGES FOR THE UK NEWS SECTOR

- **Lack of diversity.** Just three companies control 90 per cent of the UK's national newspaper circulation, while just two companies control 51 per cent of the UK's local newspapers (Media Reform Coalition 2025).
- **Lack of enforced standards.** The UK press regulator, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), lacks bite – it has never imposed a fine in its history. Moreover, almost any organisation can register as a 'recognised news publisher' and be thus exempt from online safety regulation (Hacked Off 2025).
- **News deserts.** More than 270 local news titles have vanished in the past 15–20 years, and 37 local authorities have been classified as local news deserts (Public Interest News Foundation 2025; Seger and Perry 2025).
- **Revenues in jeopardy.** Key revenue streams from advertising and print circulation are declining, with independent news organisation revenues down 30 per cent from 2023 to 2024 (Public Interest News Foundation 2024).
- **Eroded trust.** News media are some of the least trusted institutions in the UK, with just 19 per cent of respondents in the OECD's Trust Survey reporting high or moderately high trust in news media in 2023 (OECD 2024).

Rather than simply defending this flawed status quo, we should ask what news transformation is needed to tackle the information emergency we face.

2. AI COULD IMPROVE OUR NEWS LANDSCAPE

AI'S TRANSFORMATION OF NEWS IS UNDER WAY

Whether AI will transform our news ecosystem is not in question. Already, AI is an increasingly dominant information gatekeeper, intermediating the public's access to information and shaping what content we see.

Use of AI for information retrieval has doubled over the course of a single year, with 24 per cent of people now using AI for information seeking every week (Simon et al 2025), rising to 40 per cent among people aged 18–24 years (Adami and Simon 2025). Still, these numbers pale compared with the rapid rise in the public consuming news through AI by default rather than through choice. Google AI Overviews now reach 2 billion users every month (Joseph 2025) and appear under more than 60 per cent of US Google searches (Melton 2025).

As AI capabilities continue to improve and AI use spreads across the UK, AI tools will increasingly become a core method through which society informs itself, with the power to curate what we see at scale. In this report, we are primarily interested in understanding the impacts of generative AI and focus on a range of AI tools, from Google AI Overviews to popular 'chatbots' (see table 1).[3]

TABLE 1

Summary of the AI tools discussed in this report

Google AI Overviews	A generative AI feature that is now integrated directly within Google Search and automatically summarises results using AI.
ChatGPT	The UK's most popular AI tool. This chatbot is owned by OpenAI and uses generative AI to generate text, images and more in response to user queries.
Google Gemini	Another of the UK's most popular AI chatbots, owned by Google. It uses generative AI to generate text and images in response to user queries.
Perplexity	Another AI chatbot that is designed with the ability to search the web in real time as a key priority. It uses third-party models (including ChatGPT) but provides additional features designed to ensure answers draw on trusted sources.

Source: Authors' analysis

3 Throughout this report, 'AI' refers to generative AI, defined as AI models that produce content based on patterns picked up from training data and in response to user prompts. Other AI technologies beyond generative AI will also impact the news and information environment, but are beyond the scope of this research. Many, but not all, generative AI products take the form of a chatbot, where AI directly answers user questions through back-and-forth conversation.

THE RIGHT POLICIES COULD MAKE AI A FORCE FOR GOOD

It is possible that AI is accelerating the decline of news, as is often assumed in the pessimistic predictions that dominate the debate. But it is also possible that AI will improve our news ecosystem (Caswell 2025). In this section we outline what this positive transformation could involve, demonstrating how many benefits could be realised if we get this transition right:

- **News becomes more accurate and transparent.**

  AI could help with fact checking, for example by comparing information across multiple sources easily. It could also help make news more transparent, with clarity on where information has been sourced and more consistent communication of confidence levels below 100 per cent.

- **News becomes more accessible, engaging and relevant.**

  AI could make news more engaging by summarising content, personalising outputs and converting content to audio and video formats. It could also connect the public to more relevant information by predicting interests and providing deeper insights by answering follow-up questions. And AI could help underserved audiences access news, including non-English speakers, people with disabilities and communities with little local news coverage.

- **News becomes more abundant.**

  If AI brings more efficiency to newsrooms and these savings are directed towards underfunded parts of news (for example, local news and investigative journalism), longstanding holes in funding for public interest journalism could be filled. AI could also lower the barrier to entry into journalism, allowing the democratisation of news as more people can contribute without large overheads. In the longer term, AI could even make news information abundant, with the option for individuals to precisely tailor their news feed to their needs (Caswell 2025).

THE FUTURE OF NEWS HANGS IN THE BALANCE

Whether we see AI facilitate this positive transformation of news depends on two central questions:

1. **Will AI be designed as a reliable interface for news?** As the most popular AI tools become more dominant gatekeepers of information, it is essential that they act as a reliable interface for consuming news. This requires them to reliably surface accurate, diverse and relevant content, all while attributing sources transparently and disclosing the personalisation of answers.
2. **Can we ensure there are sustainable incentives for the creation of high-quality journalism?** It is not enough for AI to act as a reliable interface for the news content that exists today. We also need strong financial incentives for producing reliable and democratically aligned news in the first place. Existing economic incentives in news are far from perfect, with news organisations often highly dependent on technology giants to distribute their content. This means, at the exact time AI is transforming the business model of news, many forms of journalism are already chronically underfunded (Media Reform Coalition 2025), with better incentives urgently needed.

In the rest of this report, we will explore these two questions in detail.

3.
AI IS CURRENTLY AN UNRELIABLE INTERFACE FOR NEWS CONTENT

WHY AI SOURCING MATTERS

As AI has begun to be used for news, concern has grown that it will produce inaccurate answers and influence how the public view the news and information, prioritising certain facts and opinions over others. Understanding which sources AI tools draw on helps us assess these risks.

Research shows that the sources AI uses directly affect accuracy. When AI answers are grounded in specific citations, achieved via retrieval augmented generation (RAG) methods, the rate of 'hallucination' (where AI makes things up) can be dramatically reduced (Huang et al 2023; Mohammad 2025; Qian et al 2025). Evidence from newsrooms' own experimentation with AI backs this up, where bespoke AI products have been limited to drawing on a pre-defined set of verified sources and shown to have very high accuracy (Roth and Kennemer 2024; Axelrod 2025; Philip 2025). AI tools can access data from across the internet, from unverified facts and misinformation and from credible news sources, meaning where they draw information from matters.

Beyond accuracy, the sources AI draws on also shape which perspectives are foregrounded. Just as human editorial decisions have always shaped the news we see, AI's source selection embeds a new form of editorial decision-making. With AI, it is typically less clear to the reader where information has been drawn from, making it even more risky for AI tools to skew readers towards certain sources, without their knowledge.

MODEL-LEVEL 'HALLUCINATIONS' REMAIN A CHALLENGE

Even when AI draws on reliable sources, it can still make errors, be overconfident or misinterpret information ('hallucinate'). There is no silver bullet for this on the horizon, given the current methods used to train models. Significant improvements can be made where models are optimised to avoid overconfidence, but this will not reduce the error rate to zero. While this research focusses on sourcing as one important lever for improving AI accuracy and avoiding bias, these deeper model-level challenges remain.

AI MAKES INVISIBLE EDITORIAL DECISIONS THAT SHAPE WHAT WE SEE

To explore how AI companies make editorial choices that shape our news ecosystem, we tested four AI tools' responses to 100 UK news queries, randomly generated using the AI model Claude Sonnet 4.5. These news questions spanned topics from politics and current affairs to celebrity news, entertainment, sport and more. We used the latest version of each of the AI tools for the experiment (GPT-5, Google AI Overviews, Google Gemini 2.5 Flash and Perplexity), analysing more than 2,500 links.[4] All personalisation features were disabled for this research.[5] Full methodological details can be found in the Annex.

This small-scale experiment builds on related research, including the BBC's study on AI assistants' responses to questions about BBC reporting (BBC and EBU 2025) and academic and industry studies on AI sourcing behaviour (Muck Rack 2025; Yang 2025). Our work focusses specifically on which sources AI tools cite when answering questions about UK news.

Our results, combined with additional research, reveal some areas where AI tools are successfully delivering news content – but they also show several areas for concern.

AI tools do draw on original journalism

Answers to news queries demand up-to-date, verified information. It is important for answers to draw on diverse viewpoints, not merely amplify corporate press releases or government statements.

Our analysis suggests that AI tools largely meet this standard. In our experiment, on average, when responding to news queries, journalism accounted for nearly 40 per cent of citations (see figure 3.1). This pattern in what sources AI reads will depend significantly on the type of user prompt, with related work finding that 25 per cent of AI sources are journalistic in response to a broader set of prompts (beyond just news queries) (Muck Rack 2025).

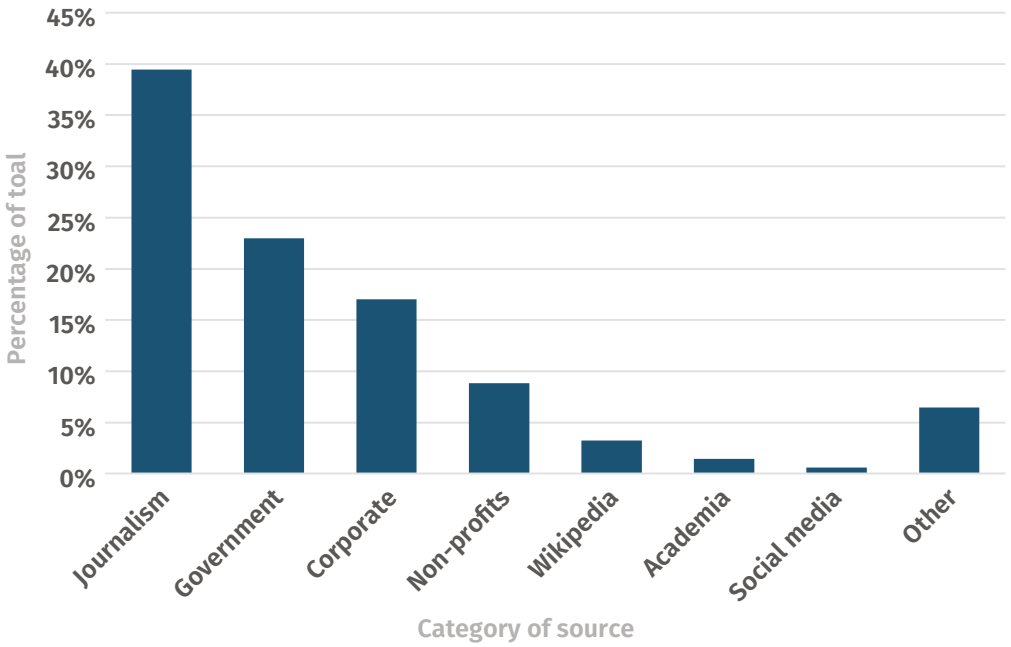
4 Google AI Overviews perform a distinct function compared with the other AI tools we tested. They appear automatically under Google searches, while the remaining AI tools we tested are 'chatbots'. Given the rapid expansion in Google AI Overviews, they are included here as an important comparator. In our experiment, a Google AI Overview appeared for 61 out of our 100 news queries and we used this smaller dataset for analysis.

5 All queries were conducted with user-level personalisation and memory features disabled, and no prior conversational context. While these steps suppress individual personalisation, some residual variation may persist, for example due to location-based inference or due to further personalisation mechanisms that are not publicly known. The findings thus reflect depersonalised but not entirely context-free AI behaviour.

FIGURE 3.1

AI tools predominantly draw on journalism in response to news queries

Type of source used within AI answers (% of the total)



Source: Authors' analysis based on a one-shot experiment evaluating AI responses to news queries

Note: We collected data from October to November 2025. Further methodological details are provided in the Annex. Here, AI sources are divided into eight categories: journalism, government sources, links to corporations, non-profits, Wikipedia, academia, links to social media posts (for example, via X, Reddit or Facebook) and 'other'.

A narrow range of sources dominate

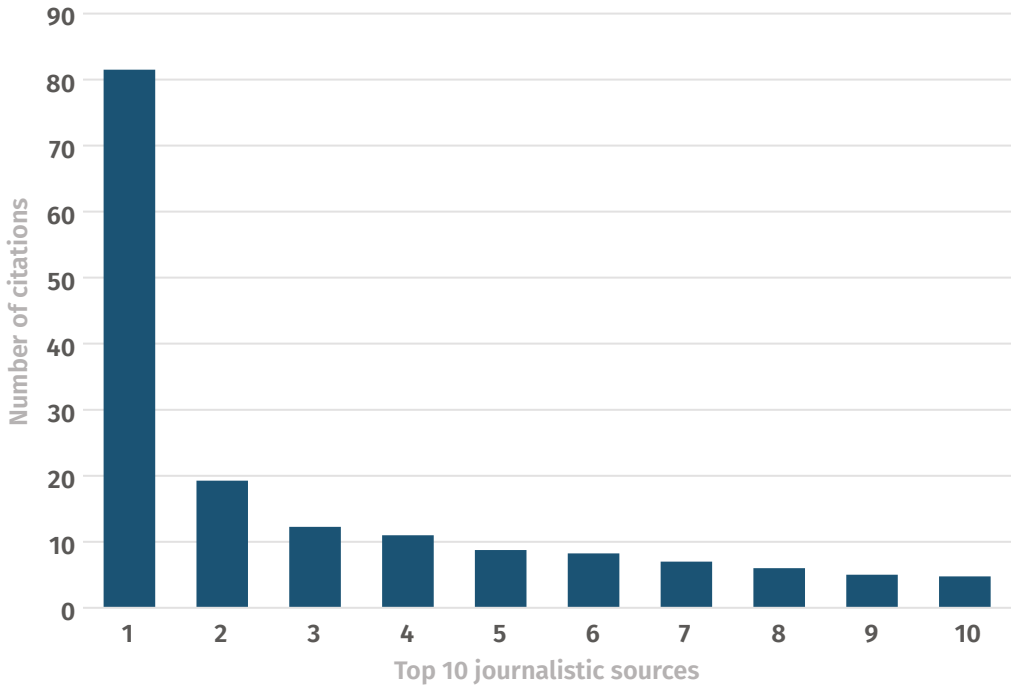
In selecting sources to draw on, AI tools choose which perspectives to surface. Currently, they show a strong preference for just a few major news outlets. In our tests, there was a steep drop in citation count after the top news site (see figure 3.2). On average, the single most-cited cited news source accounted for 34 per cent of all journalistic sources in AI's answers, making it on average more than four times more prominent than the next most commonly used news outlet. Independent research confirms this pattern whereby AI citations concentrate on a narrow range of outlets, with a steep drop-off in citations after these (Yang 2025).

While some news outlets may merit preferential treatment based on accuracy or popularity with the public, AI tools do not inform users about this narrow concentration in sourcing, making it easy for users' attention to be redirected towards this narrow set of publications without their knowledge. For different AI tools, the source that is most prominent in AI answers is distinct. For some AI tools it is the *Guardian* and for others it is the *BBC*. However, transparency is not sufficient for users to easily understand which perspective is being foregrounded.

FIGURE 3.2

A narrow range of journalistic sources dominate in AI answers

Number of citations from the top 10 journalistic sources (out of 100 queries)



Source: Authors' analysis based on a one-shot experiment evaluating AI responses to news queries

Note: For each AI tool, we counted how many times it cited its top 10 journalistic sources across the 100 news queries and averaged this across the AI tools. The chart shows how much AI tools rely on each of their top 10 journalistic sources, with a steep drop-off after the most-cited source.

AI creates new winners and losers

In selecting where information is drawn from, AI companies can create new winners and losers, with some outlets benefitting from greater visibility, while others suffer. Each AI tool draws on a distinct selection of sources and in doing so foregrounds a new set of sites compared with those that are currently most read in the UK (see figure 3.3). Certain AI tools also draw heavily on news sources that do *not* feature in the UK's top 10, such as Reuters, the *Financial Times* and the Press Association.

FIGURE 3.3

AI creates new winners and losers

Popularity of UK news sources (% of the UK public who use each news site) versus prominence in AI answers (% of AI answers that cite each outlet, by AI tool)

News source	UK Audience (%)	Google AI Overview %	ChatGPT %	Perplexity %	Google Gemini %
BBC	59	52.5	0	36	0
Sky News	21	9.8	14	7	10
Guardian	20	16.4	58	11	53
Daily Mail	14	3.3	0	2	0
LADbible	11	0	0	0	1
Huffington Post	9	0	0	0	0
Buzzfeed	9	0	0	0	0
GB News	8	3.3	3	3	0
Telegraph	8	6.6	4	3	0
Sun	8	3.3	1	3	1

Sources: Ofcom 2025a and authors' analysis based on a one-shot experiment evaluating AI responses to news queries

Note: Ofcom's 2025 ranking of the UK's most popular news sources is given in the far left-hand column (from highest to lowest). The next column (blue) gives the percentage of the UK public who reported using each news website in 2025. In the other (red) columns, the numbers indicate the percentage of AI answers that cited each outlet, showing the prominence of these outlets with AI answers. Darker shades of blue and red correspond to higher percentages.

Research finds that AI tools can result in significant shifts in terms of which websites are most visible (Muck Rack 2025). But further work is needed to unpick these patterns and explore which sorts of publications may be benefitting and which ones may be losing out, for example:

- Is AI favouring prestige brands?
- Is it avoiding commercial and tabloid outlets?
- Or is it favouring newswires that provide all the factual content that AI needs in a single place?

The most trusted UK source is often missing entirely

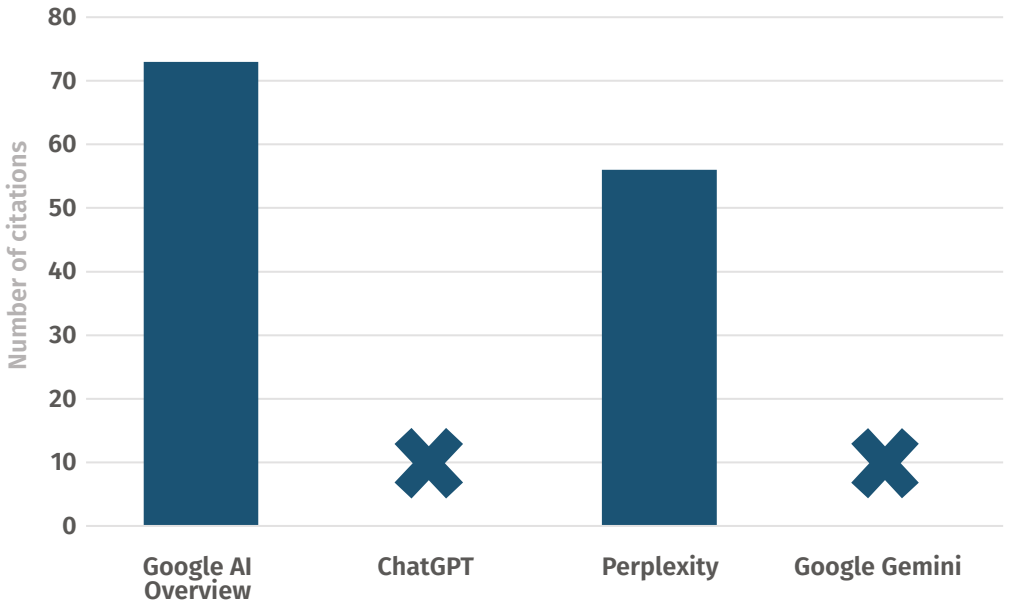
Despite the BBC being by far the most trusted and widely read news source in the UK (Newman et al 2025; Ofcom 2025a), only two out of the four AI tools we tested draw on BBC content (see figure 3.4). And the UK's most popular AI tool – ChatGPT – cites GB News more than the BBC.

The BBC's choice to block AI companies from scraping its content, and threats of legal action when its content is used, may explain this (Adami 2023; Pandey 2023; McMahon, 2025), as some AI companies choose to respect the BBC's directive. Nevertheless, this means the UK's most trusted source is often absent from AI answers.

FIGURE 3.4

Representation of the BBC across AI tools varies

Citation count for the BBC, by AI tool



Source: Authors' analysis of the citation count of the BBC within AI's responses to news queries in our one-shot experiment

Note: A cross indicates that no BBC sources were cited.

Blocking AI access is not currently an effective way to protect a news brand from being misrepresented. When users ask AI tools about reporting from blocked sites, the AI tools simply turn to secondary sources – often inaccurately. This means that news organisations continue to face the risk they tried to avoid, with their brand misrepresented, but now through less reliable intermediaries and without the benefit of users clicking through to their original content.

Commercial relationships may have a renewed role in shaping what we read

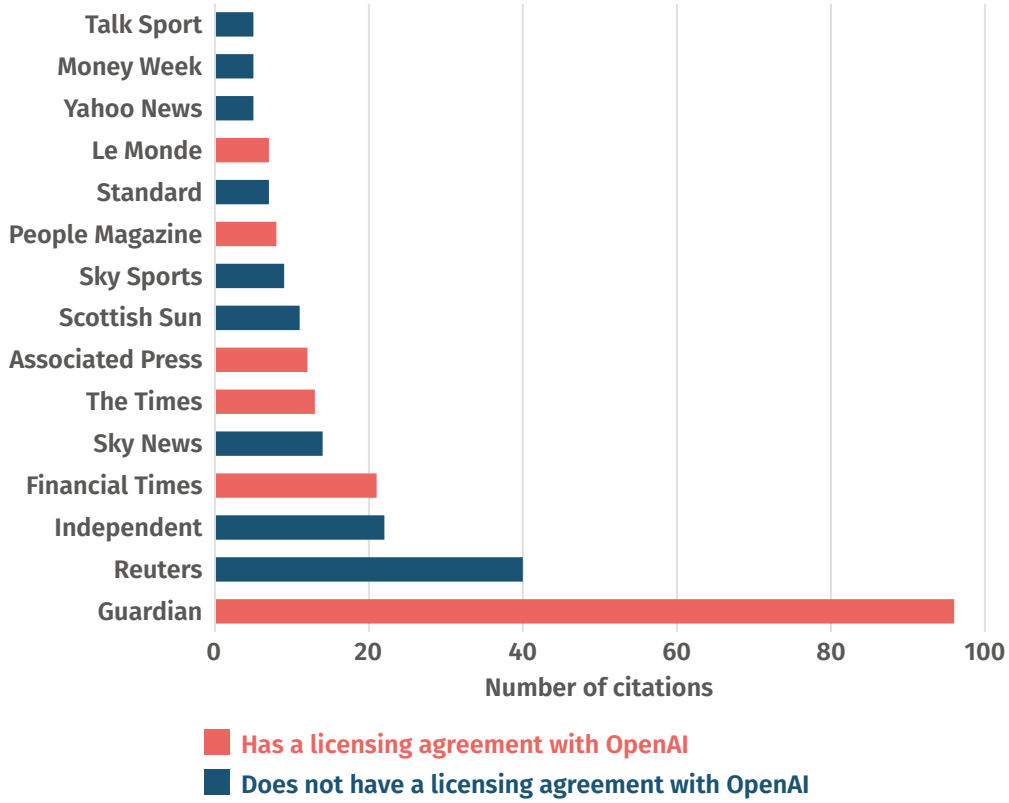
Several news organisations now have commercial agreements with AI companies. While the details of these deals are private, they often include structured data access and explicit permission to use content (OpenAI 2024a, 2024b; Fares 2025; Jaźwińska 2025). Whether and how these deals affect content visibility in AI responses remains unclear.

In our experiment, licensed publications appeared prominently in AI answers, as illustrated by ChatGPT's top cited news sources (see figure 3.5). This is consistent with AI companies' stated aim of making licensed content "more discoverable" and "broaden[ing] the reach" of this journalism (*Financial Times* 2024; OpenAI 2024a). However, without transparency on the technical mechanisms that determine source ranking, it remains difficult to assess the extent to which these publications receive a visibility advantage. If they do, this raises new questions, especially around the need for transparency where certain sources are favoured and the impact this may have on smaller outlets, which receive fewer opportunities for licensing deals.

FIGURE 3.5

ChatGPT's top citations often align with OpenAI's publisher deals

Citation count of ChatGPT's top 15 journalistic sources



Source: Authors' analysis of the 15 most cited journalistic sites by ChatGPT in our one-shot experiment, compared with public disclosures of OpenAI's deals with news publishers

Note: Newscorp, which has a licensing deal with OpenAI, also owns TalkSport and the *Scottish Sun*. While these outlets are not explicitly mentioned with reference to the Newscorp–OpenAI deal, they may be within scope.

AI sourcing behaviour can change overnight

While our research captured a single point in time, it is clear that AI companies' prioritisation of sources is changing all the time.

Research shows rapid shifts in AI citation patterns through the latter half of 2025 (Muck Rack 2025), with Wikipedia experiencing sudden citation falls, while YouTube observed significant citation spikes and Reuters' citation percentage grew gradually. Further work highlights the challenge of domain drift, with 40–60 per cent of the domains cited in AI responses being completely different just one month later, even for identical questions (Blyskal and Rajpal 2025). Technology companies are still experimenting with new ways to present and rank content in AI answers, contributing to these rapid shifts (Budaraju 2024).

Longer-term patterns in how AI citation behaviour is likely to change also remain unclear. For example, as AI tools become more capable of extracting information direct from primary sources (for example, social media posts and government filings), they may rely less on journalists' synthesis of information, with drastic impacts for the visibility of news sites within AI answers.

AI responses lack transparency

In many of these cases, sourcing choices may be justifiable, whether sources are selected based on trust metrics, financial deals or user engagement. Nevertheless, the lack of transparency around how sources have been selected and which sources are relied on for which information is problematic and should be addressed.

More clarity is also needed on where personalisation is playing a role, along with clearer signposting to information that has been drawn from specific sources versus information generated by the AI model itself, without a clear source.

4.
AI IS REDEFINING THE FINANCIAL INCENTIVES THAT SHAPE OUR NEWS ECOSYSTEM

ADVERTISING-BASED INCENTIVES ARE STARTING TO DISAPPEAR

News organisations continue to rely significantly on advertising, and more recently subscribers, for income. Already, these revenue streams have been under threat as technology platforms receive the vast majority of online advertising revenue, while their market control gives news publishers no option to leave their platforms (Public Interest News Foundation 2024; Ponsford 2025).

New threats are emerging as AI accelerates this trend, creating even more separation between users accessing news content and the organisations that publish news. With users now often able to get all the information they need without leaving the AI or search interface, they are becoming far less likely to interact directly with the author or publisher, even if their work made the AI output possible.

Already, clear impacts can be measured. To date, the main impacts on the business model of news can be linked to Google's introduction of AI Overviews, which have led to a sharp rise in zero-click searches and falls in click-through to news sites.

HOW GOOGLE AI OVERVIEWS REDUCE THE VISIBILITY OF NEWS SITES

Zero-click searches are on the rise. Between May 2024 and May 2025, coinciding with the launch of Google AI Overviews, the percentage of news searches that result in no clicks at all rose from 56 per cent to 69 per cent (Guaglione 2025).

Click-through rates are down. While exact numbers vary by context, the trend is clear:

- Google users who see an AI Overview click on a link 8 per cent of the time, compared with 15 per cent of the time in cases where no AI Overview is present (Pew Research Center 2025).
- Google users are more likely to end their browsing session entirely after seeing an AI Overview, with this happening on 26 per cent of webpages with an overview compared to just 16 per cent of webpages with only traditional search results (Pew Research Center 2025).
- Where an AI Overview is present, the time spent on the site is lower compared with the time spent on searches where there is no AI Overview (DMG Media 2025).

The use of other AI tools (for example, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Perplexity) for news is still emerging, meaning they have not been linked to dramatic shifts in click-through yet. However, there is growing evidence that as soon as they become

more popular, they will have the same effect. AI chatbots scrape content far more than they refer traffic, with a referral rate of 179:1 for OpenAI, 369:1 for Perplexity and 8,697:1 for Anthropic (Tollbit 2025). This means that AI companies are rarely returning value to news companies, despite regularly scraping their content.[6] Research also shows that just a third of users (33 per cent) say they always or often click on links in an AI Overview, 37 per cent say they do sometimes and 28 per cent say rarely or never do (Simon et al 2025).

As generative AI models can instantly provide a summary, video or personalised podcast on any topic at near-zero cost to the user, people are beginning to interact less with the news organisations whose content made this AI product possible.

WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE CLICK-THROUGH COLLAPSE?

To address the click-through collapse, it is important to understand how AI companies' use of news data creates AI products that directly compete with news brands.

AI companies use news data in two distinct ways – to train models and to answer queries – but these two uses have very different implications for the economics of journalism.

To date, most policy attention has focussed on AI companies using news content to train AI models. Training causes economic harm by creating models that can eventually replace some of the tasks that journalists perform. So concerns around AI companies using data to train new models remain important.

However, emerging evidence suggests that 'inference' (scraping news data to directly answer queries) presents a more immediate threat to news business models:

- Data scrapes for query answering have now overtaken scrapes for training and are rising more quickly (Tollbit 2025).
- When AI answers questions by directly drawing on news content, it transforms the content far less and is much more likely to act as a replacement for a reader engaging with the content directly.
- Inference occurs continuously at a massive scale and is only set to grow further as more people use AI.

It is inference that is displacing news traffic at scale at the moment. Policymakers therefore need to have a far greater focus on it to address the near-term economic impacts of AI.

AI LICENSING AGREEMENTS ONLY PARTIALLY REPLACE LOST REVENUE

While AI is undoubtedly eroding current news revenues, it is also to an extent replacing them. To date, 68 per cent of known AI licensing agreements are with news companies (Thomas and Kretschmer 2025), demonstrating that, under certain circumstances, AI companies are willing to pay for news data.

6 While referral rates are an imperfect metric, given that AI companies might have multiple motivations for scraping content, not simply to produce AI answers, they do provide important information around whether news sites are seeing benefits by having audiences referred to them through AI.

However, early evidence suggests that AI licensing could bring problems for the news ecosystem as a whole.

- **Power imbalances prevent fair negotiation.** News organisations are at a disadvantage when dealing with technology giants such as Google, as they rely on their platforms to reach readers. Google's approach to data scraping is a clear example of a power imbalance. Currently, publishers must allow Google to scrape their content for AI if they want to appear in search results, as Google uses the same tool for both purposes without offering reasonable opt-outs (Tobitt 2025). Without outside help, even major news brands struggle to negotiate on fair terms.
- **Deals are concentrated at the top.** Early evidence suggests that AI licensing agreements are concentrated at the top, with AI companies cherry picking big, prestige brands without supporting diverse news organisations (Weinberg 2024). While large news companies have resources to negotiate deals, smaller outlets risk being presented with take-it-or-leave-it terms (Simon 2024).
- **The licensing market is built on shaky foundations.** The nascent licensing market is built on the shaky foundations of copyright uncertainty. The threat of legal action has been a key motivating force for AI companies doing deals. If parliament weakens copyright protections, licensing agreements could disappear quickly, leaving news providers with even less revenue to reinvest in original reporting.
- **The flaws of the advertising model are replicated.** In many ways, AI licensing recreates the structural flaws of the advertising model. News brands become dependent on AI companies for revenue and must optimise their content to maintain this funding, rather than prioritising content that serves the public interest. News providers also currently have very little certainty around the reliability of the outputs generated using their brands. Nor do they have any knowledge or control over the quality or veracity of the news brands that their own brand will appear next to.

NEWS WILL NEED TRANSFORMED BUSINESS MODELS TO SURVIVE

As the economic impacts of AI layer on top of the existing struggles of many news brands, the UK's news landscape will shift dramatically. Some forms of news are especially exposed, while others may adapt and thrive.

Below we outline how these changes could play out across the varied news ecosystem.

- **High-volume commodity news producers could face decline.** Bulk news providers relying heavily on search engine optimisation (SEO) and Google referrals are the most exposed, as AI tools erode referral traffic and the value of fast-turnaround content.
- **Local news could face severe decline**, as such outlets, already under extreme financial pressure, are unable to absorb even small financial impacts from AI. However, local news is not a monolith, and outlets built for SEO will be hit hardest, while those with deep community roots may survive.
- **Investigative news could face decline if not supported via public funding.** Investigative news was commercially fragile even before AI, facing rising costs and diminishing returns. Its survival will depend increasingly on public funding and philanthropic support, with minimal commercial incentive in the AI age. It will also depend on whether the AI licensing market rewards the outlet that invested in and published the original piece of investigative reporting, rather than relying on reprints.
- **Prestige and specialist outlets are more protected in the short term but still face headwinds.** Brands with strong reputations, high public trust and large

subscriber bases will be better insulated as direct consumer relationships act as a shield against the impacts of AI. But this only works up to a point, and more extreme AI adoption scenarios will still hit them hard. They also face significant challenges to brand-based trust as their content and brand name are used within AI answers without easy ways of opting out.

- **Creator-driven journalism may thrive.** Audiences are showing greater loyalty to individual journalists while creator-centric platforms (for example, Substack and podcasts) thrive. This content provides a clear contrast with AI-generated material, with less direct competition between the two.
- **News verification as an emerging business model for news could thrive.** As AI becomes ever better at generating news artefacts (for example, videos and articles), the value of these artefacts could reduce to near zero. But there will be a growing market for adjacent business models that involve verifying that content is accurate and human generated, and providing trust labels for that content.

To support the sustainability of news, it will be important to both shape an AI licensing market that underpins a plural news ecosystem *and* support the emergence of new news business models that are less dependent on the tech sector for survival.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

An AI-driven transformation in how we consume news is already under way, but whether this transformation serves the public's needs hangs in the balance.

The government, AI companies and news organisations can all act to help steer this transformation in a more positive direction. To do this, they must work towards:

- improved reliability and transparency of AI tools
- a licensing market that supports a plural news ecosystem
- the creation of sustainable new business models for news.

MAKE AI ANSWERS RELIABLE AND TRANSPARENT

As the public increasingly access news through popular AI tools, it is important to make these tools a more reliable and transparent interface for information. Clear standards on how content gets editorialised and communicated through AI will help address this. Below, we illustrate how standardised 'nutrition labels' for AI news might work in practice, building on work from the BBC and the European Broadcast Union to define what features are essential to "news integrity" within AI answers (BBC and EBU 2025).

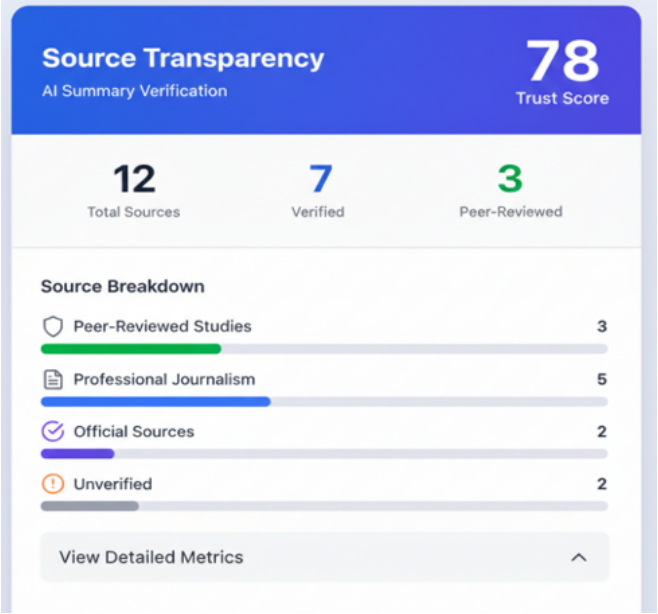
For these nutrition labels to be a success, standardised templates must be developed, for example by international standards bodies, with both the government and the news sector contributing to their design. The government should also consider new incentives for AI companies to adopt these standards.

Transparency disclosures should be part of AI answers

AI's source selection rationale should be explained to users in an accessible way, to give clarity around what kind of information has been used to generate news answers, including the share of peer-reviewed studies, professional news organisations and user-generated but unverified content. Such labelling could incentivise fact checking on a hitherto unprecedented level (see figure 5.1).

FIGURE 5.1

Example of a transparency disclosure to precede an AI answer



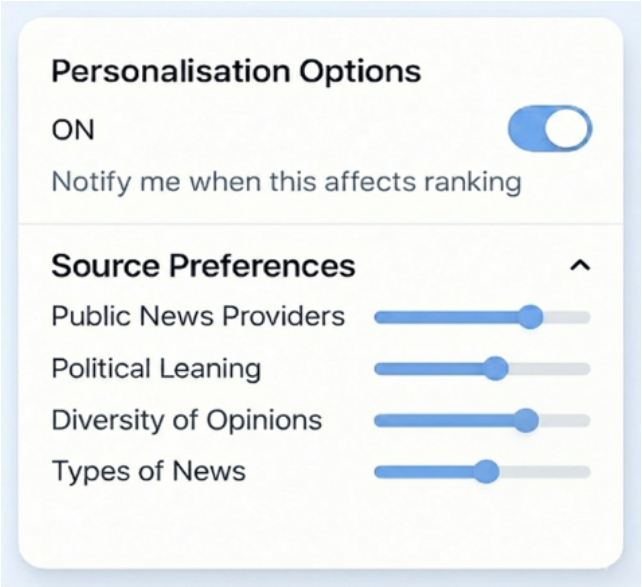
Source: Example nutrition label generated using Gemini 3 to fit the authors' specifications

AI tools should give users choices on sourcing

As personalisation increases, it will become even more important for users to have choices around what kinds of sources they want AI answers to draw on (see figure 5.2). This would require regular reminders to users about the ways in which personalisation shapes AI answers.

FIGURE 5.2

Example of an AI interface to encourage more user choice over sourcing



Source: Example nutrition label generated using Gemini 3 to fit the authors' specifications

Further standards may be required

Further standards on how AI tools present information may also be required, for example to ensure AI answers clearly attribute opinions to their original source and, crucially, to ensure AI tools decline to answer when asked to summarise news sources that they have been blocked from accessing.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA AND AI LITERACY

Even with high standards for how AI tools present information, there are still risks that AI answers are biased or contain errors. Care must therefore be taken in interpreting answers; increased momentum on media literacy can help support this (UNESCO 2025).

The public should be offered education on how to use AI as a positive tool for their own media consumption (for example, through the use of AI fact checking), while at the same time avoiding overreliance on AI, and users should be encouraged to check AI's sources frequently (De Tender 2023). Funded AI literacy initiatives to be delivered through the UK curriculum and the BBC will be key to delivering on this (DCMS 2025; MILA 2025).

SUPPORT THE COLLECTIVE LICENSING OF NEWS DATA FOR AI

While improving transparency in how AI tools respond to news queries will address immediate concerns, it does not tackle the deeper issues identified. AI tools still need access to reliable sources, and the journalism that produces these sources still needs to be fairly compensated. A licensing market is beginning to emerge, but as things stand, it is not set to underpin a thriving, diverse news ecosystem, as:

- power imbalances prevent fair negotiation
- questions around copyright legislation remain unresolved
- licensing deals concentrate on the largest players in the news ecosystem.

Each of these barriers to the collective licensing of news data could be removed, helping to grow this market and ensuring that it underpins both news sustainability and AI accuracy, as we set out below.

Addressing power imbalances

Well-designed competition policy can rebalance bargaining power so that news content is properly attributed and fairly paid for. This requires decisive action from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

The CMA's designation of Google as having 'strategic market status (SMS) is a welcome first step. But designation alone is just the beginning. Robust and enforceable conduct requirements that help news providers to engage on an equal footing must now follow.

In the immediate term, the CMA should use its powers regarding strategic market status entities and require Google to be more transparent with publishers around how their data gets used and to give publishers genuine choice to opt out (for example, by separating data scraping for grounding AI answers from data scraping for search). At the same time, the CMA should require Google to attribute news providers clearly within AI answers and, most crucially, require Google to trade on fair and reasonable terms with news providers, remunerating them for content.

In the long run, the CMA will likely need to consider designating other big AI players with strategic market status to avoid a single AI tool dominating the market. Today, the AI market is still dynamic, and this would be premature.

However, while the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 was designed to allow the CMA to act early, before market dominance becomes entrenched, its backlog of cases prevents this from happening. The CMA must therefore be sufficiently resourced to rapidly work through the existing backlog, so that it is ready to intervene quickly in the AI market.

Addressing copyright issues

We are at a pivotal moment on AI and copyright. AI companies are increasingly coming to the table to pay for news content, and a licensing market that could work for both publishers and AI companies is beginning to form. However, this market is only possible when AI companies are incentivised to pay for content.

Currently, there are two major incentives at play. First, global copyright uncertainty drives AI companies to negotiate pre-emptively rather than risk legal action. Second, commercial incentives drive AI companies to seek access to stable, structured data, delivered in predictable formats, with clear usage permissions. If copyright protections were weakened now – removing news organisations' leverage – this market could easily disappear just as it is beginning to form.

It would also be premature for the UK to engage in a race to the bottom in the name of competitiveness when there is no settled international approach. The EU, Australia and Canada all continue to struggle in the search for a solution that both the creative and AI sectors will accept (Jervis-Bardy 2025; Karadeglija 2025; Martens 2025). Even the US direction on copyright is uncertain, given:

- courts in the US continue to come to different conclusions on "fair use" (Bosher 2025)
- the US Copyright Office has suggested that using data to directly answer a query would not constitute fair use (US Copyright Office 2025)
- US republicans remain bitterly divided on AI and copyright (Barrabi 2025).

The UK has struggled to come to a solution that is acceptable to the creative industries, with just 3 per cent of respondents to the government's AI and copyright consultation supporting the proposed solution of a text and data-mining copyright exemption for AI training with an opt-out (DSIT 2025). In light of this, the UK is right to look for new solutions with genuine potential for the long run.

In practice, this should mean exploring the following options in detail.

- **Supporting international standards** (such as through the Internet Engineering Task Force[IETF]) that give creators more control around how AI companies use their data – in the long run, these standards could make opt-out approaches to copyright more feasible and could help to build international consensus. They could also help build momentum on the need for transparency from AI companies on how they use news data
- **Distinguishing training from inference**, ensuring there is sufficient focus on governing how AI companies scrape data in response to individual queries as well as for use in training – this is especially important for the news sector where inference rather than training presents a more immediate risk.
- **Developing tiered licensing models** that protect rights-holders while enabling new AI companies to enter the market without being locked out by high data costs.

Addressing licensing issues

Policies are needed to support the collective licensing of news data, such that it is not only the largest news brands that feel the benefits.

The government should help remove practical barriers to the collective licensing of news data in the following ways, which will enable news organisations to come together as a collective.

- Develop an **inference-focussed AI licence** to complement the Copyright Licensing Agency's existing plans for an AI training licence (Cormack 2025). This sort of licence would be better suited to the news sector as its data is more valuable for everyday AI queries than it is for AI training, and it will give small news providers a template to use when negotiating with AI companies.
- Support the development of **infrastructure for the collective licensing of data**, for example by hosting structured, indexed and catalogued news data within the National Data Library so that this is ready to be licensed at scale to AI companies.
- Resource existing bodies, for example the **Newspaper Licensing Agency**, to take on an increased role in facilitating the collective licensing of news data for AI, managing partnerships between the news and AI industries.
- The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology should consider setting up an independent **news licensing taskforce**, chaired by an independent expert and bringing together representatives across broadcasting, print and local news, to build consensus across the sector on the collective licensing of their data to AI companies.
- Create incentives for **standards setting in news**, in order to service the demand from AI platforms for fact checked high quality information. This demand, for example, could be serviced by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), Impress or Ofcom or through other industry led quality certification processes. By developing clearer standards for news accuracy, these organisations could play a role in steering which sources should be prioritised for inclusion within AI answers.
- **News organisations must also come to the table.** With the right competition and copyright protections in place from the government, the UK news sector should collectively negotiate access to its data. If news organisations join forces, they can create a sovereign UK news dataset that is of significant strategic value to AI companies. If licensed successfully, this could ensure AI answers are grounded in reliable, diverse news content *and* that diverse publishers are rewarded.

CATALYSE INNOVATION IN THE NEWS ECOSYSTEM

Even where we can make the licensing market work better, commercial incentives will still largely shape it. In the context of the information emergency we are experiencing, some outcomes are too important to leave entirely to market forces. Rather than leave the news sector to become increasingly dependent on technology companies for revenue, public funding could be used to support news independence.

Support alternative, publicly owned AI news products

A small number of US technology firms are rapidly becoming the major gatekeepers for news information. While improving such platforms is valuable, relying on these companies to serve the public's news needs would be naive.

In the UK, there is only one organisation with enough market access to genuinely compete: the BBC. The government should therefore treat the BBC's AI capabilities as a sovereign AI priority, resourcing the corporation to build a democratically aligned AI news product using open models and BBC data.

This tool could enable the public to easily search and access BBC content, summarise it, convert it to video and audio format, and even receive daily,

personalised news briefings. With wider agreements in place, this could also provide a platform for non-BBC content, with a view to bringing the highest-quality news publishers together to build genuinely transformational public-interest AI products.

SHOULD BBC CONTENT ALSO BE PROMINENT WITHIN COMMERCIAL AI TOOLS?

As the BBC builds its own AI tools, difficult decisions must be made about whether its content should also appear prominently within third-party AI products.

There have already been growing calls for the BBC to be featured more prominently on third-party sites such as YouTube and Facebook, with growing recognition that the BBC must work with global tech firms in order to reach audiences (Ofcom 2025b).

However, when it comes to prominence within AI tools, the trade-offs are more complex:

- **Reach versus control.** Should the BBC try to reach the growing number of people consuming news through AI *or* try to preserve control of its data and brand, shielding it from being misrepresented in AI?
- **Integration versus choice.** Should the BBC share its data with technology giants to ensure the most popular AI tools become more reliable *or* try to compete by only making its content available via AI products it controls?

Use public funding to catalyse innovative new business models for news

Even if licensing revenues from AI companies grow, they risk replicating the weaknesses of the advertising models that they partially replace, where incentives skew towards scale and engagement rather than accuracy or public value.

This makes it essential to strengthen more democratic funding models for the forms of journalism that society needs most, but that AI companies may be less motivated to pay for. This should include:

- investigative news, which is vital for holding power to account but rarely commercially viable
- local news, where the business model already teeters on the edge, making it especially vulnerable to AI transformation.

Canada and the EU's recent measures to support public-interest journalism demonstrate that democratic governments can step in at moments of disruption. The Canada Periodical Fund and one of its components – the Special Measures for Journalism – help Canadian publishers to overcome market disadvantages in the face of digital platform control (Canadian Heritage 2025). Meanwhile, the EU Democracy Shield includes reinforced support for independent and local journalism to accompany the European commission's plans to modernise advertising rules to foster the sustainability of EU media (EC 2025).

Where possible, this funding should not make news dependent on government, but rather catalyse innovation from within the sector. In many cases, there is potential for new business models to thrive (for example, creator-driven journalism, news verification services and local news with genuine community roots). The government can play a significant role in seeding this transformation.

6. CONCLUSION

AI is transforming news faster than almost any other sector, meaning a rapid policy response is essential to shaping the direction of AI in news.

To date, AI has arguably caused more harm than good in our news ecosystem, but this need not continue. The recommendations we set out in chapter 5 can steer us towards a better future, where AI tools reliably connect people to accurate information, and where quality journalism thrives, becoming increasingly independent from the technology sector for survival.

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APPENDIX: AI ATTRIBUTIONS METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to assess the overall sourcing behaviour of popular AI tools in response to queries about UK news and current affairs.

DATASET GENERATION

Our dataset is based on AI tools' responses to 100 randomly generated news queries. We generated the news queries using the AI model Claude Sonnet 4.5, and this was followed by human quality assurance.

We used the following prompt to generate the news queries:

> ***"Please generate a dataset (n=100) consisting of hypothetical news queries that users might type into LLMs or search engines. Each query should be specific to the UK context. They can start with a variety of stems, for example "tell me the latest news on", "what's new with", "give me the latest on". Please make the query topics as representative as possible of the UK's news interests to the extent that these are known. Please produce these as a table with the following columns. Column 1 = Category, Column 2 = Query."***

We checked the news queries for:

- how representative the news topics were
- how appropriate they were for a UK context
- whether they were time sensitive in any way.

We divided the final set of news queries by topic as follows: economy (8), UK politics (8), business (6), entertainment (6), football (6), health (6), local news (6), transport (6), education (5), royal family (5), sport (5), weather (5), celebrity (4), crime (4), environment (4), immigration (4), international (4), social issues (4) and technology (4).

SELECTING AI TOOLS

Our experiment focussed on the following AI tools: Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Perplexity (see table A1).

TABLE A1

Summary of the AI tools discussed in this report

Google AI Overviews	A generative AI feature that is now integrated directly within Google Search and automatically summarises results using AI.
ChatGPT	The UK's most popular AI tool. This chatbot is owned by OpenAI and uses generative AI to generate text, images and more in response to user queries.
Google Gemini	Another of the UK's most popular AI chatbots, owned by Google. It uses generative AI to generate text and images in response to user queries.
Perplexity	Another AI chatbot that is designed with the ability to search the web in real time as a key priority. It uses third-party models (including ChatGPT) but provides additional features designed to ensure answers draw on trusted sources.

Source: Authors' analysis

We selected the AI tools to reflect the most popular ones within the UK. (We did not test Microsoft Copilot, despite being widely used, due to significant overlap with ChatGPT in functionality.) Where there are different versions of a model available, we used the latest freely available model at the time of testing (GPT-5, Google AI Overviews, Google Gemini 2.5 Flash and Perplexity).

Google AI Overviews is unique in not responding to all news queries. In our experiment, a Google AI Overview appeared for 61 out of the 100 news queries, spanning all categories of news query, and we used this dataset for our analysis of Google AI Overviews' citation behaviour.

Data gathering and quality assurance

We entered all 100 news queries into each AI tool manually before we collated the sources. For this experiment, we did not assess the accuracy of the AI answers themselves.

Our focus was on gathering in-text citations rather than including all sources listed at the end of an AI answer that may not have directly fed into that answer. Within each AI answer, we counted every link once, meaning that if the same citation was used multiple times, it was just counted once.

Each AI tool displays sources in a distinct way, meaning we gathered links in a bespoke way for each AI tool, while keeping the total count as consistent as possible:

- **ChatGPT.** We asked ChatGPT to gather together all in-text citations for each AI answer. We double checked the accuracy of this data. In the case of ChatGPT, secondary citations are sometimes used, which the model fails to gather. These are not included in our analysis.
- **Google AI Overviews.** We manually recorded each in-text citation.
- **Google Gemini.** We asked Gemini to gather together all in-text citations for each AI answer. We double checked the accuracy of this data.
- **Perplexity.** We asked Perplexity to gather together all in-text citations for each AI answer. We double checked the accuracy of this data.

Given the use of AI to speed up link collation, we conducted quality assurance to spot check whether the correct links were gathered for at least 10 AI answers from each AI model.

We gathered the data between 28 October and 25 November 2025.

ANALYSIS

For each AI tool, we created a ranked citations list, ranking websites from those receiving the most citations to those receiving the least.

We also categorised each website into one of eight broad groups:

- journalism
- government
- corporate
- non-profits
- Wikipedia
- academia
- social media
- 'other'.

We then analysed key patterns, focussing in on which news sites were most cited across the four AI tools and what this reveals about how AI tools editorialise information.

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