

Will AI Overviews Reshape Media SEO Strategies? A Longitudinal Analysis of Query Segments and Search Traffic Changes

Tereza Schambergerová^a

^a Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague, Czechia

1. Introduction

Will AI-powered search features change SEO (search engine optimization) strategies for media outlets? AI-powered search features represent a shift from a link-based information search model to an answer-based search model (Google, 2025). This development raises an important question for the future of online publishing: to what extent can AI-powered summaries (Google, 2026) change SEO strategies for media by altering the visibility and traffic potential of different types of content? While existing research has tended to examine the technical evolution of search interfaces and the broader epistemic implications of algorithmically mediated access to information (Palese, 2026; Aral et al., 2026), less attention has been paid to how AI-powered summaries are distributed over time across query types and how this distribution relates to changes in search-driven traffic for media websites. This article addresses this gap by combining query-level analysis of AI-powered summary coverage with long-term traffic data from selected media domains.

The study is guided by the following research question: How does the proliferation and distribution of AI-powered summaries across query segments relate to changes in search patterns on media websites, and what implications might this have for SEO strategies in the media? Drawing on perspectives from the political economy of media (McChesney, 2008), agenda-setting perspectives (McCombs, 2004), and platform power and gatekeeping (van Dijck et al., 2018), the article conceptualizes AI-powered summaries as a mechanism that can selectively shift user attention by modifying the role of search results as gateways to external content.

Empirically, the analysis is based on a longitudinal dataset of search queries collected in the Czech Republic over several months, combined with observed search traffic data from a sample of media websites. The query dataset consists of predefined sets of queries representing different types of information demand, including public figures, “how-to” educational queries, searches related to travel, health, and other topics commonly covered by media websites. For each query, the presence of AI-powered summaries is tracked over time, allowing measurement of overall coverage and temporal evolution. Queries are grouped into thematic segments to identify systematic differences in AI-powered summary coverage across types of information demand. These thematic segments are then linked to the editorial profiles of selected media websites, enabling an assessment of how strongly different publishers are exposed to AI-powered summaries based on the thematic composition of their content, and whether differences in exposure are associated with subsequent changes in search traffic.



Although the study cannot prove causality, consistency of patterns across segments and over time may indicate possible correlations between the expansion of AI-powered summaries and shifts in traffic distribution. The results may provide insights into whether the impact of generative search features depends on the alignment between content strategies and the types of queries most frequently influenced by AI-powered summaries. Knowledge-oriented platforms, such as Wikipedia, but also certain media company websites, may be particularly exposed due to their focus on informational queries.

By integrating query-level coverage data with longitudinal traffic analysis, this article contributes empirical evidence to ongoing debates about the future of search and the sustainability of online media.

2. References

Google (2025). *Artificial Intelligence Overviews and Your Website*. <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ai-features>

Palese, R. (2026). Artificial Truth: Algorithmic Power, Epistemic Authority, and the Crisis of Democratic Knowledge. *Societies*, 16(3), 102. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc16030102>

Aral, S., Li, H., & Zuo, R. (2026). The rise of AI search: Implications for information markets and human judgement at scale. arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2602.13415>

McCombs, M. (2004). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*. Polity Press.

McChesney, R. W. (2008). *The political economy of media: Enduring issues, emerging dilemmas*. Monthly Review Press.

van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press.