

WHY PR IS THE ENGINE BEHIND AI SEARCH VISIBILITY

Stats on PR's role in Generative Engine
Optimization (GEO)

PROPER PROPAGANDA

IS AI SEARCH THE NEW SEO?

Unequivocally, no. It is a multi-disciplinary activity encompassing a connected mix of web architecture, content, parts of SEO, and, most importantly, PR and earned media. This document highlights stats that paint the picture.

THE DIGITAL SHIFT

Earned media - the primary output of PR - is the main raw material AI search engines cite when answering questions about brands. According to Muckrack, **82% of all AI-cited links come from earned media**. In this context, earned media includes editorial coverage, social media, independent research, and third-party validation. Any brand that doesn't consistently invest in PR is largely invisible to AI.

SEARCH HAS CHANGED

AI-powered search is no longer an emerging trend. ChatGPT now processes over 2.5 billion prompts per day and has reached 800 million weekly active users. Google's AI Overviews reach 2 billion monthly users across 200 countries. Nearly 40% of Americans use at least one AI chatbot monthly. The search landscape has fundamentally changed and the stakes are high.

AI TRUSTS EARNED MEDIA

Researchers at [Princeton](#), [Georgia Tech](#), and [IIT Delhi](#) formally established in 2024 that AI engines strongly favor earned media and authoritative third-party sources over brand-owned content. The data since then has been unambiguous.

6.5x

A brand is 6.5x more likely to be cited by AI through third-party sources than through its own domain.

82%

82% of all AI-cited links across ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Perplexity come from earned media. In total 94% of citations come from non-paid sources. Paid content barely registers.

27%

27% of all AI citations across LLMs are journalistic. For time-sensitive queries, that figure jumps to nearly 50%

The most common time for content to be cited by AI is the day after it is published. Half of all AI citations reference content published within the last 11 months. A brand that goes quiet loses citation presence quickly, there's no coasting on legacy coverage. Consistent PR is a must.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND PR-DRIVEN GEO

The most important quantified proof of earned media's GEO impact comes from a joint study by [Stacker and Scrunch](#).

Key findings include:

- Brands saw a 325% increase in AI citations when their content was distributed across third-party news outlets vs. published on a brand's own domain only. Editorial, in other words, is king and a huge multiplier.
- [Scrunch and Stacker also found that, across all AI platforms, a citation's valuable lifespan is basically 4.5 weeks.](#)
- However, **citations from earned, editorial media typically get scraped for twice as long, closer to 9 or 10 weeks.** Meaning, if you want to influence the conversation in your category on AI, the earned media you generate via PR is the most valuable asset you have.

Finally, the study showed a 5x growth in press release citations between July and December 2025, driven by ChatGPT and Gemini. Qualitative analysis revealed that this was only for releases that included objective language, statistics, and substantive news. The takeaway? Having good PR help is critical to producing material LLMs actually scrape.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BRAND

GEO is a reorientation of how brand authority is built. It cannot be separated from PR. The brands that win are those that have built consistent, credible earned media footprints across trusted publications.

The window to [build that footprint ahead of competitors is open now and narrowing.](#) First-mover advantages in GEO compound: early citations train AI systems to associate a brand with its industry, and can [even define how LLMs explain the category](#) more broadly.

The data is clear: Earned media is the currency of AI search. PR is how you earn it. There is still time to invest in your AI search presence and the PR that powers it, but you need to move now.

RESOURCES

For more on PR and GEO, [check out our Resource Center.](#) In particular the [GEO system](#) we have developed which is [delivering significant results for both us and our clients.](#)