Otterly.AI × PRESS RANGER

GEO RESEARCH STUDY · AUGUST 2026

AI Licensing Deals Study: News Publishers With OpenAI Deals Get 48% More AI Citations on ChatGPT

Between 2023 and 2026, AI companies signed **91 confirmed licensing deals** with news publishers, and every publisher and PR team asks the same question: does a licensing deal actually shape what AI reads and cites? Together with Press Ranger, we cross-referenced **20M+ URLs** cited across 7 AI Search platforms in June 2026 against every confirmed AI licensing deal on record. Now there is a number.

News pages from publishers with an OpenAI licensing deal earn **48% more citations on ChatGPT** than pages from publishers without a deal (10.2 vs 6.9 citations per cited page). Across all 7 AI Search platforms combined, the premium is 46%. Put simply: **OpenAI is one of the only AI companies that visibly rewards its licensed publishers with more AI citations, aside from Microsoft.** Everyone else's deals do not show up in citation behavior at all.

Key Findings

- **News publishers with OpenAI licensing deals get 48% more AI citations on ChatGPT than those without.** Per cited news page on ChatGPT: 10.2 citations versus 6.9. Across all 7 AI Search platforms combined, OpenAI-licensed publishers collect 10.7 citations per cited page versus 7.3, a 46% premium.
- **ChatGPT becomes your dominant citation source once you sign.** OpenAI-licensed publishers draw 57.9% of all their AI citations from ChatGPT. Publishers with any licensing deal still draw a 55.0% majority from ChatGPT. Unlicensed news publishers draw 32.4% of theirs from ChatGPT and lean on Perplexity instead.
- **Only OpenAI shows this self-preference.** Publishers that signed with OpenAI alone earn 112% more citations per page on ChatGPT than unlicensed publishers, against a 45% premium on the other platforms. Publishers that signed only with Perplexity or only with Google show no such home-platform edge.
- **58.8% of licensed publishers' citations come from commercial evergreen content** (best-of lists, buying guides and money advice, product reviews) versus 47.1% for unlicensed news publishers. Only 5.1% of licensed publishers' citations point to dated news articles. Licensing deals monetize buying guides more than breaking news.
- **News is a small slice of AI answers: 7.2% of all citations.** Claude cites news most (14.0% of its citations), followed by Perplexity (8.6%) and ChatGPT (8.3%).
- **Five media groups capture 69% of all citations to licensed publishers:** Future plc, Forbes (licensed through Amazon's launch roster), People Inc., Condé Nast, and Hearst.
- **Niche and trade media are the biggest winners of AI Search.** Trade and vertical outlets carry the majority of News/Media citations in 15 of 16 industries we measured, collecting 213% more AI citations than mainstream media.
- **A licensing deal is not a prerequisite for AI visibility.** The biggest unlicensed news domains in our data out-earn every licensed publisher except the top two.

Scope of Study

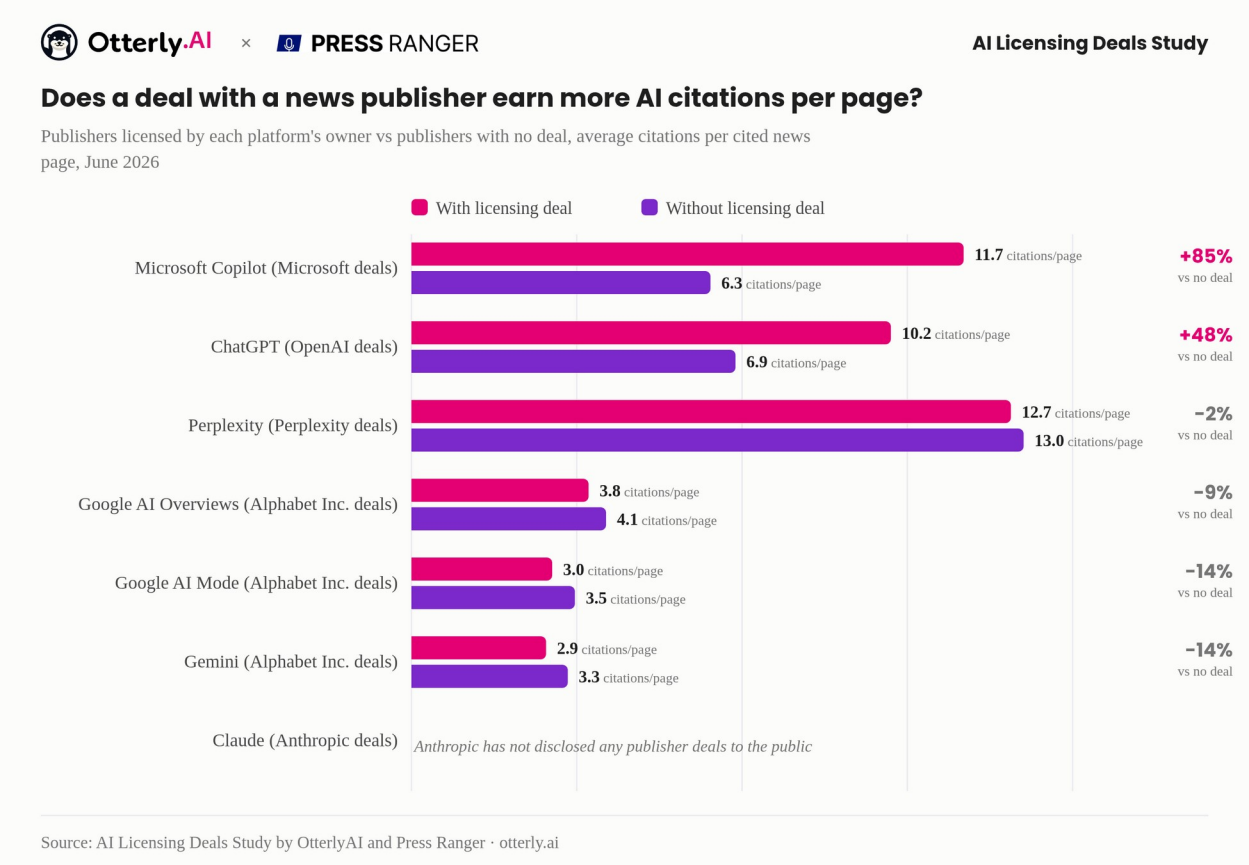
We joined two first-party datasets. The citation side comes from OtterlyAI: **129.3 million citations** across 20M+ cited URLs, captured on ChatGPT, Google AI Overviews, Google AI Mode, Perplexity, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, and Claude during June 2026. The deal side comes from Press Ranger's AI-Publisher Licensing Research: **91 confirmed AI-company × publisher agreements** (public evidence through 28 July 2026), mapped to 314 publisher domains.

90.8% of the citations we attribute to licensed publishers sit on domains explicitly named in deal announcements, not inferred from portfolio ownership. Per-page comparisons divide each group's citations by its cited news pages, so results are not distorted by group size, and the underlying study additionally validated the ChatGPT effect with volume-matched controls. This is a descriptive snapshot: it shows association, not causation.

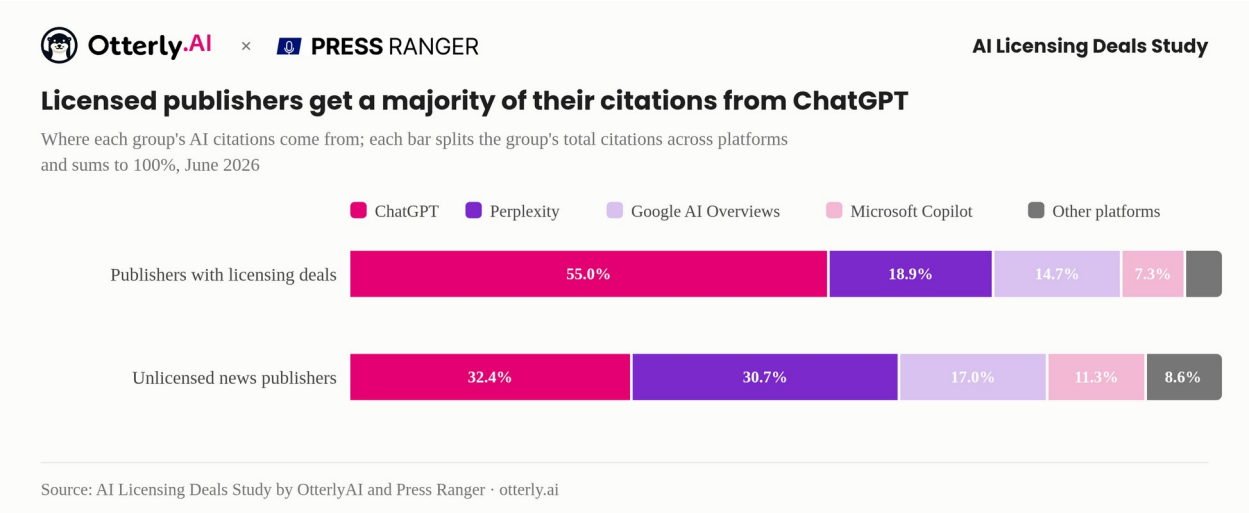
OpenAI Deals: 48% More Citations Per Page

Take every news page cited by AI Search in June 2026. On ChatGPT, pages from publishers with an OpenAI licensing deal collected **10.2 citations each on average versus 6.9** for pages from unlicensed news publishers: a **48% citation premium**. Across all 7 platforms combined, the OpenAI cohort's premium is 46% (10.7 vs 7.3 citations per cited page), and publishers with any licensing deal average 51% more (11.0 vs 7.3).

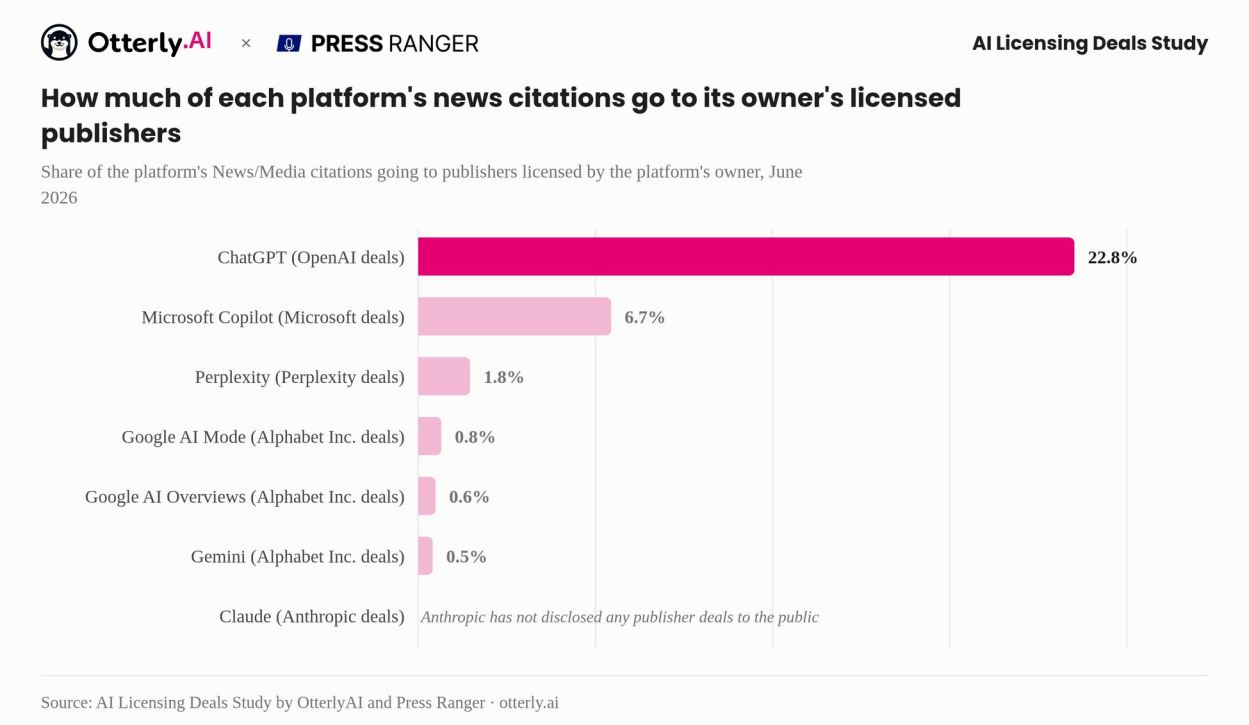
The chart below runs the same test for every platform owner: does a deal with the company behind the platform earn you more citations per page on that platform? Only OpenAI's clearly does. Copilot's raw premium reflects that Microsoft's licensees are largely the same big publishers OpenAI signed (94 of 144 overlap), and it disappears in this study's size-controlled matched test. Perplexity and the three Alphabet platforms show no premium at all.



The result: publishers who signed with OpenAI now draw a majority of their entire AI Search citation volume (**57.9%**) from ChatGPT alone. Widen the lens to publishers with any licensing deal and the ChatGPT majority still holds at 55.0%. Unlicensed news publishers have a more balanced mix: 32.4% from ChatGPT, with Perplexity nearly equal at 30.7%.



Flip the perspective to the platform side: how much of each platform's news citations go to publishers licensed by that platform's own parent company? On ChatGPT it is **22.8%**, while OpenAI-licensed publishers make up only 17.3% of the news pages ChatGPT cites. No other platform hands its owner's licensed publishers more than 6.7% of its news citations.



Why the Other AI Deals Show No Advantage

Google-licensed publishers are cited on Google AI Overviews at a slightly lower rate than comparable unlicensed news publishers, and Perplexity's licensed publishers land at parity on Perplexity. Neither platform gives its own licensees an edge.

Microsoft Copilot is the second platform where licensed publishers visibly earn more, which is why the intro names it alongside OpenAI. The nuance is attribution, and it matters: the lift is not traceable to Microsoft's own deals. Copilot rewards licensed publishers as a class, whoever licensed them: publishers signed by OpenAI, Amazon, Meta and Perplexity all earn between 61% and 85% more citations per page on Copilot than unlicensed publishers do. What Copilot rewards is publisher scale, and the licensed pool is full of large publishers that nearly all signed with several AI companies at once.

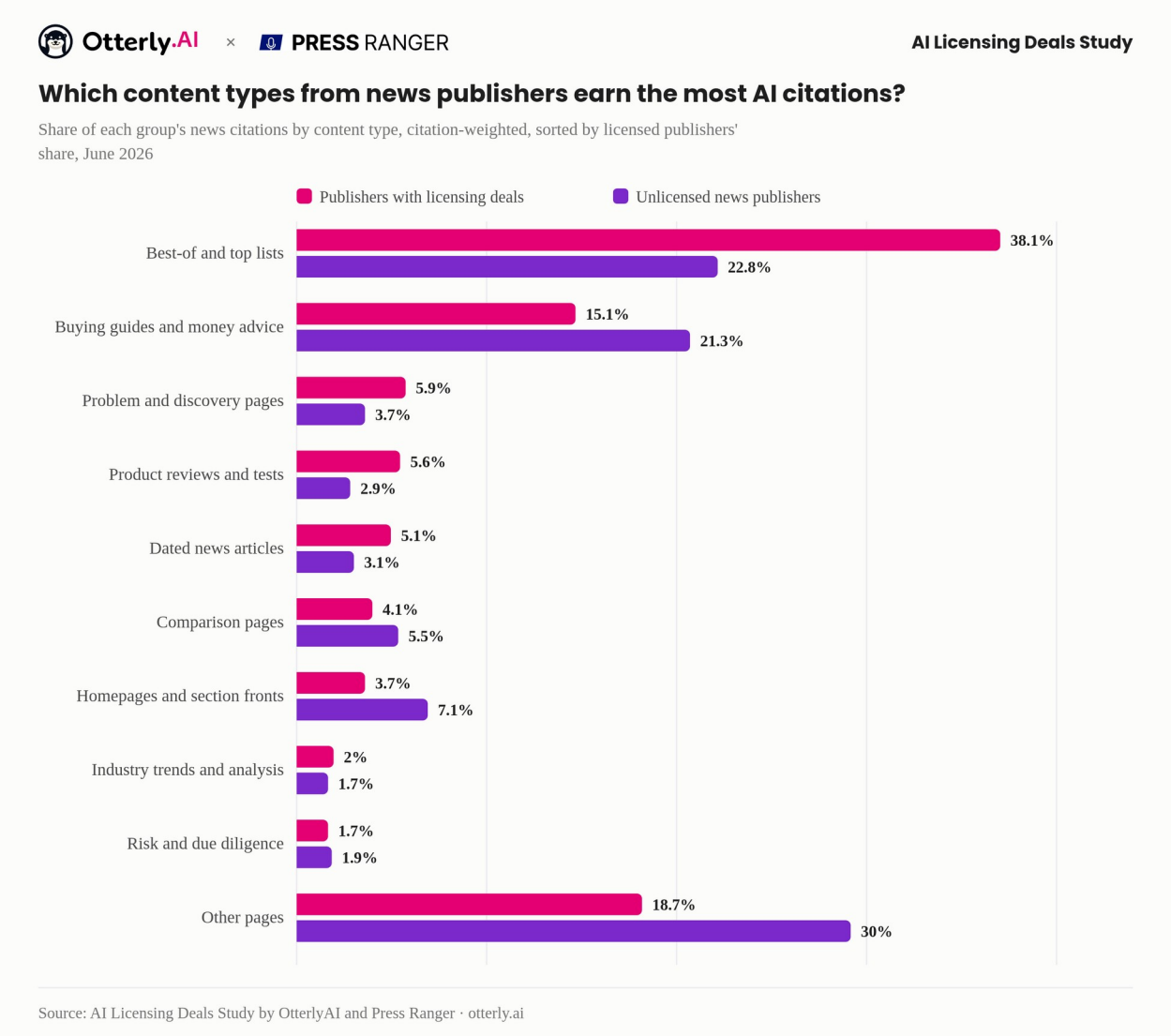
Isolating single-deal publishers makes the difference plain. Publishers that signed with OpenAI and nobody else earn **112% more citations per page on ChatGPT** than unlicensed publishers, well above the 45% premium the same publishers average across the other platforms. Publishers that signed only with Perplexity beat their own away-platform baseline by 6 percentage points, and publishers that signed only with Google by none at all. OpenAI is the only licensor whose deal shows up as a home-platform advantage.

Meta, Amazon, and Mistral signed deals for products outside classic AI Search (Meta AI inside social apps, Alexa+ and Rufus, Le Chat), so their deals cannot show a home-platform effect in citation data. Amazon's launch roster still matters here for a different reason: it includes Forbes, the single most-cited licensed publisher of the month.

OpenAI has signed 21 of the 91 confirmed deals, second only to Perplexity's 24. The difference is that OpenAI's deals are the ones that show up in citation behavior.

Which Content Types AI Cites Most

The content that AI Search platforms cite from licensed publishers is overwhelmingly commercial and evergreen. Weighted by citations, **38.1%** of licensed publishers' cited pages are best-of and top-list pages, **15.1%** are buying guides and money advice, and **5.6%** are product reviews and tests: together **58.8% commercial evergreen content**. Dated news articles account for just 5.1%.

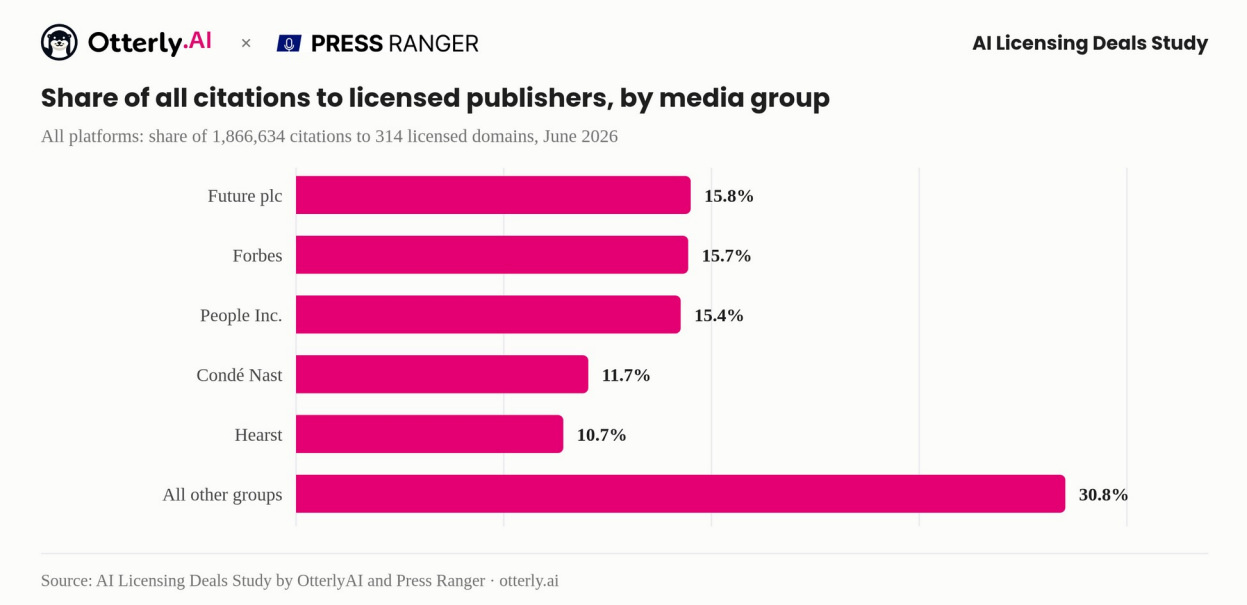


Unlicensed news publishers show a different profile: buying guides and money advice are the one category where they beat licensed publishers (21.3% against 15.1%), because the biggest unlicensed news domains in the data are personal finance and insurance specialists. The categories that sound like classic journalism are the smallest on the board: dated news articles 5.1%, industry trends and analysis 2.0%, risk and due diligence 1.7%. Press releases and wire copy barely register at all, under 1% for both groups.

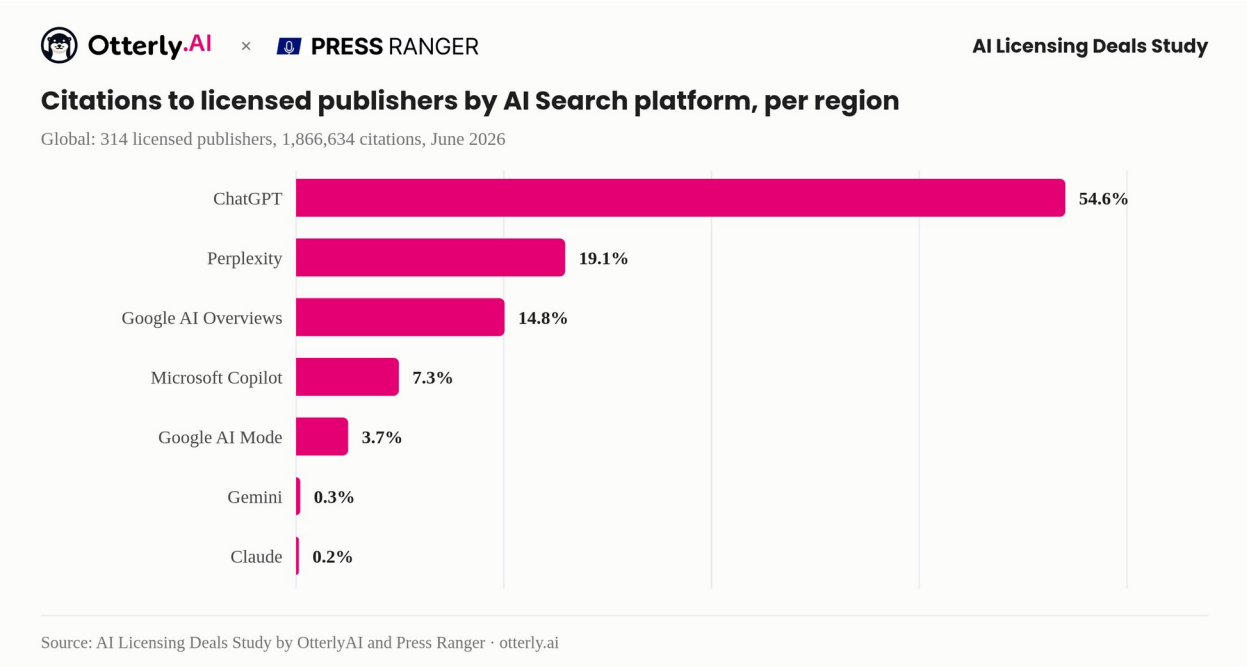
For publishers weighing a deal, this is the practical read: the citation upside concentrates on service journalism and product content, because that is where AI Search platforms need continuously updated, trustworthy answers.

Five Media Groups Hold 69% of Licensed Citations

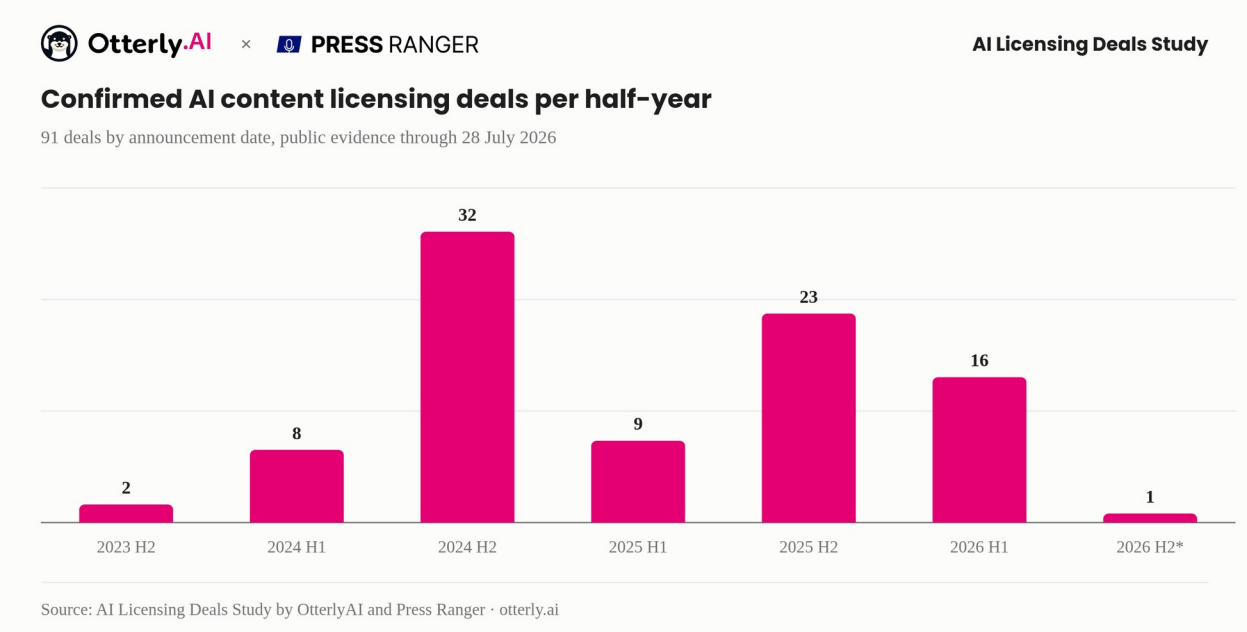
Citations to licensed publishers concentrate heavily at the top. Future plc titles (TechRadar, Tom's Guide, Marie Claire) capture 15.8% of all citations to licensed publishers. Forbes alone, licensed through Amazon's launch roster, captures 15.7%. People Inc. brands take 15.4%, Condé Nast 11.7%, and Hearst 10.7%. Together: **69% of the entire licensed citation pool in five media groups.**



The market is also geographically narrow: 88.7% of citations to licensed publishers go to English-language publications and 73.0% to North American ones. DACH is the only region where Perplexity, not ChatGPT, leads. And the portfolios overlap heavily: People Inc., Condé Nast, and Hearst have each licensed their portfolios to three or four AI companies, while Microsoft has no exclusive publishers at all.

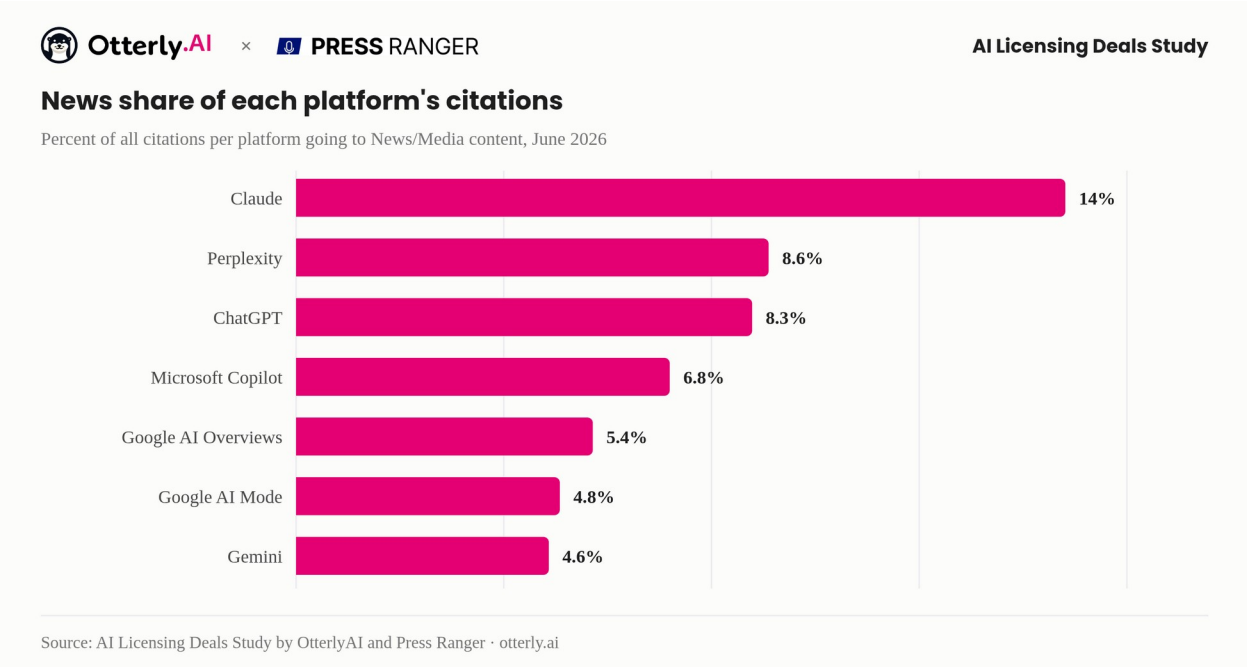


Deal economics stay mostly private. Of 91 confirmed deals, only 2 have publicly reported values: Meta × News Corp at up to 50 million US dollars per year and Amazon × The New York Times at 20 to 25 million US dollars per year.



News Is Only 7.2% of All AI Citations

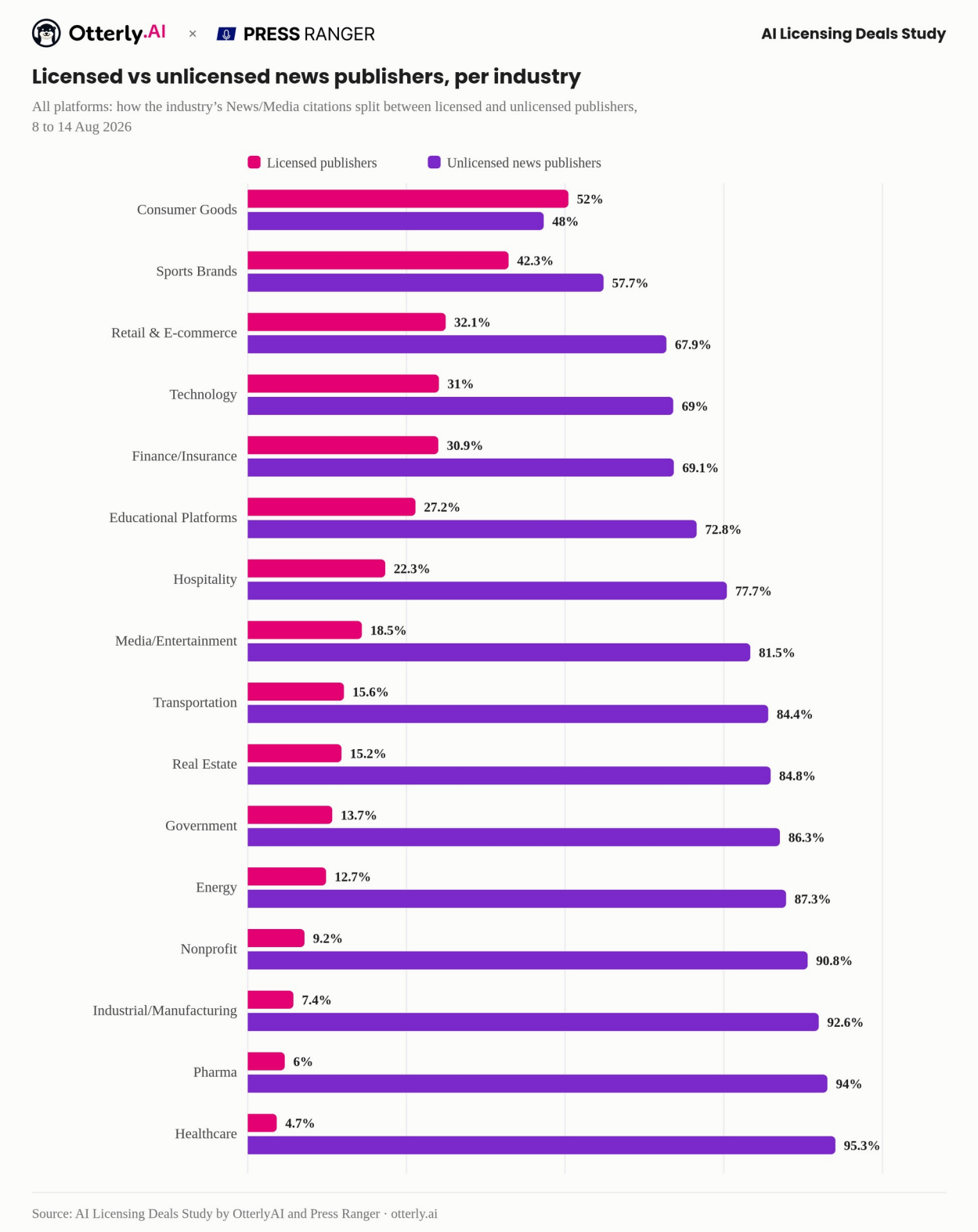
Across 129.3 million citations, News and Media content receives **7.2%**. The rest goes to brand pages, blogs, government sites, forums, encyclopedias, and video. Claude cites news the most of any platform, at 14.0% of its citations versus 8.6% for Perplexity and 8.3% for ChatGPT.



Worth noting: Claude's high news appetite exists without any licensing deal. Anthropic has no confirmed publisher license, so Claude's news share reflects retrieval and product design choices, not contracts.

Industries: Licensed vs Trade Media Per Vertical

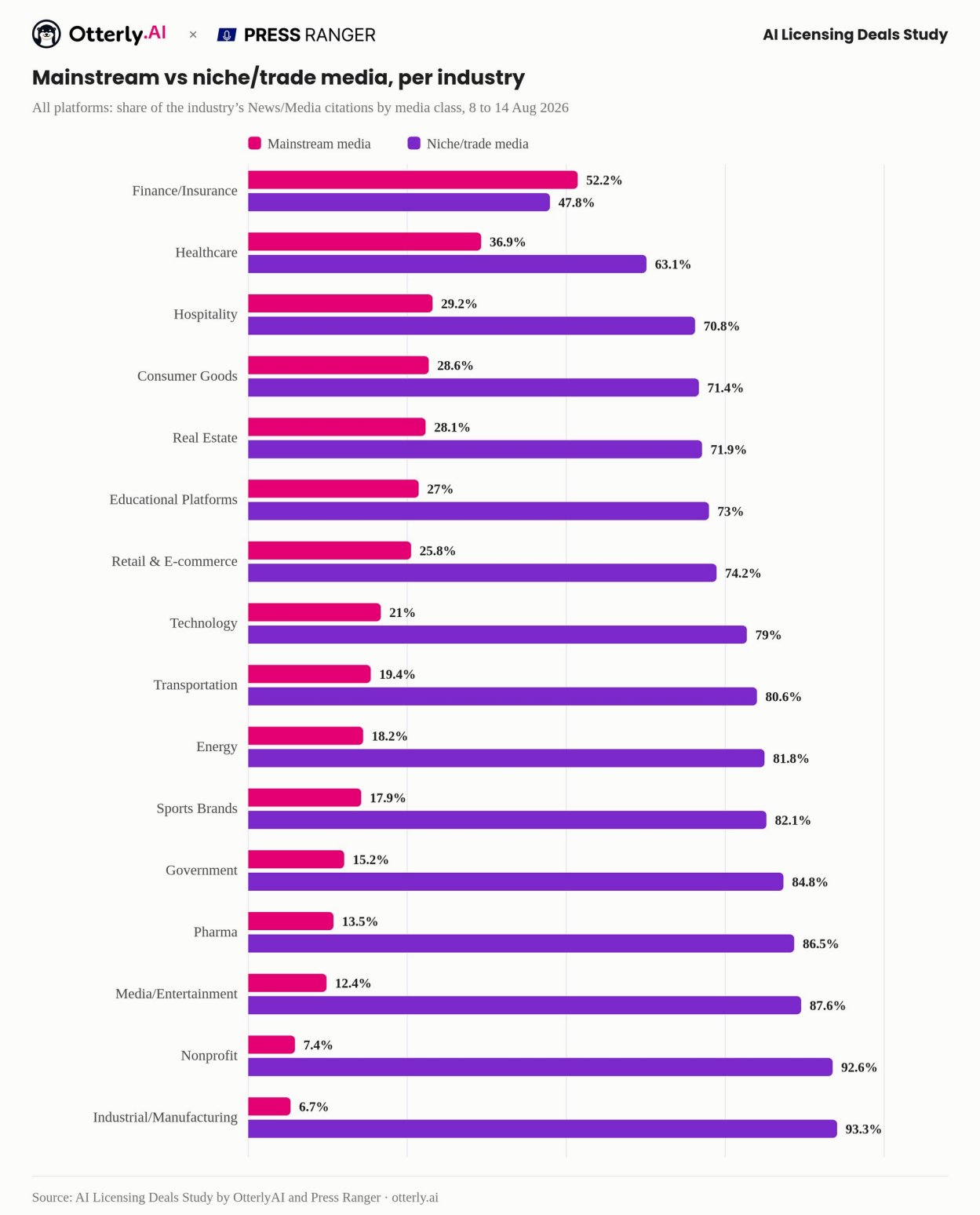
We joined a second dataset to the study: 16 US industry prompt sets tracked in OtterlyAI across the same 7 AI Search platforms (8 to 14 Aug 2026), cross-referenced against the same 91 licensing deals. The pattern from the main study repeats at industry level, with wide spread: licensing deals pay off in consumer verticals and barely register in regulated ones.



Trade media beats mainstream media in 15 of 16 industries

Finance/Insurance is the only industry where mainstream outlets take a majority of news citations (52.2%). Everywhere else, niche and trade media carry the industry's news presence in AI answers, up to 92.6% in

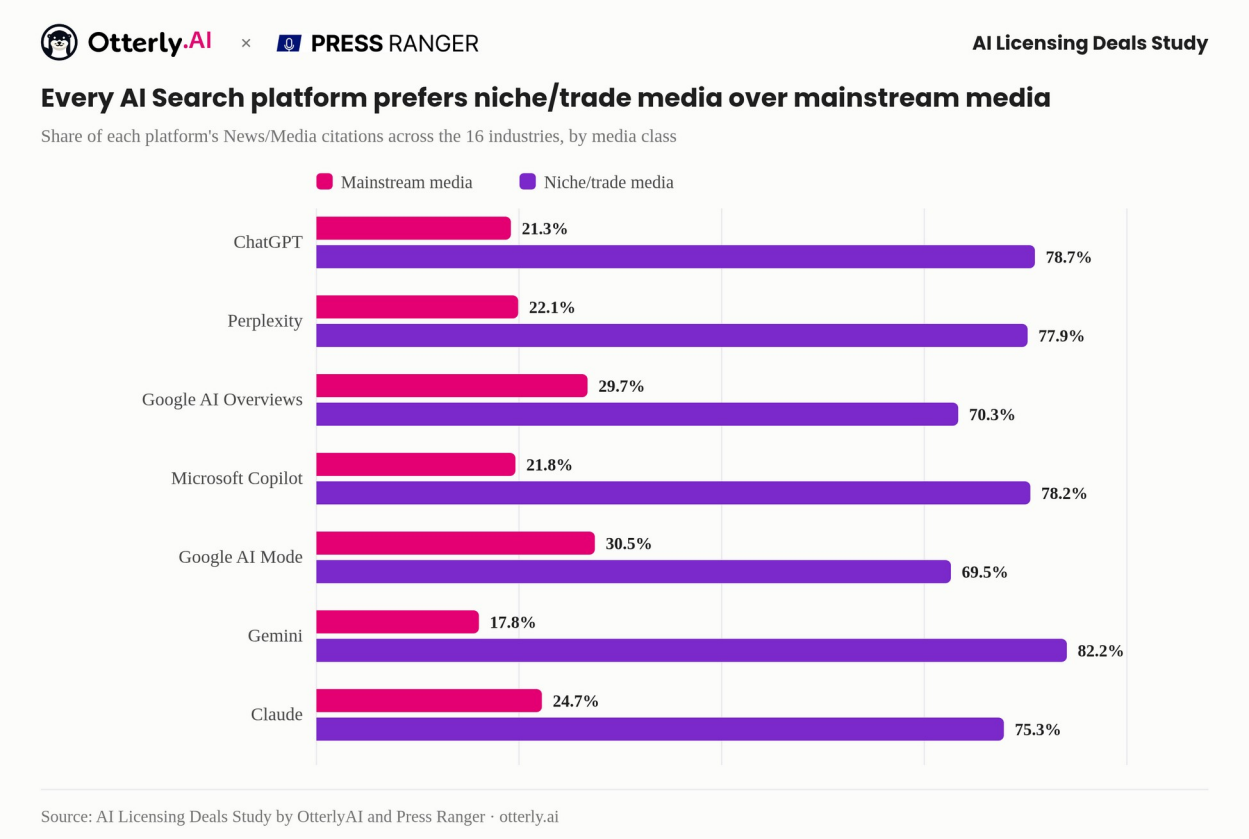
Nonprofit and 93.3% in Industrial/Manufacturing. Pooled across all 16 industries, niche and trade media collect **213% more AI citations than mainstream media** (75.8% vs 24.2% of news citations).



Splitting each media class by licensing status reveals where the deals actually sit. Within mainstream media, publishers with licensing deals capture **54.7%** of citations. Within niche and trade media, licensed publishers

capture only **17.2%**. Put simply: AI companies have licensed the mainstream layer, but the trade layer that carries most industry news remains almost entirely unlicensed, and it gets cited anyway.

Every one of the 7 AI Search platforms prefers niche and trade media over mainstream media, from 69.5% niche/trade share on Google AI Mode up to 82.2% on Gemini.



What This Means for PR Teams

For PR pros, this study answers the question behind the question: what news is AI actually reading, and can you influence it? Three practical moves follow from the data.

1. Map your earned media to platforms

Check which publishers earn citations for your prompts in your OtterlyAI Citations report, and whether they hold licensing deals. Coverage in licensed publishers tilts your brand's exposure toward ChatGPT, where those publishers earn a majority of their citations.

2. Pitch the formats AI cites

Best-of lists, buying guides, and product reviews drive 58.8% of licensed publishers' citations. A placement in a service-journalism page outworks a mention in a dated news article for AI visibility, on every platform.

3. Do not ignore unlicensed publishers

NerdWallet, Healthline, and Finanztip out-earn almost every licensed publisher. Strong vertical publishers spread your exposure across Perplexity and Google AI Overviews, balancing a ChatGPT-heavy mix.

You Do Not Need a Licensed Publisher to Get Cited

Licensing deals are signed between AI companies and publishers. PR and marketing teams don't get a vote in them, but they do choose where to pitch, and that is where this finding matters. The most-cited news sources in AI answers include completely unlicensed outlets: NerdWallet, Finanztip, Healthline, Handelsblatt, and Bankrate each collected more citations in June 2026 than every licensed publisher except Forbes and TechRadar.

The right pitch list depends on your client's niche. In consumer verticals where licensed lifestyle and service publishers dominate the citations, pitching the news publishers ChatGPT already rewards can be exactly the right move. In most industries, though, the bigger and more budget-friendly opportunity sits one level down: **niche and trade media are the biggest winners of AI Search**. They carry the majority of news citations in 15 of 16 industries we measured, and because brands spent years obsessing over mainstream placements only, the trade outlets AI Search actually reads remain underpriced attention.

What the winning outlets share, licensed or not, is content type: deep commercial evergreen coverage in a vertical, structured to answer questions directly. For earned media planning, that means pitching the outlets that own your vertical's buying guides and explainers, and treating licensed publishers as one lever among several: the one to pull when you specifically need ChatGPT-weighted exposure.

What This Means for Your GEO Strategy

Definition: AI licensing deals are agreements that let AI companies use publisher content for training, retrieval, or display, usually with attribution.

Why it matters: if your earned-media strategy targets licensed publishers, your brand's citation exposure tilts toward ChatGPT, where those publishers earn a majority of their citations. If you target strong unlicensed publishers in your vertical, your exposure spreads more evenly across platforms, led by Perplexity.

How to act on it:

- Identify which publishers earn citations for your prompts in your OtterlyAI Citations report, and check whether they hold licensing deals.
- Weight your PR and earned-media outreach by the platforms you need visibility on: licensed lifestyle and service publishers for ChatGPT, strong vertical and trade publishers for Perplexity and Google AI Overviews.
- On your own site, invest in the format the data rewards everywhere: evergreen, answer-first commercial content.

Final Conclusion

Licensing deals moved from experiment to industry standard in under three years, and 91 confirmed agreements now cover 314 publisher domains. But in June 2026 citation data, only OpenAI's deals correlate with a visible citation advantage: 46% more AI citations per cited page, 48% more on ChatGPT itself, and a citation mix that majority-tilts to ChatGPT.

For publishers, the negotiating table now has a number on it. For PR and marketing teams, the encouraging news is that the pitch list does not need one: the most-cited news domains in AI Search include unlicensed publishers that earned their position with content alone, and the niche and trade outlets that carry most industry news in AI answers remain wide open.

All figures are first-party OtterlyAI citation data (June 2026, 7 AI Search platforms) joined with Press Ranger's AI-Publisher Licensing Research (91 confirmed deals, public evidence through 28 July 2026). Industry findings are a one-week snapshot (8 to 14 Aug 2026). Findings describe association, not causation.

Got a GEO experiment idea? Let's collaborate

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👉 Want to measure your AI Visibility? Start with OtterlyAI and our GEO Guide.

👉 Learn how to connect your Claude or ChatGPT to OtterlyAI's MCP

Reach the journalists AI actually reads

Press Ranger is an AI-native PR platform that helps teams get visible in AI search. Press Ranger also built the deal research behind this study: the AI-Publisher Licensing Research, 91 confirmed agreements mapped to 314 publisher domains, every record backed by a public source. If the trade-media findings above changed your pitch list, Press Ranger is where you build the new one.

👉 Start running performance PR campaigns with Press Ranger.