# ChatGPT referrals nearly double in months but impact on total news traffic remains limited



ChatGPT, OpenAI's generative AI platform, has significantly increased its referral traffic to publishers' websites, with notable gains in the first half of 2025. According to data from Similarweb, the volume of referrals sent to news and media sites surged to approximately 243.8 million visits in April 2025, marking a striking 98% increase from just 123.2 million visits in January. This upward trend in traffic from ChatGPT, which now constitutes 83% of all external referrals—up from 64%—indicates a growing reliance on AI platforms for content discovery.

Several prominent news outlets have experienced remarkable boosts in their traffic shares derived from ChatGPT referrals. For instance, The BBC has seen an astonishing increase of 188.9%, translating into about 118,000 visits, while Fox News and The Independent have recorded gains of 166.3% and 157.7%, respectively. These figures highlight how AI-generated recommendations may be reshaping the digital landscape for news consumption.

Conversely, not all media platforms are faring equally well. For example, CNN's Spanish language site reported a dramatic decline of 55.3% in referral traffic, alongside a drop for Mumsnet and HuffPost as well. This volatility underscores the competitive nature of audience engagement in the current media ecosystem, where some platforms are witnessing diminishing returns even as others thrive.

Despite the apparent rise in traffic, industry executives caution that the significance of referrals from ChatGPT remains minimal when measured against total site traffic. A senior publisher noted that while year-over-year referrals from AI sources have surged by over 1000%, the overall impact remains negligible, especially when compared to traditional traffic sources like Google. In fact, as of January, ChatGPT referrals accounted for only 0.5% of the New York Post’s total visits, underscoring a gap that many consider unlikely to be bridged.

Further complicating the situation is the broader context within which these changes are occurring. With the advent of AI-powered tools, users' click-through habits on platforms such as Google are shifting due to the rise of AI Overviews. This feature compiles information directly on the search engine results page, potentially diminishing referrals and traffic directed to news websites.

The situation is made more complex by ongoing legal challenges facing OpenAI, with several lawsuits alleging copyright infringement due to the way AI scraping occurs. Concerns over how AI systems utilize copyrighted content have led to questions about the adequacy of current attribution and compensation practices for publishers. Industry insiders have expressed the need for a more equitable approach, especially as ChatGPT’s functionality evolves to include real-time search capabilities linked to credible sources, which was implemented following users' demands.

In stark contrast, Perplexity, another AI search engine, has seen a decline in its referring traffic to publishers. The platform’s referrals plummeted by about 35% between January and April 2025, highlighting the fickle nature of AI-driven traffic as publishers navigate their engagement strategies with emerging technologies.

As the landscape continues to shift with the influence of AI, publishers are grappling with the dual challenge of adapting to new traffic sources while also engaging sustainably with traditional ones. OpenAI has asserted its commitment to enhancing its search capabilities, claiming that its ChatGPT Search feature has become one of the fastest-growing tools within their ecosystem, with over a billion queries processed weekly. Nevertheless, the efficacy of AI-driven referrals remains under scrutiny as the publishing industry cautiously approaches this transformative period.

Increasingly, the need for clearer frameworks regarding content attribution and compensation becomes apparent as the coexistence of traditional search engines and AI-driven platforms shapes the future of content discovery. As the industry evolves, media organisations must reassess their strategies to ensure they can leverage the potential of AI while safeguarding their content and interests in an ever-changing digital realm.

### Reference Map

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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://digiday.com/media/chatgpt-referral-traffic-to-publishers-sites-has-nearly-doubled-this-year/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://digiday.com/media/chatgpt-referral-traffic-to-publishers-sites-has-nearly-doubled-this-year/> - This article reports that ChatGPT's referral traffic to publishers' sites has nearly doubled in 2025. In April, ChatGPT sent 243.8 million visits to 250 news and media websites, up 98% from January. The share of traffic to news and media sites increased from 64% to 83%. Notable increases were seen by The BBC (up 188.9%), Fox News (up 166.3%), and The Independent (up 157.7%). However, some sites experienced declines, such as CNN's Spanish language site (down 55.3%).
3. <https://www.searchenginejournal.com/chatgpt-referral-traffic-to-publishers-remains-minimal/540349/> - Despite significant growth in ChatGPT's referral traffic, the overall impact on publishers remains minimal. Data from Similarweb shows that referrals from ChatGPT to 14 leading news publishers grew from approximately 435,000 monthly visits in August to 3.5 million in January. However, this still accounts for less than 0.1% of these sites' total visits. The New York Post received 760,000 visits from ChatGPT in January, representing 0.5% of its 143.5 million monthly visits.
4. <https://www.adweek.com/media/perplexity-referring-traffic-to-publishers/> - Perplexity, an AI search engine, has been referring modest traffic to publishers. Data indicates that The New York Times, The Guardian, and Forbes have seen increases in referral traffic from Perplexity, despite previously blocking its bots. Forbes received 236,300 visits from Perplexity in August 2024, up from 10,800 in August 2023. The New York Times followed with 96,600 visits, an increase from 11,600 visits year-on-year. The Guardian saw 76,800 visits, a rise from 6,700 visits in August 2023.
5. <https://www.breitbart.com/tech/2025/03/04/report-ai-search-engines-send-96-less-traffic-to-publishers-than-google/> - A report by content licensing platform TollBit reveals that AI search engines like OpenAI and Perplexity send 96% less referral traffic to news sites and blogs compared to Google search. The study analyzed 160 websites across various categories and found that AI developers' scraping of websites has more than doubled in recent months, yet the referral traffic remains significantly lower than that from traditional search engines.
6. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rashishrivastava/2025/03/03/openai-perplexity-ai-search-traffic-report/> - Data shows that AI search engines, including OpenAI and Perplexity, are sending significantly less referral traffic to publishers compared to traditional search engines like Google. Despite claims that AI search would benefit publishers by directing more readers to their sites, the reality is starkly different, with AI search engines sending 96% less referral traffic to news sites and blogs than Google search.
7. <https://toolhunt.io/ai-platforms-drive-referral-traffic-to-publishers-despite-blocking-efforts/> - Referral traffic from AI platforms like ChatGPT and Perplexity is increasing, even as some publishers attempt to block these platforms' crawlers. Data from Similarweb and Chartbeat shows that major publishers, including The Atlantic, have seen significant increases in referral traffic from ChatGPT. The Atlantic's referrals from ChatGPT rose by more than 80% from December to January. However, some publishers that have blocked AI crawlers are still receiving referral traffic from these platforms, indicating that AI platforms may be circumventing publishers' blocking efforts.