

INVISIBLE OR INFLUENTIAL?

PR IN THE AI ERA:

How leading
travel and luxury
publications
are adapting
to AI

AS AI PLATFORMS
RESHAPE DISCOVERY,
WHICH PUBLICATIONS
ARE INFLUENCING
WHAT UHNW
TRAVELLERS SEE...
AND WHY

PRODUCED IN
ASSOCIATION WITH

**MAKE
LEMONADE**

spotlight
COMMUNICATIONS

spotlight

Connecting the world through storytelling.

Foreword

by Lucy Clifton
SPOTLIGHT CEO



“
*In many cases,
highly respected
publications are
being outranked
not because they
are less trusted,
but because
their journalism
is harder for
AI systems to
interpret.*
”

Something important has changed, and once you see it, you can't unsee it.

The old relationship between editorial authority, visibility and influence is starting to fracture. Some of the world's most respected luxury travel publications are becoming increasingly invisible to AI. The industry is no longer just deciding what gets published. AI systems are increasingly deciding which publications get surfaced in the first place. Influence is no longer solely shaped by readership and reputation.

It now depends on whether journalism can be found, interpreted and repeatedly surfaced by the platforms that guide discovery. In practical terms, the question is no longer which publications your audience reads. It is the publications AI reads on their behalf.

For years, influence in luxury travel media moved in relatively familiar ways. Certain publications shaped aspiration. Certain editors carried disproportionate authority. A feature in the right title could define a destination, a hotel or an entire travel conversation for years.

That ecosystem still exists. But something new now sits alongside it: AI platforms increasingly determine which publications are cited, prioritised and repeatedly seen in the first place. Last year, working with our digital partner, Make Lemonade, Spotlight published a report that explored how AI was beginning to reshape luxury travel discovery itself: how destinations, hotels and brands were being surfaced, filtered and recommended to increasingly affluent audiences.

This second white paper asks a more specific - and perhaps more consequential - question: which luxury travel publications are AI platforms actually surfacing, and why? We wanted to interrogate that shift in detail: to understand how editorial authority is being translated into AI visibility, which titles appear across AI platforms, how different systems behave, and why some publications repeatedly surface while others became increasingly invisible. What emerges is a far more uneven landscape than many in the industry realise.

Different platforms reward different forms of authority. Some empower established editorial brands. Others favour commercially structured content that is easier to parse and prioritise. In many cases, highly respected publications are being outranked not because they are less trusted, but because their journalism is harder for AI systems to interpret. For luxury travel brands, publications and the wider media landscape surrounding them, the implications are significant.

In this new environment, editorial quality alone is no longer enough. Authority now depends not only on what is published, but on whether it can be recognised and repeatedly surfaced by the systems increasingly sitting between publishers and audiences.

**Those who understand that shift
early will not simply remain visible.
They help define what visibility
looks like next.**



“AI still can’t quite replicate voice and in an ideal world human experience will continue to be prioritised over machine recommendations in travel.”

Claire Irvin
HEAD OF TRAVEL, THE TIMES



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What we *found*: A SUMMARY



*For editorial brands, the implication is stark.
Authority that cannot be extracted cannot be cited.*

1 The visibility shift

Across major AI platforms, premium editorial publications are increasingly competing with commercial blogs, specialist content sites and utility-led travel platforms for prominence in AI-generated luxury travel recommendations.

In many cases, those alternative sources are outperforming established editorial brands, not because they are more trusted, but because they are easier for AI systems to interpret and retrieve. The implications for media, publishing and luxury travel brands are significant.

AI is no longer simply reshaping discovery - it is redistributing editorial influence itself.

AI is already shaping which destinations, hotels and experiences enter the consideration set in the first place. But this report is less concerned with the traveller journey itself than with the media ecosystem now shaping that visibility.

AI platforms aren't neutral. They are actively selecting which publications, formats and sources of authority are surfaced first, and those choices are beginning to redistribute influence across luxury travel media.

2 Why commercial content is winning

The data makes for uncomfortable reading. Across major AI platforms, commercial blogs, specialist content sites and utility-led travel platforms are consistently outperforming premium editorial publications in luxury travel queries.

This is not necessarily because they are more trusted. In many cases, it is because they are easier for AI systems to interpret, retrieve and repeatedly surface.

*AI is no longer simply
reshaping discovery -
it is redistributing editorial
influence itself.*

3 Different AI platforms reward different authority

Not all AI platforms behave in the same way. ChatGPT shows the strongest bias towards established editorial brands, while others, particularly Perplexity, lean heavily towards commercially structured and utility-led content. Gemini tends to reward clarity, readability and highly organised information over prestige alone. Claude has the broadest citation range of all, regularly surfacing OTAs, aggregator and reference sources alongside traditional editorial media.

The result is a fragmented visibility landscape in which different forms of journalism are rewarded by different systems and where format, structure and topical authority can increasingly outperform scale or heritage alone.

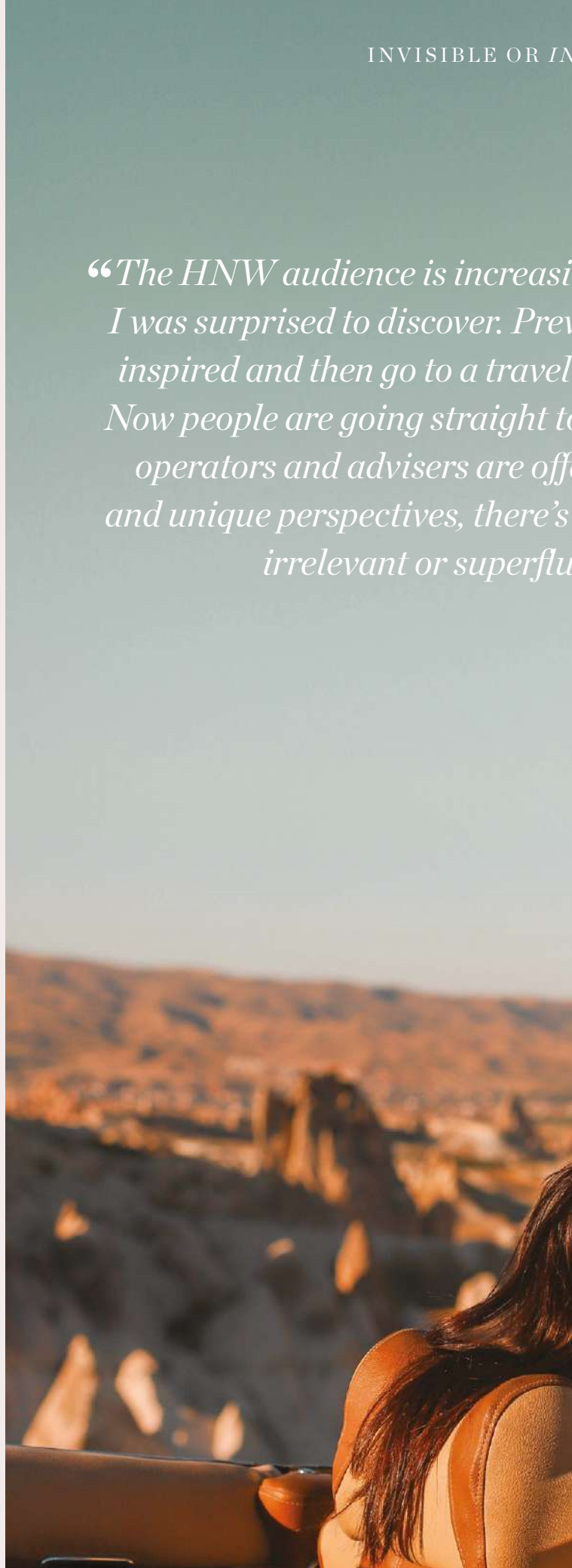
4 What AI still struggles to read

What AI ignores is proving just as important as what it rewards. Sponsored content, duplicated articles, inaccessible pages and poorly maintained archives are frequently discounted or missed altogether. Even highly respected journalism struggles to surface consistently if it is difficult for AI systems to parse, attribute or contextualise.

5 Why archive suddenly matters

Archive has become newly consequential. Outdated, inconsistent or poorly maintained content does not simply sit quietly in the background; it can actively weaken authority signals and reduce the likelihood of current journalism being surfaced. In this environment, archive is no longer a passive asset, it is an active part of visibility itself.

“The HNW audience is increasing. I was surprised to discover. Previously inspired and then go to a travel. Now people are going straight to operators and advisers are offering and unique perspectives, there’s irrelevant or superfluous.”



ngly using AI to plan trips, which
viously they'd go to editorial, get
adviser to book the experience.
o AI to create itineraries. Unless
ering genuine personalisation
a real danger of some becoming
ous to that process.”

Paul Croughton

EDITOR IN CHIEF, ELITE TRAVELER



6 Depth is beating scale

The research also challenges long-held assumptions about media value. Specialist publications with deep topical authority are often outperforming much larger generalist titles in AI citation environments.

Increasingly, depth, consistency and clarity are carrying more weight than scale alone.

7 Print's counterintuitive return

Alongside this, a more counterintuitive shift is emerging. Print is regaining a different kind of relevance, not as a discovery tool, but as a complementary experience.

AI is increasingly used to find; print is still used to feel.

The two serve different purposes within the luxury travel ecosystem, and judging them by the same metrics is an increasingly flawed way of understanding influence.

8 Strategic invisibility

Not all invisibility is a problem to solve. For some, loyalty, membership and closed-distribution publications as well as limited AI visibility is a deliberate strategic choice, one that protects exclusivity, controlled access and audience ownership.

INTRODUCTION

THE *RE*DIS TR OF INFLUENCE

The question we kept returning to was a simple one: who is actually shaping what Ultra High Net Worth (UHNW) travellers are being told, and why?



Maria Sze
BRAND STRATEGIST
MAKE LEMONADE



Sara Lemos
DIGITAL STRATEGIST
MAKE LEMONADE

IBU T I O N

The more we looked at AI-led travel discovery, the clearer one thing became: not all publications were being surfaced equally. Some titles appeared repeatedly across platforms and prompts. Others, including highly respected editorial brands, barely surfaced at all.

At the same time, the industry was still largely measuring influence using metrics built for a different era: reach, traffic and impressions. Useful indicators, but increasingly incomplete ones.

None of them properly explained which publications AI platforms were actually drawing on when shaping luxury travel recommendations, or why. That gap became the starting point for this research.

Rather than being neutral, AI platforms are actively selecting, interpreting and prioritising content; drawing disproportionately from certain publications, formats and signals of authority. In doing so, they are redistributing the visibility of luxury travel media.

Existing AI citation tools offered part of the picture, but only at a broad level. They didn't reflect the nuances of ultra-luxury, where relevance behaves differently: shaped not simply by scale, but by tone, specificity, editorial

authority, scarcity and an understanding of audiences that do not behave like the mainstream.

We couldn't find a tool that helped us analyse the gap properly. So, we developed our own analytical framework: **SIGNAL NOIR™**.

Designed to analyse how editorial influence is being distributed across AI platforms, SIGNAL NOIR™ examines which publications repeatedly surface, which formats are favoured, and how different systems interpret authority. The aim was not simply to track visibility, but to understand the mechanics behind it.

Why do some publications repeatedly appear while others disappear? Why do certain formats consistently surface across platforms? And how are AI systems reshaping the hierarchy of editorial influence itself?

For luxury travel brands, publishers and the wider media ecosystem surrounding them, these are no longer marginal questions; they are increasingly strategic ones.

METHODOLOGY

How we analysed **AI VISIBILITY**

We analysed 30 leading luxury travel and lifestyle publications, focusing specifically on how their content surfaces across major AI platforms rather than through traditional measures such as traffic, reach or search rankings.



The study combined quantitative analysis using our proprietary framework, SIGNAL NOIR™, with qualitative interviews conducted with senior editors across leading luxury travel and lifestyle titles.

Quantitative analysis

Using SIGNAL NOIR™, we analysed how leading luxury travel and lifestyle publications surfaced across major AI platforms in response to comparable luxury travel queries.

The framework allowed us to compare which publications surfaced most consistently, how different platforms prioritised content and which editorial formats appeared most frequently across recommendation-led responses.

Testing was conducted using luxury travel prompts designed to reflect real-world recommendation behaviour across destinations, hotels and experiences. For example, searches around private villas, emerging destinations, discreet luxury, wellness retreats and high-end hotel recommendations.

This allowed us to assess not only whether a publication appeared, but how consistently it surfaced, how prominently it was cited, and how different platforms behaved across comparable prompts.

Editorial interviews

Alongside the quantitative analysis, our interviews with senior editors across leading luxury travel and lifestyle publications provided context behind the numbers: how editorial teams are thinking about AI, where they see opportunity or risk, and the operational realities shaping their ability to respond.

Importantly, the interviews revealed that many of the structural gaps identified in the research are not caused by lack of awareness, but by wider cultural, commercial and organisational pressures within publishing itself.

What we examined

Bringing these two perspectives together allowed us to analyse three core questions:

- **which publications repeatedly surface across AI platforms**
- **when and how they enter the recommendation process**
- **and why certain sources are prioritised over others**

The goal was not simply to measure visibility, but to understand how editorial influence is being redistributed within AI-driven discovery.

Important context

All findings are based on audit data gathered across the featured AI platforms in April 2026. As these systems continue to evolve, outputs will naturally shift over time. The study was conducted independently and is not affiliated with or sponsored by any of the platforms referenced.

Points to note

- *AI citation is influenced by formatting, accessibility and clarity as much as editorial quality.*
- *Absence from AI results should be understood as a structural outcome, not an editorial judgement.*
- *Strong AI visibility does not replace traditional forms of influence, but it is increasingly shaping the consideration set alongside them.*





INVISIBLE OR *INFLUENTIAL* 2026

SECTION ONE

THE
NEW VISIBILITY
LANDSCAPE

1.

The media
landscape
*is being
rewritten
by AI.*

For years, luxury travel discovery followed relatively familiar patterns.

Editorial brands shaped aspiration. Search engines shaped exploration. Travel advisers shaped reassurance and conversion. The influence ecosystem was broad, layered and relatively open-ended.

AI is compressing that process.

Increasingly, travellers are no longer moving through dozens of articles, searches and recommendations before narrowing their choices. AI platforms are pre-filtering options far earlier in the journey, often before a user ever clicks through to a publication or brand at all.

That shift matters because AI systems do not surface all publications equally.

Some titles repeatedly appear across recommendation-led queries. Others barely surface at all. Increasingly, AI is not simply helping travellers navigate luxury travel discovery. It is influencing which editorial sources enter the process in the first place.

The result is a more compressed and uneven visibility landscape, where fewer publications carry disproportionately greater influence.

Editorial authority still matters enormously. So do trusted writers, long-form journalism, travel advisers and personal recommendation. But AI platforms are now acting as intermediaries between audiences and the publications they discover.

And those intermediaries behave very differently.

Some systems favour established editorial brands. Others reward commercially structured content, utility-led recommendations or highly extractable formats. In practice, different forms of journalism are becoming more or less visible depending on the platform audiences happen to be using.

The result is not the disappearance of editorial influence, but its redistribution.

The return of print

At the same time, something more unexpected is happening. As AI increasingly mediates discovery digitally, editors are simultaneously seeing renewed appetite for physical magazines, particularly among younger affluent audiences.

Not because print is replacing digital discovery, but because it serves a fundamentally different role.

AI is increasingly transactional: used to answer questions, narrow options and accelerate decisions. Print remains experiential. Slower. More immersive. More emotional.

**One helps travellers find.
The other helps them feel.**

Several editors described print less as a discovery tool and more as a form of immersive trust-building: a slower, more intentional experience that sits in contrast to the speed and utility of AI-led recommendation.

Rather than replacing one another, the two are beginning to operate in parallel, serving different moments within luxury travel discovery. That distinction matters because many traditional media metrics still treat all visibility as equivalent. Increasingly, it isn't.

“We’re seeing a desire to return to print amongst our readers. That could be a reaction against AI or it could just be the world is cyclical. But for high-luxury consumers, there’s something deeply attractive about sitting with a thick, heavy magazine, feeling the quality of the paper, reading writers you know, and saying to yourself: I’m putting my phone down for 30 minutes and immersing myself in this world.”

Paul Croughton

EDITOR IN CHIEF, ELITE TRAVELER

2. Which sources *AI trusts*

Across all four AI platforms analysed, one pattern emerged consistently: AI does not prioritise content in the same way human readers do.

Rather than editorial prestige alone determining visibility, clear formatting, extractable information and highly structured recommendation content increasingly shape which sources AI platforms choose to surface.

PLATFORM	Primary Citation Behaviour	Editorial Visibility
ChatGPT	Strongest alignment with traditional editorial authority	Highest editorial citation share (49%)
Perplexity	Strong preference for commercially structured, intent-led content	Editorial largely deprioritised
Claude	Broadest and most fragmented citation ecosystem	Mix of editorial, OTAs, aggregators and reference sources
Gemini	Utility and readability-led retrieval behaviour	Rewards clarity and structure over prestige alone

ChatGPT remains the most favourable environment for established editorial brands. Nearly half of all its luxury travel citations were attributed to traditional editorial publishers, suggesting stronger weighting towards recognised journalistic authority and trusted media entities.

The more significant finding, however, sits beneath that platform-level nuance.

Across all four AI systems combined, the most frequently surfaced sources for luxury travel discovery were not premium editorial publications, but commercial blogs and specialist content sites.

Collectively, these generated 262 citations, compared to editorial's 156. This is not a reflection of editorial quality. It is a consequence of the kinds of content AI platforms can most easily process, extract and reuse.

Perplexity demonstrates this most aggressively. Its outputs overwhelmingly favour commercially structured, highly explicit recommendation content, with 78% of citations attributed to commercial blogs and specialist sites rather than traditional editorial publishers.

Claude behaves differently again. It has the broadest citation range of any platform analysed, regularly surfacing OTAs, Wikipedia, travel aggregators and niche reference sources alongside editorial media. Authority here appears far more decentralised, with retrieval breadth often prioritised over traditional prestige signals.

Gemini sits somewhere between ChatGPT's editorial weighting and Perplexity's commercial lean, but with a more utility-driven retrieval model. It appears to reward

content that is explicitly organised, highly readable and functionally useful, regardless of whether that content originates from a publisher, commercial blog or brand-owned environment.

For premium editorial publishers, this creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

The challenge

is that authority alone is no longer sufficient.

The opportunity

is that many competing sources are not outperforming because they are more trusted, but because they are easier for AI systems to understand.

“The UHNW traveller using AI to research a trip is not necessarily being served the best journalism. They are being served the content that happens to work best for the platform they are using.”

Sara Lemos

DIGITAL STRATEGIST, MAKE LEMONADE

That represents a growing trust challenge for AI platforms. But it also represents a substantial opportunity for publishers that understand how AI visibility is actually being shaped.

Frequently surfaced sources included:

The Luxury Travel Expert | The Luxury Editor | Context Travel | Ski In Luxury | GetYourGuide

3. What AI is (*and isn't*) *reading*

*AI platforms are not ignoring poor journalism.
In many cases, they are overlooking excellent journalism.*

A reader may value voice, originality, authority or emotional resonance. AI platforms are looking for something more functional: information they can extract, organise, attribute and reuse within a recommendation. That distinction matters more now than ever for publishers.

*“We optimise our content
to be one of the AI sources, and
format our articles to be as
visible as possible.”*

Claire Irvin
HEAD OF TRAVEL,
THE TIMES

What AI struggles to read

Some forms of content are becoming structurally invisible to AI platforms regardless of editorial quality. Broken or inaccessible pages cannot be crawled or cited. JavaScript-rendered sites, where content loads dynamically rather than appearing immediately on the page, can create similar problems, particularly when automated crawlers struggle to access or interpret the journalism consistently. Several publications included in this research rely heavily on rendering methods that block automated crawlers entirely, meaning their AI visibility is often residual, drawn from historical training data rather than current output.

Syndicated and duplicated content presents a different issue. Where the same article appears across multiple domains, AI systems tend to consolidate citation around the original source. Syndicated placements may still generate audience reach, but they rarely build independent AI visibility.

Thin category pages and SEO-led destination hubs also perform poorly. While these pages may attract traffic, they often contain too little extractable editorial substance for AI systems to treat them as authoritative recommendation sources.



“The media are too fixated on fighting AI rather than working with it. People are thinking about it from the voice perspective, but they’re not thinking about it from the readability perspective, the visibility applications.”

Claire Irvin
HEAD OF TRAVEL, THE TIMES

Why branded hubs lose credit

AI does not recognise editorial sections in the same way human readers do. It recognises publishers and structural consistency.

When content sits within a clear editorial category, for example, a dedicated travel section, AI platforms can more confidently understand what that content represents over time.

Branded hubs, like Times Luxx, for instance, behave differently. They are editorial constructs rather than standalone publishing entities. In many cases, AI platforms do not meaningfully distinguish the hub itself from the main publisher behind it.

The implication is important: in AI terms, the publication accrues the authority, not necessarily the editorial sub-brand.

Paywalls are not the barrier many assume

One of the more surprising findings from the research is that paywalls do not necessarily prevent AI visibility.

What matters is not simply whether content is paid-for, but how AI platforms are able to access it. Some publishers have licensing agreements. Some content was accessible during model training periods. Other sites sit behind advertising or registration layers that advanced crawlers can still partially navigate.

The result is an uneven landscape in which paywalled journalism can still surface prominently, although often through very different mechanisms, with varying levels of consistency and control.

The advantage of licensing agreements

Some of the strongest-performing publishers in the research, including Condé Nast, Hearst and News Corp, benefit from direct licensing agreements with OpenAI.

That matters because their visibility is no longer dependent solely on crawlability, formatting or retrieval performance. Their content remains part of the system even if paywalls shift, crawler access changes or publishing structures evolve.

In practice, this creates a more stable form of AI visibility and potentially a longer-term structural advantage over publishers operating without formal licensing relationships.

“Think about it like a librarian who has exactly three seconds to find an answer for a very demanding patron. If you hand them a dense 400-page novel, they aren’t going to read the book to find the answer. They are going to check the index, the table of contents and the glossary. AI is that hyper-fast, highly literal librarian. It needs the index.”

Maria Sze
BRAND STRATEGIST, MAKE LEMONADE

“We’ve had this period where roundups and listicles were prioritised because we believed nobody had the attention span to read anything more than a paragraph. Now we’re moving back towards long-form, and others are too.”

Rosie Paterson

DIGITAL CONTENT DIRECTOR AND TRAVEL EDITOR, COUNTRY LIFE

Why opinion alone often disappears

One of the more surprising findings from the research is that highly subjective writing often performs poorly in AI citation environments. AI systems aren’t reading for taste, voice or literary quality. They are looking for claims they can attribute, contextualise and compare.

For example, a sentence:

“The spa at Amanjiwo is unlike anything else in Southeast Asia, an experience that stays with you long after you leave.”

This may feel evocative to a human reader, but it offers very little for an AI platform to reliably extract or reuse.

Compare that with:

“The spa at Amanjiwo remains, for me, the most contemplative in Southeast Asia: 14 treatment rooms set into the hillside, each oriented toward Borobudur, with a thermal journey that takes three hours at minimum pace.”

For AI, the second version provides identifiable detail: a location, a treatment-room count, a physical orientation and a measurable experience benchmark. The opinion remains intact. The difference is that the journalism has become structurally citable.

This becomes particularly important in long-form travel writing, where authority is often conveyed implicitly through tone, observation and personal experience rather than through explicit factual framing.

The goal is not to remove opinion or flatten editorial voice. Nor is it to replace long-form journalism with listicles and SEO copy.

The opportunity is to anchor opinion to verifiable detail at regular intervals, creating a rhythm of assertion and evidence that is both editorially distinctive and readable by AI systems.

What this means for editorial

The implication is not that publishers need to write for algorithms instead of readers. If anything, the opposite may be true. Distinctive reporting, expertise and original voice are becoming more valuable as AI-generated content proliferates.

Journalism also needs to be readable by machines: clearly organised, factually anchored and technically accessible enough for AI platforms to understand what is being said, who is saying it, and why it matters

4.

The
publications
AI keeps
surfacing



Some publications surfaced repeatedly across almost every major AI platform we analysed. Others, including several highly respected editorial brands, appeared only rarely, or not at all.

The differences were not always explained by editorial quality or audience prestige. In many cases, they reflected deeper structural advantages: licensing relationships, accessible publishing systems, highly consistent editorial formatting and content architectures AI platforms could easily interpret over time. The result is a new and uneven hierarchy of influence across luxury travel media.

The top performers in luxury travel

Why certain titles surface repeatedly

The strongest-performing publications in the research combined editorial authority with structural clarity.

Publications with clearly organised travel sections, consistent publishing formats and technically accessible archives generally surfaced more reliably than titles with fragmented structures, inconsistent categorisation or inaccessible page architectures.

Some globally recognised editorial brands performed inconsistently across AI platforms, while smaller specialist titles surfaced repeatedly because their content was easier for AI systems to interpret, contextualise and reuse.

CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER: *Editorial authority and structural excellence*



Ranked #1 overall in the study, Condé Nast Traveller emerged as the strongest luxury travel performer across the platforms analysed, surfacing consistently across all four major AI systems. Its position reflects more than editorial reputation alone. Condé Nast Traveller combines strong domain

authority with highly structured editorial architecture, clear topical consistency and significant historical visibility across travel search and recommendation environments.

It also benefits from a direct licensing relationship with OpenAI, a structural advantage that may become increasingly important as AI platforms move towards more permissioned and commercially licensed content ecosystems.

The result is a publication that is not only highly visible today, but structurally well-positioned for long-term AI prominence.

FORBES: *Breadth and visibility*



Ranked #2 overall despite operating without a formal licensing agreement. Its visibility appears to be driven less by concentrated luxury travel authority and more by exceptional overall domain strength and broad cross-category relevance. Forbes content surfaces across business, lifestyle,

wealth and travel-related prompts, giving it unusually wide AI visibility.

That distinction matters strategically. High AI visibility does not automatically translate into high-value luxury travel influence within every context.

ROBB REPORT: *Where luxury authority meets AI readability*



Ranked #3 overall, Robb Report performed strongly across AI citation environments, particularly for high-end hotel, aviation and luxury lifestyle queries. Its advantage appears partly structural. Long-form reviews, highly consistent formatting and clearly framed recommendation-led editorial create content

that AI systems can interpret relatively easily while still retaining a distinctive editorial voice.

Notably, this visibility persists despite a comparatively closed publishing model, suggesting that restricted access does not necessarily eliminate AI influence altogether.

THE FINANCIAL TIMES: *Trusted authority beyond travel*



Ranked #4 overall, the Financial Times performed particularly strongly across high-value travel and wealth-adjacent queries. Its visibility appears to stem less from volume and more from authority concentration: a trusted subscription environment, strong domain credibility

and highly contextual reporting around luxury, wealth and culture.

Unlike more overtly travel-led publications, the FT benefits from being interpreted by AI systems as a broader authority source, one capable of shaping affluent consumer behaviour beyond travel alone.

THE TELEGRAPH: *Established visibility*



Ranked #5 overall, The Telegraph continues to perform strongly partly because its content remained highly accessible during key AI training periods. However, unlike some competitors, it does not currently benefit from a formal licensing

agreement. That means future visibility may depend more heavily on how AI platform relationships evolve, particularly as systems move towards more licensed and permissioned content ecosystems.

The interesting challengers

ELITE TRAVELER:

Positioned to Rise

Elite Traveler adopted a more structured editorial format relatively recently, after many major AI training windows had already closed. Despite that, the publication is already performing strongly. As future retraining cycles occur, publications that have improved clarity, structure and recommendation formatting may become significantly more visible than current citation levels suggest.

This highlights an important dynamic within AI visibility: editorial change and AI recognition rarely happen simultaneously. Publishing evolution often precedes measurable visibility shifts by months or years.

OUTTHERE:

The Strength of Experiential Reviews

OutThere's citation pattern differs noticeably from many of the broader lifestyle titles analysed. Its detailed, highly experiential hotel reviews, written in a strong first-person editorial voice, performed particularly well for specific property and destination queries.

This suggests that AI platforms may reward deeply focused, information-rich editorial formats more consistently than broader luxury lifestyle coverage, particularly when tied to identifiable locations, properties and experiences.

“I’ve moved Elite Traveler much more toward that expert, first-person opinion. Because our readers, who have access to everything, demand that. They want to know that someone credible has said: ‘I did this, and this was what it was like.’ Experience and expertise still count.”

Paul Croughton

EDITOR IN CHIEF, ELITE TRAVELER

“Trust will become extremely important in the age of AI. There is a rising tide of distrust in the way information is gathered and delivered.”

Uwern Jong

EXPERIENTIALIST@-IN-CHIEF, OUTTHERE

The visibility gap

At the other end of the spectrum, several publications generated little or no measurable AI visibility despite strong editorial reputations and credible audience authority. This should not automatically be interpreted as editorial weakness.

In many cases, invisibility is structural rather than reputational: inaccessible publishing systems, fragmented site architecture, limited crawlability or highly closed environments can all reduce the likelihood of AI citation regardless of journalism quality.

The implication is important. AI absence and editorial irrelevance are not the same thing.

Why trade titles behave differently

Travel trade publications operate within a fundamentally different influence model from consumer-facing luxury travel media.

Titles such as TTC Luxury and Aspire Travel Club are designed primarily to influence advisers, buyers and industry professionals rather than appear within consumer recommendation journeys. As a result, their content naturally sits outside many of the prompts and retrieval patterns prioritised by AI systems.

Their influence remains significant, but it operates indirectly, through the adviser networks shaping high-value travel decisions behind the scenes.

When visibility is not the goal

Inflight magazines and loyalty publications operate according to a fundamentally different visibility model from open consumer media. Their value often lies not in discoverability, but in controlled distribution: reaching highly qualified audiences within premium environments such as lounges, cabins, membership ecosystems and curated CRM channels. In these contexts, limited AI visibility may be entirely intentional. Rather than maximising open

discovery, these publications are designed to deepen brand affinity, reinforce loyalty and create moments of focused engagement among audiences already inside the ecosystem.

For some luxury publications, unrestricted visibility may actively undermine value. Scarcity, controlled access and audience precision remain central to how certain brands monetise authority. In these cases, limiting crawlability or placing content behind registration walls is not necessarily a weakness, but part of the commercial strategy itself. This reframes lower visibility not necessarily as a structural weakness, but in some cases as a deliberate strategic choice.

However, the distinction becomes more nuanced across digital environments. While inflight and loyalty publications may retain controlled distribution advantages in print, membership or owned-channel contexts, their online editorial ecosystems still participate in the wider competition for search authority, visibility and AI retrieval.

“One thing missing from the industry conversation is the importance of balancing the AI and the human. People are still actively seeking out trusted content through owned channels. How to protect the reader experience, and ensure that content has value beyond AI visibility, is part of the conversation that isn’t being had enough.”

Adam White

CONTENT DIRECTOR FOR CATHAY PACIFIC,
CEDAR HONG KONG

5.

The *visibility* killers

Archive decay

One of the clearest patterns in the research was the extent to which unmanaged archives are quietly undermining AI visibility. Outdated content is no longer just a quality issue. In AI-mediated discovery environments, it becomes a structural liability.

AI systems prioritise recency when validating recommendations and factual authority. Older articles containing outdated hotels, pricing, rankings or destination information become less likely to surface, even when published by highly authoritative brands.

More significantly, archives are not neutral. Conflicting narratives, duplicated articles and outdated recommendations create inconsistency across a publication's ecosystem, weakening the trust signals AI systems rely on when deciding what to retrieve and cite.

Large archives without active maintenance strategies can also create technical drag: slowing crawl efficiency, diluting topical clarity and making it harder for AI systems to identify which content remains authoritative.

The implication is increasingly clear: archive is no longer passive infrastructure. It is an active visibility signal. The opportunity, however, is equally significant.

Well-maintained archives are one of the few areas where established editorial publishers retain a major structural advantage over newer competitors. Titles with years of trusted content can compound authority over time, but only if that content remains current, connected and technically accessible.

“We are actually archiving a lot of our legacy content. Content that is no longer relevant actually affects some of our AI capabilities because it is pulling outdated content, such as hotels that no longer exist or tips that are no longer useful.”

Uwern Jong

EXPERIENTIALIST@IN-CHIEF, OUTTHERE

Why specialist titles are outperforming larger publishers

However, scale alone no longer guarantees visibility. Specialist titles with strong topical authority are often outperforming significantly larger publications across AI citation environments.

OutThere and Spear’s are particularly strong examples. Despite operating at a fraction of the scale of major lifestyle publishers, both perform disproportionately well within their specialist categories.

That authority comes from depth rather than breadth. AI systems appear to reward publications that consistently publish expert-led content around highly defined subject areas over time. The result is that deeply specialised titles can develop stronger authority signals within specific niches than far larger generalist competitors. This represents a significant shift in how media value is distributed.

“This is a structural reversal of how media value has historically been calculated. Volume-based metrics systematically undervalue specialist titles in an AI-first discovery environment.”

Sara Lemos
DIGITAL STRATEGIST
MAKE LEMONADE,

New content carries more authority

Publishing frequency matters.

AI systems increasingly interpret regular publishing as a signal of ongoing relevance and topical authority. In recommendation-led environments, recent articles help reinforce whether a destination, property or editorial perspective still holds true.

This creates a structural challenge for titles built primarily around monthly or quarterly publishing cycles, particularly when little supporting content exists between issues.

Older authoritative journalism can still establish trust, but without more recent reinforcement, that authority can weaken over time within AI outputs.

By contrast, publications consistently producing aligned, up-to-date coverage are often cited more reliably, not necessarily because every article is stronger, but because AI systems can validate the narrative more confidently across multiple recent signals.

For editorial teams, this changes the role of publishing itself. Content is no longer simply created and archived. Increasingly, it must be actively reinforced over time.

6. What editors are *seeing*

The interviews revealed an industry in transition: rethinking visibility, authority and audience behaviour in real time.

“There is still a push from the people that run these companies to hub content. It destroys individual titles, brand identity. Everything becomes this homogenous pot of nothingness that all sounds incredibly similar. AI can now do all of that. Give you the generic global overview. And if the publishing industry can tell individual, local stories, I think they’ll reclaim quite a lot of power back.”

Rosie Paterson
DIGITAL CONTENT DIRECTOR AND
TRAVEL EDITOR, COUNTRY LIFE

The industry is not dividing along traditional lines

One of the clearest findings from the interviews was that AI readiness is not dividing neatly along expected industry lines. The assumption might be that larger, better-resourced publishers are structurally better positioned for AI-led discovery, while smaller independent titles are more vulnerable, but the interviews don’t support that conclusion.

Some legacy publishers are adapting quickly and strategically. Others remain structurally fragmented despite significant scale and resources. Meanwhile, several smaller specialist titles are proving unusually agile: rebuilding publishing structures, reassessing archives and rethinking editorial formats faster than some of their larger competitors.

What emerged repeatedly was that mindset matters more than size.

“The dividing line is not scale or resource. It is mindset, specifically, whether an editor has internalised AI as an optimisation problem to be solved or an existential threat to be mourned. Mindset, not budget, is the primary predictor of citation readiness in this cohort.”

Maria Sze
BRAND STRATEGIST,
MAKE LEMONADE

“It’s trust that’s on the line. If you try to play the algorithm game, you could lose that trust and ultimately your values, and those goalposts are changing all the time. Keep to your authority, your values and your quality, you lose that, you lose everything.”

Lucy Cleland

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

Trust is becoming more valuable, and more fragile

Trust was the one theme every editor returned to repeatedly. But the interviews also revealed that “trust” no longer operates as a single idea. Different forms of trust now influence visibility in different ways:

- Historical trust built through archive authority
- Relational trust built through editorial access and expertise
- Community trust built through newsletters, memberships and direct audience relationships

Each behaves differently within AI-mediated environments. Historical authority may already be embedded into AI training data. Community trust often sits outside AI visibility altogether. Relational trust, the credibility attached to expert voices, access and lived experience, may ultimately become the hardest form of authority for AI systems to replicate convincingly.

“Trust is the absolute thing we have to protect. It’s our greatest brand asset. It’s the easiest to lose. It’s the hardest to earn. Once you’ve lost it, you can’t get it back.”

Claire Irvin
HEAD OF TRAVEL,
THE TIMES

Archive management is emerging as a major structural weakness

Across the interviews, archive management emerged as one of the most widespread, and least resolved, structural problems inside publishing organisations.

Many editors acknowledged that legacy content is outdated, inconsistent or actively working against current visibility performance. Yet relatively few titles have active systems in place to address it comprehensively.

The challenge is not simply editorial maintenance. It is organisational. Archive management sits awkwardly across editorial, product, SEO and commercial teams, meaning responsibility is often fragmented or unclear.

“Archive management is where awareness and action most consistently fall apart. It doesn’t show up clearly in the data, because the data only reflects what’s being cited now, not the weight of everything sitting behind it. The interviews surface what the numbers miss: legacy content isn’t neutral, it’s holding performance back.”

Sara Lemos
DIGITAL STRATEGIST.
MAKE LEMONADE

“We’re not the publication the traveller reads on the plane. We’re the publication that shapes what the person advising that traveller recommends. That’s a different kind of influence and a more consequential one.”

April Hutchinson

HEAD OF LUXURY, TTG MEDIA

Publishing is stuck between the collapse of SEO and the rise of AI

Perhaps the strongest shared sentiment across the interviews was uncertainty. For more than a decade, SEO shaped how many publishers commissioned, structured and distributed content. That system is now weakening rapidly, yet its replacement has not fully arrived.

Newsletters are growing in importance. Social reach is becoming less reliable. AI visibility remains inconsistent and difficult to predict. As a result, many editorial teams feel caught between systems: aware that old models are deteriorating, but without complete confidence in what replaces them next.

“The titles getting their structure right for AI now aren’t doing it from a position of strength; they’re doing it because they have to. That creates a real, but short-lived, opportunity. Smaller players can overtake bigger ones simply by moving faster and getting the fundamentals right before the next retraining cycle. That window is open now, but it won’t stay that way for long.”

Maria Sze

BRAND STRATEGIST, MAKE LEMONADE

The result is a transitional period in which many publishers are simultaneously restructuring, experimenting and protecting existing revenue models at the same time. That uncertainty may also be creating opportunity.

“For ten years our biggest driver for content discovery was SEO, but that has fundamentally disappeared. Which is why we’ve changed strategy to include the direct newsletter, because we cannot rely on those big numbers being seen. It’s a pay-to-play model now.”

Lucy Cleland

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR,
COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE



...age. The confidence of
...at is the root of western
...umor, sex, shape, ripens,
...warmth, amore.))

INVISIBLE OR *INFLUENTIAL* 2026

SECTION TWO

WHAT SMART
PUBLICATIONS
ARE STARTING
TO DO

The research revealed a clear pattern:
*the publications performing most strongly
across AI platforms are not necessarily changing
their editorial identity. They are changing how
that authority is structured, maintained and
reinforced over time.*



1 The formats AI keeps surfacing

Different editorial formats appear to perform differently at different stages of the luxury travel decision journey.

The strongest-performing publications are not relying on a single content type. They are creating layered ecosystems of editorial that align with how AI-assisted discovery now operates: from inspiration and shortlist-building through to validation and final decision-making. One of the clearest findings from the research is that AI consistently rewards content that helps answer a very specific question: Which option is right for me? That is why comparison-led editorial, structured review content and clear recommendation formats surface so consistently across AI platforms.

2 Treating archive as a living asset

The publishers performing most consistently across AI platforms now treat archive management as an active editorial function, not a passive content store. The goal is no longer simply preservation. It is reinforcement. Rather than continuously creating new articles around the same topics, many editorial teams are beginning to:

- update existing high-authority content
- consolidate overlapping coverage
- strengthen internal linking
- maintain clearer timestamps and structured summaries
- retire outdated content that no longer reflects current positioning

This creates stronger topical consistency across the archive and gives AI systems clearer signals around which content remains authoritative.

Done well, archive strategy becomes a compounding advantage: allowing established publishers to strengthen visibility over time rather than repeatedly rebuilding it from scratch.

JOURNEY STAGE	What the reader is looking for	Formats AI surfaces most consistently
Inspiration	Identity, aspiration and direction. What kind of traveller am I? What kind of experience am I looking for?	Trend reports; destination features; long-form travel essays; cultural storytelling; seasonal narratives; social-first editorial.
Discovery	Shortlist generation and recommendation filtering.	Ranked lists; curated round-ups; “best hotels in...” formats; category guides; destination-specific edits.
Consideration	Validation, comparison and reassurance.	Head-to-head comparisons; experience-led reviews; itineraries; “hotels like...” editorial; expert commentary.
Decision	Final confidence and recommendation authority.	First-person reviews; adviser insight; insider booking intelligence; “worth it?” formats; FAQ-style property content.

3. Writing for humans and AI *without losing your voice*

Across both the interviews and citation analysis, one pattern emerged consistently: distinctive human voice remains one of luxury travel journalism's greatest advantages.

The first-person review. The considered verdict. The writer placing a property into a cultural or emotional context. These remain some of the most valuable forms of editorial authority in luxury travel media.

Several editors described a renewed appetite for slower, more immersive editorial experiences, particularly as AI-led discovery becomes faster and more transactional.

“In print, we’ve really found ourselves moving back towards richer, deeper long reads, particularly in luxury. High-quality writing. An unexplored point of view. Something topical and of the moment, but not overly trendy. As everything else gets faster, we’ve leaned into that lean-back experience even more.”

Kim Willis
CHIEF STRATEGIST,
BA HIGH LIFE

The problem is not that AI devalues opinion. The problem is that AI often struggles to interpret it. When atmosphere, judgement and expertise exist only inside continuous narrative, AI systems frequently fail to identify the extractable signals needed for citation and retrieval.

The strongest editorial voices are not being devalued by AI. They are simply not always legible to it.

The publications building the strongest AI visibility are not replacing voice with generic structure. They are combining distinctive editorial perspectives with highly extractable context.



PHOTO: THE NORMAN, OUTTHERE

The most effective pattern is remarkably simple:

Assertion + evidence.

The opinion carries the storytelling. The factual detail carries the citation value. They reinforce rather than weaken each other.

There are four structural techniques that preserve voice and earn citations:

Specific details matter.

Property names, locations, measurable attributes and defining features give AI systems identifiable signals to retrieve and reuse.

Give long-form journalism a clear takeaway.

A short summary or structured verdict helps anchor complex narrative features without diluting editorial voice.

Make comparisons explicit.

Comparison-led editorial performs particularly strongly because AI systems frequently prioritise content that helps narrow choices between competing options.

State the frame upfront.

Clearly explaining what is being assessed, and on what basis, gives AI systems a framework for interpreting the content that follows.

One of the strongest examples in the research came from OutThere Magazine. Its review of The Norman in Tel Aviv generated repeated citations despite carrying relatively little traditional SEO structure. What mattered was not formatting alone, but the combination of:

- *specificity*
- *experiential authority*
- *property-level depth*
- *and a strong, identifiable editorial perspective*

Writing for AI does not mean writing generically.

In fact, the publications building the strongest visibility are often the ones producing the most distinctive editorial work. What separates them is not style, scale or volume. It is structure.

They make their authority easier for AI systems to interpret, extract and confidently reuse. The risk for strong editorial brands is not that AI undervalues them. It is that too much of their authority still remains structurally invisible.

The brief is not to write more generically. It is to ensure that strong editorial judgement is supported by signals that can travel across AI-mediated discovery.

Keep the voice.
Add structure where it matters.
Make authority easier to find.



A photograph of a bedroom interior. In the foreground, a bed with white linens is partially visible on the left. A wicker basket containing white orchids hangs from the top left. A window with light-colored curtains is on the right. The background is a dark wood-paneled wall.

INVISIBLE OR *INFLUENTIAL* 2026

SECTION THREE

THE NEW PUBLISHING ECONOMICS



Don't rent the audience. Own the relationship.

As AI platforms increasingly mediate discovery, publishers are being forced to reconsider the value of direct audience relationships. Visibility alone no longer guarantees traffic, and citation alone does not guarantee commercial return.

The anxiety surrounding AI within publishing is not simply technological. It is economic. Publishers are contributing to ecosystems that increasingly extract editorial value without guaranteeing a corresponding return in audience visitation. As discovery becomes mediated through AI interfaces, the historical relationship between visibility and traffic begins to weaken.

This is prompting a broader strategic shift across publishing, particularly within premium and luxury media. Increasingly, the challenge is not simply how to remain visible within AI systems, but how to retain commercial and cultural value when audiences may no longer need to visit the originating source directly.

Several strategic responses are beginning to emerge.

I Becoming the source AI must cite

For many publishers, the immediate priority is strengthening authority signals so that their journalism remains visible within AI-generated responses. This includes improving content structure, strengthening topical consistency, enhancing metadata, and ensuring archives remain accessible and machine-readable.

The strategic value here is clear: authority, brand recognition and editorial influence can survive even if referral traffic declines.

However, citation visibility does not automatically translate into monetisation. In many cases, this model protects prestige and influence more effectively than it protects audience scale or advertising revenue.

2 The rise of licensing and intellectual property models

Major publishing groups are increasingly pursuing licensing agreements with AI platforms, positioning journalism not simply as content, but as intellectual property with commercial value.

This represents a meaningful economic shift. Historically, much digital publishing revenue depended on audience scale, impressions and referral traffic. Licensing models reposition editorial value around proprietary information, trusted archives and brand authority.

The challenge is that this strategy currently favours only the largest publishing entities, those with sufficient scale, leverage and recognisable intellectual property to negotiate meaningful commercial agreements. Smaller publishers face a more uncertain position: highly visible within AI systems, but with limited power to control how that value is extracted or compensated.

3 Rebuilding direct audience relationships

One of the clearest behavioural shifts emerging from editorial interviews is the renewed importance of owned audiences.

Across the industry, publishers are increasing investment in:

- *newsletters*
- *memberships*
- *subscriber communities*
- *live events*
- *loyalty ecosystems*
- *experiential products*

This reflects a growing recognition that over-reliance on intermediary platforms, whether search engines, social platforms or AI systems, creates long-term vulnerability.

Direct channels are regaining strategic

based relationships with audiences outside algorithmically controlled discovery environments.

The underlying logic is increasingly simple:

**Don't rent the audience.
Own the relationship.**

4 The return of experience-led publishing

AI systems are exceptionally effective at synthesis, summarisation, comparison and recommendation. They are significantly less effective at replicating emotional texture, cultural instinct, taste, atmosphere and the experiential value of spending time with a trusted publication.

As a result, many publishers are increasingly leaning into the forms of editorial value that remain difficult to commoditise:

- *distinctive editorial voice*
- *long-form narrative*
- *deeply reported features*
- *collectible print editions*
- *trusted personalities*
- *live experiences*
- *cultural curation*

This helps explain the renewed strategic importance of print, events and membership environments within premium publishing. Not as nostalgic exercises, but as commercially differentiated experiences that AI systems cannot easily replicate.

In this environment, commodity information becomes increasingly vulnerable. Distinctive editorial environments become more valuable.

5 From reference publishing to relationship ecosystems

Historically, many publishing models relied on a relatively linear commercial equation:

content → traffic → advertising revenue

Increasingly, publishers are moving towards broader ecosystem models:

publication → membership → events →

partnerships → commerce → loyalty → data

In this structure, the publication itself becomes more than a destination for content consumption. It becomes:

- *a trust engine*
- *a cultural signal*
- *a relationship platform*
- *a curatorial layer*
- *a luxury ecosystem*

This shift is particularly visible among premium media brands expanding into memberships, events, travel experiences and experiential products. The commercial value increasingly sits not only in readership, but in trusted affiliation and ongoing audience relationships.

6 From scale economics to trust economics

Perhaps the most significant implication of AI-led discovery is that it may fundamentally reshape what publishing value looks like.

For much of the digital era, success was largely driven by scale:

- *reach*
- *volume*
- *frequency*
- *search visibility*
- *audience acquisition*

AI environments may increasingly reward different qualities:

- *recognised authority*
- *trusted entities*
- *distinctive editorial identity*
- *consistency of expertise*
- *high-confidence recommendations*

This has important implications for luxury publishing specifically. Luxury media has never depended solely on scale. Its value has historically been built on:

- *trust*
- *curation*
- *authority*
- *discernment*
- *cultural positioning*

In that sense, AI may not diminish the importance of premium editorial brands. But it may fundamentally change where their value sits.

The future value of publishing may lie less in being passively visited, and more in being:

- *trusted*
- *remembered*
- *cited*
- *subscribed to*
- *experienced*
- *deliberately sought out*

For luxury publishing, that distinction may prove commercially decisive.



INVISIBLE OR *INFLUENTIAL* 2026

Conclusion:
THE NEXT
VISIBILITY
ERA

The future of editorial influence will not be defined by who produces the most content, but by whose authority remains structurally visible inside AI-led discovery.

In fact, many of the publications performing most strongly across AI-led discovery environments are also producing some of the most distinctive editorial work. What separates them is not style, scale or volume. It is structure. The titles building the strongest visibility are making their authority easier for AI systems to interpret, retrieve and reuse. They are reinforcing expertise through consistency, maintaining archives more actively and structuring opinion in ways machines can properly understand without flattening editorial voice.

The barrier facing publishing is therefore not intellectual. It is operational.

Adapting to AI-led discovery requires coordination across editorial, commercial, technical and leadership teams at the same time. In many organisations, those functions still operate separately. The result is not resistance so much as inertia: widespread recognition that discovery is changing, but uncertainty around how to respond consistently.

That matters because visibility is no longer simply a by-product of quality. It is becoming an outcome of structure, reinforcement and organisational alignment.

Several wider patterns emerged clearly throughout the research.

Commercial blogs and specialist platforms are frequently outperforming premium editorial titles, not because they are more trusted, but because they are easier for AI systems to interpret and retrieve.

At the same time, the strongest editorial voices are not being devalued by AI. They are simply not always being understood by it.

As AI systems increasingly commoditise summary and aggregation, originality, perspective and trusted voice may become even more valuable differentiators. But those qualities will only influence AI-led discovery when they are supported by signals machines can properly interpret and reuse.

For brands, the implications are equally significant.

The value of media can no longer be assessed solely through audience reach, circulation or brand alignment. Increasingly, it must also be understood through a different lens:

- *whether a publication consistently surfaces across AI-led discovery*
- *how its authority is interpreted across platforms*
- *and whether its content is structurally visible inside the systems now shaping recommendation itself*

“There are more opportunities to look at this without such an ‘end-of-days’ framework, which is how much of the industry sees it. We had conversations like this about the internet, and we haven’t learned.”

Claire Irvin

HEAD OF TRAVEL, THE TIMES

This changes the role of both media strategy and PR. Visibility is no longer simply about placement. It is about whether the placement can travel.



Spécial

La Plage

DU MARTINI

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5. ...
6. ...
7. ...
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10. ...

References & Sources

AI platforms analysed:

Claude
ChatGPT
Perplexity
Gemini

Technical and analysis tools:

SEMrush
Screaming Frog
Google Rich Results Test

Primary methodology

SIGNAL NOIR™ (Make Lemonade proprietary framework)
SIGNAL NOIR™ is a proprietary methodology developed to assess how content is structured, interpreted and cited within AI-driven environments. Within this study, it has been used to evaluate patterns of visibility, retrieval and citation across leading AI platforms, with a specific focus on luxury travel and lifestyle editorial. A more detailed overview of the framework and its broader applications is provided within the methodology section and can be expanded upon request.

Qualitative sources

One-to-one interviews with senior editors across leading luxury travel and lifestyle publications (conducted March and April 2026).

Contact

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make-lemonade.co.uk

If you would like discuss any of the details or themes addressed within please contact:

Lucy Clifton, Spotlight Communications
lucy.clifton@spotlightcoms.com

Maria Sze, Make Lemonade
maria@make-lemonade.co.uk

Sara Lemos, Make Lemonade
sara@make-lemonade.co.uk



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