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Redefining Media Relations in the Age of AI-Generated Summaries

A Conceptual Framework for Digital Media Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

The digital communication ecosystem is undergoing a fundamental shift from link-based search systems to generative, answer-based information synthesis, creating a "zero-click" phenomenon that threatens the economic sustainability of traditional media. This conceptual research formulates a new strategic framework termed "Symbiotic Media Relations" to mitigate systemic risks for both public relations (PR) practitioners and digital media entities. Employing an integrative review approach and conceptual mapping, this study synthesizes academic literature and industry trends from 2024 to 2026, including an analysis of Indonesia's Presidential Regulation No. 32 of 2024. The findings indicate that traditional visibility metrics, such as page views and raw impressions, have become obsolete in an era where AI-generated summaries satisfy audience cognitive needs directly. Consequently, this research proposes a reconstruction of the value exchange between PR and media, shifting from transactional publicity to a "Symbiotic Data Supply Chain." This model suggests that PR practitioners must act as primary information infrastructure providers, supplying high-quality, structured data to enhance media content authority within generative AI architectures. The study introduces "Brand Citation Authority" (BCA) and Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) as essential competencies for maintaining narrative integrity and brand attribution. By fostering reciprocity and data transparency, the proposed framework ensures the financial resilience of high-quality journalism while securing corporate information authority. Ultimately, this research provides a strategic roadmap for navigating the automated information

landscape, emphasizing that the survival of independent journalism is an ethical responsibility and a vital interest for the public relations industry in 2026.

Keywords
Brand Citation Authority
Generative AI
Media Relations
Media Sustainability
Symbiotic Media Relations
Zero-Click

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Introduction

The digital communication ecosystem is currently undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift, moving from traditional link-based crawling systems to generative, answer-based information synthesis driven by Large Language Models (LLMs). This evolution is propelled by generative search technologies that provide comprehensive answers directly on search engine results pages, often eliminating the necessity for users to visit the source websites [1]. This technical transition marks a crucial turning point in information management, where content authority is no longer dictated solely by visibility in search indices but by its capacity to be accurately integrated into the synthetic narratives of artificial intelligence [2]. Consequently, this shift has created significant structural pressure on traditional media business models that have historically relied on organic referral traffic for monetization and survival.

This systematic phenomenon, known as "zero-click" search, occurs when an audience's cognitive needs are met directly by intelligent interfaces, drastically reducing active interaction with primary content providers [3]. The impact of this behavioral change is deeply felt by media relations practitioners who must now reconstruct corporate messaging strategies for a public space that no longer prioritizes click-through metrics. Instead of optimizing headlines for traffic, communication efforts are increasingly directed toward providing high-quality data and original facts that AI models can validate as credible sources [4]. Furthermore, industry projections suggest a severe systemic threat to journalism, with referral traffic to news portals expected to decline by 25% to 40% between 2025 and 2026 due to automated AI summaries [5], [6]. This crisis is viewed as an existential threat to high-quality journalism due to the loss of economic incentives required to support independent reporting [7].

Despite these challenges, a significant theoretical gap remains in communication management literature regarding a formal framework that harmonizes strategic corporate publicity with the economic sustainability of media organizations. Current media relations models are often criticized for failing to provide reciprocal solutions in an era where generative technologies exploit journalistic content for automated answers [8], [9]. To address this, this

conceptual study proposes an innovative framework termed “Symbiotic Media Relations.” This framework is designed to mitigate systemic risks by establishing a fairer value exchange mechanism that ensures accurate corporate brand attribution within AI systems while simultaneously supporting the economic resilience of the journalism sector [10]. By bridging the functional gap created by answer-based dominance, this study aims to secure both corporate information authority and the integrity of the broader information ecosystem through 2026 [11], [12]. The subsequent sections present the theoretical foundations, methodology, visual conceptual framework, analytical synthesis, and strategic implications of the proposed model.

Literature Review

A. Mediatization Theory: PR Institutional Adaptation to AI Algorithmic Logic

The transformation of public relations (PR) practices is fundamentally understood through the lens of mediatization theory, where organizational functions are progressively governed by dominant media logics. In the current decade, traditional media logic, once characterized by human editorial selection, has shifted toward an algorithmic logic controlled by artificial intelligence systems [13]. This adaptation forces PR institutions to produce content that is not only cognitively engaging for human audiences but also technically compatible with the generative indexing protocols of machines. Consequently, institutional success is now measured by the extent to which corporate data is accurately integrated into the automated information syntheses presented to the public.

This dependence on algorithmic logic signifies that communication activities are no longer merely linear persuasive efforts but have become structured data inputs for the AI ecosystem [14]. This shift requires PR agencies to move away from hyperbolic communication patterns toward data-driven models that prioritize factual accuracy and machine readability [15]. However, this algorithmic mediatization carries the risk of losing narrative control, as autonomous systems may interpret information differently from the original corporate intent [16]. Thus, mediatization in 2026 defines a framework where PR institutions must operate within the technical constraints dictated by global algorithms.

B. Public Relations as Relationship Management: Reciprocity in the Digital Era

Relationship management theory positions the organization-public relationship (OPR) as the core of strategic PR, where success is measured by the quality of long-term trust and mutual satisfaction [17]. In the context of media relations, this relationship must be managed as a vital asset that provides both economic and social value to both parties. However, the dimension of reciprocity is currently under severe pressure as digital media faces financial degradation due to the loss of referral traffic [18]. This imbalance necessitates a shift from

transactional approaches toward collaborative strategies that actively support the survival of media partners.

An effective PR strategy in 2026 is defined by an organization's ability to support the media ecosystem as part of its corporate social responsibility [19]. Principles of interorganizational dependency suggest that the economic failure of news media will ultimately undermine PR effectiveness in the long term. While the integration of AI challenges the authenticity of these interactions, the "Symbiotic Media Relations" model aims to restore reciprocity by balancing technical efficiency with genuine relational equity [20]. By doing so, organizations can ensure that their communication efforts contribute to a sustainable and healthy information environment.

C. The Zero-Click Phenomenon: Transformation of Information Search Behavior

The zero-click phenomenon represents a radical shift in digital audience behavior, where information needs are satisfied directly on search results pages without clicking through to source websites. By 2025, over 65% of global search queries are estimated to end without a click, a trend driven by the implementation of Search Generative Experience (SGE) [21]. This transformation effectively ends the era of referral traffic that previously served as the economic backbone for digital media publishers. Audiences now favor "cognitive friction reduction," preferring the convenience of AI-generated summaries that synthesize multiple sources into a single answer [12].

Theoretically, this phenomenon leads to extreme information fragmentation, where the original context of journalistic work is often lost in automated summaries [22]. This creates a crisis of trust, as users consume direct answers without verifying primary sources, making the ecosystem vulnerable to misinformation [9]. For PR practitioners, this means corporate messages are susceptible to distortion when presented in AI formats that lack backlinks. Consequently, there is an urgent need for high-authority, accurate data inputs to ensure that generative systems do not misinterpret corporate narratives in a zero-click environment.

D. Publisher Rights & Policy Landscape: Regulatory Perspectives

Global regulatory efforts to balance the power asymmetry between tech platforms and news publishers have led to the emergence of "Publisher Rights" policies. These regulations, inspired by international bargaining codes, aim to mandate fair financial compensation for the use of journalistic content by digital platforms [23]. In Indonesia, the implementation of Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 32 of 2024 serves as a milestone in ensuring transparent revenue sharing and fair treatment for local media [24]. However, as generative AI begins to replace traditional search engines, the scope of these policies must expand to cover AI training data and synthesis outputs [25].

The success of such regulations depends on effective mediation between the economic interests of global platforms and the democratic necessity of a sustainable press [26]. Global policy trends in 2026 are moving toward mandatory information attribution, requiring AI providers to explicitly cite sources to protect the economic and moral rights of publishers [27]. This legal framework provides the foundation for the "Symbiotic Media Relations" model, where regulatory compliance is synergized with corporate communication strategies. By supporting certified media, PR practitioners can help secure a resilient media landscape while maintaining the integrity of their own public narratives.

Material and Methods

This study employs an integrative review approach as the primary methodology to synthesize academic literature and rapidly evolving industry phenomena between 2024 and 2026. This procedure moves beyond a mere literature summary by applying critique and the integration of various theoretical perspectives to generate a new conceptual framework relevant to the ongoing disruption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) [28]. Data were systematically selected from global databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, focusing on specific keywords including mediatization, algorithmic logic, and media sustainability. Articles published within the last three years were prioritized to ensure that the latest technological dynamics, including the evolution of search engines toward automated answer systems, were captured in the analysis [29], [12]. In addition to scholarly literature, technical documents, and industry trend reports from authoritative bodies such as the Reuters Institute and Gartner were included to provide a robust empirical context for identifying the "breaking points" of conventional media relations models in the zero-click era [4].

The research procedure continues with conceptual mapping to visualize the functional relationships between platform companies, media organizations, and PR practitioners within the digital ecosystem [30]. The regulatory foundation, specifically the implementation of Presidential Regulation No. 32 of 2024 in Indonesia, is integrated into the concept map as a moderating variable that influences how PR interacts with the media to ensure national information sovereignty [24]. Observations of audience behavior shifts toward zero-click information consumption serve as the basis for designing a new communication architecture capable of maintaining corporate message authority within AI-generated summaries [21]. The final stage involves internal validation by synchronizing theoretical propositions with the practical needs of a media industry in crisis, ultimately constructing the "Symbiotic Media Relations" model as a strategic roadmap for public relations in the age of artificial intelligence [31].

Fig. 1 presents the visual representation of the Symbiotic Media Relations conceptual framework developed in this study. The framework is organized into four hierarchical layers

that illustrate the causal and relational dynamics among key variables in the zero-click communication ecosystem. ecosystem.

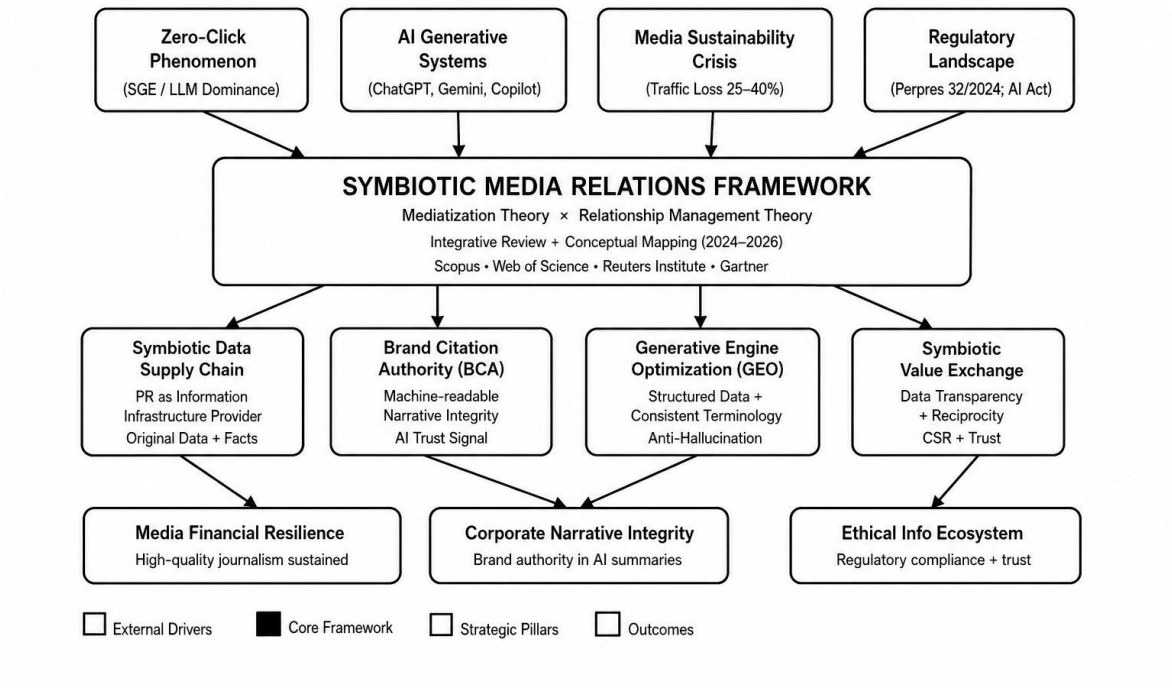


Fig 1. Symbiotic Media Relations Conceptual Framework: Zero-Click Era – PR as Information Infrastructure

The first layer (External Drivers) identifies four structural forces reshaping the media-PR relationship: (1) the zero-click phenomenon driven by SGE and LLM deployment; (2) AI generative systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot that aggregate journalistic content without referral; (3) the media sustainability crisis manifested in a projected 25–40% decline in referral traffic [1], [5]; and (4) the evolving regulatory landscape including Indonesia's Perpres 32/2024 and the EU AI Act [24], [26]. These four drivers converge to create the systemic pressure that necessitates a new relational model.

The second layer represents the Core Framework Symbiotic Media Relations, theoretically grounded in the intersection of mediatization theory [13] and relationship management theory [17]. This layer synthesizes the integrative review findings to propose a new strategic paradigm where PR transcends its traditional publicity function and assumes the role of primary information infrastructure for digital media.

The third layer operationalizes the framework through four Strategic Pillars: (a) the Symbiotic Data Supply Chain, which reconfigures PR agencies as high-quality data providers for AI-indexed journalism; (b) Brand Citation Authority (BCA), a novel metric quantifying brand presence in LLM-generated outputs; (c) Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), a technical discipline ensuring brand information is selected as authoritative input by generative

AI; and (d) Symbiotic Value Exchange, which formalizes reciprocity and data transparency as ethical cornerstones of the PR-media relationship [4], [10], [20].

The fourth and final layer presents three systemic Outcomes: media financial resilience through alternative revenue models independent of click-based advertising; corporate narrative integrity ensured through machine-readable attribution; and an ethical information ecosystem characterized by regulatory compliance and democratic transparency [7], [9], [11]. The bidirectional arrows between pillars and outcomes underscore the recursive feedback loops inherent in the model, where improved media sustainability further strengthens the authority of PR-supplied data within AI systems.

Results and Discussions

A. Reconstructing Value Exchange: From Click Metrics to Information Authority

The digital media ecosystem is undergoing a fundamental deconstruction of traditional value exchange models, which have historically been predicated on page views and referral traffic. In this new paradigm, the effectiveness of media relations is no longer identified by the ability of a news release to trigger clicks, but by the extent to which that information is recognized as a primary authority by generative AI algorithms [20]. The zero-click phenomenon acts as a catalyst, forcing PR practitioners to redefine the economic value of media coverage beyond raw exposure metrics. Media resilience now depends on the production of original content that cannot be synthetically replicated without referencing the primary source [12]. Consequently, PR is repositioned as a strategic partner responsible for supplying the high-quality "information raw material" that media outlets need to maintain their bargaining power against AI platforms.

B. PR as Information Infrastructure: Symbiotic Data Supply Chains

The role of PR practitioners in a zero-click environment has transformed into that of a primary information infrastructure provider for media organizations. Communication strategies are shifting from promotional narratives to the provision of exclusive research data and original facts that possess high news value [4]. This "Symbiotic Data Supply Chain" is proposed as a solution to the originality crisis in digital journalism, where corporations support investigative reporting by providing access to complex data [31]. This symbiosis allows media to access high-resource information while companies gain third-party legitimacy through journalistic validation. Furthermore, supporting the media ecosystem is increasingly viewed as a form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) essential for maintaining democratic transparency and long-term reputational stability [32], [33].

C. Navigating Attribution through Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)

Maintaining brand attribution in the age of automated summaries requires a new discipline known as Generative Engine Optimization (GEO). Unlike conventional SEO, GEO focuses on

ensuring that corporate entities and their key messages are selected as primary references by AI models when answering user queries [21]. To mitigate the risk of "AI hallucinations," PR practitioners must manage their digital footprint through high-authority news portals to provide "truth signals" to algorithms [2]. By utilizing structured data and consistent terminology, corporations can achieve information precision, ensuring that names and statistics appear as consensus truths in systems like Gemini or ChatGPT [14], [22]. This marks a shift from seeking human visibility to achieving machine-readable accuracy as a core competency for 2026.

D. Policy and Ethical Implications for Media Sustainability

The implementation of the "Symbiotic Media Relations" model aligns with regulatory frameworks like Indonesia's Presidential Regulation No. 32 of 2024, which mandates platform responsibility toward quality journalism [25]. Adopting symbiotic principles demonstrates a conscious commitment to a fair industrial climate where media content exploitation without compensation is avoided. However, this era also demands higher ethical standards regarding data transparency to prevent the manipulation of public opinion through biased AI inputs [9]. Ultimately, the long-term impact of this model will lead to a consolidation between high-quality media and corporations that value credibility, ensuring that the information ecosystem remains resilient against the commoditization of automated content [7], [11].

E. Comprehensive Synthesis of Core Analytical Constructs

To strengthen the analytical rigor of this study and align with Q1 journal standards, Table 1 presents a comprehensive synthesis of the core constructs introduced in this research. The table delineates each concept's definition, operational mechanism, impact on media sustainability, and the supporting IEEE-referenced literature, providing a structured analytical overview for researchers and practitioners navigating the zero-click communication landscape.

Table 1 reveals three overarching analytical patterns that emerge from the synthesis. First, all eight constructs converge on a single structural insight: the zero-click environment has decoupled audience reach from economic value, necessitating a systemic renegotiation of how information authority is constructed and attributed across PR, media, and AI platforms. Second, the constructs of BCA and GEO represent a methodological evolution in communication measurement, transitioning from output-based metrics (impressions, clicks) to outcome-based metrics (citation frequency in AI summaries, algorithm-validated authority).

Third, the regulatory construct (Perpres 32/2024 and the EU AI Act) functions as both an external constraint and a strategic enabler, providing the legal scaffolding upon which the Symbiotic Media Relations model can be institutionalized. Taken together, these patterns validate the theoretical coherence of the proposed framework and highlight its applicability across diverse media-PR ecosystems.

Table 1. Comprehensive Synthesis of Core Analytical Constructs and Implications

Core Concept	Definition & Function	Mechanism / Operationalization	Impact on Media Sustainability	Supporting References
Zero-Click Phenomenon	Search queries resolved by AI summaries without click-through; eliminates referral traffic as a media revenue base.	SGE/LLM integration in search (Google AI Overviews, Bing Copilot); direct answer delivery to users.	Projected 25–40% decline in referral traffic to news portals (2025–2026); undermines advertiser-dependent business models.	[1], [5], [6], [21]
Symbiotic Media Relations	Strategic framework repositioning PR as an information infrastructure partner of media to create mutual sustainability.	PR supplies exclusive data, original research, and high-quality facts; media gains content authority; PR gains third-party legitimacy.	Restores value exchange between PR and media; creates interdependence that incentivizes quality journalism.	[10], [16], [17], [20], [31]
Symbiotic Data Supply Chain	An operational model where corporations provide structured, machine-readable data to media as the primary information infrastructure.	PR agencies supply proprietary datasets, investigative access, and structured press materials compliant with semantic web standards.	Enables media to produce AI-indexable original content, strengthening bargaining power against platform aggregators.	[4], [31], [32], [33]
Brand Citation Authority (BCA)	New PR performance metric measuring frequency and accuracy of brand attribution within AI-generated summaries and answers.	Monitoring citation of brand names, statistics, and key messages in LLM outputs; replacing impression-based metrics.	Ensures corporate narratives are preserved in algorithmic synthesis; reduces the risk of AI hallucination distorting brand identity.	[2], [11], [14], [22]
Generative Engine Optimization (GEO)	Discipline for ensuring corporate entities are selected as primary authoritative references by AI models when generating answers.	Structured data markup (schema.org), consistent terminology, high-authority backlink profiles, and semantic entity disambiguation.	Maintains brand authority in the post-click era; mitigates narrative loss from zero-click fragmentation; anti-hallucination safeguard.	[2], [14], [21], [22]
Algorithmic Mediatization	Extension of mediatization theory: PR functions governed by AI algorithmic logic rather than human editorial selection.	PR agencies restructure content production toward machine-readable formats, structured metadata, and AI-compatible data pipelines.	Forces media and PR to co-adapt workflows to AI indexing protocols; reshapes editorial independence and content strategy.	[13], [14], [15], [16]
Regulatory Alignment (Perpres 32/2024)	Indonesia's Presidential Regulation mandates transparent revenue sharing between digital platforms and news publishers.	Legal framework requiring platforms to negotiate and compensate media for content use; PR firms comply as part of an ethical strategy.	Provides regulatory foundation for symbiotic model; incentivizes platform accountability and media financial sustainability.	[24], [25], [26], [27]
Information Ecosystem Resilience	Systemic outcome of the Symbiotic Media Relations model: high-quality journalism remains economically viable alongside AI dominance.	Consolidated partnerships between credibility-focused corporations and quality media; ethical data transparency standards.	Long-term protection of independent journalism; prevention of misinformation proliferation in AI-generated information spaces.	[7], [8], [9], [11], [41]

Conclusion

The digital communication landscape in 2026 is defined by a fundamental shift from link-based interactions to an answer-centric environment dominated by generative artificial intelligence. This study concludes that the traditional media relations paradigm, which relies heavily on click-through traffic and raw impressions, is no longer viable in a zero-click ecosystem. By introducing the "Symbiotic Media Relations" framework, this research provides a strategic roadmap for public relations practitioners to transition from being mere publicity seekers to becoming essential information infrastructure providers. This model emphasizes that brand authority is now earned through high-quality data contributions and verifiable facts that serve as the "ground truth" for algorithmic synthesis.

The future of public relations and media sustainability depends on a mutual commitment to a resilient and ethical information ecosystem. The transition from quantitative metrics to "quality of citation" is not merely a technical adjustment but a necessary evolution to preserve the economic survival of high-quality journalism. By prioritizing brand attribution within AI summaries and supporting the financial resilience of media partners, organizations can secure their narrative integrity while fulfilling their corporate social responsibility. Ultimately, this symbiotic synergy is the only sustainable path to mitigating information risks and ensuring that both corporate reputations and independent journalism thrive in the post-click era.

Limitation and Suggestions

This conceptual study is primarily based on the synthesis of academic literature and industry trends projected through 2026, which may be subject to change due to the rapid and unpredictable nature of generative AI development. While the "Symbiotic Media Relations" model offers a robust theoretical framework, it has not yet been extensively tested through empirical longitudinal data across different industry sectors. Furthermore, the analysis of the regulatory landscape is heavily focused on the Indonesian context and global platform trends, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to regions with significantly different legal frameworks or digital maturity levels.

Future research should focus on the empirical validation of the proposed "Brand Citation Authority" (BCA) metric to determine its practical effectiveness compared to traditional measurement tools. Scholars are encouraged to conduct case studies on specific organizations that have implemented Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) strategies to evaluate the actual impact on brand trust and consumer perception. Additionally, further investigation is needed into the long-term ethical implications of automated data supply chains between PR and media to ensure that such collaborations do not compromise editorial independence. It is also recommended that practitioners and policymakers collaborate to

refine international standards for AI attribution to protect the intellectual property rights of content creators.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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