Advertising in Generative Information Retrieval

Ines Zelch   **Matthias Hagen**   **Martin Potthast**

Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena, Leipzig University and ScaDS.AI
ines.zelch@uni-jena.de, matthias.hagen@uni-jena.de, martin.potthast@uni-leipzig.de

Abstract

How will generative AI pay for itself? Unless charging users for access, selling advertising is the only alternative. Especially in the multi-billion dollar web search market, the introduction of a subscription model seems unlikely. The recent disruption of search by generative large language models could thus be ultimately accompanied by generated ads—as ads are the main source of revenue in traditional web search. Our main concern is that the commercialization of generative AI in general and large language models in particular could lead to native advertising in the form of subtle or not so subtle brand or product placements. The evolution of search results pages (SERPs) from traditional lists of "ten blue links" (list SERPs) to generated texts with references to web pages (text SERPs), may further blur the line between advertising and organic search results and make it more difficult for users to distinguish between the two, depending on how ads are integrated and how they are disclosed. To raise awareness of this potential development, we conduct a feasibility study analyzing the capabilities of current large language models to blend ads with organic search results. Although the models still have difficulties subtly framing ads in unrelated context, their potential shows up when integrating ads in related topics which warrants further investigation.