

5W RESEARCH
ANNUAL REPORT

The State of AI Search 2026.

The definitive annual report on citation share, AI visibility, and the brands winning inside ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews — across the categories where consumer and B2B buyer decisions are now made.

5

AI engines analyzed

15+

categories indexed

10,000+

prompts run

62

pages

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Executive Summary

AI is the new shelf. The chatbox is the new checkout. More than a third of consumers now begin product research with AI — not Google. The browser tab is not where decisions get made anymore. The answer is.

Across 15+ B2C and B2B categories, 10,000+ buyer-intent prompts, and a year of citation tracking across the five major engines — ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews — one pattern is clear: citation share is the new market share. The brands the engines name are the brands buyers consider. The brands the engines skip are invisible.

This is not a forecast. It is a map.

Ten findings define the year.

01 Citation share is concentrating faster than market share. In most tracked categories the top three brands captured a modeled majority of citations across the five engines.

02 The top-cited brand wins disproportionate consideration — a self-reinforcing dynamic that compounds quarter over quarter.

03 Each engine has distinct citation preferences. Single-engine optimization leaves citation share unclaimed.

04 Reddit is a disproportionately influential source. Community sentiment is a top-tier AI citation signal across consumer categories.

05 Earned media remains the strongest single GEO signal. Independent third-party validation outperforms owned content as a citation input.

06 Schema markup is a baseline, not a differentiator. Structured citation density across third-party sources is the next-frontier signal.

07 Citation decay is real and measurable. Brands that paused earned media investment lost share within months — before traditional metrics flagged it.

- 08 Local services categories are dramatically under-cited. Most local operators are not cited at all when buyers ask AI engines for recommendations.
- 09 AI Overviews are reshaping the SERP economy. Click-through-rate-only optimization is increasingly invisible.
- 10 The citation gap between leaders and challengers is widening. The flywheel of citation authority is accelerating, not flattening.

AI Communications is a mix of journalism, psychology, and engineering — and the audience is now the machine.

What follows is the data, the methodology, and the playbook.

PART ONE

The Landscape.

Engine adoption, the shift from blue links to synthesized answers, and what Citation Share replaces.

CHAPTER 01

The State of AI Search in 2026

Market sizing, engine adoption, and what the data shows about how buyers research today versus three years ago.

8 pages

The State of AI Search in 2026

Search is not what it was. Three years ago, search meant a list of blue links and a buyer's willingness to click through them. Today, search means a synthesized answer — generated by a model, sourced from a small set of citations, and delivered in a paragraph that 60% of users never scroll past.

The shift is structural. Not a feature change. Not a Google update. A new layer of the internet.

Consumer behavior has caught up. By the most recent industry estimates, more than one in three U.S. consumers now begins product research with an AI engine rather than a traditional search engine. In B2B, the number is higher. Gartner reported in mid-2025 that 61% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free experience and spend only 17% of their journey in direct contact with vendors — meaning the bulk of the consideration set is now decided inside AI-mediated research.

The category that used to be "PR" is now AI Communications: the discipline of becoming the answer inside ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews.

From blue links to synthesized answers.

The blue-link era was an attention economy. Buyers saw ten ranked options. They scanned, clicked, compared, and chose. Brands competed on rank, on click-through, and on landing-page conversion.

The synthesized-answer era is a citation economy. Buyers see one paragraph. Inside that paragraph are three to seven brand citations. Citation order, citation framing, and citation depth determine which brands enter the consideration set. The rest are invisible — not ranked lower, not on page two. Not there at all.

This is the structural shift. Rank-and-click ladders have collapsed into a single answer surface. The brands inside it move forward. The brands outside it stop existing as commercial entities for that query.

Engine adoption — 2023 to 2026.

In 2023, ChatGPT and Perplexity were the early movers. Claude was a developer tool. Gemini was unreleased under its current name. Google AI Overviews did not exist.

By the end of 2025, all five engines crossed the threshold from "early-adopter curiosity" to "daily decision tool" for material slices of the U.S. consumer population. ChatGPT's weekly active user base passed 800 million. Perplexity grew 6x year-over-year. Claude moved decisively into consumer chat. Gemini became the default assistant on more than a billion Android devices. Google AI Overviews appears in an estimated 40%+ of U.S. SERPs for commercial queries — and that share is growing.

The aggregate effect: AI-mediated search is no longer a sub-segment of search. It is the new top of the funnel for an expanding share of B2C and B2B purchase journeys.

Engine share of buyer-research minutes — modeled.

Engine	Q1 2025 share	Q1 2026 share	Direction
ChatGPT	44%	41%	Slight decline (share of larger pie)
Google AI Overviews	22%	28%	Up — distribution advantage
Perplexity	11%	13%	Up — research depth use case
Gemini	10%	11%	Stable — assistant integration
Claude	8%	9%	Up — enterprise and developer halo
Other (Copilot, Pi, etc.)	5%	<5%	Consolidating

Modeled directional estimates. See Chapter 9 for methodology and limitations.

Three forces compounding.

Three forces compound the shift and explain why it accelerates, not flattens.

Distribution. Google AI Overviews and Gemini integration into Android, Workspace, and Search itself put AI answers in front of buyers who never opt in. The default expanded the addressable user base by an order of magnitude in 18 months.

Trust. Engines added source-link visibility, citation expansion, and confidence framing. Users learned to expect citations. Once expectation forms, the synthesized answer reads as the primary information artifact and the citations as the support.

Behavior. Search habits transferred. Users now skip Google entirely for category-research queries — "best running shoes for plantar fasciitis," "safest sunscreen for kids," "top sports betting site in Ohio." The query patterns that were highest-intent for traditional search are now highest-intent for AI.

What it means for brands.

The earned-only AI visibility play is over. Brands that built citation share by accident — through pre-existing third-party press, Wikipedia presence, and Reddit traction — got a head start. They no longer have a moat. Brands that did nothing got skipped. The gap is now widening because the leaders are also investing on purpose.

Three implications follow directly.

- Citation share is a measurable, manageable asset class — not a side-effect of "good PR."
- AI visibility requires an integrated stack: earned media, structured publishing, community presence, and analyst-grade research outputs — at minimum.
- Single-channel investment is dead capital. Brands cannot rank in one engine and ignore the others; engines weight sources differently and the cross-engine view is what buyers actually see.

In 2026, the question is no longer whether to invest in AI visibility. It is which engines, which categories, and how fast.

CHAPTER 02

The Five Engines, Compared

Citation behavior, source preferences, retrieval logic, and category strengths across ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews.

7 pages

The Five Engines, Compared

Five engines. Five logics. ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews answer the same buyer questions in materially different ways. They prefer different sources, structure answers differently, and reward different brand behaviors.

Single-engine optimization is the most common mistake we observed. A brand wins on ChatGPT, declares victory, and finds out six months later it is unrankable on Perplexity and absent from Google AI Overviews. The cross-engine view is the one buyers actually see — most users now consult two or more engines before a meaningful purchase.

How each engine answers.

ChatGPT (OpenAI)

The category-defining product. Highest absolute usage. Strong general-purpose knowledge retrieval. ChatGPT cites a mix of editorial press, Wikipedia, Reddit, Quora, brand sites, and structured reference data, with a noticeable preference for high-authority editorial domains in commercial categories. Web search inside ChatGPT increases citation freshness but does not change the underlying weighting toward established editorial sources.

Brand implication: Earned media in tier-one trade and consumer publications has the highest single-source impact. Wikipedia presence is high-leverage. Reddit and community presence are necessary but not sufficient.

Claude (Anthropic)

Smaller user base than ChatGPT but higher per-user research intent. Disproportionately used by professionals, analysts, and developers — meaning Claude citations carry outsize weight in B2B consideration sets. Claude's retrieval rewards structured authority: research papers, analyst notes, original reporting, and primary sources. Claude is more conservative in citation density and tends to surface fewer but stronger citations per answer.

Brand implication: Owned research, original data, and analyst-grade outputs win Claude. Light-touch content marketing does not. For B2B and considered-purchase categories, Claude visibility is high-value per citation.

Perplexity

Purpose-built for research. Always-on citations. Users self-select for higher information need. Perplexity over-indexes on news and recent web sources, with strong Reddit and community surfacing, and visible source-mix transparency. The engine punishes thin content and rewards source depth — a single high-authority recent article can dominate an answer.

Brand implication: Newsworthy earned media in the trailing 30 days matters more on Perplexity than on any other engine. Persistent Reddit presence compounds. Brands without recent third-party coverage are systematically under-cited.

Gemini (Google)

Distribution-led. Embedded in Search, Workspace, Android, and Pixel. Lower per-user research intent than Claude or Perplexity but enormous reach. Gemini citations lean Google-native — Knowledge Graph entities, YouTube, structured Google sources, and high-authority editorial — and reward brands with deep Knowledge Graph and schema deployments.

Brand implication: Knowledge Graph optimization is the highest single-leverage move. Schema markup is a hard floor. YouTube presence on key buyer queries pays disproportionate dividends inside Gemini answers.

Google AI Overviews

Not a chatbot — a SERP feature. Appears above traditional results on an expanding share of commercial queries. Overviews synthesize a short answer from web sources and surface 3–8 source links. Overview presence is the new featured snippet — except the answer is now generative and the click-through is much lower.

Brand implication: Overview citation is the closest thing in 2026 to "ranking number one" — and a brand can be cited in the Overview without ranking organically. Brands optimized only for traditional CTR are increasingly invisible. Overview optimization is a discipline of its own.

Cross-engine source mix — modeled.

The same buyer query, asked across all five engines, returns materially different source mixes. The chart below summarizes modeled source-type weighting across the five engines, averaged across our 15+ tracked categories.

Source type	ChatGPT	Claude	Perplexity	Gemini	AI Overviews
Editorial / news	32%	28%	41%	26%	38%
Wikipedia / reference	18%	14%	9%	21%	12%
Reddit / community	14%	8%	16%	9%	7%
Brand-owned sites	15%	13%	14%	19%	21%
Research / analyst	8%	22%	10%	7%	6%
YouTube / video	5%	3%	4%	11%	9%
Other	8%	12%	6%	7%	7%

Modeled directional. Sample averaged across categories. Per-category variance is large — see Chapter 4.

If a brand only optimizes for one engine, it is optimizing for one source mix — and missing the other four.

Category strength by engine.

Not every engine wins every category. Across the categories we tracked, engines specialize:

- ChatGPT: dominant share of general consumer-product research and entertainment recommendations.

- Claude: strongest for B2B SaaS, professional services, and considered-purchase categories.
- Perplexity: strongest for news-adjacent categories and fast-moving categories (crypto, sports betting, beauty launches).
- Gemini: strongest for local services and Google-ecosystem-adjacent categories.
- Google AI Overviews: strongest for shopping intent and direct-buy commercial queries.

A brand serious about citation share builds toward the engines that own its category — and at minimum maintains floor visibility on the rest.

CHAPTER 03

Citation Share & the New Share-of-Voice

How citation share replaces traditional share-of-voice and share-of-search. The 5W AI Visibility Index methodology and what it reveals about category leadership.

6 pages

Citation Share & the New Share-of-Voice

Share-of-voice is dead. Share-of-search is dying. The metric that replaces them — and that brands should now organize around — is Citation Share. The percent of AI answers, across the engines that matter, in which a brand is named, framed favorably, and surfaced with enough density to enter the buyer's consideration set.

It is not an analogy. It is an asset class. Citation Share is measurable, trackable, benchmarkable, and improvable. The brands that started measuring it in 2024 entered 2026 with a structural lead.

What Citation Share actually is.

Citation Share, as 5W defines and measures it, is the percentage of buyer-intent AI answers across the five engines in which a given brand is cited within a defined category and prompt set. It is calculated per engine, per category, per quarter, and then weighted to a composite.

The 5W Citation Share Index applies a five-factor scoring framework:

Factor	Weight	What it measures
Citation Frequency	40%	How often the brand appears in answers across the prompt set
Cross-Engine Breadth	20%	How many of the five engines cite the brand at material rates
Query-Type Breadth	20%	How many of the buyer-intent query types surface the brand
Extractability	15%	How well brand content is structured for AI retrieval
Crawl Access	5%	Whether brand and source content is reachable by AI training and retrieval

Citation Share is a composite. A brand can rank #1 on Citation Frequency in ChatGPT and be unrankable on Perplexity because it lacks recent earned coverage. The composite score is what reflects the buyer's actual research experience.

Why traditional share-of-voice misses the point.

Share-of-voice (SOV) was built for a linear-media world. Count brand mentions in a fixed press universe; weight by publication tier. It assumed humans were reading the publications directly.

Humans are no longer the primary reader. AI engines are. The publications still matter — but only inasmuch as the engines weight them. A SOV score that does not map to citation share has no commercial meaning for a 2026 buyer journey.

Share-of-search (SOS), the modern replacement that gained traction in 2020-2023, runs into the same wall. Search queries shifted to AI engines. SOS now measures a shrinking pie.

Citation Share is to 2026 what share-of-search was to 2020 — and what share-of-voice was to 1990. The leading indicator of demand.

What Citation Share predicts.

In tracked categories where we have year-over-year data, Citation Share leads conventional demand metrics by two to four quarters. A brand that gains 5 points of Citation Share in Q1 typically sees branded-search volume, direct-traffic share, and unprompted brand recall move in Q3–Q4. The opposite pattern — Citation Share decay — also leads demand decline.

This is consistent with the structural read: AI answers shape the consideration set before buyers ever search a brand directly. By the time branded search rises, the answer has already been formed.

Reading a Citation Share table.

Throughout this report, brand-level Citation Share tables follow a consistent format:

- Rank — composite Citation Share rank within category, across five engines, quarterly average.

- Brand — entity as cited by the engines (not necessarily the legal name).
- Composite — composite Citation Share score, 0–100.
- Lead engine — engine where the brand performs strongest.
- Trend — year-over-year direction of composite score.

The composite is normalized so the top brand in each category scores 100. Absolute citation rates vary materially across categories — a 100 in a fragmented category like Pickleball corresponds to a lower absolute citation frequency than a 100 in a consolidated category like Sports Betting.

How brands move up.

Across all 15+ categories tracked, the brands that gained material Citation Share year-over-year shared four behaviors:

- Sustained earned media at high-authority publications — not bursts.
- Original research, owned data, or proprietary indices — published, schema-marked, and distributed.
- Active community presence on Reddit and category-native forums.
- Tight knowledge-graph and structured-data hygiene — entity disambiguation, schema, source consistency.

None of these is novel. What is novel is that they are now measurable as inputs to a single composite output: Citation Share. The brands that ran these plays without a measurement layer were doing AI Communications by accident. The brands running them with the measurement layer are doing it on purpose.

PART TWO

The Data.

Eight categories profiled. Brand-level Citation Share. The source mix that explains the leaderboard.

CHAPTER 04

Category Deep-Dives

Citation leadership patterns across consumer and B2B categories. Brand-level rankings, engine-by-engine variance, and what the leaders are doing right.

12 pages

Category Deep-Dives

Citation Share patterns vary by category. What wins Beauty does not win SaaS. What wins Sports Betting does not win Wedding. This chapter is the heart of the report — eight categories profiled with brand-level modeled Citation Share, engine-by-engine variance, and the behaviors that explain the leaderboard.

The categories chosen reflect a deliberate mix: high-consideration B2C, fast-moving emergent, regulated, B2B, and under-cited. Read across them and the pattern is consistent — the brands that invested in the AI Communications stack moved up; the brands that did not moved down or held.

All Citation Share scores in this chapter are modeled directional composites. See Chapter 9 for methodology.

Beauty

Beauty is the category where AI search behavior is most mature on the consumer side. Buyers ask AI engines for sunscreen recommendations, skincare routines for skin type, and dupe identification at a scale no other consumer category matches. Citation Share leadership tracks closely to a combination of editorial press (Allure, Byrdie, Cosmopolitan), Reddit community presence (r/SkincareAddiction, r/BeautyGuruChatter), and structured product data.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Sephora	100	ChatGPT	↑ Strong
2	Ulta Beauty	92	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate
3	The Ordinary	88	ChatGPT, Perplexity	↑ Strong
4	CeraVe	85	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate
5	Drunk Elephant	78	Perplexity	→ Flat
6	Glossier	72	ChatGPT	↓ Slight decline

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
7	e.l.f. Cosmetics	70	Google AI Overviews	↑ Strong

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. Sephora wins on editorial dominance and retailer authority. The Ordinary and CeraVe win on Reddit — community sentiment converts directly into citation share at unusual rates in skincare.

What's moving. e.l.f. is gaining share fast on the back of TikTok-driven trade press. Glossier is slipping as earned media intensity declines. Brands that pause press lose visible Citation Share within two quarters.

Action. Beauty brands need both editorial and community. Single-channel investment loses to brands that build both. Schema markup is now table stakes — every product page schema-marked or invisible.

Crypto / Digital Assets

Crypto is fast-moving, regulated unevenly, and dominated by a small set of operators whose Citation Share consolidated through 2025 and 2026. Buyer queries cluster around exchange comparisons, security, regulation, and specific token research. The category rewards news freshness — Perplexity and Google AI Overviews surface recent events disproportionately.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Coinbase	100	ChatGPT	↑ Strong
2	Kraken	82	Claude	↑ Moderate
3	Gemini (exchange)	76	ChatGPT	→ Flat
4	Binance	68	Perplexity	↓ Decline
5	Robinhood Crypto	61	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
6	Crypto.com	55	ChatGPT	→ Flat
7	Bitstamp	38	Claude	↑ Slight

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. Coinbase is the default citation across all five engines — a function of regulatory transparency, sustained earned media, and a deep public-company information surface. Kraken over-performs on Claude due to research and security-content depth.

What's moving. Binance Citation Share continues to compress under regulatory pressure. Robinhood Crypto is gaining share through integrated app distribution and consumer trade press. Brand recovery after regulatory events takes 18+ months of sustained Citation Share work.

Action. Crypto brands cannot rely on community alone — Reddit is contested and noisy. Earned media in financial and tech trade press is the highest-leverage input. Schema-marked educational content compounds on Perplexity.

Wedding

Wedding is one of the most concentrated Citation Share categories tracked. A handful of marketplaces and content sites dominate every engine. The query pattern is research-heavy and high-consideration — buyers ask AI engines for venue research, vendor evaluation, and registry advice — which rewards editorial depth and structured marketplace data.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	The Knot	100	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate
2	Zola	88	ChatGPT	↑ Strong
3	WeddingWire	82	Google AI Overviews	→ Flat

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
4	Brides (Dotdash)	70	ChatGPT	→ Flat
5	Joy	55	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate
6	Minted	48	Claude	→ Flat
7	Martha Stewart Weddings	40	Perplexity	↓ Slight

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. The Knot and Zola won the editorial-plus-marketplace combo.

Structured vendor listings + ten-plus years of advice content = the engines have nowhere else to send a buyer.

What's moving. Zola is gaining on The Knot through aggressive content production and a stronger schema deployment. Joy is the only meaningful new entrant gaining Citation Share. Independent vendors are systematically under-cited even when locally dominant.

Action. Wedding vendors below the marketplace tier face a hard structural problem — AI engines retrieve marketplaces first. The fix: long-tail editorial coverage in regional bridal media plus Reddit and forum presence in r/weddingplanning.

Local Services

Local services — HVAC, plumbing, dental, funeral, car wash, home repair — is the most under-cited category tracked. Across thousands of "best [service] near [city]" queries, AI engines disproportionately return directory aggregators, not individual operators. Most local businesses are not cited at all. The leaderboard below reflects the aggregators that fill the void.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Angi (formerly Angie's List)	100	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate
2	Yelp	92	ChatGPT	→ Flat

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
3	Thumbtack	78	Gemini	↑ Strong
4	HomeAdvisor	65	Google AI Overviews	→ Flat
5	Nextdoor	55	Perplexity	↑ Moderate
6	Houzz (home services)	48	ChatGPT	→ Flat
7	Google Business Profile (operators)	32	Google AI Overviews	↑ Slight

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the structure is broken. Local operators don't generate the third-party citation surface that AI engines retrieve from. The engines fall back on directories. The result: a \$400B+ category in which most individual operators are invisible to AI buyers.

What's moving. Thumbtack gains share fast — its structured-data discipline outpaces the directories. Google Business Profile is the only operator-level surface that AI engines reliably cite, and only when profiles are fully populated and schema-marked.

Action. Local operators serious about AI visibility need a stack: aggressive Google Business Profile completion, local-press earned media, Reddit and Nextdoor community presence, and category schema on owned sites. This is the largest unclaimed Citation Share opportunity in the report.

Pickleball

Pickleball is the report's emergent category — three years ago it would not have warranted inclusion. By 2026 it is a \$1B+ equipment and apparel market with a buyer-research pattern dominated by paddle comparison and brand evaluation queries. The Citation Share landscape is fragmented; no brand dominates all five engines.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Selkirk	100	ChatGPT	↑ Strong
2	Joola	94	Perplexity	↑ Strong
3	Paddletek	80	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate
4	Engage	72	Claude	↑ Moderate
5	Onix	65	Google AI Overviews	→ Flat
6	Vatic Pro	52	Perplexity	↑ Strong
7	Six Zero	44	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. Selkirk and Joola dominate editorial and Reddit. Vatic Pro and Six Zero — newer entrants — gain share through aggressive review-cycle press and direct-to-consumer community plays. The category rewards niche-media presence (paddle review sites, dedicated YouTubers).

What's moving. Citation Share is moving fast — quarterly variance is the highest in this report. The category is unstable; small earned-media bursts move composite scores 8-10 points. By 2027 the leaderboard could reorder substantially.

Action. Pickleball brands competing for Citation Share have a window. Niche-media saturation now — review sites, YouTuber outreach, Reddit r/Pickleball presence — compounds before the category consolidates. Late entrants in 2027 will face structural headwinds.

Sports Betting

Sports Betting in the U.S. is one of the most-cited categories tracked — buyer queries are high-volume, regulatorily complex, and state-specific. The Citation Share landscape is consolidated: a handful of operators dominate every engine. Engine variance is high because each engine surfaces different aspects of the buyer journey (welcome bonus, state availability, app reviews).

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	DraftKings	100	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate
2	FanDuel	98	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate
3	BetMGM	78	ChatGPT	→ Flat
4	Caesars Sportsbook	70	Perplexity	→ Flat
5	ESPN BET	62	ChatGPT	↑ Strong
6	Fanatics Sportsbook	48	Gemini	↑ Moderate
7	BetRivers	38	Google AI Overviews	→ Flat

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. DraftKings and FanDuel are effectively tied. Their Citation Share advantage compounds from product-marketing volume, sustained sports-media earned coverage, and category-native content (odds explainers, guides) that engines repeatedly retrieve.

What's moving. ESPN BET gains share fast through editorial integration with ESPN content. Fanatics is gaining ground despite a later start. State-launch news cycles produce visible Citation Share spikes — engines weight recent news heavily in this category.

Action. Operators in this category cannot rely on advertising volume alone. Earned media in sports and finance press, plus structured "best sportsbook by state" content, plus Reddit community presence is the floor. Regulatory transparency content has high citation value in Claude.

B2B SaaS

B2B SaaS is the category where Claude carries disproportionate weight. Buyer queries are evaluative and high-stakes — "best CRM for mid-market," "Notion vs Asana for marketing teams" — and the answers buyers see shape RFPs and shortlists. Citation Share leadership tracks to analyst coverage, sustained trade press, and well-engineered comparison content.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Salesforce	100	Claude	↑ Slight
2	HubSpot	94	ChatGPT	↑ Moderate
3	Notion	88	Claude	↑ Strong
4	Asana	78	ChatGPT	→ Flat
5	Monday.com	75	Google AI Overviews	↑ Moderate
6	Slack	72	ChatGPT	→ Flat
7	Linear	55	Claude	↑ Strong

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. Salesforce wins on analyst depth — Gartner and Forrester coverage compounds in Claude. HubSpot wins on owned-content saturation. Notion and Linear win on developer and prosumer community presence — the engines weight Hacker News and GitHub-adjacent discussion heavily in B2B tech.

What's moving. Notion is the fastest-rising in the category. Linear is the strongest emergent. Both run aggressive original-research and comparison-content programs. Legacy enterprise brands without a content layer are quietly losing Citation Share to nimbler challengers.

Action. B2B SaaS Citation Share is the most engineerable category in the report. Original research, comparison content, analyst engagement, and developer/practitioner community presence — done together — compound faster than any single channel. Brands without a Claude strategy are leaving B2B share on the table.

Health & Wellness

Health & Wellness is a citation-cautious category — engines apply higher source-quality thresholds and surface clinical and editorial sources disproportionately. Buyer queries skew

toward symptom research, product evaluation, and supplement comparison. Brands win by combining clinical credibility, sustained editorial press, and community trust signals.

Top brands by composite Citation Share — modeled.

#	Brand	Composite	Lead engine	Trend YoY
1	Peloton	100	ChatGPT	→ Flat
2	Oura	92	Claude	↑ Strong
3	Whoop	85	Perplexity	↑ Moderate
4	Hims & Hers	78	Google AI Overviews	↑ Strong
5	AG1 (Athletic Greens)	70	ChatGPT	↓ Slight decline
6	Calm	62	ChatGPT	→ Flat
7	Headspace	55	Claude	↓ Slight

Modeled directional Citation Share. Composite of five engines. Normalized so category leader = 100.

Why the leaders lead. Peloton remains the default-cited brand for at-home fitness despite hardware-side challenges — Citation Share lags brand health by quarters. Oura wins on research depth and clinical-press credibility. Hims gains share on aggressive trade press and a broadening category definition (mental health, weight loss).

What's moving. AG1 Citation Share is softening under sustained skeptical press. Reddit sentiment has shifted, and engines reflect that within one to two quarters. Wearables (Oura, Whoop) gain at the expense of legacy fitness brands.

Action. Health & Wellness brands cannot fake clinical credibility. The Citation Share fix is real third-party validation — peer-reviewed citations, clinical-press relationships, and conservative claims content. Brands that over-claim get punished by engine source weighting; the trend is intensifying.

Across all eight categories — a unified read.

Eight categories. Five engines. One pattern. The brands at the top combined four behaviors at a scale most of their challengers did not. Sustained earned media. Original research. Community presence. Structured-data hygiene. None new in isolation; all rare in combination.

The brands at the bottom of these tables — and the thousands of brands not listed at all — share the inverse pattern: episodic press, no original data, no community footprint, and inconsistent or absent structured data. The engines do not have what they need to cite these brands. So they don't.

Citation Share is a managed asset. Brands that treat it that way pull ahead. Brands that don't fall further behind every quarter.

CHAPTER 05

The Source Mix Problem

Earned media, Reddit, analyst coverage, structured data, community content — what AI engines actually retrieve and how brands should weight investment.

7 pages

The Source Mix Problem

Every brand has a source mix. Most brands don't know what it is. Across the 15+ categories tracked, the single most common failure mode is over-investment in one source type — usually owned content — at the expense of the source types the engines actually weight.

The source mix is the answer to a simple diagnostic question: when the engines cite a brand, what kinds of sources do they cite? Editorial press? Wikipedia? Reddit? Brand sites? Analyst reports? YouTube? The mix tells you where Citation Share is coming from — and where it is exposed.

Six source types that matter.

1. Editorial press

Trade and consumer publications. The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, The New York Times, TechCrunch, Wired, Allure, Variety, Sports Illustrated, the trade equivalents in every vertical. Engines weight high-authority editorial sources more than any other input across most categories. This is the irreplaceable layer.

2. Wikipedia and structured reference

Wikipedia is over-cited relative to its information density. The reasons are structural: editable, well-cited internally, treated by engines as a disambiguation layer. A brand without a Wikipedia entity, or with a stub entity, leaves Citation Share on the table in every engine — most dramatically in Gemini, where the Google Knowledge Graph leans on Wikipedia heavily.

3. Reddit and community

Reddit punches above its weight in every consumer category. The engines treat Reddit as a sentiment and verification source. Brands with strong Reddit presence — favorable threads, accurate AMAs, knowledgeable subreddit moderators — gain Citation Share that paid media cannot match. Community-native categories (gaming, beauty, fitness, software) over-index on Reddit; regulated categories (finance, healthcare) under-index.

4. Brand-owned sites

The brand's own website, blog, and content properties. Necessary for product-detail citation but rarely sufficient as the dominant input. Engines that over-cite a brand's own site are flagging an information gap elsewhere — and competitors often outflank brands that rely too heavily on owned content.

5. Research and analyst coverage

Gartner, Forrester, IDC, McKinsey, BCG, plus industry-specific analysts. Disproportionately weighted by Claude and on B2B categories. Analyst reports often function as the single highest-leverage source in considered-purchase B2B research.

6. YouTube and structured video

Video is increasingly retrieved by AI engines — Gemini and Google AI Overviews most aggressively. Long-form review videos, demo videos, and how-tos generate citation share that text alone does not. Most brands under-invest here.

The diagnostic — what your mix says.

Three diagnostic patterns recur.

Pattern A — "Owned-content trap." 60%+ of citations come from the brand's own site.

Vulnerability: as soon as a competitor produces structured third-party content, share collapses.

Common in B2B SaaS and DTC categories.

Pattern B — "Single-engine concentration." Brand wins ChatGPT, loses everywhere else.

The source mix is over-weighted to the inputs ChatGPT favors and under-built for the engines that weight news (Perplexity) or analyst depth (Claude) or Knowledge Graph (Gemini).

Pattern C — "Community-dependent." Citation Share is healthy but driven primarily by Reddit and forum activity. Vulnerability: a single negative news cycle or sentiment swing collapses the source. Common in fast-moving consumer categories.

The corrective is the same in all three cases: diversify the source mix. Build the under-invested layers. Maintain the strong ones.

Modeled benchmark mix — best-in-class.

Across the leaders profiled in Chapter 4, a benchmark source mix emerges. No leader matches this exactly — variance by category is significant — but it serves as a target for brands assessing their own mix.

Source type	Best-in-class benchmark	Typical underperformer
Editorial / news	30-40%	10-15%
Wikipedia / reference	12-18%	0-5%
Reddit / community	10-15%	<5%
Brand-owned	12-18%	50%+
Research / analyst	8-15%	<2%
YouTube / video	5-10%	<2%
Other	5-10%	Variable

Modeled directional. See Chapter 9 for methodology.

The best-in-class brands don't have a content strategy. They have a source mix strategy. The difference is everything.

Where the money should go.

The implication for budget allocation is direct. The brands gaining Citation Share are reallocating from paid acquisition and owned content into the three source layers that compound: earned media, structured publishing for retrieval, and community presence. Paid advertising still has its job — direct response, conversion — but it does not move Citation Share.

The 5W investment heuristic for brands building an AI Communications program from a standing start: budget 50% to sustained earned media, 25% to structured original content and Wikipedia/Knowledge Graph hygiene, 15% to community and Reddit, 10% to analyst engagement and YouTube. Adjust by category. Do not skip layers.

CHAPTER 06

GEO vs AEO — The Unified Discipline

The strategic distinction between optimizing for recommendation engines (GEO) and answer-extraction engines (AEO), with prescriptive frameworks for each.

5 pages

GEO vs AEO — The Unified Discipline

GEO and AEO are not the same. Generative Engine Optimization and Answer Engine Optimization are related disciplines with different optimization targets, different content patterns, and different success metrics. Brands that conflate them under-perform on both.

The discipline has matured to the point that the distinction matters operationally — different teams own different pieces, different KPIs apply, different content patterns work. This chapter is the operational reference.

The definitions.

GEO — Generative Engine Optimization

Optimizing brand presence inside generative AI engines — ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini — where buyers ask open-ended questions and receive synthesized, multi-source answers. GEO is the work of being one of the brands the engines name in the answer. Success metric: Citation Share.

AEO — Answer Engine Optimization

Optimizing brand presence inside direct-answer surfaces — Google AI Overviews, featured snippets, voice assistants, in-app answer features — where a single answer or short list is extracted and presented. AEO is the work of being the source the answer is extracted from. Success metric: extracted-citation rate.

The distinction in practice.

Same buyer query, two different optimization patterns.

Dimension	GEO (generative)	AEO (extractive)
Output	Synthesized multi-source answer	Single extracted answer or short list
Source surfacing	Multiple citations per answer	1-5 sources, often de-emphasized
Optimization unit	Brand entity authority	Specific content passage

Dimension	GEO (generative)	AEO (extractive)
Content pattern	Editorial saturation, breadth	Schema-marked Q&A, direct answers
Lead engines	ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity	Google AI Overviews, Gemini, voice
KPI	Citation Share	Extracted-answer share
Time horizon	6-18 months to move	Faster — weeks to months

What works for GEO.

- Sustained earned media in high-authority publications — the single highest-leverage GEO input.
- Original research and proprietary data — published with clear methodology, broadly distributed.
- Wikipedia and Knowledge Graph entity hygiene — disambiguation, source quality, factual accuracy.
- Community presence on Reddit, Quora, and category-native forums — sustained, accurate, helpful.
- Cross-engine source mix — built deliberately, not by accident.

What works for AEO.

- Direct-answer content — short, structured, exactly answering the buyer query in the first 40 words.
- Schema markup — FAQPage, HowTo, Article, Product, Review, with full property completion.
- Question-pattern content architecture — H2/H3 headings phrased as buyer questions, each followed by a direct answer.
- Source-citation discipline — link out to primary sources to inherit citation authority.
- Speed and crawlability — engines extract from sources that are reachable and fast.

The unified discipline.

Brands that treat GEO and AEO as separate programs typically under-invest in one. The brands gaining the most Citation Share run them as a unified discipline with shared infrastructure: one editorial team, one structured-data layer, one community-presence program — with execution patterns calibrated to each engine.

GEO builds the brand's right to be named. AEO captures the moment of extraction. Both, or neither.

CHAPTER 07

Local AI Visibility — The Next Frontier

The crisis facing local services brands and operators. What's working, what's not, and the largest unclaimed Citation Share opportunity in the market.

6 pages

Local AI Visibility — The Next Frontier

Local services has an AI problem. Across the buyer queries we tracked — "best plumber near me," "dentist accepting new patients in [city]," "emergency HVAC repair [city]" — the engines disproportionately return directory aggregators rather than individual operators. Most local businesses are not cited at all when buyers ask AI engines for recommendations.

This is a structural problem. AI engines retrieve from sources at scale, and individual local operators rarely generate the third-party citation surface engines need to cite them. The result: a \$400B+ U.S. local-services economy in which most operators are invisible to AI buyers.

The diagnostic — what we found.

Local category	Modeled operator citation rate	Aggregator citation share
HVAC	12%	82%
Plumbing	10%	85%
Dental	18%	70%
Funeral services	8%	88%
Car wash / detail	14%	78%
Home cleaning	9%	86%
Locksmith	6%	90%

Modeled directional. "Operator citation rate" = % of answers naming any individual operator. "Aggregator share" = % of answers naming a directory or marketplace.

Across all seven local categories tracked, operator-level Citation Share is materially below what category economics would predict. The engines know the directories exist; they cannot easily verify the operators.

Why this is happening.

- Individual operators rarely generate sustained earned media — the highest-leverage GEO input.
- Local press is fragmented, paywalled, and inconsistently indexed by AI engines.
- Operator websites are typically thin on structured data — schema absent or partial.
- Reviews on Google Business Profile, Yelp, and Angi feed aggregators more than operators directly.
- Local community surfaces (Nextdoor, Facebook groups) are unevenly retrieved across engines.

What's working — the early movers.

A small set of local operators have cracked AI visibility. The common pattern, across categories:

- Aggressive Google Business Profile completion — full attributes, photos, services, Q&A, posts.
- Sustained local-press earned media — chamber publications, regional trade press, neighborhood papers.
- Reddit and Nextdoor presence — accurate, helpful, sustained — by name.
- Owned-site schema deployment — LocalBusiness, Service, Review, FAQPage at minimum.
- Original local-context content — "best [service] for [city neighborhood]," "[city] [seasonal issue] guide" — that becomes the local answer source itself.

The opportunity — by the numbers.

If the local-services Citation Share gap closes — if individual operators move from a modeled 12% category average to even 25% — the operators that move first capture disproportionate share for several reasons. The engines lock in early citations. Buyers form habits around named operators. Aggregators lose their structural advantage in the category.

Local AI visibility is the largest unclaimed Citation Share opportunity in this report. The operators that build the stack in 2026 own the 2028 buyer.

A starter framework for local operators.

- Month 1 — Google Business Profile fully built; LocalBusiness schema on all service pages; basic FAQPage schema on top 10 service queries.
- Month 2-3 — Local-press outreach: chamber publications, neighborhood papers, regional trade press. Sustained, not episodic.
- Month 4-6 — Original location-content production: "best [service] in [neighborhood]" guides, seasonal issue explainers, local cost transparency content.
- Ongoing — Reddit and Nextdoor presence by name; review-response discipline; quarterly schema audit; quarterly Citation Share check.

PART THREE

The Playbook.

GEO vs AEO. Local AI visibility. The prescriptive 90-day, 6-month, and 12-month frameworks.

CHAPTER 08

The 2026 GEO Playbook

The prescriptive 90-day, 6-month, and 12-month framework for brands competing on the AI answer surface. One linear program. Three milestones. Always-on operation.

8 pages

The 2026 GEO Playbook

Diagnosis is not enough. This chapter is the operational playbook — what to do, in what order, on what time horizon, with what resourcing. One linear program. Three milestones. Always-on operation. The brands building Citation Share are not running campaigns. They are running operating rhythms.

The program has three milestones: a 90-day baseline-and-repair phase, a 6-month build phase, and a 12-month always-on cycle that reruns every quarter. Each milestone unlocks the next. No skipping. The brands at the top of every Citation Share Index in this report ran this loop — most for years, some on the second cycle, none in their first 90 days.

Citation Share is not a project. It is an operating rhythm. The brands moving up are the ones running the loop quarterly — every quarter.

90 days — Baseline and repair.

Goal: Establish baseline category visibility, identify the citation gaps, repair the structured-data layer, and prioritize the source targets engines will retrieve from over the next twelve months.

Output by Day 90: Measured Citation Share baseline across five engines. Repaired technical layer. Prioritized source-target list. Quarterly measurement cadence installed.

Days 1-30 — Audit and baseline.

- Run a Citation Share baseline audit across the five engines on the top buyer-intent prompts in the category.
- Inventory the current source mix — where do existing citations come from, and what's missing.
- Audit owned-content schema and structured data — flag every gap.
- Confirm Wikipedia presence and Knowledge Graph entity status.

- Document community presence: Reddit, Quora, category-native forums.
- Lock the prompt set. This audit reruns quarterly — same prompts, same engines, same scoring.

Days 31-60 — Repair the foundation.

- Deploy schema across owned content: Organization, Product/Service, FAQPage, Review, Article. Full property completion — not partial.
- Stand up or expand the Wikipedia entity. Factual, well-sourced, encyclopedia-grade content.
- Fix Knowledge Graph entity disambiguation, source accuracy, and entity-linking.
- Recover lost or broken third-party citation surfaces — dead links, deindexed press, outdated bios.
- Begin Reddit and category-forum presence work: accurate, helpful, by name.

Days 61-90 — Prioritize the source targets.

- Identify the top 20 high-authority publications and source surfaces engines retrieve from in your category.
- Map current relationships: which of those 20 have covered the brand in the trailing 12 months?
- Prioritize the 5-7 high-leverage gaps to close in months 4-6.
- Re-run the Citation Share audit. Establish the quarter-over-quarter movement baseline.

Day 90 is the only milestone where speed is the metric. Months 4-12 are about density and discipline. From here, the rhythm is the product.

6 months — Build density.

Goal: Build earned-media density at the publications that matter. Strengthen community signals across Reddit and forum surfaces. Refresh structured owned content as engines re-train.

Output by Month 6: Measurable Citation Share movement on at least two of the five engines. Sustained earned-media cadence. Strengthened community presence. Refreshed, engine-readable owned-content layer.

Months 4-5 — Earned media density.

- Launch sustained earned-media program: 3-5 placements per month in tier-one trade and consumer press.
- Prioritize the 5-7 publications identified at Day 90.
- Commission the first piece of original research or proprietary data — methodology locked, data run, schema-marked, distribution planned.
- Begin analyst engagement where relevant: Gartner, Forrester, IDC, McKinsey, sector-specific firms.

Month 5-6 — Community and content.

- Strengthen Reddit and category-forum presence — sustained, accurate, helpful, by name.
- Refresh the top 25 owned-content pages: schema property completion, direct-answer formatting, FAQ patterns.
- Publish the original-research piece. Distribute widely. Pitch the data to the 5-7 priority publications.
- Begin video content cadence for retrieval: YouTube long-form, demos, how-tos.

Month 6 — Re-audit and reallocate.

- Re-run the full Citation Share audit. Compare Day 90 baseline to Month 6.
- Engine-by-engine breakdown — which engines moved, which didn't.
- Source-mix benchmark vs. category leaders. Identify the layer to reinforce in months 7-12.
- Reallocate budget into the weakest-performing source layer for the next two quarters.

12 months — Always-on operation.

Goal: Operate an always-on citation program with quarterly retesting, executive reporting, and continuous reallocation. The program is no longer a launch. It is an operating rhythm.

Output by Month 12: Top-quartile Citation Share across at least three of the five engines. Quarterly executive reporting installed. Category leadership defense pattern in place.

Months 7-9 — Compound.

- Cross-engine optimization — close the gap on the weakest engine.
- Quarterly Citation Share review with executive distribution.
- Second piece of original research published. Quarterly cadence established.
- Sustained earned-media cadence: 3-5 per month, no gaps. Episodic press loses Citation Share within 90 days.
- Begin claiming emergent buyer-query categories: new prompt patterns, new sub-categories, new use cases.

Months 10-12 — Defend and extend.

- Sustained source-mix discipline — never let any single source type exceed benchmark ranges.
- Quarterly proprietary research; annual flagship research piece planned for the following year.
- Wikipedia and Knowledge Graph: monthly hygiene audit installed.
- Cross-engine variance: maintain top-quartile on all five engines, no exceptions.
- Citation Share decay watch: any 5+ point movement triggers diagnosis within 30 days.

The always-on operating rhythm.

- Quarterly: Citation Share audit, source-mix benchmark, budget reallocation, executive report.
- Monthly: earned-media placements (3-5), community presence (sustained), Wikipedia and Knowledge Graph hygiene.

- Annually: flagship research, strategy re-baseline, methodology update, prompt-library refresh.

The brands that lose Citation Share don't get out-strategized. They relax. The always-on rhythm is the only defense.

Common pitfalls — at every milestone.

- Single-channel investment — owned content only, earned only, community only. None alone works.
- Episodic press — three placements in March, none in April, two in May. Engines de-weight episodic sources.
- Schema theater — partial deployments, missing properties, never audited. Engines read what's actually there.
- Ignoring Wikipedia — the highest-leverage single asset most brands neglect.
- Optimizing for one engine — winning ChatGPT, missing Perplexity, invisible on Google AI Overviews.
- No measurement — running the program without Citation Share data is doing AI Communications by feel.

Budget heuristics.

Directional starting point — adjust by category, starting position, and engine mix:

Activity	% of GEO budget	Notes
Sustained earned media	40-55%	Tier-one trade and consumer press; 3-8/month
Original research / data	10-20%	Quarterly cadence; annual flagship
Community presence (Reddit, Quora)	8-12%	Full-time or near-FT owner
Owned content + schema	10-15%	Production + structured-data discipline
Wikipedia / Knowledge Graph	5-8%	Monthly hygiene + entity expansion
YouTube / video	5-10%	Long-form, demos, how-tos

Activity	% of GEO budget	Notes
Measurement / Citation Share auditing	5-8%	Quarterly; per-engine variance

CHAPTER 09

Methodology & Glossary

Full methodology disclosure, prompt libraries, scoring frameworks, statistical notes, and a glossary of every term used in the report.

3 pages

Methodology & Glossary

How 5W researches.

Every finding in this report is grounded in systematic prompt testing across all five major AI engines. The methodology mirrors the 5W AI Visibility Index Series — extended to a full annual sample.

- Engines analyzed: ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, Google AI Overviews.
- Categories sampled: 15+ B2C and B2B, of which eight are profiled in Chapter 4.
- Prompt set: 10,000+ buyer-intent queries; per-category subsets of 600-1,000 prompts.
- Scoring: composite Citation Share — Citation Frequency (40%), Cross-Engine Breadth (20%), Query-Type Breadth (20%), Extractability (15%), Crawl Access (5%).
- Sampling window: trailing twelve months; quarterly snapshots; year-over-year comparison.
- Updates: methodology revisions disclosed; prompt libraries re-tested quarterly.

On modeled directional Citation Share.

Brand-level Citation Share scores in this report — particularly the leaderboards in Chapter 4 — are presented as modeled directional composites. They are constructed by combining prompt-response patterns observed during the sampling window with engine source-weighting models calibrated to the 5W AI Visibility Index methodology.

They are not derived from logged query runs against a single point-in-time engine instance. Engine outputs vary by user, session, and personalization state; logged query data from any single test instance is a snapshot, not a benchmark. The composite Citation Share scores published here are designed to be directionally accurate and comparable across categories, not to be reproduced query-by-query.

Brands seeking benchmark-grade, logged Citation Share data for their specific category should engage the 5W AI Visibility Index Series — the per-category, deep-sample, logged-query research product that feeds this annual report.

Limitations and confidence.

- Engine versions move. Citation patterns observed in any sampling window reflect the engines at that time.
- Personalization and account-state variance create variance in single-query reproducibility.
- Source mix percentages are weighted averages across the prompt set; per-query variance is high.
- Local and emergent categories carry larger confidence intervals than mature concentrated categories.

All findings should be read as directional patterns at the category and engine level — not as forensic single-query verdicts.

Glossary.

AI Communications

The discipline of becoming the answer inside ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, and Google AI Overviews. Combines public relations, digital marketing, Generative Engine Optimization, and AI-visibility research.

Citation Share

The percentage of buyer-intent AI answers across the five major engines in which a brand is cited within a defined category and prompt set. Calculated per engine, per category, per quarter; weighted to a composite score.

Citation Frequency

How often a brand appears in answers across the prompt set, measured per engine. Highest-weight factor in the composite Citation Share score.

Cross-Engine Breadth

The number of the five engines that cite a brand at material rates. A brand winning one engine and absent on the other four has low Cross-Engine Breadth.

Query-Type Breadth

The number of distinct buyer-intent query types within a category that surface the brand. A brand cited only for one query pattern has narrow Query-Type Breadth.

Extractability

The degree to which brand-owned content is structured for AI retrieval — schema, semantic HTML, factual density, direct-answer formatting.

Crawl Access

Whether brand and source content is reachable by AI training and retrieval crawlers. Robots policies, paywall behavior, and rendering all factor in.

GEO — Generative Engine Optimization

Optimizing brand presence inside generative AI engines where buyers ask open-ended questions and receive synthesized answers. Success metric: Citation Share.

AEO — Answer Engine Optimization

Optimizing brand presence inside direct-answer surfaces — Google AI Overviews, featured snippets, voice assistants — where a single answer is extracted and presented. Success metric: extracted-citation rate.

Source Mix

The distribution across source types — editorial, Wikipedia, Reddit, owned, analyst, YouTube — from which a brand's citations are drawn. Diagnostic of program vulnerability and opportunity.

Citation Decay

Measurable loss of Citation Share when brands pause earned media or structured-content investment. Typically observable within 60-120 days of investment reduction; precedes declines in traditional brand-health metrics.

Retrieval Anchor

A piece of brand content or third-party citation that the engines repeatedly retrieve as the source of a particular fact or claim. Retrieval anchors compound — once an engine learns where to find an answer, it returns there.

Structural Shift

The transition of buyer research from a click-and-rank attention economy to a synthesized-answer citation economy. The defining commercial shift of 2024-2026.

About 5W AI Communications

5W is the AI Communications Firm, building brand authority across the platforms where decisions now happen — ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews — alongside earned media, digital, and influencer channels. 5W combines public relations, digital marketing, Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), and proprietary AI visibility research to help clients measure and grow their presence in AI-driven buyer research.

Founded in 2003, 5W is recognized as a Top U.S. PR Agency by O'Dwyer's, named Agency of the Year in the American Business Awards®, honored as a 2026 Top Place to Work in Communications by Ragan, and named to Digiday's WorkLife Employer of the Year list.

5W serves clients across B2C sectors — Beauty & Fashion, Consumer Brands, Entertainment, Food & Beverage, Health & Wellness, Travel & Hospitality, Technology, and Nonprofit — and B2B specialties including Corporate Communications, Reputation Management, Public Affairs, Crisis Communications, and Digital Marketing across Social, Influencer, Paid Media, GEO, and SEO.

Learn more at 5wpr.com.

About the author.

Ronn Torossian is the founder and chairman of 5W AI Communications, the AI Communications Firm. He is the publisher of Everything-PR and the author of two best-selling editions of For Immediate Release. He has been an industry leader for decades and is now building the AI Communications era.

More than a third of consumers now begin product research with AI, not Google. Torossian's work is to influence the answer.

AI Communications is a mix of journalism, psychology, and engineering — and the

audience is now the machine.

Continue the conversation.

Media & analyst inquiries: press@5wpr.com

Custom data cuts and briefings: 5wpr.com/contactus

Speaking and contributed commentary: 5wpr.com/contactus

AI Visibility Index Series: 5wpr.com/research/ai-visibility-index/2026-series

AI Reputation Index: 5wpr.com/reputation

AI Citation Audit: 5wpr.com/ai-citation-audit

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