



AI CITATION STUDY

We Asked AI 1,226 Questions.

Here's How it Decides Who to Cite.



Contents

01	Overall Findings	03	12	Related Searches Reveal Many More Potential Sources	10
02	ChatGPT and Gemini Cite Different Sources	04	13	What Are the Top-Cited Domains?	11
03	AI Search Is More Location-Specific Than Organic Search	04	14	The Domains AI Treats as Core Sources	12
04	Gemini Leans More on Company-Owned Content Than ChatGPT	05	15	AI Answers Are Rewritten for Each Country	13
05	What AI-Cited Snippets Have in Common	06	16	Global Giants Dominate, but Many Sources Are Local	14
06	AI Cites a Broader Mix of Pages for Low-Volume Keywords	07	17	What Cited Pages Have in Common: Structure & Schema	15
07	Brand Reputation Searches Send Users to Review Platforms	07	18	Link Authority: AI Does Not Need Your Backlinks	16
08	How Often Each AI System Cited a Source	08	19	What Do Cited Pages Rank for Organically?	16
09	Ranking Higher on Google Improves AI Citation Chances	09	20	Additional Observations	17
10	ChatGPT's Citations Are Closer to Google's Than Bing's	09	21	Conclusion: What This Study Means for Marketers	18
11	AI-Cited Snippets Tend to Appear Near the Top of a Section	10			

Overall Findings

Generative engine optimisation (GEO) is still taking shape, so it's no surprise that many marketers aren't sure how AI search actually works. In client meetings, one question comes up again and again: when ChatGPT, Gemini, or Google AI Overviews answer a question, how do they decide which websites to mention?

To find out, we ran a controlled study of 613 B2B search queries across six sectors, each tested in the US and the UK. We queried ChatGPT (with web search), Google Gemini, Google Search (including AI Overviews), and Bing, then traced more than 11,000 citations back to the exact passages that earned them.

ChatGPT, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews don't simply repeat the pages that rank highest on Google, nor do they cite the same sources as one another. Each platform draws from a different mix of company-owned content, review platforms, technology publications, and other sources.

The findings suggest that AI citation is related to traditional SEO but distinct enough to require a dedicated GEO approach. For marketers, that means:

- Ranking well on Google can help (especially with AI Overviews), but it won't guarantee visibility in ChatGPT or Gemini.
- Those models favour content that is clear, comprehensive, well-structured, and easy to extract, while also leaning heavily on recognised third-party sources such as review sites and industry publications.
- In some searches, the AI invented brand names, tools, and features, especially when it couldn't find strong, up-to-date sources. That makes source quality and recency a brand-safety and trust issue, not just an SEO one.

The sections that follow break down what the data says about source selection, localisation content structure, and organic visibility. We also provide insights into content planning, reputation management, and how to measure your AI visibility across markets.

ChatGPT and Gemini Cite Different Sources

Across 1,226 keyword-and-country tests, ChatGPT and Gemini shared an average of just 5% of their cited domains. This figure uses Jaccard overlap, a measure of how many sources two lists have in common relative to the total number of distinct sources across both lists.

In the typical test, the overlap was zero: 58% of searches produced completely different citation sets.

Intent	Mean overlap
Brand reputation	0.090
Branded	0.063
Client brand	0.115
Commercial	0.035
Head	0.060
Question	0.029
Transactional	0.029

58%

of searches produced completely different citation sets between ChatGPT and Gemini.

AI Search Is More Location-Specific Than Organic Search

Higher scores indicate greater overlap between the sources shown in the US and UK. AI tools showed less overlap than Google's regular organic results, meaning they rebuilt their source lists more extensively for each country.

Interestingly, Gemini showed the greatest degree of localisation.

Source	US / UK domain overlap
Google organic (top 10)	0.387
ChatGPT citations	0.267
Bing organic (top 10)	0.221
Gemini citations	0.192
Google AI Overview citations	0.183

Gemini Leans More on Company-Owned Content Than ChatGPT

Most citations in this test came from company-owned content, but Gemini relied on it more heavily. Vendor blogs accounted for 74.6% of Gemini's citations versus 57.5% of ChatGPT's.

ChatGPT spread the remaining citations across corporate sites, documentation, news media, and directories more than Gemini did, even though both systems drew equally on independent review sites.

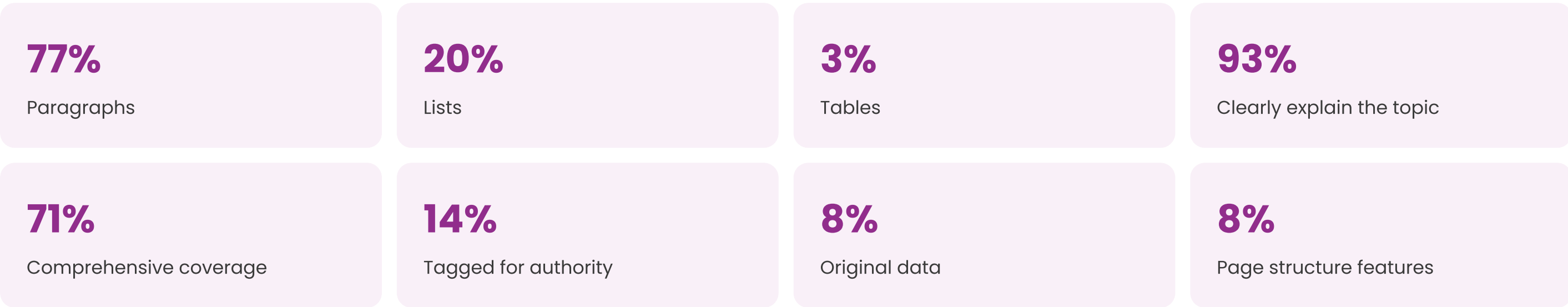
Commercial bias, i.e., the page recommending what it sells, appeared in 75% of ChatGPT's citations and 82% of Gemini's.

Page type	ChatGPT	Gemini
Vendor blog	57.5%	74.6%
Independent review	18.9%	18.9%
Corporate site	12.7%	3.3%
News media	4.2%	0.7%
Documentation	3.8%	0.9%
Directory	1.4%	1.3%
Other	1.2%	0.2%
Agency blog	0.3%	0.1%
Forum / UGC	0.0%	0.0%



What AI-Cited Snippets Have in Common

Most AI-cited passages were concise, self-contained explanations rather than isolated facts, definitions, or table entries. Of the 11,037 citation matches analysed, 89% could be understood without relying heavily on the surrounding page. The typical cited passage was 56 words long, although longer excerpts raised the average to 73 words.



The one major difference between the systems was the prevalence of FAQ-style passages. ChatGPT's cited passages were more likely than Gemini's to appear under question-based headings (29% versus 16%) and to form the first block of text beneath a heading (53% versus 46%).

Provider	Self-contained	Median words	Paragraph share	Question heading	First block after heading
ChatGPT	83.3%	56	71%	29.3%	52.7%
Gemini	91.6%	56	79%	16.4%	45.9%

AI Cites a Broader Mix of Pages for Low-Volume Keywords

AI didn't treat all keywords the same way. For high- and mid-volume queries, company-owned content dominated the citations, taking around three-quarters of the spots (74.0% for high-volume, 73.8% for mid-volume keywords). That dominance dropped in the low-volume group, where vendor content fell to 65.6% of citations.

Lower-volume keywords brought more variety into the mix. Independent review sites accounted for 15.9% of citations in the low-volume group, compared with just 8.6% for high-volume keywords. Directories also showed up more often: 5.2% of citations for low-volume keywords versus 1.7% for high-volume.

Page type	High volume	Mid volume	Low volume
Vendor blog	74.0%	73.8%	65.6%
Independent review	8.6%	14.0%	15.9%
Corporate site	9.0%	6.7%	10.1%
Directory	1.7%	1.1%	5.2%
News media	1.7%	1.6%	1.4%
Documentation	2.9%	1.6%	1.0%
Other	1.4%	1.1%	0.4%
Agency blog	0.9%	0.1%	0.5%

Brand Reputation Searches Send Users to Review Platforms

When users asked about a brand's reputation, AI systems turned to review platforms far more often than they did for other searches. These platforms accounted for 36% of cited URLs in reputation-related queries, compared with 6% across all other intents.

The effect was stronger in ChatGPT, where review sites accounted for 41% of citations, compared with 27% in Gemini. For marketers, this means that reputation management is also an AI visibility issue: the sources that shape an AI-generated answer may sit outside the brand's own content ecosystem.

Domain	Citations
g2.com	343
gartner.com	207
reddit.com	124
capterra.com	107
trustpilot.com	86
techradar.com	85
forbes.com	79
trustradius.com	73
softwareadvice.com	53
uk.trustpilot.com	52
glassdoor.com	50
nerdwallet.com	37

36%

of cited URLs in brand-reputation queries came from review platforms, vs 6% for all other intents.

How Often Each AI System Cited a Source

The table below shows the percentage of searches in each intent category that produced at least one citation from ChatGPT, Gemini, or Google AI Overviews. It measures whether a citation appeared and not how many citations appeared or whether the answer was accurate.

ChatGPT cited a source in every test, partly because web search was enabled for all ChatGPT runs. Gemini's citation rate varied more by intent: it cited 89% of brand-reputation searches but only 34% of question-based searches. Google AI Overviews appeared most often for branded and client-brand searches, while transactional searches had the lowest AI Overview rate at 67%.

Intent	ChatGPT cites	Gemini cites	AI Overview present
Brand reputation	100%	89%	92%
Branded	100%	88%	97%
Client brand	98%	79%	98%
Commercial	100%	74%	91%
Head	100%	66%	83%
Question	100%	34%	93%
Transactional	100%	80%	67%

Ranking Higher on Google Improves Your Chances of AI Citation

Ranking well still helps, but AI citation is not simply a copy of Google's ranking system.

In this test, domains ranking in Google's top three results were more likely to be cited by ChatGPT, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews than domains ranking lower down the results page. However, this didn't always guarantee a citation: ChatGPT cited 34.8% of these domains, Gemini cited 21.0%, and Google AI Overviews cited 26.6%.

The relationship weakened further down the rankings. For domains ranking in positions 11–20, citation rates fell to 14.1% for ChatGPT, 8.4% for Gemini, and 12.8% for Google AI Overviews.

Google rank bucket	Cited by ChatGPT	Cited by Gemini	Cited by AI Overview
1–3	34.8%	21.0%	26.6%
4–10	19.8%	16.1%	18.1%
11–20	14.1%	8.4%	12.8%

ChatGPT's Citations Are Closer to Google's Than Bing's

Because ChatGPT has been associated with Bing, one theory is that its citations should overlap more with Bing's top results than with Google's. We tested this by comparing ChatGPT's cited domains with the top 10 results from both search engines.

And guess what? The data does not support this idea.

ChatGPT's cited domains had an average overlap of 0.104 with Google's top 10 results, compared with 0.035 with Bing's. That's roughly three times as much overlap with Google.

Google AI Overviews showed the strongest relationship with Google's own rankings (makes sense, I guess), with an average overlap of 0.145. Its overlap with ChatGPT's sources was 0.043 and with Gemini's was 0.049.

This means that Google rankings appear to be more relevant to visibility in Google AI Overviews than in chatbot citations. But ranking well is not enough: most AI citations still came from pages outside Google's top 10.

Comparison	Mean Jaccard overlap
ChatGPT vs Google top 10	0.104
ChatGPT vs Bing top 10	0.035
Gemini vs Google top 10	0.116
Gemini vs Bing top 10	0.016
AI Overview vs Google top 10	0.145

AI-Cited Snippets Tend to Appear Near the Top of the Section

In this test, 80% of the cited passages could be pinned to a specific element on the page, such as a paragraph under a heading or a list item.

24%	Median page depth — how far down the page the cited passage sat
52%	of cited passages were in the top quarter of the page
19%	of cited passages appeared under a question-phrased heading
47%	were the first paragraph or list immediately below their heading
5	words — median distance from the heading to the cited passage

In other words, AI systems often cited passages that sat near the top of a section and were close to a clear heading.

Related Searches Reveal Many More Potential Sources

We grouped related searches into "fan-out" groups. Each group contained a median of six related queries for the same topic and market.

13	60	4.7×
domains cited by seed query alone	domains cited across a full fan-out group	increase from seed to full group

If you expand one target keyword into around five related searches and combine the results, you will see several times more candidate sources than if you look at a single query. This matters for content briefs and competitive research because relying on a single search can miss many of the domains that AI systems consider relevant.

What Are the Top-Cited Domains?

This test shows how many times ranked domains appeared as a cited source across all tests. Despite the visibility of social and forum platforms, user-generated content (Reddit, LinkedIn, YouTube, Quora, etc.) accounted for only 4.0% of all 24,897 citations.

B2B AI answers in this test were anchored in edited tech media, review platforms, and company-owned content rather than open forums.

ChatGPT — Top 15

Domain	Citations
1 techradar.com	425
2 g2.com	351
3 forbes.com	270
4 reddit.com	243
5 gartner.com	179
6 salesforce.com	162
7 techtarget.com	161
8 legalclarity.org	155
9 clutch.co	152
10 shopify.com	136
11 capterra.com	125
12 fitsmallbusiness.com	110
13 microsoft.com	109
14 nerdwallet.com	109
15 semrush.com	105

Gemini — Top 15

Domain	Citations
1 reddit.com	203
2 g2.com	192
3 gartner.com	95
4 pcmag.com	83
5 sentinelone.com	72
6 forbes.com	70
7 dhl.com	64
8 airwallex.com	60
9 capterra.com	56
10 zapier.com	56
11 technologyadvice.com	53
12 clutch.co	52
13 stripe.com	49
14 techradar.com	48
15 squareup.com	47

The Domains AI Treats as Core Sources

Known as "anchor domains," these were cited by three or more related queries within the same fan-out group, indicating they are recurring sources for that topic.

It's interesting that only 50% of these domains also appeared in Google's top 10 for their respective groups. In other words, about half of the domains that AI consistently relies on would be invisible to a content brief based only on Google rankings.

Domain	Fan-out groups
techradar.com	19
forbes.com	17
techtarget.com	14
reddit.com	11
legalclarity.org	9
microsoft.com	9
shopify.com	9
semrush.com	9
wise.com	7
techrepublic.com	7
fitsmallbusiness.com	7
cyberdefenders.org	7
ahrefs.com	7
quickbooks.intuit.com	6
salesforce.com	6

50%

of anchor domains also appear in Google's top 10 — the other half is invisible to Google-only briefs.

AI Answers Are Rewritten for Each Country

We compared the full text of ChatGPT's and Gemini's answers for the same keyword in the US and UK. We measured how similar the wording was, using a text-similarity metric where 0 means completely different and 1 means identical.

No keyword produced a near-identical answer in both countries. Out of 613 keywords, none had a similarity score above 0.8 for either provider.

Answers diverged most for transactional searches, where currencies, providers and regulations differ.

The metric measures wording, not meaning. That means that answers could still convey similar information while being phrased differently.

Example — ChatGPT answering “SEO agency pricing”

US

Monthly SEO retainer (small business) | \$500–\$2,000/month

UK

Basic local SEO | £300–£800 | Small local businesses

Provider	Mean	Median	Mostly rewritten (<0.3)
ChatGPT	0.10	0.09	99%
Gemini	0.05	0.05	100%

Intent	ChatGPT similarity	Gemini similarity
Brand reputation	0.08	0.06
Branded	0.10	0.05
Client brand	0.09	0.05
Commercial	0.10	0.05
Head	0.11	0.06
Question	0.13	0.07
Transactional	0.08	0.04

AI systems aren't simply copying the same answer and swapping a few details. They generate distinct, locally adapted responses for each market.

Global Giants Dominate, but Many Sources Are Local

The test ranked domains by citation count separately for the US and UK.

- The most-cited domains were largely the same in both countries: G2, TechRadar, Reddit, Forbes, and Gartner appeared at or near the top in both markets.
- The low overall overlap between US and UK sources (from the earlier localisation finding) came from the many smaller, country-specific domains that appeared in one market but not the other.
- Aggregator and review platforms (for example, G2, Capterra, and Trustpilot) maintained a strong cross-border presence.
- Content citations, however, were effectively won market by market, with local variants and country-specific domains rising in the UK.
- UK-specific top mentions included: uk.trustpilot.com, wise.com, airwallex.com, and the .co.uk review ecosystem (capterra.co.uk, softwareadvice.co.uk, ncsc.gov.uk).

US domain	US citations	UK domain	UK citations
g2.com	284	g2.com	259
reddit.com	234	techradar.com	241
techradar.com	232	reddit.com	212
forbes.com	183	forbes.com	157
gartner.com	122	gartner.com	152
clutch.co	106	clutch.co	98
capterra.com	103	dhl.com	93
legalclarity.org	96	salesforce.com	90
salesforce.com	93	shopify.com	85
fitzsmallbusiness.com	93	wise.com	78

For international brands, this means that a strong global domain is not enough. To show up consistently in AI answers across markets, you need market-specific content and a local presence on relevant review and comparison platforms.

What Cited Pages Have in Common: Structure and Schema

We analysed 8,561 cited pages to understand their structure and technical markup.

Here's what we found in the structural anatomy of these 8,561 scraped cited pages:

- ➔ **Length and structure:** The typical cited page had a median length of 2151 words with 27 headings. AI systems in this test tended to cite long, well-organised content rather than short, lightly structured pages.
- ➔ **FAQ-style content:** 65% of cited pages included a section with three or more question-style headings, and 19% of all headings across these pages were phrased as questions.
- ➔ **Lists and tables:** The median cited page contained around 30 list items, and 41% included at least one table. Among independent review pages, 59% featured comparison tables.

Page structure is a given. Pages that were cited five or more times look structurally identical to pages cited once. What separates anchors is coverage and brand, not extra formatting.

Schema markup on the 798 most-cited pages:

Schema type	Share of top-cited pages
Any JSON-LD	83%
Organization	72%
Article/BlogPosting	51%
BreadcrumbList	46%
FAQPage (Question/Answer)	30%
Review/Product/AggregateRating	12%
HowTo	1%

In this sample, structured data was common on the most-cited pages: 83% used some form of JSON-LD schema, about half were marked up as articles, and nearly a third carried the FAQPage schema.

To see whether these patterns were specific to AI-cited pages or just a feature of any high-performing page, we compared them with two control groups:

- ➔ Pages cited only by Google AI Overviews.
- ➔ Pages that ranked in Google's top 10 for the same keywords but were never cited by any AI surface.

The next table shows how the groups differ.

Group	Has JSON-LD	Has Article	Has FAQPage	Has Organization	Pages
Cited by AI Overview only	60.5%	44.4%	14.7%	49.4%	387
Cited by ChatGPT / Gemini	82.6%	50.8%	30.1%	71.6%	798
Ranks top-10, never cited	58.2%	25.7%	10.1%	40.5%	378

Pages cited by ChatGPT or Gemini were about three times more likely to carry an FAQPage schema and about twice as likely to carry Article schema than pages that ranked well but were never cited.

This suggests that well-structured, semantically marked-up content is more common among AI-cited pages, although the study does not prove that schema alone causes a page to be cited.

We also broke down schema usage by provider to see whether ChatGPT and Gemini favoured different types of markup.

Provider	Pages	Any JSON-LD	Article	FAQPage	Review/Product	Breadcrumb
ChatGPT-cited	635	82%	44%	29%	13%	45%
Gemini-cited	333	87%	69%	32%	10%	47%

There's no evidence in this data that you can target one chatbot over the other by choosing a specific schema type. Therefore, the goal should be to implement the right schema for your content (articles, FAQs, organisation info, breadcrumbs) rather than trying to optimise separately for ChatGPT and Gemini.

Link Authority: AI Does Not Need Your Backlinks

For many marketers, the assumption is that pages with lots of backlinks will dominate AI citations, just as they often perform well in traditional search. This test suggests otherwise.

We compared backlink data for all 14,116 cited URLs against a control group of 3,915 URLs that ranked in Google's top 10 for the same keywords but were never cited by any AI surface.

Group	URLs	Median backlinks	Median referring domains	Share with zero ref. domains
Cited by AI	14,116	0	0	53%
SERP-only (never cited)	3,915	2	1	40%

The median AI-cited page had zero page-level backlinks, and 53% had no referring domains at all. That's a weaker link profile than the Google top-10 pages that were never cited.

Even the most-cited "anchor" pages were lightly linked: those cited more than five times had a median of just three referring domains, compared with zero for once-cited pages.

What does this tell us? Visibility in AI answers appears to depend more on content structure, topical coverage, and domain recognition than on traditional page-level authority signals.

You do not need a strong backlink profile to be cited, although links may still matter for overall domain strength and traditional search performance.

What Do Cited Pages Rank for Organically?

We examined the organic keyword footprints for 482 of the 600 most-cited pages (US data).

- Each page ranked for 42 keywords, but only 4 of those were in the top 10.
- 26% of the top-cited pages ranked for fewer than 10 keywords in total. Even though these pages were heavily cited by AI, they had almost no visible presence in Google.
- 118 of the 600 pages returned no ranking data at all.
- AI-cited pages are, on the whole, organically modest: being a Google winner and being an AI source are largely separate games, as we saw earlier in the section on Google rankings and AI citation.

What does this mean for your strategy? You don't need to dominate Google Search to become a frequent AI source. Many of the most-cited pages in this study had small or even negligible organic footprints. This reinforces the earlier finding that AI citation and traditional rankings are related but distinct: strong SEO helps, but it is not a prerequisite for AI visibility.

Additional Observations

Beyond the main patterns, here are a few technical notes from the data that are worth highlighting:

1.4%

Possible Hallucinated Citations

We flagged 152 of 11,037 matches (1.4%) as likely hallucinations, or cases where the cited page did not support the claim and the model's confidence was low.

While rare, these show that AI answers can occasionally misrepresent sources, so it matters not just whether you're cited, but how accurately.

85%

Google AI Overview Trigger Rate

Google triggered an AI Overview in 85% of queries overall, with higher rates for brand and informational intent (92–98%) and lower for transactional queries (67%).

For marketers, this means AI-generated answers are now the default first impression for most non-transactional searches.

86%

Scrape Coverage

We retrieved 86% of cited pages. Browser-impersonating requests recovered an additional 603 pages that standard requests could not, suggesting some sources are partially blocked to simple crawlers.

This can make AI visibility harder to measure with traditional SEO tooling.

What This Study Means for Marketers

This study shows that AI search is not just a new ranking surface but a distinct information environment. Visibility in ChatGPT, Gemini, and Google AI Overviews depends less on backlinks and raw Google rank and more on:

- How clearly and completely your pages answer specific questions.
- How often you appear in the third-party sources (review sites, publications) that AI models treat as trusted references.
- How well you're represented in each market's local ecosystem, not just in one global "top 10."

For CMOs, the practical takeaway is to treat AI visibility as its own channel: plan content, reputation, and measurement strategies specifically for GEO, alongside traditional SEO.

Do you know what AI is saying about your brand?

Run a free AI visibility audit.

Get Started

Notes

The findings are based on a single point-in-time snapshot (July 2026). AI citation behavior will shift as models and retrieval systems are updated. Page classification, citation matching, and “why cited” tags were generated by an LLM (gemini-2.5-flash-lite) and validated via spot-checks, not full human-labelled ground truth. Overlap metrics are reported at domain level; URL-level overlap is stricter and therefore lower. In this run, Bing's API exposed no generative/Copilot elements, so Bing analysis covers organic results only. Review-platform bot protection limited full-page retrieval for some brand queries, so brand routing findings rely on citation inventories rather than detailed page analysis. Taken together, the patterns here should be read as directional signals, not permanent rules, about how AI search currently selects and uses sources.

Suggested URL: geekytech.co.uk/resources-tools/ai-citation-study-july-2026/



AI CITATION STUDY

We Asked AI 1,226 Questions.

Here's How it Decides Who to Cite.

July 2026

geekytech.co.uk