THE MENTION REPORT

JULY 2026 EDITION

You can rank first and still never get named.

A monthly read on how brands are found, cited, and forgotten inside AI search.

75/100

Search has moved from clicks to citations.

Fixed formula on page 7.

68%

of Google searches now end without a click

48–60%

of US searches trigger an AI Overview

900M

weekly ChatGPT users

Plain read: Clicks matter less, rankings guarantee less, and your own website carries less of the burden. The brands winning now are the ones AI systems cite.

Published by Mention Marketing Group

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Reading note, July 3, 2026. This month's reading rose to 75, from 72 in June, driven by the zero-click rate firming to 68% on SparkToro's newest full panel. Citation overlap held at 17–38%, now corroborated by a second independent source. Engine share is a fresh reading this edition, not a same-source comparison to June, see Finding 02.

Naming note, July 3, 2026. Earlier editions called this index the AI Reach Barometer and its headline figure the AI Reach Score. From this edition, both are retired: the publication is The Mention Report and its market-level figure is simply the monthly reading. Same formula, same ledger, no values changed. The brand-level score a business can request is the Mention Score.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

People are moving from searching to asking. That changes where a brand has to show up: not just in the list of links, but inside the answer itself. The dashboards most organizations rely on were not built to see this, so the gap between being visible and being invisible is widening quietly, before it shows up in revenue.

This is not a prediction piece and not a single company's data. It assembles the best public measurements available and shows the range wherever independent sources disagree, the honest reading is the spread, not a tidy figure that hides how much the underlying studies differ.

The search box became an answer box

This summer Google redesigned its search box for the first time in twenty-five years, building an AI Mode button into it. That redesign is the shift this report tracks: the search engine is turning into an answer layer, and the dashboards most brands rely on were not built to measure it.

Three findings carry this edition: **the click is no longer the default outcome; ranking and citation have come apart;** and **the traffic that remains is smaller, but more valuable.**

The pool of clicks is shrinking, and the clicks that remain concentrate around whoever the model cites. The conclusion is not to mourn lost traffic. It is to compete for the citation.

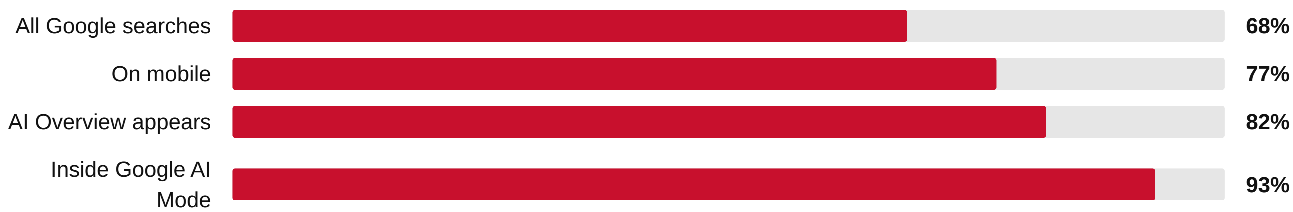
FINDING 01 · THE SHIFT

The click is no longer the default

When an AI answer appears, the user usually has what they need before any link. The reading is starkest inside the AI surfaces themselves, where the zero-click rate climbs as the context becomes more AI-native, and it firmed further this spring as the newest full panel closed.

Zero-click rate, by context

share of searches ending without a click (%)



Sources: SparkToro / Similarweb panel (Jan–Apr 2026), Pew Research, Seer Interactive (25.1M impressions), Semrush AI Mode study, 2025 to 2026.

A randomized field experiment found AI Overviews cut outbound organic clicks by about **38%** on affected queries; Ahrefs (Feb 2026) measured up to **58%** for the top-ranking page when an Overview sits above it. Gartner expects traditional query volume to fall around **25%** as answer engines absorb everyday questions.

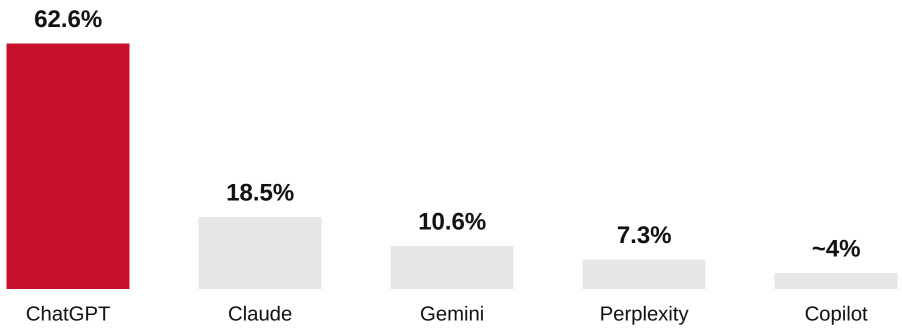
FINDING 02 · WHERE ATTENTION MOVED

Attention is splitting across AI engines

ChatGPT opened the category and still leads it, but its early near-monopoly has fractured further this quarter. A handful of engines now split most referral traffic, and the mix shifts month to month. Estimates vary widely by method, so treat the ordering as more durable than the precise percentages.

Share of measurable AI referrals

brand-averaged B2B referral traffic, April 2026 (%)



ChatGPT fell from 72.5% in January to 62.6% in April; Claude is the only line rising decisively. Sources: Goodie AI Search Traffic Report (2026 monthly trend, B2B referrals), Conductor 2026 benchmarks, Seer Interactive.

Read the scale before the share. AI platforms generate billions of sessions a month, much of it inside mobile apps that browser analytics never see. The shift is larger than most dashboards report, partly because only about one in six brands tracks AI search performance at all.

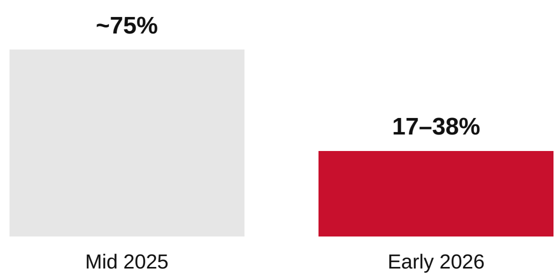
FINDING 03 · THE BREAK

Ranking and citation have come apart

This is the finding on the cover, and the one that should move budgets. The overlap between holding a top-ten Google ranking and being cited in the AI Overview for that query narrowed sharply in under a year and has since held. The page that wins the search result is increasingly not the page the AI quotes.

Top-10 ranking and AI Overview citation overlap

share of cited sources also ranking top 10 (%)



Source: aggregated across SEO measurement firms, mid 2025 to early 2026; 5W Research corroborates. Range reflects differences by industry and study.

When an AI Overview appears, organic click-through has been measured to drop by 58 to 61% for the pages that used to win the click. The traffic does not simply vanish; it reroutes to whoever the model decided to cite.

Ranking still helps a page get considered. It no longer settles who gets quoted. And a structural fact reshapes strategy: roughly 85% of brand mentions in AI answers come from third-party pages, not the brand's own domain, inverting two decades of on-site SEO practice.

A top-ten ranking used to guarantee visibility. In 2026 it is one input into citation, not a guarantee of it. Citation is the new gatekeeper.

FINDING 04 · THE QUALITY REVERSAL

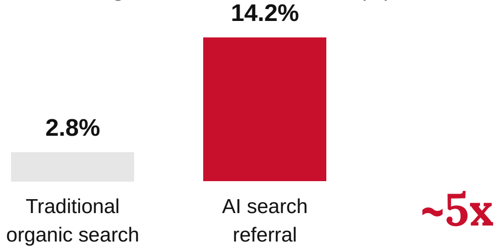
Fewer visitors, stronger intent

The instinct is to mourn lost traffic. The fuller picture is that the traffic that remains changes character. People arriving from an AI answer have already done much of their research. They land later in the decision. That means fewer visitors, but better-qualified ones.

The volume is smaller. The intent is stronger.

Visitor conversion rate

traditional organic vs AI search referral (%)



Source: Opollo 2026 AI Search Benchmark (312 B2B technology firms); RankScience independently reached the same figures across 12M visits.

The multiple is not a single-study artifact. Semrush put AI visitors at about 4.4x organic conversion; Shopify found AI-referred shoppers converting nearly 50% higher on product pages with 14% higher order values. The caveats are stated plainly: AI volume is still a small share of sessions, small denominators make percentages volatile. The trajectory is clear; the precision is not.

ACTING ON THE READING

From ranked to cited: what to do

Measure what you cannot see. Add AI-citation tracking alongside Search Console and tag AI-origin leads in your CRM so the channel stops hiding inside "direct."

Optimize for citation, not just rank. Structured, well-sourced content with clear E-E-A-T signals outlasts a single ranking position beneath the answer.

The Next Layer of AI Visibility

Traditional ranking is no longer enough to secure market share. As generative engines mature, digital leaders must begin auditing four emerging core dimensions:

Citation Share. How often AI systems pull from your footprint inside your category.

Source Mix. Where your citations live: owned domains, independent review platforms, earned media, or community forums.

Recommendation Share. The share of prompts where an AI names you as the preferred or leading choice, not just a listed option.

Citation Freshness. The indexing age of the pages the LLMs trust to answer category queries.

Build off-site validation. Since most AI mentions come from third-party pages, earned media and community presence carry the weight on-site SEO once did.

Fix the foundation. Models favor fast, accessible, well-structured sites. Speed and accessibility are visibility inputs now.

The fix depends on the weakness. Some brands need stronger authority and third-party mentions. Others need cleaner technical structure. Others need accessibility and trust work before AI systems can confidently cite them. A Mention Scan shows which problem you actually have.

The next competitive frontier is not merely whether an AI system mentions a brand. It is whether it recommends it, links to it, and trusts the third-party ecosystem surrounding it. Future editions of this publication will systematically unpack these attribution source mixes, tracking the shift from general visibility to defensive market share.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Triangulated and dated

The monthly reading behind this report does not run on a single feed. Each figure is assembled from multiple independent measurements, the spread is shown where sources disagree, and every edition carries its date so movement is comparable over time.

Aggregate
Pull the latest public measurements on AI search prevalence, engine share, and citation behavior.

Triangulate
Cross-check each figure across panels and methods. Where they diverge, publish the range.

Benchmark
Set readings against the prior edition so direction and pace of change are visible.

Publish
Release on a fixed cadence, the first Friday of each month, under a dated edition built to be cited and re-checked.

Sources this edition: Similarweb, Goodie, Semrush, Seer Interactive, Ahrefs, Pew Research, Gartner, SparkToro, 5W Research, Conductor, Shopify, Opollo, RankScience, AirOps, OpenAI, Google Trends. Figures span Sept 2025 to July 2026.

HOW WE KEEP THIS HONEST

Transparency rules

- **Sourced.** Every figure traces to a public source, listed in the appendix. Nothing in this report is gated.
- **Ranges over false precision.** Where independent studies disagree, we publish the spread, not a tidy single number.
- **Primary and Aggregated, labeled.** A single named study is marked Primary; a range across panels is marked Aggregated.
- **Dated and unedited.** Each edition is dated. Material corrections and renames run as a dated note, never a silent swap.
- **Measured, not predicted.** The report reads where things are. Directional calls live in our commentary, never inside the report.
- **No logos inside.** Authority comes from method and sources, not a client roster.

About the publisher. Mention Marketing Group is a Milwaukee-based digital visibility agency helping brands get found, ranked, cited, and trusted across Google, AI search, and generative answer platforms. We specialize in SEO, Generative Engine Optimization, AI visibility, content authority, technical readiness, and the trust signals that help organizations earn visibility.

APPENDIX · VERIFY EVERY READING

Sources and confidence

Every figure in this edition traces to a public source. **Primary** denotes a single named study measuring the figure directly (high confidence). **Aggregated** denotes a range assembled across multiple panels that measured related but not identical things.

FIGURE	WHAT IT MEASURES	SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
68.01%	US Google searches ending without a click, Jan–Apr 2026	SparkToro / Similarweb panel, 2026	**Primary**
48–60%	US searches triggering an AI Overview, Mar–Apr 2026	Semrush 2026 AI Visibility Index (126M prompts)	**Aggregated**
~93%	Zero-click rate inside Google AI Mode	Semrush / Seer Interactive (25.1M impressions)	**Primary**
up to 58%	CTR drop for top page when an AI Overview appears	Ahrefs, February 2026	**Primary**
~38%	Outbound click reduction on affected queries	Randomized field experiment, 2025–26	**Primary**
~25%	Projected fall in traditional search query volume	Gartner	**Primary**
62.6% / 18.5%	ChatGPT / Claude share of AI referral traffic, April 2026	Goodie AI Search Traffic Report, monthly trend	**Aggregated**
70–75% → 17–38%	Top-10 ranking and AIO citation overlap, then vs now	Aggregated across SEO measurement firms; 5W Research	**Aggregated**
~85%	Brand mentions in AI answers from third-party pages	AirOps, 2026	**Primary**
14.2% vs 2.8%	AI referral vs organic visitor conversion rate	Opollo 2026 Benchmark (312 firms); RankScience	**Primary**
~4.4x	AI visitor conversion multiple vs organic	Semrush, 2025–26	**Primary**
900M	Weekly ChatGPT users, more than double a year earlier	OpenAI, Feb 2026	**Primary**
58.3% / 19.3%	ChatGPT / Gemini US chatbot web-visit share, May 2026	Similarweb	**Primary**

Figures span Sept 2025 to July 2026 except the SparkToro zero-click anchor, refreshed each edition against the most recent full panel. Where this report shows a range, it is because the underlying panels genuinely disagree; the range is the honest reading, not an estimate.

ADDENDUM · VERIFIED AGAINST THE JUNE EDITION

Change since last edition

Every core metric this edition, checked against last month's by a script, not by prose. MOVED means a real change on a like-for-like source. NOT COMPARABLE means the source or method changed enough that a delta would be misleading. Generated from the ledger, not typed by hand.

> **How this month's reading is built.** Average of three Primary-confidence readings: zero-click rate, the citation gap (100 minus the top-10/AI-citation overlap), and third-party mention share. Fixed formula, published here so it stays checkable; it will not be reweighted without a dated note in this section. June, same formula: 72.

METRIC	JUNE	JULY	STATUS	NOTE
Zero-click, all Google searches	~60%	68%	**MOVED**	*+8pts, same SparkToro panel family*
AI Overview trigger share	~25%	48–60%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*different Semrush study/method, not a real 2x move*
Zero-click inside Google AI Mode	93%	93%	**UNCHANGED**	
CTR drop, top page w/ Overview	up to 58%	up to 58%	**UNCHANGED**	
Outbound click reduction	~38%	~38%	**UNCHANGED**	
Query volume, projected fall	~25%	~25%	**UNCHANGED**	
Engine share: ChatGPT	63–87%	62.6%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*new Goodie monthly-trend cut, see Finding 02*
Engine share: Claude	5–18%	18.5%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*new cut; Goodie trend itself: 11.8%→18.5%*
Engine share: Gemini	3–11%	10.6%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*new cut*
Engine share: Perplexity	~7%	7.3%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*new cut*
Engine share: Copilot	4%	4%	**NOT COMPARABLE**	*separate panel (Conductor), see Finding 02*
Top-10 ranking / citation overlap	17–38%	17–38%	**UNCHANGED**	*now corroborated by 5W Research*
Third-party brand mention share	85%	85%	**UNCHANGED**	
AI referral conversion rate	14.2%	14.2%	**UNCHANGED**	
Organic conversion rate	2.8%	2.8%	**UNCHANGED**	
AI conversion multiple	~4.4x	~4.4x	**UNCHANGED**	
Weekly ChatGPT users	900M	900M	**UNCHANGED**	

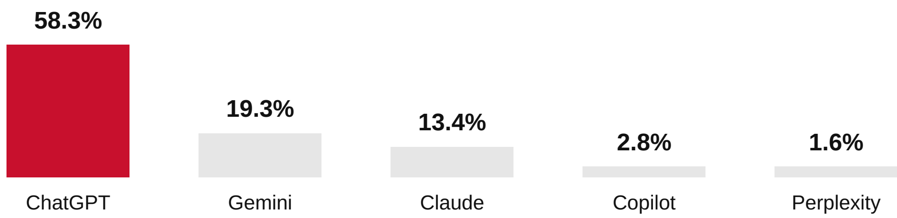
NEW THIS EDITION

Market share, the 5 leading AI tools

A companion track to engine referral share (Finding 02): this measures the tools' own web-visit share, not the traffic they send elsewhere.

US AI chatbot market share, by web visits

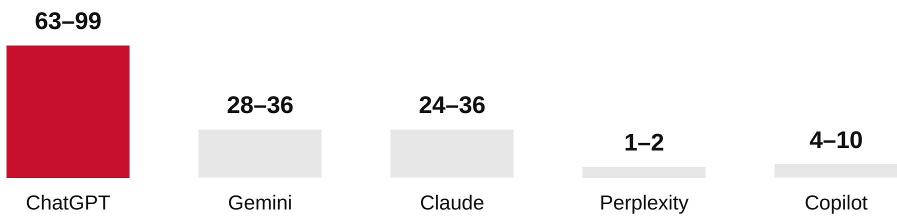
share of the 5 tools this report tracks (%)



Source: Similarweb, US AI chatbot web-visit share, May 2026. These 5 tools total 95.4%; the remainder sits with Grok, DeepSeek, and other engines this report does not track. Baseline reading, first tracked this edition; ledger comparisons start next month.

Google Trends search interest, US

relative index, 0–100 scale (not a percentage), range across Jun 3–Jul 3, 2026 (a volatile daily series, not a single average)



Source: Google Trends, Interest over time, US, Jun 3–Jul 3, 2026. Index points, not percentages, all 5 tools share one comparative 0–100 axis, so the numbers show relative interest to each other, not absolute search volume. Baseline reading, first tracked this edition.

A geographic wrinkle worth flagging: in Bay Area tech hubs (Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, Fremont, San Jose) Claude runs close to ChatGPT for search-interest share, about 33% vs 38%, well ahead of Gemini's 25%. In a broader consumer sample (Anaheim, Tallahassee, Baton Rouge, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Irving), ChatGPT dominates far more, about 55%, with Claude and Gemini roughly tied near 20% each. Source: Google Trends, compared breakdown by city, same window.

The next reading lands Friday, August 7.

The Mention Report publishes the first Friday of each month at **mention.report**, dated, sourced, and checked against its own ledger. To see where your brand stands before the next edition, request a Mention Scan.