

• The Future of Search | An AdLift Perspective

Search Has Reached Its Biggest Inflection Point Since Mobile

For **20 years**, ranking **#1** meant winning the click. Now Google can answer the question before anyone visits your site.

Rank Higher → Earn Clicks → Acquire Customers

Swipe >>>

WHAT GOOGLE'S DATA TELLS US

1.5B+

1B+

3×

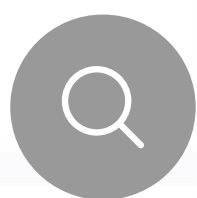
10%+

2×+

Why This Matters for Brands

You can rank #1 and still lose the customer.

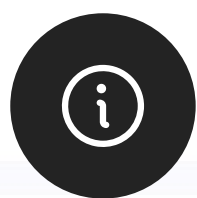
AI Mode can answer the question, compare the options, and recommend a product, all without a single click to your site.



Search journeys are becoming conversational. Users don't type keywords anymore, they ask questions the way they'd ask a person.



Ranking on page one no longer guarantees visibility. Google can synthesize an answer and never show your listing at all.



Citations are replacing clicks as the currency of search. If AI won't cite you, your ranking doesn't matter.

What Is Google AI Mode?

Powered by **Gemini**, AI Mode is built to handle complex questions through an interactive, conversational experience. Instead of handing back ten blue links, it breaks a question into subtopics, pulls from multiple sources, and writes an answer in real time.

" If an AI doesn't trust you enough to cite you, it doesn't matter how well you rank. That's the new game.

HOW USER BEHAVIOR IS CHANGING

3×

AI Mode users ask longer, more specific questions than they ever typed into search bar. Average query length is roughly 3× longer than traditional search.

1 in
6

More than 1 in 6 AI Mode searches now include voice or image input.

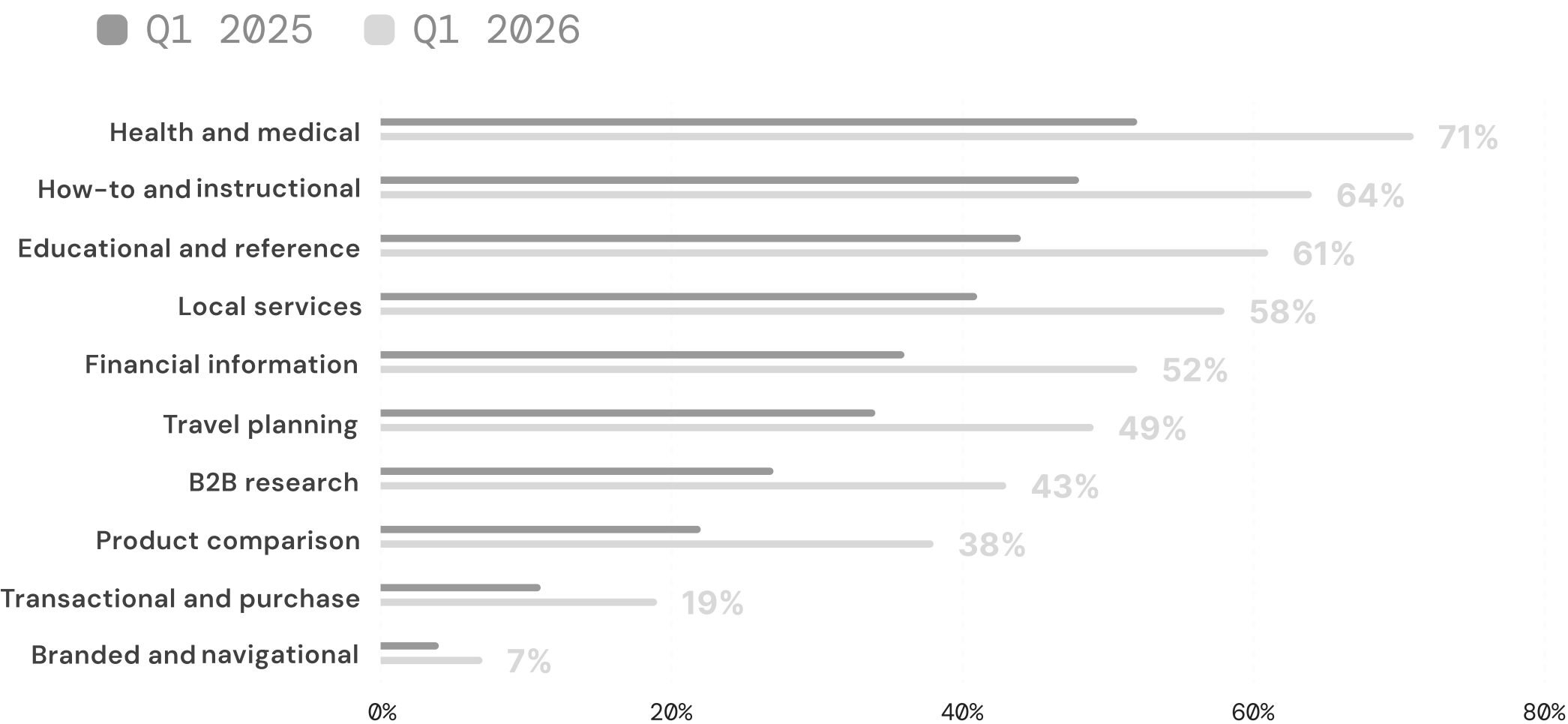


Follow-up questions keep coming. Search has turned into a conversation, not a single lookup.



Brands must earn inclusion within AI-generated responses. Authority, trust, and entity recognition are now central to search success.

AI Overview Coverage by Query Category



Health, how-to, and education queries are already majority answered by AI. Transactional and branded queries are the last to fall — which means the brands that move now on informational content get a two-year head start before the rest of the market catches up.

The Customer Journey Has Compressed

Research and comparison used to be two separate stages where a brand could win attention. AI Mode compresses both into a single recommendation. You now have one shot to be the answer, not four chances to be found along the way.

TRADITIONAL CUSTOMER JOURNEY

- 1 Awareness
- 2 Research
- 3 Comparison
- 4 Decision

AI-POWERED CUSTOMER JOURNEY

- 1 Question
- 2 AI Recommendation
- 3 Decision

Research + Comparison compressed into a single AI recommendation

WHAT HAS CHANGED ?

AI increasingly does the work consumers used to do themselves. Instead of visiting five sites, they ask one question:

“Which CRM is best for a mid-sized B2B company?”

“What is the safest sunscreen for sensitive skin?”

“Which running shoe offers the best support for marathon training?”

The AI compares the options and hands back a recommendation instantly. Your brand is either in that answer or it doesn't exist for that customer.

THE CONVERSION PARADOX



Fewer people may click through from AI search. But the ones who do have already done their research and made most of their decision.

Less traffic

Lower overall click volume from AI results

Stronger intent

Visitors arrive pre-qualified and decided

Higher close rate

A shrinking funnel that converts better

Who Wins in AI Search?

As AI-generated answers become a primary layer of search visibility, the brands earning citations consistently share a small set of authority signals.

30%

of domains cited in AI Overviews don't rank on page one. Citation selection runs on different signals than traditional ranking.

21%

Reddit and other community platforms are among the most cited sources in AI search. A forum thread is beating your homepage.

Multi-source

AI answers now pull from multiple sources per query, which widens the field of who can win visibility beyond the old top-10.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AI SEARCH WINNERS

- ✓ **Demonstrate strong E-E-A-T signals**
96% of citations came from sources with strong E-E-A-T, out of 2,400+ citations studied. Authority isn't a ranking factor anymore — it's an entry ticket.
- ✓ **Publish original research and proprietary data**
Answer engines need something to cite. A stat nobody else has is worth more than a page that ranks well.
- ✓ **Earn mentions from authoritative publications**
- ✓ **Build visibility beyond owned channels**
- ✓ **Participate in industry communities and discussions**
- ✓ **Invest in digital PR and thought leadership**
- ✓ **Establish strong brand entities across the web**

96%

of AI Overview citations came from sources exhibiting strong E-E-A-T signals

366K+

citations studied across AI search systems — heavily concentrated among a small group of trusted publishers

THE ADLIFT AI VISIBILITY FRAMEWORK

Introducing the A.C.E.S. Framework

AI visibility isn't driven by rankings alone. Based on emerging AI search patterns, brands need to optimize across four areas.

A — ACCESSIBILITY

AI can't cite what it can't access. Pages have to be crawlable and indexable to even be considered for citation.

Crawlability

AI Crawler Access

Structured Data

Technical SEO

C — CREDIBILITY

Authority has become a primary citation signal. An AI Overview Ranking Factors study across 15,847 results and 63 industries found 96% of citations come from sources with strong E-E-A-T, and pages with 15+ recognized entities have a 4.8× higher selection probability.

96% Citations from E-E-A-T sources

E-E-A-T

Primary Source Citations

Expert Authorship

Original Research

E — ENTITY BUILDING

AI search increasingly understands brands as entities, not just websites. 62% of citations bypass the conventional top-10 entirely — coming from pages ranked 11th or lower, or sources outside the top 100 organic results.

62% Citations bypass top-10 rankings

Knowledge Graph Signals

LinkedIn Presence

Industry Directories

Third-Party Mentions

S — SHARE OF VOICE

Visibility now extends beyond rankings. AI Overviews already appear in roughly 39% of informational queries, and between 25–48% of all Google searches depending on vertical.

39% Of informational queries show AI Overviews

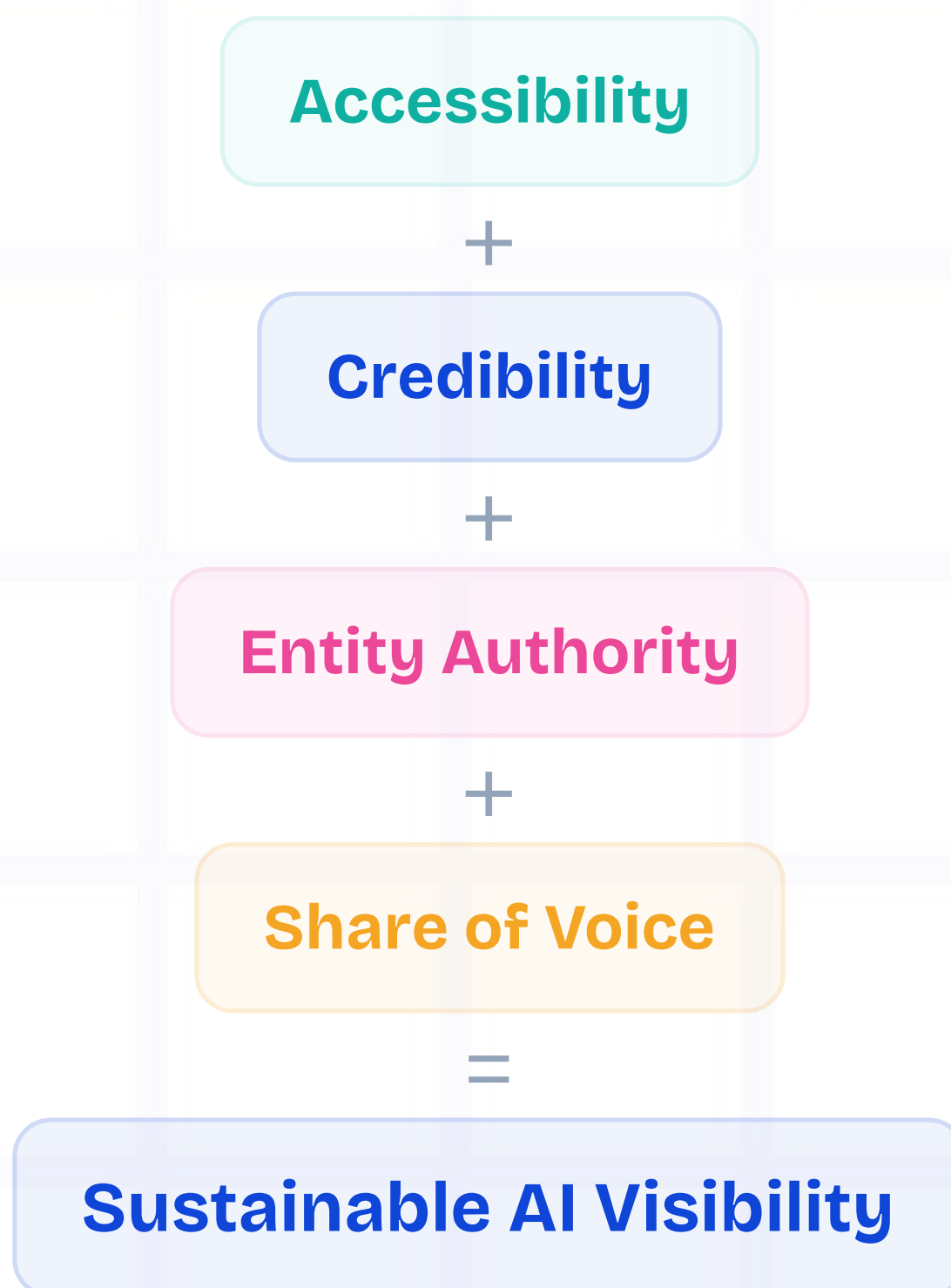
AI Citations

Competitive Visibility

Recommendation Frequency

Brand Mentions

THE NEW VISIBILITY FORMULA



Brands that strengthen all **four pillars** earn more citations, more recommendations, and more visibility across **Google AI Mode, AI Overviews, ChatGPT, Gemini**, and every other **AI-powered** discovery platform that comes after them.



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Your Next Customer May Never Visit Google.

They asked. AI answered. Was it your brand?

[See Your AI Visibility Score →](#)