



Searching for answers: How AI is changing online discovery in 2026

/Research Reality



Contents

- 3** Foreword
- 4** Report takeaways
- 6** The online search landscape in 2026
- 12** AI assistants enter the search journey
- 21** The trust gap
- 26** Methodology



Foreword



The search box is one of the internet's most familiar interfaces. The exchange is simple: users type a query, search engines return links, and people decide which sources to trust. AI assistants are challenging that pattern by offering an answer itself rather than a list of links.

This report examines how consumers in Great Britain are embracing that shift. Our findings suggest that Brits are not abandoning search engines, but AI assistants are carving out a role in the search journey, especially when users want answers to direct questions, summaries, or help checking information.

The central challenge is trust. AI assistants may be useful because they reduce the work of search, but consumers still want to verify what they find. They rely on multiple sources, official websites, source links and other signals to decide whether information is credible. That makes the future of search less a battle between links and answers than a race to deliver both: fast, useful answers backed by visible proof.

Mimi Smith-Jones

Research Manager, YouGov

[Get in touch](#)

[Explore research solutions](#)

The power of the YouGov panel

The insights in this report are fuelled by YouGov's consumer research panel, which has over 34 million registered members from 55+ markets.

Every day, our members share their realities with us – enabling true insights into behaviours and attitudes from people of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs.

Inclusion is essential for our members, our clients, and our mission. We invest millions each year to ensure we can create truly nationally representative online samples and access hard-to-reach groups.

This dedication to reflecting reality means we're cited as the most accurate online pollster regularly.

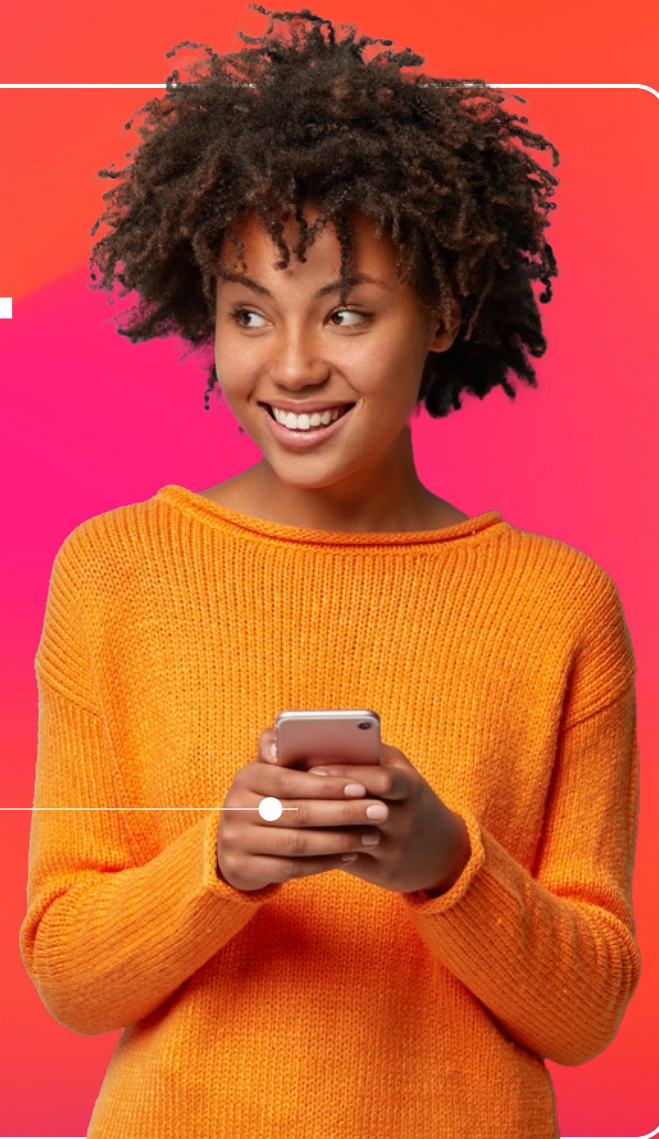
[Run a survey](#)

34m+

registered
panel members

55+

markets



Report takeaways

Search engines still dominate the information journey

Traditional search engines remain the default gateway for online information. Nearly nine in 10 online searchers in Great Britain used a search engine in the past 30 days, and search engines remain the leading starting point across the information tasks examined.

Younger adults are expanding what counts as search

Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to use a wider set of platforms to find information. Video platforms, online forums, social media and AI assistants all play a larger role in younger adults' search behaviour.

AI search growth is strongest among existing users

Current AI searchers are more likely to say their use has increased than decreased over the past year. Looking ahead, expected growth is concentrated among people who already use AI assistants regularly, pointing to deeper engagement more than broad non-user conversion.

AI assistants are strongest when searchers want answers, summaries or checks

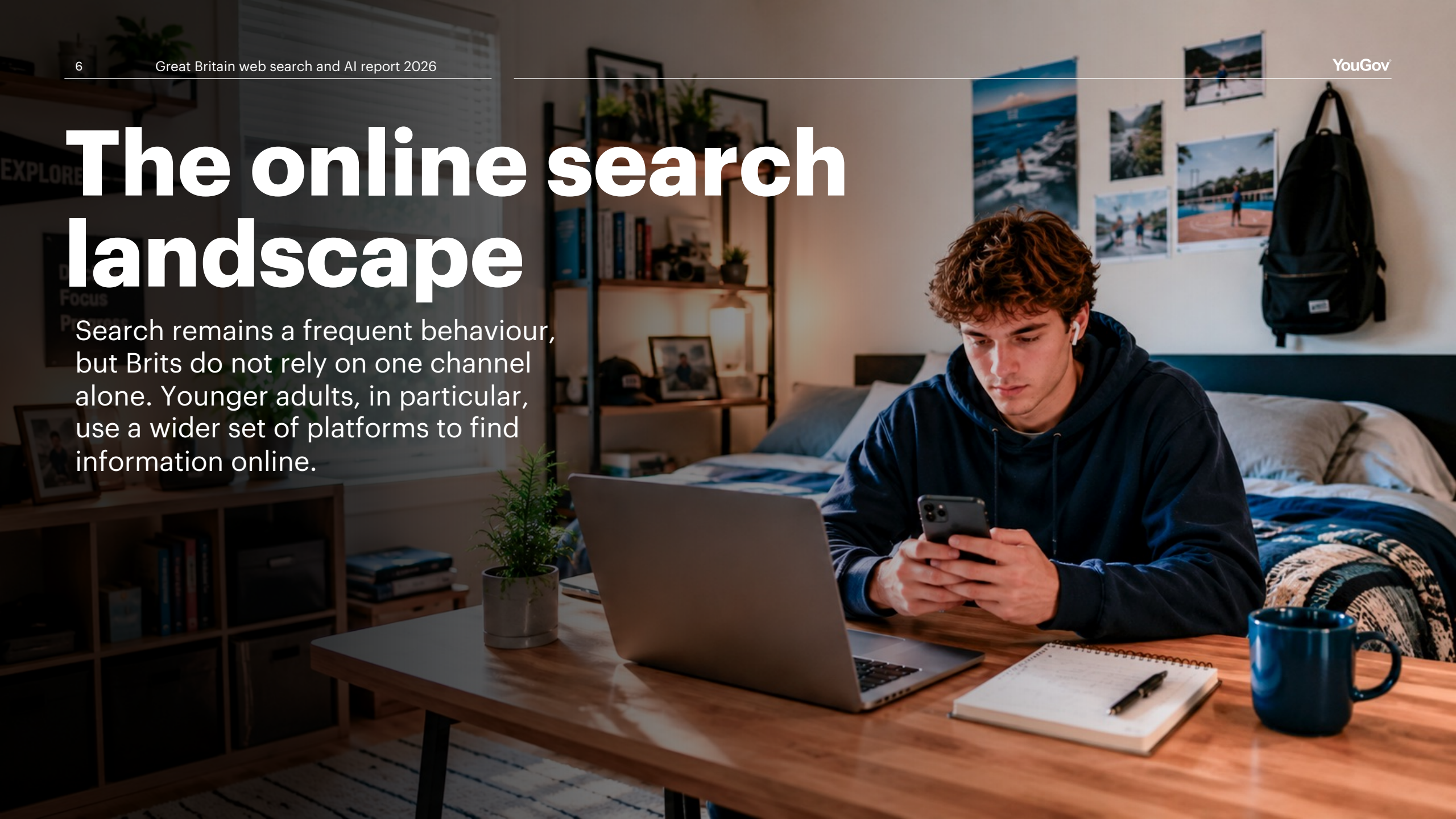
Leading use cases for AI in search include direct answers, summaries, and verification. Comparing options and troubleshooting are also prominent uses.

Trust is the key divide between AI users and non-users

Traditional search engines have a clear trust advantage over AI assistants. But the bigger divide is between current AI searchers, who are more open to AI answers, source links and personalisation controls, and non-users, many of whom remain difficult to persuade.

The online search landscape

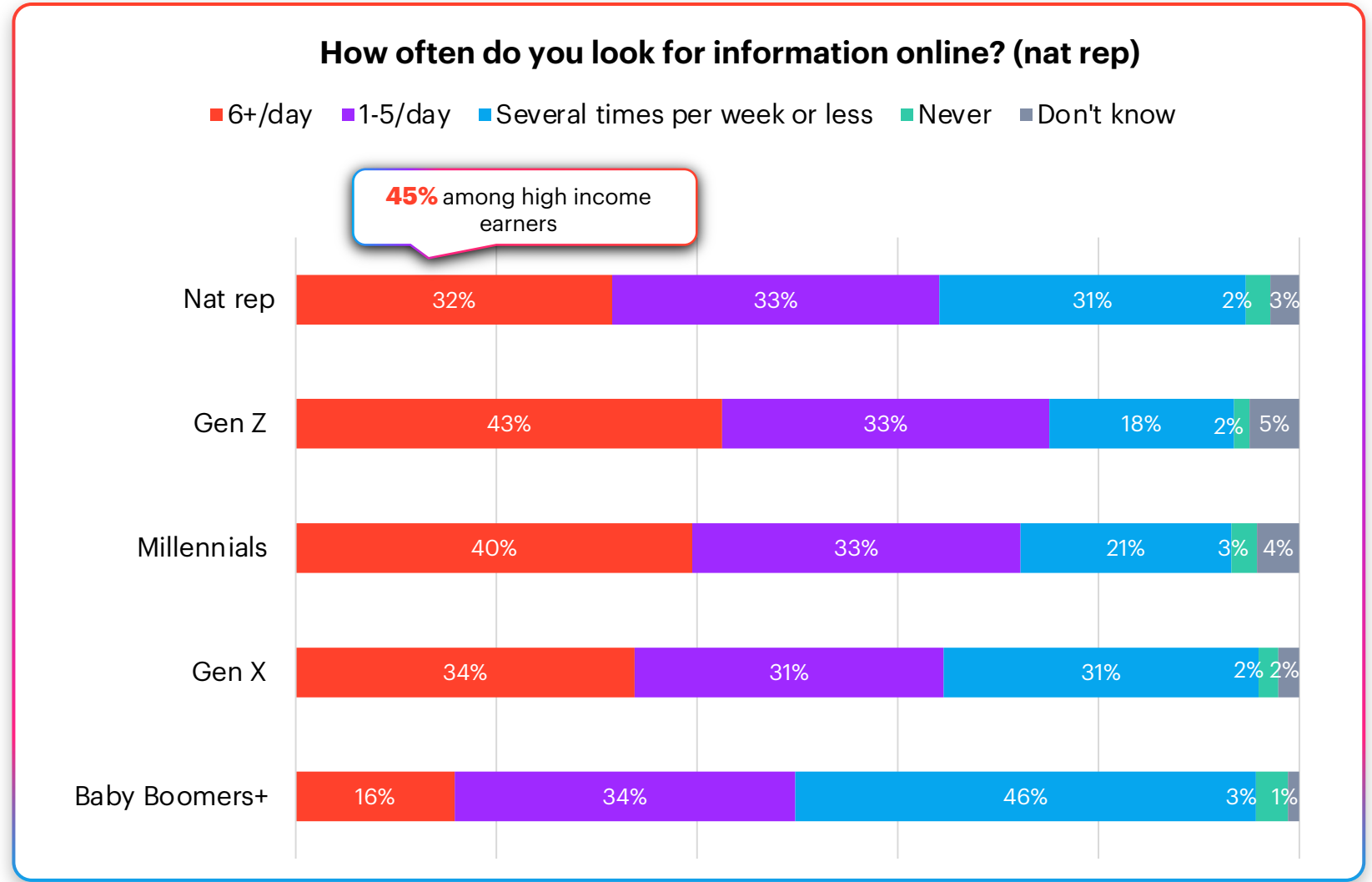
Search remains a frequent behaviour, but Brits do not rely on one channel alone. Younger adults, in particular, use a wider set of platforms to find information online.



Daily information-seeking is common, with younger adults searching more frequently

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Brits look up information online every day. More than a third of Gen Z (43%) and Millennials (40%) do so six or more times daily. High-frequency searching declines among Gen X (34%) and Baby Boomers+ (16%).

Higher income earners are also much more likely to search six or more times per day (45%).



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. GB nat rep n> 2,000, Gen Z n> 300, Millennials n> 550, Gen X n> 450, Baby Boomers+ n> 600, high income earners (>200% median) n> 400.

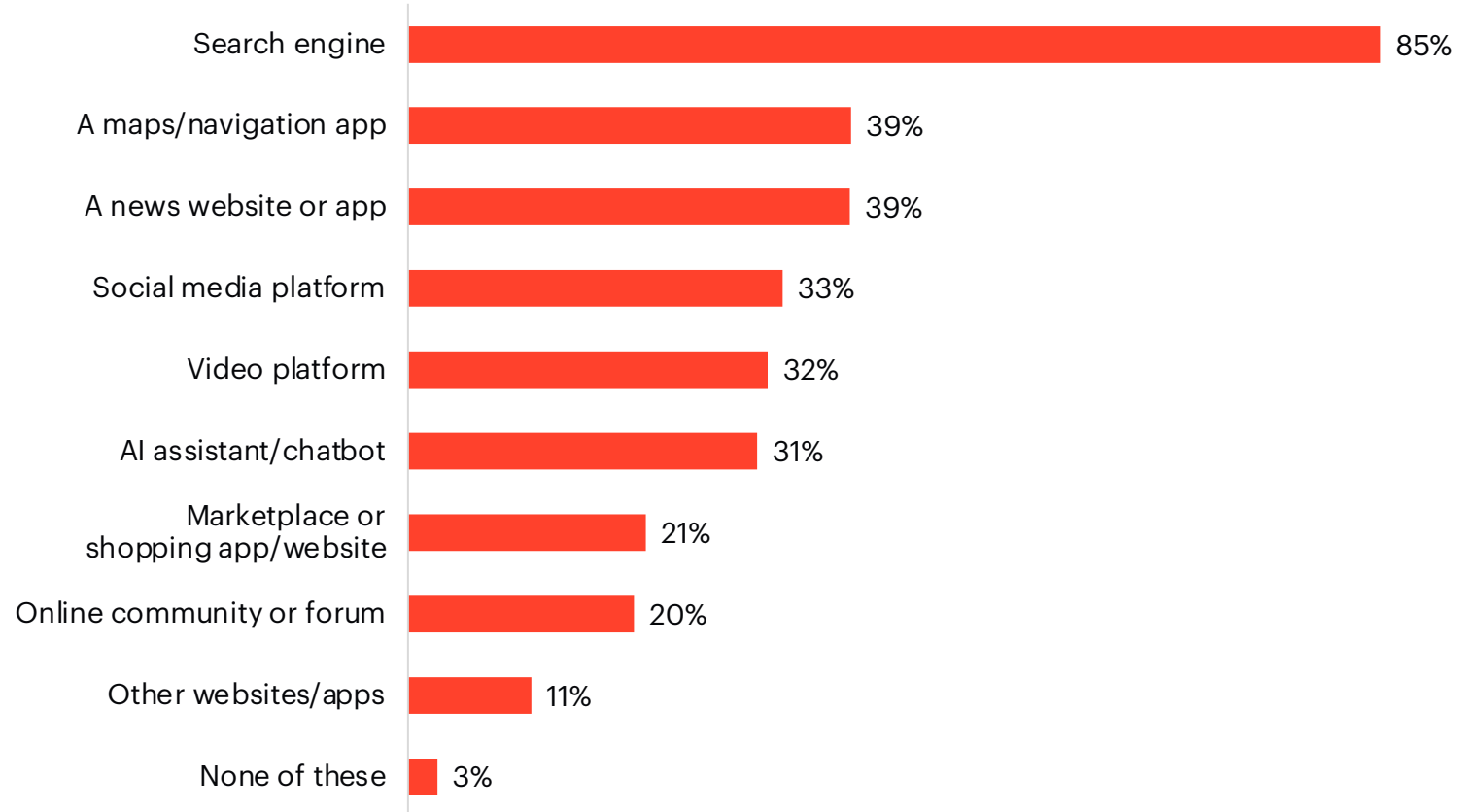
Search engines remain the dominant search channel

Nearly nine in ten online searchers in Great Britain (85%) have used a search engine in the past 30 days.

Although search engines are dominant, other channels play a meaningful role, such as maps (39%), news apps (39%), social media (33%), video platforms (32%), and AI assistants (31%).

[Get in touch](#)

In the past 30 days, where have you looked for information or answers?
Please select all that apply. (online searchers)



Younger adults treat more platforms as search tools

Search engines lead in every generation, but younger searchers are more likely to also search elsewhere.

Millennials use AI assistants (42%) more than all other generations while Gen Z leads in social media (49%) and online communities (37%).

Use of these channels drops sharply in Gen X and Baby Boomer generations.

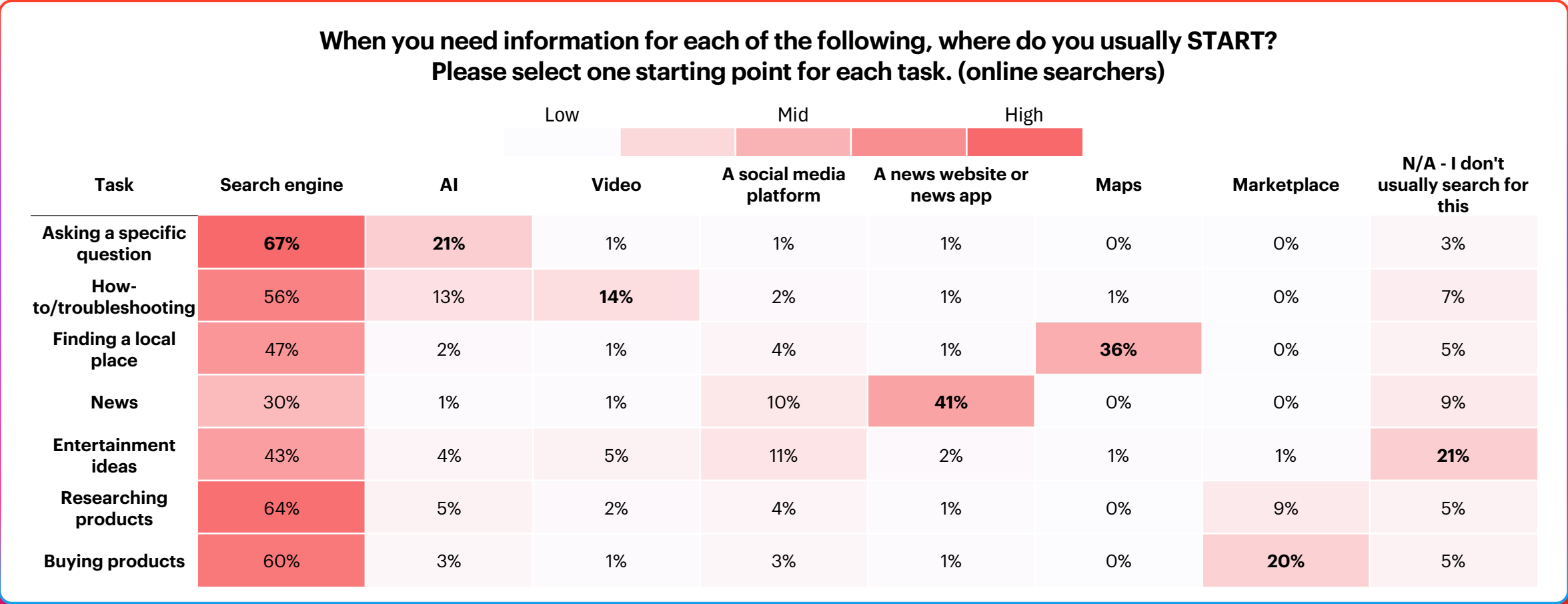
In the past 30 days, where have you looked for information or answers?
Please select all that apply. (online searchers, by generation)

	Low	Mid	High		
	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers+
Search engine	85%	79%	86%	87%	87%
Maps/navigation app	39%	35%	39%	40%	40%
News website/app	39%	34%	36%	42%	41%
Social media platform	33%	49%	33%	31%	25%
Video platform	32%	45%	34%	30%	23%
AI assistant/chatbot	31%	35%	42%	33%	15%
Marketplace or shopping app/website	21%	17%	20%	20%	24%
Online community or forum	20%	37%	29%	13%	7%

YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. "Other websites/apps" and "None of these" options not shown.
Online searchers: All n> 1,800, Gen Z n> 250, Millennials n> 550, Gen X n> 450, Baby Boomers+ n> 550. Average tools per respondent was calculated by summing the percentages for each group and dividing by 100.

Search engines lead across tasks, but AI and specialist apps have clear roles

Search engine is the default starting point for every tested task, but each has a significant runner-up. For example, 36% turn to navigation apps for finding locations and 21% start with AI assistants when asking specific questions.



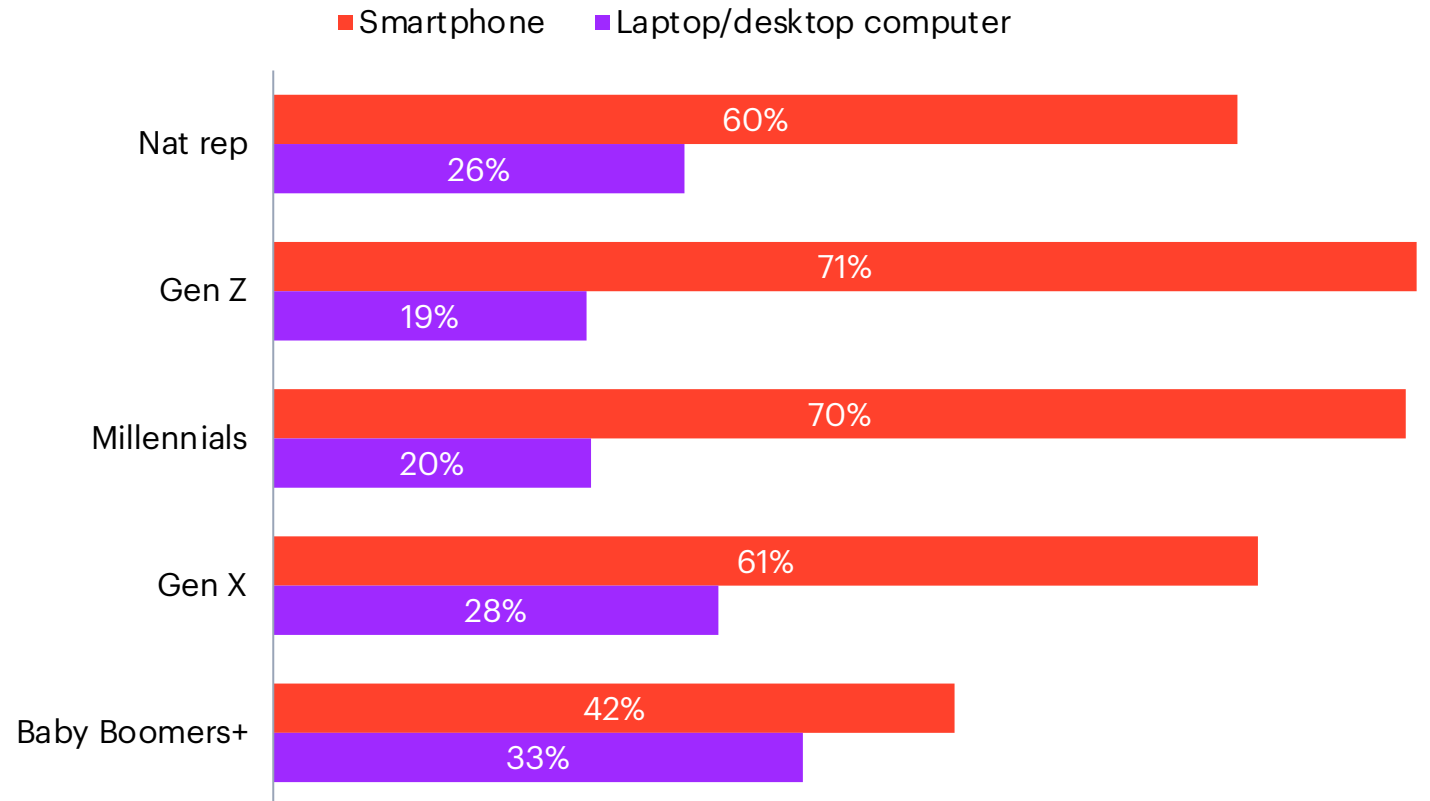
"Online community or forum", "Other information websites/apps" and "None of these" responses are not shown due to low responses.
Online searchers n> 1,800.

Search is mobile-first across generations, though computer use rises with age

Three in five (60%) Britons usually use their smartphone to search for information compared to a quarter (26%) who turn to their laptop or desktop computer.

Gen Z (71%) and Millennials (70%) favour mobile more heavily than older adults.

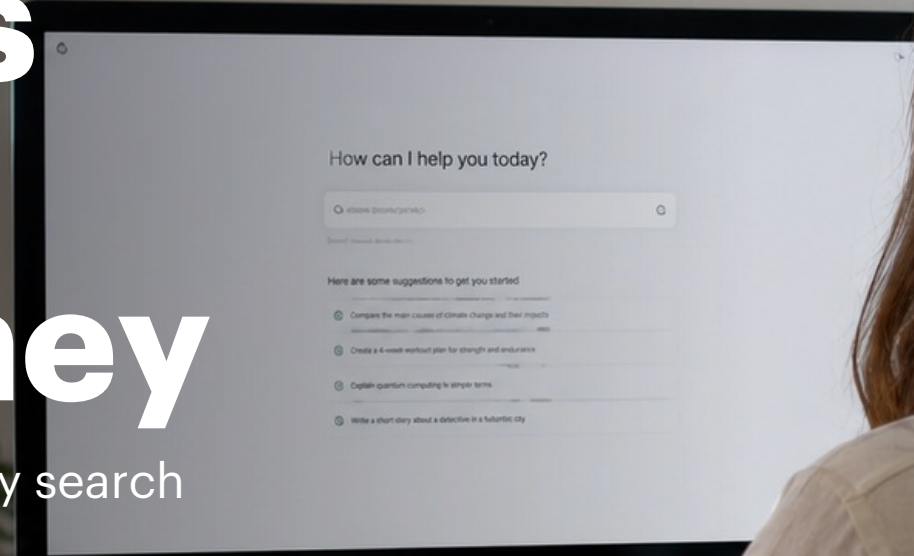
Which device do you most often use for searching information online? (nat rep, by generation)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. GB nat rep n> 2,000, Gen Z n> 300, Millennials n> 550, Gen X n> 450, Baby Boomers+ n> 600. Remaining responses include "tablet," "smart TV," "smart speaker," other and "don't know". Not shown due to low response.

AI assistants enter the search journey

AI assistants are not yet a mainstream daily search habit, but they are becoming a regular information tool for some Brits.



AI search is regular for some, but non-use remains common

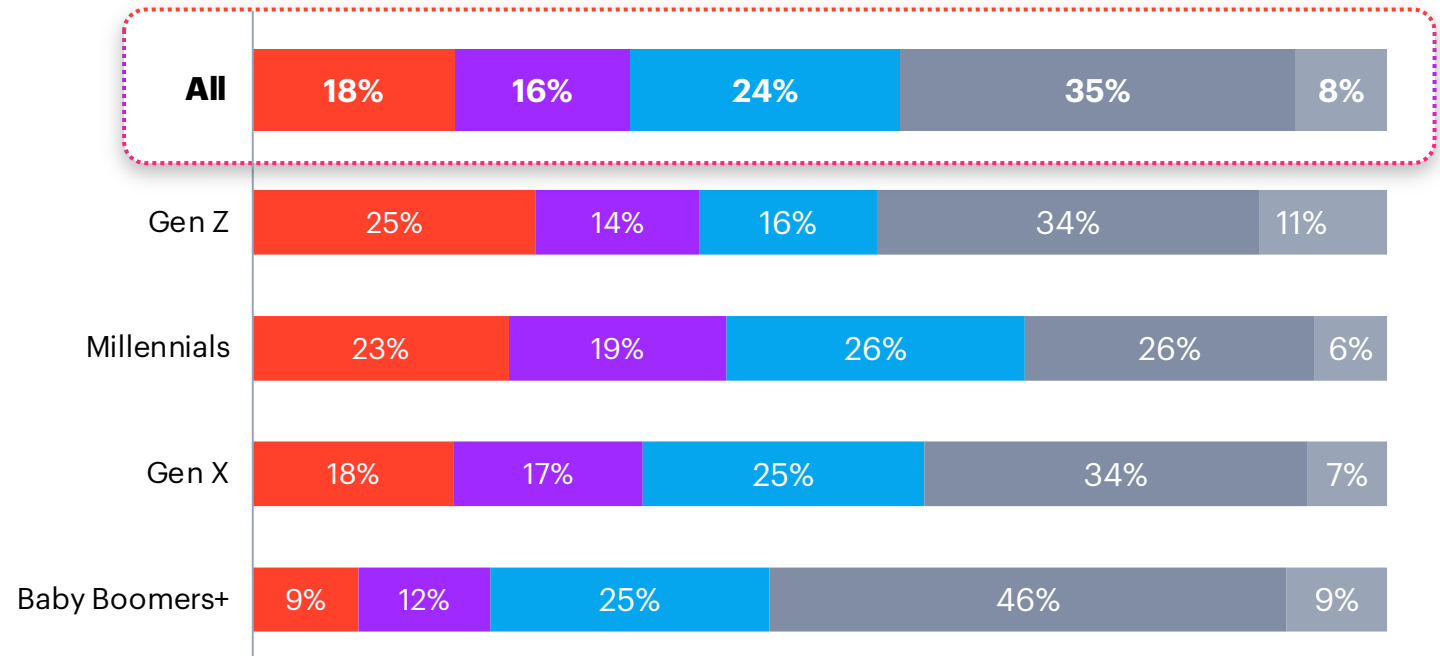
More than half of online searchers (58%) sometimes start with an AI assistant. Henceforth, this group will be referred to as “AI searchers”.

Non-AI searchers are the 35% who don’t ever start queries with AI.

Gen Z leads daily adoption with 25% using AI assistants to initiate queries every day, but Millennials have lowest non-use.

On average, how many new queries do you start with an AI assistant to find information? (online searchers)

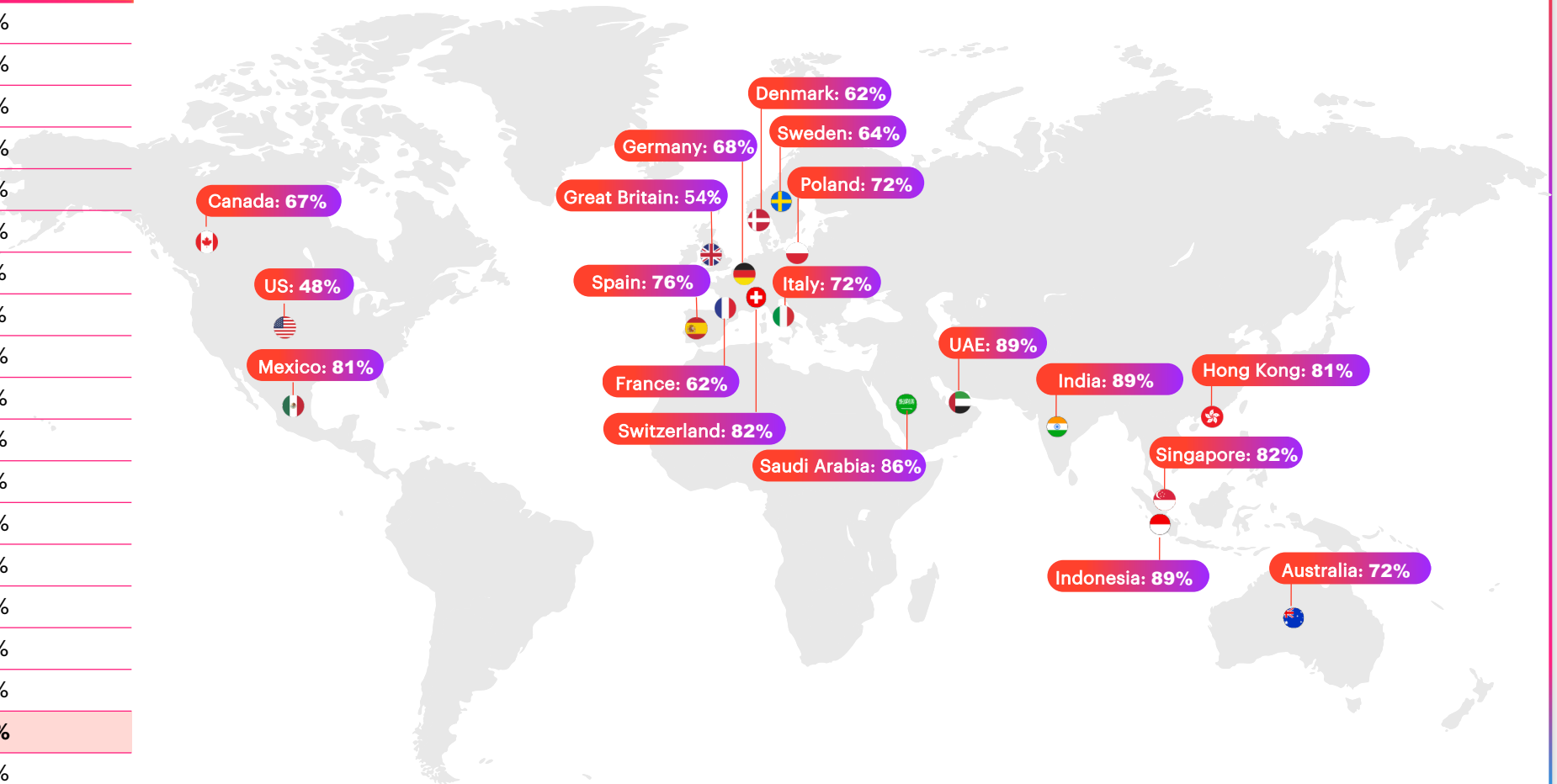
- Frequent (at least one daily)
- Regular (several per week)
- Occasional (up to one per week)
- None
- Don't know



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Online searchers: All n> 1,800, Gen Z n> 250, Millennials n> 550, Gen X n> 450, Baby Boomers+ n> 550. “Frequent” AI searchers answered “1 to 5 a day”, “6 to 10 a day”, or “more than 10 a day”. “Regular” AI searchers answered “several a week”. “Occasional” AI searchers answered “about one a week” or “less than one a week.” “Non-AI” searchers answered “none” or “don’t know”.

Great Britain sits near the lower end of AI search adoption

Markets	% AI searchers
India	89%
Indonesia	89%
UAE	89%
Saudi Arabia	86%
Singapore	82%
Switzerland	82%
Hong Kong	81%
Mexico	81%
Spain	76%
Australia	72%
Poland	72%
Italy	72%
Germany	68%
Canada	67%
Sweden	64%
France	62%
Denmark	62%
Great Britain	54%
U.S.	48%



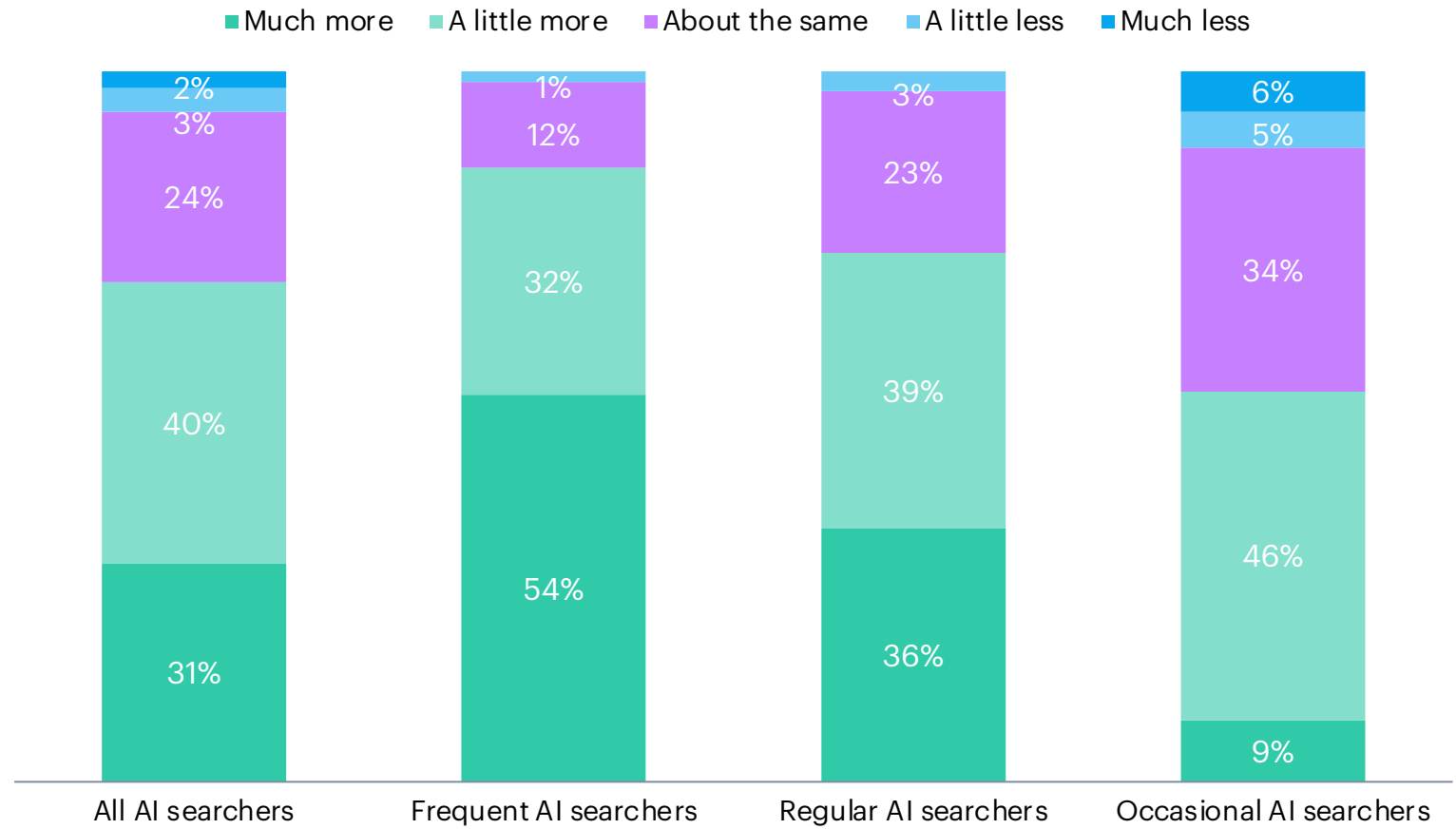
Current AI searchers are using the technology more than last year

Among AI searchers, 71% have increased their usage since a year ago, including 31% who use it “much more.” Only 5% have reduced their usage.

Among regular users, more than half (54%) use AI in search “much more” than a year ago, with another 32% using it “a little more.”

[Get in touch](#)

Compared to one year ago... how much more or less do you use AI assistants to find information? (AI searchers)



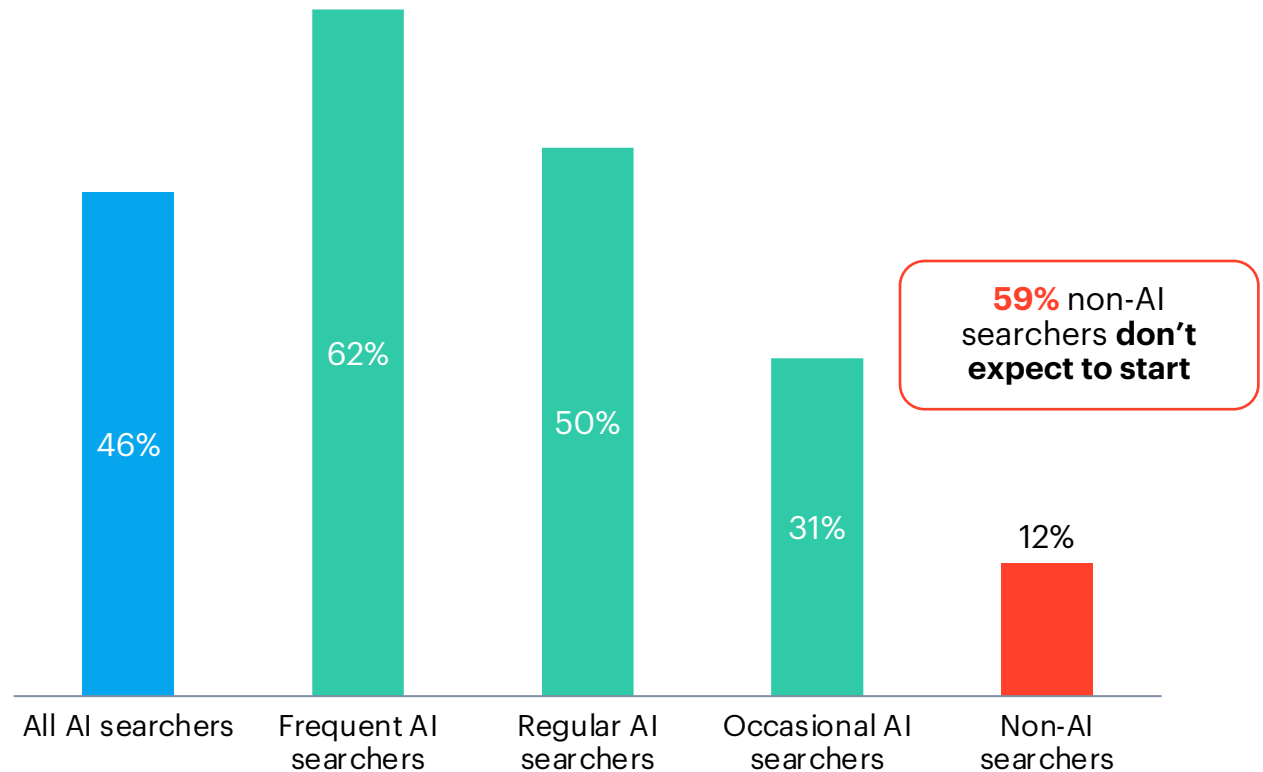
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n> 1,000, frequent AI searchers n> 300, regular AI searchers n> 250, occasional AI searchers n> 400. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with AI assistant. Frequent searchers start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers start several new queries per week. Occasional AI searchers start 1 or less than 1 new query in a week. Rebased among AI searchers by excluding "I do not use AI" and "Don't know".

Users plan to increase use, non-users don't plan to start

The AI search forecast for next year splits sharply between those who already use AI and those who don't. About a half (46%) of AI searchers will use these tools more in the coming year. This rises to 62% among frequent AI searchers.

Among those who don't use AI, only 12% say they'll use it more, and nearly six in ten (59%) don't expect to start.

Thinking about the next 12 months, do you expect to use AI assistants for finding information more, less or about the same amount?
(% expecting to use AI assistants more: much more or little more)

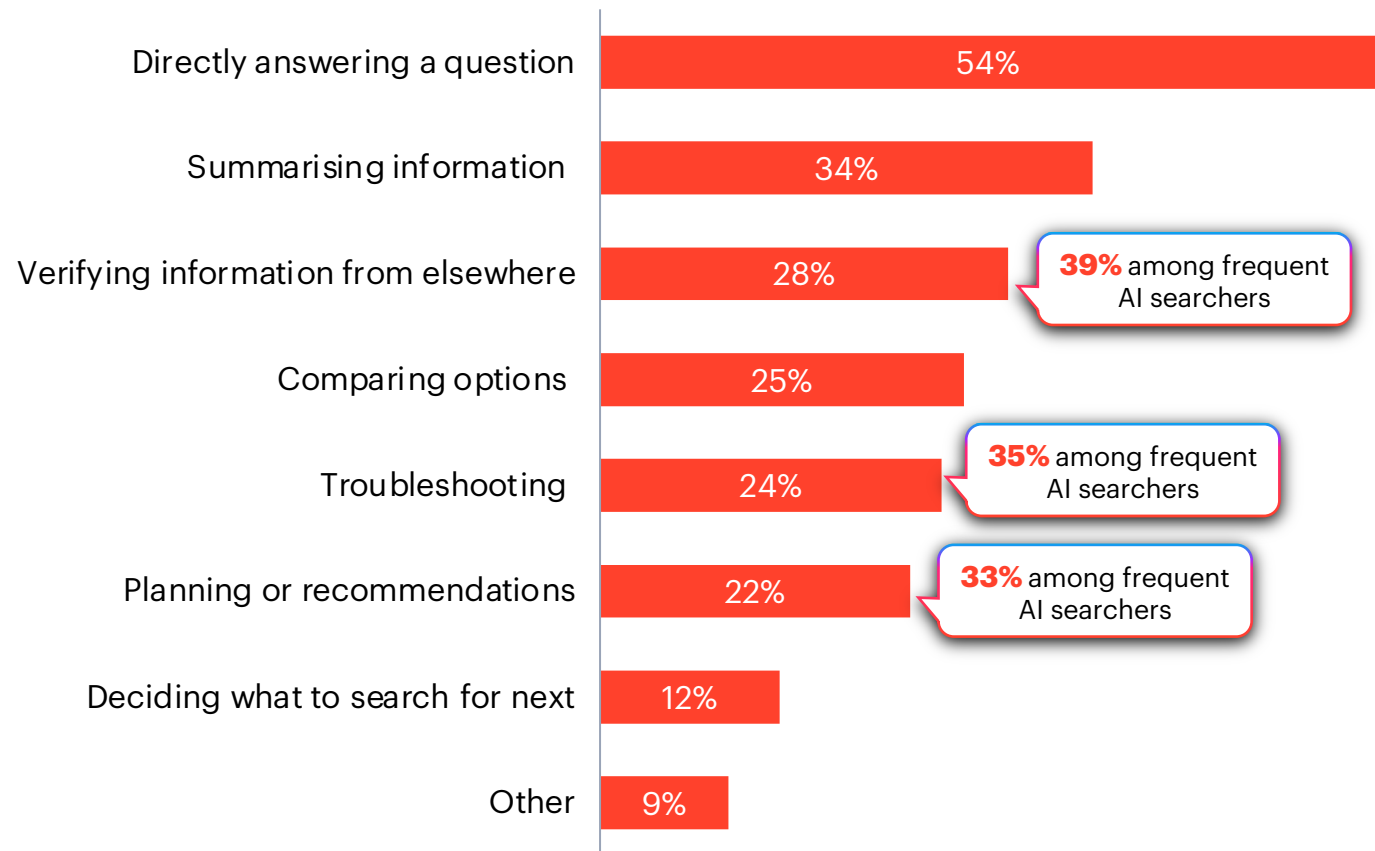


Answers, summaries and checks are leading use cases for AI search

Among AI searchers, the leading use case is getting a direct answer (54%). But AI assistants are also used to summarise (34%), check information (28%), compare options (25%) and troubleshoot problems (24%), all tasks where users want help resolving information, not just finding links.

[Explore research solutions](#)

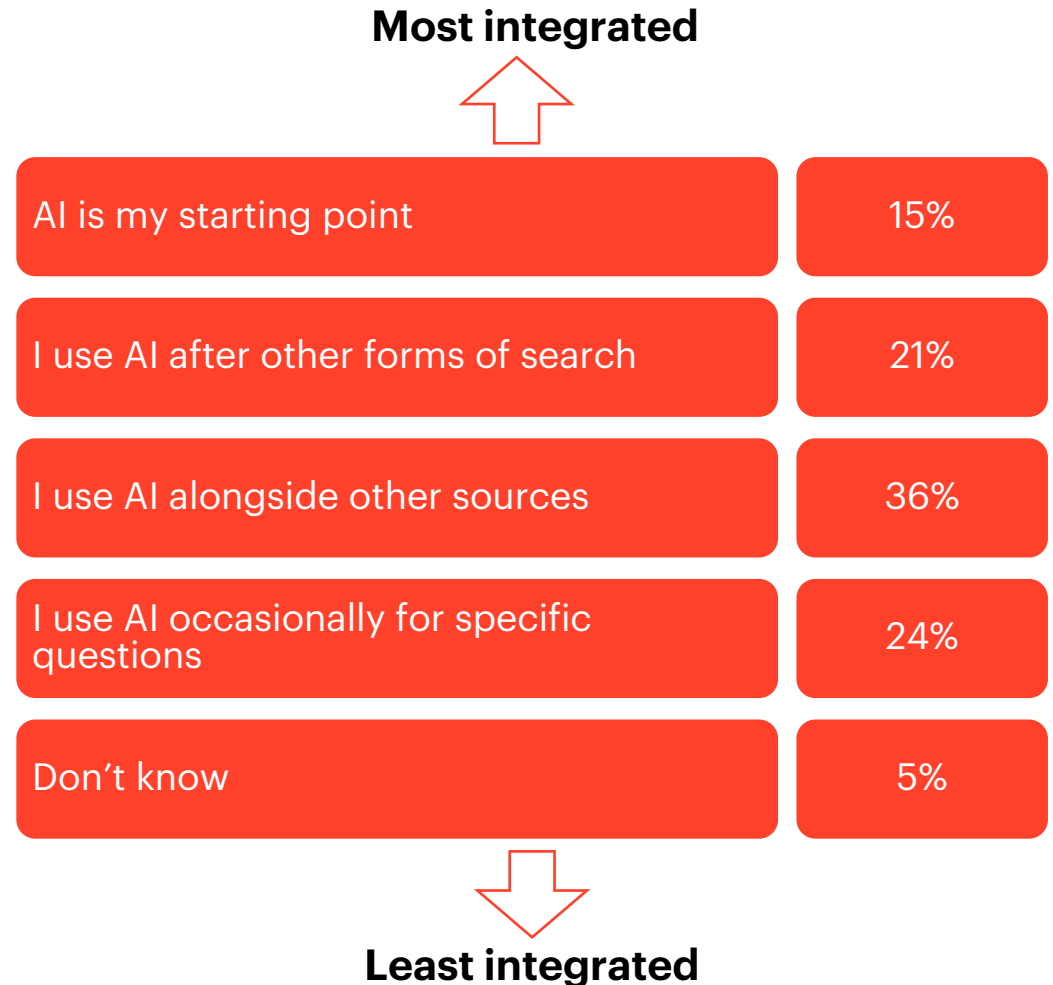
When you use an AI assistant to find information or answers, what do you typically use it for? Please select all that apply. (AI searchers)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n> 1,000, frequent AI searchers n> 300. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with AI assistant.

Even among AI searchers, chatbots are search companions more than starting points

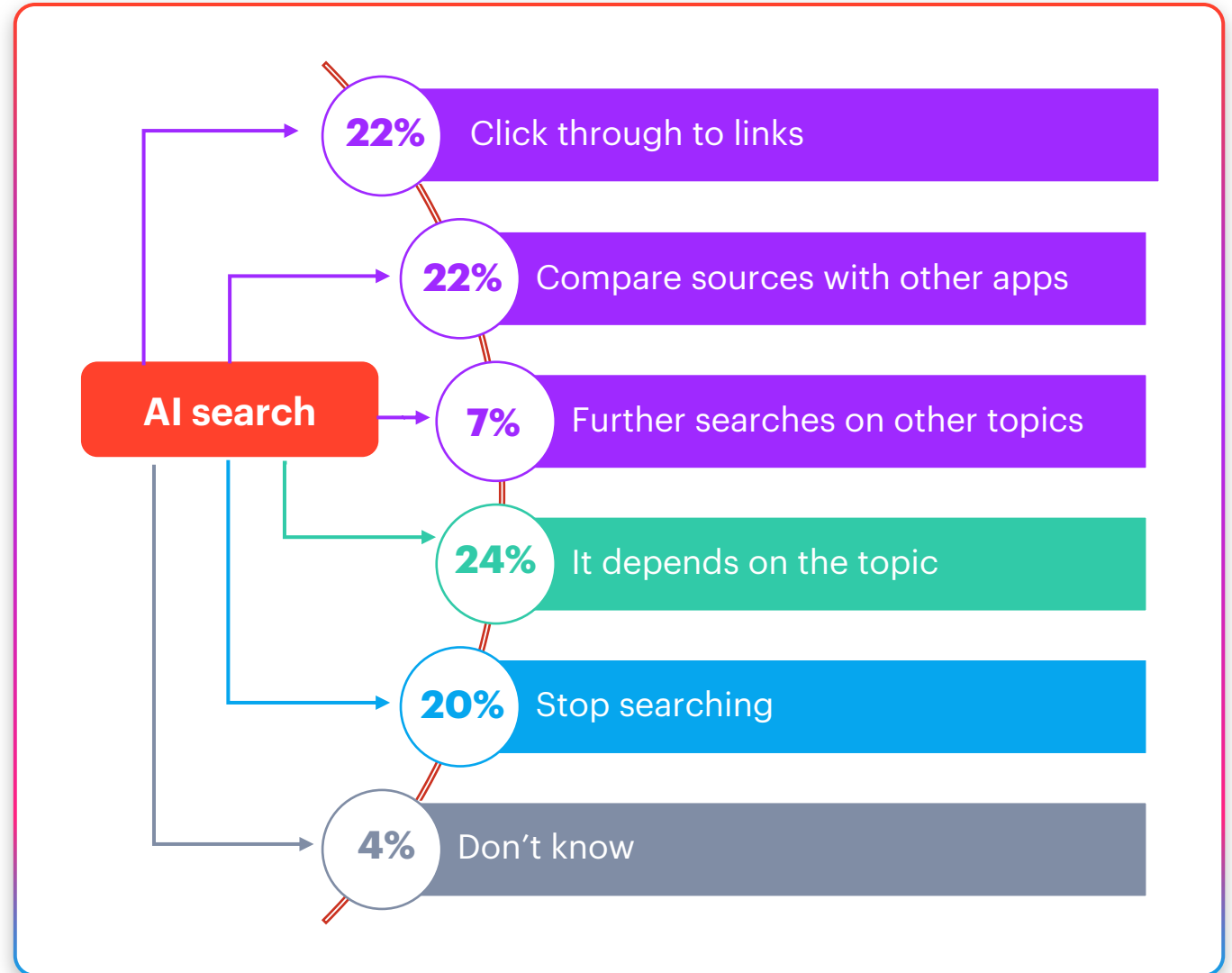
Among AI searchers, relatively few (15%) describe AI as their starting point. Most position AI as part of a broader search journey, used alongside other sources (36%), after other searches (21%) or only for specific questions (24%).



Click-through or quit: What happens after AI answers a search?

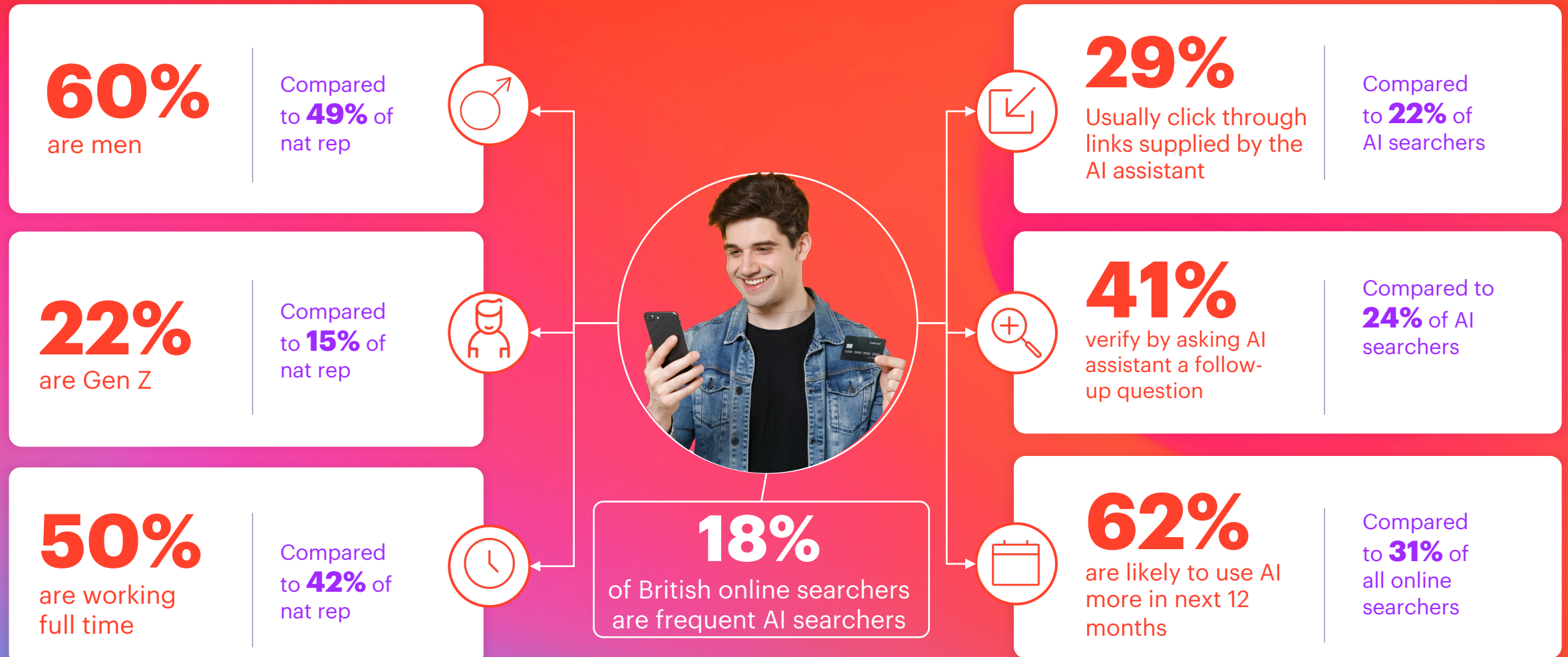
When people use AI assistants to find information, the generated answer is not always the end of the journey. Among GB AI searchers, 22% most often click through to links, 22% compare with other apps or websites, 7% continue searching on other topics and 24% stop searching.

Among frequent AI searchers, clicking AI-supplied links (29%) is more common than stopping at the answer (24%).



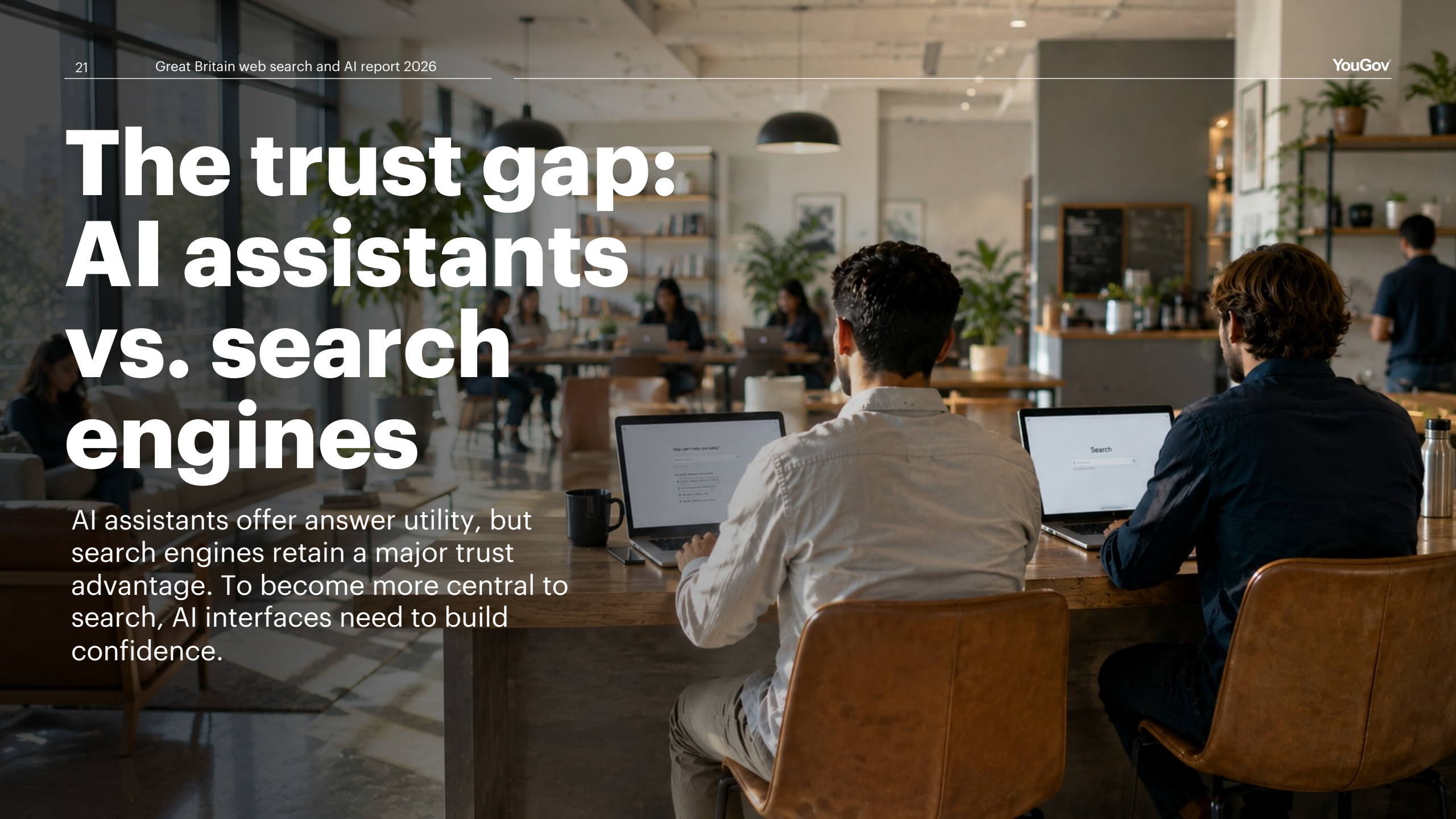
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searcher n> 1,000, frequent AI searchers n> 300.
Question: “When you look for information using an AI assistant, which of the following happens most often?”
AI searchers are respondents who at least sometimes start queries with AI assistant.

Profile spotlight: Who are Great Britain's frequent AI searchers?



The trust gap: AI assistants vs. search engines

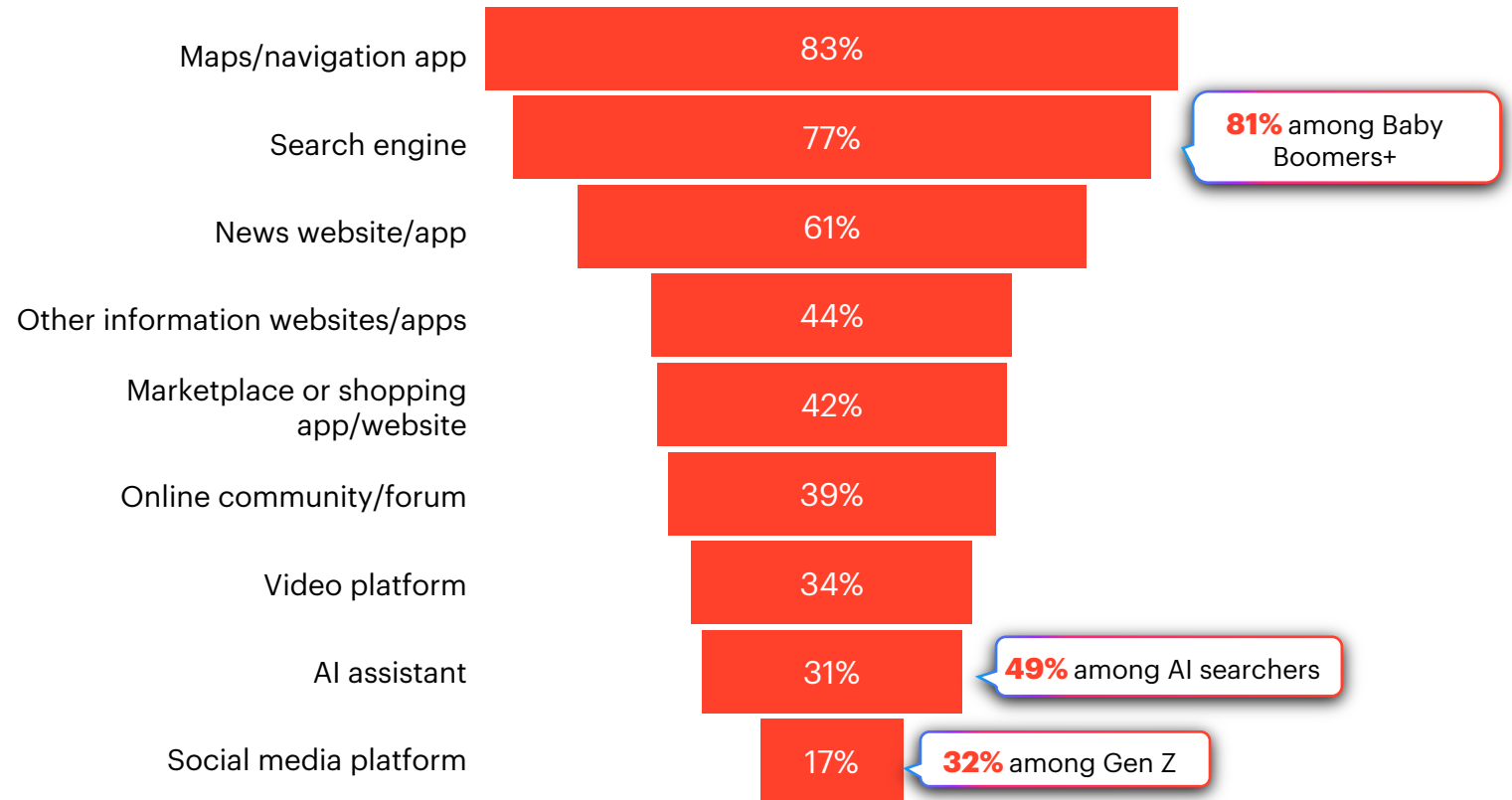
AI assistants offer answer utility, but search engines retain a major trust advantage. To become more central to search, AI interfaces need to build confidence.



Maps and search engines are the most trusted information sources, AI assistants lag

AI assistants are ahead of social media but still trail most other tested sources. While only 31% of online searchers trust information provided by AI assistants, that rises to 49% among those who actually use them, indicating a deep divide between those who have adopted AI for search and those who have not.

How much do you trust information you find from each of the following sources?
Please select one option for each row. (online searchers)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Online searchers: All n> 1,800, Gen Z n> 300, Baby Boomers+ n> 550, AI searchers n> 1,000. Trust is aggregate of “Trust a lot” and “Trust somewhat”.

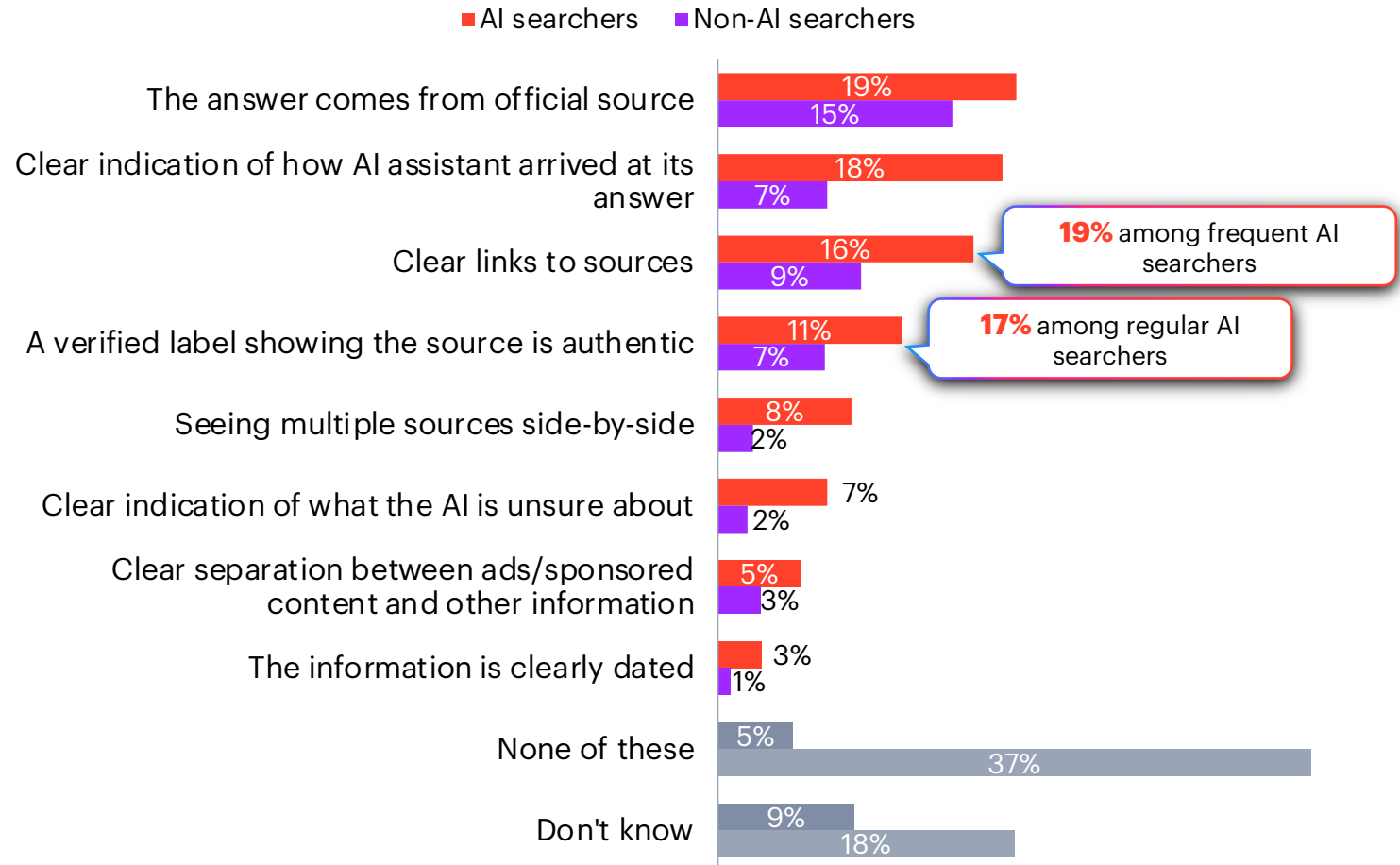
No single trust signal is likely to move non-AI searchers

AI searchers are more likely than non-AI searchers to say that trust signals such as source links and official sources would increase trust.

Non-AI searchers are much more likely to say that no features could sway them, suggesting that transparency tools may not effectively move non-users.

Get in touch

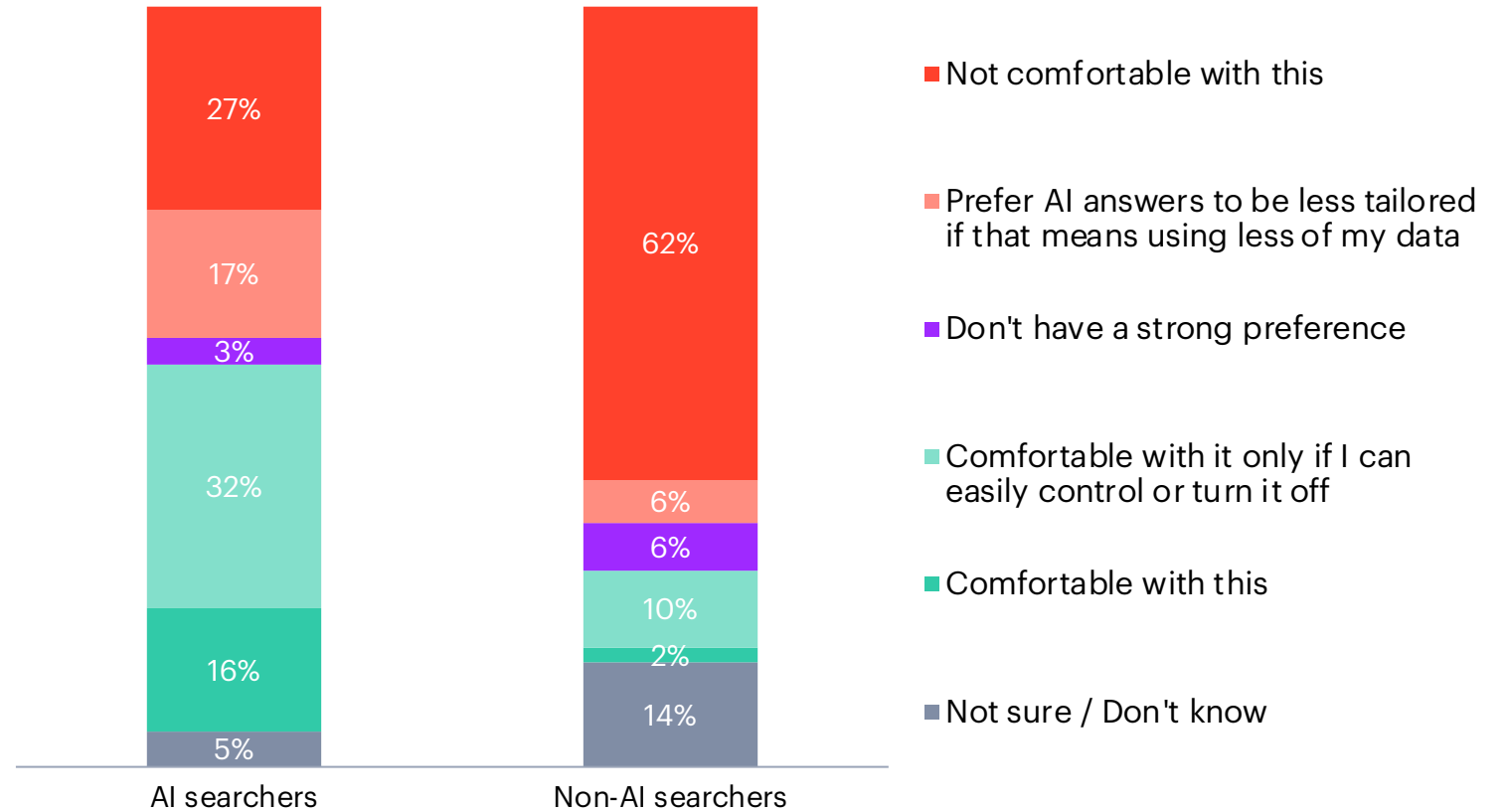
Which ONE of the following would most increase your trust in an AI assistant's answer?
(AI searchers vs. non-AI searchers)



Personalisation faces a privacy ceiling

Non-AI searchers are mostly uncomfortable with data use for tailored answers at 62%, while AI searchers are more open to personalisation with controls: 32% are comfortable if they can control or turn it off.

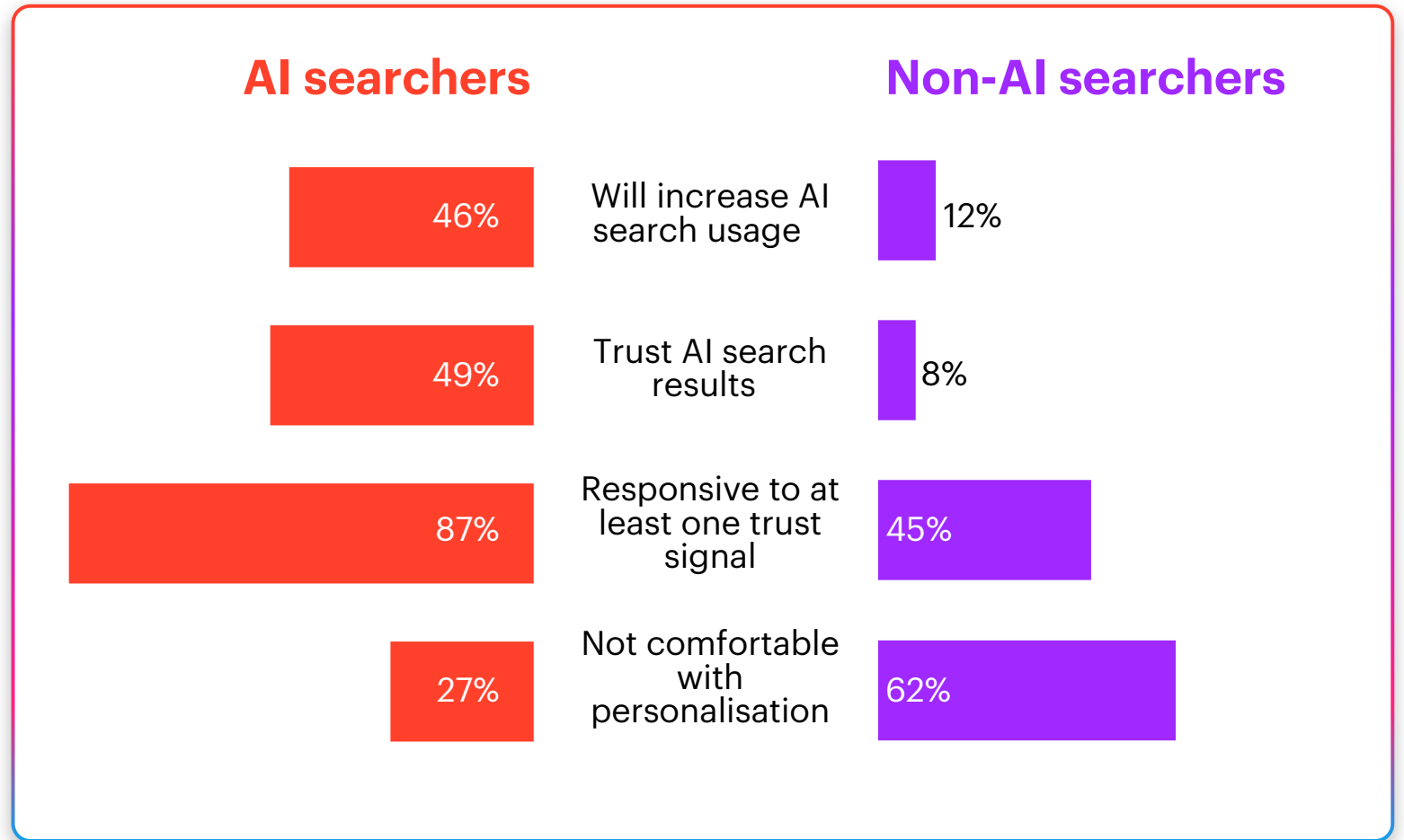
Which ONE is closest to your view about AI assistants using your data (e.g., your previous chats, search history, or app activity) to give more tailored answers? (online searchers, by AI usage)



A new digital divide? Current AI users vs. non-users

AI search is becoming stickier among users, but non-users remain hard to move

AI searchers are more likely to expect greater future use, respond to trust signals and accept personalisation with controls. Non-AI searchers, by contrast, are much less likely to expect to start using AI and are more likely to say trust features would not change their view.



Methodology

The insights in this report have been sourced via YouGov Surveys: Serviced – providing rapid answers from the right audience.

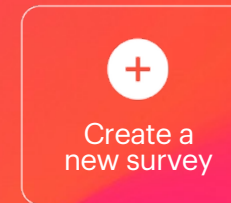
- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The multi-region survey was conducted online from April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026.
- Australia n= 1002, Canada n= 1015, Denmark n= 1006, France n= 1045, Germany n= 1005, Great Britain n= 2003, Hong Kong n= 508, India n= 1004, Indonesia n= 1032, Italy n= 1003, Mexico n= 1000, Poland n= 1006, Saudi Arabia n= 1008, Singapore n= 1002, Spain n= 1005, Sweden n= 1003, Switzerland n= 1011, U.S. n= 1494, UAE n= 1006. The figures have been weighted to be representative of adults aged 18+ in each market's respective target population.
- Audiences are nationally representative in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the U.S., and the UAE. Audiences in India and Mexico are representative of the urban population and those in Hong Kong and Indonesia are representative of the online population.
- Online searchers (n> 1,800) are defined on the question, "How often do you look for information online (on any device)?" – Respondents who look for information online at least once a week.
- AI searchers (n> 1,000) are respondents who start new queries with AI assistant, based on the question, "On average, how many new queries do you start with an AI assistant to find information?" Frequent AI searchers (n> 300) start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers (n> 250) start several new queries per week. Occasional AI searchers (n> 400) start 1 or less than 1 new query in a week. Non-AI searchers (n> 800) are defined as those who selected "None" and "Don't know".
- Throughout the report, each generation is defined as: Gen Z (1997 or later), Millennial (1981-1996), Gen X (1965-1980) and Baby Boomers+ (Pre-1964).

Ready to get real answers to your questions?

Replace gut feel with confident decisions, powered by accurate, actionable data that fits your budget.

Trusted as the most quoted research company in the world, YouGov delivers insight you can act on. From self-serve research to expert-led custom studies, we uncover consumer behaviour, trends, and sentiment - all grounded in reality.

[Explore research solutions](#)



Target market

- ☐ Great Britain
- ☒ Other countries

Fast-turnaround surveys in



- 36
- has two dogs
- lives with his brother
- does adventure activities
- loves architecture