



Searching for answers:

How AI is changing online discovery in 2026

/Research Reality



Contents

- 1 Foreword
- 2 Report takeaways
- 3 The online search landscape in 2026
- 4 AI assistants enter the search journey
- 5 The trust gap
- 6 Methodology



Foreword



The search box remains 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 direct answers, summaries and comparisons rather than only a list of links.

In Australia, search engines still anchor online discovery, but the search journey is already becoming more distributed. Social media, video platforms, maps and AI assistants all play meaningful roles, and more than a third of online searchers start at least one new query a day with an AI assistant.

Of the 19 markets surveyed, Australia sits above the middle on AI-assisted search. AI assistants are already being used regularly, especially among younger adults, but trust and privacy continue to shape how far they can go. Consumers still want ways to verify what they find, including source links, official information, transparency about how answers are produced and control over how their data is used.

Laura Robbie

CEO APAC & MENA

[Get in touch](#)

[Explore research solutions](#)

Report takeaways

Search is fragmented, so visibility needs to stretch beyond search engines

Search engines still lead, but Australians are using a broad mix of discovery tools. This means brands need to think about how they appear across answer engines, video, social, local search and trusted publisher environments.

AI search is becoming part of the discovery funnel

More than a third of Australian online searchers start at least one new query a day with an AI assistant. This means AI search is part of the discovery funnel, especially for questions, comparisons, recommendations and product research.

Younger adults are driving AI search frequency

Gen Z and Millennials are especially likely to start AI queries daily, while Baby Boomers+ are much less likely to do so.

AI is usually a companion, not a replacement

Among Australian AI searchers, the largest share use AI alongside other sources rather than as their first stop. This means AI search should be treated as part of a connected discovery journey rather than as a standalone replacement for search.

Trust depends on proof

The strongest trust signals for AI search are clear explanations, official sources and links or citations. Brands can benefit from authoritative content that is easy for AI tools to verify and attribute.

The power of the YouGov panel

The insights in this report are fueled 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.

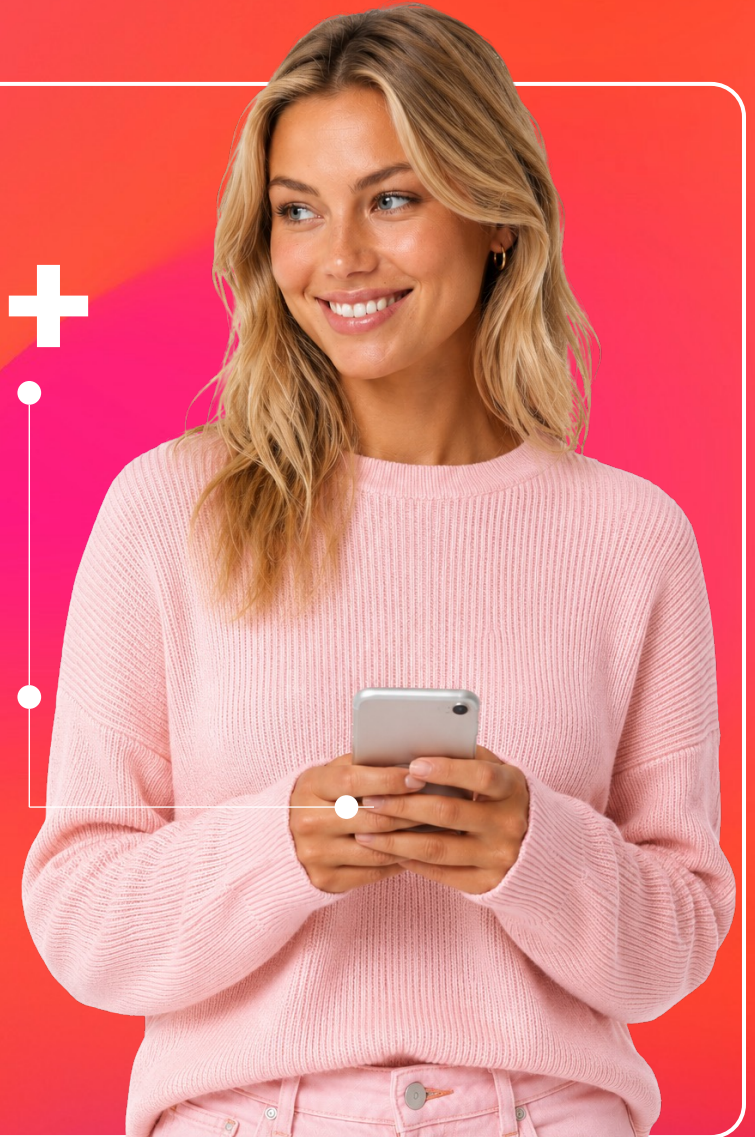
[Run a survey](#)

34m+

registered
panel members

55+

markets



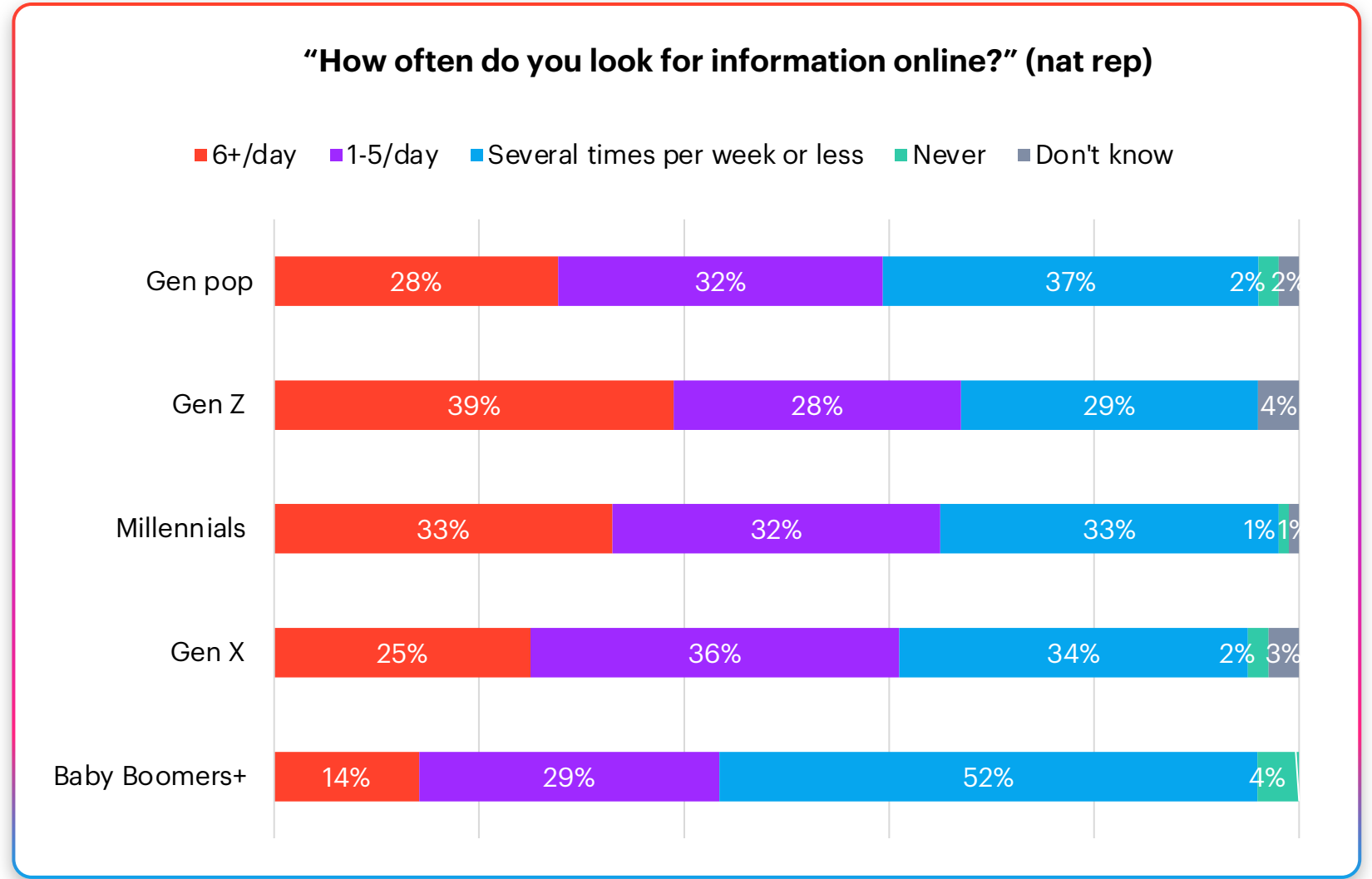
The online search landscape

Search remains a frequent behaviour in Australia, but consumers 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, especially among younger Australians

Six in 10 Australians look up information online every day. Gen Z are the most likely to be high-frequency searchers, with 39% saying they search online six or more times a day, compared with 33% of Millennials, 25% of Gen X and 14% of Baby Boomers+.



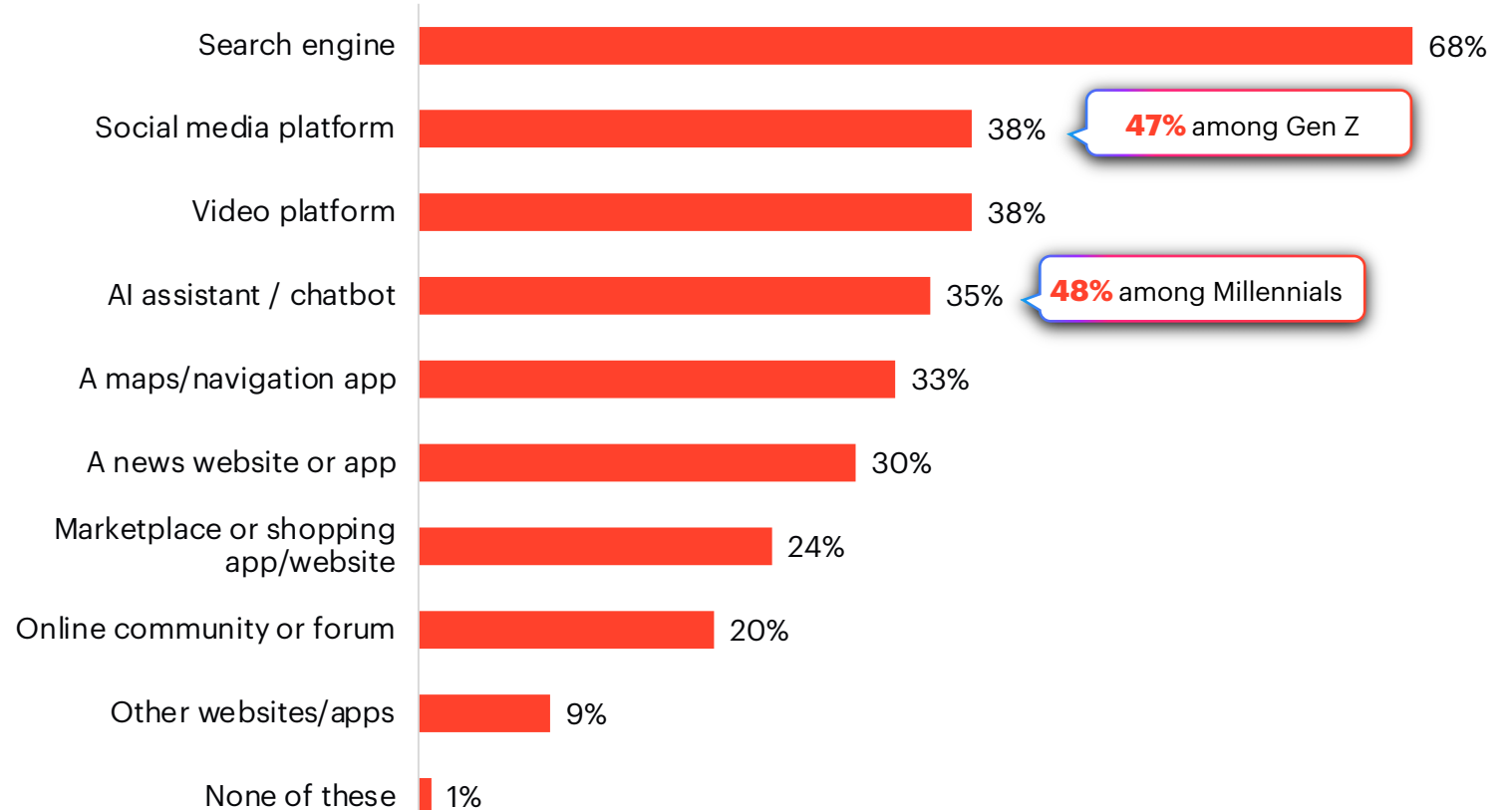
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Australia nat rep n> 1,000, Gen Z n> 200, Millennials n> 250, Gen X n> 200, Baby Boomers+ n> 250.

Search engines lead, but Australians use a broad mix of discovery tools

Search engines remain the most-used information source among Australian online searchers. More than two-thirds used a search engine in the past 30 days, while social media platforms and video platforms were each used by 38%, AI assistants or chatbots by 35% and maps/navigation apps by 33%.

[Get in touch](#)

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



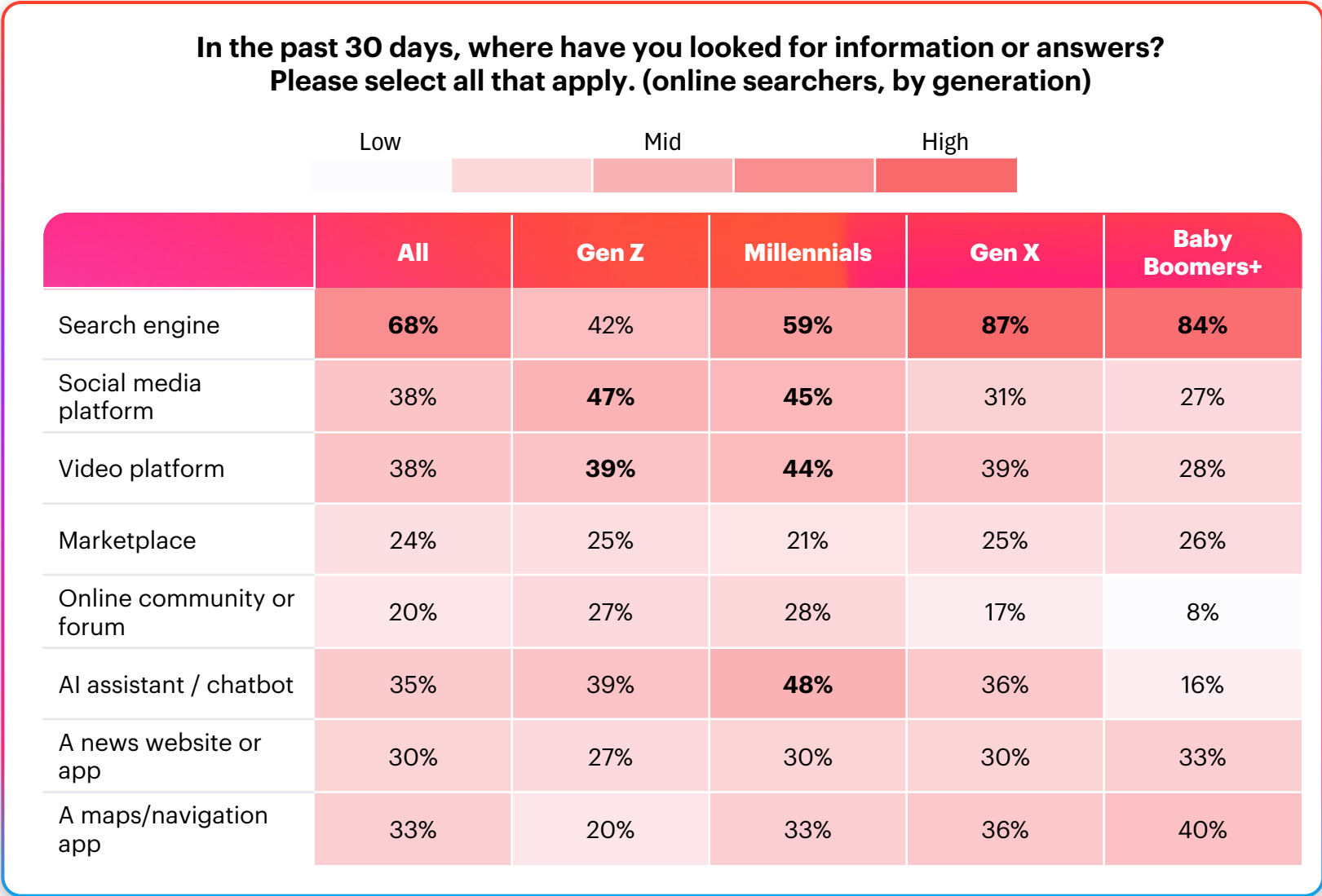
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Online searchers: All n> 950, Gen Z n> 200, Millennials n> 250, Gen X n> 200, Baby Boomers+ n> 200.

Younger Australians use a wider search toolkit

Search engines lead overall, but platform use differs sharply by age. For example, social media is the search tool of choice for Gen Z, at 47%.

Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than older Australians to use social media, video platforms, online communities and AI assistants to find information.

Millennials are the most likely generation to use AI assistants or chatbots, at 48%.



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. "Other websites/apps" and "None of these" options not shown. Online searchers: All n> 950, Gen Z n> 200, Millennials n> 250, Gen X n> 200, Baby Boomers+ n> 200.

Search engines lead most tasks, but news starts with news sites

Search engines are the most common starting point for most information tasks tested. But the runner-up varies by task: 23% start with AI assistants when asking a specific question, 25% start with maps for finding a local place, 23% start with marketplaces when buying a product and 29% start with news websites or apps for news and current events.

When you need information for each of the following, where do you usually START?
Please select one starting point for each task. (online searchers)

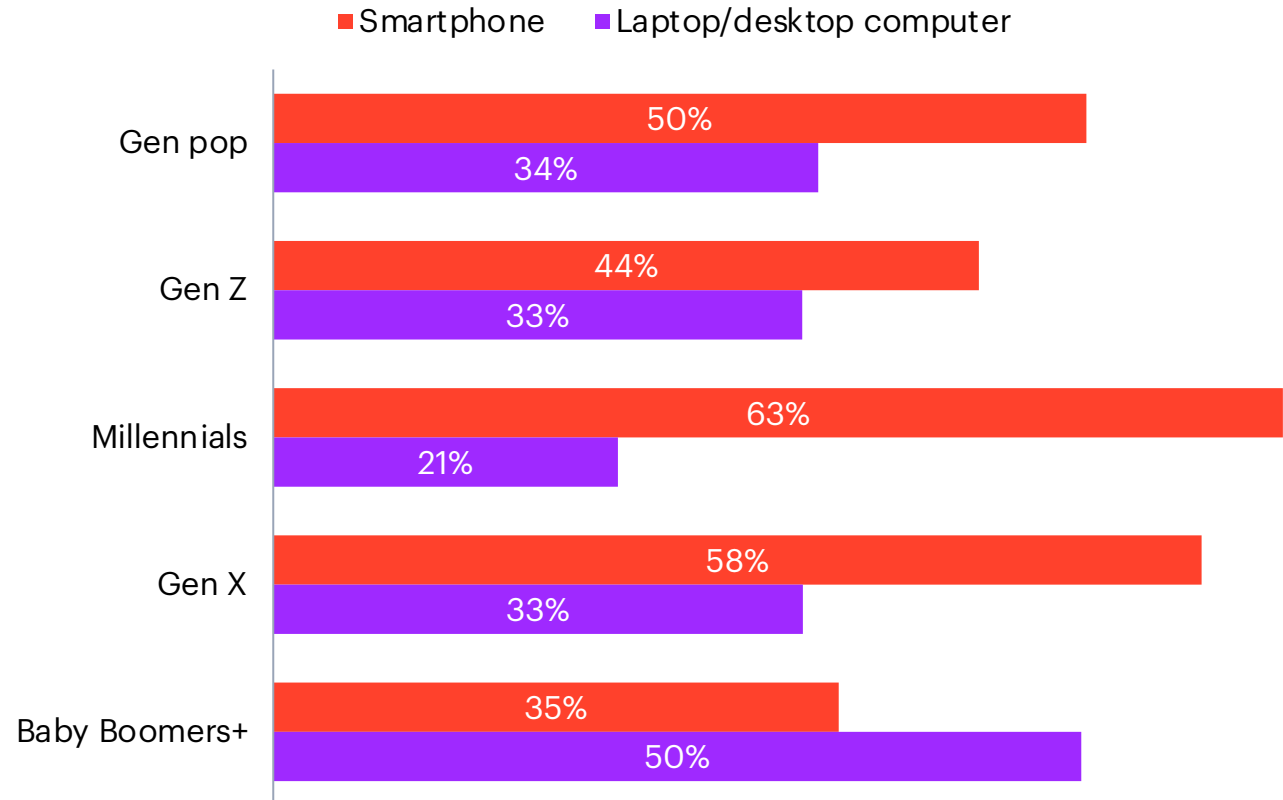
Task									
	Search engine	A social media platform	Video	Marketplace	AI	A news website or news app	Maps	Online community/ forum	N/A - I don't usually search for this
Researching a product before buying	46%	7%	6%	13%	8%	2%	1%	6%	4%
Asking a specific question	42%	5%	5%	7%	23%	2%	1%	6%	3%
Buying a product	39%	6%	6%	23%	5%	2%	1%	6%	5%
Finding a local place	36%	6%	6%	6%	4%	2%	25%	7%	5%
How-to or troubleshooting	35%	6%	17%	5%	15%	2%	1%	6%	8%
Entertainment ideas	31%	15%	8%	6%	5%	4%	1%	6%	17%
News / current events	22%	12%	6%	6%	3%	29%	1%	4%	8%

"Other information websites/apps" and "None of these" responses are excluded due to low responses. Neither received more than 5% as starting point on any task. Online searchers n> 950.

Search is mostly mobile-first, but computers still matter

Smartphones are the most common search device among Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X, though Gen Z are more divided between smartphones and computers than Millennials. Baby Boomers+ are the exception: half most often use a laptop or desktop, compared with 35% who use a smartphone.

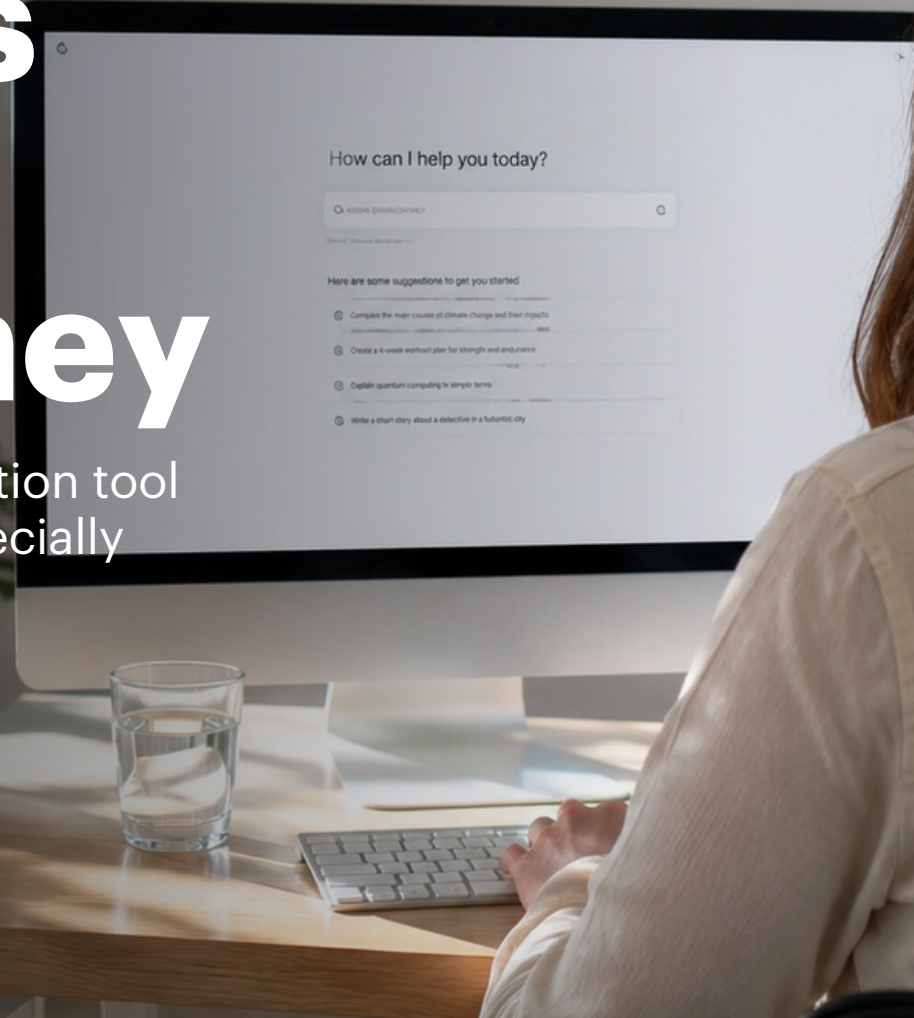
Which device do you most often use for searching information online? (nat rep, by generation)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Australia nat rep n> 1,000, Gen Z n> 200, Millennials n> 250, Gen X n> 200, Baby Boomers+ n> 250. 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 already a regular information tool for many Australian online searchers, especially Gen Z and Millennials.



Daily AI search is already common among younger Australians

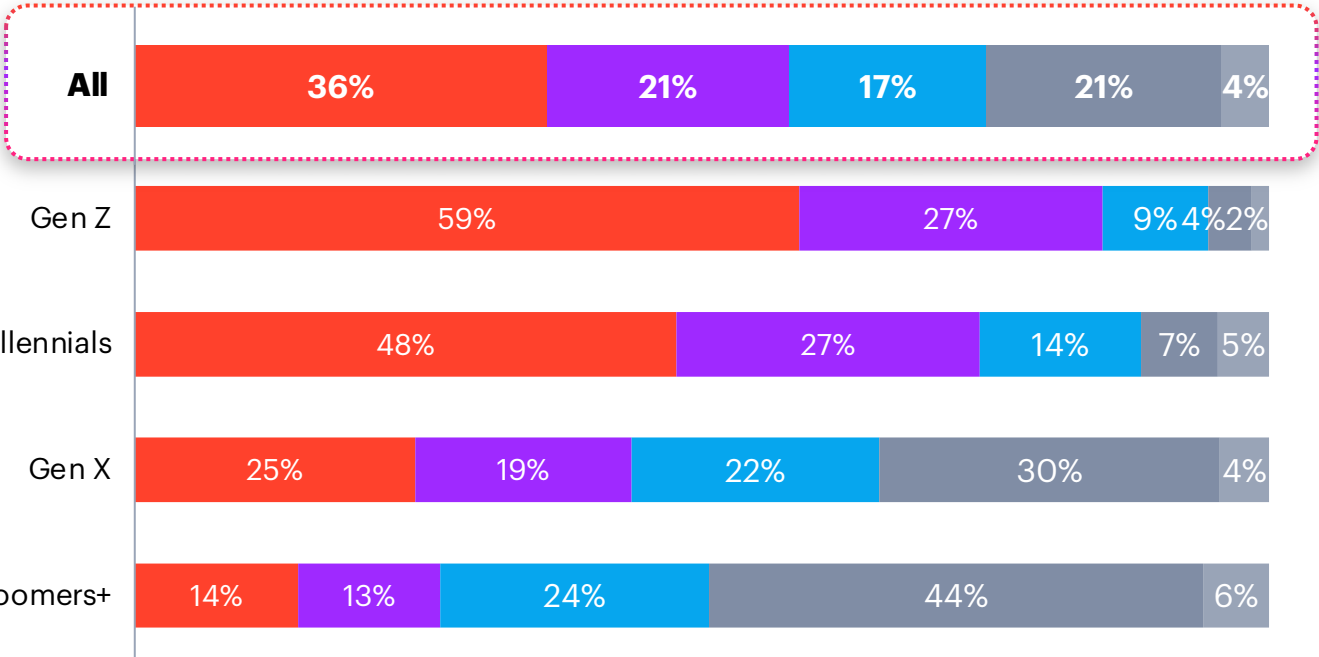
More than a third of Australian online searchers start at least one new query a day with an AI assistant. Daily AI query-starting is especially common among Gen Z (59%) and Millennials (48%), compared with 25% of Gen X and 14% of Baby Boomers+.

Only about one in five Australian online searchers say they never start queries with AI.

Get in touch

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

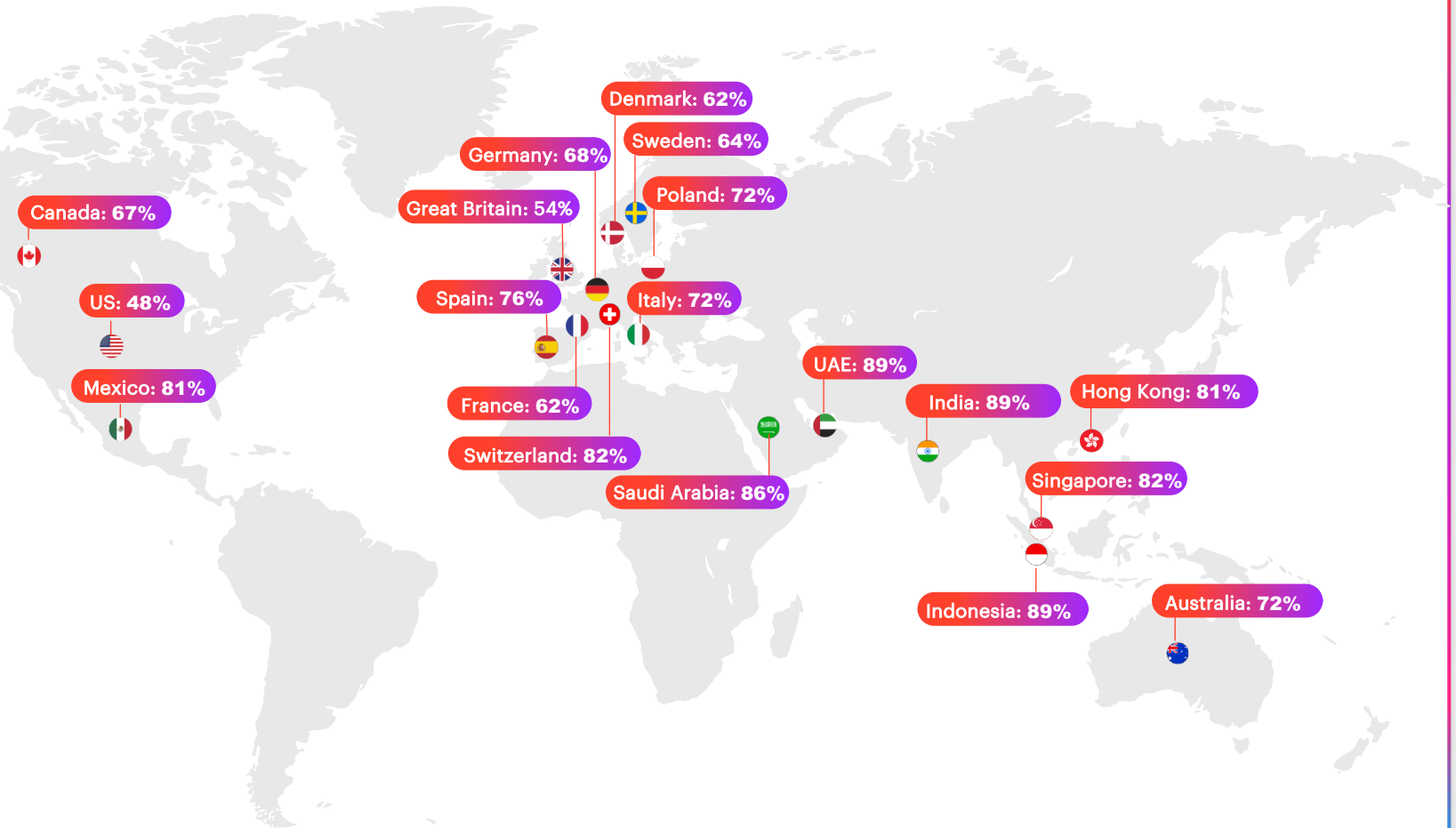
- Frequent (at least one daily)
- Occasional (up to one per week)
- Don't know
- Regular (several per week)
- None



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Online searchers: All n> 950, Gen Z n> 200, Millennials n> 250, Gen X n> 200, Baby Boomers+ n> 200. "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".

Australia ranks in the middle for AI-assisted search

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%



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. U.S. n> 1,400, Hong Kong n> 500, Great Britain n> 2,000, rest of the markets n> 500 each.

Question: On average, how many new queries do you start with an AI assistant to find information?

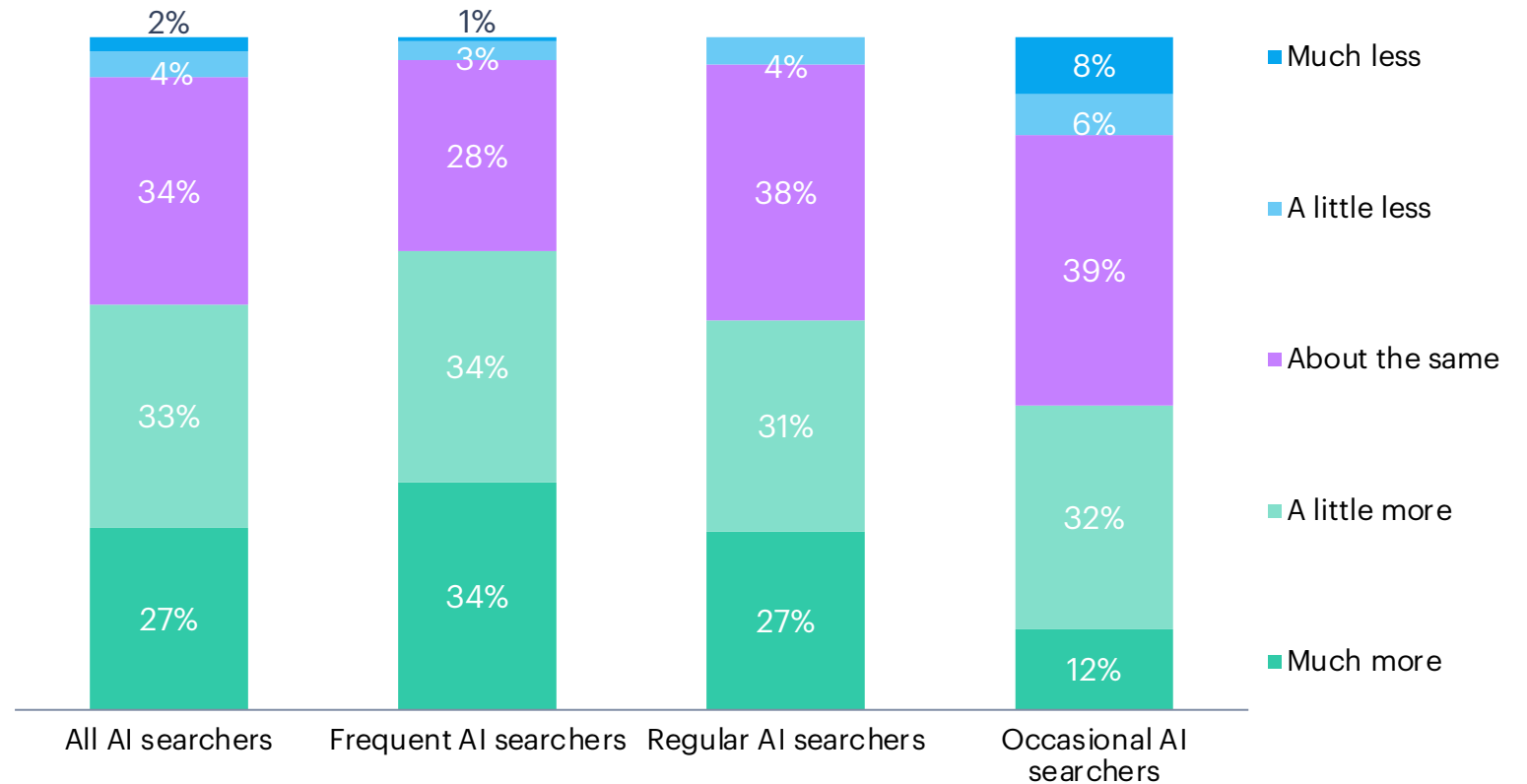
AI searchers are respondents who start queries with AI assistant (did not select “Don’t know” or “None”).

Current AI searchers are using the technology more than last year

Among Australian AI searchers, 60% say they use AI assistants to find information more than they did a year ago, including 27% who use them much more. Only 6% say they use AI assistants less.

Growth is strongest among frequent users: 68% say they use AI assistants more than a year ago.

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

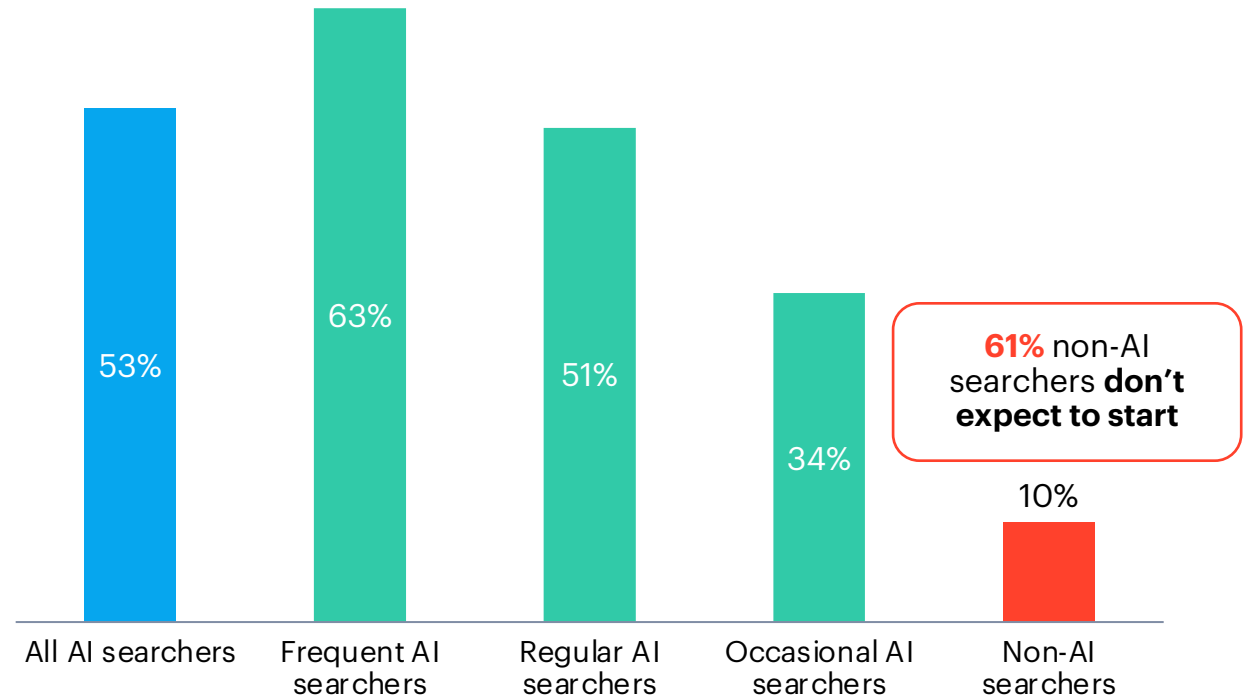


YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searcher n> 700, frequent AI searchers n> 350, regular AI searchers n> 200, occasional AI searchers n> 150. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with AI assistant. Frequent searchers start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers 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".

AI users expect to deepen their use, while non-users remain hesitant

The AI search forecast splits sharply between those who already use AI and those who do not. More than half of Australian AI searchers expect to use AI assistants more for finding information over the next 12 months, rising to 63% among frequent AI searchers. Among non-AI searchers, only 10% expect to use AI more, while 61% do not 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 + little more)



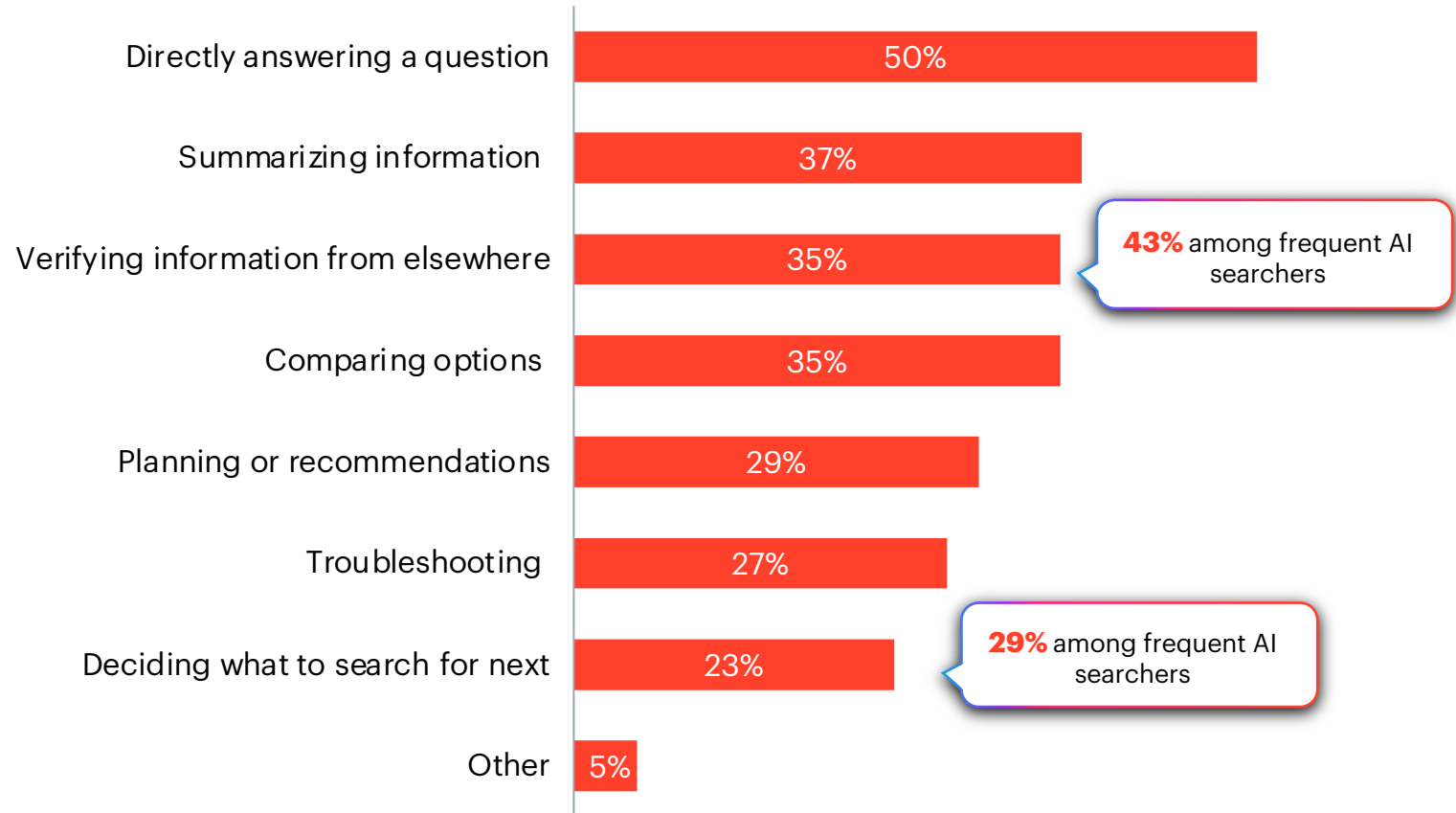
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searcher n> 700, non-AI searchers n> 200, frequent AI searchers n> 350, regular AI searchers n> 200, occasional AI searchers n> 150.
AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with AI assistant.

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

Among Australian AI searchers, the leading use case is getting a direct answer to a question, selected by 50%. But AI assistants are also used to summarise information (37%), verify information from elsewhere (35%), compare options (35%) and plan or get recommendations (29%).

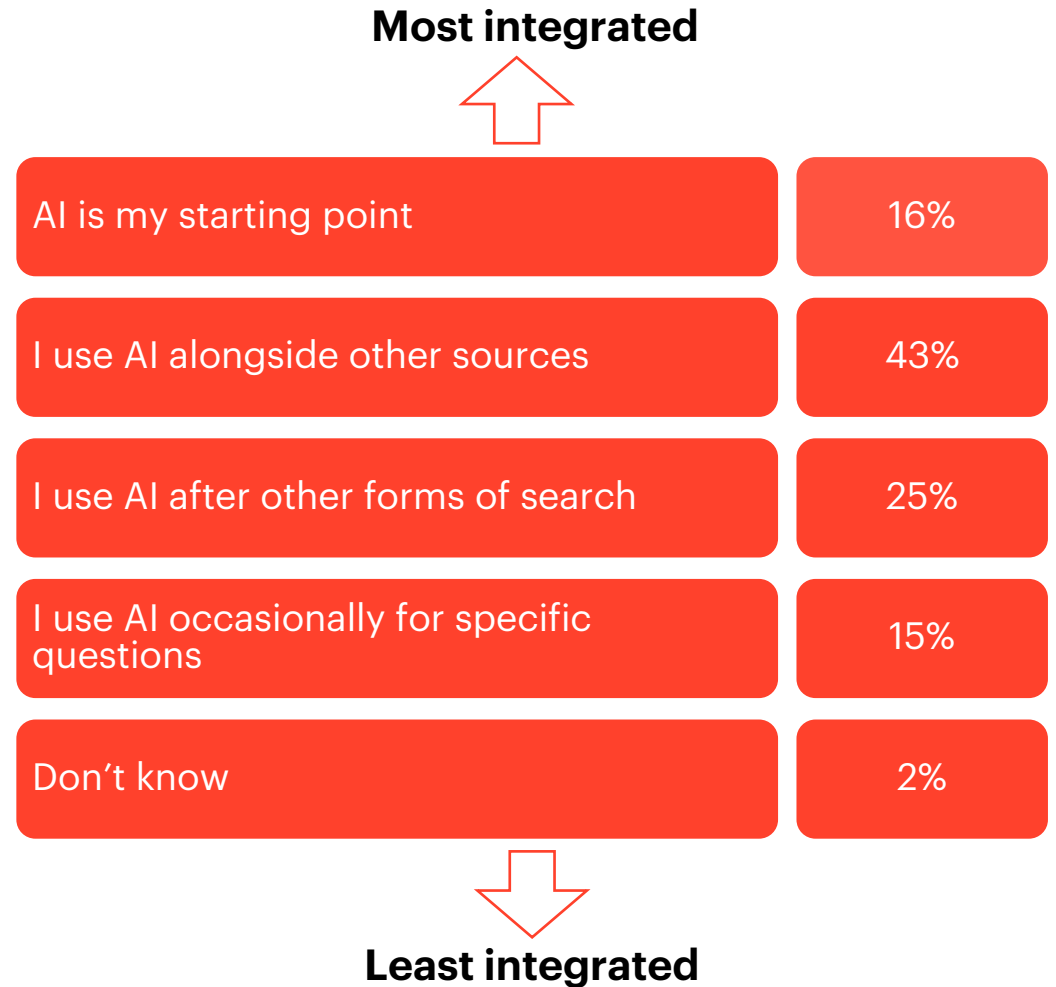
[Explore research solutions](#)

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)



AI chatbots are more often companions than starting points

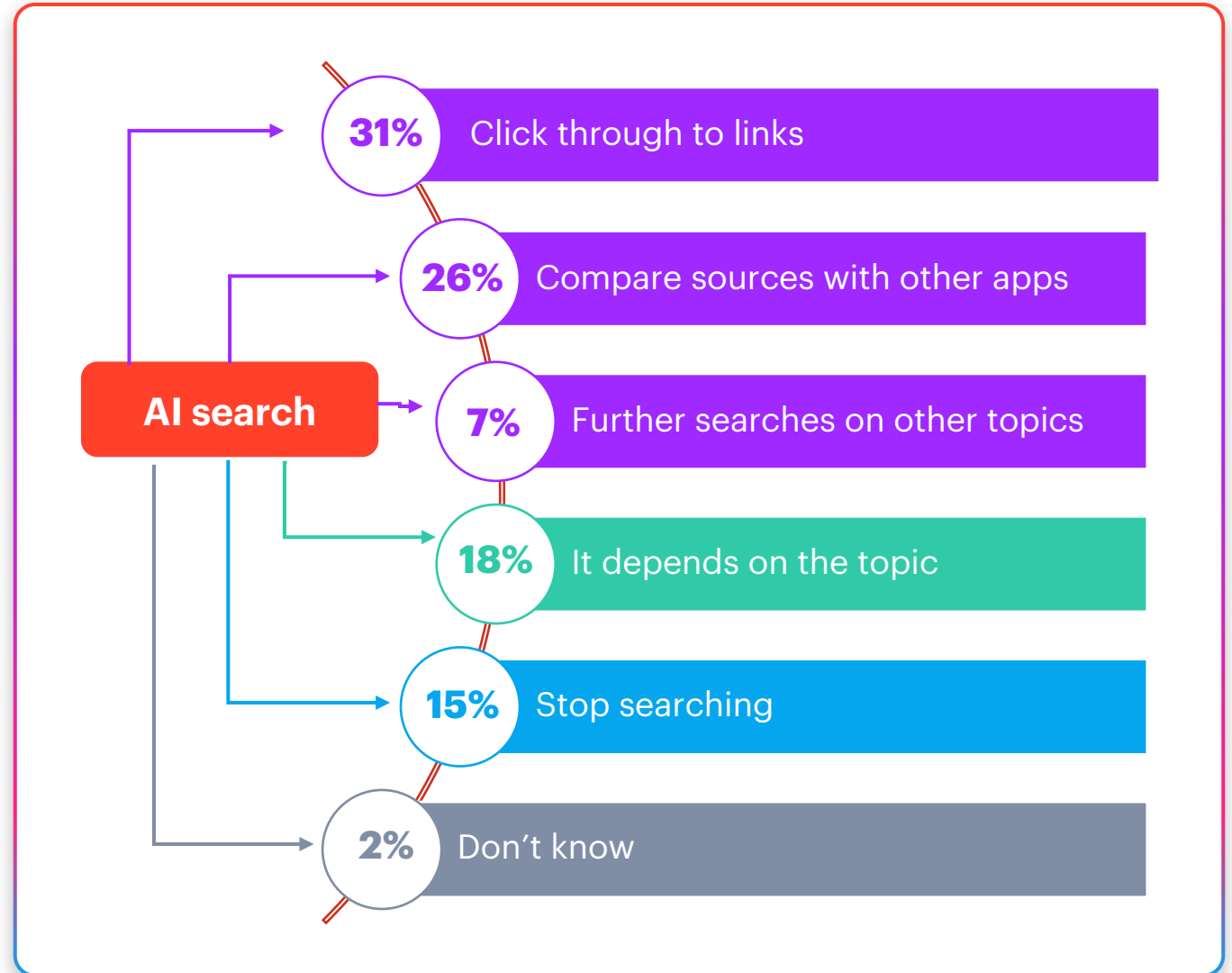
Among AI searchers, relatively few (16%) describe AI as their starting point. Most position AI as part of a broader search journey, used alongside other sources (43%), after other searches (25%) or only for specific questions (15%).



AI answers often lead to verification, not just a finished search

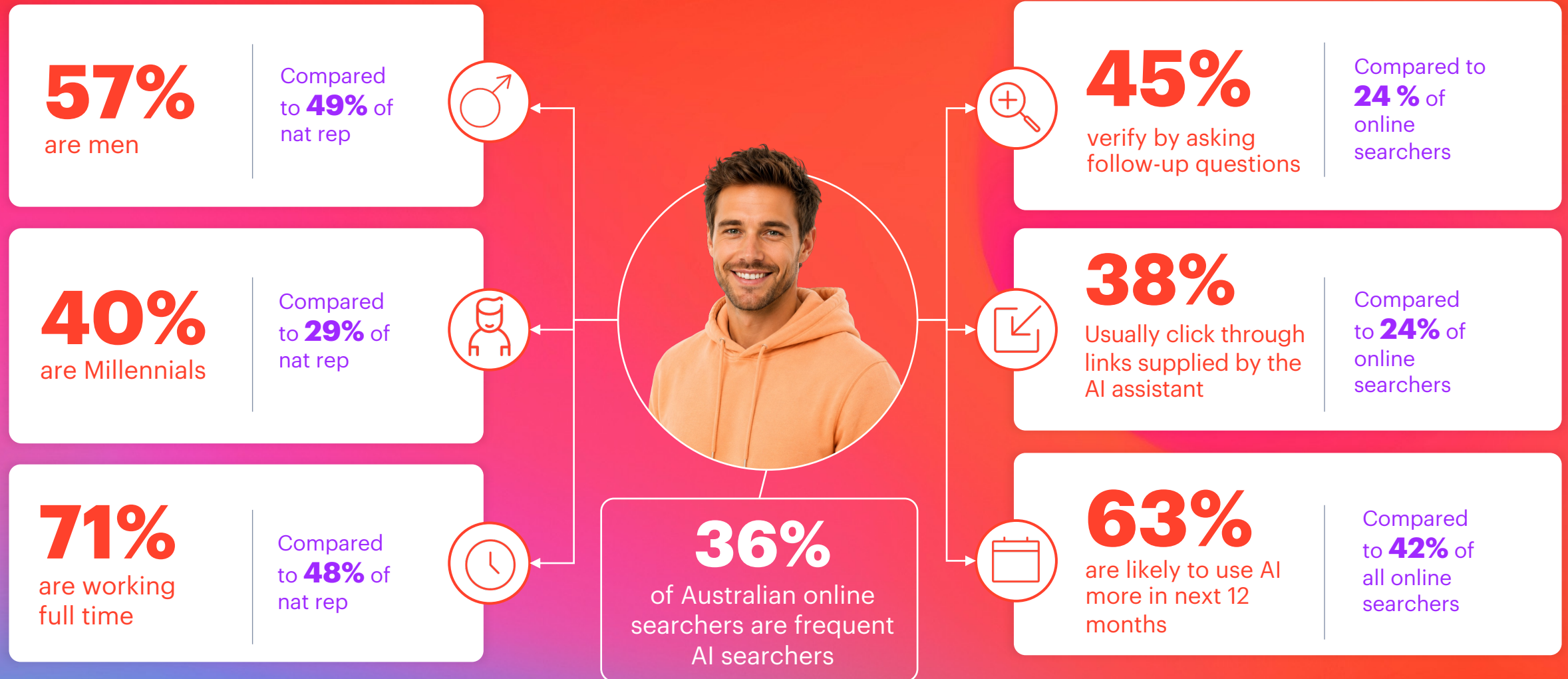
When Australians use AI assistants to find information, the generated answer is not always the end of the journey. Among AI searchers, 31% most often click through to AI-supplied links, 26% compare the answer with other apps or websites and 7% continue searching on other topics.

Fewer (15%) say they most often stop searching after the AI answer.



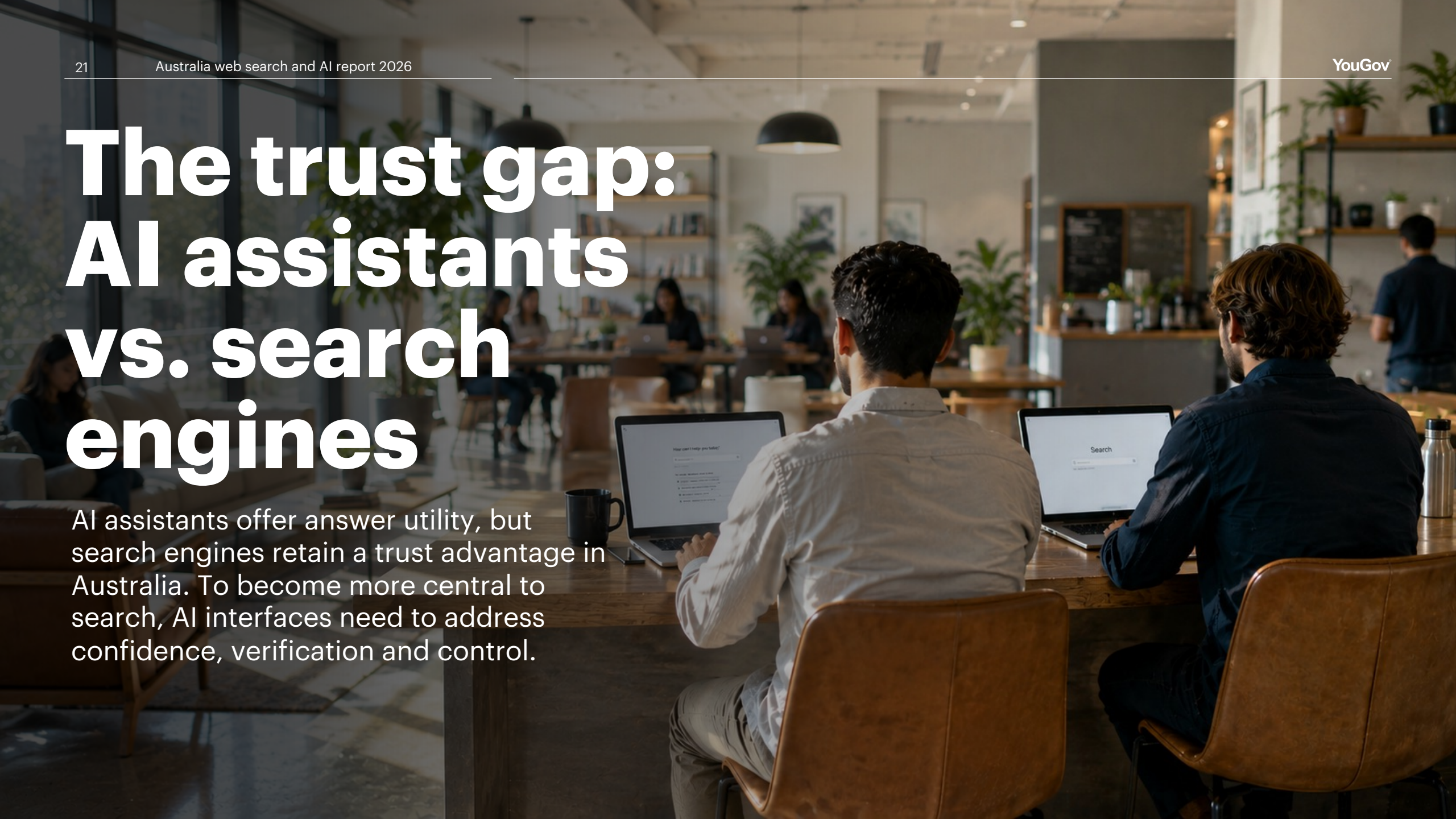
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searcher n> 700. Question: "When you look for information using an AI assistant, which of the following happens most often?" AI searchers are respondents who at least sometimes start queries with AI assistant.

Profile spotlight: Who are Australia's frequent AI searchers?



The trust gap: AI assistants vs. search engines

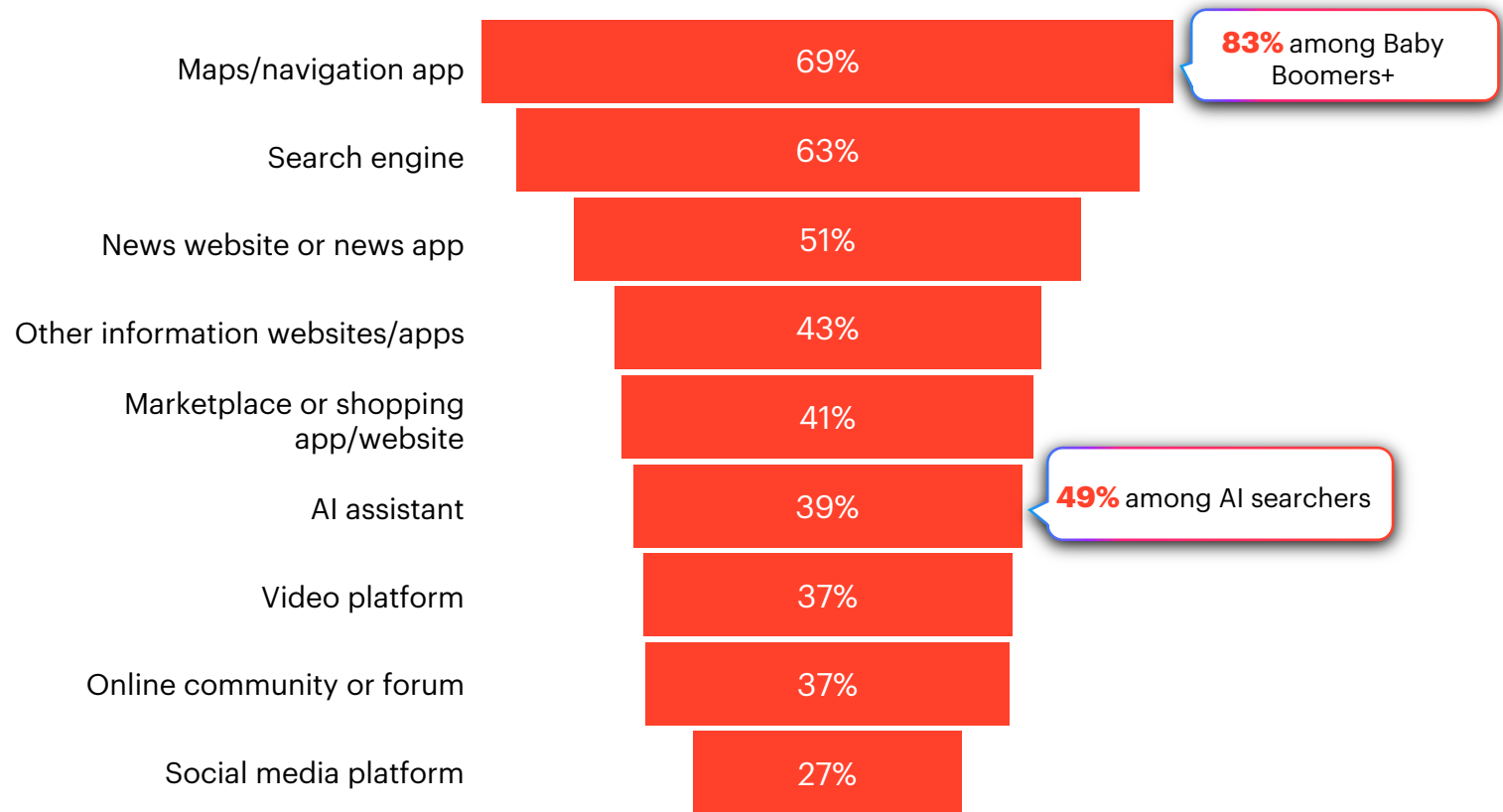
AI assistants offer answer utility, but search engines retain a trust advantage in Australia. To become more central to search, AI interfaces need to address confidence, verification and control.



Map and search engines are the most trusted information source, AI assistants lag

AI assistants are ahead of video and social media platforms. While only 39% of online searchers trust information provided by AI assistants, that rises to 49% among those who use them.

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

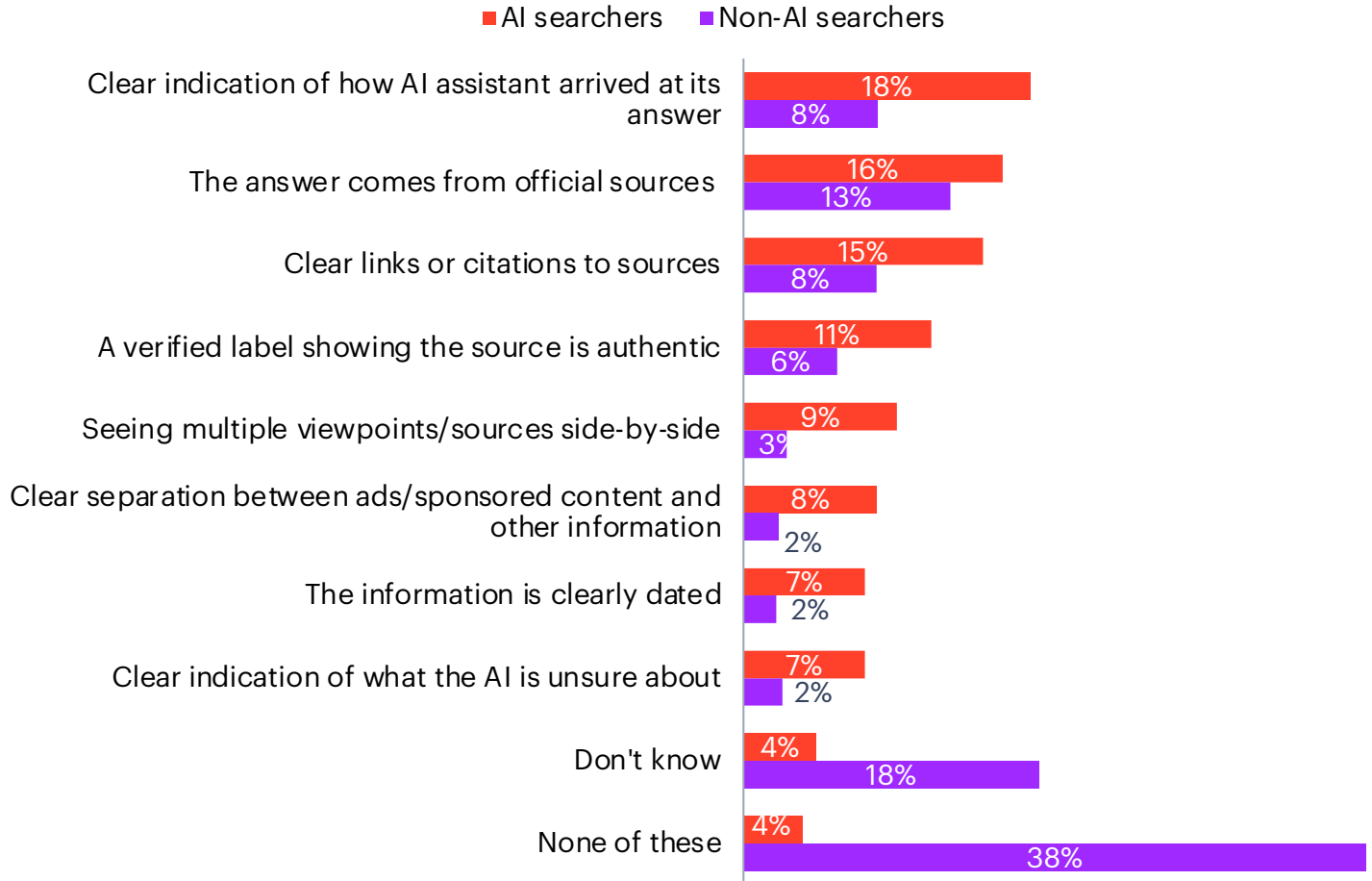


Non-AI searchers are harder to persuade on trust

AI searchers are more likely than non-AI searchers to say transparency features would increase their trust in an AI assistant's answer, including clear explanations of how the answer was produced, official sources and links or citations.

Non-AI searchers are much more likely to say none of the listed features would increase their trust.

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



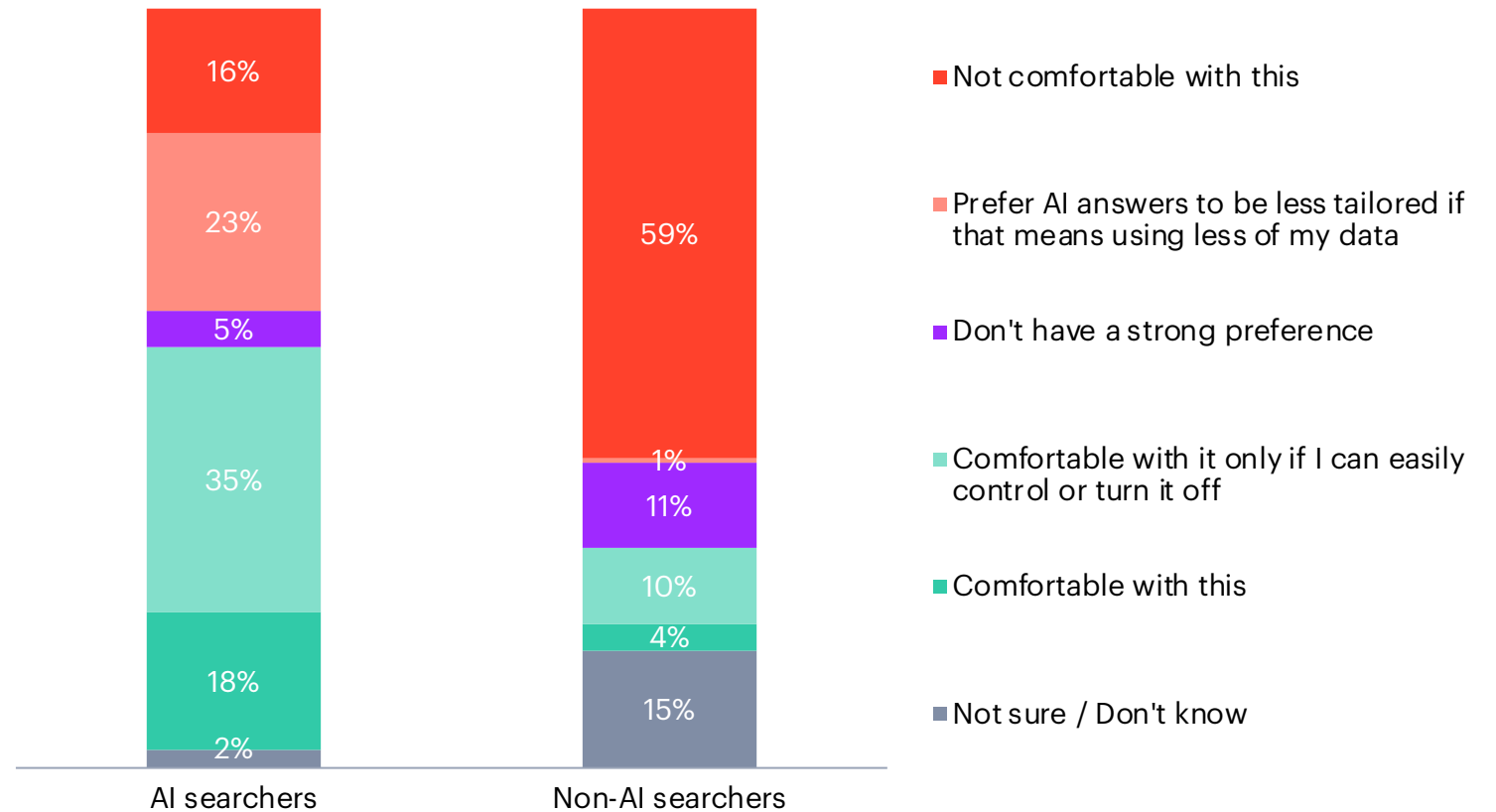
Personalisation faces a privacy ceiling

Personalisation divides AI searchers from non-users. Among Australian AI searchers, 35% say they are comfortable with AI assistants using data such as previous chats, search history or app activity if they can easily control or turn it off.

Among non-AI searchers, 59% say they are not comfortable with this kind of personalisation.

[Get in touch](#)

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)

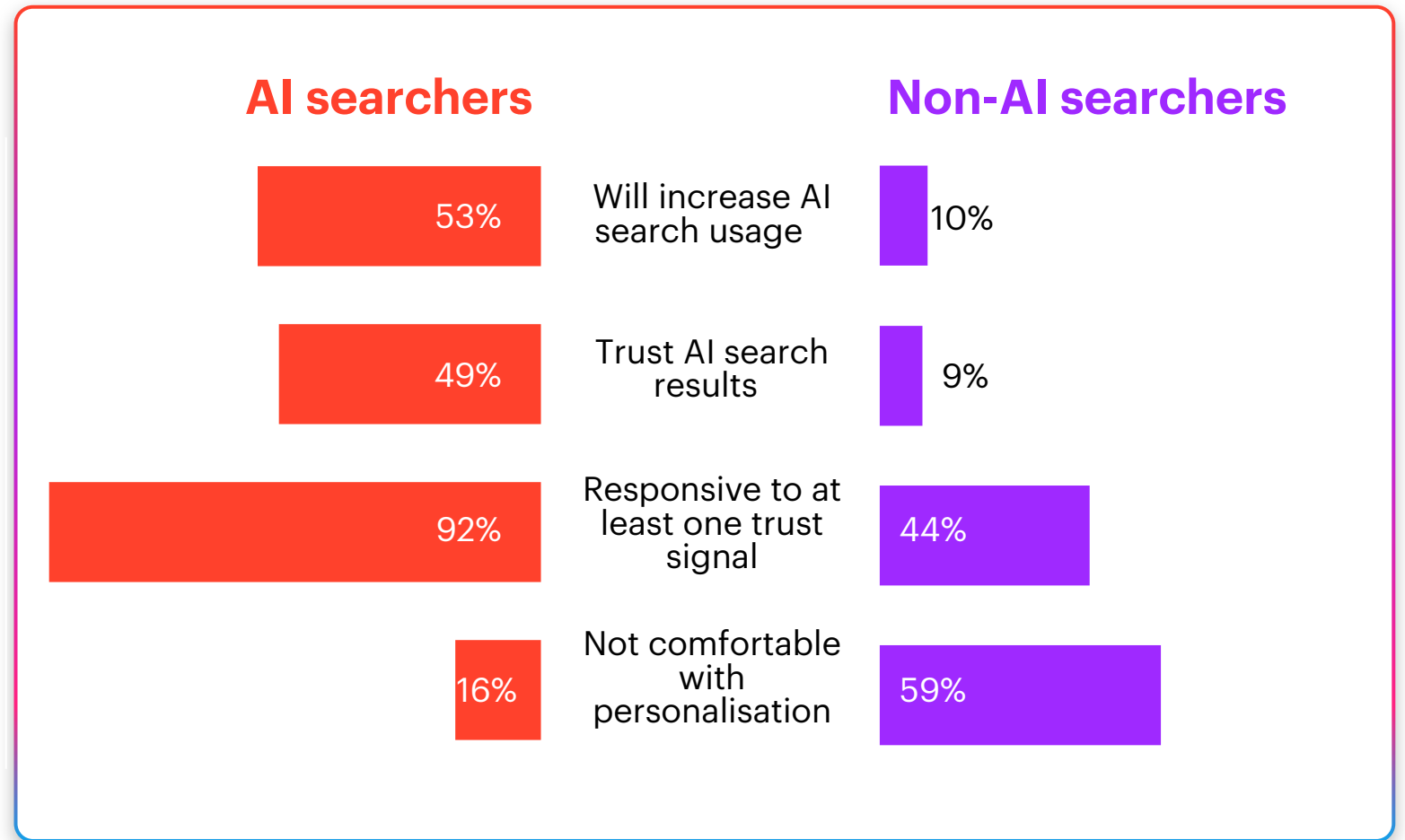


A new digital divide? Current AI users vs. non-users

AI search is gaining momentum among users, but non-users remain cautious

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> 950) 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> 700) are respondents who start new queries with AI assistants, based on the question, "On average, how many new queries do you start with an AI assistant to find information?" Frequent AI searchers (n> 350) start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers (n> 200) start several new queries per week. Occasional AI searchers (n> 150) start 1 or less than 1 new query in a week. Non-AI searchers (n> 200) 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](#)




Create a new survey

Target market
☐  Australia
☒  Other countries

Fast-turnaround surveys in

Hours

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

Thank you

/Research Reality

YouGov, 2026, all rights reserved. All materials contained herein are protected by copyright laws. Any storage, reproduction or distribution of such materials, in whole or in part, in any form without the prior written permission of YouGov is prohibited. This information (including any enclosures and attachments) is propriety and confidential and has been prepared for the exclusive use and benefit of the addressee(s) and solely for the purpose for which it is provided. We make no representations, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that the information is accurate, complete or up to date. We exclude all implied conditions, warranties, representations or other terms that may apply and we will not be liable to you for any loss or damage, whether in contract, tort (including negligence), breach of statutory duty, or otherwise, even if foreseeable, arising under or in connection with GBe of or reliance on the information. We do not exclude or limit in any way our liability to you where it would be unlawful to do so.