



Searching for answers:

How AI is changing online discovery in 2026

/Research Reality



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Foreword



For most of the internet's life, search meant one thing: type a question, get a list of links, figure it out yourself. AI assistants are changing that deal. They want to just answer you.

What we found is that Americans aren't abandoning search engines, but they're increasingly turning to AI when they want a direct answer, a quick summary, or someone to do the comparison shopping for them. The classic ten blue links aren't dead. They're just not always the point of entry anymore. The catch is trust. AI might save you steps, but people still want receipts: source links, official sites, something to verify against.

That's the real insight here. The future of search isn't links vs. answers. It's whoever can deliver fast, useful answers with the evidence attached. 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.

Mark Fantino

Senior Vice President, YouGov America

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Report takeaways

Search engines still dominate the information journey

Traditional search engines remain the default gateway for online information. Nearly nine in 10 Americans who search for info online did it using 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 behavior.

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, synthesis or verification

Leading use cases for AI in search include direct answers, checking or verifying information, summarizing web content, comparing options and troubleshooting.

Trust is the main constraint on AI's role in search

Traditional search engines have a clear trust advantage over AI assistants. Consumers continue to verify information through multiple sources, official websites, source links and contextual checks.

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 behaviors 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 is one of the reasons we're regularly cited as the most accurate online pollster.

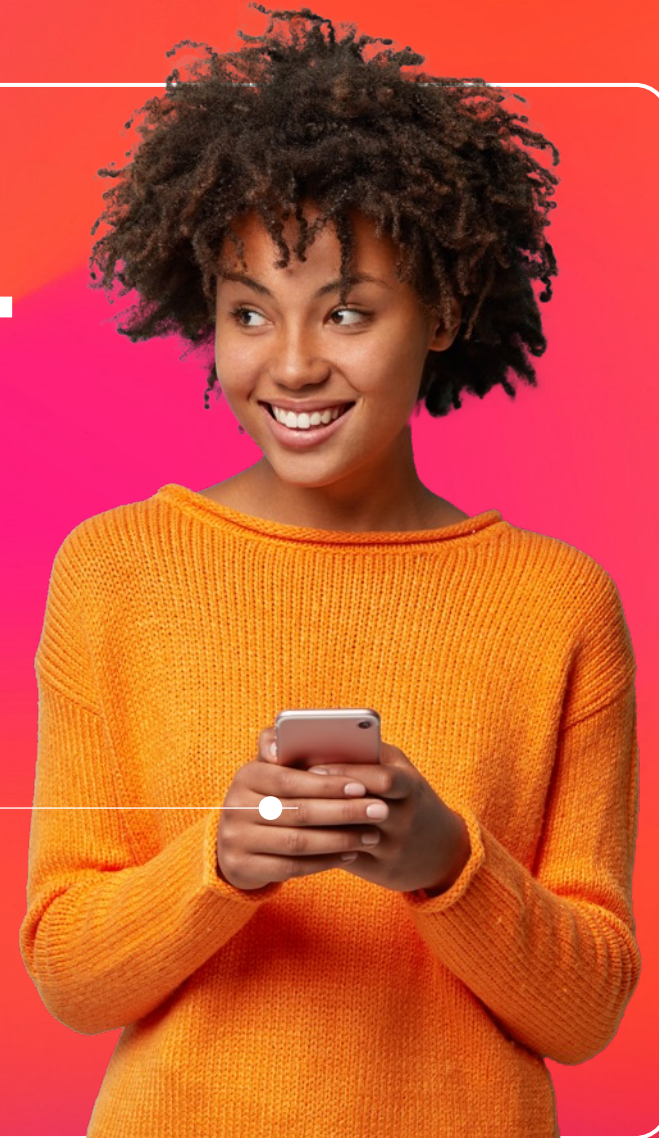
[Run a survey](#)

34m+

registered
panel members

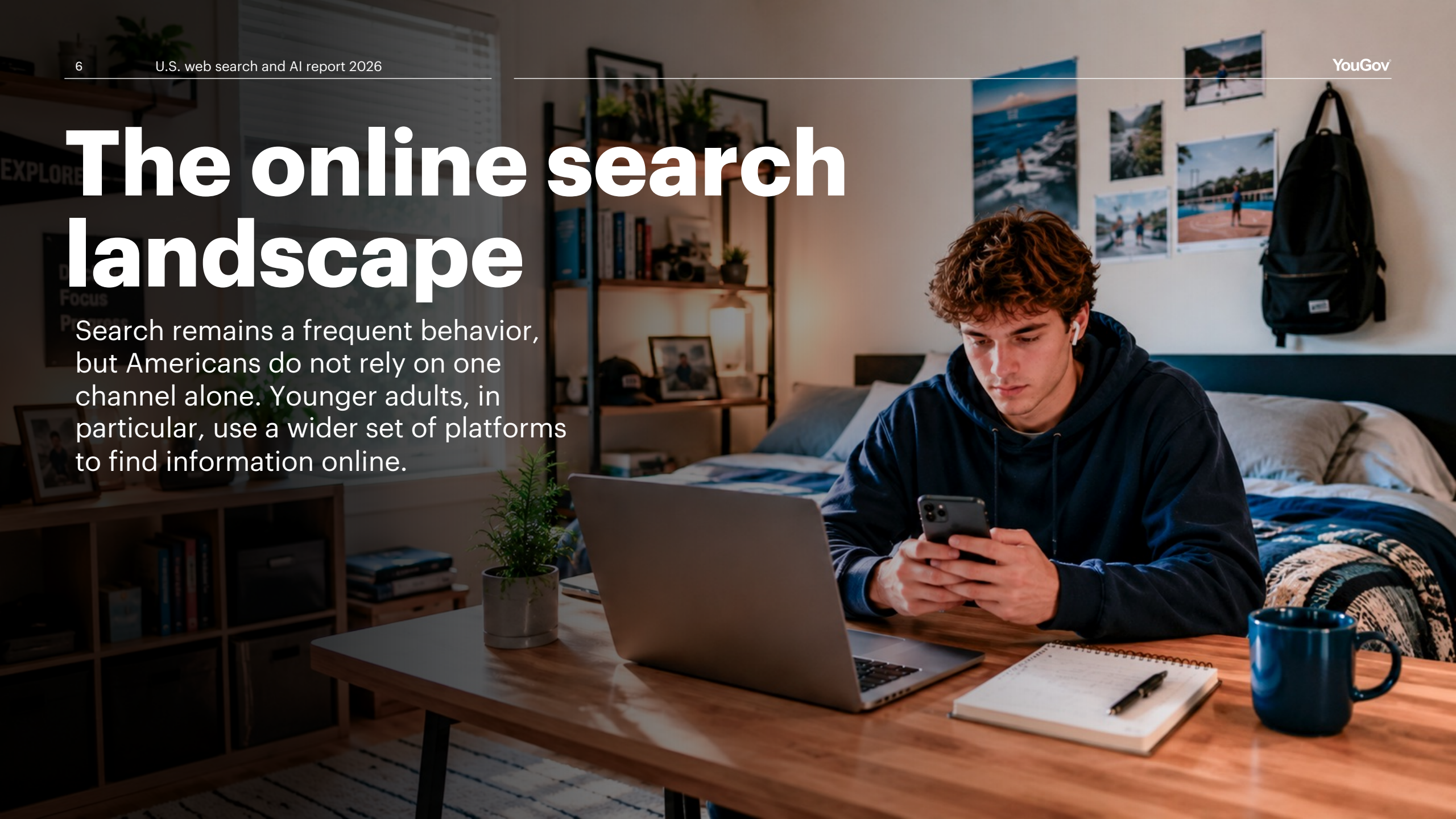
55+

markets



The online search landscape

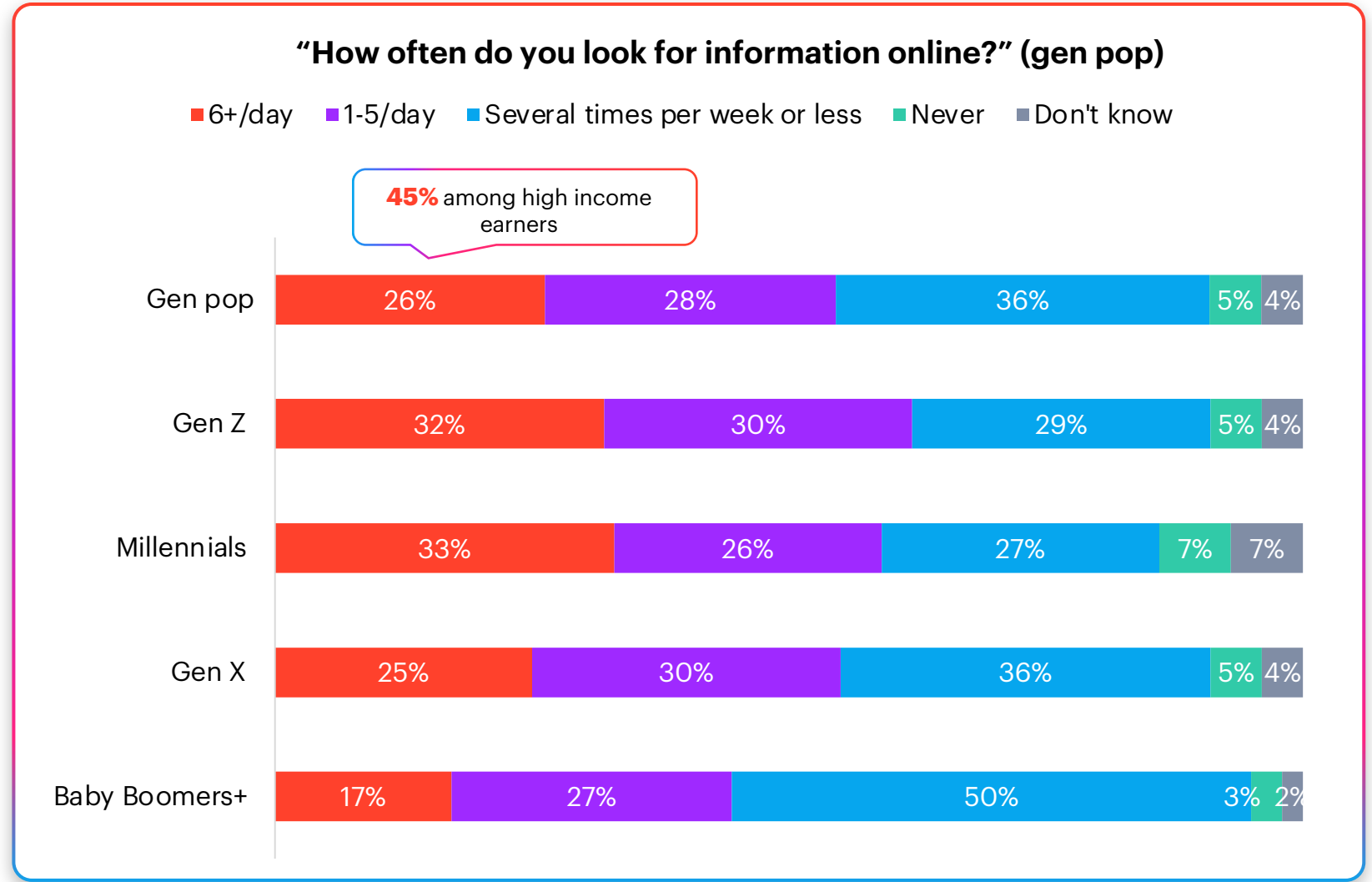
Search remains a frequent behavior, but Americans do not rely on one channel alone. Younger adults, in particular, use a wider set of platforms to find information online.



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

More than half (54%) of Americans look up information online every day. A third of Gen Z (32%) and Millennials (33%) do so six or more times daily. High-frequency searching declines among Gen X (25%) and Baby Boomers+ (17%).

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. U.S. gen pop n> 1,400, Gen Z n> 300, Millennials n> 400, Gen X n> 300, Baby Boomers+ n> 450, high income earners (>200% median) n> 100.

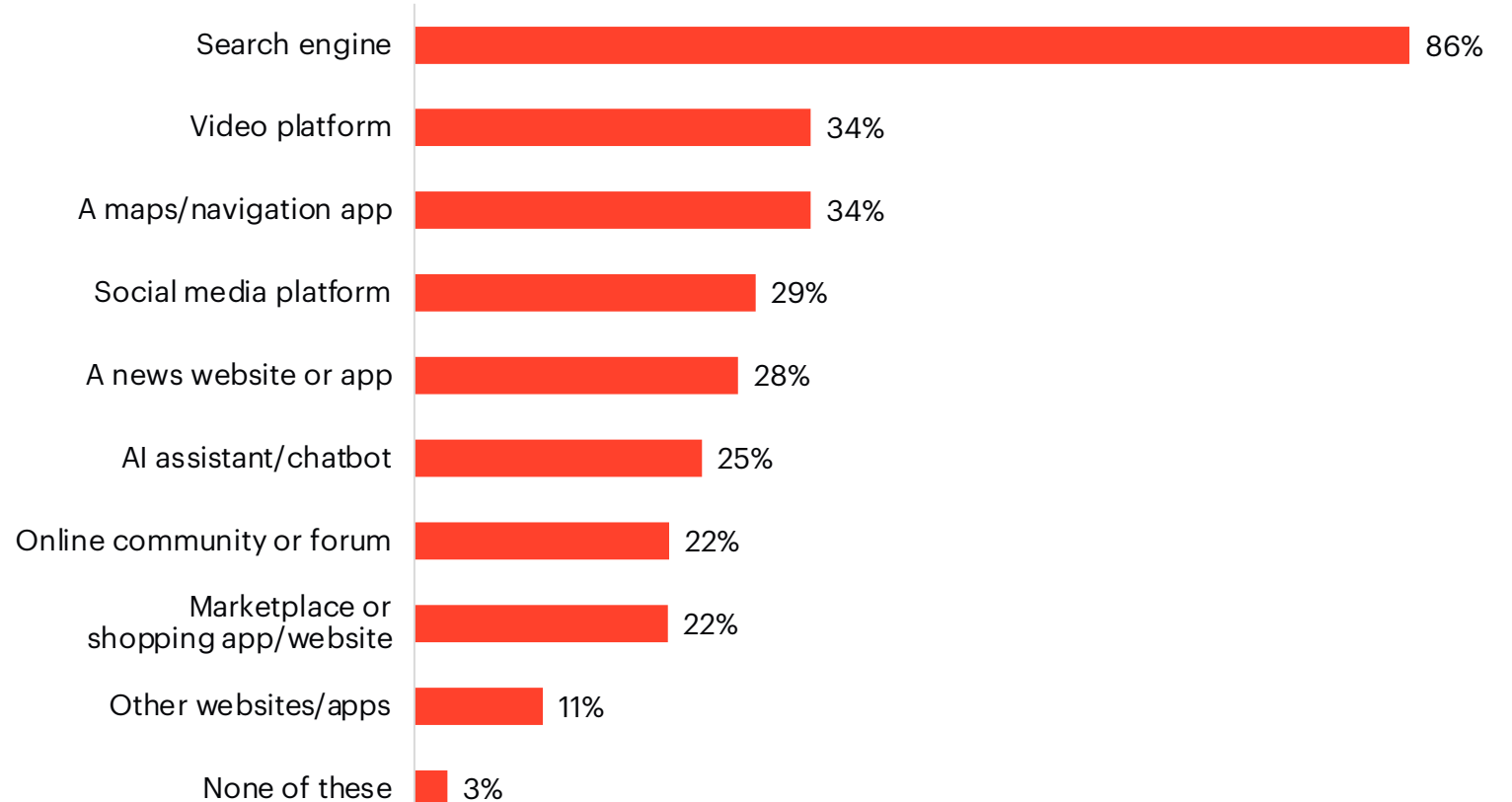
Search engines remain the dominant search channel

Nearly nine in ten online searchers in America (86%) have used a search engine in the past 30 days.

Although search engines are dominant, other channels such as maps (34%), video platforms (34%), social media (29%), and AI assistants (25%) also play a role.

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

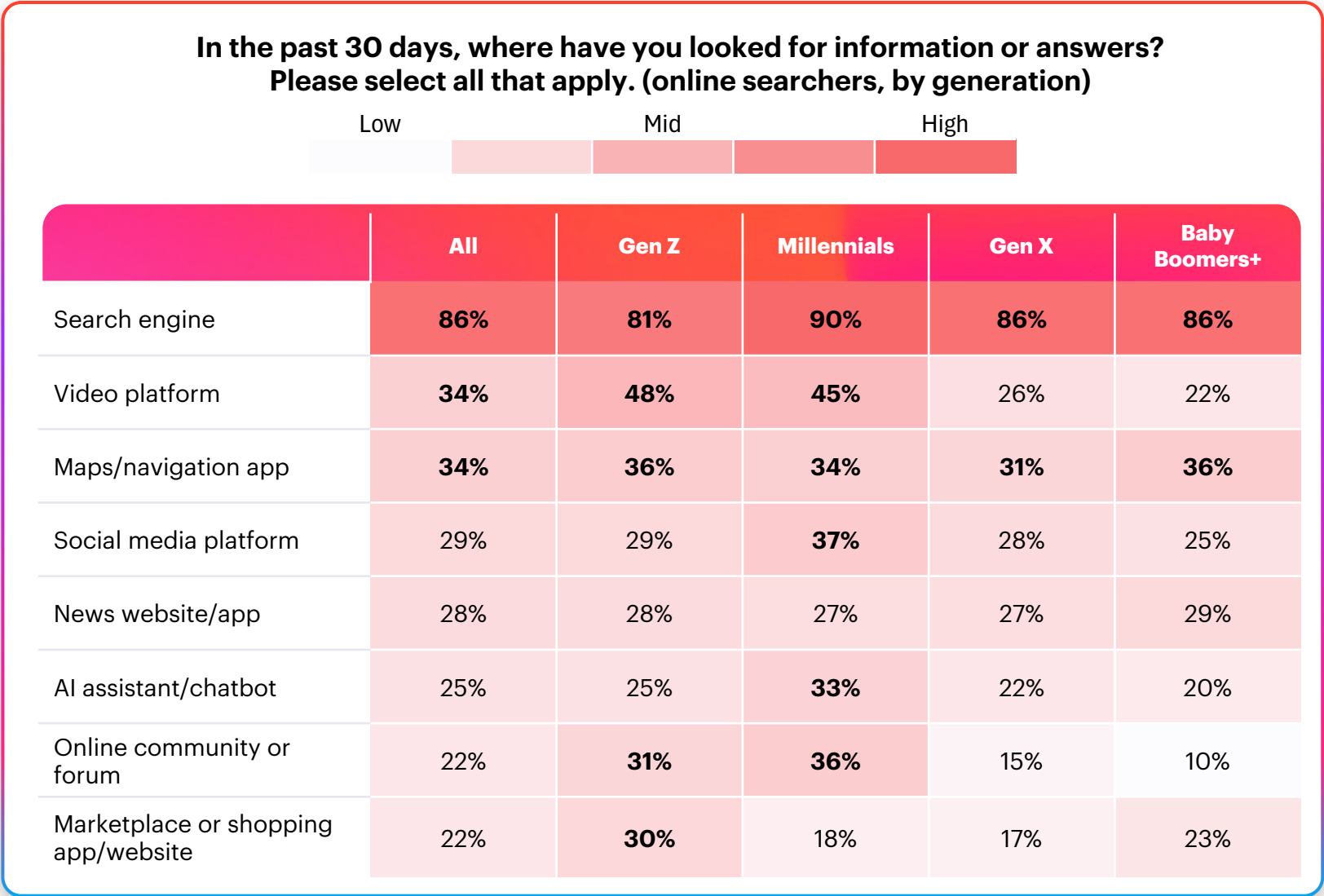


Younger adults treat more platforms as search tools

Search engines lead in every generation, but younger searchers are more likely to use video platforms and online communities.

Millennials use social media (37%) more than Gen X and Baby Boomers+ while Gen Z leads in marketplace use (30%).

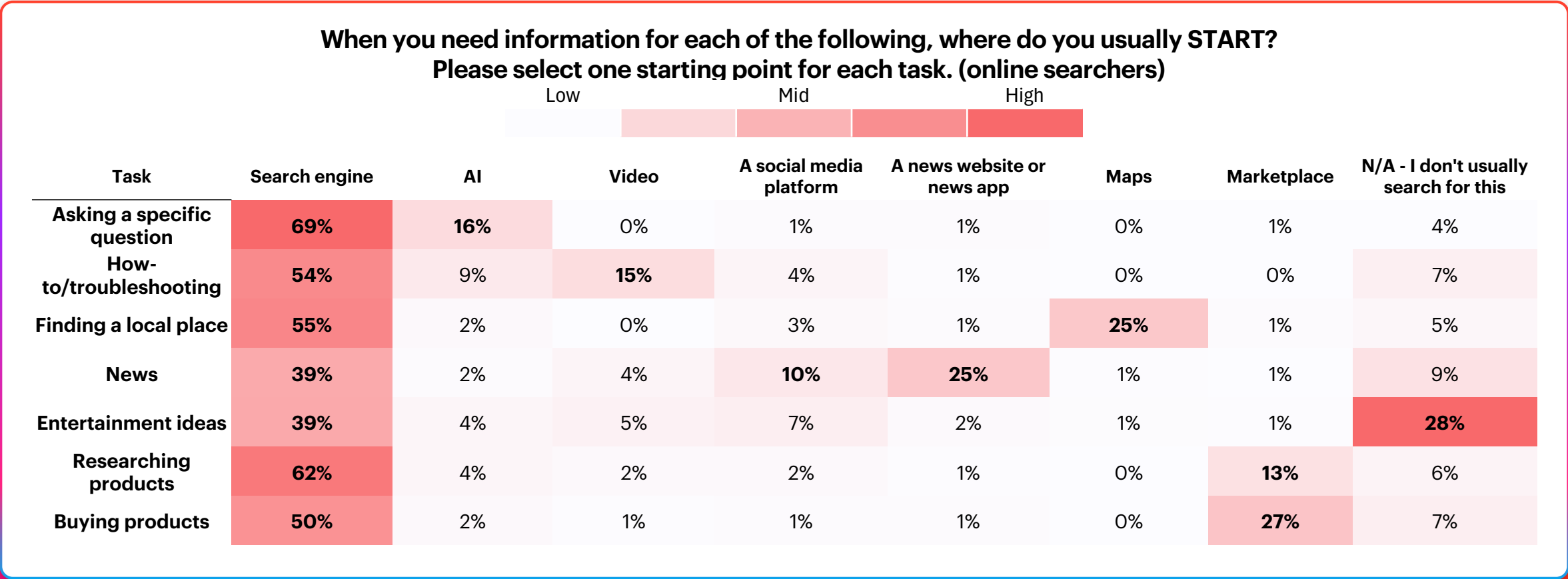
Use of these channels drops sharply in Gen X and Baby Boomer generations.



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. "Other websites/apps" and "None of these" options not shown.
Online searchers: All n> 1,300, Gen Z n> 250, Millennials n> 300, Gen X n> 250, Baby Boomers+ n> 400.

Search engine is the default starting point across information tasks

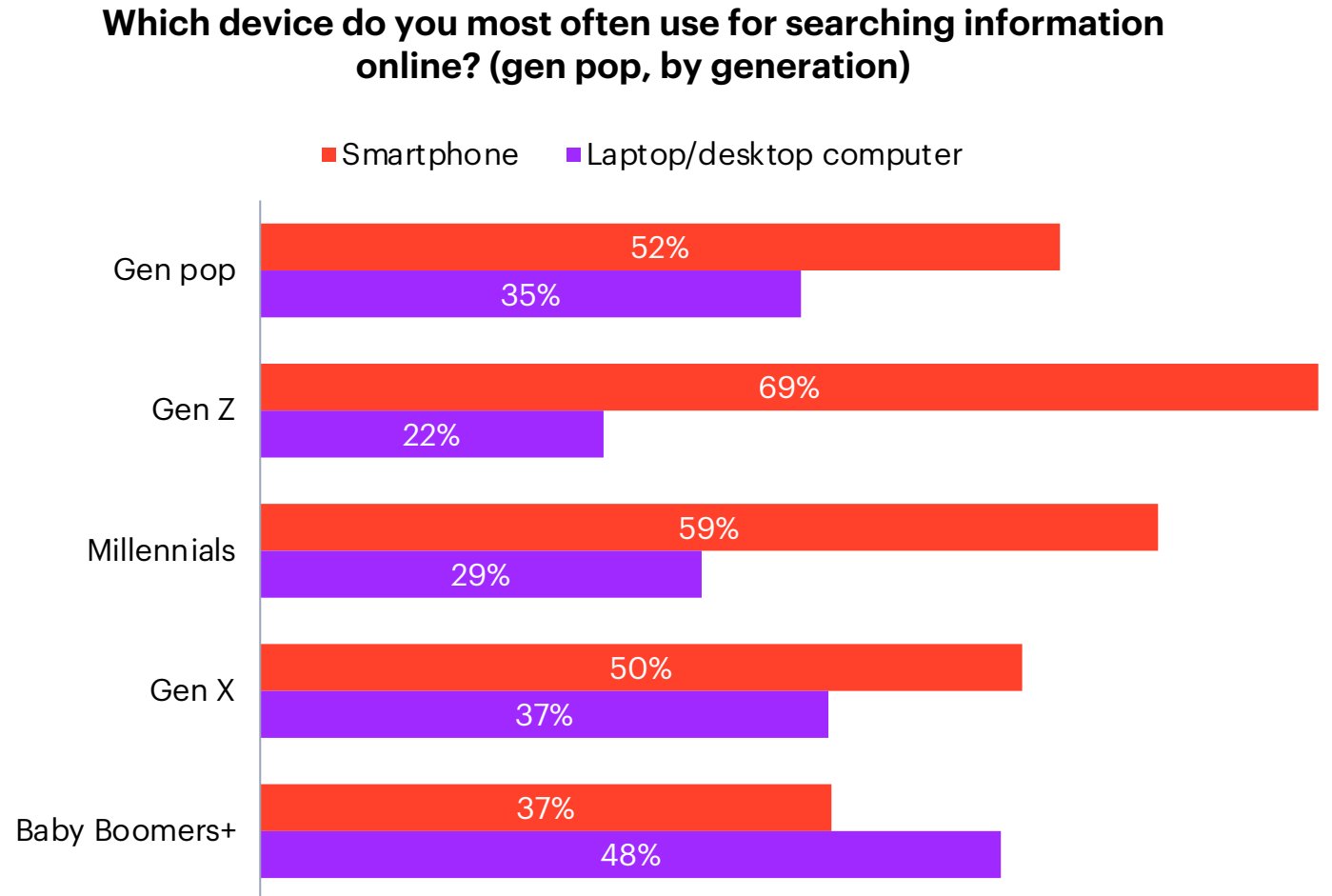
Search engine is the default starting point for every tested task, but each has a significant runner-up. For example, 25% turn to navigation apps for finding locations and 16% start with AI assistants when asking specific questions. A significant proportion of Americans do not usually search for entertainment ideas.



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. “Online community/forum”, “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> 1,300.

Search is mobile-first for **younger adults**, but computers still matter, especially for older users

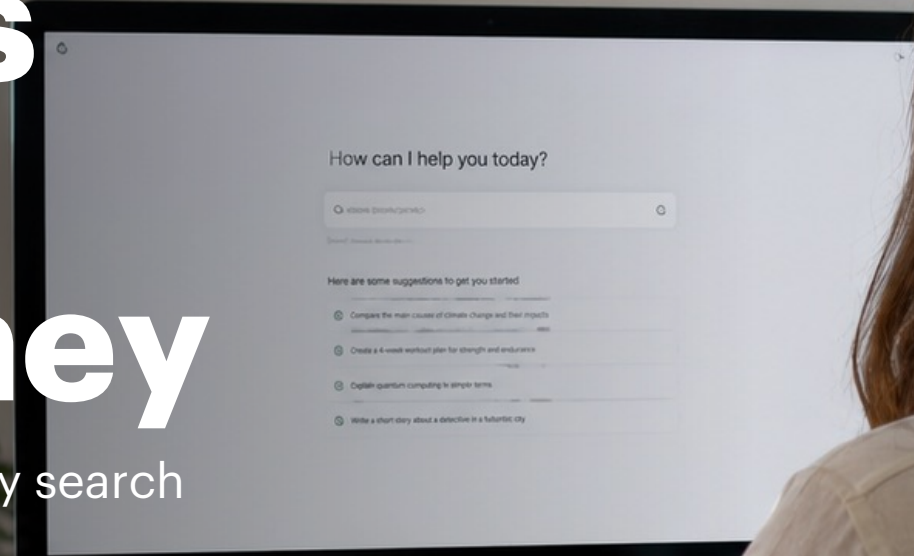
Smartphones are the primary device for online information search among Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X. Baby Boomers+ are the exception: they are more likely to use a laptop or desktop than a smartphone, and 13% report using a tablet.



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. U.S. gen pop n> 1,400, Gen Z n> 300, Millennials n> 400, Gen X n> 300, Baby Boomers+ n> 450. Remaining responses, “tablet,” “smart TV,” “smart speaker,” other and “don’t know” not displayed.

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 Americans.



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

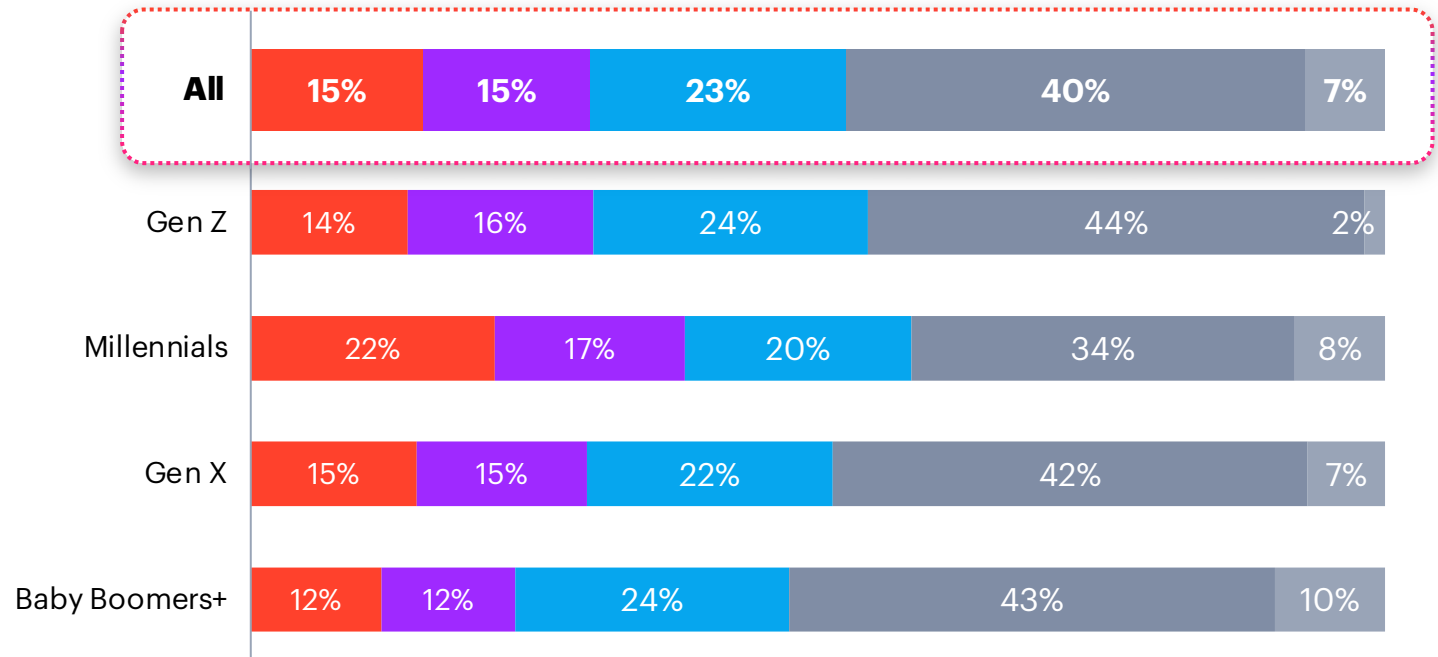
More than half of online searchers sometimes start with an AI assistant. Still, daily use remains limited, and 40% don't ever begin with AI.

Millennials lead adoption with 22% using AI assistants to initiate queries every day.

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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> 1,300, Gen Z n> 250, Millennials n> 300, Gen X n> 250, Baby Boomers+ n> 400.

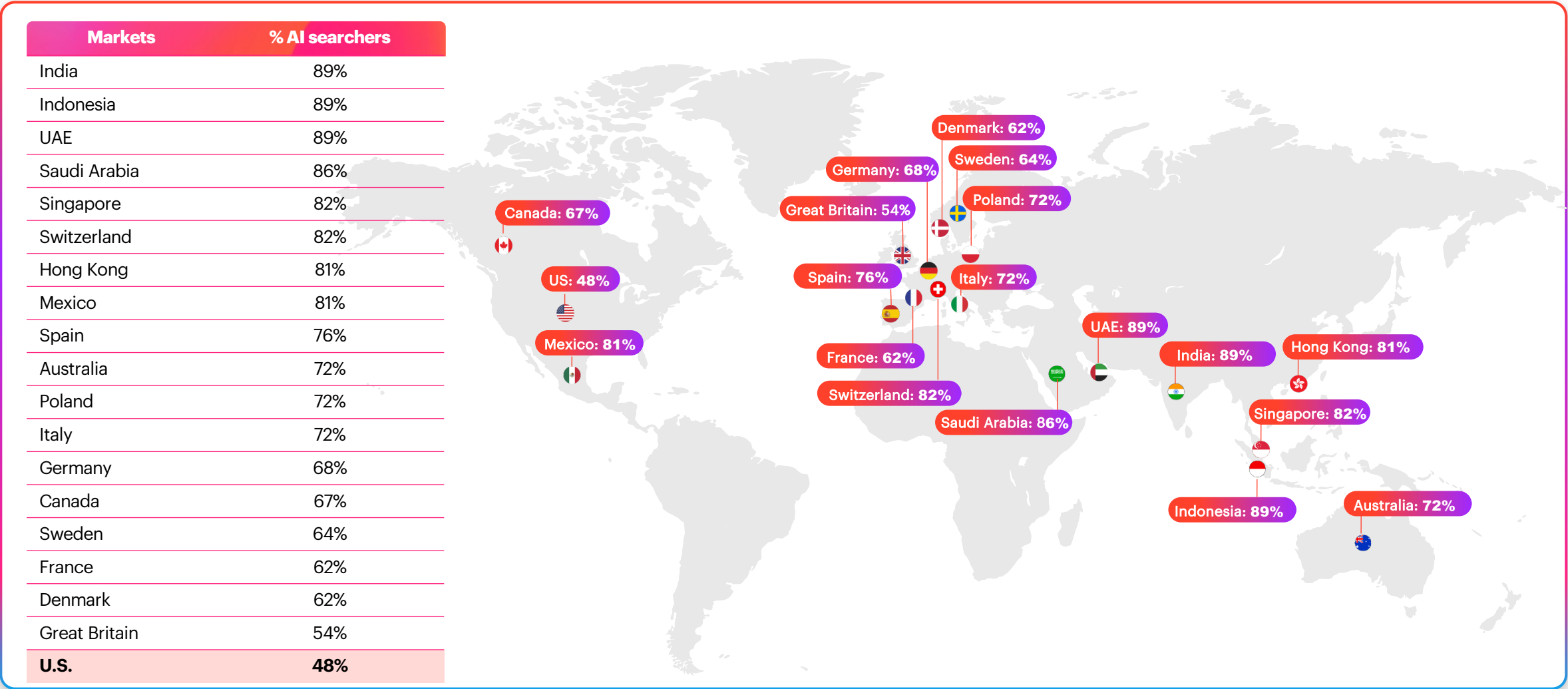
"Frequent" AI searchers answered "1 to 5 a day", "6 to 10 a day", or "more than 10 a day".

"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".

AI use in search is lowest in the U.S. of all markets surveyed



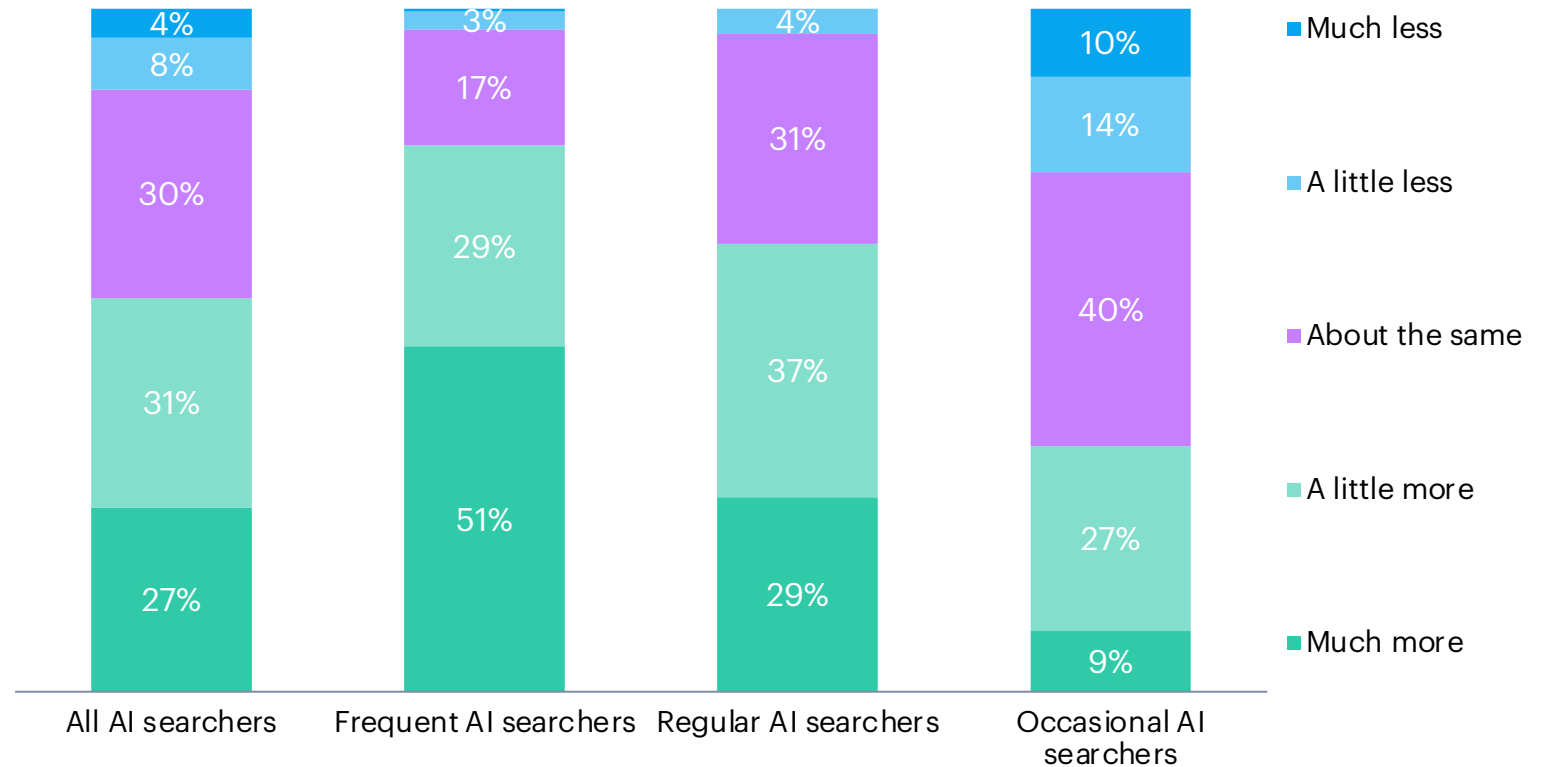
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. U.S. n> 1,400, Hong Kong n> 500, Great Britain n> 2,000, rest of the markets n> 500 each.
Question: On average, how many new queries do you start with an AI assistant to find information?
AI searchers are respondents who start queries with AI assistant (did not select “Don’t know” or “None”).

Current AI searchers are using the technology more than last year

Among AI searchers, more than half (58%) have increased their usage since a year ago, including 27% who use it “much more.” Only one in eight (12%) have reduced their usage.

Among frequent users, half (51%) use AI in search “much more” than a year ago, with another 29% using it “a little more.”

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



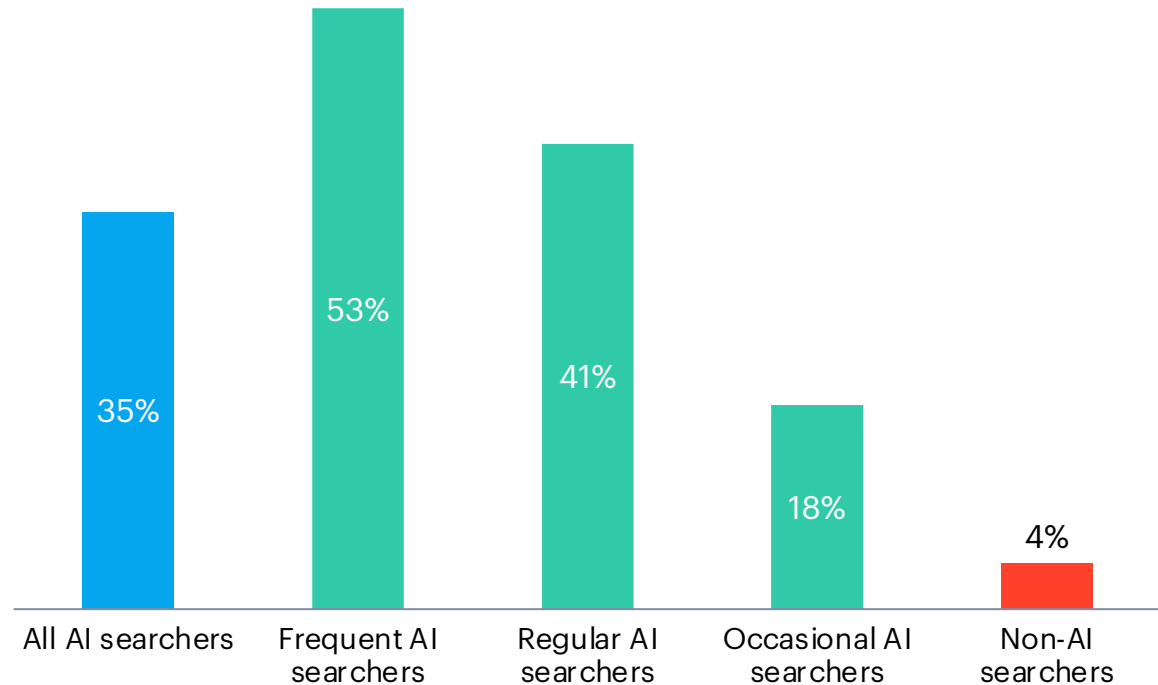
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n>650, frequent AI searchers n> 200, regular AI searchers n> 150, occasional AI searchers n> 250. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with an AI assistant. Frequent searchers start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers 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 third (35%) of AI searchers will use these tools more in the coming year. This rises to 53% among frequent AI searchers.

Among those who don't use AI, only 4% say they'll use it more, and nearly three quarters (72%) 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 + little more)

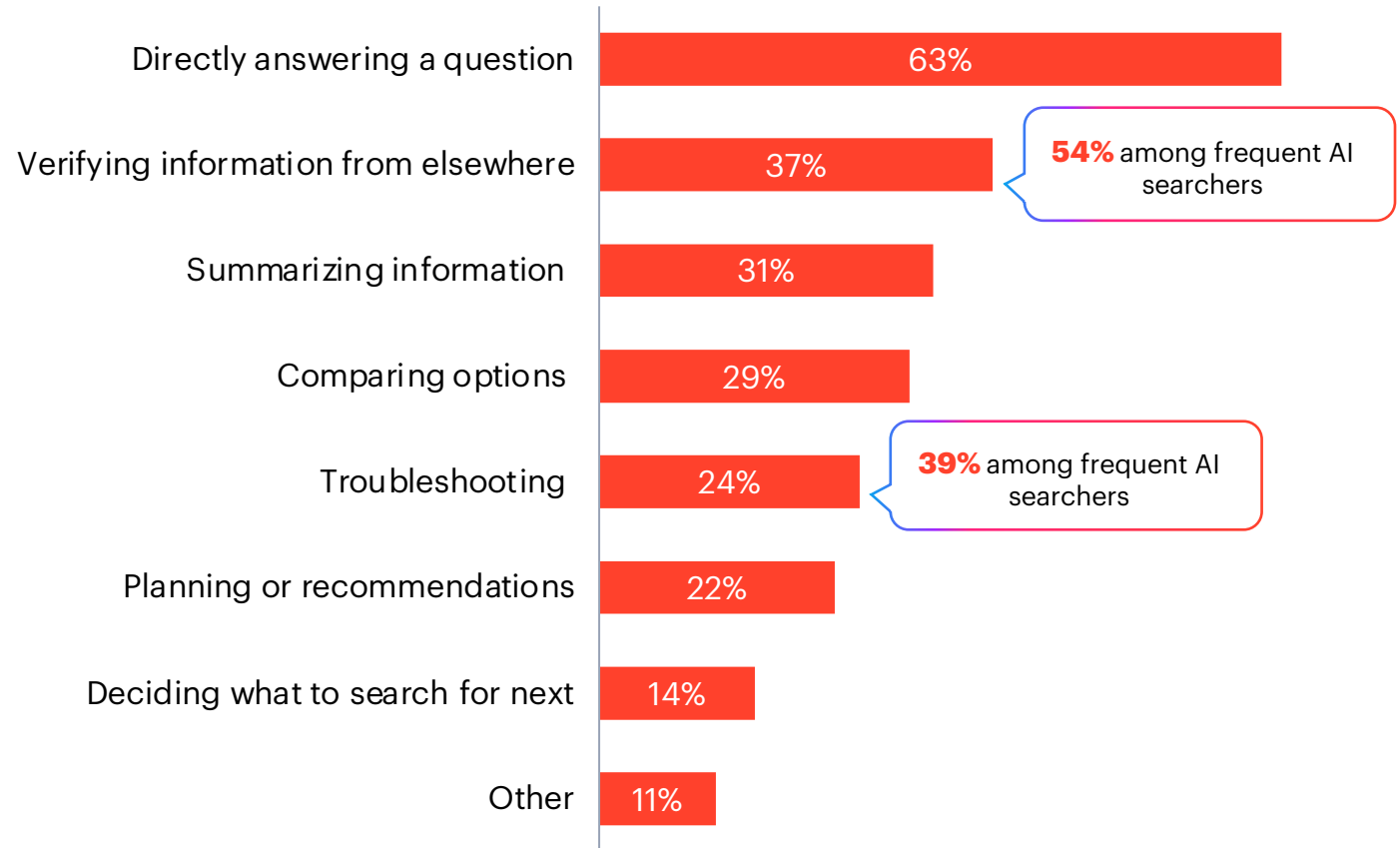


AI assistants are strongest when searchers want answers, summaries or verification

Among AI searchers, the leading use case is getting a direct answer (63%). But AI assistants are also used to check information (37%), summarize web content (31%), compare options (29%) and troubleshoot problems (24%), all tasks where users want help resolving information, not just finding links.

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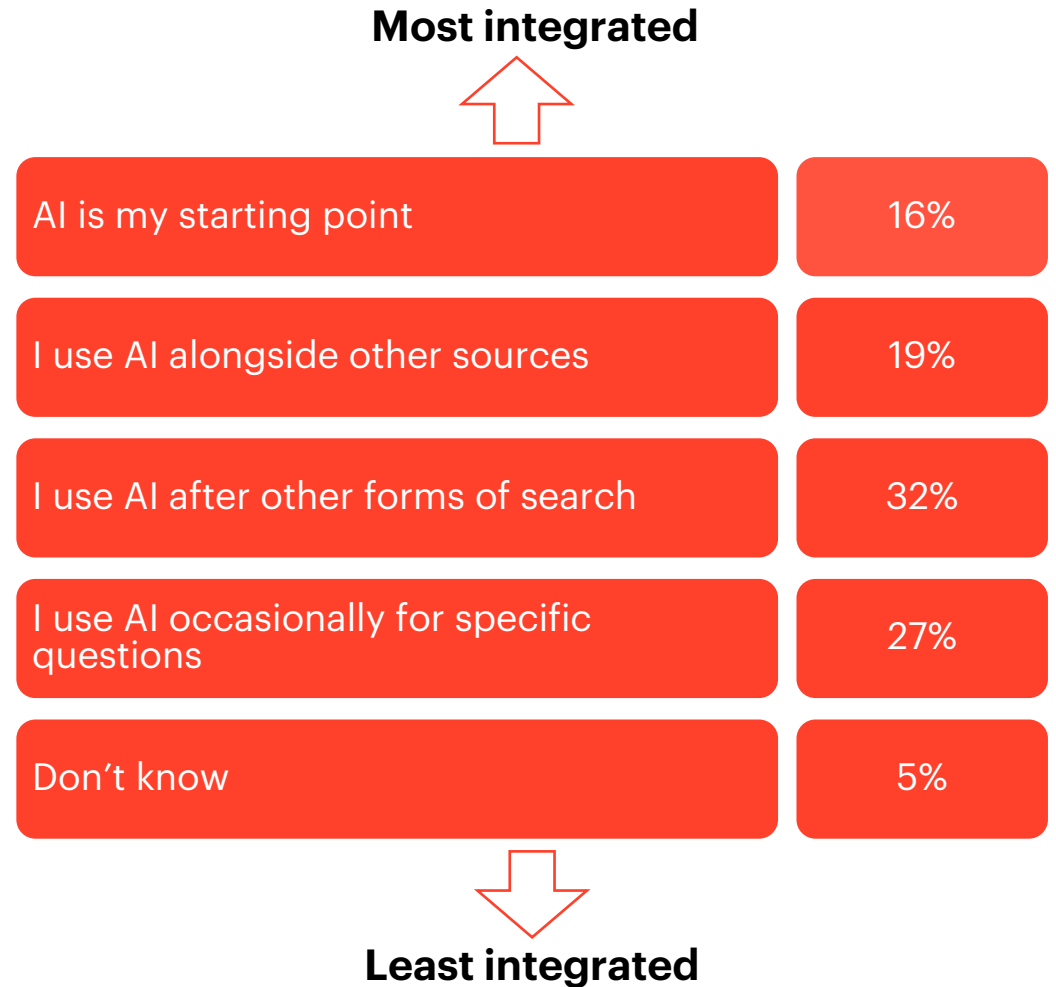
When you use an AI assistant to find information or answers, what do you typically use it for? Please select all that apply. (AI searchers)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n> 700, frequent AI searchers n> 200. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with an AI assistant.

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

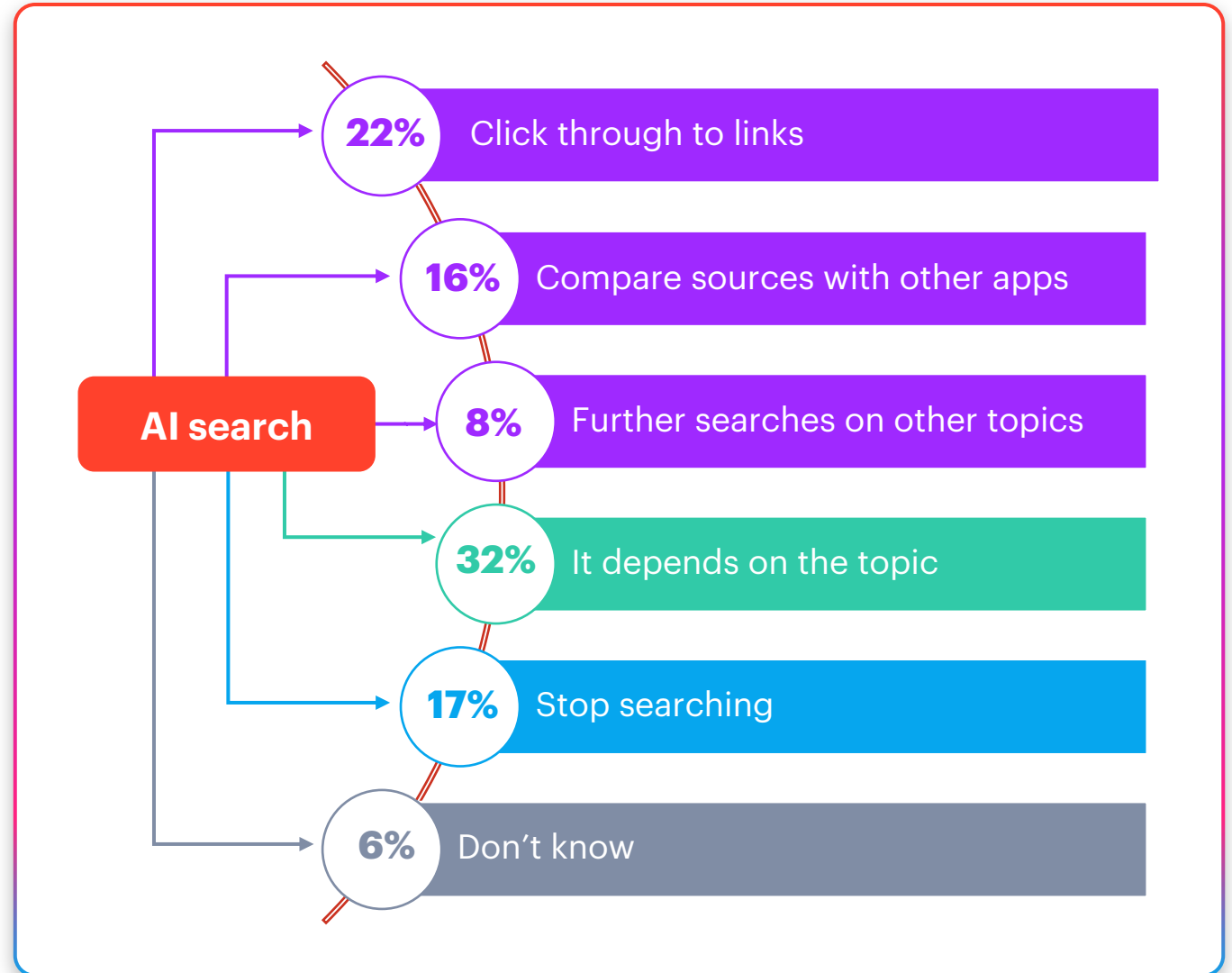
Among AI searchers, relatively few (16%) describe AI as their starting point. Most position AI as part of a broader search journey, used alongside other sources (19%), after other searches (32%) or only for specific questions (27%).



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

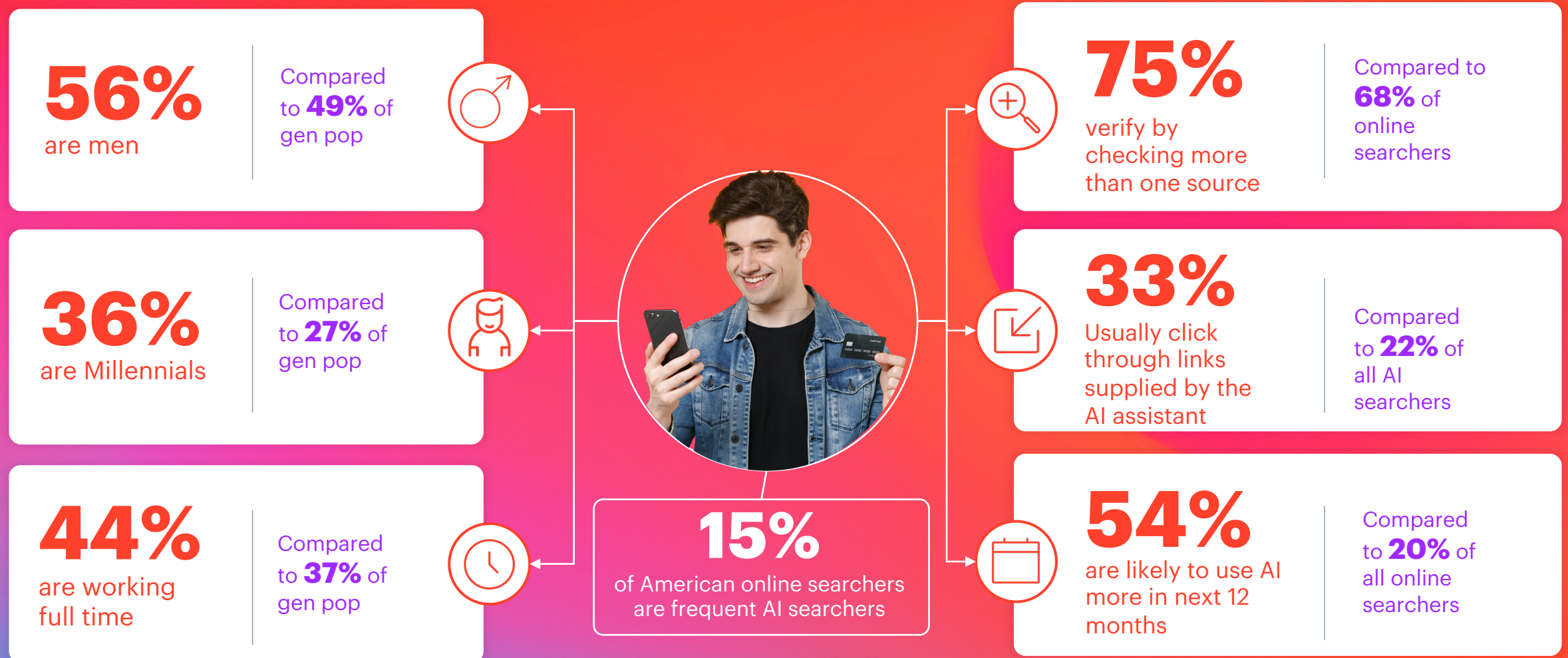
When people use AI assistants to find information, the generated answer is not always the end of the journey. Among AI searchers, 22% most often click AI-supplied links, 16% compare the answer with other apps, and 8% continue searching.

Among frequent AI searchers, clicking AI-supplied links (33%) is more common than stopping at the answer (17%).



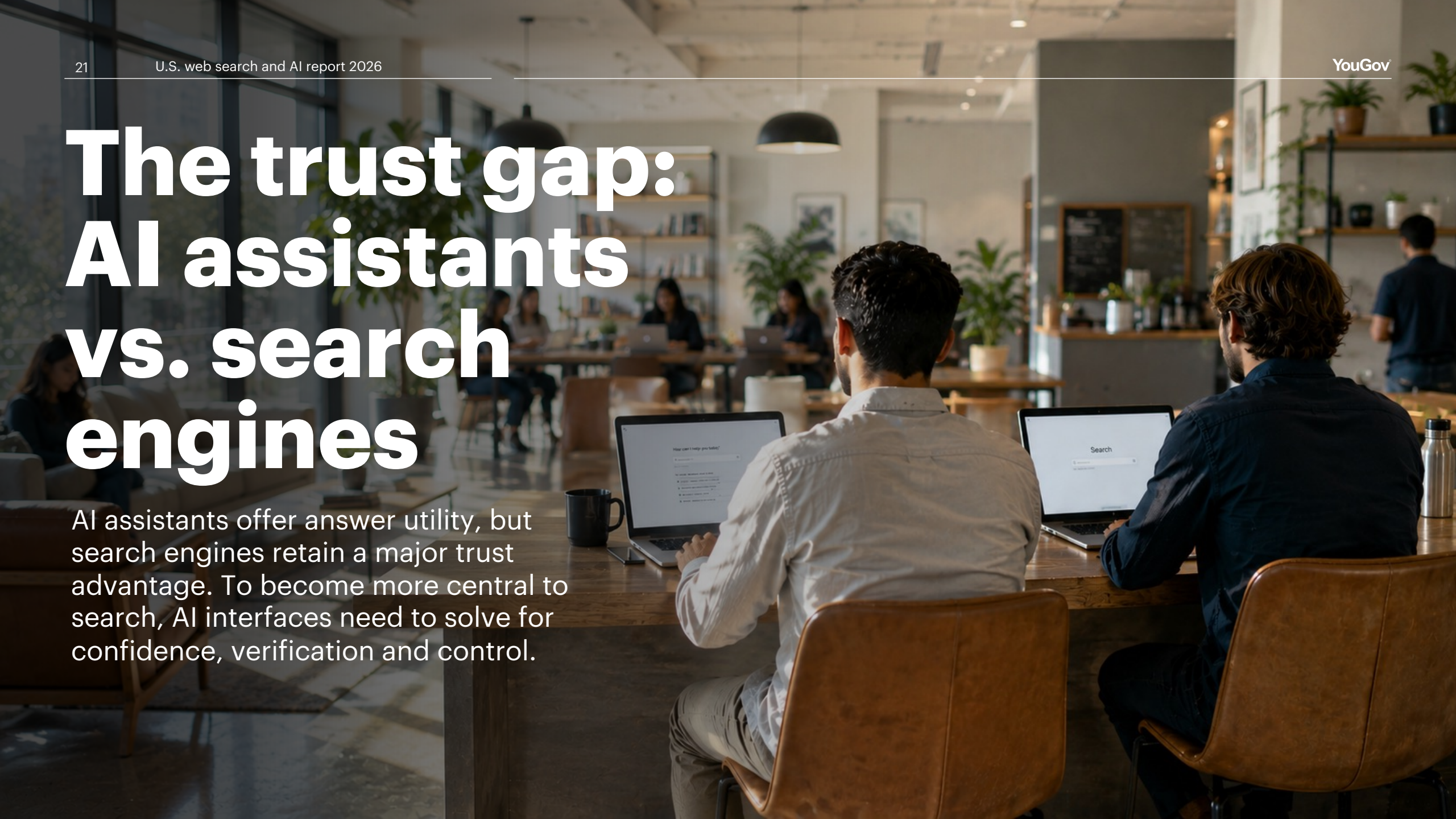
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n> 700, frequent (daily) AI searchers n> 200. Question: "When you look for information using an AI assistant, which of the following happens most often?" AI searchers are respondents who at least sometimes start queries with an AI assistant.

Profile spotlight: Who are America'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 solve for confidence, verification and control.



The U.S. is a **more skeptical** AI-search market

Among the markets surveyed, the U.S. stands out as one of the most cautious environments for AI-assisted search. Compared to all other markets surveyed, U.S. online searchers are least likely to use AI for search, and Americans also show weaker confidence across trust, personalization and persuasion measures.

Adoption

48% of U.S. online searchers use AI-search vs. **72%** of Australia online searchers (Median market).

Trust

28% of U.S. online searchers trust AI-search vs. **42%** of Denmark online searchers (Median market).

Reluctance

28% of U.S. online searchers say no listed trust signal would increase trust vs. **9%** of Spain online searchers (Median market).

Comfort

47% of U.S. online searchers are not comfortable with data use for personalization vs. **18%** of Switzerland online searchers (Median market).

U.S. is a skeptical AI-search market

Among the markets surveyed, the U.S. stands out as one of the most cautious environments for AI-assisted search. Compared to all other markets surveyed, U.S. online searchers are least likely to use AI for search, and Americans also show weaker confidence across trust, personalization and persuasion measures.

Lowest AI-search adoption *

U.S.: 48%

Median market
(Australia): 72%

Lowest trust in AI search

U.S.: 28%

Median market
(Denmark): 42%

Hardest to persuade (say no listed trust signal would increase trust)

U.S.: 28%

Median market
(Spain): 9%

Least comfortable with personalization (say I'm not comfortable with using their data for tailored answers)

U.S.: 47%

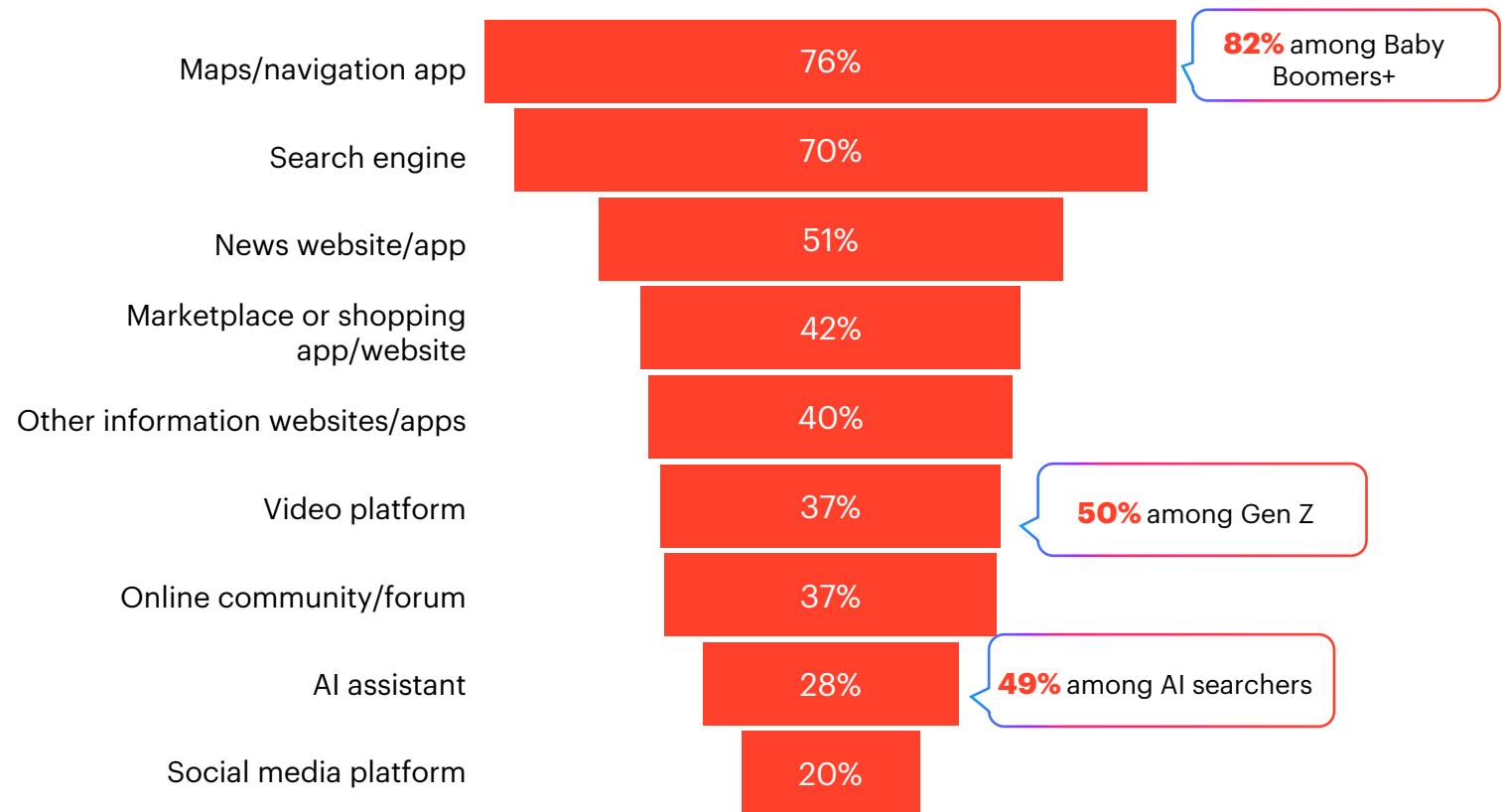
Median market
(Switzerland): 18%

YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. * Based on gen pop: U.S. n> 1,400, Australia n> 1,000
Online searchers in: U.S. n> 1,300, Denmark n> 900, Spain n> 950, Switzerland n> 950.
Market median gives each surveyed market equal weight and is not population-weighted.

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

AI assistants are just ahead of social media platforms. While only 28% of online searchers trust information provided by AI assistants, that rises to 49% among those who actually 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)



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Online searchers: All n> 1,300, Gen Z n> 250, Baby Boomers+ n> 400, AI searchers n> 700.
'Trust = Trust a lot + Trust somewhat'.

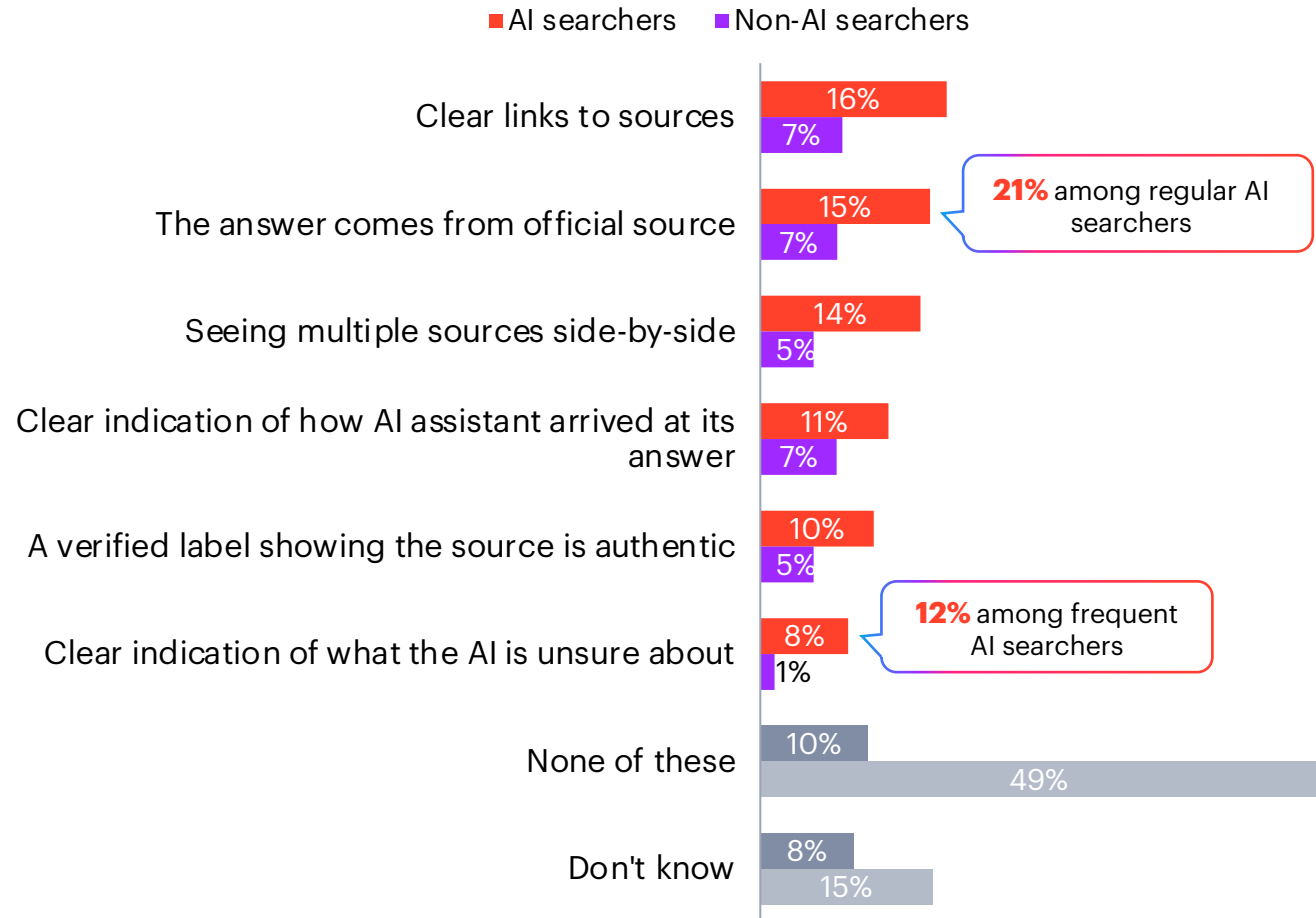
No single trust signal is likely to convert non-AI searchers

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 be better at deepening trust among existing users than converting skeptics.

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



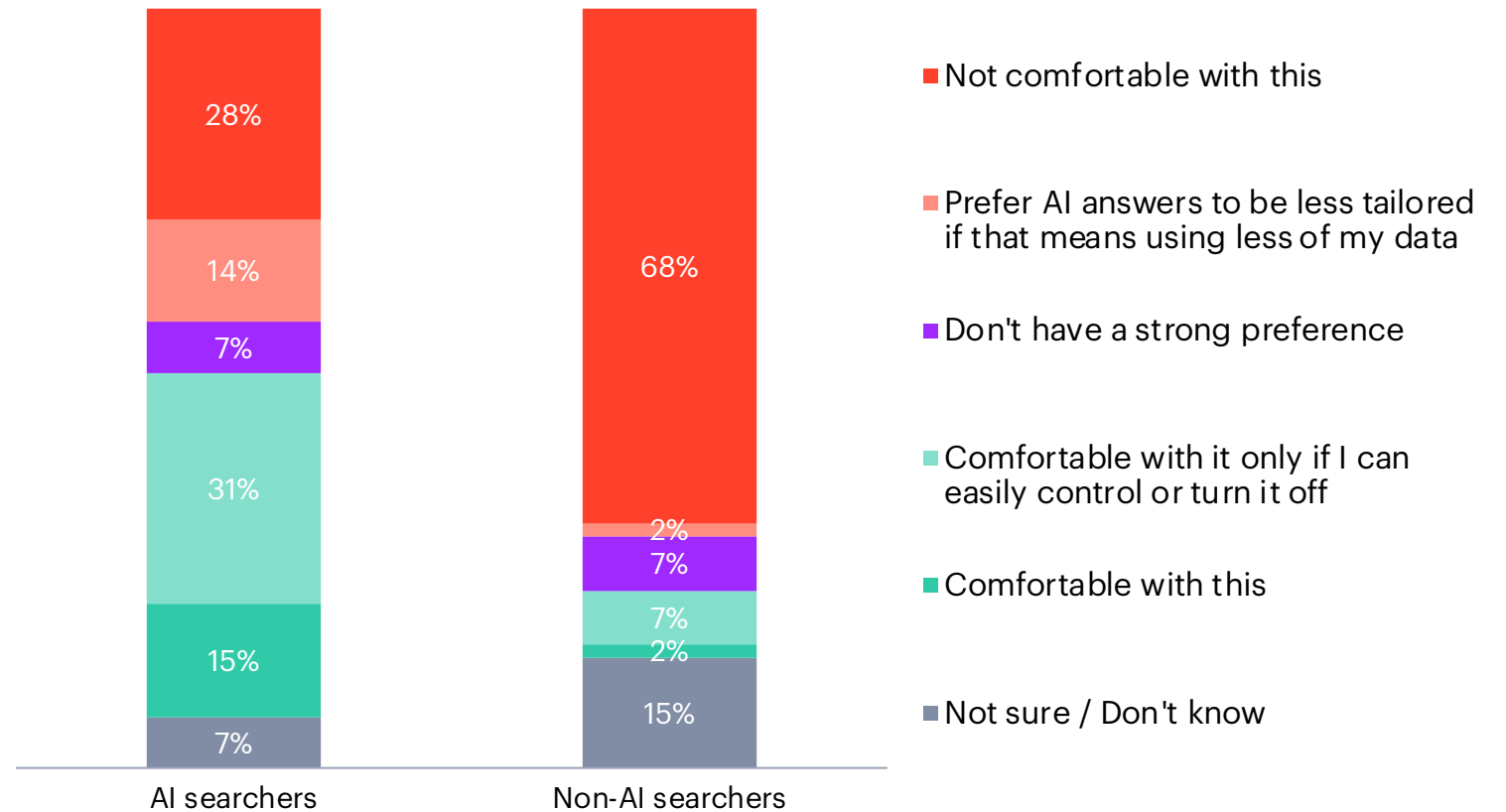
YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. Top 8 options for AI searchers.
AI searchers n> 700, non-AI searchers n> 600, frequent AI searchers n> 200, regular AI searchers n> 200.

Personalization faces a privacy ceiling

Searchers who do not use AI are mostly (68%) uncomfortable with the use of data in return for tailored answers.

Among AI searchers, 31% are comfortable with personalization if they can control it or turn it off.

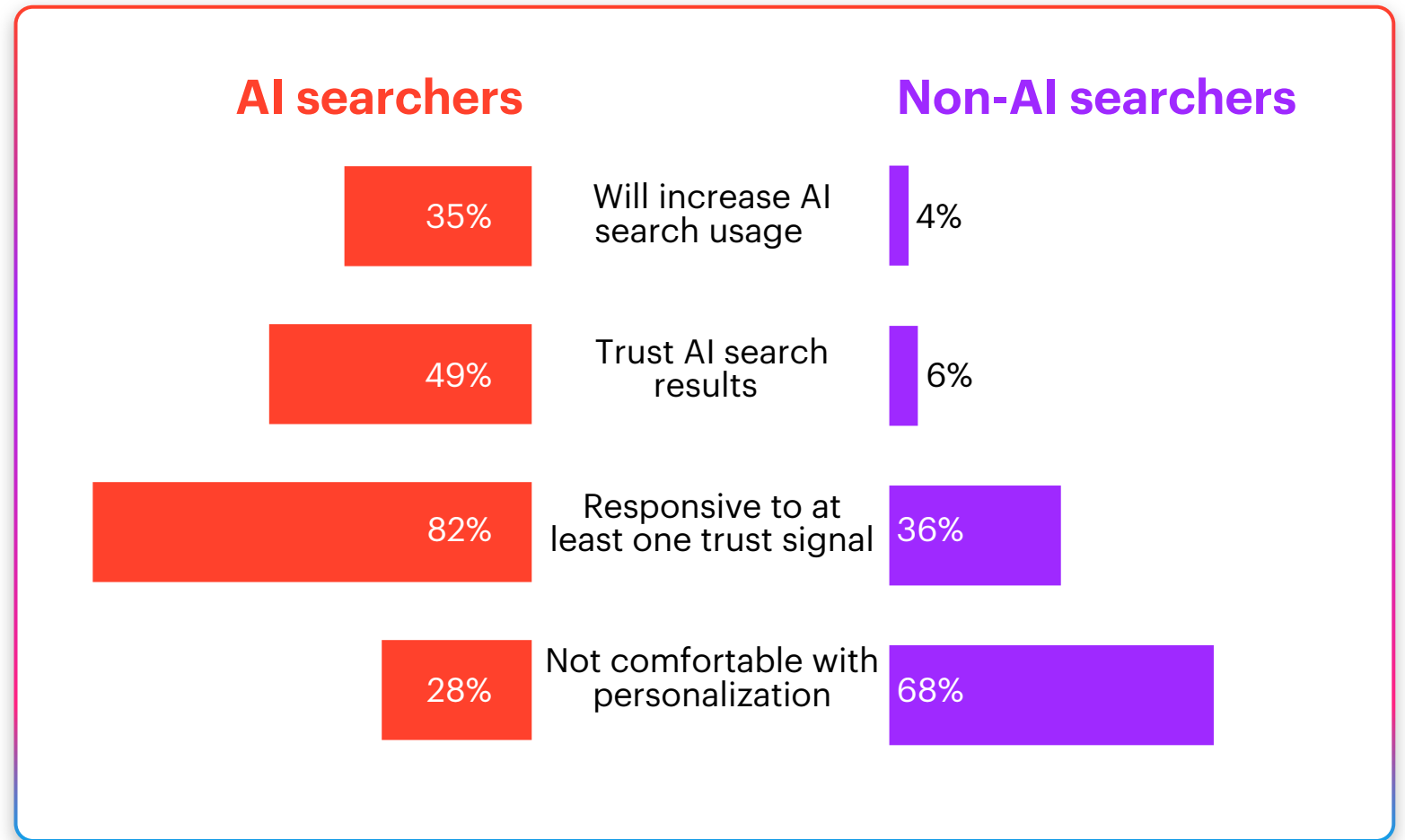
Which ONE is closest to your view about AI assistants using your data (e.g., your previous chats, search history, or app activity) to give more tailored answers? (online searchers, by AI usage)



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

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

AI searchers are more likely to expect greater future use, respond to trust signals and accept personalization 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.



YouGov Surveys, April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026. AI searchers n> 700, non-AI searchers n> 600. AI searchers are online searchers who start queries with AI assistant.

Methodology

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

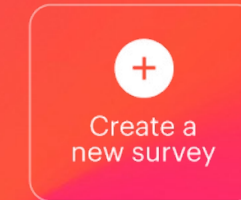
- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The multi-region survey was conducted online from April 21, 2026 – May 29, 2026.
- Australia n= 1002, Canada n= 1015, Denmark n= 1006, France n= 1045, Germany n= 1005, Great Britain n= 2003, Hong Kong n= 508, India n= 1004, Indonesia n= 1032, 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> 1,300) 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> 650) 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> 200) start at least one new query per day. Regular AI searchers (n> 200) start several new queries per week. Occasional AI searchers (n> 300) start 1 or less than 1 new query in a week. Non-AI searchers (n> 600) are defined as those who selected "None" or "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).

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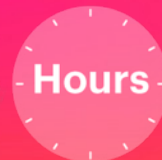
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Target market

- ☐ United States
- ☒ Other countries

Fast-turnaround surveys in



- 54
- has two cats
- lives with her husband
- donates to charity
- is in the cause



Thank you

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