FREE DATA SHEET · GROWTH BY CC

Which content formats does AI actually cite?

Ten formats, ten years. How AI answers chose what to cite from 2021 to 2026, a forecast to 2030, and the format worth betting on.

Estimates built from published studies, not measurements

34%

Listicles' share of article citations in 2026. Still #1.

12 → 20%

Original research, 2026 to 2030. The fastest climber.

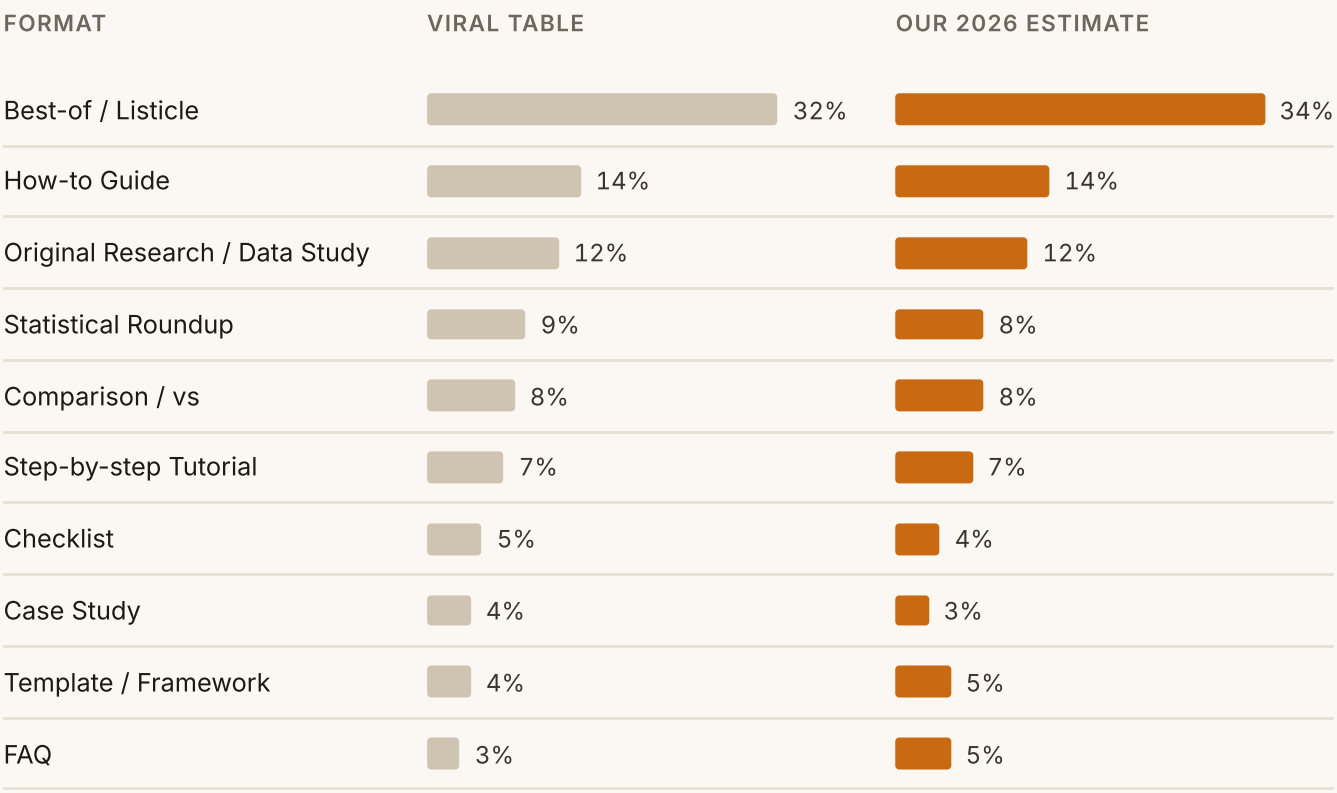
45%

Share of ALL AI citations going to articles. The rest go to product pages, Reddit, YouTube and more.

START HERE

That viral "AI citation" table? Nobody can trace it.

A table claiming listicles get 32% of AI citations has been going around. We looked for its source and couldn't find one. No published study uses its 10 categories, its rows add up to **98%**, not 100%, and its "2.7x" figure comes from a different study about a different format. It does get one thing right: **listicles are #1 in every study we found.**



21.9%

Listicles' share of **all** citations in the largest study: Wix and Peec AI, 1.06M citations across ChatGPT, AI Mode and Perplexity.

40–63%

Listicles' share on "best X" and recommendation prompts. The query decides the format.

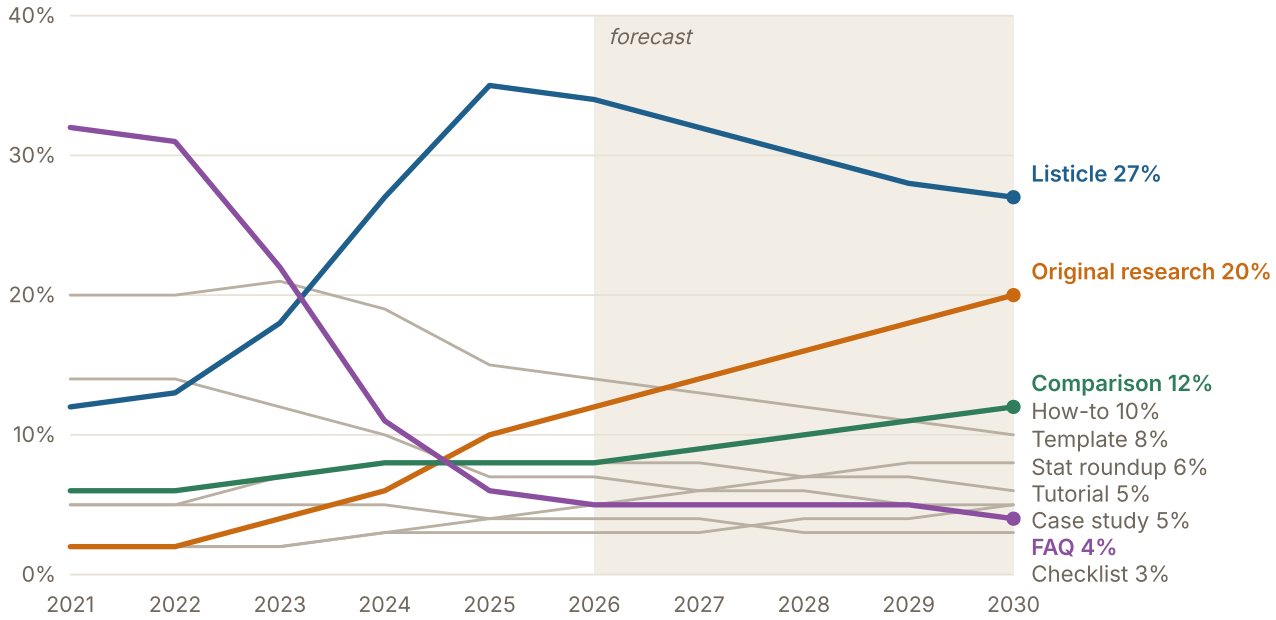
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Studies with a separate "original research" category big enough to test the viral claim.

THE TREND

Ten years of what AI cites

Share among the 10 formats; each year adds to 100%. 2021–22 use Google featured snippets as a stand-in (AI citations didn't exist yet), 2023–24 are interpolated, 2025–26 are anchored to measured studies, and 2027–30 are a forecast.



FAQs collapsed

From **32%** in 2021 to **5%** in 2026. AI now answers simple questions itself, without citing anyone.

Listicles peaked

Up from **12%** to **35%** in 2025, now easing as Google and ChatGPT cool on self-promotional "best of" lists.

Original data climbs

From **2%** to **20%** by 2030, becoming #2. AI favours sources that own a fact.

THE DATA SHEET

Every format, every year

Share of AI citations among the 10 formats, in %. Shaded columns are forecasts. "Viral table" shows the circulating figures for comparison.

Format	Viral table	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Best-of / Listicle	32	12	13	18	27	35	34	32	30	28	27
How-to Guide	14	20	20	21	19	15	14	13	12	11	10
Original Research / Data Study	12	**2**	**2**	**4**	**6**	**10**	**12**	**14**	**16**	**18**	**20**
Statistical Roundup	9	5	5	7	8	8	8	8	7	7	6
Comparison / vs	8	6	6	7	8	8	8	9	10	11	12
Step-by-step Tutorial	7	14	14	12	10	7	7	6	6	5	5
Checklist	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	3
Case Study	4	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	5
Template / Framework	4	2	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	8
FAQ	3	32	31	22	11	6	5	5	5	5	4
Total	98	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Confidence	–	Low	Low	Low	Low	Med-low	Med-low	Low	Low	V. low	V. low

What each period rests on

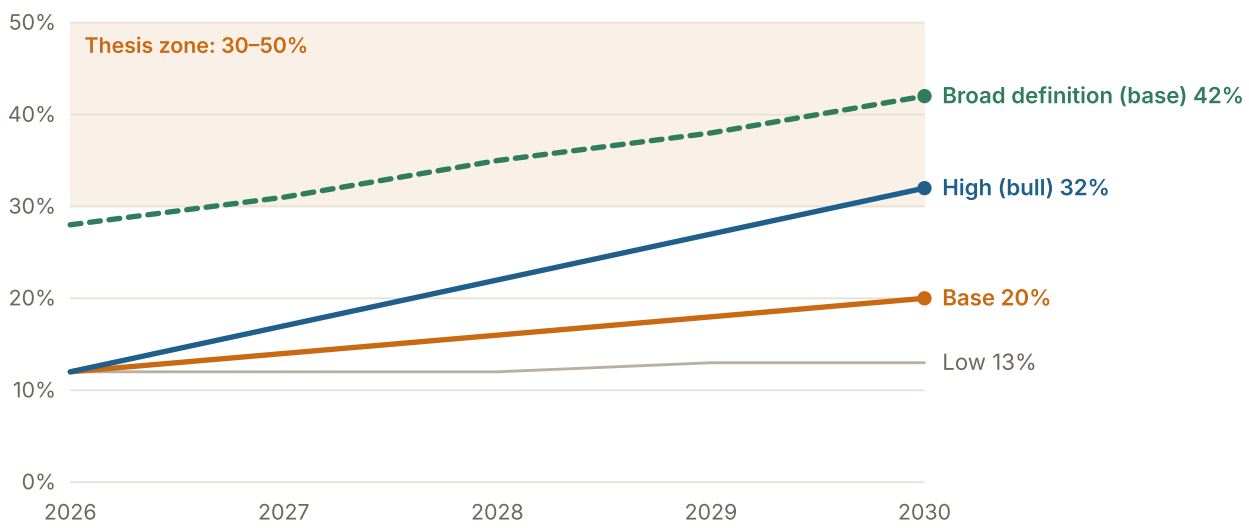
- **2021** Proxy: Google featured snippets (Low)
- **2023** Early AI (SGE, Bing Chat, Perplexity); no format data (Low)
- **2025** Anchored to measured studies (Medium-low)
- **2027** Forecast (Low)

2022 follows 2021, 2024 follows 2023, 2026 follows 2025 and 2028–30 follow 2027 in method. Confidence falls the further out the forecast goes, because shares have swung by double digits within months after a single AI model update.

THE BIG QUESTION

Will original research take 30–50% of AI citations?

Original research's share of the 10 formats under four scenarios. The shaded band is the 30–50% thesis.



Scenario	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Low	12%	12%	12%	13%	13%
Base	**12%**	**14%**	**16%**	**18%**	**20%**
High (bull)	12%	17%	22%	27%	32%
Broad definition (base)	28%	31%	35%	38%	42%

STRICTLY: NO

A page that is just a data study

Reaches about **20%** of article citations by 2030 and becomes #2, not #1. Even the bull case tops out near **32%**. As a share of **all** AI citations, it's only about **8.4%**.

BROADLY: YES

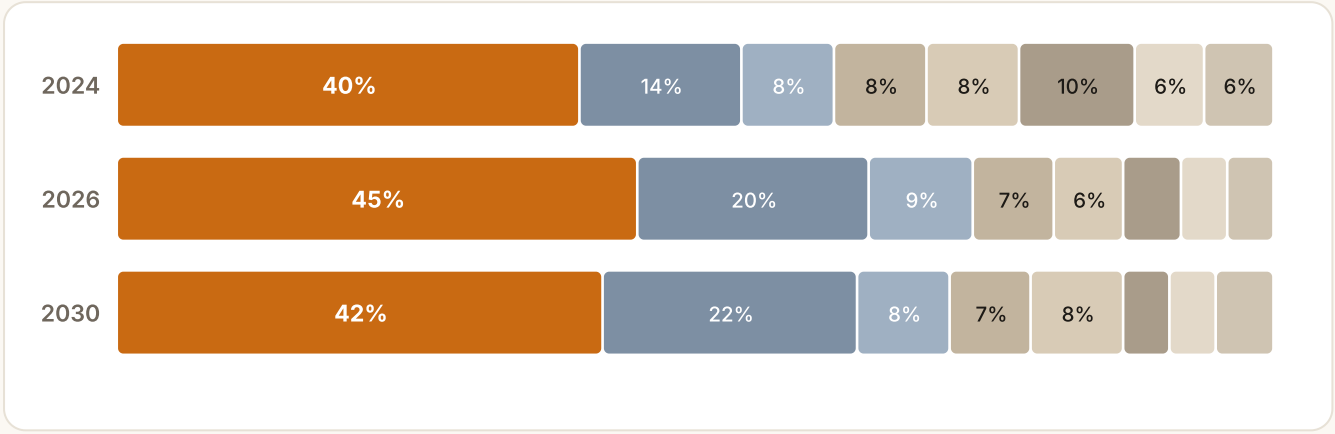
Your own data as the ingredient

Count benchmarks, tested comparisons, case studies and listicles built on first-hand data, and that group reaches about **42%** by 2030. The lists that keep winning will be the data-backed ones.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Articles get less than half of what AI cites

Estimated share of **all** AI citations by source type. Product and category pages keep gaining as AI agents start shopping for people, while Wikipedia's share shrinks.



5.4%

Original research's share of all AI citations today: 12% of articles × 45% article share.

8.4%

The same figure in 2030, base case. Big growth from a small base.

22%

Product, category and homepages by 2030, the biggest non-article source.

What would make original research win big

1. AI engines extend their shift toward primary sources (PubMed jumped from #64 to #4 in ChatGPT citations in 2026) to data that brands publish.
2. They cite the original study, not the "100+ statistics" roundup quoting it.
3. ChatGPT and other AI engines, not just Google, keep penalising self-promotional listicles.
4. More prompts become data-seeking as AI agents do research for people.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS

Six moves for creators and businesses

1. Run small, recurring studies

Benchmark 50 local businesses' reviews, track which queries show AI Overviews, time how fast Google indexes new pages. Data no AI can make up.

2. Publish data as a named benchmark

Give it a name, a method box and tables. Benchmarks with named options get cited; raw data dumps mostly don't.

3. Get into other people's lists

Most listicles AI cites are written by third parties. Don't rank yourself #1 on your own "best of" page; that tactic lost visibility in 2026.

4. Refresh every quarter

Pages left un-updated lose citations fast; about 70% of pages cited in AI Overviews change within 2–3 months.

5. Keep listings and reviews clean

For local searches, business listings and reviews take a large share of citations. Your Google Business Profile is content too.

6. Post your video on YouTube too

YouTube is one of the most-cited sources in AI Overviews. One study can feed a reel, a thread, a LinkedIn post and a video.

Want this applied to your business?

Follow growth by cc for weekly SEO and AI-search breakdowns in Hinglish. DM "DATA" for help turning your own numbers into content AI cites.

SOURCES AND METHOD

Where these numbers come from

Every year-by-year figure is an estimate we built from the studies below. None of them measures all 10 formats directly. All are vendor or agency studies except the GEO paper, which is academic.

Study	Sample	Finding
Wix Studio AI Search Lab + Peec AI Mar 2026 · ChatGPT, AI Mode, Perplexity	1.06M citations, 75K answers	Listicles 21.9% of all citations; articles 16.7%; no research/data category
Evertune 2026 · 6 engines	~400M citations, recommendation prompts	Listicles 63% on recommendation prompts (40% Copilot to 65% Gemini)
BuzzStream Jan 2026 · ChatGPT, AI Mode, AI Overviews, Gemini	~4M citations	Blogs 53.5%; within blogs comparison/alternatives 26.9%, market analysis 23.1%
Seer Interactive Feb 2026 · ChatGPT, AI Overviews	2M+ citations	ChatGPT listicle share 17.8% to 15.5% (Nov 2025 to Jan 2026)
Ahrefs (via SEJ) Oct 2026 · ChatGPT	Top cited domains, Mar to Sep 2026	Primary sources rise: PubMed #64 to #4; WebMD #18 to #79
Position Digital 2026 · Google AI, ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity	7 B2B SaaS clients	Research papers 0.9%, case studies 0.1% of LLM citations
On-Page.ai Jul 2026 · AI Overviews	50 keywords, one day	Cited pages not more original than uncited (median 52 vs 55.5)
GEO paper (Princeton, IIT Delhi) Nov 2023 · Simulated BingChat, Perplexity	10K queries, lab engine	Adding stats, quotes, sources: up to ~40% more visibility
Semrush featured snippets Nov 2020 · Google featured snippets	1M result pages	70% paragraph, 19.1% list, 6.3% table, 4.6% video (2021–22 proxy)

Assumptions

- The 10 formats are treated as covering all article citations. Real pages mix formats; a "best X" list with original tests counts as a listicle.
- Reddit, Wikipedia, YouTube, product pages, news and listings are removed before each year is scaled to 100%.
- The mix of informational, shopping and local prompts stays roughly stable to 2030.
- Numbers are global and English-language. No India-specific citation data exists yet.

Research compiled October 2026. Figures are estimates for education, not guarantees of results. Track your own AI citations rather than trusting any single table, including this one.