



W H I T E P A P E R

The Prompt Gap

One brand, many positions

AI Reach Rank Inc.
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I. THE SCALE OF THE PLATFORM

In September 2025, researchers from Harvard Kennedy School and OpenAI published the most comprehensive analysis of ChatGPT usage to date. NBER Working Paper 34255 classified 1.1 million conversations and drew on complete platform telemetry through June 2025.¹

ChatGPT processes 2.6 billion messages per day.² That figure grew 5.8x in a single year, from June 2024 to June 2025. The user base grew 3.2x over the same period.³ The platform serves 800 million weekly active users, approximately 10% of the global adult population.⁴ David Deming, one of the study's authors at Harvard, noted that Google took 8 years, from 1999 to 2007, to reach 1 billion daily searches. ChatGPT reached 1 billion daily messages in under 2 years.⁵

Bain & Company, working with Sensor Tower data from 30 million ChatGPT conversations, found that total prompt volume jumped nearly 70% from January to June 2025.⁶ Similarweb's analysis of the broader generative AI landscape shows these platforms receive 7 billion average monthly web visits, up 76% year over year, with app downloads surging 319% to 1.9 billion.⁷

II. WHAT PEOPLE ARE DOING ON THESE PLATFORMS

Adobe surveyed more than 5,000 U.S. consumers. 39% have used generative AI for shopping, with 53% planning to.⁸ Among those who have used it, 85% say it improved their shopping experience, 73% cite AI as their primary source of product research, and 83% say they are more likely to use AI for larger or more complex purchases.⁹ 7 in 10 U.S. consumers now use AI in their personal lives, with 45% using it daily.¹⁰

39% of consumers have already used AI for shopping. 53% plan to. 85% say it improved the experience.

The NBER study classified all 1.1 million conversations into 3 primary categories. 49% falls into "Asking": people seeking information, advice, and guidance to make decisions. 40% is "Doing," covering task completion. 11% is "Expressing."¹¹

In July 2024, Asking and Doing were roughly even. By June 2025, Asking had grown to 51.6% while Doing declined to 34.6%.¹² The fastest-growing subcategory within Asking is "Seeking Information," which grew from 14% to 24% of all usage in 12 months. The researchers explicitly classify "Purchasable Products" as a named subcategory within Seeking Information.¹³

How People Use ChatGPT

NBER Working Paper 34255 | 1.1 million conversations classified | June 2025



73% of ChatGPT usage is personal, up from 53% in June 2024.¹⁴

Bain's data confirms the purchase pattern. Shopping as a share of all ChatGPT searches grew from 7.8% to 9.8% in 6 months, a 25% category gain on top of 70% overall growth.¹⁵ Click-throughs more than doubled between March and June 2025, with the rate jumping from 2.2% to 5.7%.¹⁶

III. THIS IS NOT GOOGLE

Seer Interactive analyzed more than 500 citations returned by SearchGPT and compared them against Bing and Google. 87% of SearchGPT's citations aligned with Bing's top organic results. Only 56% overlapped with Google, with a median Google rank of 17 and an average rank of 28.¹⁷

Ahrefs analyzed 15,000 long-tail queries across ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Copilot. Only 12% of URLs cited by those platforms rank in Google's top 10. 80% do not rank in Google's top 100.¹⁸ In a separate analysis of ChatGPT's 1,000 most-cited pages, 28% have zero organic visibility in Google. 67% are off-limits to traditional marketing outreach.¹⁹

Where ChatGPT Citations Actually Come From

Ahrefs | 15,000 long-tail queries | ChatGPT, Perplexity, Copilot vs. Google top 10



80% do not rank in Google's top 100 | 28% of most-cited pages have zero Google visibility | 86% of top sources not shared across platforms

Conductor's 2026 benchmarks report, drawn from 3.3 billion sessions across 13,770 domains, found that 87.4% of all AI referral traffic originates from ChatGPT.²⁰ Google AI Overviews now appear in approximately 25% of searches and reach 2 billion users per month.²¹ Across platforms, 86% of top-mentioned sources are not shared between ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Google AI features.²²

IV. THE PROMPT GAP

To test how brand positioning varies across prompt types, we ran a series of queries on ChatGPT using the same brand categories with different prompt constructions. All queries were run on the same day, on the same platform, using a blank-slate session with no personalization history. The only variable in each test was the wording of the prompt.

Steakhouses

We asked ChatGPT: "What are the top 10 steakhouse brands?" Then we asked: "What are the top 10 steakhouse brands near me in Westchester NY?" Fogo de Chao has a physical location in White Plains, Westchester County.

NATIONAL PROMPT	LOCAL PROMPT
<i>"What are the top 10 steakhouse brands?"</i>	<i>"What are the top 10 steakhouse brands near me in Westchester NY?"</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ruth's Chris Steak House — Upscale chain, USDA Prime 2. Morton's The Steakhouse — High-end, fine dining 3. Del Frisco's Double Eagle — Premium, luxury setting 4. Fogo de Chao — Brazilian churrascaria 5. Smith & Wollensky — Classic upscale chain 6. The Palm Restaurant — Historic, prime cuts 7. Mastro's Restaurants — Premium, notable wine 8. Texas Roadhouse — Casual chain, value 9. LongHorn Steakhouse — National casual chain 10. The Capital Grille — Upscale, refined service 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Benjamin Steakhouse — Dry-aged, classic 2. Hudson Prime Steakhouse — Irvington, upscale 3. Averna Italian Steakhouse — Rye, dry-aged 4. One Rare Italian Steakhouse — Scarsdale, local favorite 5. Flames Steakhouse — Elmsford, traditional 6. Peter's Steakhouse — Eastchester, steak/seafood 7. Fogo de Chao — White Plains location 8. Brasserie Le Steak — Larchmont 9. Red Horse by David Burke — White Plains 10. Osaka / Southern Table — Alternative options

Fogo de Chao dropped from #4 nationally to #7 locally. 6 restaurants that do not appear on the national list now rank ahead of it. The entire competitive set changed. On the national prompt, Fogo competes against Ruth's Chris, Morton's, and Del Frisco's. On the local prompt, it competes against Benjamin Steakhouse, Hudson Prime, and Averna Italian Steakhouse.

Hotels

We asked ChatGPT: "What are the top 10 hotel brands?" Then: "What are the top 10 hotels near me in Scottsdale AZ?"

NATIONAL PROMPT	LOCAL PROMPT
<p><i>"What are the top 10 hotel brands?"</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marriott International — Largest global, 30+ brands 2. Hilton Worldwide — Waldorf, Conrad, Hampton 3. Hyatt Hotels — Park Hyatt, Grand Hyatt 4. IHG — InterContinental, Holiday Inn 5. Accor — Sofitel, Fairmont, Raffles 6. Wyndham — Largest by property count 7. Choice Hotels — Comfort, Quality Inn 8. Four Seasons — High-end luxury 9. Best Western — Midscale, global 10. Radisson Hotel Group — Radisson Blu, Park Inn 	<p><i>"What are the top 10 hotels near me in Scottsdale AZ?"</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Phoenician — Luxury Collection Resort 2. Canyon Suites at Phoenician — Ultra-luxury boutique 3. Four Seasons Scottsdale — Luxury resort, desert views 4. JW Marriott Camelback Inn — Iconic resort, golf/spa 5. Westin Kierland Resort — Large resort, golf/spa 6. Grand Hyatt Scottsdale — Pools, activities, dining 7. Kimpton Miralina — Stylish, desert design 8. Scottsdale Resort, Curio/Hilton — Spa, pools 9. Hotel Valley Ho — Boutique, mid-century 10. The Scott Resort & Spa — Trendy upscale

Marriott International holds the #1 position nationally as a parent brand. On the local prompt, the name "Marriott" does not appear as a brand at all. Instead, individual Marriott-owned properties appear under their property names: The Phoenician (#1 and #2 as Luxury Collection), JW Marriott Camelback Inn (#4), and Westin Kierland (#5). Marriott sub-brands hold 4 of the top 7 positions, but a consumer reading the list would never associate them with a single parent company. The brand equity that earned the #1 national ranking fragmented entirely at the local level.

Sneakers

We asked ChatGPT: "What are the best brands of sneakers?" Then: "What are the best brands of sneakers I can buy today?"

GENERIC PROMPT	PURCHASE-INTENT PROMPT
<p><i>"What are the best brands of sneakers?"</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nike — Largest global brand 2. Adidas — Performance and lifestyle 3. New Balance — Comfort and running 4. Puma — Performance and casual 5. Reebok — Sportswear and lifestyle 6. ASICS — Running and training 7. Saucony — Running specialist 8. Vans — Skate and casual 9. Converse — Classic lifestyle 10. Under Armour — Performance training 	<p><i>"What are the best brands of sneakers I can buy today?"</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nike — Leader, performance/lifestyle 2. Adidas — Running and fashion 3. New Balance — Comfort, fit, performance 4. ASICS — Running and training 5. Puma — Performance and lifestyle 6. Reebok — Classic and modern 7. Under Armour — Performance training 8. Vans — Classic skate/casual 9. Converse — Timeless lifestyle 10. Saucony — Performance running

Adding 4 words, "I can buy today," reshuffled the rankings. ASICS moved from #6 to #4. Under Armour jumped from #10 to #7. Saucony dropped from #7 to #10. Puma fell from #4 to #5, and Reebok dropped from #5 to #6. The prompt did not change the category, the platform, or the day. It added purchase intent, and 5 brands changed position.

3 categories. 3 prompt variations. Every single one produced a different brand ranking. The only variable was the wording of the question.

Consumer behavior data adds context. Gartner surveyed 365 U.S. consumers and found that 51% say their research habits have changed due to generative AI. Of those, 71% changed how they phrase queries. 18% use generative AI to engineer prompts before searching Google.²³

The average ChatGPT conversation runs 348 words, roughly 70x longer than a typical Google query.²⁴ 95% of ChatGPT users still rely on Google, indicating the platforms function as complementary.²⁵

1 agency case study documented AI referral leads converting at 25x the rate of traditional search leads, with results achieved in under 90 days.²⁶

ANALYSIS

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I started running these tests because something did not add up. Every CMO I spoke with had a detailed understanding of where their brand ranked on Google. They had dashboards, agencies, quarterly reports, and 7-figure budgets dedicated to search visibility. But when I asked where their brand appeared in ChatGPT, the answer was always the same: they did not know.

The data in this paper explains why that gap matters. We are not looking at an emerging trend. We are looking at a platform that processes 2.6 billion messages per day, where half of all usage is people asking questions to make decisions, and where the fastest-growing subcategory involves products they can buy. Harvard classified it. Adobe surveyed it. Bain measured it. The numbers are not speculative.

What I find most significant is the structural disconnect between Google and AI search. Only 12% of the URLs cited by ChatGPT rank in Google's top 10. A brand's 2-decade investment in search optimization tells it almost nothing about where it stands on the platform that 800 million people use every week. That is not an incremental shift. That is a measurement blind spot.

The Prompt Gap makes it worse. Consider what happened with something as straightforward as steakhouses. Fogo de Chao is a publicly traded national chain. It held the #4 position on the national prompt. It has a physical location in White Plains, Westchester County. And yet on the local buying prompt, the prompt where someone is actually deciding where to eat tonight, Fogo dropped to #7 behind 6 restaurants that most people outside Westchester have never heard of.

For something as simple as a steakhouse, one prompt change moved a national brand from the top 4 to behind local restaurants with a fraction of its brand recognition.

The hotel example reveals a different dimension of the same problem. Marriott holds the #1 position nationally. On the local prompt, the brand name disappears entirely. A consumer in Scottsdale sees The Phoenician and JW Marriott Camelback Inn, but nothing that says "Marriott International." The brand equity that earned the #1 ranking does not transfer to the local surface. The parent brand is invisible at the point of purchase.

A brand's AI position is not a single number. It is a portfolio of positions across prompt types, and the prompts that matter most to revenue may not be the ones where the brand performs best. No one is measuring this systematically. Brands need to know where they stand on the specific prompts that drive their business before they can know whether anything they are doing is working.

Every marketing team tracks their Google position. None of them track what happens when 800 million people ask an AI which brand is best.

What's your AiRR score? → airrscore.com

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