



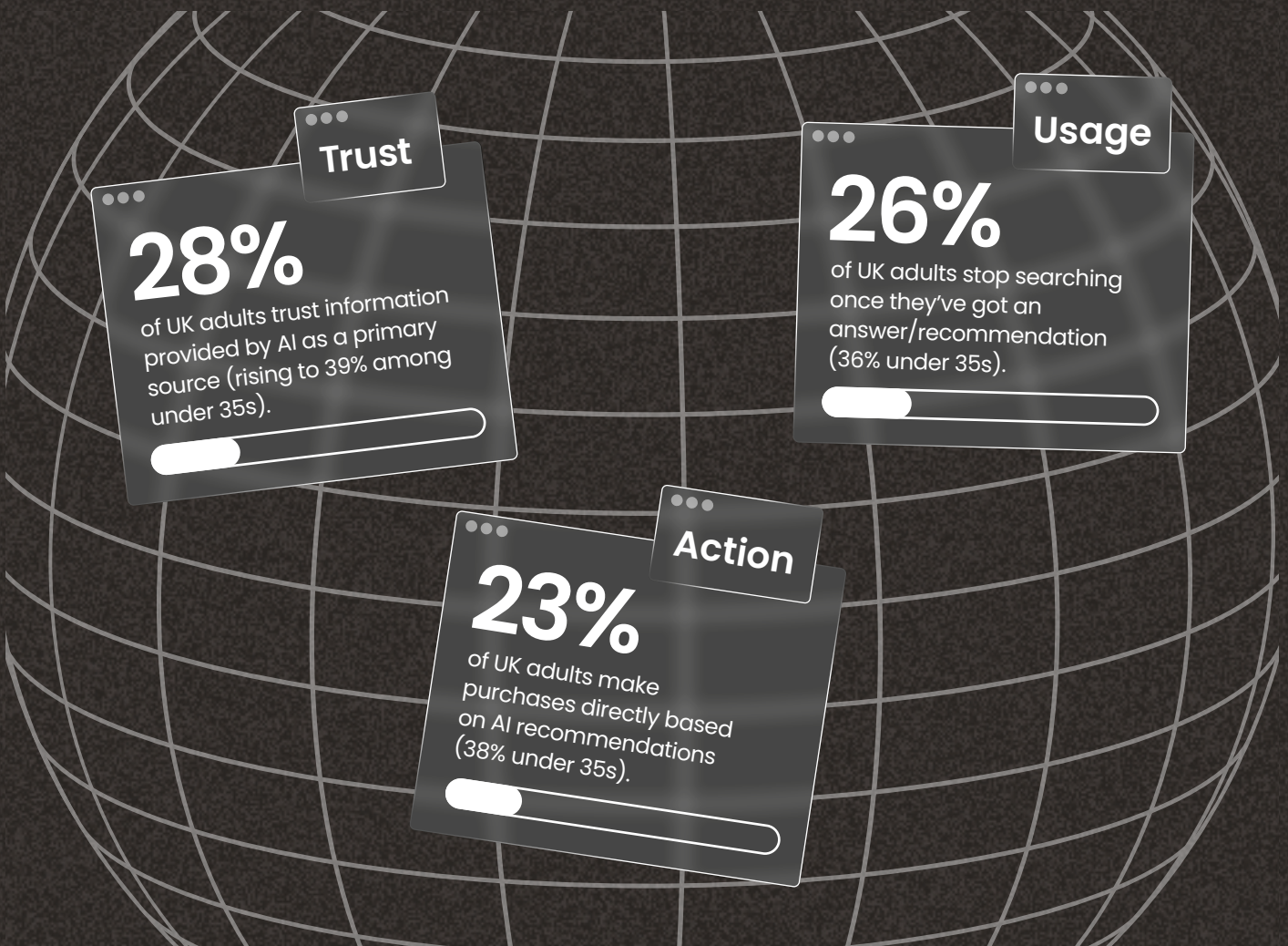
Unretrievable

Why Global Brands
Are Vanishing from
the Answer Economy

tangerine 

The digital landscape has undergone a tectonic shift.

We have moved from the era of the search engine to the era of the answer engine.



The “Stop Searching” Effect

Audiences, particularly those under 35 but expanding into older demographics, are increasingly trusting and relying on AI to make purchasing decisions. This means key audiences are using algorithms to navigate entire markets in a matter of minutes, and influence is concentrated into the hands of the brands sending the right digital signals.

Fewer touchpoints.

Fewer opportunities to influence.

Higher penalty for being absent from AI answers.





AI is already a primary source for 28% of buyers.

AI Stickiness: 47% would rephrase their question rather than move to a different tool/platform.

AI compresses the buying journey: 26% don't look anywhere else after an AI answer/recommendation.

AI is already driving conversion:
23% buy directly from AI recommendations.

Gender split: men are more likely than women to trust AI as a primary source (33% men vs 23% women) and to buy based on AI recommendations (27% men vs 19% women).

Survey source: Censuswide, nationally representative sample of 2,000 UK adults (18+), fieldwork 24-27 April 2026.

AI knows what your customer wants before they want it

you need to make sure it's you.



The Visibility Trap | Presence vs. Retrievability

This is no longer about ranking on a page. You can spend millions on advertising and still remain unretrievable to AI.

Everything people see across news, search, and social is driven by these algorithms, which rely on deep interconnected signals to make decisions on what to retrieve.

That's because most AI systems don't "display" information the way a results page does; they retrieve what they judge to be most relevant based on a set of signals.

LLMs (in fact all algorithmic environments) rely on signals like perceived expertise and authority, third-party trust, and evidence of genuine audience experience.

A huge volume of these signals come from long-term brand building work and require maintenance and consistency or "systems planning" to ensure that brands secure and continually grow their piece of the pie.

If a brand isn't producing and distributing the information those systems can confidently retrieve, it effectively stops "existing" in the machine's view of the category.

This is the Retrievability

Gap.

You cannot simply spend your way to the top of an AI response; you must earn your way there and maintain your position.

The retrievability gap is a winner-takes-all effect: 74% of all economic value created by AI is currently captured by only 20% of organisations.¹

Laggards pay the “citation tax”—spending 20–40% more on ads just to be seen next to leaders.

If a company's leads come entirely from “blue link” SEO (reported to be declining at ~25% year-over-year), analysts can devalue that company by 15–20%.²

In 2026, if your comms strategy doesn't create the retrievability signals that LLMs rely on, you aren't just losing clicks – you're losing value.

The New Mapping: Ecosystem Resonance

To win in this new era – and close the retrievability gap – earned thinking has never been more important.

The PR approach goes beyond generating citations and brand visibility when you team it with digital thinking and social-native knowledge. This trifecta of skillsets builds expertise, authority, and trust, creating advantages that translate into business impact that other disciplines struggle to replicate.

It strengthens signals across news, social, search, forums, brand sites and the industry that improve retrievability long term. For example, if search presence is high but your “human proof” (forums/social) and “expert authority” (news/creator platforms) are low, an AI will infer a trust deficit. It will often down-rank a lopsided brand in favour of one with a balanced, high-resolution footprint across the full discovery ecosystem.

To bring this to life, we need to look at the most critical and often overlooked factor in retrievability: decay.

Research³ shows that a citation has 'life' before it is replaced by more recent reporting on the same topic:



This is called the "cliff effect".

This happens because AI isn't just scanning links and text; it is looking for consensus. Rich, repeated signals (news, social, search, forums, brand sites and industry) create structural advantages that help counter the "cliff effect."

As competitors inject fresh, richer signals into the ecosystem, older brand data is pushed out of the AI's immediate context.

A market leader that stays quiet for a single quarter can find its presence meaningfully reduced in AI-driven recommendations – especially in fast-moving categories.

By contrast, the brands capturing disproportionate value from AI retrieval focus on sending integrating signals and publishing consistently – compounding signals over time and raising the barrier for others to break in.

How To Win In The Retrievability Revolution

Becoming retrievable isn't something you can buy or badge – you have to earn it. That's why earned (PR) combined with a social and digitally native approach enables signal integrity, which generates competitive and commercial advantage.

This involves three industry-standard pillars:

- 01 Semantic richness:** moving from “thin” content to data-dense signals AI can extract and reuse.
- 02 Cross-platform alignment:** ensuring your ecosystem share of voice is balanced and aligned
- 03 Frequency governance:** implementing a “recharge” cadence to match the natural pace of signal decay.

The brands that will thrive are the ones that stop asking “How do we rank?” and start asking **“How do we become retrievable?”**

See how your brand is performing in the answer economy with our new tool Retriva.

Contact hello@tangerinecomms.com to stay visible.



¹ PwC Global AI Performance Study (April 2026)

² KPMG UK M&A Outlook / PKF Smith Cooper Insights (Q1 2026)

³ Scrunch & Stacker (March 2026), “The Half-Life of AI Citations: What 3.5 Million Citation Events Taught Us About AI’s Memory.”