

AI Overviews vs. AI Mode

What Google's Dual AI Search Experiences
Might Mean for Your Marketing Strategy



Executive Summary

Google's introduction of AI Overviews and AI Mode has changed how information appears in search results. In an effort to understand the nuances of this shift, Victorious analyzed **more than 1,500 real-world queries** to determine how content is surfaced within each of the two search experiences and whether both systems draw from the same sources or produce distinct citation patterns.

The findings offer an early look at how generative models are shaping visibility within search results and how these patterns differ from traditional, link-based results.

The findings are clear

- **Limited overlap**
Only 30–35% of the sources cited in AI Overviews also appear in AI Mode.
- **Diverging authority**
77% of unique domains were cited in only one experience.
- **Different citation patterns**
AI Mode references more sources on average (~9) than AI Overviews (~7.7).

Visibility in one experience does not guarantee visibility in the other.

The strategic implication is that AI Overviews and AI Mode must be treated as separate visibility channels, each requiring distinct reporting and optimization strategies.

Marketers who adapt now will be better positioned to allocate budgets effectively, measure performance accurately, and capture brand presence across Google's evolving search landscape.

Context and Objectives

Google's search results now feature two AI-driven experiences: **AI Overviews**, which summarize information from multiple sources, and **AI Mode**, which generates complete responses in a conversational format. AI Overviews frequently capture user attention before a click occurs, shifting engagement away from traditional listings, and fundamentally changing how users engage with search content. AI Mode, by contrast, keeps users in a chat-based interface, where users rarely engage with traditional search result links and effectively operate in a zero-click environment.

This shift has created a new layer of visibility that traditional metrics fail to capture. SEO frameworks built on ranking position and click-through rate describe performance within a list of links, not within the AI-powered results that surface brand mentions without driving traffic. As user attention moves from link-based results to AI-generated experiences, marketers need a clearer view of brand visibility within these environments so they can refine their content strategies and stay relevant.

To address this gap, we set out to understand how visibility functions across Google's two AI environments. We analyzed how content is surfaced within and across AI Overviews and AI Mode to identify how visibility is distributed between them. We measured the frequency and distribution of domain citations to test whether the same domains appear in both environments or if each relies on a distinct retrieval pattern.

Our hope was that the answers to these questions would quantify how visibility differs across Google's AI environments and provide a factual basis for evolving our [answer engine optimization framework](#).

Methodology

The study analyzed **1,540 real-world search queries** to compare how domains are cited within AI Overviews and AI Mode. Each query was tested in both environments to observe which domains appeared and how often they were referenced.

A citation was defined as any domain referenced or linked within an AI-generated response.

When multiple URLs from the same domain appeared, the domain was counted once per query. This approach reflects domain-level visibility rather than page-level frequency, creating a consistent basis for comparison between AI Overviews and AI Mode.

For each query, two sets of citations were captured:

- **AI Overviews (AIO):** the domains referenced in Google's AI-generated summary at the top of its results page.
- **AI Mode:** the domains referenced in the full AI-generated response provided when users activate AI Mode.

Then, we compared these citation sets using three measures:

1. **Average number of sources cited per query**
Did one experience consistently cite more domains than the other?
2. **Overlap between the two experiences**
How often did the same sources appear in both AIO and AI Mode for the same query?
3. **Domain carryover**
Looking across the entire dataset, how many unique domains appeared in both experiences versus only one?

Together, these measures provide a clear view of how visibility is distributed across Google's two AI experiences. The analysis focuses on observable citation patterns and overlap, but we believe other factors such as sentiment, placement, and contextual prominence within AI-generated responses warrant additional study as AI-driven search continues to evolve.

Findings and Analysis

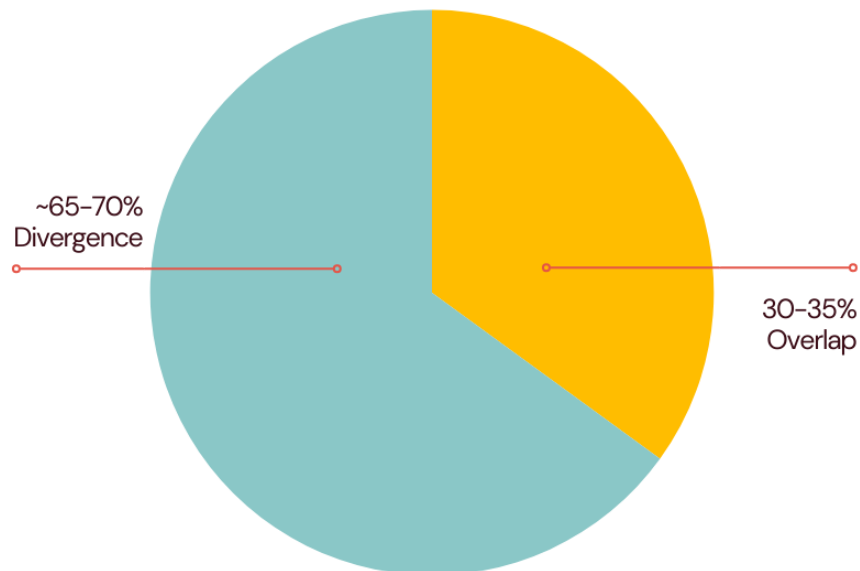
The comparison of more than 1,500 queries uncovered four consistent patterns about how AI Overviews (AIO) and AI Mode cite sources. Each has direct implications for how marketing leaders should think about search visibility.

1. Partial But Limited Overlap

On average, only **30–35% of the sources cited in AI Overviews also appeared in AI Mode**. Nearly two-thirds of citations did not carry over.

While the data shows that AI Overviews and AI Mode surface different sets of sources for the same queries, our current analysis doesn't identify the cause of that variation. Instead, it raises new questions about how differences in the retrieval or display systems in each experience might contribute to these patterns.

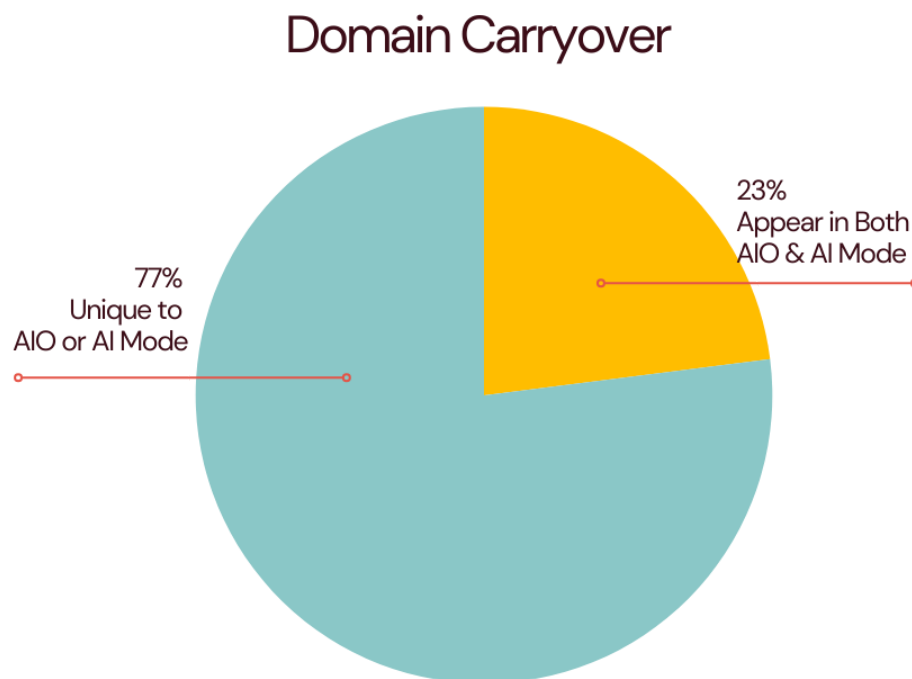
Citation Overlap: AIO vs. AI Mode



2. Limited Domain Carryover

Across the entire dataset, **77% of unique domains appeared in only one experience**, while just 23% showed up in both. In practical terms, a domain that earns visibility in one experience isn't likely to appear in both.

That smaller group of recurring domains may represent sites with strong topical authority or broad informational coverage, serving as sources the systems consistently trust to support generative answers. Identifying what distinguishes those domains, whether content depth, credibility signals, or schema clarity, is an important next step in understanding how brands can strengthen their presence across both environments.

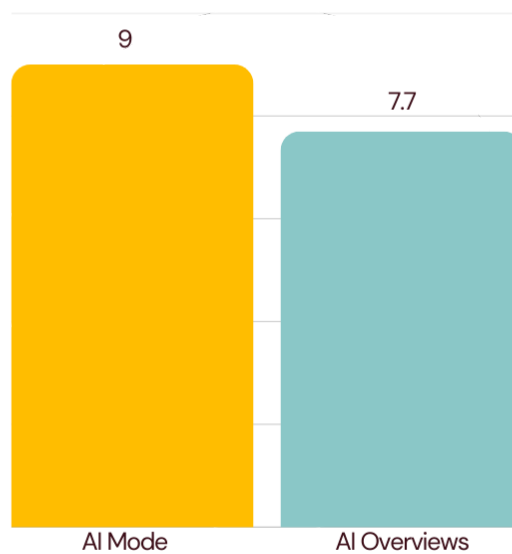


3. Broader Citation Pool in AI Mode

Across all the queries we analyzed, **AI Mode cited an average of nine domains per query**, while **AI Overviews cited 7.7**.

This indicates that AI Mode draws from a wider set of sources, while AI Overviews use a more concentrated group to generate summaries.

Average Sources Cited per Query



4. No Identical Citation Sets

Not a single query produced the exact same list of citations across both experiences. Even in cases of strong overlap, at least some sources diverged.

This finding further confirms that AI Overviews and AI Mode don't retrieve or display information in the same way. As noted in our analysis of the partial overlap data, it doesn't reveal whether those differences stem from distinct retrieval models, ranking logic, or other system-level factors.

Data Summary

	AI Mode	AI Overviews
Citation volume	Cites more domains per query, showing that it references a wider range of sources.	Cites fewer domains per query, showing that it draws from a smaller set of sources.
Retrieval behavior	Rarely cites the same domains as AI Overviews for the same query.	Rarely cites the same domains as AI Mode for the same query.
Visibility pattern	Spreads citations across more sites, creating broad but shallow visibility.	Concentrates citations within a smaller group of sites, creating narrow but deeper visibility.

The data points to a clear pattern. Achieving visibility in one AI experience does not extend to earning visibility in the other.

Measuring search visibility accurately requires viewing each experience as a distinct search surface and tracking citations within each environment separately rather than treating them as variations of the same result.

Next Steps in Understanding AI-Driven Visibility

Our findings reveal two parallel systems of visibility within Google's AI search experiences. Each highlights different sources, raising new questions about what drives retrieval and how that exposure shapes brand outcomes.

The next step toward understanding AI-driven visibility is to move beyond domain-level data. We plan to extend this research to page-level analysis to determine whether specific types of content are cited more often in one environment than the other and how brand authority and entity clarity influence those outcomes. As Google continues to refine its AI search systems, finding data-backed answers to these questions will be essential to building a practical framework for earning and sustaining visibility across AI-driven search experiences.

Follow the latest developments in our research
on AI-driven visibility at [Victorious.com](https://victorious.com).