GEOLY AI / RESEARCH REPORT 2026

The 2026 Third-Party AI Search Sources Report

Follow the evidence behind AI answers.

OBSERVATION WINDOW / JAN 01 — NOV 28, 2026

5,275,954
Eligible AI answers

1,450
Monitored projects

15
Third-party domains / list

Two windows. Different leaders.

Year to date
Reddit 14.90% · YouTube 13.02%

September onward
YouTube 8.65% · Reddit 8.18%

Official brand domains excluded from the rankings.
Percentages are answer coverage, not global market share.

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Research window: January 1–November 28, 2026. Recent window: September 1–November 28. All dates use Asia/Shanghai. This is a year-to-date study, not a completed calendar year.

01 Executive findings

Which websites do AI search engines cite? In GEOly's monitored custom-project sample, Reddit leads the year-to-date ranking, appearing in 14.90% of eligible answers. YouTube leads the September–November 28 window at 8.65%. In November alone, through the 28th, Reddit moves ahead again. A source ranking is a description of a particular set of questions, platforms and dates, rather than a universal list of websites AI trusts.

The main study contains **5,275,954 eligible answers across 1,450 projects**, with **22,763,535 explicitly cited source records**. The recent window contains 2,131,985 answers across 1,033 projects and 5,982,072 explicit citation records. Repeated monitoring of a question produces separately counted answers; projects are not unique brands.

Three findings matter for brand and content teams. First, compare long-run presence with recent, platform-specific evidence before allocating a channel budget. Second, inspect the actual cited pages: a community, a review publisher and a brand website can serve different buyer questions. Third, treat sample composition as part of the result. The eight largest projects contribute 62.60% of year-to-date answers and 67.50% of recent answers.

02 What the study counts

GEOly inventoried 8,813,455 completed answers across three data systems. Custom projects account for 5,536,161 completed answers before cleaning, with actual observations from January 16 through November 28. The public library contains 3,105,511 completed answers, mainly from May through September; a further 171,783 completed answers belong to a legacy industry library covering March and April.

Only the cleaned custom-project sample supports the main explicit-citation ranking. Of its 5,275,954 answers, 3,312,845 contain at least one qualifying explicit citation, or 62.79%. Answers without a qualifying citation remain in the denominator. The 22,763,535 citation records reduce to 13,432,809 answer–domain pairs across 265,450 normalized domains. These are not counts of unique web pages.

Answer coverage = eligible answers citing a domain / all eligible answers in the same window and platform. Multiple pages from one domain within an answer count once. One answer can cite multiple domains, so domain coverage percentages need not sum to 100%.

The US country setting accounts for 76.81% of year-to-date answers and 91.20% of recent answers. This describes collection settings, not the geographic distribution of real search users.

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03 Which sources qualify as third-party?

The ranking includes publishers, review sites, community and social platforms, video platforms, third-party retailers, comparison marketplaces and public-data aggregators. Official product and service brand domains are excluded. Each destination is labeled by role; a retailer or marketplace is not described as an independent editorial publication.

Third-party here describes a domain's destination type. It does not guarantee commercial neutrality, absence of advertising or independence of corporate ownership. Retailers can sell private-label products. Social and video platforms can host brand-operated accounts. We have not classified individual authors or sponsorships, so domain coverage cannot establish the share of independently produced content.

Every raw-ranking candidate through the fifteenth qualifying third-party domain was reviewed for each of the two displayed windows. Candidates below those cutoffs cannot enter the same window's Top 15. This is not a claim that all 265,450 normalized domains have been ownership-classified.

Excluding official domains changes the ranked candidate set, not the denominator. Coverage still uses all eligible answers, including answers with only official sources or no qualifying citations. The 22,763,535 citation records and the platform totals below include all source types; they are not third-party citation totals.

We do not publish a percentage of answers citing official brand sources. That measure requires a sufficiently complete official-domain classification and an answer-level union across those domains. Adding brand-domain coverage rates would double-count answers. Citation is also not evidence of search indexing.

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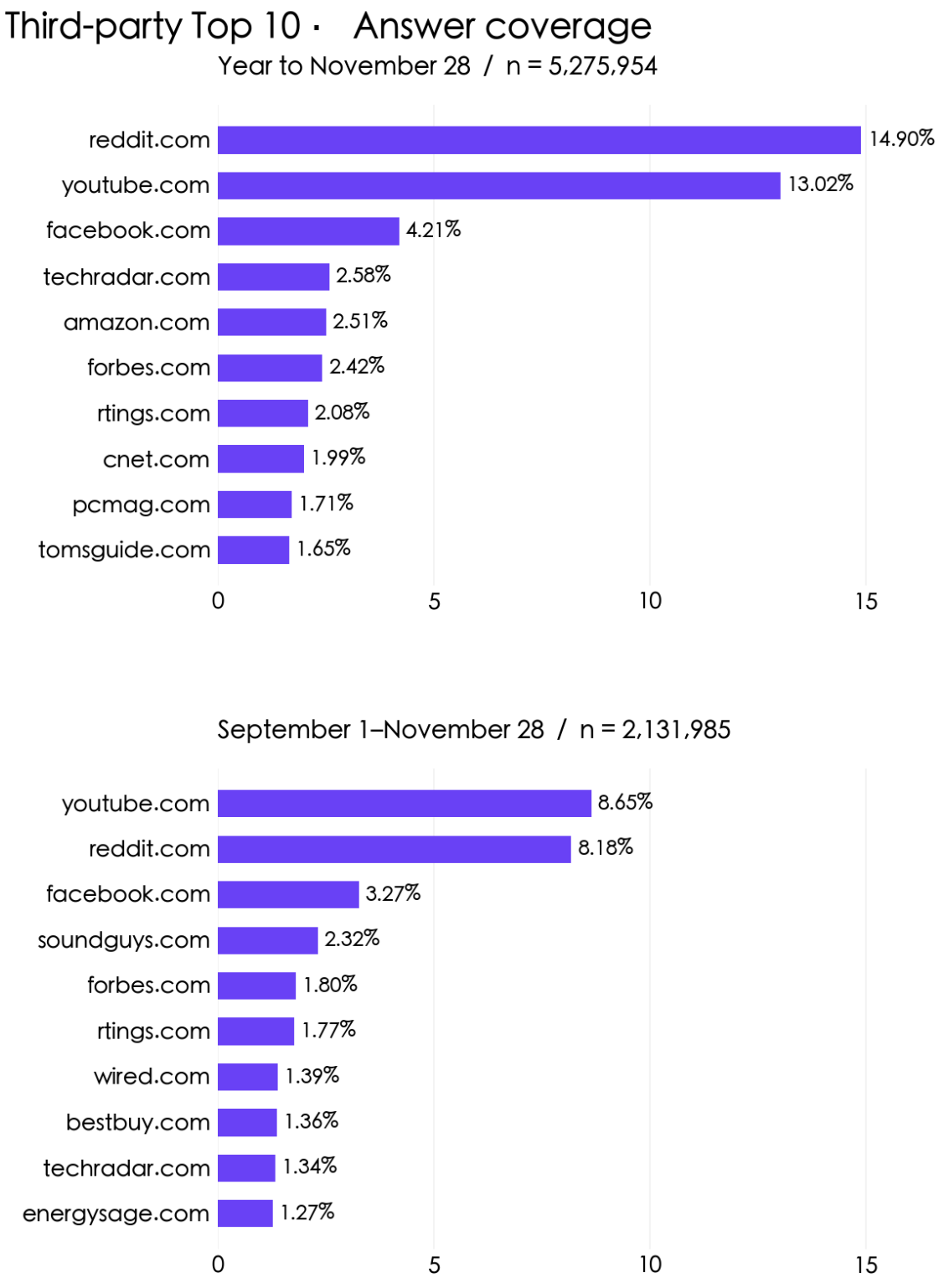
04 Year-to-date third-party Top 15

Rank	Third-party domain	Type	Citing answers	Coverage
1	reddit.com	community	785,969	14.90%
2	youtube.com	video	687,033	13.02%
3	facebook.com	social	222,078	4.21%
4	techradar.com	publisher	136,044	2.58%
5	amazon.com	retailer	132,655	2.51%
6	forbes.com	publisher	127,848	2.42%
7	rtings.com	reviews	109,938	2.08%
8	cnet.com	publisher	105,028	1.99%
9	pcmag.com	publisher	90,039	1.71%
10	tomsguide.com	publisher	86,950	1.65%
11	soundguys.com	reviews	78,323	1.48%
12	wired.com	publisher	77,050	1.46%
13	nytimes.com	publisher	76,297	1.45%
14	bestbuy.com	retailer	67,564	1.28%
15	instagram.com	social	66,941	1.27%

Reddit, YouTube and Facebook lead, followed by a combination of publishers, specialist reviews and retail destinations. A domain-level ranking cannot show which claim a page supports or whether the answer recommends the monitored brand.

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Third-party Top 10 · Answer coverage



Source: GEOly AI · Through Nov 28, 2026 · Denominator: all eligible answers

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05 Third-party sources since September

Rank	Third-party domain	Type	Citing answers	Coverage
1	youtube.com	video	184,434	8.65%
2	reddit.com	community	174,413	8.18%
3	facebook.com	social	69,669	3.27%
4	soundguys.com	reviews	49,393	2.32%
5	forbes.com	publisher	38,352	1.80%
6	rtings.com	reviews	37,816	1.77%
7	wired.com	publisher	29,590	1.39%
8	bestbuy.com	retailer	28,981	1.36%
9	techradar.com	publisher	28,479	1.34%
10	energysage.com	comparison marketplace	27,055	1.27%
11	amazon.com	retailer	26,309	1.23%
12	cnet.com	publisher	26,054	1.22%
13	tomsguide.com	publisher	25,708	1.21%
14	poweroutage.us	data aggregator	23,357	1.10%
15	consumerreports.org	reviews	22,124	1.04%

Specialist review sites appear alongside video, community, retail and data destinations. This is a starting point for inspecting the cited pages, not a universal media buying list or a demonstrated return on content investment.

EnergySage is classified as a comparison marketplace using its platform description. PowerOutage.us is classified as a data aggregator using its about page. These descriptions inform the destination categories; citation counts come from GEOly's research data.

The year-to-date and recent windows answer different questions. The former summarizes accumulated observations; the latter describes the more recent project mix. Changes between them reflect both time and composition. They do not isolate an algorithm change.

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06 September, October and November

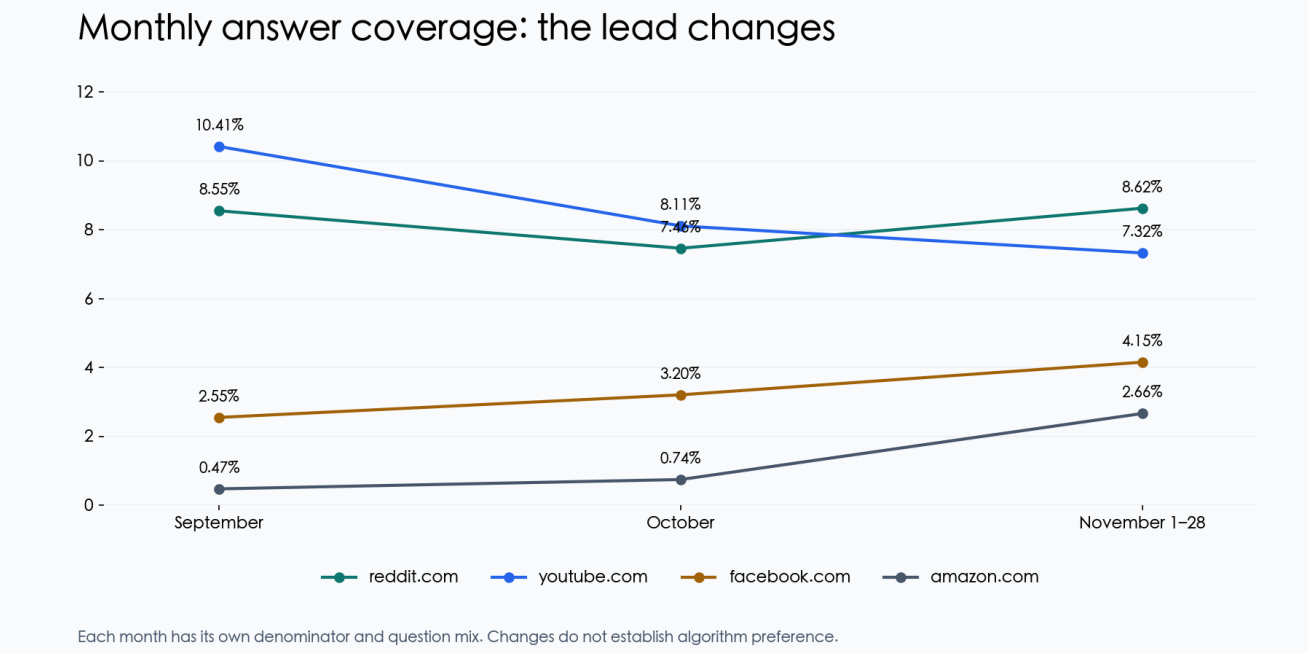
Month	Projects	Eligible answers	All citation records
2026-09	535	723,475	1,973,970
2026-10	372	760,152	2,104,835
2026-11 (1–28)	301	648,358	1,903,267

Domain	September	October	November 1–28
reddit.com	8.55%	7.46%	8.62%
youtube.com	10.41%	8.11%	7.32%
facebook.com	2.55%	3.20%	4.15%
amazon.com	0.47%	0.74%	2.66%

YouTube leads in September and October; Reddit leads in November through the 28th. The wider recent-window result does not mean YouTube leads in every month. Monthly coverage is calculated from that month's total eligible answers, not by taking the simple average of daily percentages.

A changing project roster, question mix, platform mix, model version, collector or parser can affect these results. November is incomplete. The observed reversal does not demonstrate a change in platform trust, consumer demand or the return on investment from publishing on either site.

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Source: GEOly AI · Through Nov 28, 2026 · Denominator: all eligible answers

07 Platform differences change the interpretation

Platform	YouTube Sep → Nov	Reddit Sep → Nov
ChatGPT	0.22% → 0.12%	3.34% → 1.41%
Gemini	2.75% → 1.57%	6.80% → 6.50%
Google AI Mode	18.48% → 10.60%	9.76% → 14.04%
Google AI Overviews	56.01% → 40.99%	34.15% → 24.52%

Between September and November, Reddit coverage rises from 9.76% to 14.04% in Google AI Mode, while declining from 3.34% to 1.41% in ChatGPT and from 34.15% to 24.52% in Google AI Overviews. The aggregate ranking conceals these different directions.

YouTube coverage declines in both monitored Google products over this interval. Facebook rises in those samples. Platform-specific views reduce the risk of attributing changes in the platform mix to source preferences, but they do not hold the project and question set constant. Cross-platform percentages are not trust scores.

Platform	YTD answers	All citation records	Answers with citations
ChatGPT	1,525,999	4,174,173	66.61%

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Platform	YTD answers	All citation records	Answers with citations
Copilot	24,861	0	0.00%
Gemini	1,297,957	5,283,434	69.26%
Google AI Mode	1,255,776	5,743,993	76.42%
Grok	190,981	5,388,260	93.91%
Perplexity	699,551	0	0.00%
Google AI Overviews	280,829	2,173,675	91.99%

Perplexity and Copilot have eligible answers but no records meeting this study's explicit-citation filter. This is a limitation of the available records and filtering, not a finding that these platforms never cite sources. Collection and parsing differ across platforms and historical periods. Their eligible answers are included in the pooled denominator; a different platform selection would produce a different aggregate rate.

08 Comparing quarters fairly

Window	Projects	Eligible answers	All citation records
Q1	206	334,133	5,513,124
Q2	216	1,308,810	6,219,883
Q3	673	2,224,501	7,022,426
Q4 (10/01–11/28)	603	1,408,510	4,008,102

Q3 covers a complete July–September quarter; Q4 covers October 1–November 28 only. Their durations and sample compositions differ. Raw count differences must not be presented as quarterly growth rates. The September-onward window is also not equivalent to the complete Q3–Q4 period.

09 Historical libraries are kept separate

The original research also inventoried public and legacy industry libraries. Their usable-source rules can include attached links and unknown citation states. Their counts are not merged into this report's explicit-citation ranking and are not used to calculate cross-library growth. The public library has insufficient October and November coverage to represent recent trends.

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10 What brands can do with this evidence

Start with a buying question, not a global domain leaderboard. Separate discovery, comparison, compatibility, installation and purchase questions in your own monitoring. For each important question, record the platform, cited page, publication date and the claim that the answer attributes to that page.

Use the year-to-date list to find recurring candidates, then check recent evidence for your category and target platform. For review sites, investigate whether the cited material contains relevant testing, comparisons or product details. For a community discussion, read the thread and its context. For video, check the specific video and the task it answers. These are practical investigation steps, not experimentally proven ranking interventions.

Improve owned information where your customer needs evidence: specifications, compatibility, limitations, setup and comparisons. Earn independent coverage by making evidence available and responding usefully in relevant communities. A citation is not necessarily a positive recommendation of a brand. Measure answer wording and, where observable, visits and conversions separately.

Keep the question panel and collection settings stable when evaluating a content change. Record additions and removals; segment by platform. A before/after movement in a mixed sample alone is insufficient to attribute a result to a campaign.

11 Methodology and limitations

Dates. The main sample uses answer business timestamps and Asia/Shanghai month boundaries. The half-open annual interval is January 1, 2026, 00:00 through November 29, 2026, 00:00; in UTC, [2025-12-31 16:00:00, 2026-11-28 16:00:00). Public and legacy libraries use their original date-type business dates. The incomplete November 29 day and future dates are excluded.

Projects and answers. Only completed answers are retained, with explicitly non-triggered AI Overviews excluded. Project metadata at extraction time is used to remove internal GEOly/RIJOY domains and clearly labeled test, acceptance, regression and presales projects. English test markers use word or delimiter boundaries. This rule-based cleaning does not certify every remaining project as a commercial deployment. Projects need not have an active paid subscription.

Explicit citation filter. Main-ranking rows must have source_type = citation, cited = true, an HTTP(S) URL and a nonempty domain. Google search and redirect URLs on google.com or www.google.com are excluded. Uncited, unknown-state, attached-link and standalone search-result records are excluded. Explicit means the stored database field, not manual verification that each citation supports a statement in the answer.

Domains. Host-to-root-domain mappings merge subdomains where available. Early records stored as website names are recovered from the original URL, with Public Suffix List rules used where needed. No main-sample source rows remain unresolved after this normalization. Different registered domains are not merged by corporate ownership.

Dependence and representativeness. This is a convenience sample of business monitoring, not a random sample of global AI search. Repeated questions across dates, sampling runs and similar projects remain

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separate. Large projects dominate answer volume. No global market-share estimate, significance test or causal effect is claimed. The year-to-date ranking is answer-weighted, not project-equal-weighted.

Time comparisons. Metrics are recomputed within each window. Missing collection is not treated as zero citation. Platform collection gaps and parser changes may create structural differences. Monthly comparisons do not hold a fixed panel of questions constant, so changes cannot be attributed solely to model preference.

Audit. Monthly and platform answer denominators reconcile with independent coverage queries. Year-to-date totals reconcile to monthly, platform and quarterly totals. Batch date ranges do not overlap. The public dataset contains reviewed third-party Top 15 lists and aggregate denominators; read-only SQL and batch audit material remain internal. Public materials omit official brand domains, project IDs, customer prompts and raw answers. Filtering official domains does not remove concentration or question-mix bias.

12 Read, download and cite

Report page: https://www.geoly.ai/reports/2026-ai-search-sources

Suggested citation: GEOly AI Research. The 2026 Third-Party AI Search Sources Report. November 29, 2026. Observation window January 1–November 28, 2026, Asia/Shanghai.

Use the report's observation window and denominator alongside any quoted percentage. For a brand-specific study, start with the actual questions and platforms your customers use at https://app.geoly.ai.

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