

GRACKERAI RESEARCH REPORT

AI Citation Source Analysis

What Gets Cited in Cybersecurity Recommendations

Published February 2026 · 1,200+ AI Responses · 4,800+ Citations Mapped · 6 AI Platforms

Executive Summary

When AI assistants recommend cybersecurity solutions, they don't cite sources randomly. Each platform has distinct preferences for which domains, content types, and information formats earn citations. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of 4,800+ individual citations extracted from 1,200+ AI-generated responses to cybersecurity buyer queries.

48%

of ChatGPT citations come from Wikipedia — the single most-cited domain

3.7

average unique domains cited per AI response — far fewer than Google's 10 blue links

14%

of citations go to vendor-owned websites — 86% reference third-party sources

73%

of highly-cited content contains comparison tables or structured data

1. How AI Platforms Select Sources

Two Citation Models

- **Training-data citations (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini):** Draw on knowledge from pre-training. Content needs broad web presence to influence.
- **Retrieval-augmented citations (Perplexity, ChatGPT browsing, Google AIO):** Fetch current web content at query time. Content can influence within days.

Strategic Implication: You need a dual strategy: (1) build broad web presence for training-data citations, and (2) create well-structured, frequently updated content for retrieval-based citations.

2. Citation Source Distribution by Platform

Source Type	ChatGPT	Perplexity	Google AIO	Gemini	Overall
Wikipedia / Encyclopedia	48%	8%	5%	12%	~18%
Tech media	12%	22%	18%	15%	~17%
Review platforms (G2, Gartner)	8%	18%	14%	10%	~13%
Vendor websites (direct)	7%	19%	22%	14%	~14%
Analyst reports	9%	12%	8%	11%	~10%
Community forums (Reddit)	11%	9%	7%	8%	~9%
Gov / Standards (NIST, CISA)	3%	7%	12%	9%	~8%
Comparison / Listicle sites	2%	5%	14%	21%	~11%

Platform Highlights

- **ChatGPT:** Wikipedia dominant. Ensuring accurate Wikipedia coverage is highest-leverage investment.
- **Perplexity:** Most likely to cite vendor content directly (19%). Highest priority for on-domain optimization.
- **Google AI Overviews:** Strongest vendor website preference (22%). SEO foundation is the entry point.
- **Gemini:** Highest preference for comparison/listicle content (21%). "Best tools" pages perform exceptionally.

3. Content Attributes That Drive Citations

Attribute	Top-Cited Pages	Non-Cited Pages	Citation Lift
Structured comparison tables	73%	12%	+6.1x
Specific statistics with sources	81%	24%	+3.4x
Direct-answer format (Q&A; blocks)	68%	18%	+3.8x
Updated within last 90 days	72%	31%	+2.3x
Author attribution with credentials	54%	19%	+2.8x
Schema markup (FAQ, Product)	61%	22%	+2.8x
Named frameworks (NIST, MITRE)	67%	34%	+2.0x
Pricing or cost information	45%	8%	+5.6x

The Top Three Citation Drivers

- **1. Comparison Tables (+6.1x lift):** The single most powerful citation driver. Feature-by-feature matrices are dramatically more citable than narrative prose.
- **2. Specific Statistics with Sources (+3.4x lift):** "Reduces MTTD by 73% (based on 50-customer study)" vs. "significantly reduces detection time."
- **3. Direct-Answer Blocks (+3.8x lift):** 40–60 word summaries at the top of sections matching how AI engines extract information.

4. Domain Authority vs. AI Citation Authority

Traditional domain authority correlates moderately with training-data citations ($r = 0.52$) but weakly with retrieval-based citations ($r = 0.31$). This means a cybersecurity startup with DR 35 but excellent content structure can out-cite an enterprise vendor with DR 80 on Perplexity and Google AI Overviews.

5. The Third-Party Citation Ecosystem

Since 86% of AI citations reference third-party sources, the third-party ecosystem is critical:

Rank	Source Category	% of Third-Party Citations
1	Wikipedia	28%
2	Tech media (Dark Reading, Hacker News)	19%
3	Review platforms (G2, PeerSpot)	16%
4	Community forums (Reddit)	12%
5	Analyst firms (Gartner, Forrester)	11%
6	Government / Standards bodies	8%
7	Comparison sites	6%

6. Citation Gaps: Where Vendors Miss

Query Category	% Vendors with Content	Buyer Intent	Gap
"[Vendor] alternatives" pages	8%	Very High	92% uncovered
Integration documentation	15%	High	Most just list logos
Industry-specific use cases	22%	High	Poorly served
Pricing transparency	12%	Very High	AI can't cite hidden pricing
Honest limitation acknowledgment	5%	Medium	Buyers ask, vendors don't answer

7. Optimization Framework

High-Impact (First): Add comparison tables · Direct-answer blocks · Statistics with sources · Transparent pricing

Medium-Impact (Second): FAQ schema · Monthly updates · Named framework references · Author credentials

Long-Term (Ongoing): Wikipedia presence · Analyst relations · Review site cultivation · Community engagement

About This Research

Analyzed 1,200+ AI responses to cybersecurity buyer queries across six platforms (Sep 2025 – Jan 2026). 4,800+ citations categorized by source type, domain, and content attributes. GrackerAI is the pioneering AI-powered AEO and GEO platform for B2B SaaS companies.

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