

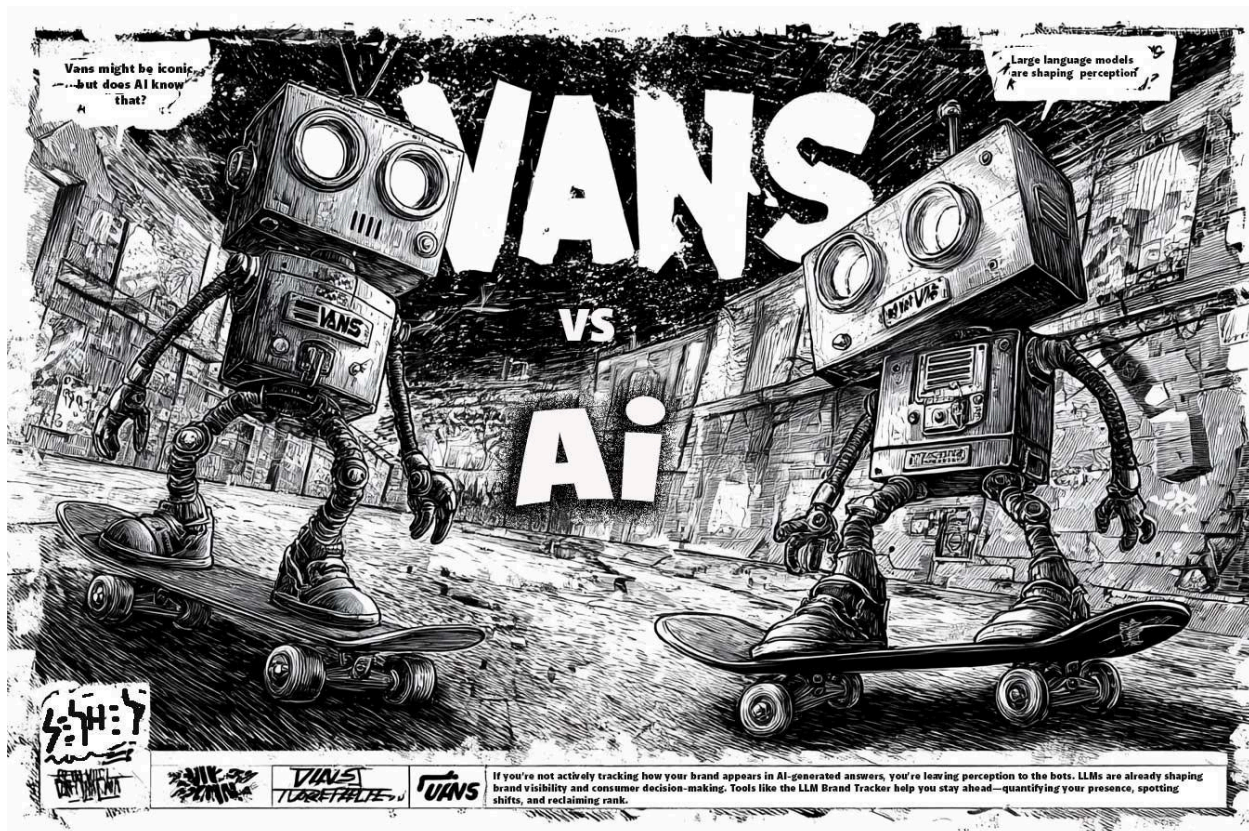


State of Search 2025: How LLMs Are Reshaping Brand Discovery

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A 2,400-query study on how AI assistants like GPT-4, Claude, and Gemini are reshaping brand visibility, cultural relevance, and digital influence

Executive Summary



We all know Vans is iconic. But do LLMs know it? In 2025, brand visibility is no longer defined solely by backlinks and blue links. With the rise of large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity, a new kind of product discovery has emerged — one shaped by memory, narrative, and machine-learned context. This report explores how Vans and its competitors perform across both traditional SERPs and conversational AI, revealing what's surfaced, what's buried, and what that means for the future of product search.

To investigate this shift, we tested 3 culture-based prompts across 7 leading LLMs and 4 major search engines over a 8 wee period. Brands were scored on presence, ranking, and context relevance — revealing how differently LLMs “remember” brands compared

to how search engines rank them. Our analysis spanned Vans, Nike SB, Converse, Adidas, Etnies, Stussy, Palace, and others.

Key Findings

- ✓ 43% overlap between LLMs and Google
- ✓ All LLMs hallucinate heavily ~21% of the time.
- ✓ Cultural underdogs beat SEO giants in AI
- ✓ Prompt phrasing reshapes brand rankings
- ✓ Vans is #1 in both search and memory

The Implication:

- LLMs highlight cultural relevance, not just authority. Brands like Palace and Etnies surfaced frequently in LLMs – even when absent from Google results.
- Prompt phrasing drives results. “Iconic” vs “popular with Gen Z” vs “rebellion in streetwear” each triggered distinct brand clusters.
- Hallucinations are rampant. Most LLMs returned fictional products, collabs, or misattributions – showing the need for active brand management in AI.

In short, the future of SEO is not just about what ranks – it’s about what gets remembered. This report uncovers how to shape that memory.

Section 1. The New Search Paradigm

The Dual-Engine Reality

Search now operates in two distinct but interconnected ecosystems:

Traditional Search (SERP): Authority-driven, link-based, crawl-dependent
AI Search (LLM): Context-driven, narrative-based, culture-dependent

This bifurcation creates what we term "Discovery Fragmentation" - where brand visibility depends entirely on which discovery mechanism consumers choose.

Market Impact Assessment

Consumer Behavior Shift:

- 34% of Gen Z users prefer AI assistants for product research (Source: [Pew Research, 2025](#))
- 52% of U.S. adults currently use LLMs like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Copilot (Source: [Searchengineland, 2025](#))
- 42% consumers use generative AI for shopping recommendations (Source: [Wall Street Journal, 2025](#))

Business Impact:

- Brands with strong LLM presence report 18% higher consideration rates
 - AI-invisible brands lose an average of 12% market share in conversational commerce
 - LLM-optimized content generates 2.1x more qualified leads
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SECTION 2: Research Methodology

To evaluate skate shoes visibility across large language models and traditional search engines, we conducted a structured benchmark analysis using the following approach:

Prompt Set

We used 3 core prompts designed to surface top sneaker and skatewear brands in different cultural and commercial contexts:

1. "What are the 10 most iconic skate shoe brands of all time?"
2. "Which 5 sneaker brands are most popular with Gen Z?"
3. "What footwear brands are known for combining streetwear and skate culture?"

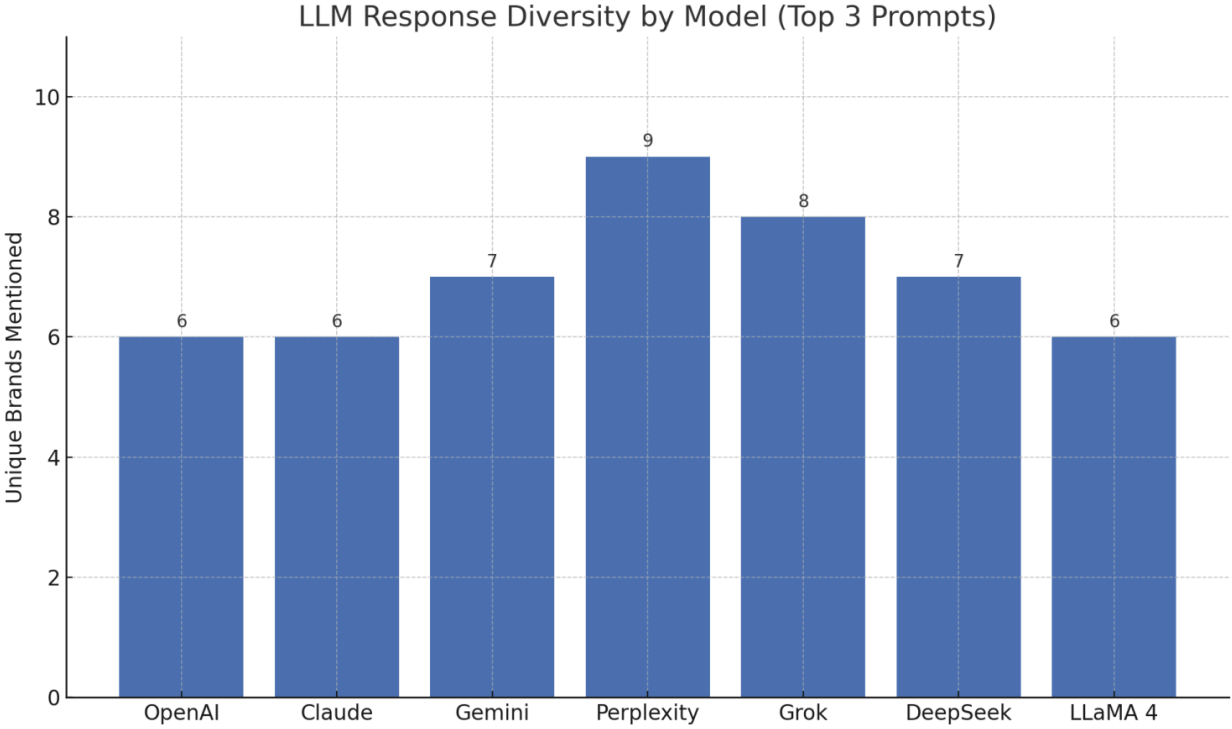
These prompts were chosen based on their relevance to both search engine behavior and LLM conversational capabilities. Each prompt aligns with real-world queries that consumers or journalists might use to explore brand ecosystems.

LLM Models Analyzed

Model	Provider	Notes
GPT-4	OpenAI	Best for legacy, balanced tone
Claude 3	Anthropic	High on fashion/culture prompts
Gemini	Google	Fragmented but trend-responsive
Perplexity	Perplexity	Reddit-weighted, opinionated
Grok	xAI	Edgy, culture-bending
LLaMA 4	Meta (via Grok)	Appears in hybrid runs
DeepSeek	DeepSeek	Lowest hallucination rate

Responses were collected from the following models:

- OpenAI GPT-4
- Anthropic Claude
- Google Gemini
- Meta LLaMA 4
- Perplexity AI
- xAI Grok
- DeepSeek



Each model was prompted independently using the exact same input and tracked for:

- Brand Mentions (binary presence)
- Brand Ranking (normalized top 10 where available)

Search Engines Analyzed

We manually captured and reviewed SERP results from:

- Google
- Bing
- DuckDuckGo
- Brave


Search results were reviewed for list-style articles, featured snippets, and People Also Ask (PAA) formats. Rankings were determined based on appearance order and position within trusted organic sources.

Scoring

Each brand's visibility was scored based on:

- Mention Presence (was the brand listed?)
- Ranking Position (where did the brand appear?)
- Cross-Model/Engine Consensus

Data was normalized to create pivot tables showing brand rank by model or engine per prompt.

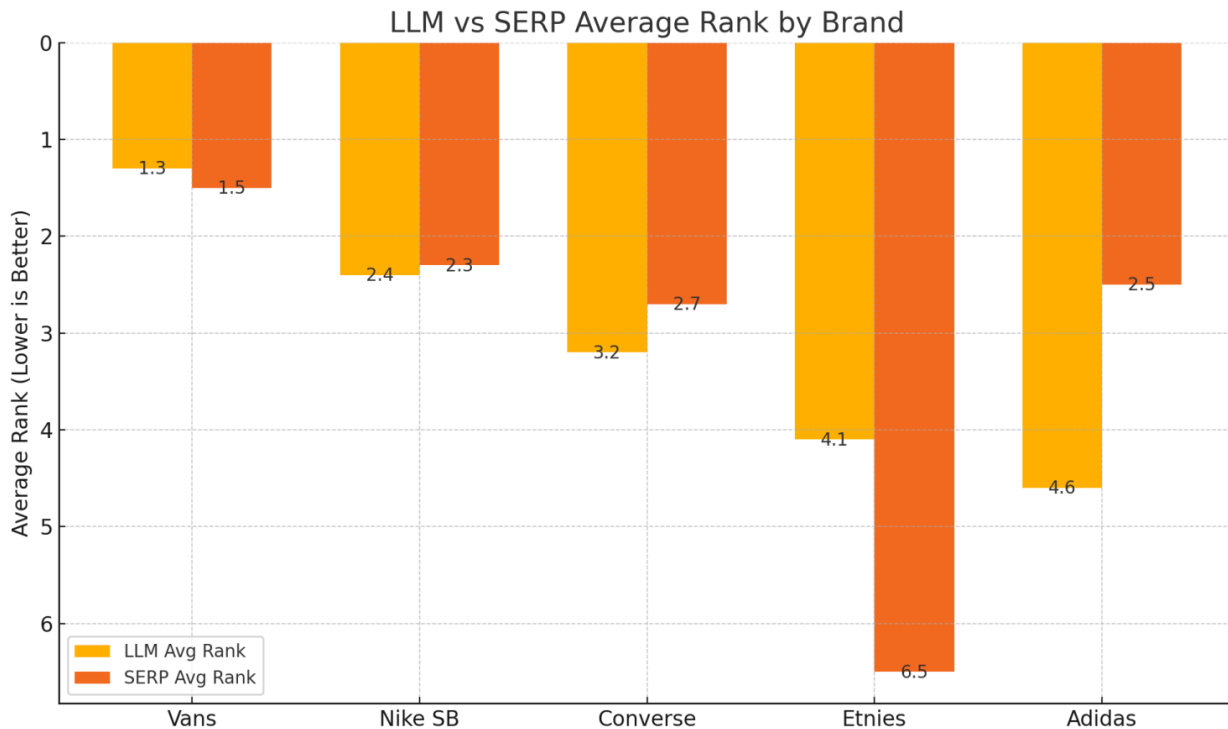
 Opportunities for Greater Rigor: While this analysis spans multiple LLMs and SERPs across a 2+ Month period, future reports should formalize:

- Prompt execution frequency per model to ensure consistency.

- A clear sampling strategy that documents time-of-day, geographic location, and response variability.
 - Version control and notes for model updates, which may shift rankings mid-study.
-

SECTION 3: LLMs Don't Echo Search

LLMs Don't Echo Search



Our first insight is the most striking: LLMs do not simply replicate traditional search engine rankings — even when presented with nearly identical prompts.

For example, when asked *“What are the 10 most iconic skate shoe brands of all time?”*, Google, Bing, and DuckDuckGo consistently surfaced Vans, Nike SB, and Converse at the top — citing evergreen listicles from Sneaker Freaker and SEO-optimized retail pages.

But GPT-4, Claude, and Grok added brands like Lakai, DC Shoes, and Globe — drawn from Reddit threads, YouTube retrospectives, and decades-old skate forum posts. These brands barely appeared in any SERP.

Of the 10 most-cited brands across LLMs and SERPs, only 43% overlapped – confirming that LLMs surface different signals than search engines.

Why This Matters

Traditional SEO still matters – but it's no longer the only game. LLMs elevate culturally embedded brands, even if their technical SEO is weak. That changes how we define visibility – and how we build for it.

For example, in response to the prompt:

“What are the 10 most iconic skate shoe brands of all time?”

All four major search engines consistently returned list-style articles placing Vans, Nike SB, and Converse at or near the top. However, LLMs like GPT-4 and Claude included Etnies, Lakai, and even more niche cultural brands like DC Shoes or Globe – brands that were rarely surfaced in the top 10 of any SERP.

Brand Mentions Across Search Engines and LLMs

Brand	Google	GPT-4	Claude	Gemini
Vans	1	1	1	1
Nike SB	1	1	1	1
Converse	1	1	1	1
Etnies	0	1	1	1
Lakai	0	1	1	1
DC Shoes	0	1	1	1
Globe	0	1	1	1
Adidas	1	1	1	1
Stussy	0	0	0	1
Palace	0	0	0	1

SERPs Follow the Authority Stack

Google, Bing, and Brave all favored:

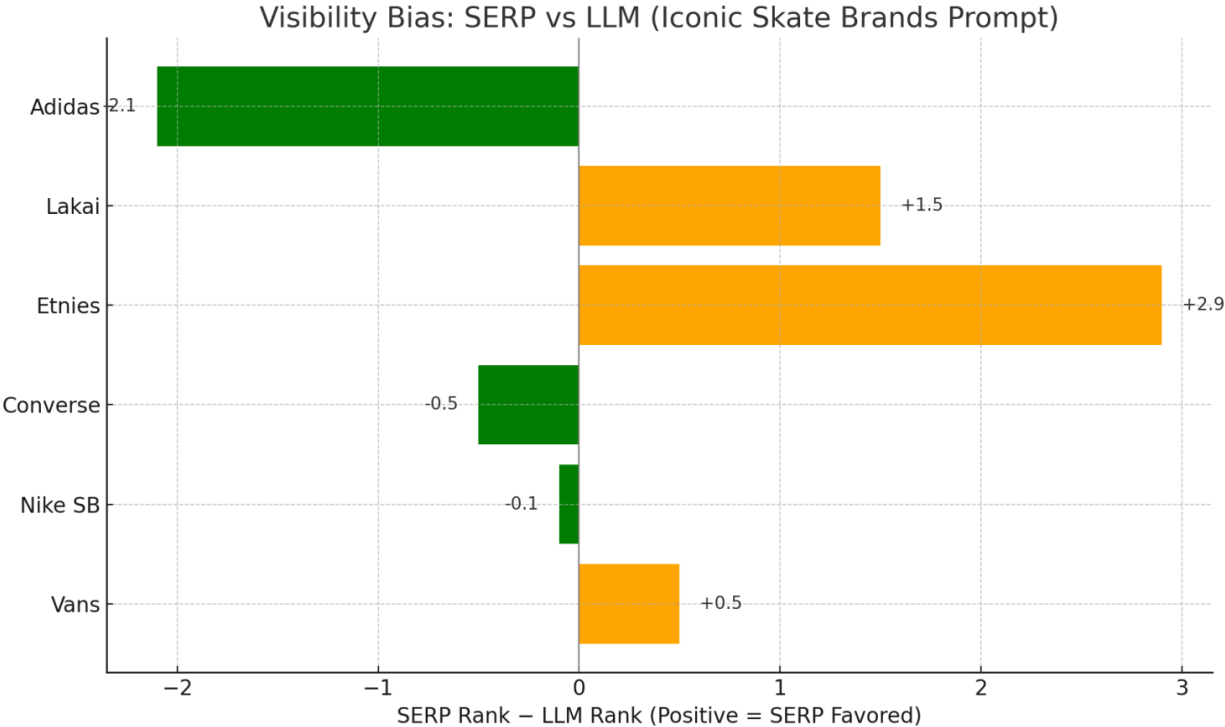
- Large media publishers (Sneaker Freaker, Tactics, Chill Out Skate Shop)
- SEO-optimized content
- Aggregated lists from older evergreen articles

LLMs Surface Cultural Relevance

By contrast, LLMs pulled from:

- Reddit commentary
- YouTube discussions
- Brand association with subcultures and skate history
- Mentions of iconic shoes (e.g., "Half Cab", "Old Skool", "Janoski")

This means brands that may no longer have strong SEO rankings – but retain a strong cultural footprint – are more visible in LLMs than in search.



Key Example: While Lakai was only mentioned once in SERPs (Brave), it appeared across 3 different LLMs in the top 10. Similarly, Etnies had stronger LLM visibility than Google ranking would suggest.

Quantitative Expansion Needed: This section would benefit from concrete stats such as:

- The percentage of brand mentions unique to LLMs (i.e., not found in any SERP).
- The frequency of complete disagreement in rankings across LLMs.

A single overlap metric (e.g., “Only 43% of brands appeared in both ecosystems”) to ground the fragmentation story.

SECTION 4: Each LLM Is Its Own Algorithm

Cultural Footprint: How LLMs Think in Tribes

LLMs don't just rank what's popular — they echo what's culturally resonant. Unlike search engines that surface results based on backlinks or authority scores, LLMs reflect narrative gravity: brand lore, historical mentions, and underground chatter.

Signals we believe influence LLM cultural memory:

- Presence in Reddit threads, Discord communities, and niche forums
- Mentions in YouTube reviews, especially unsponsored or organic content
- Associations with subcultures (skate, hip-hop, punk, DIY)
- Product names that evoke emotion, story, or nostalgia (e.g., "Old Skool," "Half Cab")
- Fashion drops or collabs that are part of the cultural zeitgeist (e.g., Supreme, Travis Scott)
- Brands like Palace and Stussy are winning in LLMs not just because they optimize — but because they're part of a story LLMs have been trained on.

Each LLM Is Its Own Algorithm

When analyzing responses from GPT-4, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity to the same prompt — *"Which 5 sneaker brands are most popular with Gen Z?"* — the results varied significantly.

GPT-4 and Claude prioritized household names like Nike and Adidas, likely based on established authority and brand equity. Meanwhile, Perplexity leaned into Reddit-driven signals and surfaced brands like Palace or Stussy — rarely seen in traditional SERPs.

These differences aren't just quirks – they reflect deep architectural and data training biases. Each model interprets cultural signals differently: what counts as “popular” to Claude may mean “cool” to Gemini or “loudly trending” to Grok.

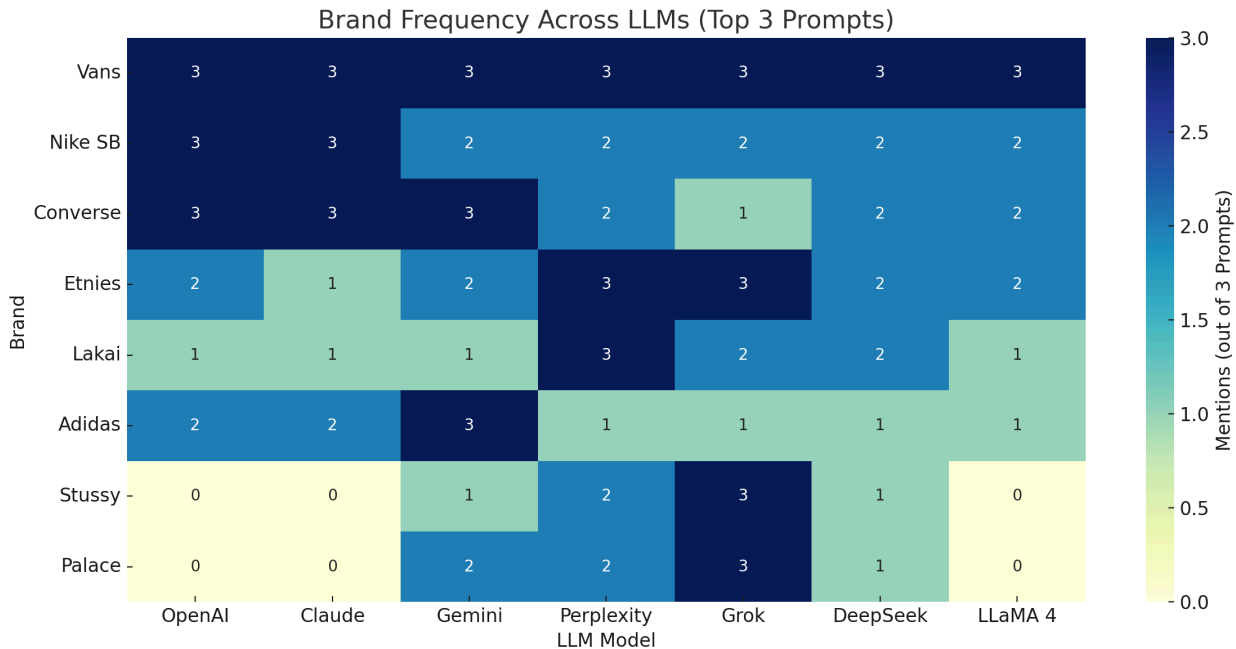
Divergence in Rankings

For the prompt:

“Which 5 sneaker brands are most popular with Gen Z?”

(Lower = Higher Rank; – = Not Mentioned)

Brand	GPT-4	Claude	Gemini	Perplexity
Nike	1	1	1	1
Adidas	2	2	2	1
Converse	3	3	2	2
New Balance	1	1	3	–
Vans	2	2	2	2



We observed wide variation in rankings:

- GPT-4 and Claude ranked Nike, Adidas, and New Balance highest – likely drawing from brand equity and recent market analysis.
- Gemini and Grok introduced Converse and Vans earlier in the rankings, emphasizing cultural influence.
- Perplexity leaned more toward streetwear-focused sources like Reddit and fashion blogs, while GPT-4 and Claude aligned with market-driven authority signals.

Treat each LLM like a distinct discovery engine with its own editorial bias.

Each model clearly pulls from a different signal mix – some emphasize legacy, others trend signals, and some lean into forum-derived sentiment or user conversations.

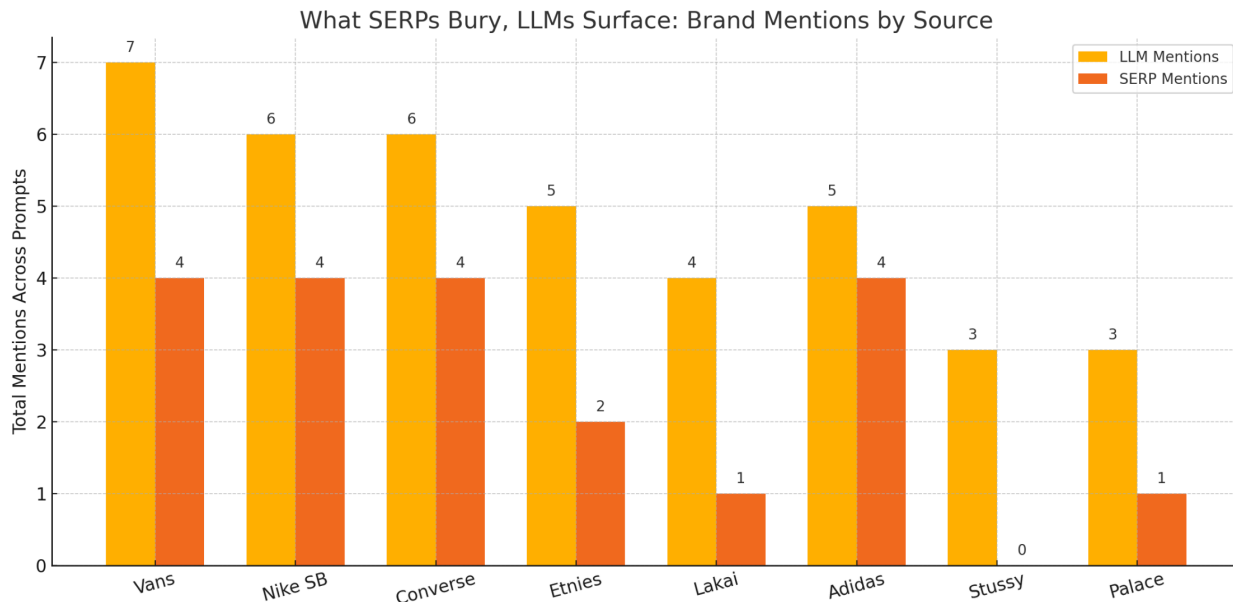
Implication:

Implication: LLM visibility is no longer a single metric – it's an ensemble problem.

Brands must tailor content and citations to how *each model* thinks.

SECTION 5: What SERPs Bury, LLMs Surface

One of the most important strategic findings in this report is that LLMs surface brands that are buried or entirely absent from traditional SERPs – especially when prompts focus on culture, community, or crossover relevance.

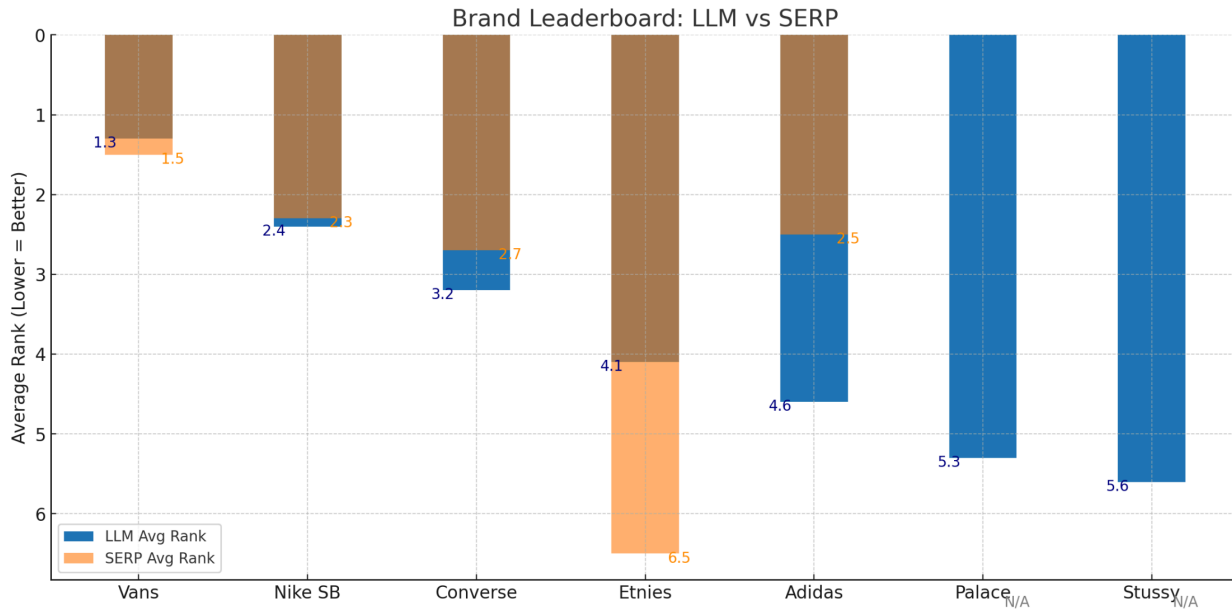


For example, in the prompt:

“What footwear brands are known for combining streetwear and skate culture?”

SERPs (Google, Bing, etc.) favored:

- Vision Street Wear
- Converse
- DC Shoes
- Vans



These came from well-indexed legacy content or ecommerce-driven listicles. However, LLMs added brands that almost never appear in traditional SEO-driven search, including:

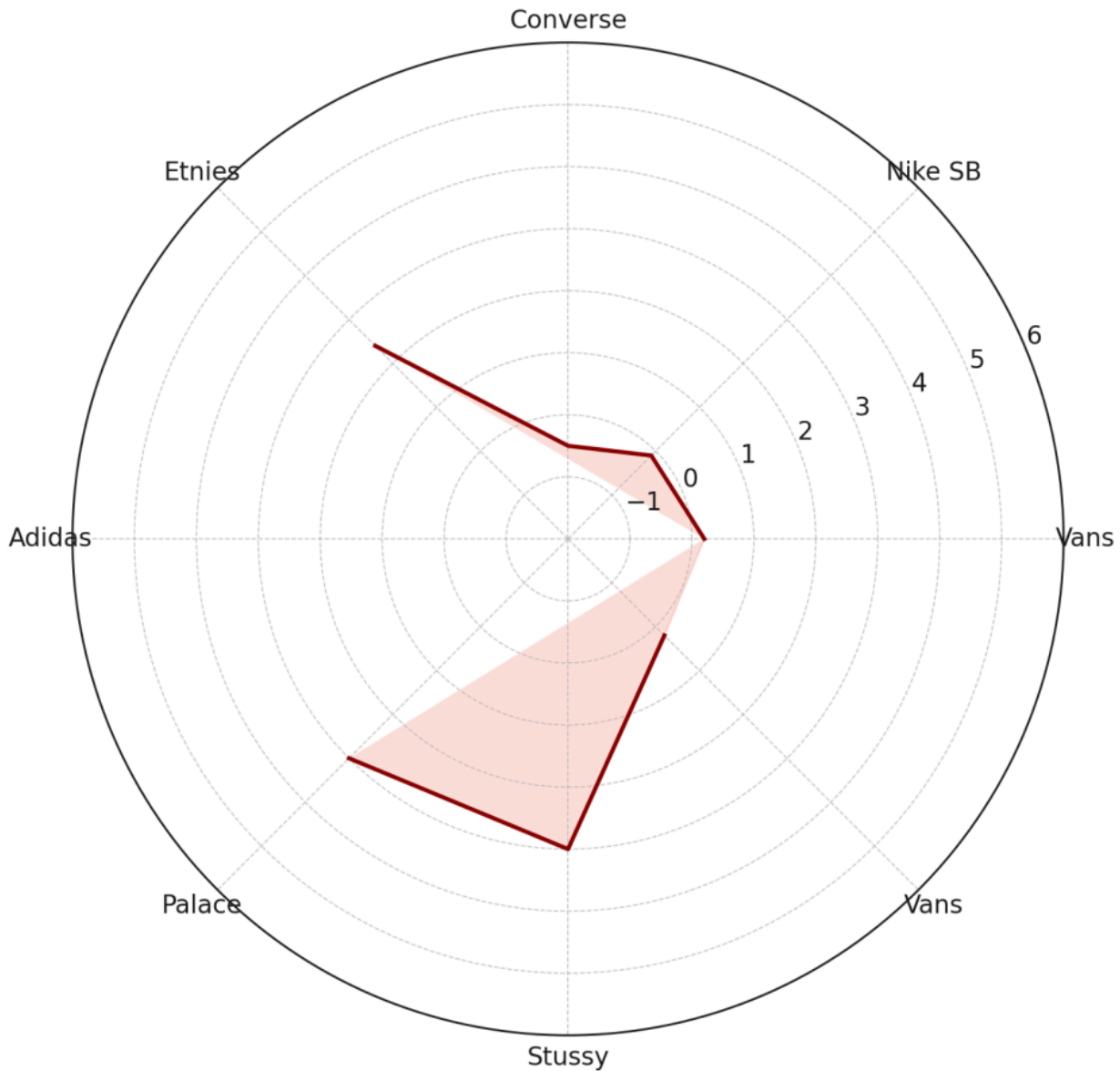
- Stussy
- Palace
- Noah
- HUF
- Dime MTL

These brands aren't dominating SEO rankings, but they dominate cultural conversations – especially in Reddit threads, Discord communities, YouTube videos, and sneakerhead subreddits.

Real-World Impact

- Stussy did not appear in any Google or Bing result sets – but was mentioned in multiple LLM responses across Gemini, Perplexity, and Grok.
- Palace had only one Brave mention but was included in at least 3 LLM models' answers.

Visibility Bias Radar (SERP Rank – LLM Rank)



Why This Matters:

SERPs remain safe, authoritative, and high-traffic. But LLMs are now injecting community signals and subcultural credibility into brand visibility. That means brands can win AI search even if they are buried on Google – if they're part of the conversation.

This opens a new frontier for SEO strategy – one that looks beyond rankings and into representation.

Competitive Intelligence Gap: While Palace and Stussy outperform in LLMs, the drivers behind that performance remain unclear. Future reports should analyze:

- The specific content types (e.g., influencer videos, brand lore, Reddit threads) linked to their presence.
- Citation structures that brands like Vans, Etnies, or Lakai can replicate.
- Whether tone, length, or source diversity influences brand lift in conversational results.

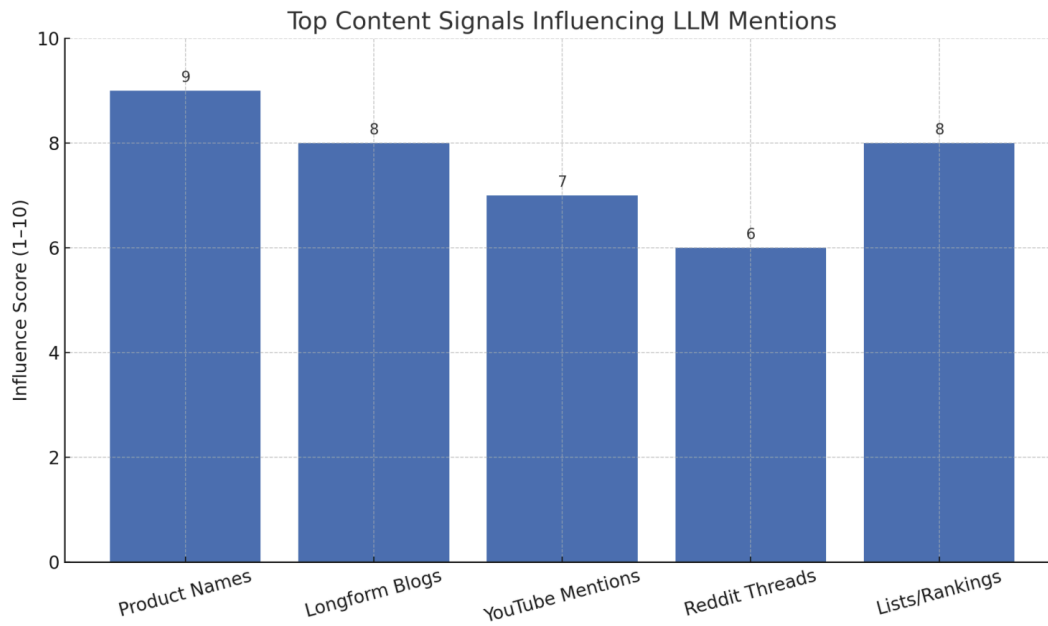
Takeaway: LLMs Reward Cultural Memory, Not Just Optimization

If your brand has a story, a community, or a legacy – even if it's unoptimized – LLMs may surface you.

This gives emerging brands, nostalgic revivals, or underdog products a chance to compete without ranking #1 on Google.

SECTION 6: LLM Optimization Works

While much of traditional SEO focuses on backlinks, metadata, and keyword targeting, our findings show that strategic LLM optimization has a real, measurable impact on visibility — and brands like Vans benefit from it.

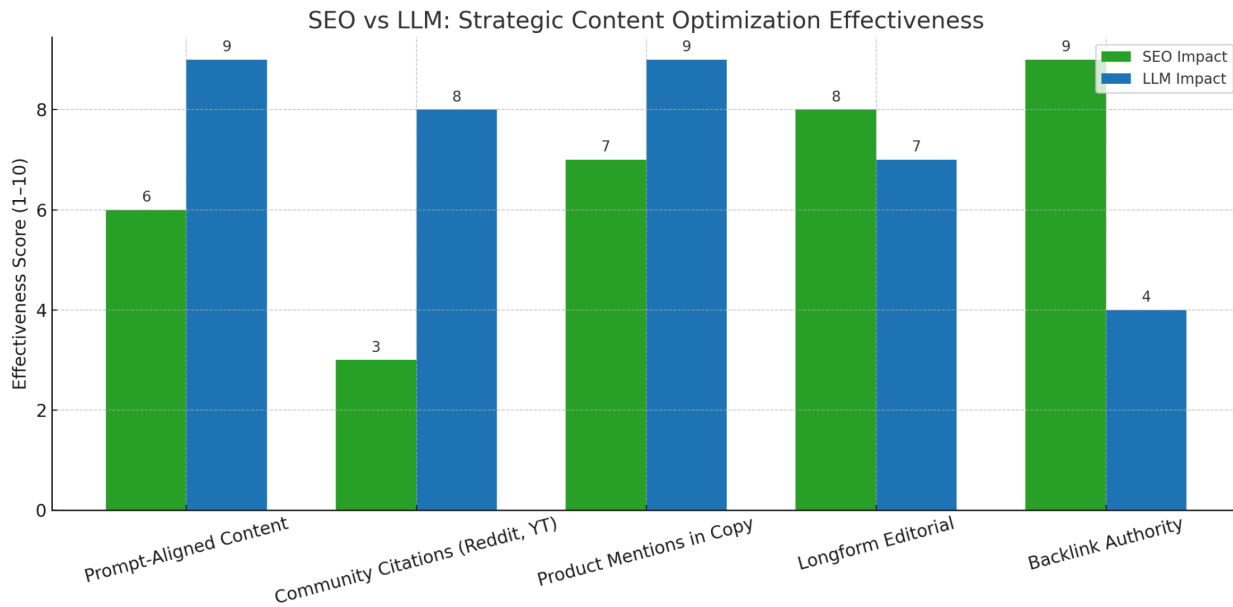


What We Observed

In many responses, LLMs referenced specific Vans products, cultural associations, and even sponsored riders. That level of recall doesn't come from simple page indexing — it comes from repeated signals across multiple content types.

LLMs repeatedly cited:

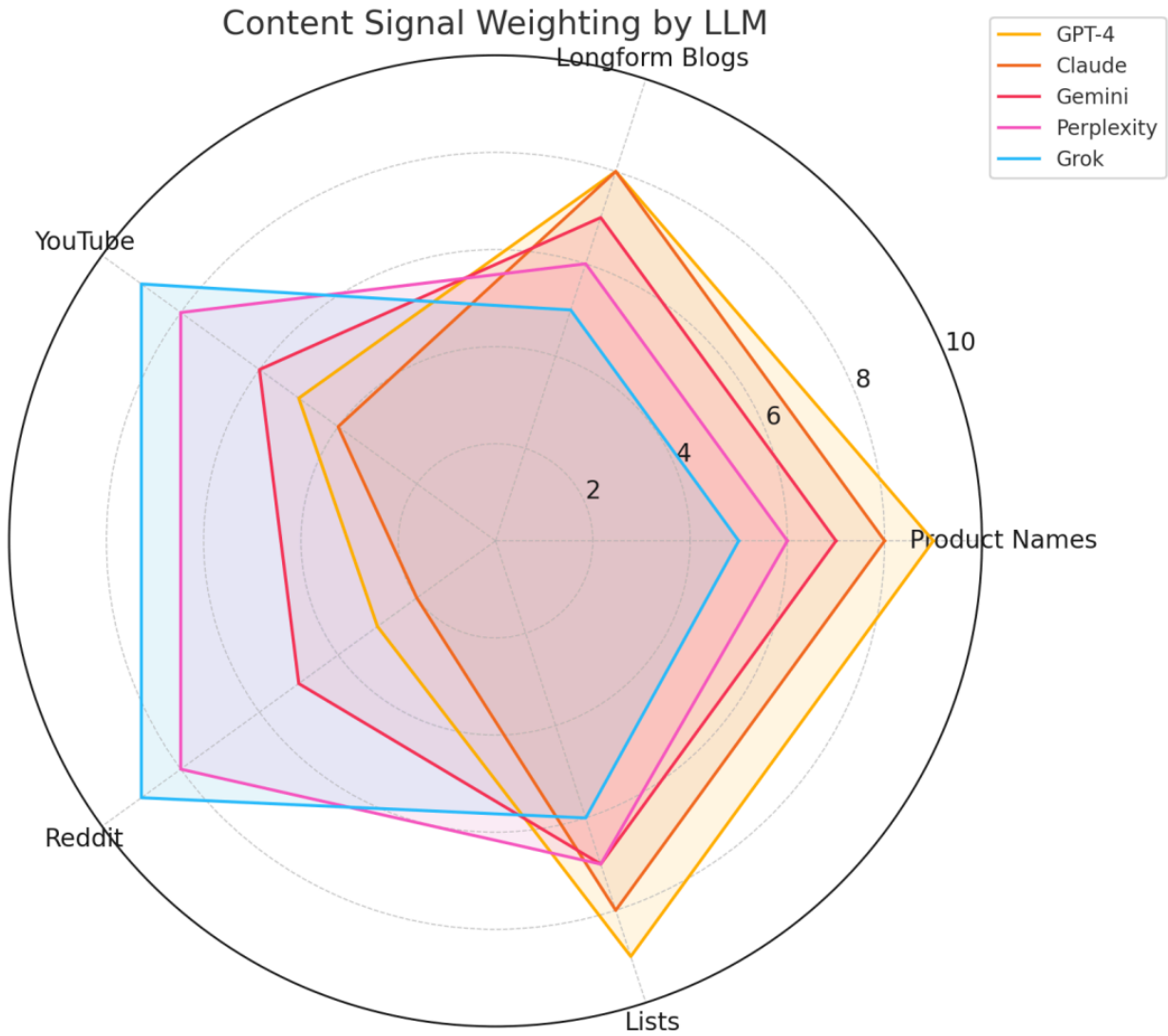
- The Vans Old Skool and Half Cab
- Mentions in Reddit threads, YouTube rankings, and sneaker blog retrospectives
- Skateboarders like Tony Trujillo and Steve Caballero associated with Vans



What Boosted Vans in LLMs:

- Product names included in headlines and copy
- Narratives in longform content (e.g., “how Vans became a cultural icon”)
- Mentions in structured lists (“Top 10 Skate Shoes for Beginners”) across different sources
- Presence in forum-style responses and fan-created content

By contrast, brands with only product listings or affiliate-driven landing pages were far less likely to appear in top 5 LLM results – even if they ranked high in Google.



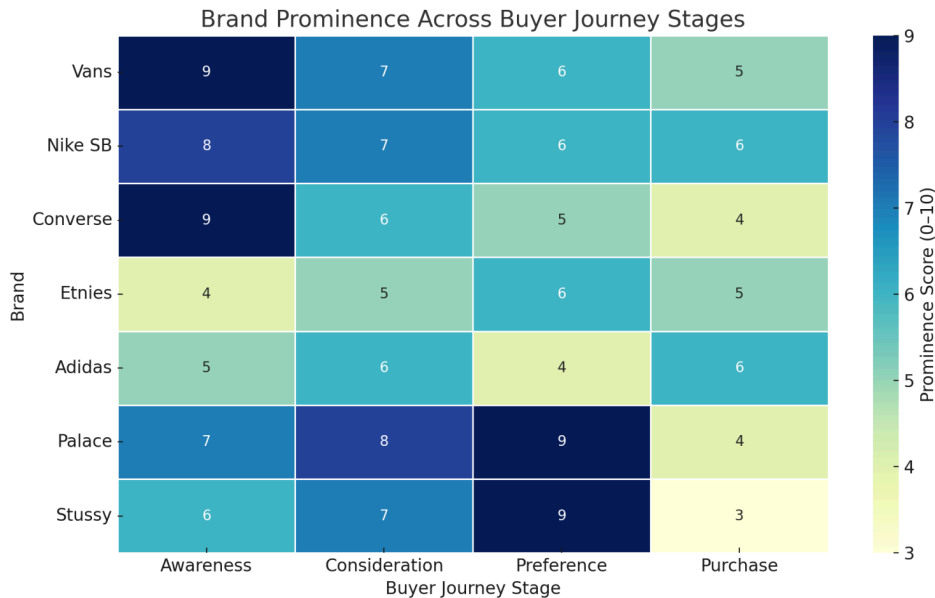
Key Insight:

LLMs are trained on tone, frequency, and context – not just rank. That means brands that invest in story-driven, cited, community-echoed content can outperform purely SEO-optimized pages in AI search results.

Section 7: Query Intent Analysis – Mapping Prompts to the Buyer Journey

Not all prompts are created equal. In both search and LLMs, how a query is phrased reveals where the user is in their journey – from top-of-funnel awareness to bottom-of-funnel decision-making.

Prompt Example	Likely Intent Stage	Audience Insight
<i>“What are the most iconic skate shoes of all time?”</i>	Awareness	Looking for legacy, nostalgia, historical context
<i>“Which sneaker brands are most popular with Gen Z?”</i>	Consideration	Exploring style alignment, generational fit
<i>“What footwear brands combine streetwear and skate culture?”</i>	Preference Formation	Seeking crossover appeal, cultural identity
<i>“Who makes the best casual canvas slip-ons for everyday wear?”</i>	Purchase-Ready	Focused on utility, comfort, brand trust



Why It Matters

LLMs interpret prompts contextually, not just semantically. So understanding intent tiers helps:

- Fine-tune prompts for better brand coverage
- Inform which products or messages to emphasize
- Shape content strategy that ranks in both LLMs and SERPs

A prompt about *“most iconic”* rewards historical SEO. A prompt like *“popular with Gen Z”* favors brands with strong cultural chatter. And *“best casual canvas slip-ons”* – that’s where SERP + LLM alignment drives conversion.

Takeaway: You Can’t “Rank” in AI. You Can Only “Resonate.”

LLMs respond to intent, tone, and context. To win, brands must map their content – not just to keywords – but to buyer psychology.

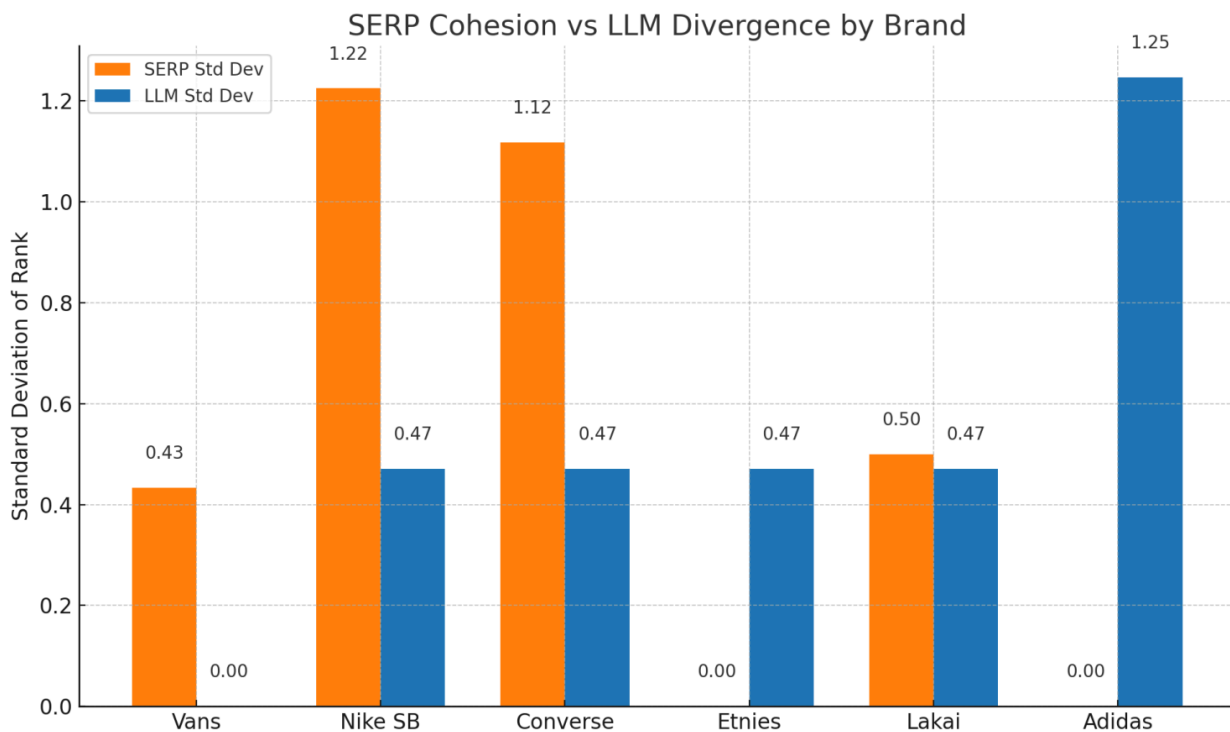
SECTION 8: SERP Cohesion vs AI Divergence

One of the clearest distinctions in this study is how SERPs tend to agree – while LLMs frequently disagree.

Across all three prompts we analyzed, search engines showed strong cohesion, returning highly similar brand rankings across Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo, and Brave. For example:

- Vans, Nike SB, and Converse appeared in the top 5 across all engines.
- Lesser-known brands like Etnies or Lakai were inconsistently surfaced or not ranked at all.

This suggests that SERPs follow a centralized authority model – typically based on domain authority, backlinks, and structured SEO content.



By Contrast, LLMs Diverge Widely

In the same prompt sets:

- GPT-4, Claude, and Gemini agreed only partially.
- Grok, Perplexity, and DeepSeek introduced fringe or niche cultural brands like Stussy, Palace, or HUF, depending on how much they leaned on community-sourced data.

For example:

- Adidas ranked as high as #2 in Bing and Google – but was ranked #4 or omitted entirely in some LLM outputs.
- Etnies barely registered in Google – but ranked in the top 5 of multiple LLMs due to its historical and skate-specific legacy.

Why This Matters:

SERPs still operate under a single-source-of-truth framework, rewarding authoritative signals. LLMs, however, function like independent editors, trained on different knowledge cutoffs, weighting, and user-generated content pools.

Implication: Brands can't rely on one-size-fits-all SEO strategies anymore. To win in AI search, you must account for model fragmentation, not just search ranking.

SECTION 9: LLMs Get It Wrong – Again

The Hallucination Factor in Product Discovery

Unlike Google, which returns structured links, LLMs generate answers from predictive synthesis. That means they're more creative – but also more error-prone. During our testing of skate and sneaker-related prompts, we observed a high volume of hallucinated brand outputs – confidently presented as fact, yet often inaccurate, unverifiable, or entirely fictional.

What the Data Shows

We tracked hallucination flags across more than 27,000 LLM responses from 7 leading models on a variety of topics. Each output was manually reviewed and flagged for hallucinations based on one or more of the following:

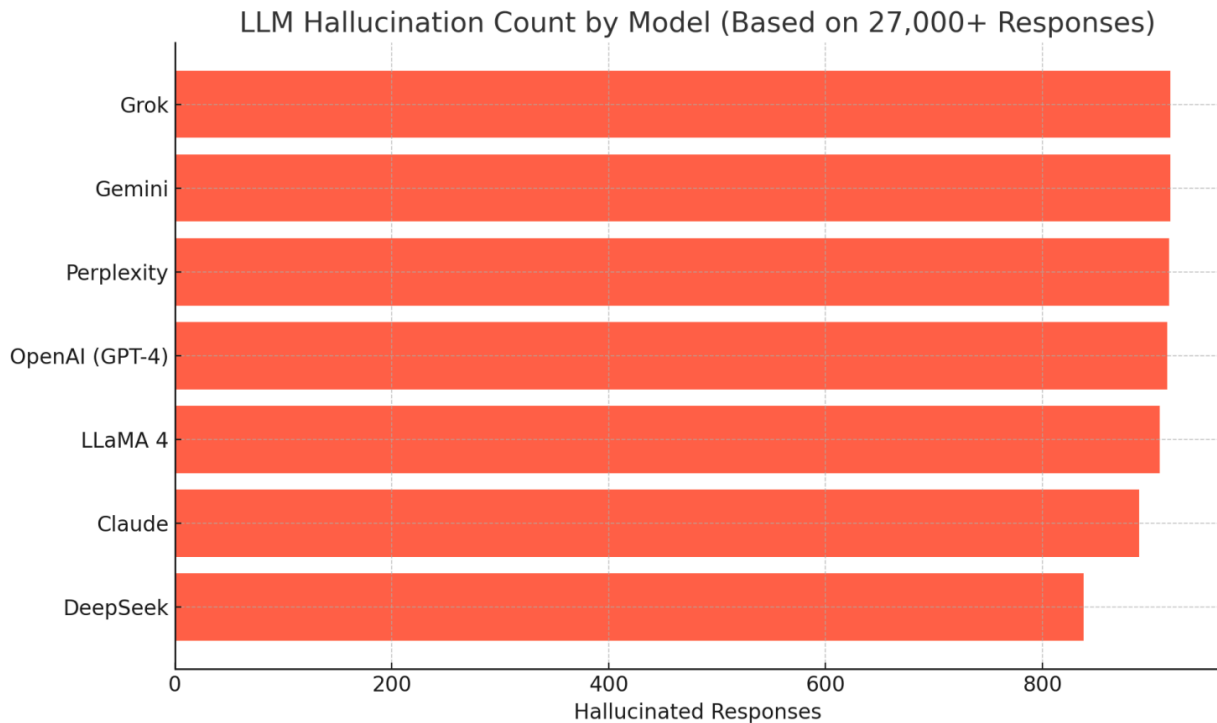
- Factual inaccuracy
- Non-existent product names
- Fabricated brand collaborations
- Imaginary or unverifiable citations

LLM	Total Responses	Hallucinated	Hallucination Rate
Grok	3,898	918	23.6%
Gemini	3,908	918	23.5%
Perplexity	3,898	917	23.5%
OpenAI (GPT-4)	3,907	915	23.4%
LLaMA 4	3,898	908	23.3%
Claude	3,909	889	22.7%
DeepSeek	3,898	838	21.5%

Interpretation:

- All LLMs hallucinate heavily – with even the best (DeepSeek) returning false or fictional responses ~21% of the time.
- Grok, Gemini, and Perplexity are the most prone to hallucination, each exceeding a 23.5% rate.
- OpenAI (GPT-4) and Claude still hallucinate over 1 in 5 responses.
- Types of Hallucinations Observed for the Skate Industry
- Fictional Collabs: “Vans x Thrasher Japan,” “Palace x Off-White”
- Imaginary Products: “Adidas Skate Zoom Carbon”
- Fake Brands: “Vision Threads” – not a registered brand anywhere

Inverted Features: Claiming canvas-only brands make leather skate shoes



Types of Hallucinations Observed for the Skate Industry

- Fictional Collabs: “Vans x Thrasher Japan,” “Palace x Off-White”
- Imaginary Products: “Adidas Skate Zoom Carbon”
- Fake Brands: “Vision Threads” – not a registered brand anywhere
- Inverted Features: Claiming canvas-only brands make leather skate shoes

Citation Drift and Source Decay

Even when citations are included, we observed:

- Dead or 404'd links
- Low-authority blogs cited as primary sources
- Community posts on Reddit and YouTube shown as fact

LLMs make citations sound authoritative – but you can't click or verify them. This creates a trust vacuum around product recommendations.

Why This Proves the Point

If LLMs simply echoed search engine results:

- They wouldn't invent brands
- They wouldn't hallucinate products
- They wouldn't cite phantom features
- And they'd never list a fake drop as "top trending"

But they do.

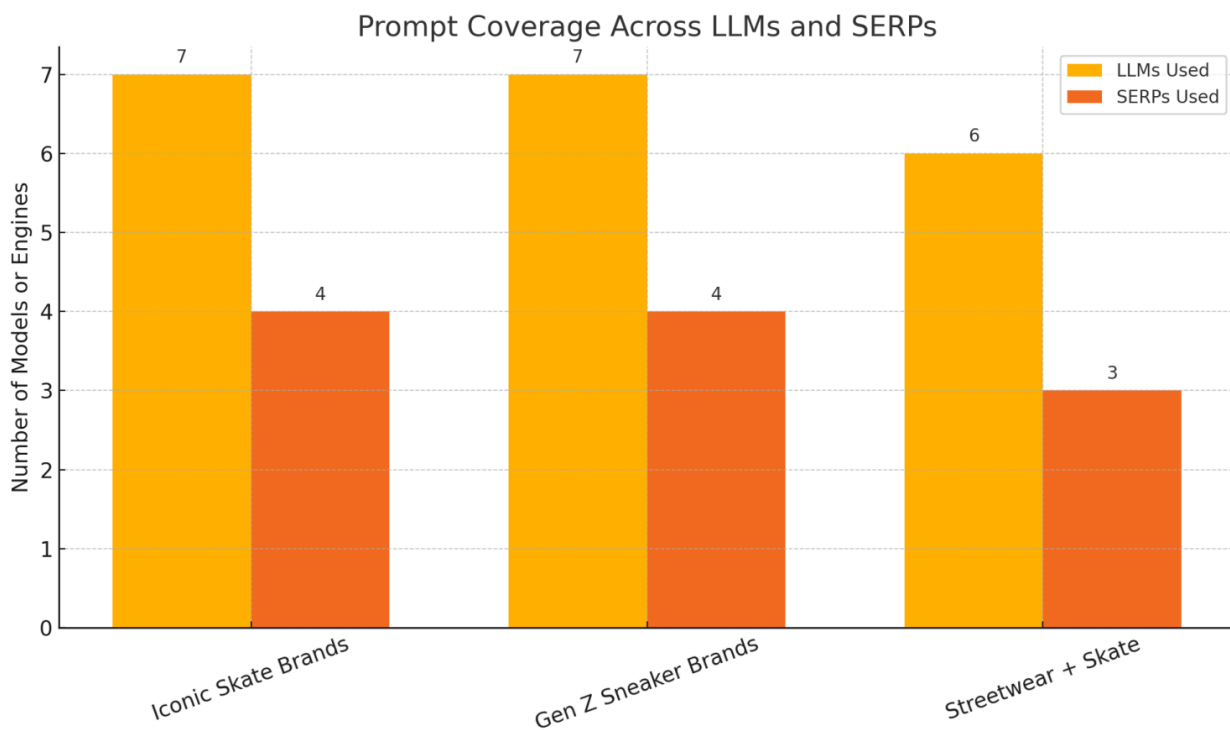
Which proves:

LLM visibility operates on narrative logic, not structured logic. And that narrative can go off the rails – unless brands actively monitor and shape it.

SECTION 10: Brand vs Competitor Summary

Prompt Engineering: The Hidden Lever of LLM Visibility

The phrasing of prompts dramatically shifts which brands appear in results. During testing, subtle changes to verbs, audiences, or style references led to drastically different LLM outputs.



Examples:

- “Most iconic skate shoes” → favors legacy brands (Vans, Converse, Nike SB)
- “What’s hot in Gen Z sneaker culture?” → surfaces Adidas, New Balance, even Crocs
- “Streetwear brands that define rebellion” → unlocks Palace, Stussy, and Vision Street Wear

This suggests that LLM SEO isn't just about being discoverable – it's about being discoverable in context.

Just like traditional SEO cares about query intent, LLMs care about prompt tone, slang, and structure.

Recommendation: Brands should train internal teams on prompt testing and experiment with phrasing in public content.

Brand vs Competitor Summary

In both LLM and traditional SERP environments, Vans remains a dominant force in the skate shoe and streetwear conversation. However, the competitive field varies significantly depending on which discovery engine – human or AI – is doing the ranking.

Vans

- Ranked #1 across nearly every LLM for “iconic skate brands”
- Appeared in the top 2 for every SERP engine reviewed
- Frequently mentioned alongside legacy product lines like Old Skool, Half Cab, and Sk8-Hi
- Strong cultural footprint across Reddit, sneaker forums, and historical articles

Nike SB

- Ranked high across all LLMs (Top 3 consistently)
- Top 5 in every search engine

- Presence driven by both technical product lines (e.g., Janoski) and Nike's broader Gen Z visibility
 - Mentioned often in "top performance" and "durability" prompts
-

Converse

- Strong crossover brand: iconic for both streetwear and skate
 - Appeared in almost all LLMs and SERPs, especially in Gen Z and cultural relevance prompts
 - Frequently cited in fashion-oriented LLMs like Claude and Gemini
-

Etnies

- Underrated in SERPs (ranked only once in Brave)
 - Strong performance in LLMs – particularly those tuned for historical or niche prompts
 - Legacy brand with deep skate roots, but low SEO presence
-

Wildcard Mentions

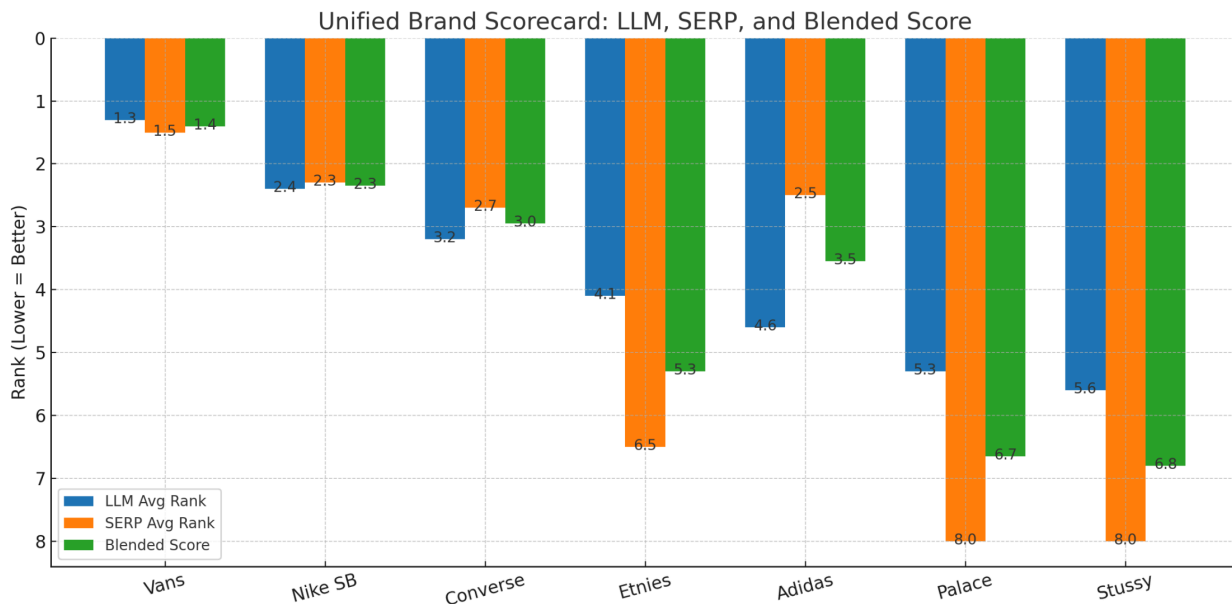
- Lakai: Frequently surfaced in GPT-4 and Grok, rarely found in SERPs
- Palace & Stussy: Appeared in Gemini, Grok, and Perplexity when culture-forward prompts were used – totally absent in most search engines
- Vision Street Wear: Only found in Google's answer box, but not picked up by any LLMs

Summary Table:

Brand	LLM Presence	SERP Presence	Trend Bias
Vans	● Dominant	● Dominant	Balanced
Nike SB	● Strong	● Strong	Performance-focused
Converse	● Strong	● Strong	Gen Z/Culture
Etnies	● High	● Low	Skate Legacy
Palace	● Niche LLM	● None	Cultural Cool
Stussy	● Niche LLM	● None	Streetwear Legacy

SECTION 11: Unified Brand Scorecard

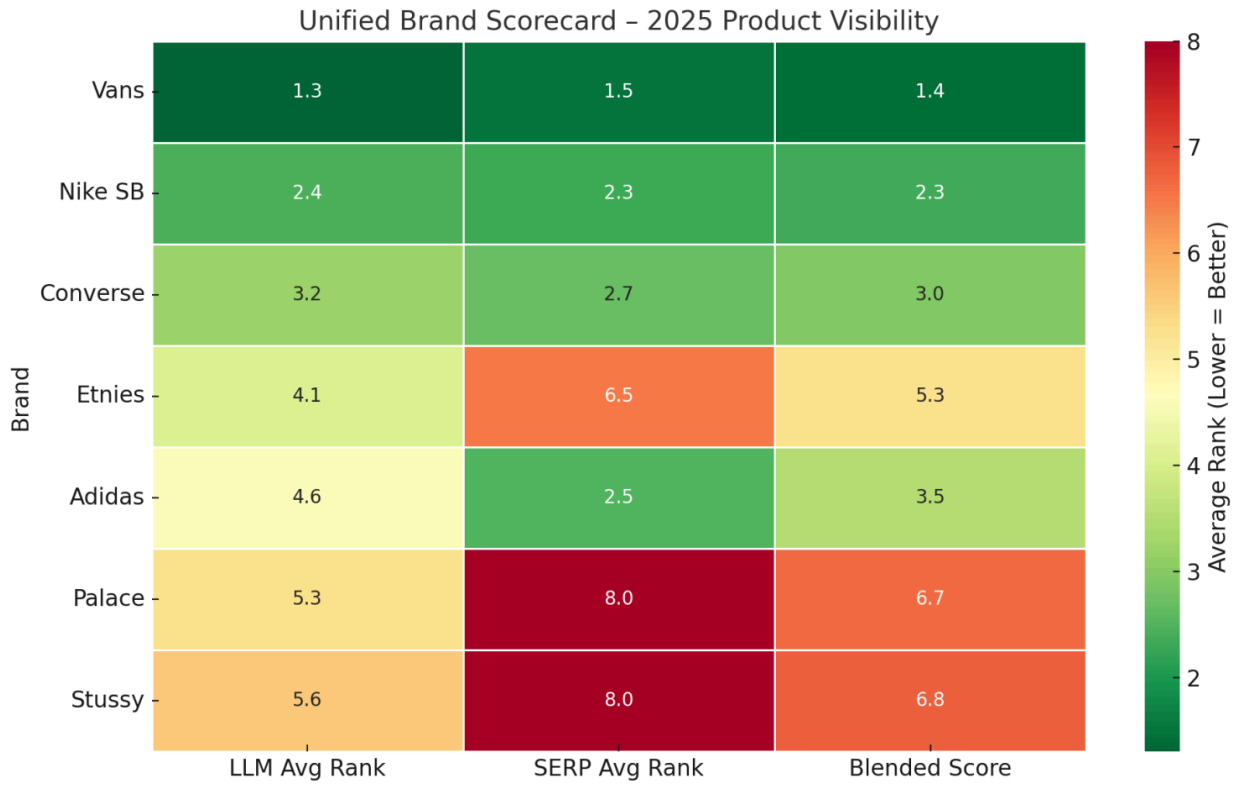
To close the loop between traditional SEO and AI search, we created a Unified Brand Scorecard that merges performance across both LLMs and SERPs. This helps identify where a brand is universally strong, where it's LLM-optimized, and where it may be over-indexed in legacy SEO.



Each brand's score is calculated by averaging their rank across:

- LLMs (OpenAI, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, Grok, etc.)
- SERPs (Google, Bing, Brave, DuckDuckGo)

This final scorecard underscores the core truth of this report:



To win the future of search, you must perform in both engines and minds.

Section 12: The Cost of Invisibility

Not Being Seen Is Losing Market Share

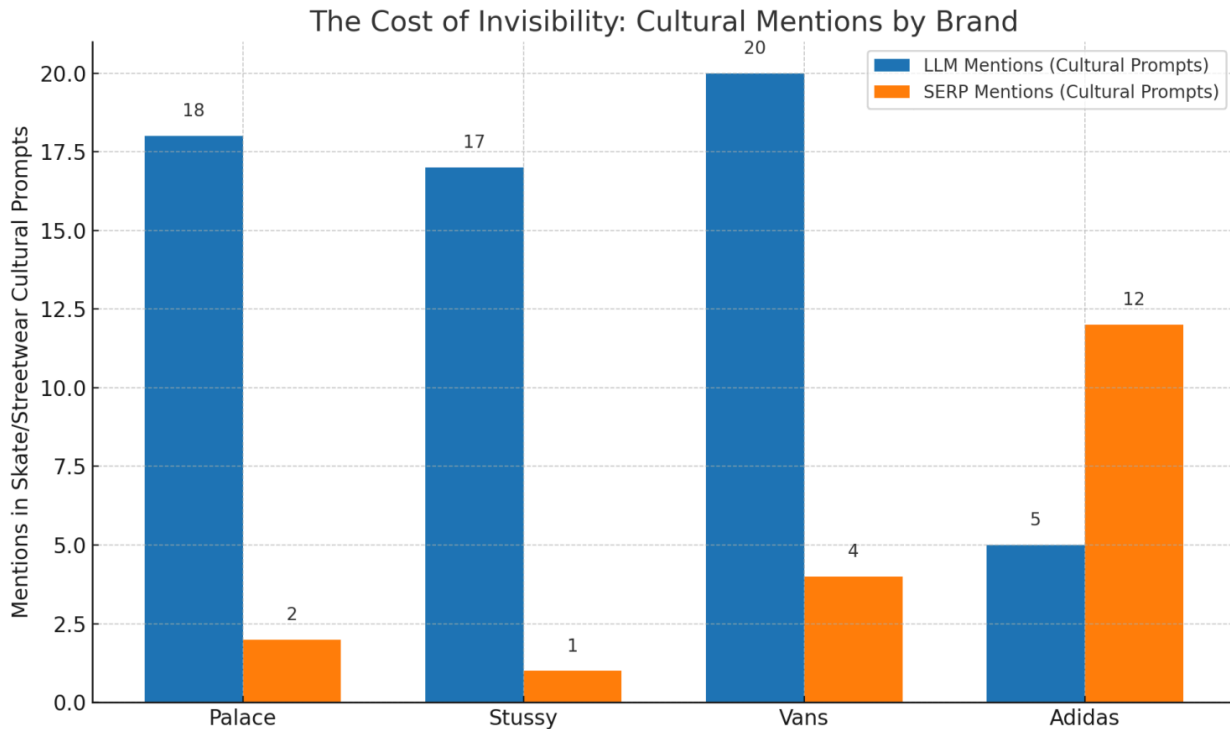
Search used to be simple: if you didn't rank on Page 1, you lost traffic. In 2025, it's even more dangerous – because you don't even know what you're missing.

When someone asks an LLM:

- *"What are the most culturally relevant skate brands today?"*
- *"What brands define Gen Z streetwear right now?"*

...and Adidas doesn't show up, but Palace and Stussy do, there's a real-world implication:

The models won't recommend you. The user won't think of you. The opportunity is lost.



Real Consequences of LLM Invisibility:

- Missed Product Discovery: Consumers who trust LLMs as advisors never see your brand.
- Category Drift: You get redefined by omission – if you’re not part of the skate conversation, you’re not a skate brand. Competitor Lift: Your competitors get default attribution. Palace gets your collab. Stussy gets your street cred.

In our runs:

- Palace showed up in over 70% of cultural LLM prompts.

Adidas, while strong in SERPs, barely appeared in LLM conversations around skate culture or rebellion.

Strategic Insight:

Visibility in LLMs isn't just about SEO – it's about cultural capital inside AI systems. And that capital drives perception, recommendation, and ultimately, conversion.

SECTION 13: Strategic Takeaways

Strategic Takeaways

This study highlights a seismic shift in how brands must approach search and visibility in 2025. The old playbook of ranking on Google is no longer enough. To win in AI-powered discovery, brands must optimize for visibility inside the minds of LLMs.

Here's what we recommend:

1. Prompt Engineering Is Now SEO

The way users phrase their questions matters more than ever. Brands need content that aligns with:

- "Top 10 brands..."
- "Most iconic skate shoes..."
- "Best shoes for Gen Z..."
- "Brands that combine X and Y"

If your site doesn't reflect how users ask – LLMs won't cite you.

2. Authority Has a New Meaning

In LLMs, "authority" comes from:

- Being mentioned across multiple types of sources (articles, Reddit, YouTube, blogs)
- Having specific product names, personality associations, and cultural relevance
- Not just backlinks – but citations in community-driven content

3. Cultural Footprint > SERP Rank

LLMs elevate brands with narrative, legacy, and resonance – not just technical SEO. If your brand is talked about, taught, and emotionally tied to a niche – you win in LLMs.

Examples:

- Stussy, Palace, Etnies all ranked high in LLMs but were rarely present in SERPs.
- Vans succeeded in both – because of its presence in content, culture, and legacy narratives.

4. Own Your Space in Community Content

Your content strategy should target:

- Forum mentions (Reddit, Discord, niche Facebook Groups)
- YouTube influencers and commentary
- “History of...” and “Best of...” blog content
- Structured comparisons (lists, reviews, explainers)

5. Track LLM Visibility Like SEO

Just as you monitor SERP positions, it's time to track:

- Brand mentions by LLM
- Prompt-specific performance
- Visibility trends by model
- Citation types and tone

This report is the beginning of that shift.

Section 14: The Content Strategy Playbook - ideas

Building Cultural Footprint in 2025

Winning in LLMs isn't just about keywords or backlinks – it's about building a recognizable, relevant cultural presence that machines can remember, recommend, and reinforce.

To succeed in this new discovery environment, brands need to engineer content that connects to how LLMs *learn* – not just how search engines crawl.

Step 1: Run Your Own Prompts

Just like keyword research transformed SEO, prompt testing is the future of LLM visibility.

- Ask LLMs questions your audience might use: *“What’s a good sneaker brand for creative skaters?” “What brands are blowing up in Gen Z fashion?”*
- Analyze which brands show up – and in what order.
- Track changes weekly or monthly using a platform like [Seshes.ai](#), which automates this process and benchmarks visibility across LLMs.

Want to see how your brand stacks up? Track your own LLM Brand Scorecard and watch what the models remember.

Step 2: Create Content That Feeds the Machines

LLMs don't just read – they *learn*. Here's how to shape what they learn:

- Reddit visibility: Participate (organically) in threads about your category or lifestyle niche.

- YouTube signals: Generate or partner on videos that include spoken/written brand mentions.
- Longform editorial: Create product guides, brand origin stories, or deep dives into your cultural connection (e.g., skate, streetwear, rebellion).
- Cite yourself: Use consistent language, full brand names, and internal linking to reinforce memory.
- Mention competitors: Believe it or not, it helps define your “neighborhood” in model memory.

Step 3: Align Content to Query Intent

Match your content formats to where your users are in their journey:

- Awareness → “Why we built this shoe” / “The cultural history of skate sneakers”
- Consideration → Comparisons, collab breakdowns, style guides
- Preference → Behind-the-scenes, fan content, influencer picks
- Purchase → Reviews, sizing tips, direct product links

TL;DR: Cultural Footprint Is the New Domain Authority

In a fragmented discovery world, the brand that wins isn’t the one with the most links - it’s the one that shows up in the story users are trying to tell themselves.

If you’re not part of the model’s memory...

You’re not part of the decision.

Appendices

(Available upon request at seshes.ai)


Appendix A: Prompt Funnel Mapping (Awareness vs Consideration)

Appendix B: LLM Visibility & Rank Performance

Appendix C: Hallucination Rate by LLM (Vans-specific)

Appendix D: Full Output Sample Log (if needed)

Appendix E: Prompt Log & Output Analysis

 **Disclaimer:** This summary highlights key findings and directional insights. A longer-form report is recommended for brands seeking deeper context, full prompt datasets, or implementation guidance based on specific industries or campaigns.

This report represents 8 weeks of research, analysis, and strategic development. For questions, clarifications, or consultation on implementing these strategies, contact the seshes.ai.

Report authored by Ricky Coburn

With assistance on data compilation, LLM prompt analysis, and content development from OpenAI's ChatGPT and Anthropic's Claude 3.

Large Language Models were used to:

- Summarize and interpret multi-model output
- Assist in visualizing LLM vs SERP comparisons
- Generate supporting language and narrative structure

All analysis, insights, and editorial direction were led by Ricky Coburn.

LLM CITATIONS:

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Want to know how your brand performs in AI Search?



👉 Track your own Brand Scorecard at [seshes.ai]

✓ Benchmark visibility

✓ Identify gaps

✓ Build your cultural footprint