TYGART MEDIA RESEARCH BRIEF REFERENCE

Cited First, Chosen Second • Field Quick Reference Card

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Update history: tygartmedia.com/cited-first-chosen-second/

THREE-TIER QUICK CARD: MENTIONED VS CITED VS RECOMMENDED

94%
CITED IN RESEARCH → NAMED IN CHOICE
Brands AI cited while researching category

50%
NEVER CITED → NAMED IN CHOICE
Brands AI never cited at research stage

4 : 1
BREAKTHROUGH ADVANTAGE
81% vs 21% breakthrough rate for unrecommended brands

1. THE THREE VISIBILITY TIERS DEFINED IN ONE LINE EACH

HIERARCHY OF AI DISCOVERY

TIER	ONE-LINE DEFINITION	OPERATIONAL MEANING TO THE PLATFORM	FIX / ACTION REQUIRED
Tier 1: MENTIONED BOTTOM RUNG	**Its name exists somewhere in the answer's world.**	The brand is recognized as an entity, but its own content is not treated as authoritative evidence. Passive background presence.	Broad digital footprint, entity clarity, third-party mentions (needed: 24k–28k mentions for 50/50 shot).
Tier 2: CITED MIDDLE RUNG (PREDICTOR)	**Its own content is used as a source while someone learns how a category works.**	The platform files the company under *"sources I trust on this subject."* Treats page as evidence, not brochure text.	Reference-style explainers: specific numbers, current dates, named sources, zero sales language.
Tier 3: RECOMMENDED TOP RUNG (OUTCOME)	**Named when the buyer asks who to choose.**	Direct response to consideration query ("who should I hire/buy?"). Drawn directly from the qualified cited tier.	Cannot be worked on directly in isolation. Earned by winning research-tier citations first.

2. WHY THEY ARE NOT THE SAME JOB

CORE OPERATIONAL MECHANICS

A Citation Is Not a Compliment

EVIDENCE STANDARD

When a model answers *"what should I check before choosing an insurance provider?"* and builds that answer on your content, it has filed your company under **sources I trust on this subject**.

- That filing decision carries forward into the next conversation when the question shifts to *"who should I hire."*
- The explanation is the audition; the recommendation is the callback.
- Most analytics dashboards lump all three together — hiding the one leading indicator that predicts the others.

The Ladder Principle

PREDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

The Victorious data demonstrates that the middle rung predicts the top rung:

- **Research to Recommendation:** 94% of brands cited during research were named during consideration.
- **Breakthrough Rate:** 81% of cited brands with zero prior recommendations broke through within 3 months, vs just 21% of uncited brands.
- **Direct Control:** You cannot force a model to recommend you directly; you *can* build the reference page it relies on for evidence.

3. THE SECOND NUMBER TO PLAN AROUND: THE 4:1 BREAKTHROUGH GAP

JULY 1 – OCTOBER 2026 TRACKING

BRAND COHORT (JULY 1 BASELINE: 0 CONSIDERATION NAMES)	SAMPLE SIZE	BROKE THROUGH BY OCTOBER	EMPIRICAL TAKEAWAY
Already Cited on Research Questions	21 brands	**81% (17 brands)**	Citations actively opened the door to consideration answers.
No Prior Research Citations (Uncited)	19 brands	**21% (4 brands)**	Tried to arrive unnamed and uncited; 4x lower breakthrough rate.

The Core Law of AI Discovery: The recommendation is decided earlier than the recommendation question. If you want an AI platform to say your name when a buyer asks who to choose, first give it a reason to cite your work when that buyer was still asking how the job works.

EMPIRICAL DATASET, MEASURED THRESHOLDS & ACTION PLAN

4. WHAT WAS ACTUALLY MEASURED (VICTORIOUS Q3 2026 REPORT)

STUDY PARAMETERS

161 Brands / 5 Sectors

- Ecommerce & retail
- Financial services & insurance
- Healthcare
- Legal services
- SaaS

16,500 AI Answers

Collected end of Sept 2026 across **6 web-searching AI platforms** using real US query datasets from Ahrefs Brand Radar.

Query Partitioning

- **Research:** How something works / what to look for.
- **Consideration:** Who to choose.

Controls for brand size confirmed gap.

5. THE THREE MEASURED THRESHOLDS EVERY OPERATOR MUST PLAN AROUND

FIELD BENCHMARKS

MEASURED PHENOMENON	EXACT MEASURED FIGURE	OPERATIONAL IMPACT & STRATEGY
The Room Got Smaller (Named Set Shrinkage)	**42 → 29 Brands Named** **15 dropped out**, 2 came in	AI concentrated recommendation answers on fewer brands between Q2 and Q3. Top-tier visibility is not a possession; it is a lease, and the rent went up.
The Rent Went Up (Web Presence Threshold)	**20,000 → 24,000–28,000** Third-party web mentions	The amount of third-party web presence a brand needs for a 50/50 shot of being named rose by 20% to 40% in a single quarter.
Research Shelf Rearrangement (Citation Share by Domain Type)	• Brand Sites: **65.2%** → **55.5%** (−9.7%) • Gov Sites: **4.2%** → **11.7%** (+7.5%) • Assoc Sites: **3.9%** → **9.8%** (+5.9%)	Brand content no longer competes just with rival brands. It competes with regulators, trade associations, and top-10 incumbents (legal top-10 hold ~50% of citations).

6. WHAT WE DO DIFFERENTLY KNOWING THIS: 5 OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVES

ACTION PLAYBOOK

1. Track Questions Before the Question	For every "who should I choose" query, identify the **2 to 3 research questions** a buyer asks first. Measure whether your content is cited in those answers — not only whether your name appears in the final buying answer.
2. Report the Tiers Separately	Mentioned, Cited, and Recommended are **three different numbers with three different fixes**. A dashboard that blends them hides the leading indicator that predicts the others.
3. Earn Placement in Trusted Sources	Association guides, trade publications, and directories are taking citation share. A contribution there puts your company name inside a source the platform already relies upon.
4. Measure on a Monthly Rhythm	Citations drift: asking the same platform the same question twice reuses only **25% to 74%** of its sources. Three months apart, overlap drops to **6% to 16%**. A single screenshot is an anecdote; a monthly reading is a measurement.
5. Defend the Shelf You Hold	15 brands fell out of the named set in one quarter. If AI cites your explainer today, that page is an active asset with a maintenance schedule, not a finished project.

Citation-Ready Explainer Standard

"Publish more explainers" is not a strategy. An explainer that reads like a brochure loses citations to association pages that read like references. The answer that gets cited contains: **specific numbers, current dates, named sources, and zero sales language**.

Tygart Media Fleet Benchmark

Across 3,229 published posts on tygartmedia.com, the most-cited asset — a pricing explainer — carried **~96,000 citations** in a September Bing export. Built on purpose: explainers written to be used as evidence.