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The New Search Journey: Why Influence Is the New SEO Metric



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- 12 years' experience in content marketing
- Heads up the Connective3 Manchester office
- Worked with brands including Nike, Avon, and Oxford University Press
- Current obsessions: Robot Olympics



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12 years ago...

The 2014 search journey

Why was it so much easier?

Search

Click

Website

Conversion!

So simple, so beautiful

And this is how we
measured success...

- ✓ Keyword rankings
- ✓ Organic clicks
- ✓ Organic traffic
- ✓ Links
- ✓ Conversions

Social media

Was much more about connection and fun (and less about search)



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Then, the
journey got
messier



Search timeline

2016 – 2019

Mobile changed how we searched

- Mobile became dominant
- Visual content grew
- Social platforms became increasingly important

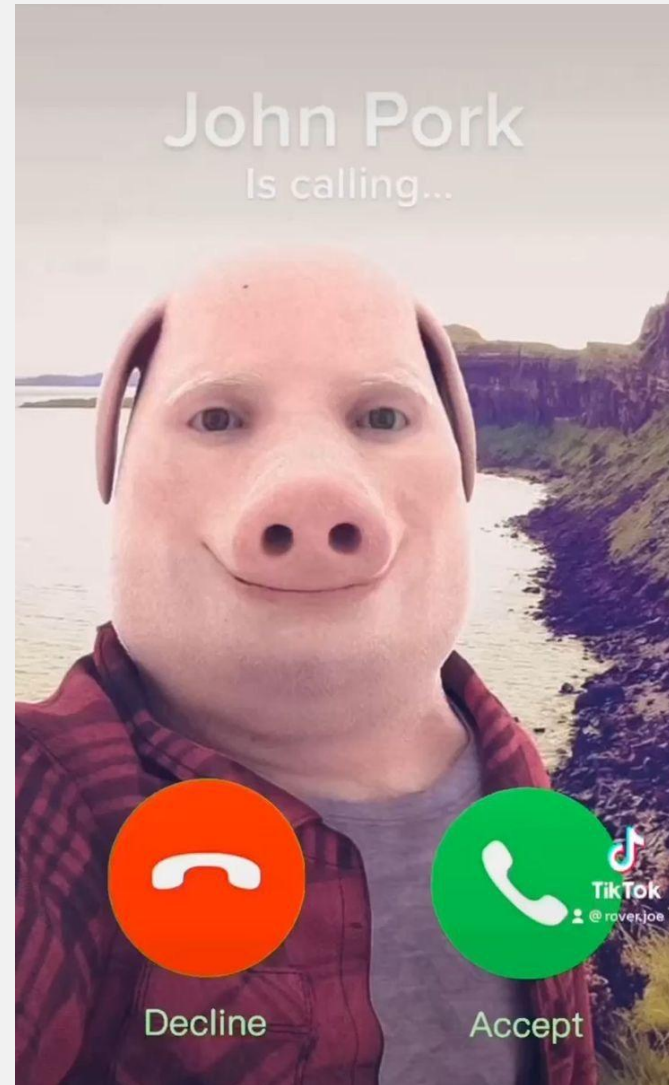


Search timeline

2020 - The video boom

The pandemic gave video a huge boost, people watched an average of 16 hours of online video per week, a 52% increase in two years.

Now, Video accounts for 82% of all global internet traffic (Cisco, cited across 2025-2026 research)

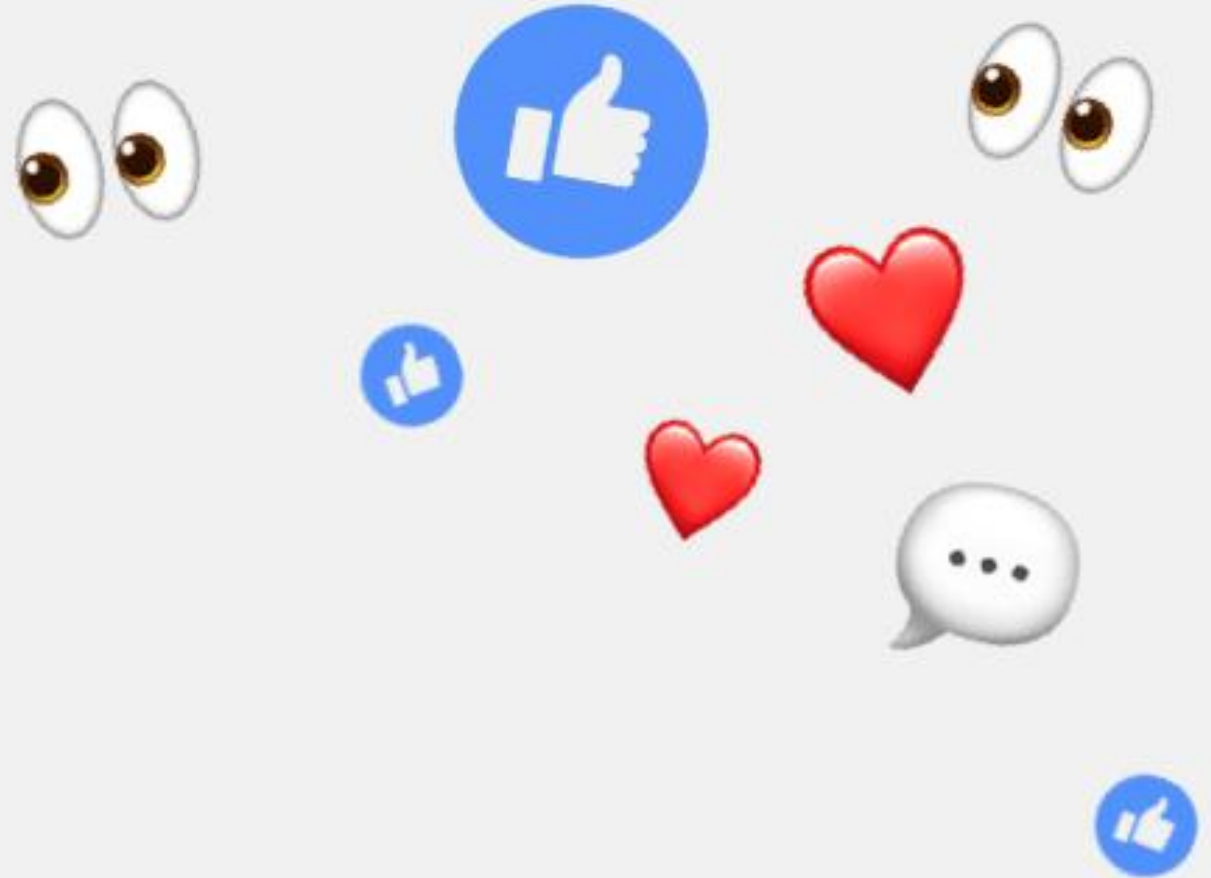


Search timeline

2016 – the rise of the influencer

Influencer marketing moves beyond bloggers receiving gifted products.

Instagram creators, YouTubers and later TikTok creators become serious media channels



Search timeline

We lost visibility of the journey

- GDPR
- Cookie restrictions
- Apple privacy changes
- Decline of third-party tracking





The customer journey became
more complicated while
measurement became harder.

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Then this guy arrived



82% of UK adults use Google Search 
with Google handling around 3 billion
searches a month in the UK. 

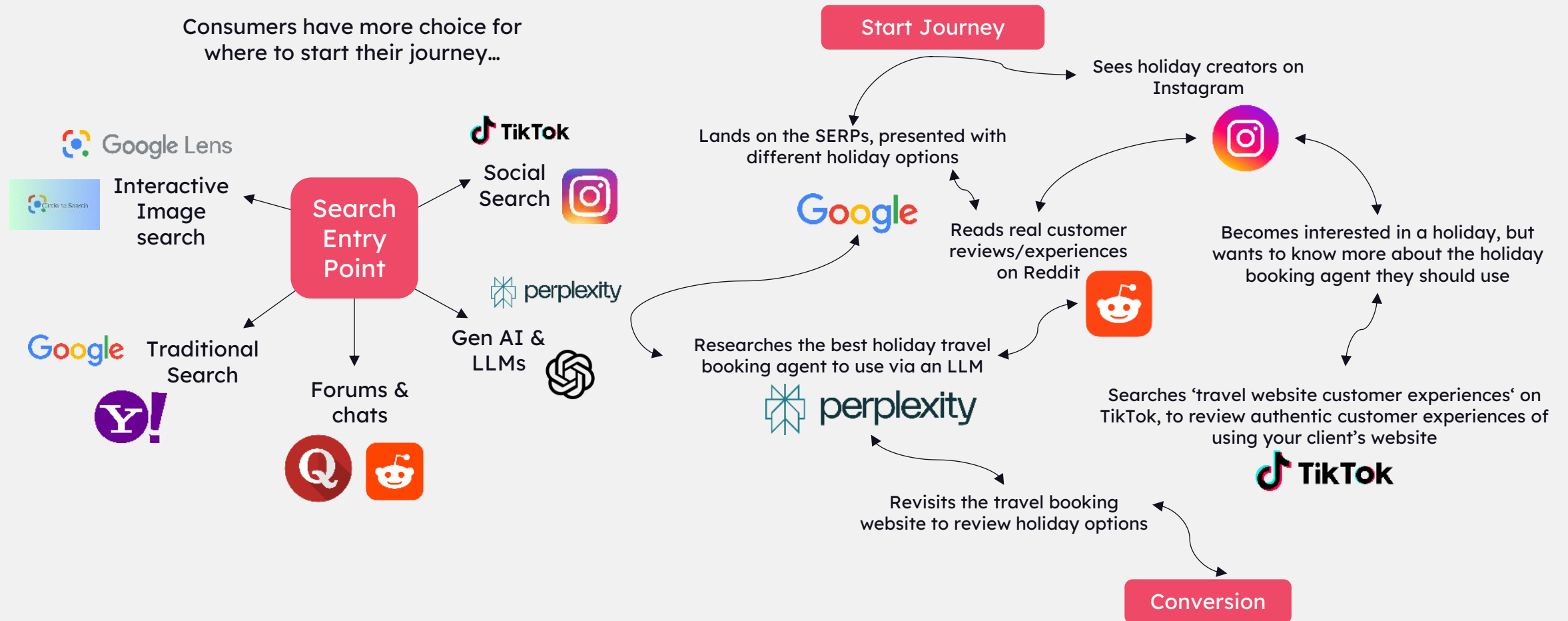
ChatGPT  received 1.8 billion UK visits in
the first eight months of 2025 
up from 368 million  during the same period in 2024.

5x increase year
on year.



There's not one, straightforward
search journey anymore

Search demand is more **fragmented** across many new sources of information and answers



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So, if a
customer is
searching
everywhere...



Where does SEO sit?

Influence



Search is happening without a
click 



68%

of U.S. Google searches ended
without a click in the first four
months of 2026



So, what happens when visibility
doesn't produce a click?

Visibility can still influence behaviour

Not every valuable interaction ends with a click

See

Remember

Trust

Choose!



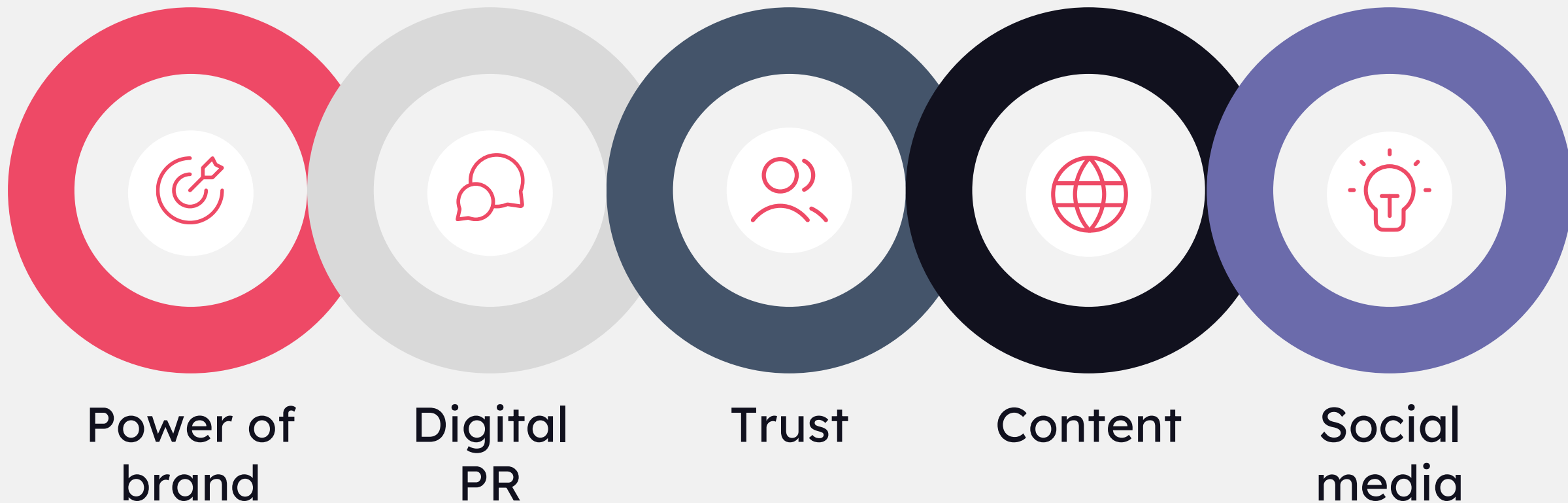
Influence becomes tangible



How do we do this?

Appearing **everywhere** is key to future growth

A connected channel approach to organic search in a dynamic landscape when appearing everywhere is crucial to winning both in traditional search and AI.



Why Digital PR is critical to influence

Across SEO and AI search systems, some of the strongest ranking and citation signals consistently come from three key Digital PR outcomes.



As **AI search accelerates**, these signals are becoming even more important, meaning **Digital PR** directly influences both traditional rankings and inclusion in AI-generated answers.



Social content is important for brand influence, and is also being cited in LLMs.

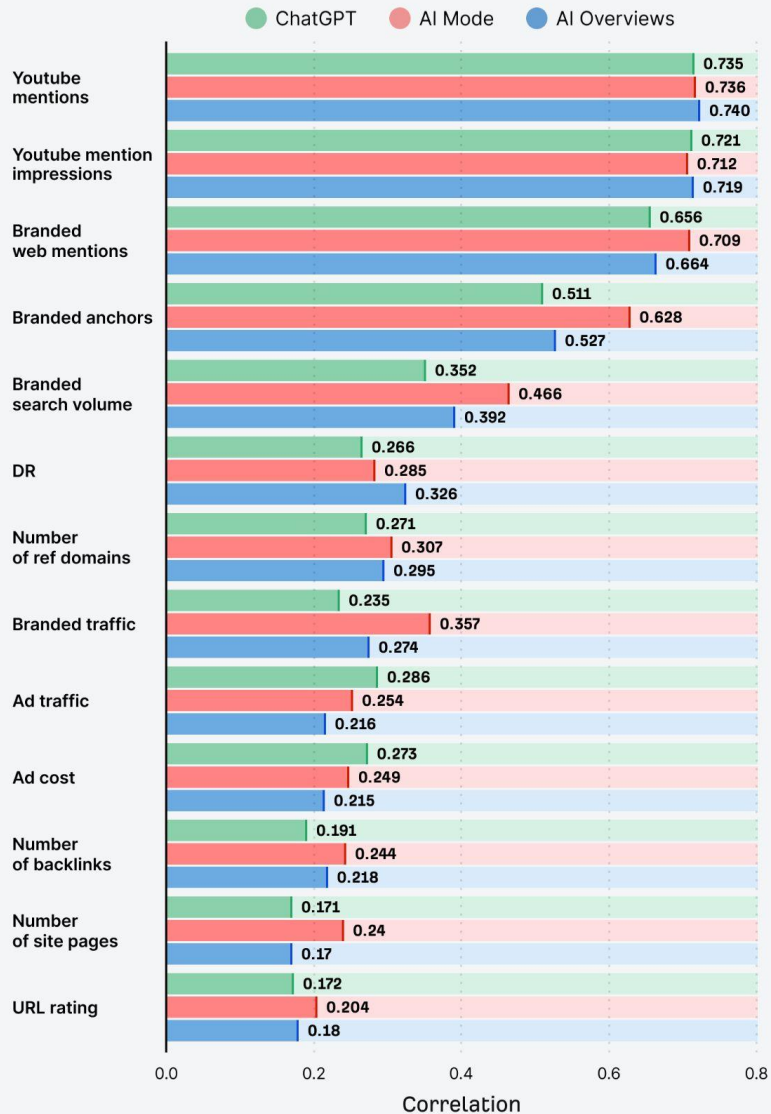


For the likes of ChatGPT, AI Mode and AIOs, social content is one of the biggest weighting factors when deciding which brands to surface

ChatGPT, AI Mode & AI Overviews compared: Factors that correlate with AI mentions

Based on a study of ~75K brands.

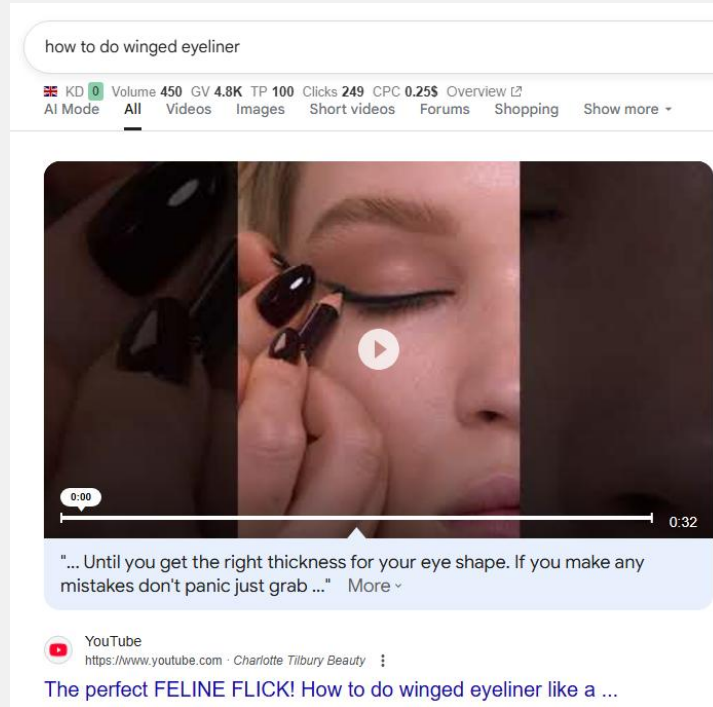
Source: Ahrefs Brand Radar and Site Explorer.



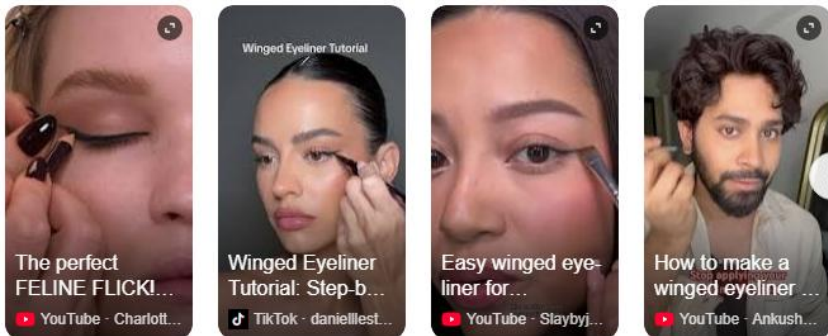
YouTube mentions show the strongest correlation with AI visibility, according to Ahrefs

- Having your own active social channels with strong engagement is important
- BUT it's also important to have other people talking about you – think about it as Digital PR for YouTube
- YouTube mentions refer to a brand name appearing across a video title, transcript or description (there doesn't appear to be a weighting across these)
- YouTube mention impressions are mentions weighted by the number of views each video received

Optimising videos for social search



Short videos



More short videos >

YouTube

Optimise title tags (60 char)

Engaging descriptions with keywords (up to 5,000 char)

Add clear CTAs to your description

Include relevant hashtags

Add closed captions

Include a link to your transcript

Quality thumbnails

Timestamps for longer videos

TikTok

Say keywords in the video

Add keywords as on-screen text

Include keywords in the video description

Include relevant, trending hashtags (max 3)

Underpinned by likes, comments, and shares

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How the hell do we measure that?

The new search journey

Key measurement areas

Visibility

Search – Rankings, SERP visibility, share of search

AI – Brand mentions, citation frequency, visibility across prompts

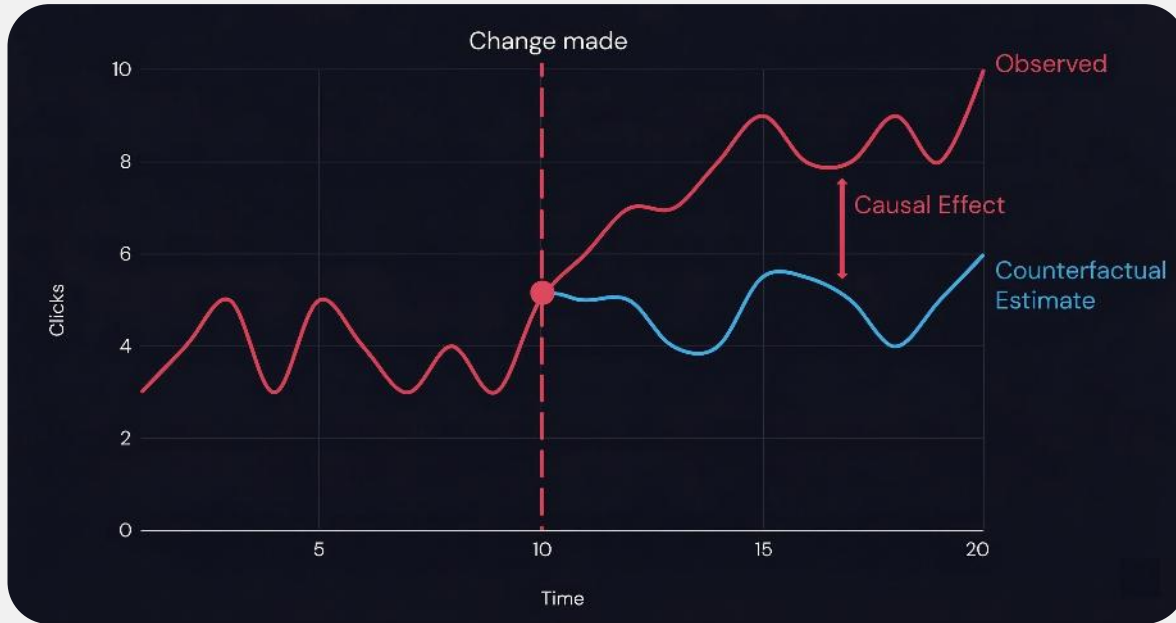
Social – reach, views, engagement, brand mentions

Influence

Brand search demand, brand consideration, sentiment, share of voice, AI visibility, social engagement, returning users

Multiple signals together show true influence

Performance always tracked – sessions, impressions, conversions, revenue



The Gap = incremental lift

Causal impact analysis allows to measure the effect of a change at one point in time – if our activity actually created additional demand.

What is it?

Causal impact measures the difference of what would happen if nothing changed. It allows us to measure the impact of budget changes, creative changes or new channel launches.

How it works

We feed Causal Impact a historical data set and data once a change has happened. It works out the difference between what is happening with the change and what would have happened with no change by using a predictive model

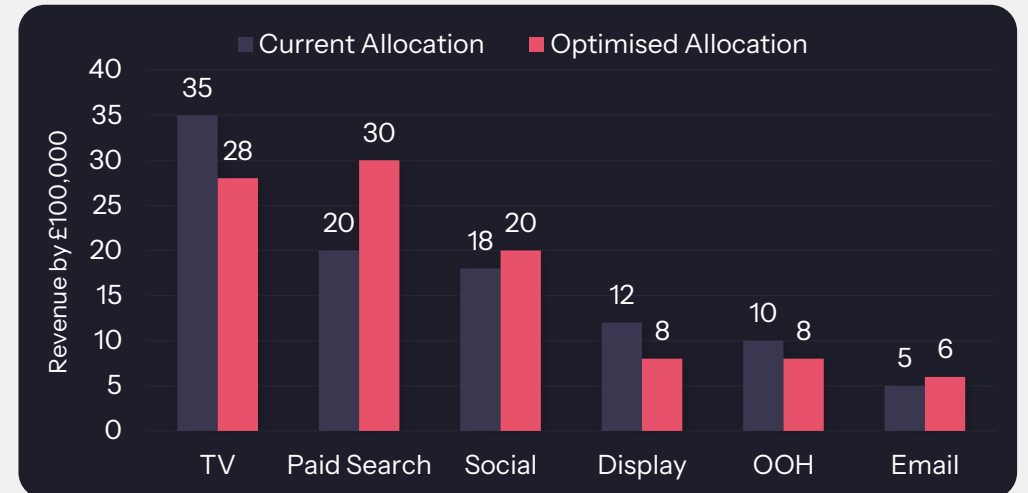
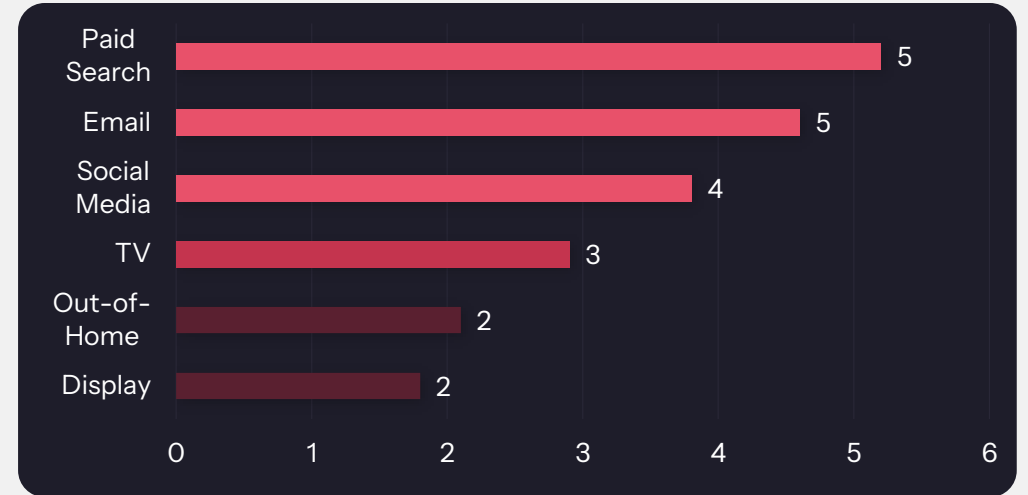
Media Mix Modelling (MMM) allows you to understand your media mix and plan budgets in accordance to what channels are driving the highest contribution to revenue and sales.

What is it?

MMM is a statistical model that assigns every online and offline channel and shows its true share of revenue, ROI and conversion built from 2+ years of weekly data. For paid channels it shows you what the best optimizable budget is

How it works

It takes all your historical data and builds a picture of what could happen in the future using all the data provided

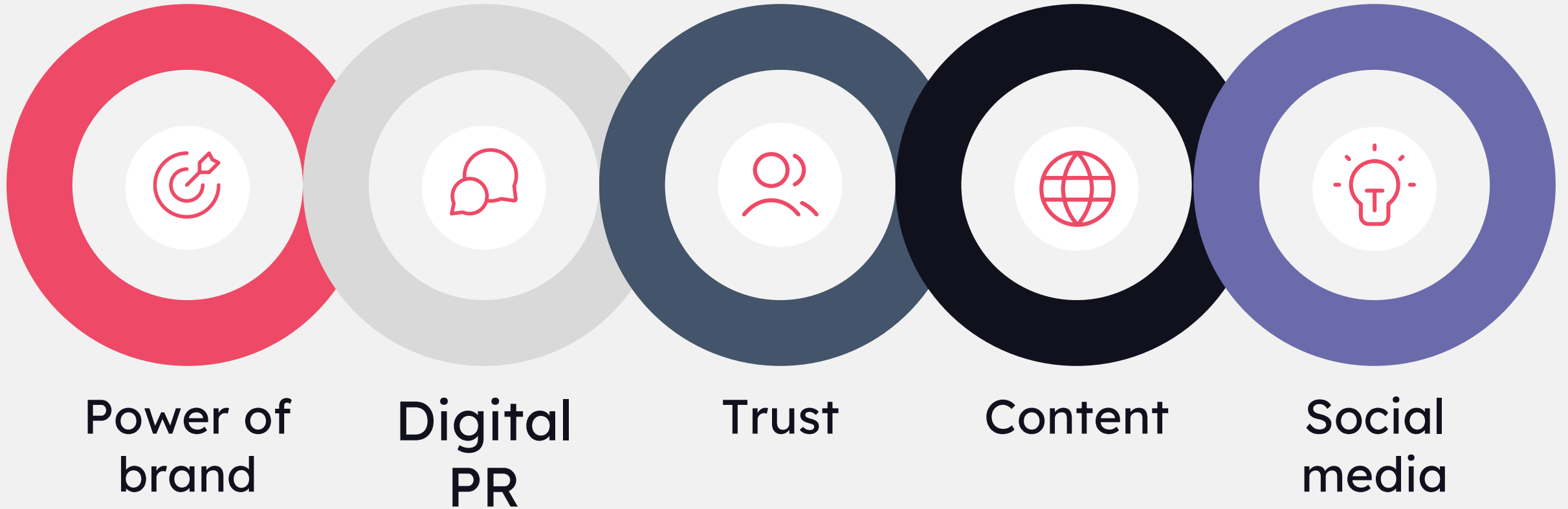




SEO does not work in isolation
anymore

Appearing **everywhere** is key to future growth

A connected channel approach to organic search in a dynamic landscape when appearing everywhere is crucial to winning both in traditional search and AI.



The new search journey

What does this mean in practice?

Be seen

Build visibility across
search, AI, social
and PR

Be trusted

Build authority,
mentions, reviews
and positive
sentiment

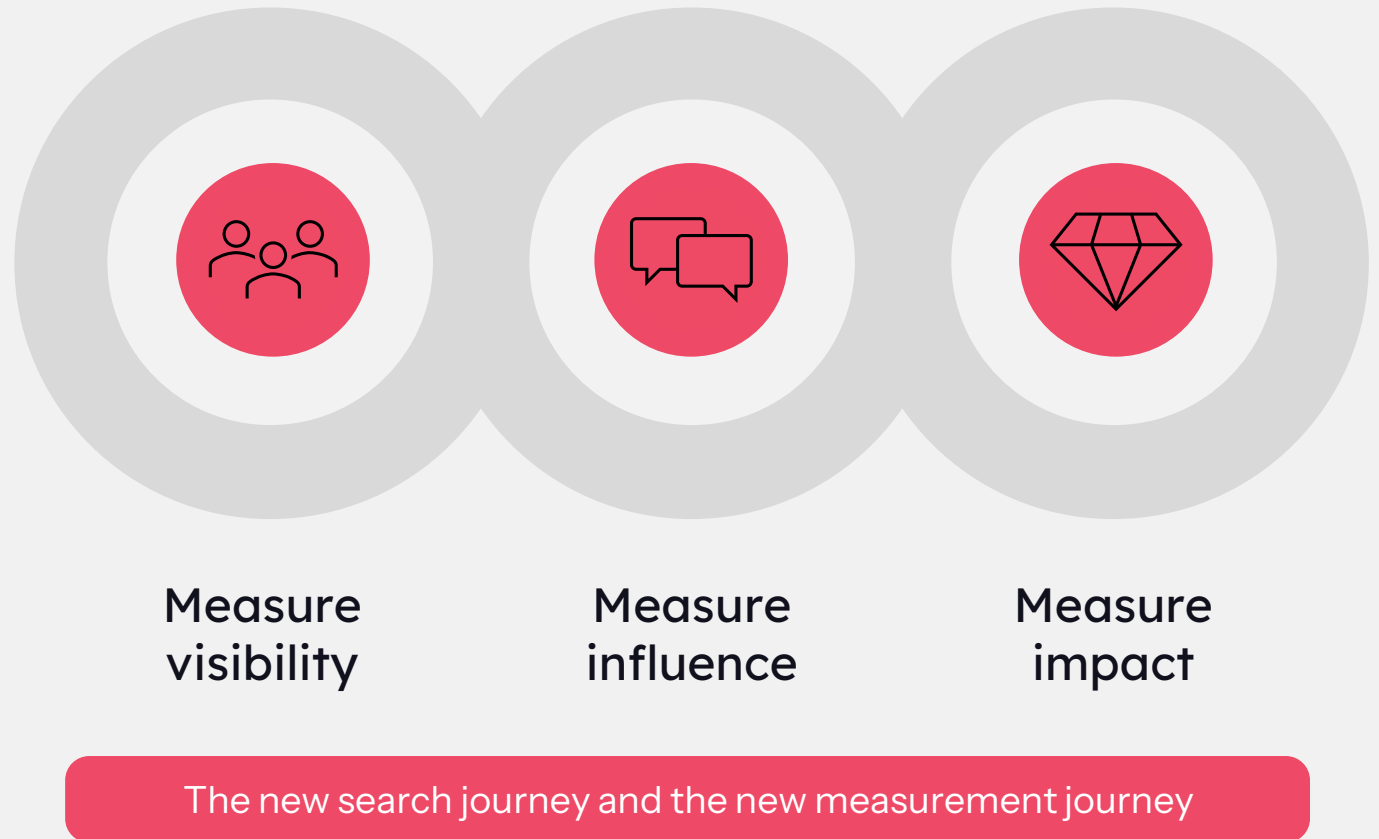
Be remembered

Create content and
experiences people
actively seek out and
share

Future of search webinar

SEO is not about winning the click anymore, **it's about influencing the choice**

The old metrics don't disappear, but the measurement gets bigger.



Becoming the **best-** **performing** **private** **bank** across AI Mode and AIOs

The challenge

Establishing a Private Bank as an authority across generative search, by increasing brand mentions within prompt responses across AI search.

The strategy

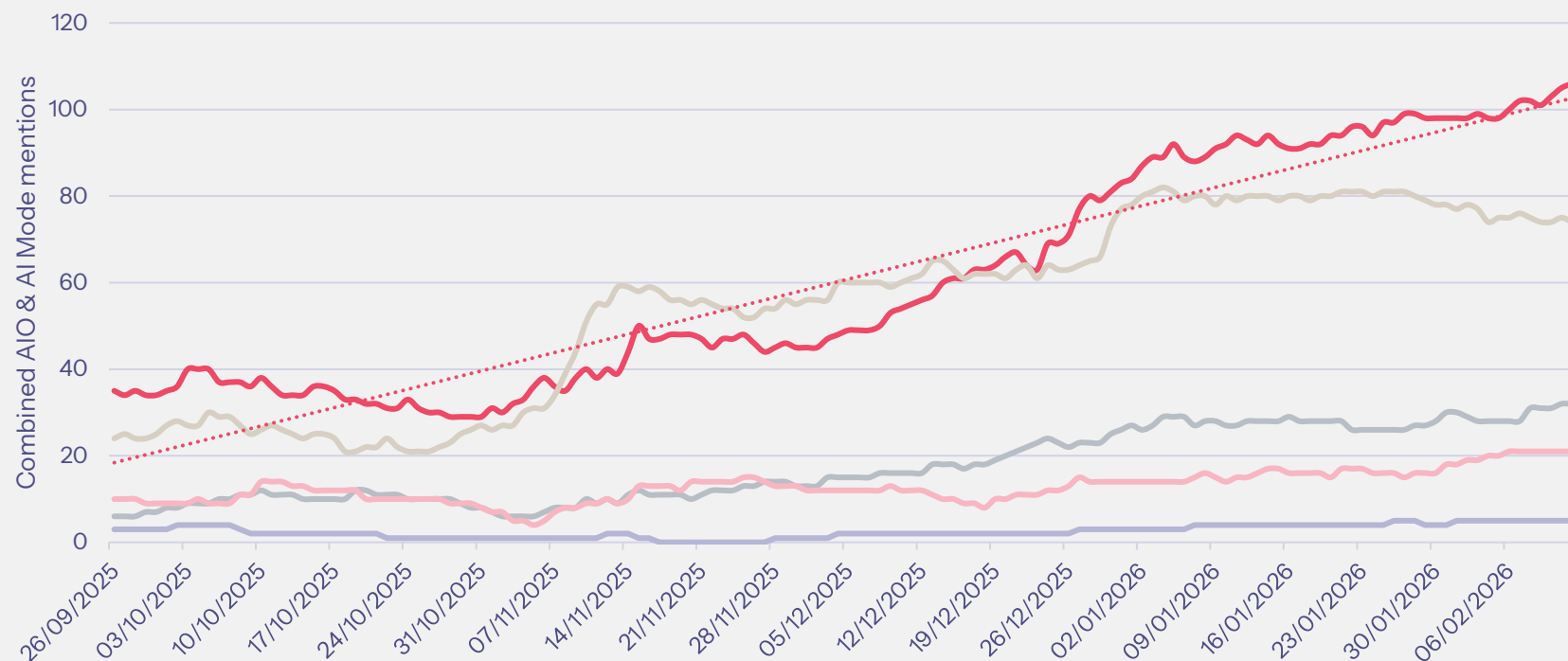
Optimising core pillar pages, in line with SEO best-practice - while also identifying on-page opportunities specific to growth across AI Overviews and AI Mode.

165%

Growth in brand mentions

43%

More brand mentions than nearest competitor.



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Nice one



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