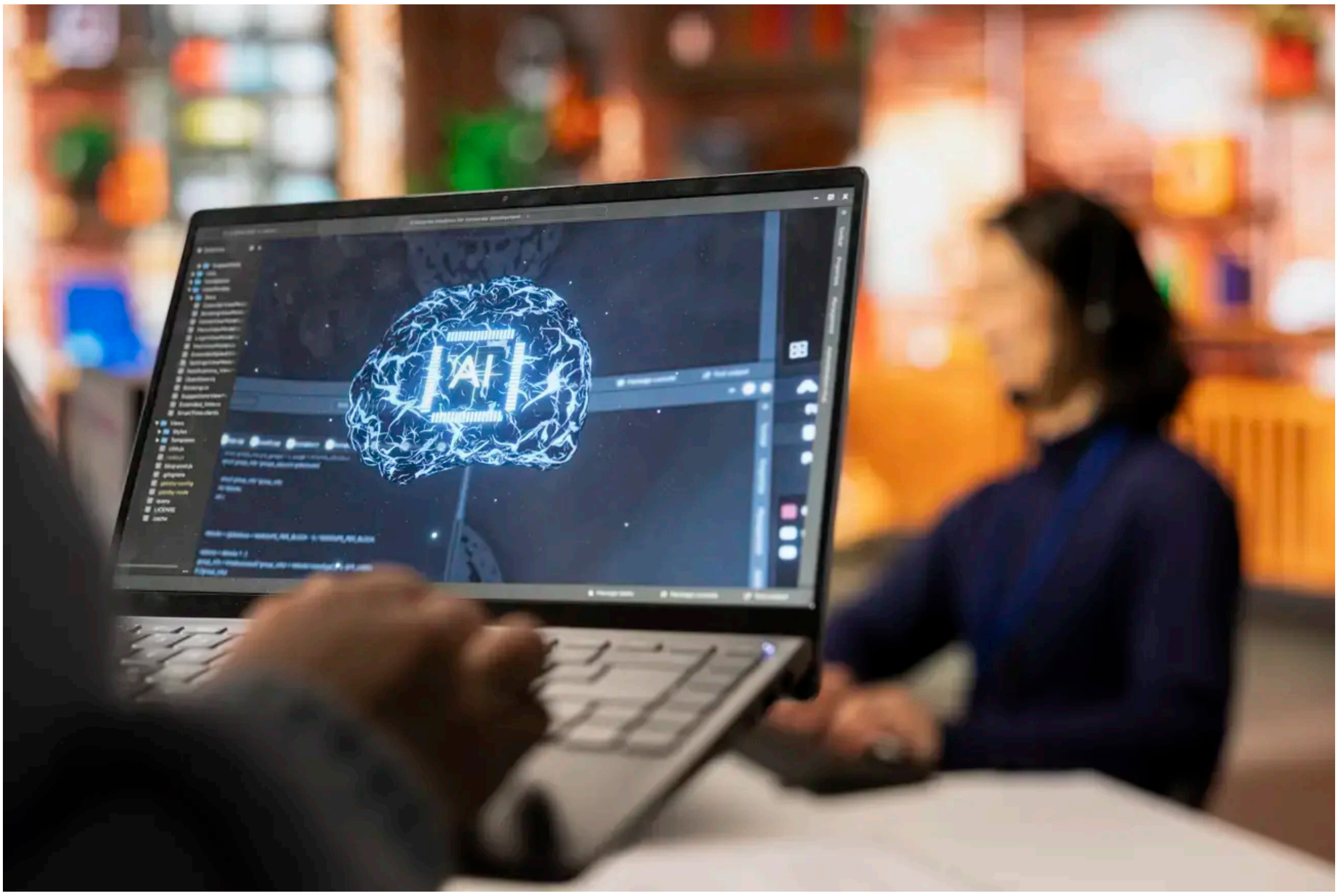
campaign

campaign

Don't let AI become your next walled garden

Google and AI assistants are changing how consumers discover brands. The answer is not simply better SEO, but a more resilient, platform-agnostic approach to digital visibility.

by Chandan Bagwe | 11/09/2026



The sudden disruption of advanced AI models due to regulatory and policy shifts has exposed a massive vulnerability for modern businesses. When access to the tools shaping digital visibility can be upended overnight, brands can no longer afford to rely on a handful of AI gatekeepers.

India is not immune. In fact, given the pace of digital adoption here, Indian brands stand to lose the most from algorithmic dependency.

campaign

digital footprint.

campaign

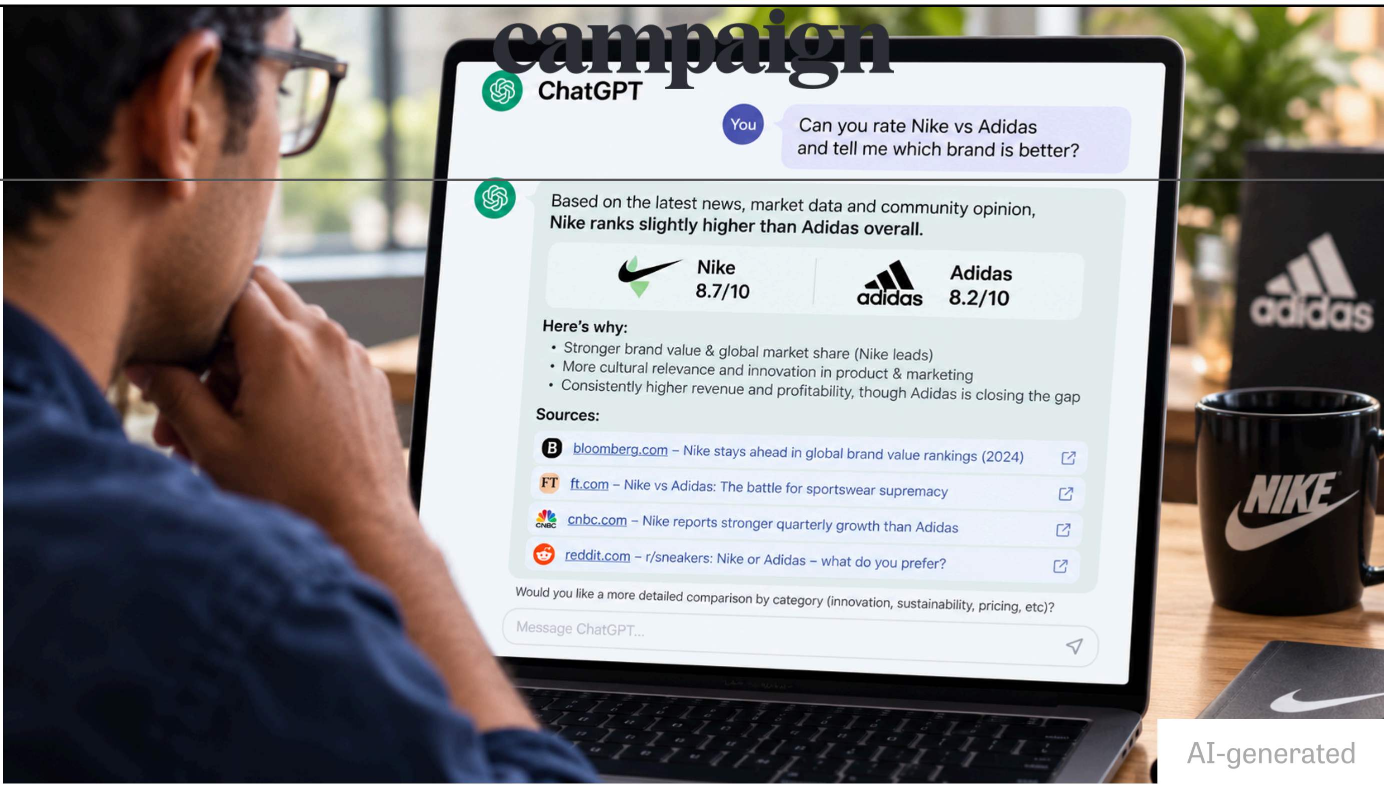
Winning the 'zero-click'

With engines like Google AI Overviews and Perplexity answering user queries directly, the goal has shifted from earning web traffic to earning citations. If an AI synthesises an answer without sending a click to your site, your brand must be the answer.

Consider what this means for a brand like Mamaearth. When a user asks an AI assistant "best natural face wash for oily skin in India," Mamaearth cannot survive on the Page 1 of Google alone. It has to be the answer the AI pulls up, extracts, cites, and trusts, without the user ever clicking through to the website. Any D2C brand, law firm or financial services company trying to build digital credibility today faces the same challenge.

- **The 50-word rule:** Create high-value content with the "answer first, explain second" structure. That way, AI bots can produce a standalone 40- to 60-word summary for lead-ins, followed by a deeper analysis. Think-tank policy briefs, like those from FICCI or NASSCOM, already do this well. Product brands need to adopt the same discipline.
- **Radical schema deployment:** Rely heavily on JSON-LD structured data, product, FAQ, and organisation schema. This provides search bots with explicit, machine-readable context. Indian e-commerce platforms that invest here, such as Meesho and Nykaa, will have a structural edge over competitors who do not.
- **New KPIs:** Accept a loss in informational web traffic. Instead, measure brand lift, conversational share of voice, and direct branded search volume. If more people are searching for 'Zepto delivery' and not 'quick grocery delivery app', that is the signal that you are winning.

campaign



AI-generated

Confronting algorithmic bias

If an AI platform changes its policies or guardrails and starts systematically dropping your products from its recommendations, you’re not going to save yourself by waiting for a re-index.
This is no hypothetical case. Several Indian fintech apps realised this when Google Play Store’s tightened lending-app policies in 2023-24 led to mass de-listings overnight. Their primary acquisition channel vanished. The brands that recovered fastest were the ones that had already diversified their discovery ecosystem.

Think of AI discovery as a distributed ecosystem. Make sure your digital footprint is optimised for OpenAI, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, Perplexity and open source models like Meta’s Llama equally. For Indian brands, think about how your entity looks in the vernacular search context.

Another element to think about is where you’re being cited. AI models cross-reference third-party data to confirm recommendations. You need to create an off-site ironclad entity footprint using high-authority PR, independent reviews and verified business registries. Being featured in *The Economic Times*, *Business Standard* or *Mint* is no longer a vanity exercise, but rather structural infrastructure for AI discoverability. If the engine trusts the ecosystem, it will suggest you.

Indian startups that stay in the media consistently such as Razorpay, Groww or CRED

Share, but safeguard your intellectual property

campaign

Brands face a delicate paradox: to rank well you have to allow AI crawlers to analyse your data, but you can’t allow them to steal your intellectual property to train their models. This protection is non-negotiable for Indian companies investing in proprietary research, regional consumer insights or unique formulations – think Himalaya Drug Company’s R&D or a fintech’s credit-scoring methodology.

Three ways you can do this:

- **Granular crawl controls:** Don't use one blunt robots.txt block to turn off all bots. Separate search retrieval from training data. Allow discovery bots (e.g. OAI-SearchBot), block core training scrapers (e.g. GPTBot or ClaudeBot) Indian companies building proprietary datasets, especially in the areas of agritech, healthtech and legaltech should look at their crawl architecture immediately.
- **The “abstract” method** Keep your proprietary, deep data securely behind authenticated walls and gated user portals. Publish only structured summaries, high-level abstracts, or metadata on your public site that bots can read without digesting your core assets. The regulated investment platforms can publish a curated research summary for public consumption and keep the entire advisory methodology behind the client login walls.
- **Build an owned moat:** Use public, AI-optimised content as a hook to pull users into your first-party ecosystem, branded apps, direct email newsletters, and proprietary portals. Jio's playbook is instructive here: by anchoring millions of users to the MyJio app and its own content ecosystem, it has built a distribution channel that no AI policy change can touch.

For brands without Jio's scale, the principle still applies: every user you bring into a direct relationship is one you cannot lose to a platform algorithm. The ultimate defence against platform volatility is owning your audience directly.

- Chandan Bagwe is the founder and director of C Com Digital, a Mumbai-based digital marketing consultancy.