



perplexity

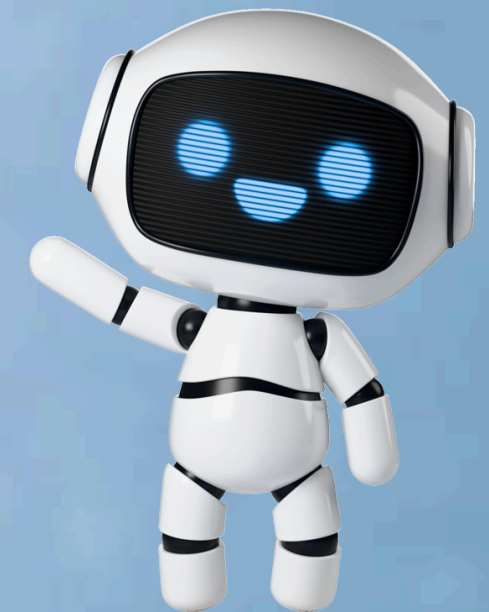
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UX REVIEW OF PERPLEXITY'S CITATIONS & FOLLOW-UPS



Analyzing User experiences and UX laws





This study analyzes Perplexity's AI-powered search experience, focusing on how its citations and follow-up features impact usability and trust.

- Applied Jakob Nielsen's 10 heuristics + key UX laws to evaluate design.
- Identified where Perplexity's UI supports user learning (clarity, transparency, minimalism).
- Highlighted violations that may cause confusion (visual hierarchy gaps, error prevention, cognitive load).
- Compared auto-suggestions, citations, images, sources, steps, and follow-ups against UX principles.
- Outlined strengths, gaps, and improvements to make the product more intuitive, consistent, and trustworthy.

In short: The case study shows how thoughtful design in AI search can build trust and usability but also where Perplexity can refine its experience to align better with user expectations.

What is Perplexity?



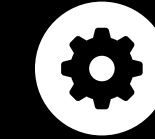
Your Perplexity is an AI-powered conversational search engine that blends **real-time web results with natural language answers**.

Unlike traditional search, it shows **direct, cited responses** to make information easier to verify and understand.

Built for **research, exploration, and learning**, with transparency at its core through **inline citations and follow-up suggestions**.

About

Key Milestones



Monthly Searches: 780M

Monthly Active Users (MAU): 22M+

Annual Revenue: \$100M+

Founded: 2022

User Growth → fastest-growing AI search startup since 2022

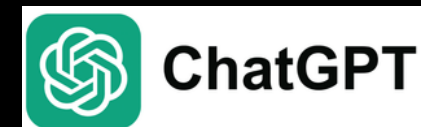
Global Reach → users in 100+ countries

Business Model & Edge

Business Model → Freemium + Pro (\$20/mo)

Differentiator → Cited answers = transparency-first design

Competitors



TAM: ~\$300B (global search + generative AI market)

SAM: ~\$30-50B (AI-powered search assistants & enterprise adoption)

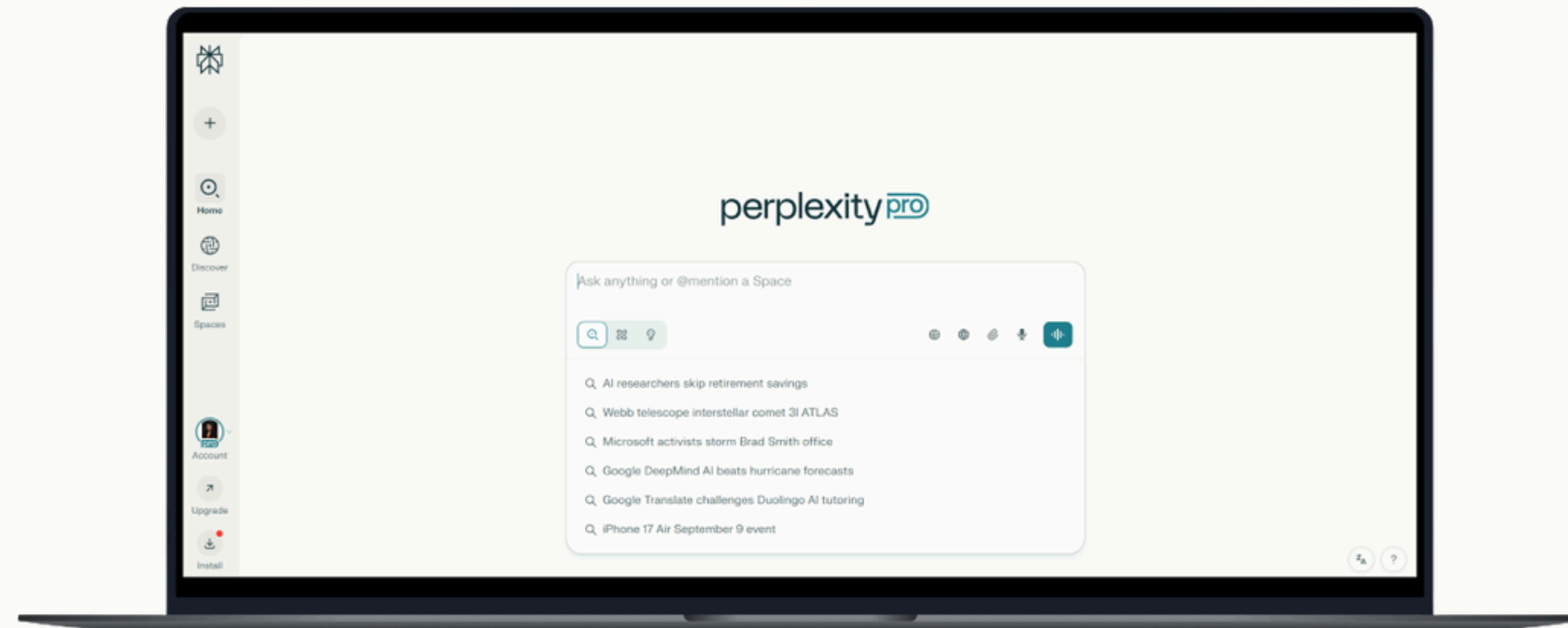
SOM: ~ \$1-2B
Perplexity's slice

User Journey



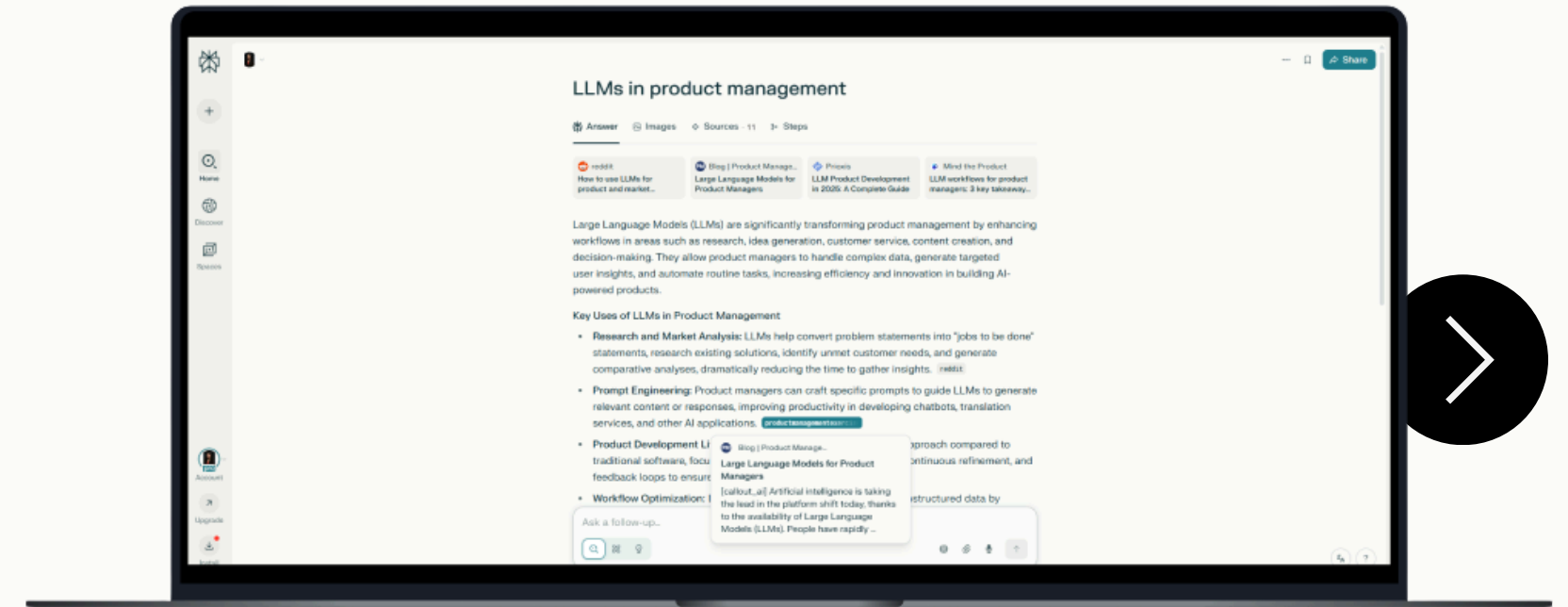
1 - Search & Auto-Suggestions

(User starts typing → gets instant smart suggestions)



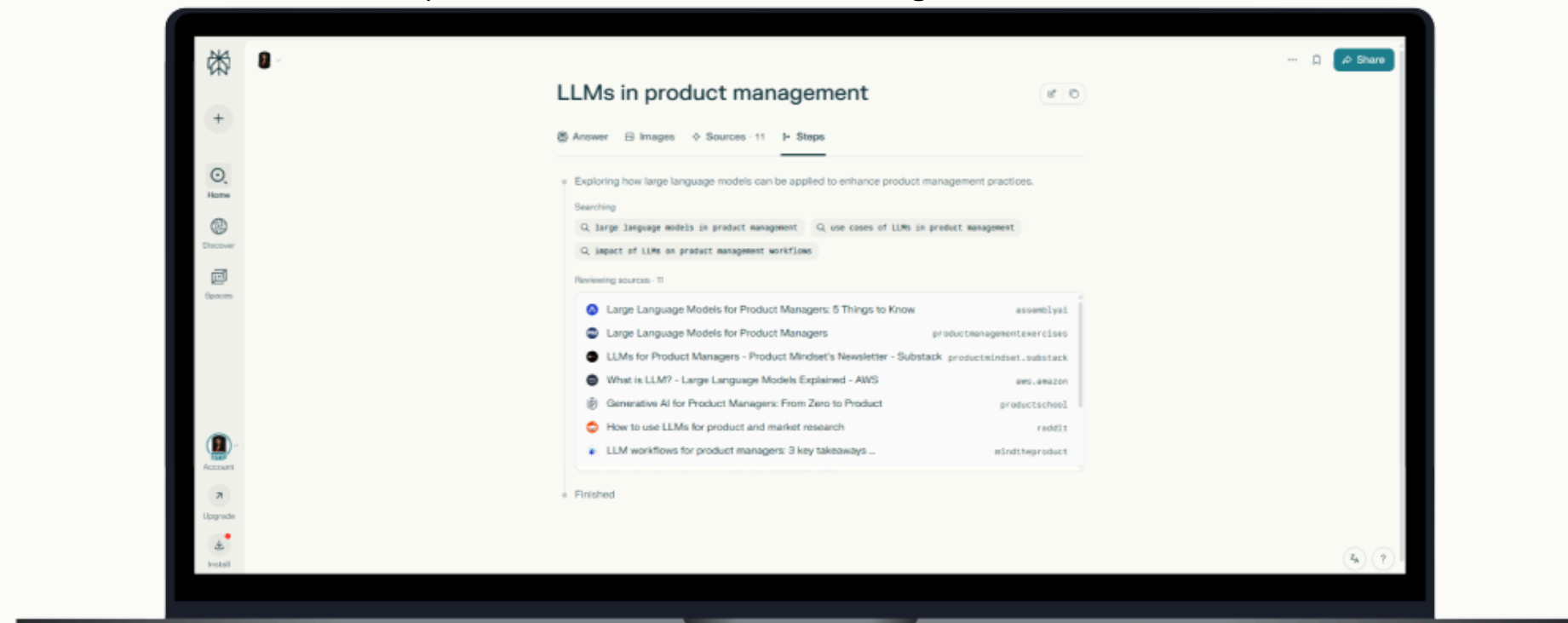
2 - Answer with Citations

(AI-generated response shown with inline citations)



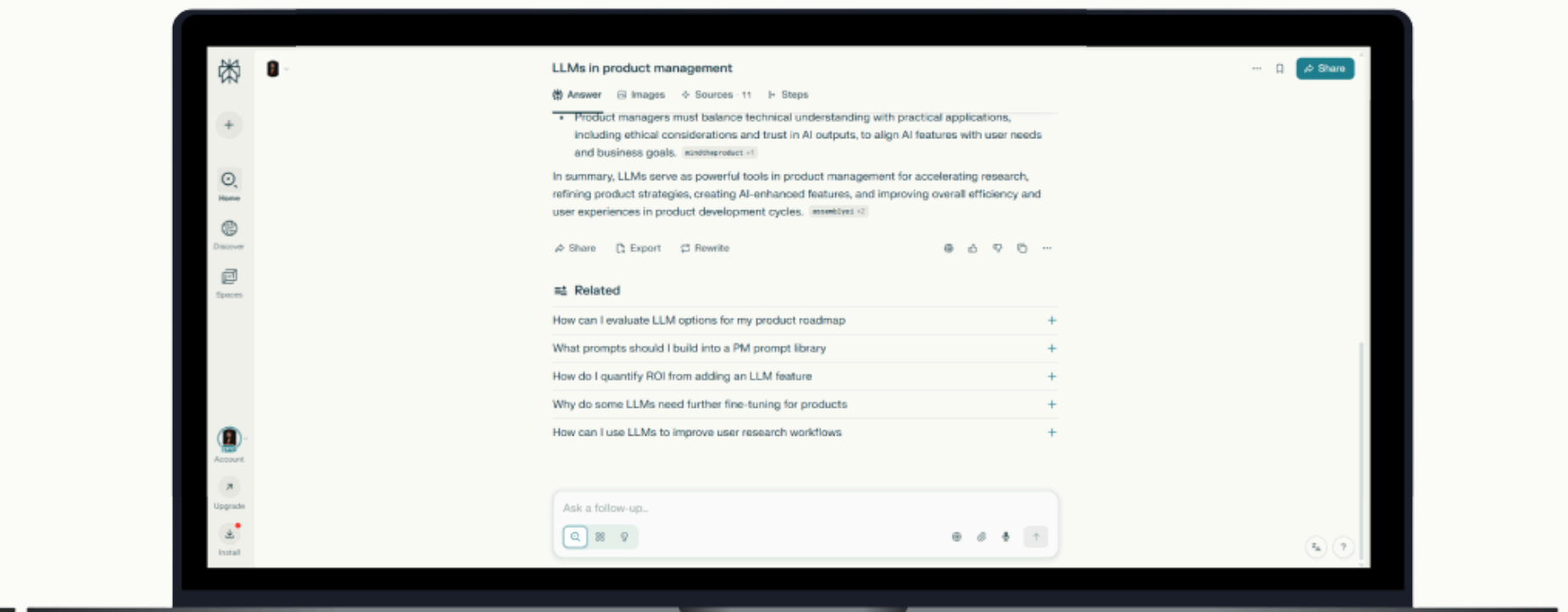
3 - Sources Panel

(Expanded list of sources used to generate the answer)



4 - Follow-up Questions

(Suggested related prompts to continue exploration)





Jakob Nielsen's 10 Heuristics & UX Laws



What They Are?

- A set of 10 general principles for interaction design created by usability expert Jakob Nielsen.
- They're not strict rules, but broad guidelines to evaluate how user-friendly a product is.
- Think of them as a **checklist** for spotting UX issues quickly.



Why They're Used

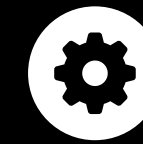
- **Universal** → Apply to any product, digital or physical.
- **Efficient** → Help identify 70-80% of usability problems early.
- **User-Centered** → Ensure designs match how people think, not how systems work.
- **Practical** → Easy to use during design reviews, prototypes, or final products.

What Are UX Laws?

- UX Laws are a collection of **psychology-based principles** that explain how people perceive, process, and interact with design.
- They're grounded in human behavior things like memory limits, attention span, and how we group visual elements.

Why They Matter

- They help designers **predict user behavior**.
- Ensure interfaces feel **intuitive** because they align with how the human brain naturally works.
- **Reduce cognitive load** → make products easier, faster, and more pleasant to use.



- **Visibility of System Status** → Keep users informed about what's happening.
- **Match Between System and the Real World** → Speak the user's language, not jargon.
- **User Control and Freedom** → Let users easily undo/redo actions.
- **Consistency and Standards** → Follow common patterns and norms.
- **Error Prevention** → Design to avoid mistakes before they happen.
- **Recognition Rather Than Recall** → Make options visible, not memory-based.
- **Flexibility and Efficiency of Use** → Support both beginners and experts.
- **Aesthetic and Minimalist Design** → Keep it clean, only show what matters.
- **Help Users Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors** → Errors should be clear and explain recovery steps.
- **Help and Documentation** → Provide support if needed, even in simple systems.

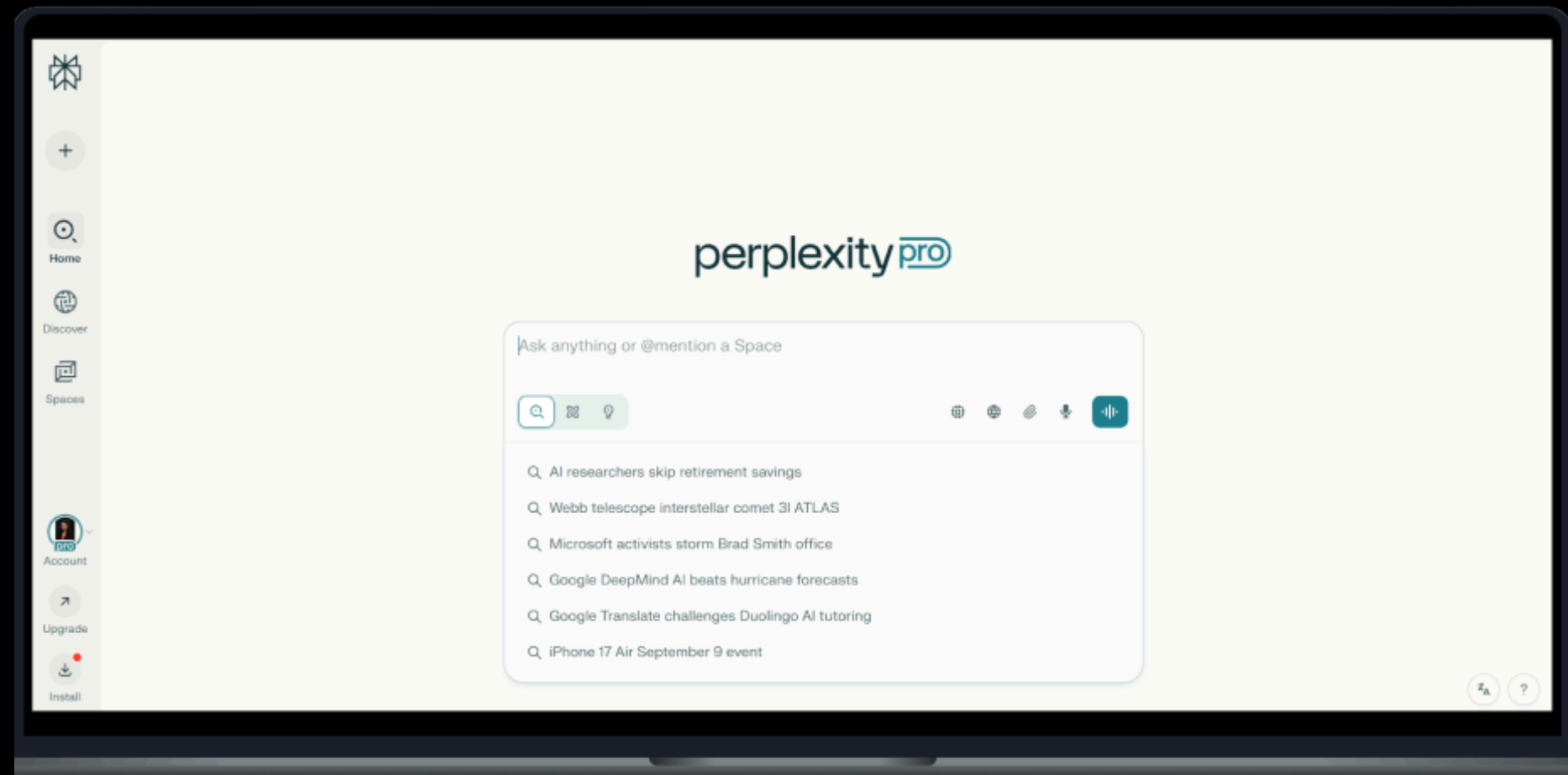
Key UX Laws

- **Hick's Law** → More choices = slower decisions
- **Fitts's Law** → Bigger and closer = easier to click
- **Jakob's Law** → Users prefer familiar experiences
- **Doherty Threshold** → Under 400ms response keeps users engaged
- **Miller's Law** → Don't overload working memory (limit 7 ± 2 items)
- **Zeigarnik Effect** → Unfinished tasks stick in our minds.
- **Meaning** → Showing "3 steps left" nudges users to complete a task.



Feature: Search & Auto-suggestions

Analyzing Key Features of Perplexity's UI for citations and follow-ups



(Homepage + Search box)

✗ Violated

- **Learnability gap:** No onboarding hints for first-time users.
- **Fitts's Law:** Small icons can be harder to tap, especially on mobile.

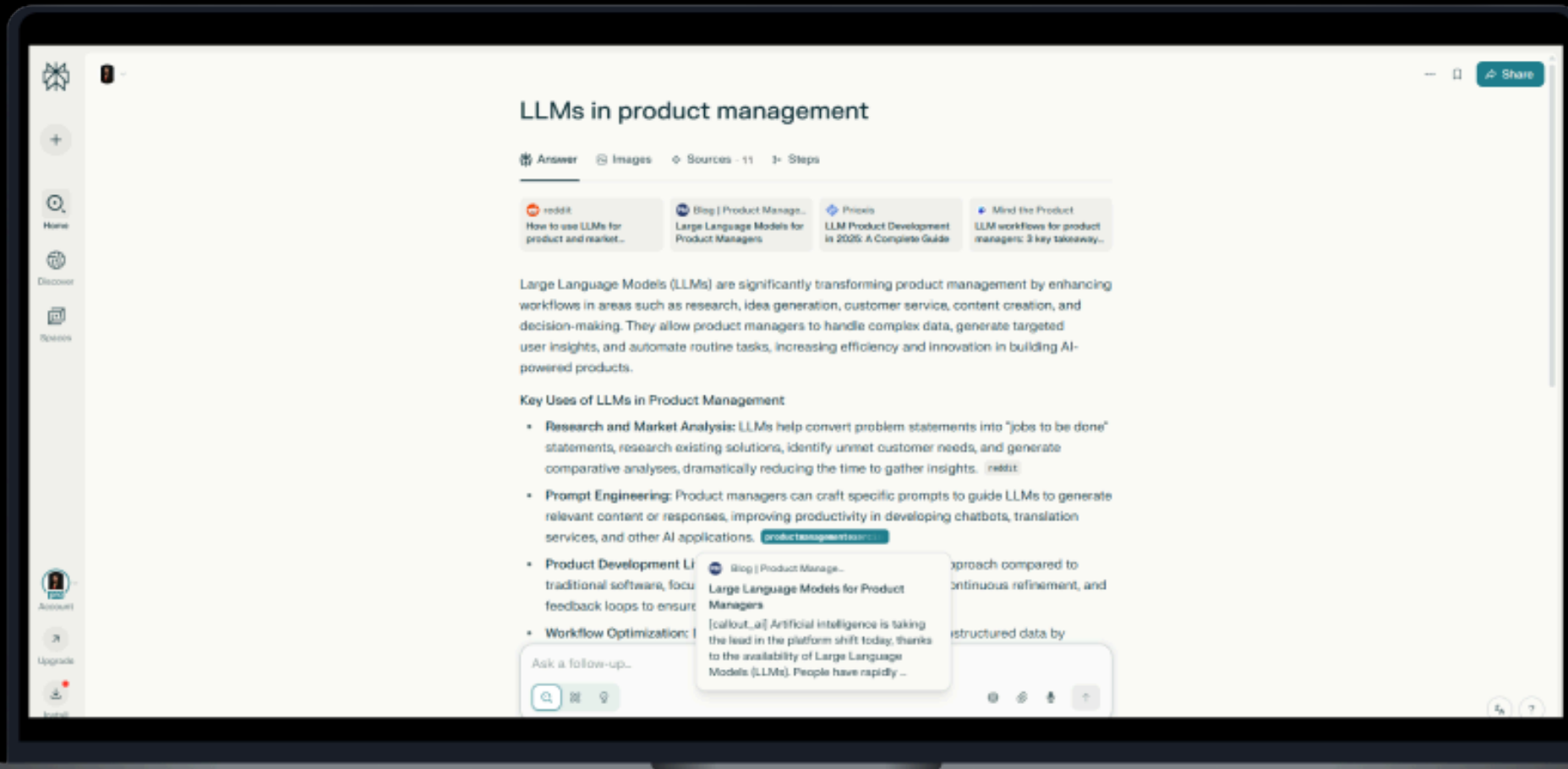
✓ Implemented

- **Aesthetic & Minimalist Design:** Clean layout, no clutter.
- **Recognition Rather Than Recall:** Suggested queries shown so users don't have to remember.
- **Hick's Law:** Limited suggestions make choosing faster.



Feature: Citations showing up

Analyzing Key Features of Perplexity's UI for citations and follow-ups



(Answer screen + Citations)

✗ Violated

- **Hick's Law:** Too many sources = decision fatigue.
- **Aesthetic & Minimalist Design:** Dense citation blocks clutter readability.

✓ Implemented

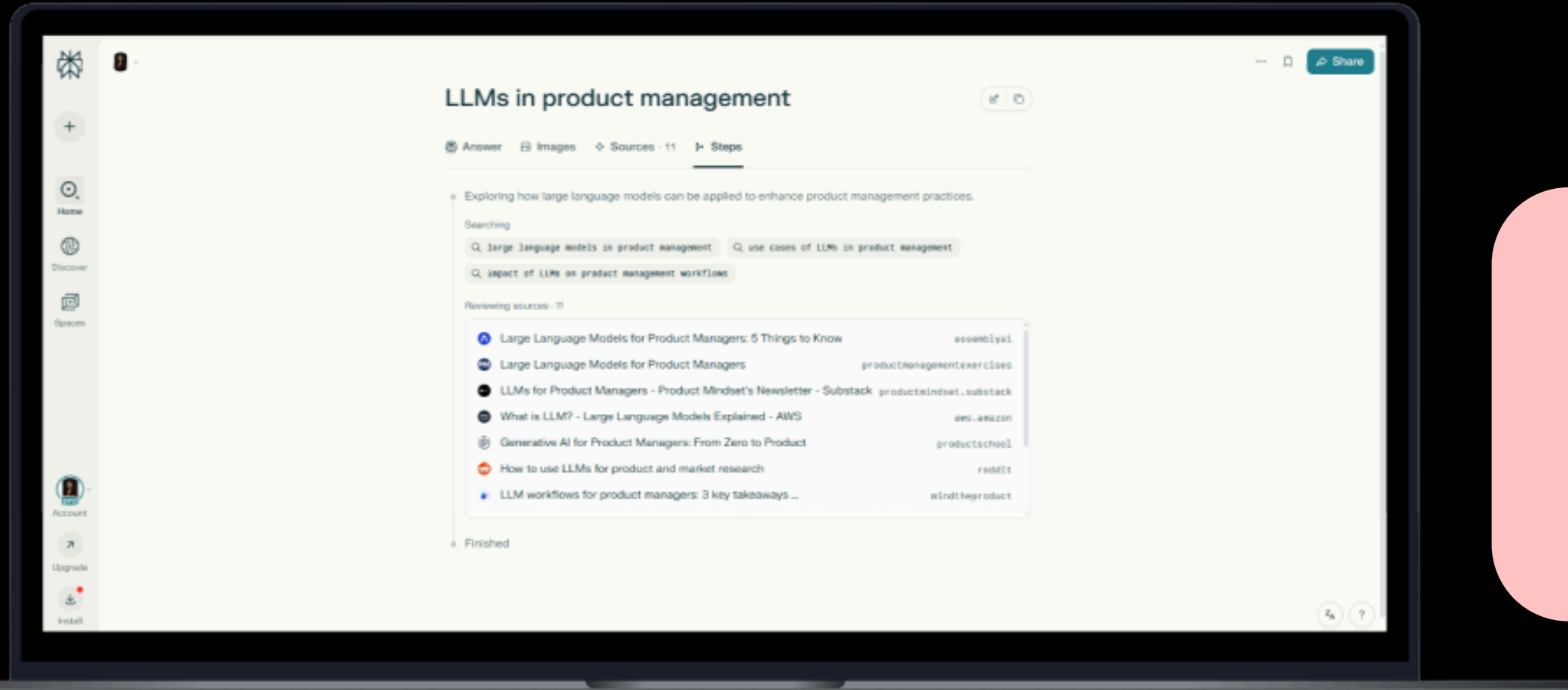
- **Trust & Transparency:** Sources cited directly under answers.
- **Law of Proximity:** Citations grouped logically with text.
- **Error Prevention:** Reduces misinformation by showing references.

Feature: Images

Analyzing Key Features of Perplexity's UI for citations and follow-ups



(Answer screen + Images tab)



✗ Violated

- **Match Between System & Real World:**
Missing captions can confuse users.
- **Trust issue:** Risk of irrelevant or low-quality images breaking credibility.

✓ Implemented

- **Visual Hierarchy:** Images separated from text, easy to locate.
- **Aesthetic-Usability Effect:** Visually engaging and inviting.
- **Recognition Rather Than Recall:** Quick reference without memorization.

Feature: Steps & Related Questions

Analyzing Key Features of Perplexity's UI for citations and follow-ups



(Steps + Follow-ups)

✗ Violated

- **Choice Overload:** Too many follow-ups can overwhelm.
- **Miller's Law:** High cognitive load when too much info is shown at once.

✓ Implemented

- **Flexibility & Efficiency of Use:** Step-by-step answers help all users.
- **Mental Model Alignment:** Related questions support natural exploration flow.
- **Peak-End Rule:** Ending with follow-ups boosts engagement.

Key Takeaways

- Perplexity nails trust, transparency, and minimalism.
- Biggest gaps = onboarding, overload prevention, and mobile ergonomics.
- Shows how AI search can balance speed + explainability, but needs polishing on guidance and hierarchy.



Thank
you

