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Which Apps Get Blamed for Full Storage? Ranking Perceived Storage Culprits by Search Demand from a 90-Day First-Party Google Search Console Corpus

Cleanor Labs Research Team

Cleanor Research Labs · Correspondence: hello@cleanor.app

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ABSTRACT

The app people blame most for full storage is not a photo app or a game — it is **Windows AppData**, followed by **YouTube** and the iPhone's mysterious **"System Data."** Across 90 days of search demand, the top of the "what is eating my storage" list is dominated by background system folders and a handful of big apps, not the camera roll.

Keywords: apps that use most storage, what app uses most storage, apps eating phone storage, why is my storage full, appdata youtube system data storage, phone storage data study

KEY FINDINGS

- We ranked the apps and system folders people search about most when storage fills up, using 59,282 Google search impressions across our storage guides — the count of how often those guides appeared in search, used here as a stand-in for how much a topic is searched. It is the same 90-day dataset as our first storage study, here viewed by app rather than by problem.
- **Top of the blame list: Windows AppData (a hidden Windows system folder), YouTube, iPhone "System Data," and Chrome.**
- **57% of these searches are diagnostic** — "why," "what," "is it safe" — versus 34% that ask "how" or "best." People are mostly trying to figure out *where* their space went before they delete anything.
- By platform, **Android drives 45% of demand, PC 26%, iPhone 10%** — storage anxiety is loudest on Android.

1. Why this matters

When a phone or PC reports "Storage Full," the first question is almost never "how do I delete files" — it is "what is taking up the space?" The apps and folders that *people believe* are responsible tell you where attention, confusion, and cleanup effort are actually concentrated. That belief is measurable: every time someone types "why does System Data use so much storage" or "what is the AppData folder," they leave a trace in search demand.

This study reads those traces. Instead of guessing which apps are the worst offenders, we rank them by how often each one drives a storage-related search — a proxy for which apps are most often *blamed*. The result is a practical map for anyone building cleanup tools, writing storage guides, or just trying to free space: the highest-value targets are rarely the obvious ones, and most searchers want to understand the problem before they touch anything.

2. The apps people blame most for full storage

Ranked by how often each app or system folder drove a storage-related search:

Rank	App / system area	Search demand (impressions)
1	Windows AppData folder	7,749
2	YouTube (Android)	5,114
3	iPhone "System Data"	3,951
4	Google Chrome (Android)	3,724
5	OneDrive	2,866
6	Telegram	2,034
7	Discord	623
8	Samsung Gallery	567
9	Spotify	494

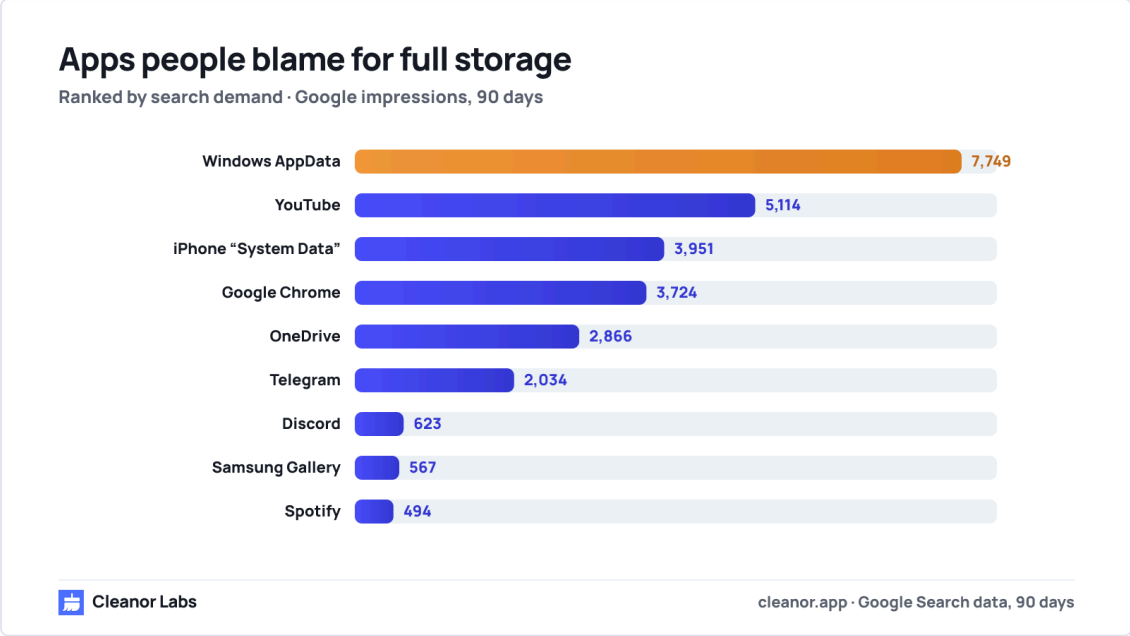

Figure 1. Ranking of apps people blame for full storage by search demand: Windows AppData, YouTube, iPhone System Data, Chrome, OneDrive, Telegram lead.

What unites the top of the list is that none of it is the obvious stuff. AppData (a hidden folder where Windows apps stash their data) and the iPhone's "System Data" are invisible system areas; YouTube, Chrome, OneDrive, and Telegram store downloads, caches, and buffers that quietly outgrow the app itself. People go looking because the space disappeared somewhere they can't see — not because they remember filling it.

3. People want to understand before they delete

The clearest signal in the data is *how* people phrase the problem. We split every storage query into two intents — questions that diagnose the problem, and questions that ask for an action:

Intent	Example queries	Share of demand
Diagnostic ("why / what / is it safe")	"why is system data so high," "what is the AppData folder"	57%
Action ("how / best")	"how to clear cache," "best cleaner app"	34%

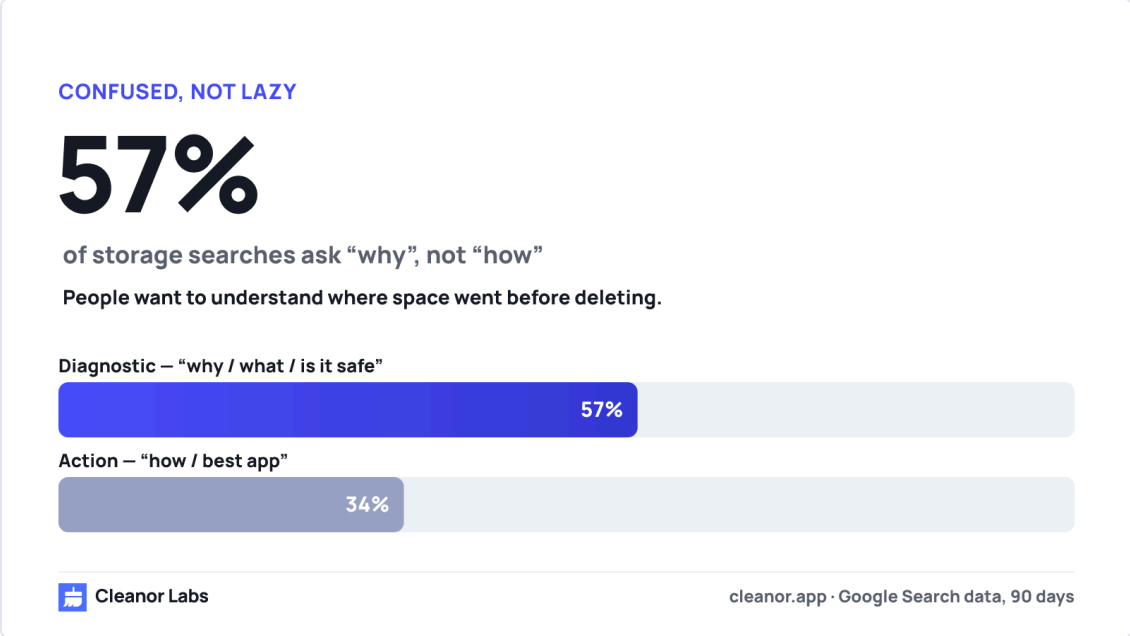

Figure 2. 57% of phone-storage searches are diagnostic (why/what/is it safe) versus 34% action (how/best) — people want to understand before deleting.

A clear majority of searches are people trying to *understand* where their storage went before they touch anything. That matters: the winning content — and the winning app — explains the cause first, then offers the fix. It does not just dump a "delete everything" button in front of someone who is still trying to figure out what "System Data" even is.

The two shares do not sum to 100%. The remaining 9% is a residual slice of navigational and miscellaneous queries — for example brand-name lookups and ambiguous phrasings — that fit neither the diagnostic nor the action pattern, so we leave them unclassified rather than force them into a bucket.

4. Storage anxiety is loudest on Android

Platform	Share of storage-search demand
Android	45%
PC / Windows	26%
iPhone	10%

Android leads by a wide margin — its visible file system and per-app storage screens mean people both notice the problem and go hunting for answers. iPhone's share is smaller, but its searches cluster tightly around one thing: the opaque "System Data" category. The three named platforms account for 81% of demand; the remaining 19% comes from cross-platform queries (e.g. cloud services like OneDrive that span devices) and searches we could not confidently attribute to a single platform.

5. What it means for cleaning your phone

If you are staring at a full phone, the data says the high-value targets are rarely your photos. Work in this order:

1. **Find the hidden hog first.** Check "System Data" (iPhone) or per-app storage (Android) before deleting anything visible.
2. **Audit the blamed apps.** YouTube, Chrome, OneDrive, and Telegram store caches and downloads you can clear without losing your account or content.
3. **Then** clear duplicate photos and large videos — easy wins, but a smaller slice of the real problem.

Cleanor is built for exactly this: it surfaces the hidden storage hogs and big-app buildup first, then duplicate and similar photos and large videos, with everything reviewed on-device before anything is removed. Free on the App Store; Android edition in review.

6. Methodology

Data source. Rankings use Google Search Console (GSC) impressions for cleanor.app's phone- and PC-storage guides over **March 16 – June 14, 2026** — a 90-day window totaling 59,282 impressions. This is first-party data from our own GSC property (i.e. measured directly from our own site, not estimated by a third party), and it is the same dataset as our first storage study; here we slice it by *app* rather than by *problem*.

What the metrics mean, in plain language.

- **Impressions** = how often one of our guides appeared on a Google search results page. We use this as a proxy for relative *demand*: if a guide answering "why does YouTube use so much storage" shows up far more often than one about Spotify, that tells us the YouTube ques-

tion is searched far more. An impression does not require anyone to click.
- **"Share"** = a slice of the total. A platform share of 45% means 45% of the demand in this dataset is attributable to that platform; an intent share of 57% means 57% of the queries fall into that intent bucket.

We report rankings on impressions alone, because impressions track demand independently of how our specific page happened to perform on any given query.

From 34 guides to 9 rows. The corpus is 34 phone- and PC-storage guides. Each guide is mapped to exactly one app or system area — the subject it answers a storage question about ("why does [app] use so much storage / space"). Several apps are covered by more than one guide (for instance, a "what is it" explainer and a "how to clear it" how-to about the same app); in those cases an app's blame demand is the **sum** of impressions across all guides mapped to it. Apps covered by a single guide carry that guide's impressions directly. The nine ranked rows are the nine apps and system areas with enough demand to surface; lower-demand guides roll up into the platform totals but do not appear as their own row.

How the figures were derived.

- *Blame ranking*. For each app, we sum the impressions of every guide mapped to it across the 90-day window and rank the sums, largest first.
- *Intent split*. We classified each guide by its dominant query pattern into **Diagnostic** ("why," "what," "is it safe") or **Action** ("how," "best"), then summed impressions in each bucket to get the 57% / 34% split. The residual 9% is queries that fit neither pattern, left unclassified.
- *Platform split*. We tagged each guide with the platform it addresses (Android, PC/Windows, iPhone) and summed impressions per platform to produce the 45% / 26% / 10% shares; the remaining 19% is cross-platform and unattributed demand.

Limitations — read these before citing.

- *Impressions are a demand proxy, not a census of device usage*. They measure search interest in a topic, not the actual gigabytes any app consumes on a given phone. The "biggest" app on *your* device depends entirely on how you use it. Likewise, the intent split measures how questions are phrased in aggregate — it is evidence about what searchers ask, not a verdict on any individual's motivation.
- *First-party reflection*. This data reflects where *our own* guides surface in Google. An app we have not written a guide about cannot rank here regardless of how often it is blamed, so the list is bounded by our coverage. Apps with strong guides may be over-represented relative to apps we cover thinly.
- *English-language bias*. Our guides are written in English, so the demand captured skews toward English-language searchers, which in turn shapes the platform mix.
- *Attribution is one-to-one*. Each guide is mapped to a single app or platform; queries that genuinely span multiple apps are simplified into one bucket, and the residual platform slice absorbs the cases we could not attribute.

7. Reproduce / data & methods

You could repeat this approach with any Google Search Console property that has topic-segmented storage content:

1. In GSC, set the date range to a fixed 90-day window (we used Mar 16 – Jun 14, 2026) and export the per-page Performance report (impressions and clicks).
2. Map each page to the app or system area it answers a storage question about ("why does [app] use so much storage").
3. Sum impressions per app to build the blame ranking; sum per platform and per intent pattern to build the share tables; leave queries that fit no pattern unclassified rather than forcing them.
4. Treat impressions as a relative demand proxy, not as device-level storage measurements, and note your own content coverage as a bound on the results.

Cite freely with a link to this page.

Related: what actually fills up phone storage · the geography of storage anxiety

8. FAQ

8.1 Which app uses the most storage on phones?

By search demand, the areas people most often blame are background system folders — Windows AppData and the iPhone's "System Data" — followed by big apps like YouTube and Chrome that store caches, downloads, and buffers far larger than the app itself. The exact "biggest" app depends on your usage, but these are the ones people search about most.

8.2 Why is my storage full when I haven't downloaded anything?

Because the space is usually consumed by things you did not download directly: app caches, system data, offline buffers (YouTube, streaming, chat apps), and temporary files. Our data shows 57% of storage searches are people trying to understand this hidden usage rather than asking how to delete files.

8.3 Is "System Data" on iPhone safe to clear?

"System Data" is a catch-all for caches, logs, and temporary files iOS manages itself. You cannot delete it directly, but it usually shrinks when you clear large app caches, remove offline downloads, and restart the device. It is not something to panic about unless it is unusually large.

8.4 What is the AppData folder, and is it safe to touch?

AppData is a hidden folder on Windows where installed programs store settings, caches, and saved data. It tops the blame list because it confuses people and can grow large, but most of it is in use — clear app caches and temporary files from within each program rather than deleting the folder wholesale.

8.5 Why does the blame list look different from the apps actually on my phone?

Because this ranks *search demand* — how often people look up each app's storage behavior — not how many gigabytes any single app uses on a given device. An app can dominate the blame list because it confuses a lot of people (like AppData or "System Data") without being the literal largest folder on your phone. Use the list to know *where to look first*, then check your own per-app storage screen for the real numbers.

8.6 How was this ranking measured?

From Cleanor's Google Search Console account: 59,282 search impressions across 34 phone- and PC-storage guides between March 16 and June 14, 2026, grouped by the app or system area each guide is about, with impressions used as a proxy for relative search demand.

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