CLEANOR LABS · TECHNICAL REPORT · JUNE 2026

What Fills Up Phone Storage? A First-Party Analysis of 59,282 Google Search Impressions for Storage and Cleanup Queries Over a 90-Day Window

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Preprint · https://cleanor.app/blog/phone-storage-problems-2026-search-demand-study

ABSTRACT

Across 90 days, the single biggest driver of "my storage is full" searches is not photos or videos — it is **invisible app and system bloat** (cache, system data, and app data), which accounts for **33.7%** of all phone-storage search demand we measured. "Big apps quietly eating space" (YouTube, Chrome, OneDrive, Telegram) is second at **26.2%**. Photos and videos — the thing most people blame — drive just **5.4%**.

Keywords: phone storage data study, what takes up phone storage, phone storage full, app cache system data, storage problem statistics 2026, why is my storage full

KEY FINDINGS

- We analyzed **59,282 Google Search impressions** across 34 phone-storage guides on cleanor.app (Mar 16 – Jun 14, 2026).
- **App/system bloat (33.7%)** and **big apps eating space (26.2%)** dominate demand — together ~60% of all storage-problem searches.
- **Photos/videos are only 5.4%** of demand, despite being the usual scapegoat.
- The most-searched single problem is *"what is the AppData folder and can I delete it"* (7,749 impressions).
- Surprising finding: the average click-through rate was **0.31%** — people see these guides on the results page but rarely click, which is consistent with AI overviews and search snippets answering storage questions inline.

1. Why this matters

When a phone says "Storage Full," almost everyone reaches for the same fix: delete photos and videos. It is the storage you can see, so it feels like the obvious culprit. But the search data tells a different story. The questions people actually type into Google are overwhelmingly about the storage they *cannot* see — caches, "System Data," and the working files that apps quietly accumulate in the background.

That gap between perceived cause (photos) and searched-for cause (hidden bloat) is the whole point of this study. If the real demand sits with invisible app and system storage, then advice, software, and even built-in OS tools that lead with "delete some photos" are optimizing for roughly 5% of the problem. Understanding where the confusion actually concentrates is the first step to fixing storage in the right order — and to building tools that surface the right thing first.

2. What people actually search when storage fills up

We grouped every storage-related query that reached our guides into problem themes and ranked them by Google Search impressions — which we use as a proxy for real-world demand.

Rank	Storage problem	Share of demand	Impressions
1	App & system bloat (cache, system data, app data)	33.7%	19,981
2	Big apps eating space (YouTube, Chrome, OneDrive, Telegram)	26.2%	15,523
3	PC / disk space	7.6%	4,517
4	Photos & videos cleanup	5.4%	3,201
5	"Storage full" despite deleting	5.0%	2,937
6	Trash / recovery	3.1%	1,838
7	Apps to offload or uninstall	2.9%	1,706
8	Duplicate contacts	1.2%	730

These eight named themes sum to about 85% of impressions; the remaining ~15% is a long tail of smaller storage queries that did not cleanly fit a single theme, which we leave grouped as "other" rather than force into a category.

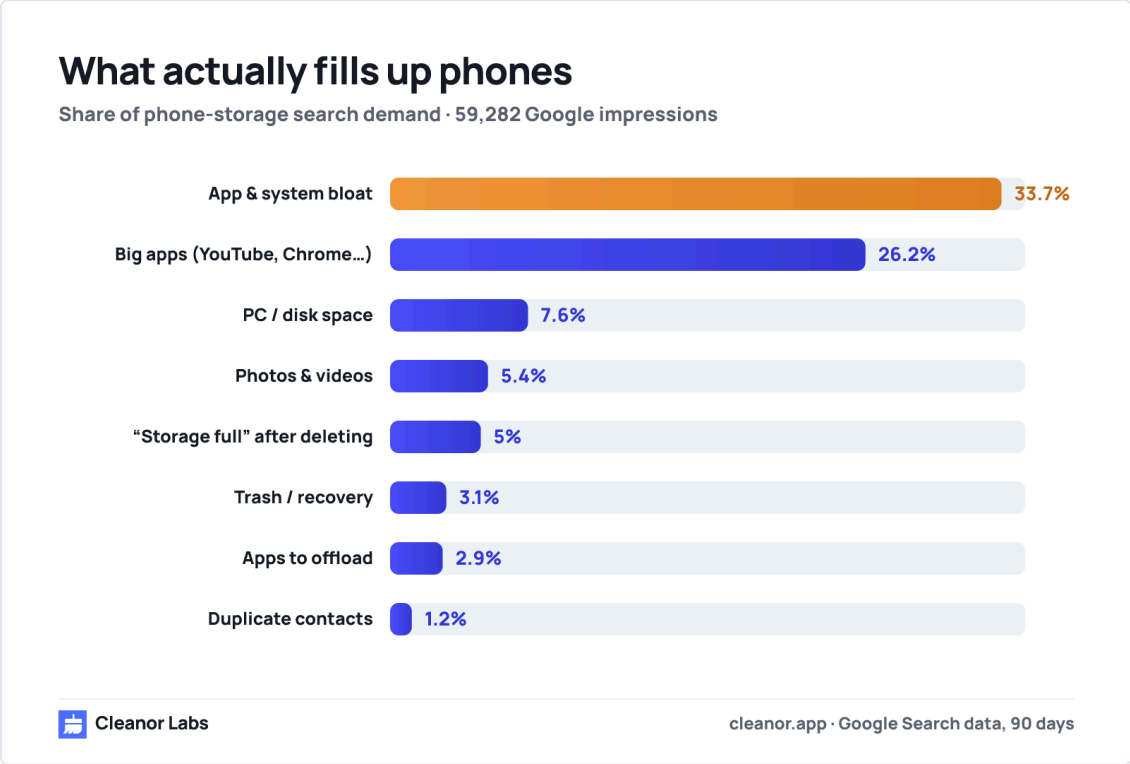

Figure 1. Bar chart: app and system bloat 33.7% and big apps 26.2% dominate phone-storage search demand; photos and videos only 5.4%.

The takeaway: the storage people *can* see (photos, videos) is a small slice of what they actually struggle with. The real pain is the storage they *cannot* see — caches, "System Data," and the working files apps accumulate in the background.

3. The 10 most-searched phone-storage problems

#	Problem	Impressions
1	What is the AppData folder, and can I delete it?	7,749
2	Why does YouTube take up so much storage on Android?	5,114
3	Clear cache vs. clear data — what's the difference?	4,401
4	Why is System Data so high on iPhone?	3,951
5	Why is Chrome taking up so much space on Android?	3,724
6	Why does OneDrive take up local hard-drive space?	2,866
7	Why is my phone storage still full after deleting photos?	2,150
8	How to clean up Telegram downloads on Android	2,034
9	Where is the trash bin on my phone, and how to empty it?	1,838
10	How to offload apps on iPhone without losing data	1,706

Notice how many begin with *"why"* — these are diagnostic questions. People do not start by wanting a cleaner app; they start confused about where their space went.

4. The surprising finding: people stopped clicking

Across all 59,282 impressions, the average click-through rate was just **0.31%**, even though most of these guides rank on the first page of Google. That is far below the 5–30% you would expect for page-one results a few years ago. In raw terms, that 0.31% works out to roughly 184 clicks against 59,282 impressions — high visibility, very few visits.

The most likely explanation is structural. Google's AI Overviews (the summarized answer Google now shows at the top of many results pages) and rich snippets increasingly answer "why is my storage full" directly, and assistants like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Perplexity answer it in chat. We can measure the low CTR directly; the AI-Overview mechanism is our interpretation of *why* it is low, not something the impression data proves on its own. Either way, the pattern is clear: ranking on page one no longer guarantees a click, which is why being the *cited source* — the page an AI answer draws from and links to — now matters as much as ranking.

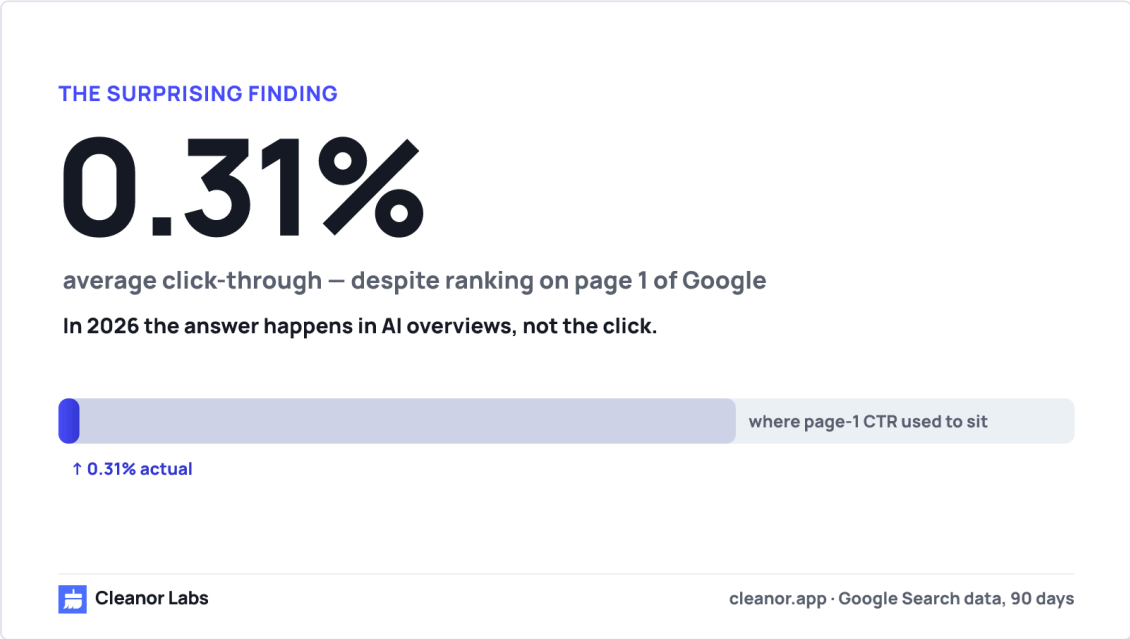

Figure 2. Average click-through rate was just 0.31% despite page-one rankings — searchers get answers from AI overviews instead of clicking.

5. What it means for cleaning your phone

If you are trying to free up space and only deleting photos, you are working on 5% of the problem. Based on this data, the higher-impact moves are:

1. **Clear app caches and review "System Data."** This is the biggest hidden category. Caches are safe to clear; system data needs app-by-app review.
2. **Audit the heavy apps** — YouTube, Chrome, streaming, and chat apps store downloads and buffers that dwarf the app itself.
3. **Then** tackle duplicate and similar photos and large videos, which are easy wins but a smaller share.

Cleanor is built around exactly this order: it surfaces hidden bloat and big-app storage first, then duplicate/similar photos and large videos, with everything reviewed on-device be-

fore anything is removed. It is free on the App Store, with the Android edition in review.

6. Methodology

6.1 Where the data comes from

The figures in this study come from **Google Search Console** (GSC), the analytics service Google provides to the verified owner of a website. GSC reports, for our own domain, how often each page appeared in Google search results and how often searchers clicked through. We pulled this report for **cleanor.app**, restricted to the **34 published guides** that address phone and PC storage problems, for the period **March 16 – June 14, 2026** — a rolling 90-day window (the most recent 90 days available at the time of analysis).

This is **first-party data**: it measures real Google search activity against our actual pages, not estimates from a third-party SEO tool. Nothing here is modeled or scraped; it is the same query report Google shows the site owner.

6.2 What the metrics mean, in plain language

- **Impression** — counted each time one of our guides appeared in a user's Google search results for a query. We treat impressions as a **proxy for demand**: the more often a guide surfaces for storage questions, the more people are asking that kind of question. Across the 34 guides and 90 days, impressions totaled **59,282**.
- **Click-through rate (CTR)** — clicks divided by impressions, expressed as a percentage. A CTR of **0.31%** means that for every ~1,000 times a guide appeared in results, it was clicked roughly 3 times. CTR tells us how often an impression turned into a visit.
- **Share of demand** — each theme's impressions as a percentage of the 59,282 total. For example, app & system bloat's **19,981** impressions ÷ 59,282 ≈ **33.7%**. "Share" is simply a slice of the whole, so the eight themes are portions of the same total.

6.3 How the figures were derived

We exported the per-page impression and click data from Search Console for the 90-day window, then mapped each of the 34 guides to one of eight **problem themes** (for example, every cache / "System Data" / app-data guide rolls up into "App & system bloat"). Summing impressions within each theme gives the per-theme totals in the first table; dividing by the 59,282 grand total gives "share of demand." Because we kept the unclassified long tail in a separate "other" bucket, the eight named themes add up to about 85% rather than 100%. The "10 most-searched problems" table is the same impression data viewed per guide rather than per theme, ranked highest to lowest. The headline **0.31%** CTR is total clicks ÷ total impressions across all 59,282 impressions (about 184 clicks in total).

6.4 Honest limitations

A few caveats a careful reader should keep in mind:

- **Impressions are a demand proxy, not a census.** They tell us how often our guides *surfaced* for storage queries, which correlates with how much people search those topics — but it is not a direct measurement of every search everyone everywhere runs. When we describe demand as large, we mean large *relative to* the other themes here, not an absolute count.
- **First-party data reflects where our own guides rank.** A theme can be under-represented here simply because we publish fewer (or lower-ranking) pages on it, not because demand is low. The shares describe the demand *our coverage intercepts*, which is a strong signal but not the entire market.
- **English-language and Google bias.** Our guides are written in English and the data is Google-only, so the mix skews toward English-speaking, Google-using searchers. Demand from other languages or search engines is not captured.
- **Themes are an editorial grouping.** Assigning each guide to one theme involves judgment at the margins; a guide that touches two topics is placed in its dominant one.

None of these caveats overturn the central finding within this dataset: across our 34 guides, hidden app/system storage and big-app storage together far outweigh photos and videos in search demand. We present it as a strong, internally consistent pattern rather than a measurement of the entire market.

6.5 Reproduce / data & methods

In principle anyone with their own site in this space can repeat the approach. Verify a domain in Google Search Console, open the **Performance → Search results** report, set the date range to a fixed 90-day window, and export the per-page **impressions** and **clicks**. Group your storage-related URLs into problem themes, sum impressions per theme, and divide by the grand total to get each theme's share of demand; divide total clicks by total impressions for the blended CTR (the single rate across all pages combined). The exact per-page numbers will differ from ours — they depend on which pages you publish and how they rank — but the *method* (impressions-as-demand-proxy, themed roll-ups, share-of-total) is fully reproducible.

Figures are Google Search Console impressions and click data for cleanor.app, limited to the 34 published guides on phone and PC storage problems, for the period **March 16 – June 14, 2026** (90 days). "Share of demand" is each theme's impressions as a percentage of the 59,282 total. Impressions measure how often a guide appeared in search results — a proxy for relative search demand. You are welcome to cite this study with a link to this page.

Related: The apps people blame most for full storage · the geography of storage anxiety

7. FAQ

7.1 What takes up the most storage on phones?

By search demand, the biggest source of confusion is invisible app and system bloat — app caches, "System Data," and app data — which made up 33.7% of storage-problem searches in our 90-day analysis. Large apps storing downloads and buffers (YouTube, Chrome, chat apps) were second at 26.2%. Photos and videos, despite their reputation, were only 5.4%.

7.2 Why is my phone storage full even though I deleted photos?

Because photos are usually a small part of the problem. App caches, "System Data," offline downloads inside apps, and items still sitting in a trash/recently-deleted folder often hold far more space. Deleting photos alone rarely moves the needle if the hidden categories are untouched.

7.3 Is it safe to clear cache to free up space?

Yes. Clearing cache removes temporary files and is safe — apps simply rebuild them. This is different from "clear data" (sometimes labelled "clear storage"), which resets the app and can wipe logins and downloads. For storage cleanup, clear cache first.

7.4 How was this data collected?

From Cleanor's own Google Search Console account: 59,282 search impressions across 34 phone- and PC-storage guides between March 16 and June 14, 2026. It reflects what people search for, measured by how often our guides appeared in Google results.

7.5 Are impressions the same as the number of people searching?

No. An impression is counted each time one of our guides appears in someone's search results, so it measures how often storage topics surface for our pages — a reliable *proxy* for relative demand rather than a head-count of every searcher. We use it to compare themes against one another, which is what the share-of-demand percentages do.

7.6 Why is the click-through rate so low if these pages rank on page one?

The most likely reason is that in 2026 many storage answers are now resolved on the results page itself. Google's AI Overviews and rich snippets surface the answer to "why is my storage full" without a click, and chat assistants answer it in conversation. We can measure the result — a 0.31% average CTR despite page-one rankings — but the AI-Overview explanation is our interpretation of the cause, not something the CTR figure proves directly. Either way, ranking high no longer guarantees a visit, which makes being the cited source as important as ranking.

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How to cite: Cleanor Labs Research Team. "What Fills Up Phone Storage? A First-Party Analysis of 59,282 Google Search Impressions for Storage and Cleanup Queries Over a 90-Day Window." Cleanor Labs Technical Report, June 2026. https://cleanor.app/blog/phone-storage-problems-2026-search-demand-study