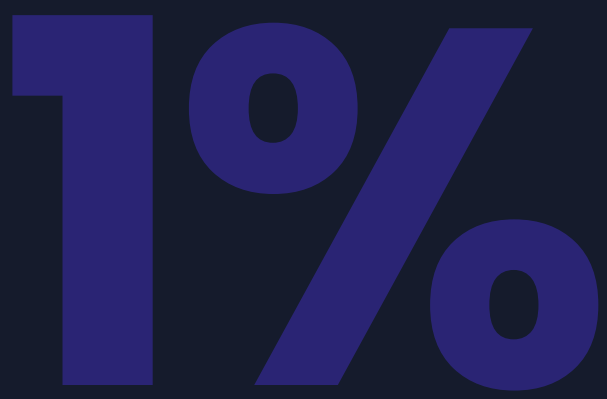
seogirl

SEO GIRL RESEARCH · AI SEARCH EVIDENCE REVIEW

The 1% Question

What AI search clicks are really worth, and what a single-site opt-out test can and cannot tell us.



Ameneh Saeednia
Senior SEO & Generative Search Strategist

November 2026
seogirl.ca

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A real number, a misleading headline

I started this research with one question: **what is a click from AI search actually worth?** The latest number in circulation comes from a single-site opt-out test shared in October 2026, which estimated a **~0.9% click-through rate** on AI impressions [1]. Social posts quickly turned that into "AI Overviews and AI Mode have less than a 1% CTR." This report tests that claim against every major published CTR study, explains what the numbers really measure, and turns them into a measurement framework and decision guide you can use.

~0.9%

Estimated CTR of one site's AI-feature impressions, before vs. after opting out

Single-site opt-out test, Oct 2026 [1]

1%

Share of visits to Google results pages with an AI summary where users clicked a link inside it

Pew Research, Jul 2025 [3]

+120%

More organic clicks per impression when a brand is cited in the AI Overview vs. not cited

Seer Interactive, Apr 2026 [6]

Five takeaways

1. **The 0.9% is credible but narrow.** It is an estimate for one site, derived by subtraction, and was shared as a small case study, not a benchmark. Even the original framing called the number "not too shabby," not a disaster [1].
2. **Independent studies land in the same neighbourhood.** Pew found users clicked a link inside an AI summary on 1% of visits. That convergence is the real story, and it is more convincing than any single test.
3. **The surprise is the halo.** When the site left AI features, its **regular organic clicks dropped too**. If that holds up elsewhere, AI visibility has value that a direct-click CTR never captures.
4. **Being cited still beats not being cited.** Seer's data shows cited brands earn far more clicks than uncited ones on the same AI Overview queries, though both trail queries with no AI Overview.
5. **Opting out is now a real lever, so measure before you pull it.** Google's Search generative AI control rolled out to all websites worldwide on August 31, 2026. It is domain-level, so a wrong call affects your whole site.

01 · THE ORIGINAL TEST

The test behind the headline

The figure comes from a case study shared on LinkedIn and covered by industry press on **October 30, 2026** [1][2]. The site owner used Google's **Search generative AI control** in Search Console to remove a site from AI Overviews, AI Mode and AI Overviews in Discover, then compared impressions, clicks and CTR across the periods when the site was in, then out, then back in AI features.

~8%

AI impressions as a share of the site's total Search Console impressions

0

AI impressions while opted out. They dropped to zero immediately [1]

How the 0.9% was calculated

Google's AI performance report shows **impressions only, with no clicks and no CTR** [8]. So the CTR was estimated indirectly, by comparing overall site CTR and impressions and subtracting the known AI impressions during the test period [1]. In other words, the 0.9% is **a modelled estimate, not a measured metric**.

> "Most surprisingly, regular organic clicks ALSO DROPPED when AI features were disabled."
>
> Reported finding from the opt-out test [1]

The headline vs. the data

WHAT THE VIRAL POST SAYS

"AI Overviews + AI Mode have less than a 1% CTR."

Framed as a universal rule for AI search.

Implies opting out costs you almost nothing.

WHAT THE SOURCE SUPPORTS

One site's AI impressions earned an **estimated ~0.9%**.

No site name, dates or sample size published. Press coverage called it "a super limited study" [1].

Opting out also **reduced regular organic clicks** and overall impressions.

Three caveats that matter

AI Overviews still appeared on those results pages. The site was only missing from them, so this does not compare SERPs with and without an AI Overview. **Average position rose sitewide** during the test because of new posts and brand search, which muddies the before/after. And the organic drop has **no published percentage**, so its size is unknown. The suggested explanation, an "AI-driven SERP halo effect," remains a hypothesis.

02 · THE EVIDENCE BASE

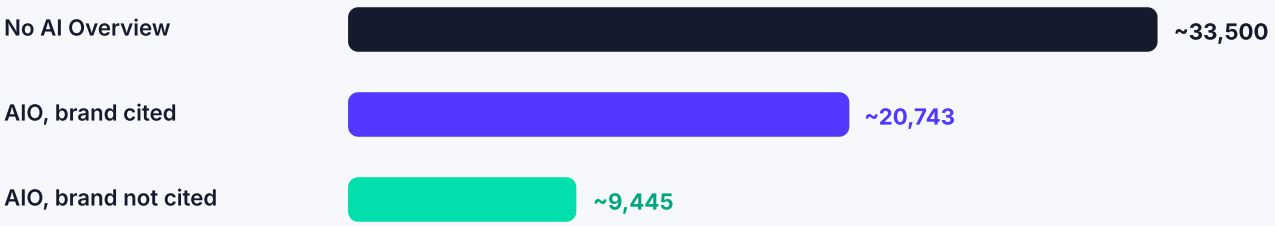
Five studies, five different "CTRs"

These numbers are often quoted side by side, but they measure different things. Read the "what's measured" column before comparing anything.

Study	What's measured	Headline	Data & limits
Opt-out test Oct 2026 [1]	Estimated CTR of one site's AI-feature impressions	**~0.9%**	Before/after opt-out, one unnamed site. single site
Pew Research Jul 2025 [3]	Share of visits with an AI summary where a user clicked a link inside it	**1%** of visits Traditional result clicks: 8% with summary vs. 15% without	Browsing data from 900 U.S. adults, March 2025. 18% of searches produced a summary. user behaviour
Ahrefs Feb 2026 [4]	Position-1 CTR on keywords with an AI Overview vs. a forecast without one	**−58%** ~1.6% actual vs. ~3.7% forecast	300,000 keywords, aggregated GSC desktop data, Dec 2023 vs. Dec 2025. Correlational. Up from −34.5% in Apr 2025 [5].
Seer Interactive Nov 2025 [7]	Organic CTR by AI Overview presence and citation, Q3 2025	**0.70%** cited 0.52% not cited · 1.45% no AIO	3,119 informational queries, 42 client orgs, 25.1M impressions. informational only
Seer Interactive Apr 2026 [6]	Organic clicks per impression, cited vs. not cited (informational)	**+120%** when cited still −38% vs. no AIO	5.47M queries, 53 brands, 2.43B impressions. AIO CTR rebounded from 1.3% (Dec 2025) to 2.4% (Feb 2026).

Clicks per 1 million organic impressions (informational queries)

Seer Interactive, AIO Impact on Google CTR: 2026 Update [6]. Approximate values as published.



Also on the record: Google's Nick Fox said on July 17, 2026 that Google is "sending billions of clicks to websites every week through AI features in Search alone" [9]. No denominator or CTR was shared, so it cannot be compared with the studies above [10].

03 · INTERPRETATION

What "under 1%" does and doesn't mean

It does mean

Direct clicks from AI features are scarce. Two very different methods (one site's Search Console math, Pew's panel of 900 users) both land near 1%.

AI impressions are cheap. A citation can register an impression without the user ever looking at your link, so the denominator is huge.

Traffic-only KPIs will undervalue AI visibility and should not be the only lens for reporting it.

It doesn't mean

That every site gets 0.9%. Ahrefs and Seer show results vary by intent, position and citation status.

That AI visibility is worthless. In the opt-out test, losing it coincided with fewer regular organic clicks.

That opting out is safe. One site, unknown size, unmeasured organic loss. That is a hypothesis to test, not a policy to copy.

The denominator problem

A traditional organic CTR divides clicks by impressions where your blue link was on screen. An **AI impression** counts whenever your URL appears inside an AI feature, often as one of many cited sources, sometimes behind a "show more" expansion. A low CTR on a very loose impression definition is **not evidence that users ignore you**. It may partly mean the metric counts exposures nobody saw.

The halo hypothesis

If AI features act as **a pre-click trust signal**, then appearing in them could lift clicks on your regular listing, your brand searches, or later visits. Greg Sterling noted that Near Media research suggests AI Overviews create "a kind of brand lift or awareness" [1]. Seer's citation premium points the same way, though Seer is careful to say authority may drive both citation and clicks [6]. None of this is proven causally yet.

Why studies disagree

Source of difference	Why it moves the number
Query intent	Informational queries trigger most AI Overviews. Ahrefs found 99.2% of AIO keywords were informational [5]. Commercial and local queries behave differently.
Unit of measure	Per impression (opt-out test, Seer), per keyword position (Ahrefs) or per visit (Pew) produce different baselines.
Time window	CTR keeps shifting. Seer saw AIO-query CTR nearly double from Dec 2025 to Feb 2026 [6].
Citation status	Being cited vs. merely ranking under an AI Overview is a large gap in every Seer dataset.

04 · MEASUREMENT

How to measure AI visibility beyond clicks

Google gives you AI impressions but not AI clicks. Build a scorecard from six signals instead of waiting for one perfect metric.

1. **Search Console AI performance report.** Track AI impressions by page, country and device (data starts May 18, 2026) [8]. Watch **AI impressions as a share of total impressions**. The opt-out test site was at about 8%; know your own baseline.

2. **Estimate AI CTR with the subtraction method.** Compare total clicks and impressions with known AI impressions over matched periods. Treat it as a directional estimate and note any confounders (new content, seasonality, algorithm updates).

3. **Isolate AI assistant referrals in GA4.** Create a custom channel group for chatbot traffic. Google's own AI Overview and AI Mode clicks generally can't be separated from regular organic in GA4, so this covers the other assistants:

```
source matches regex: chatgpt\.com|chat\.openai\.com|perplexity\.ai|gemini\.google\.com|copilot\.microsoft\.com|claude\.ai
```

4. **Brand search as the halo metric.** In Search Console, filter queries containing your brand and trend clicks and impressions. If AI visibility builds awareness, this is where it should show up first.

5. **Citation tracking.** Run a fixed prompt set across AI Overviews, AI Mode and the major assistants monthly. Log whether you're cited, cited first, or absent, and compare with competitors.

6. **Assisted conversions.** In GA4 path exploration, check how often AI-referred or brand-search sessions appear earlier in converting journeys. AI's value often shows up as **assists, not last clicks**.

Suggested KPI reframe: report AI search as **visibility** (AI impressions share, citation rate), **demand** (brand search trend) and **outcomes** (AI-referred and assisted conversions). Keep clicks in the dashboard, just not as the headline.

05 · DECISION GUIDE

Should you opt out of Google's AI features?

Since **August 31, 2026**, Google's **Search generative AI control** has been available to all websites worldwide [11]. Google says sites that opt out "will not receive traffic or impressions from our generative AI features," and that the control "will not be used as a ranking signal for search results outside of these generative AI Search features" [8]. It is **domain-level only**. Page-level controls aren't available yet [10].

Stay in (most sites)

- Brands that rely on discovery and trust
- E-commerce, travel, local and service businesses
- Sites where brand search or assisted conversions matter
- Anyone who can't yet measure the halo effect

Test carefully

- Content-heavy sites where AI answers fully satisfy the query
- Sites with high AI impression share but flat brand demand
- Teams with clean baselines and a quiet season to test in

Consider opting out

- Publishers whose business model depends on the visit itself
- Sites pursuing content licensing who need leverage
- Cases where AI summaries misrepresent your content

Know the alternatives

Control	What it does
Search generative AI control	Removes the domain from AI Overviews, AI Mode and AI Overviews in Discover. Regular rankings unaffected, per Google [8].
Google-Extended	Covers model training and grounding, but content can still appear in AI Overviews and AI Mode [10].
nosnippet	Affects AI features and regular search snippets at the same time, so it's a blunt tool [10].

If you test it, run it like an experiment

1. Record 8+ weeks of baseline: AI impressions, total clicks, brand clicks, conversions. **2.** Opt out for a fixed window and freeze major content changes. **3.** Opt back in and observe the recovery. **4.** Publish your numbers, including the organic change. That is the missing piece in the public evidence.

Bottom line: under 1% direct CTR is real and consistent across methods. But the opt-out test behind the headline also lost regular organic clicks. Until more sites share data, **treat AI visibility as a brand asset with a measurement problem**, not a traffic channel that failed.

SOURCES & METHOD

Sources

Every figure in this report was checked against the source listed. Where a number is an estimate or comes from a single site, the text says so. Research completed November 1, 2026.

1 Barry Schwartz, "Google AI Overviews & AI Mode 0.9% Click-Through Rate, Opt Out Study Says," Search Engine Roundtable, Oct 30, 2026. seroundtable.com/google-ai-overviews-mode-ctr-42421.html

2 Cyrus Shepard, LinkedIn post (opt-out case study), Oct 2026. linkedin.com/posts/cyrusshepard_case-study-...

3 Pew Research Center, "Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results," Jul 22, 2025. pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/...

4 Ryan Law, Xibeijia Guan, "Update: AI Overviews Reduce Clicks by 58%," Ahrefs, Feb 4, 2026. ahrefs.com/blog/ai-overviews-reduce-clicks-update

5 Ryan Law, Xibeijia Guan, "AI Overviews Reduce Clicks by 34.5%," Ahrefs, Apr 17, 2025. ahrefs.com/blog/ai-overviews-reduce-clicks

6 Tracy McDonald, Hannah Cooley, Marketa Williams, "AIO Impact on Google CTR: 2026 Update," Seer Interactive, Apr 24, 2026. seerinteractive.com/insights/aio-impact-on-google-ctr-2026-update

7 Tracy McDonald, "AIO Impact on Google CTR: September 2025 Update," Seer Interactive, Nov 4, 2025. seerinteractive.com/insights/aio-impact-on-google-ctr-september-2025-update

8 Barry Schwartz, "Google Search Console AI Performance Report & AI Blocking Controls (Limited)," Search Engine Roundtable, Jun 3, 2026. seroundtable.com/google-ai-performance-report-blocking-controls-41443.html

9 Barry Schwartz, "Google: We Send Billions Of Clicks To Websites Weekly Through AI Search," Search Engine Roundtable, Jul 20, 2026. seroundtable.com/google-ai-search-billions-clicks-41709.html

10 Matt G. Southern, Search Engine Journal, on the AI search opt-out and Search Console reports, Jun 6, 2026 searchenginejournal.com/.../577978; and "Google Claims AI Search Sends Quality Clicks, Without Sharing Data," Jul 18, 2026 searchenginejournal.com/.../582755

11 Barry Schwartz, "Google Search Console Generative AI Performance Report & AI Control Live," Search Engine Roundtable, Sep 1, 2026. seroundtable.com/google-search-console-generative-ai-tools-live-41984.html

Method notes

The opt-out test site, test dates and the size of the organic click drop were not published, so they are not reported here. Ahrefs' absolute CTRs are taken from the formulas in its post. Seer's 2026 per-million-impression figures are approximate as published. The GA4 regex is a starting template; check your own referral sources before relying on it.

Original work: the research question, cross-study comparison, "what it does and doesn't mean" analysis, measurement scorecard and opt-out decision guide were developed by Ameneh Saeednia for this report. Third-party data is cited to its source.

Independent research by **Ameneh Saeednia**, Senior SEO & Generative Search Strategist. No client data was used. More research and tools at **seogirl.ca**.