

AI Platform Click Referrer Reference

How outbound clicks from major AI platforms appear in raw HTTP referrer data and GA4 default channel groupings — across web, mobile web, mobile app, and desktop app surfaces.

Platform	Surface / Client	Raw HTTP Referrer	GA4 source / medium	GA4 Default Channel	Notes
ChatGPT	Web — desktop browser	https://chatgpt.com/	chatgpt.com / referral —or— chatgpt.com / (not set) if UTM-tagged	Referral or Unassigned	Referrer passes on direct clicks. Since mid-2025 OpenAI appends utm_source=chatgpt.com to citation links but not utm_medium — so UTM-tagged visits land as Unassigned, not Referral, in GA4's default grouping.
	Mobile web browser	https://chatgpt.com/	chatgpt.com / referral	Referral	Consistent with desktop web; referrer passes when user taps a link in the mobile browser version.
	iOS / Android app	None — stripped (OS handoff to system browser)	(direct) / (none)	Direct (dark)	App pushes links to the system browser via OS handoff; referrer stripped in transit. Copy-paste (common in ChatGPT) is also dark. Near-100% dark on mobile app.
	Desktop app — Atlas (macOS)	None — stripped (sandboxed Chromium)	(direct) / (none)	Direct (dark)	ChatGPT Atlas (Oct 2025, Chromium) impersonates a standard Chrome user agent so bot filters miss it. Sandboxed environment suppresses referrer headers.
Claude	Web — desktop browser	https://claude.ai/ (when passes)	claude.ai / referral	Referral	Referrer inconsistently passed — some links include it, others strip it. No UTM parameters from Anthropic. Low tracking reliability overall.
	Mobile web browser	https://claude.ai/ (when passes)	claude.ai / referral	Referral	Same inconsistency as desktop web. Referrer passes on a minority of sessions.
	iOS / Android app	None — stripped (SFSafariViewController / WebView)	(direct) / (none)	Direct (dark)	iOS uses SFSafariViewController, which sandboxes content and strips the claude.ai origin. Near-100% dark.
	Desktop app (Electron)	None — stripped (OS handoff)	(direct) / (none)	Direct (dark)	External links trigger shell.openExternal() — URL passed to system browser with no referrer context. Uses claude:// URI scheme internally.

Platform	Surface / Client	Raw HTTP Referrer	GA4 source / medium	GA4 Default Channel	Notes
Gemini	Web — browser (desktop & Chrome sidebar)	https://gemini.google.com/	gemini.google.com / referral	Referral	No standalone desktop app — all desktop access is browser or Chrome Enterprise sidebar. Despite the google.com domain, GA4 classifies as Referral not Organic Search (medium is "referral", not "organic").
	Mobile web browser	https://gemini.google.com/	gemini.google.com / referral	Referral	Moderate reliability; similar to desktop web.
	iOS / Android Gemini app	None — stripped OR google.com (via Google App routing)	(direct) / (none) —or— google / organic	Direct (dark) or Organic Search	Worst mobile performer. Routes clicks through Google App framework / Chrome Custom Tabs. ~91% land as Direct; a minority bleed into google / organic via a Google Search intermediate — invisible even in a custom AI channel group.
AI Overviews	Web — desktop browser	https://www.google.com/search?... (same as regular organic)	google / organic	Organic Search	Appears within the standard Google SERP. Referrer is google.com — identical to any organic click. Completely indistinguishable from regular organic search in GA4 and GSC. Google says these clicks are "included in overall search traffic" in GSC.
	Mobile browser / Google app	https://www.google.com/search?...	google / organic	Organic Search	Same as desktop — indistinguishable from organic. Viewable in GSC only via the Search Appearance filter.
AI Mode	Web — desktop browser	https://www.google.com/search?... (after May 28 2025 fix)	google / organic	Organic Search	Launched May 2025 with a noreferrer bug — all clicks appeared as Direct. Google confirmed as a bug and fixed it May 28 2025. Post-fix: google / organic, indistinguishable from regular search. No separate GSC dimension as of April 2026.
	Mobile browser / Google app	https://www.google.com/search?... (after May 28 2025 fix)	google / organic	Organic Search	Same as desktop post-fix. Before May 28 2025: appeared as Direct.

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Perplexity	Web — desktop browser	https://www.perplexity.ai/	perplexity.ai / referral	Referral	Best-performing AI platform for referrer passing. Highly consistent. Perplexity deliberately preserves referrer data.
	Mobile web browser	https://www.perplexity.ai/	perplexity.ai / referral	Referral	Good reliability; similar to desktop web.
	iOS / Android app	https://www.perplexity.ai/ (~70% of sessions)	perplexity.ai / referral (~70%) (direct) / (none) (~30%)	Referral (~70%) / Direct (~30%)	Significantly better than competing apps: ~30% dark vs ~70–91% for ChatGPT/Gemini mobile. Referrer passes in the majority of in-app sessions. (Loamly, 446k visit dataset, Feb 2026)
	Perplexity Comet (AI browser)	https://www.perplexity.ai/	perplexity.ai / referral	Referral	Unlike ChatGPT Atlas, Comet passes referrer data reliably. As Comet grows as a default system browser, mobile attribution should improve further.

Key caveats

Scale of the problem: 70.6% of all AI-origin traffic lands as Direct in GA4 by default (Loamly, 446k visit dataset, Feb 2026). Dark AI traffic converts at ~10% transactional rate vs ~2.5% for average traffic — the most valuable visits are the hardest to see.

ChatGPT UTM tags: OpenAI appends `utm_source=chatgpt.com` to citation links (mid-2025+) but not `utm_medium`. A UTM hit without a medium sets `medium=(not set)`, which in GA4's default grouping produces Unassigned not Referral. Fix: add a custom channel rule matching source contains `chatgpt.com`.

GA4 custom channel grouping: Create a new channel above the default Referral rule in Admin Data display Channel groups using: `(chatgpt\.com|chat\.openai\.com|perplexity\.ai|claude\.ai|gemini\.google\.com)`. This catches web/referral traffic but not dark traffic from mobile apps.

Google's AI features: Both AI Overviews and AI Mode clicks appear as `google / organic` — identical to any standard organic click. No way to separate them in GA4 as of April 2026. The AI Mode norereferrer bug (May 2025) was fixed May 28 2025.

Perplexity is the outlier: Perplexity is notably better at passing referrer data, especially on mobile (~70% attributed vs ~9% for Gemini app). Desktop web is near-perfect across all platforms except Claude.

Desktop AI apps: ChatGPT Atlas (macOS) and Claude desktop both suppress referrer headers and impersonate standard browser user agents — invisible to analytics and most bot filters alike.