

ChatGPT Referrals to E-Commerce Websites: How Do LLMs Compare Against Traditional Channels?

Maximilian Kaiser (University of Hamburg · Grips Intelligence) & **Christian Schulze** (Frankfurt School of Finance & Management) · Peer-reviewed and published in *Marketing Science* (INFORMS), 2026

Organic LLM traffic — shoppers who reach an e-commerce website through ChatGPT rather than search, ads, email, or social — is, one year in, a small but fast-improving channel: under 0.2% of visits, converting and earning per session below every traditional channel except paid social, and running higher-intent for complex, considered purchases.



KEY FACTS

- First large-scale empirical study of **organic LLM (oLLM)** traffic to e-commerce.
- 12 months of first-party data, Aug 2024 – Jul 2025; ChatGPT is **90%+** of LLM-referred sessions.
- oLLM converts and earns per session **below all traditional channels except paid social**.
- It **improved over the year** (conversion up, order value down).
- Runs **higher-intent for complex products** (~4.6× higher traffic share), where it already out-converts several channels.

HOW TO COVER IT

- **A small, fast-improving channel that runs higher-intent for complex products** — not "AI doesn't work for commerce," but also not "high-intent across the board."
- The headline is the **channel comparison**; the forward angle is **steady improvement**.
- "E-commerce websites" span **24 categories** — retail, finance, travel, law & government, and more — not just shops.
- Measures **ChatGPT referrals to e-commerce websites** — distinct from on-platform Instant Checkout or paid ads.

CITE AS

Kaiser, M., & Schulze, C. (2026). *ChatGPT Referrals to E-Commerce Websites: How Do LLMs Compare Against Traditional Channels?* Marketing Science. DOI: 10.1287/mksc.2025.0489 · SSRN: 5585812

CONTACT (INTERVIEWS IN ENGLISH & GERMAN)

Maximilian Kaiser — University of Hamburg
research@maximiliankaiser.org
Christian Schulze — Frankfurt School
email@christian-schulze.de