The commercial power of brands in the digital world

Evaluating the effect of the brand in online sales, and the efficiency of brand- and non-brand SEM-investments.

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Agenda

Behind this study

Kapero are management consultants with an engineering background specializing in marketing, communication and media.

We help marketing and communications departments, publishers, and broadcasting companies optimize their strategies, processes, and organization to increase efficiency and maximize business impact.

We carry out our projects in close cooperation with our clients, their employees, and stakeholders.

We simplify and clarify prioritization, collaboration, roles, responsibilities, key performance indicators, and decision-making processes. Our goal is to increase value creation, streamline processes, integrate into commercial operations, and ensure alignment with business goals. Our method is based on solid data analysis and interviews, which form the basis for our solutions.

We are grounded in applied knowledge, and, as specialists in the field, we support our customers with implementation.

Founded in 2002, Kapero has completed more than 300 projects for over 100 clients. Our customers are found in most industries. Many of them are active globally, in both B2B and B2C sectors. We also work with several of Europe's largest media houses.

Our clients include Ikea, H&M, Scania, Atlas Copco, Electrolux, Marshall, Volvo, Oatly, Arla, Oriflame, Bonnier News, Aller Media, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Bauer Media, Gjensidige

ANFO is the major organization for advertisers and marketing-driven companies in Norway. It represents businesses across sectors and sizes, working to secure the best possible commercial, regulatory and professional conditions for those who invest in marketing. ANFO is the unified voice of Norwegian advertisers, always working to improve conditions in the industry on behalf of our members.

It engages with policymakers, regulators and industry stakeholders to safeguard fair competition, transparency and responsible market practices. In a landscape increasingly shaped by global platforms and technology giants, this role has become more critical. A growing share of advertising spend flows to international ecosystems with limited transparency, shifting power away from local markets. ANFO works to address these structural imbalances and strengthen advertisers' position.

ANFO also provides its members with practical tools, training, insight and surveys. AI for marketers is a priority. ANFO supports members in understanding, implementing and governing AI in marketing, from strategy and productivity to ethics, compliance and brand risk.

The objective is clear: To ensure that Norwegian advertisers remain competitive, data-driven and responsible in a rapidly evolving technological environment.

In short, ANFO combines advocacy, knowledge/education and market insight to strengthen advertisers' influence and long-term value creation in Norway.

Norwegian Media Businesses' Association is the media trade- and tariff organization in Norway. The organization counts approx. 324 member businesses, consisting newspapers, TV companies, media groups, magazines, multimedia companies, press agencies, radio stations, printing offices, distribution companies, advertising groups and advertising companies. The Norwegian Media Businesses' Association is a member of the Confederation of Norwegian Business and is the main negotiator vis-à-vis the labour unions in the media industry.
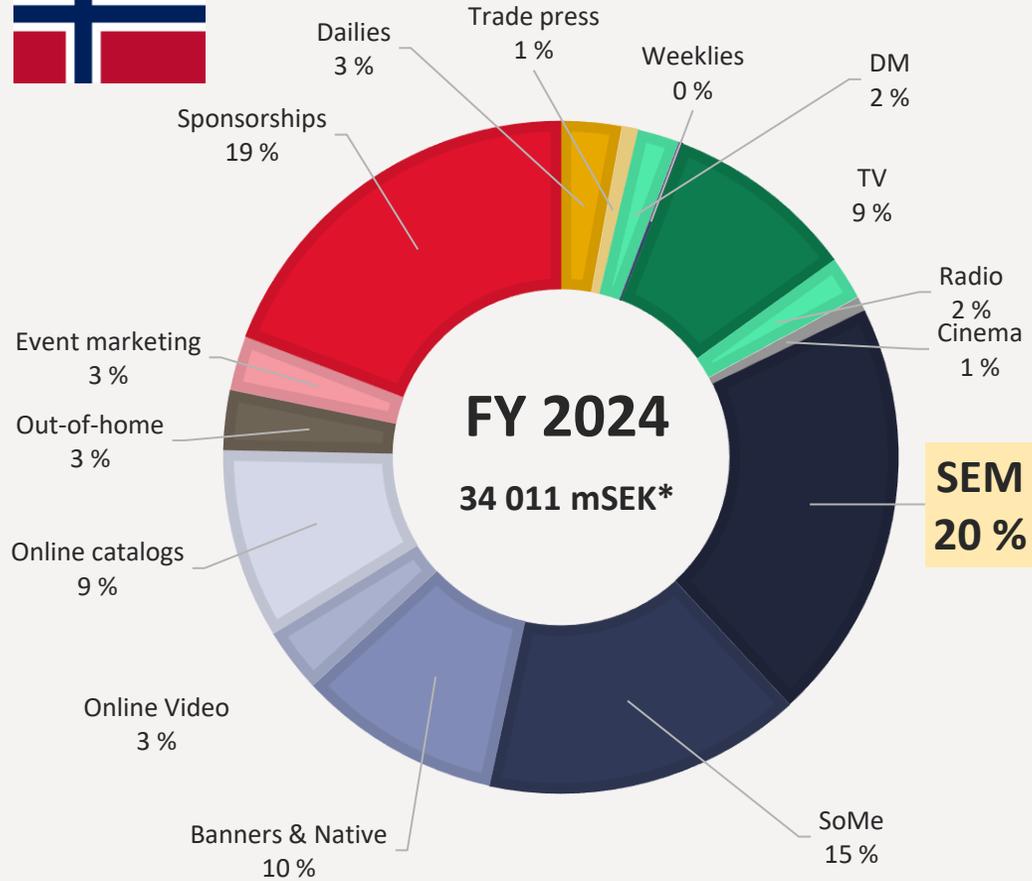
Association objectives

- Attend to members common interests, thereby contributing to a diverse, independent and economically healthy industry.
- Secure editorial independence, and work towards securing an overall framework beneficial to the industry's competitiveness and profitability, thereby securing jobs within the industry
- Promote contact and cooperation between members, and between members and employees.
- Initiate common initiatives in cases where the members deem it necessary and useful.

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ANFO

MEDIEBEDRIFTENE

Increasing investments in digital platforms

Norway — FY 2024 — 34 011 mSEK*

- Sponsorships 19 %
- Dailies 3 %
- Trade press 1 %
- Weeklies 0 %
- DM 2 %
- TV 9 %
- Radio 2 %
- Cinema 1 %
- SEM 20 %
- SoMe 15 %
- Banners & Native 10 %
- Online Video 3 %
- Online catalogs 9 %
- Out-of-home 3 %
- Event marketing 3 %

Sweden — FY 2024 — 62 890 mSEK**

- Sponsring 15 %
- Tryckta nyhetsmedier 3 %
- Tryckta intressemedier 1 %
- Direktreklam 3 %
- TV 7 %
- Radio 2 %
- Bio 0 %
- SEM 35 %
- Sociala nätverk 10 %
- Display (banners) 7 %
- Online Video 5 %
- Onlinekataloger och eftertext 4 %
- Out-of-home 3 %
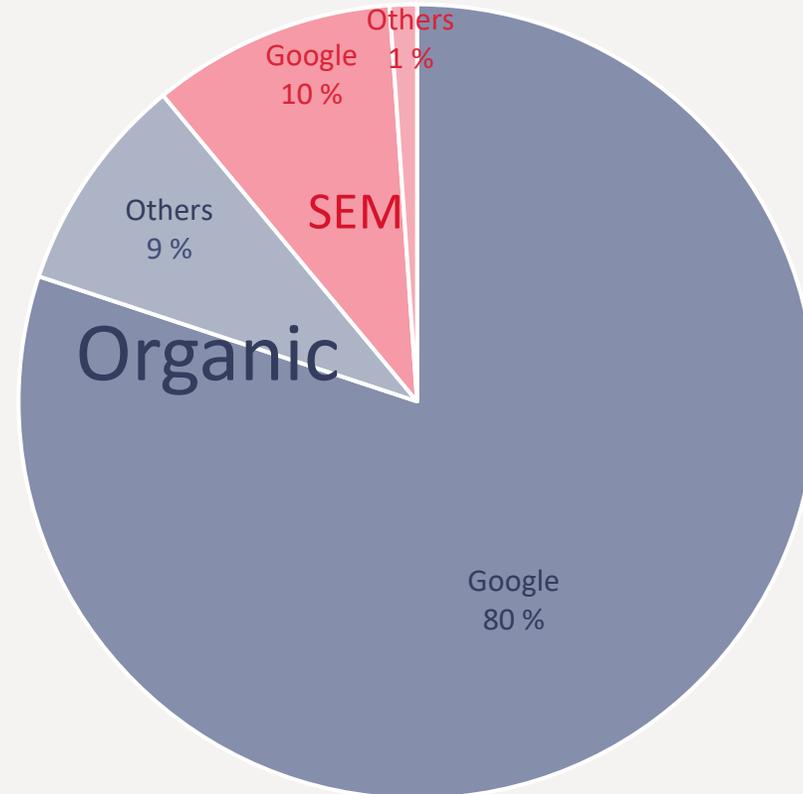- Eventmarknadsföring 5 %

* Source: irm-media.no

* Source: irm-media.se

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Background and purpose

- This study is a neutral initiative that aims to evaluate the effect of the brand on online sales and the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments on a broader base of companies.

- The purpose is to help organizations understand the true costs and potential limitations of SEM-centric advertising strategies and identify more sustainable growth opportunities.

- To achieve this, we evaluated what is driving traffic, conversions, and revenue by analyzing web statistics. This allows us to understand where the brand has been a key driver and where other factors have generated traffic, conversions, and revenue.

- Our aim is not to claim "non-brand or "brand"-traffic as good or bad. Both play distinct roles in the journey. The point is to understand what truly drives volume and value, and when search is capturing category demand versus when the brand is doing the heavy lifting to convert.

Google is dominant in search in Norway*

Others 1 %
Google 10 %
SEM
Others 9 %
Organic
Google 80 %

* Source: statcounter.com & searchengineland.com

Project context

Participating companies

The companies:

Norwegian strong, well-known brands across multiple categories and business models – both B2B and B2C - reflecting different maturity levels and funnel shapes.

Criterias for participation:

Companies with defined measurable on-site conversion (purchase, booking, sign-up, or lead generation) so traffic can be tied to outcomes.

All participating companies have a mix of sales channels, where online is one of them, but not necessarily the main one.

Time period:

Full-year 2024 with selected intra-year cuts where useful (e.g., seasonality, campaign- or billing effects).
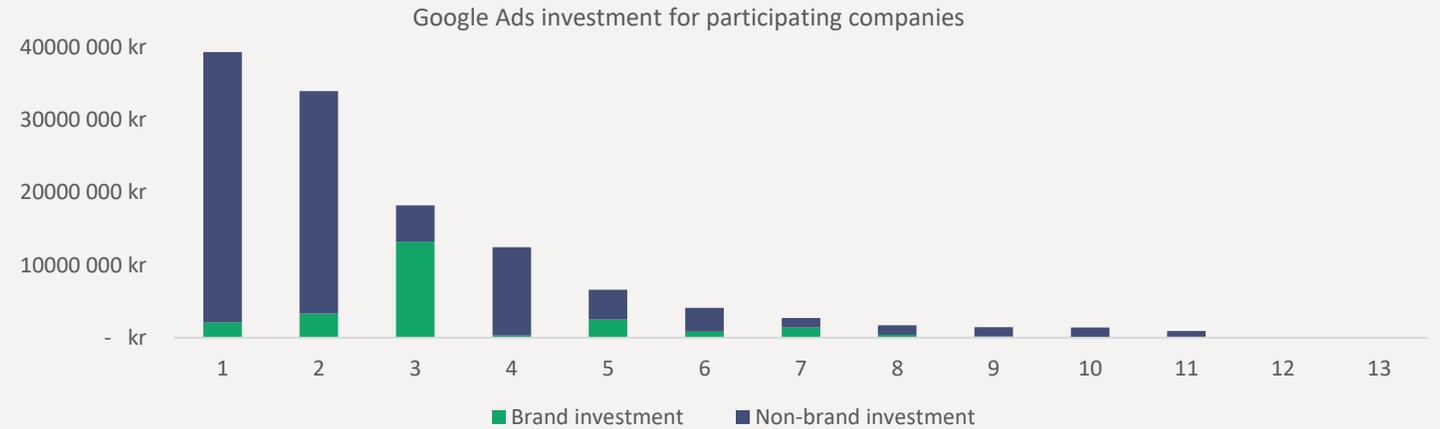
Participating companies
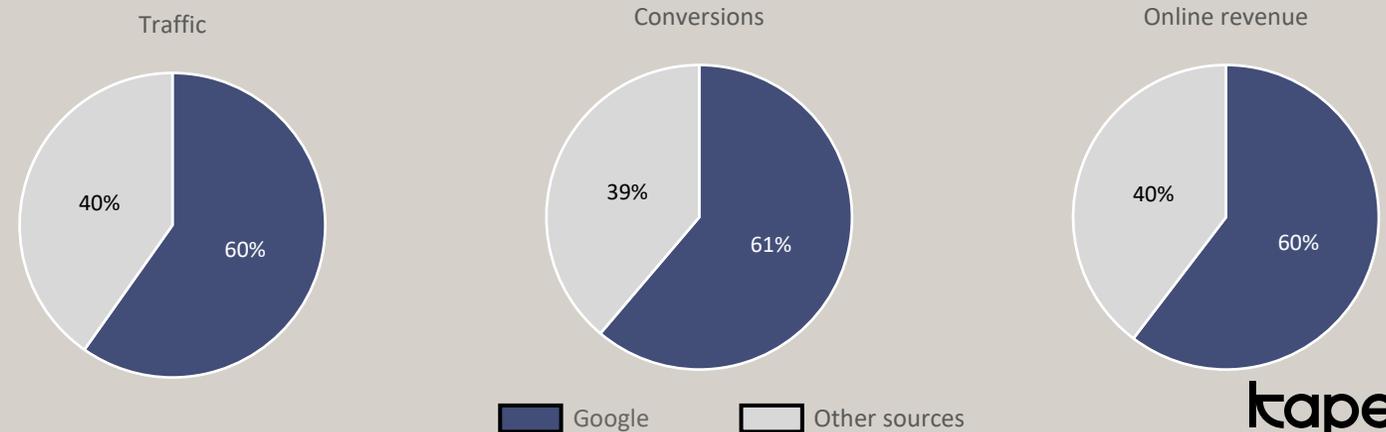
13

Total Google Ads investment

123 MNOK

Google Ads non-brand investment

80%

Google Ads investment for participating companies

■ Brand investment ■ Non-brand investment

How much impact does Google have on companies' websites, from a Google perspective?

Traffic

40% / 60%

Conversions

39% / 61%

Online revenue

40% / 60%

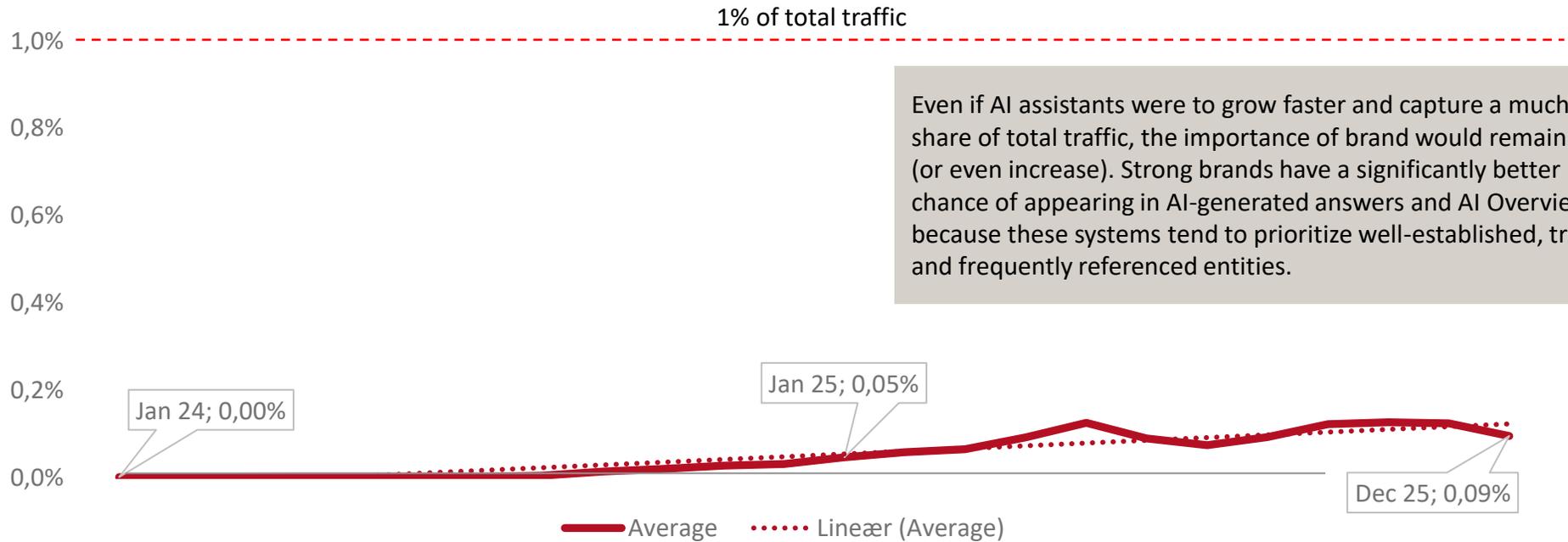■ Google □ Other sources

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Traffic from AI assistants

Impact of AI assistants

For 7 of 13 participating companies, we have had access to GA4, and have been able to track the impact of AI referral traffic over time.

...erral traffic in this study - 2024 to 2025

Even if AI assistants were to grow faster and capture a much larger share of total traffic, the importance of brand would remain high (or even increase). Strong brands have a significantly better chance of appearing in AI-generated answers and AI Overviews because these systems tend to prioritize well-established, trusted, and frequently referenced entities.

1% of total traffic

Jan 24; 0,00%

Jan 25; 0,05%

Dec 25; 0,09%

━━━ Average ⋯⋯ Lineær (Average)

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Agenda

- Project context
- **Methodology**
- Results from the study
- Cross-company analysis
- Summary & applications

Methodology

How do visitors reach your website?

	Via search (Google, Bing, AI assistants, etc.)		Via other sources
	Organic (non-paid)	SEM (paid)	
Brand	Searched on a brand word and clicked on a link (SEO)	Searched on brand word and clicked on an ad link (SEM)	Typed in the brand's website directly in browser
Non-brand	Searched on a non-brand word and clicked on a link (SEO)	Searched on a non-brand word and clicked on an ad link (SEM)	Clicked on links in other channels (e-mail, social media, other sites, etc.)

Data sources used in the study

- Web analytics data (GA4, Adobe Analytics, etc.) for total traffic, conversions, online revenue and time periods.

- Paid keyword data (Google Ads, Bing Ads, etc.) to split paid performance by Brand/Non-brand.

- Organic keyword data (e.g., Search Console) to determine the share of brand search performance.

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Methodology

How to analyse online brand effect

1
Traffic according to Google

Direct

Google

Referral

Paid Social

Email

Other

This is how sources of online traffic are presented by Google and other web analytic tools. Google (paid and organic) is often the primary driver of traffic, conversions, and online revenue.

2
In isolation

Google

Organic

Paid

In order to understand what drives traffic, it is important to recognize that Google traffic is driven by two types of activities:

• Clicks on ads connected to purchased keywords
• Brand word searches by people who have decided they want more information or to visit the brand.

3
Two intents

Brand

Non-Brand

Brand

Non-Brand

Organic

Paid

These two types of traffic are both generated from two different starting points for the existing and potential customers:

• Non-brand words and general concepts searches
• Brand word searches by people who have decided they want more information or to visit the brand.

4
Direct traffic is also brand

Brand

Brand

Brand

Non-Brand
Non-Brand
Referral
Paid Social
Email
Other

A significant portion of traffic to a typical website often comes from visitors who type the brand's web address directly. This is also brand-driven traffic, as visitors clearly intend to visit the brand.

5
Brand Traffic

Brand

Google
Referral
Paid Social
Email
Other

We define Brand traffic as the combined traffic from Google organic and paid searches connected to brand words, as well as direct traffic.

6
Brand Conversions

Brand

Google
Referral
Email
Other

In this context, we define brand conversions as conversions from brand traffic.

7
Brand Revenue

Brand

Google
Referral
Email
Other

In this context, we define brand revenue as revenue from brand traffic.

It's important to understand that the "Traffic according to Google" analysis (step 1) and the "Brand" analysis (step 5 to 7) are two different perspectives on the same data, both of which are valid. Google's perspective is correct. However, the brand/non-brand division provides complementary perspectives and insights that are crucial to businesses.

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SEM efficiency

Why divide into brand and non-brand?

The SEM cost per conversion is typically shown as an average and does not separate brand from non-brand keywords. This makes the overall cost per conversion appear safely below the product margin. This creates the impression that both spending and cost per conversion can be increased without putting profitability at risk.

How to analyze the efficiency of SEM investments
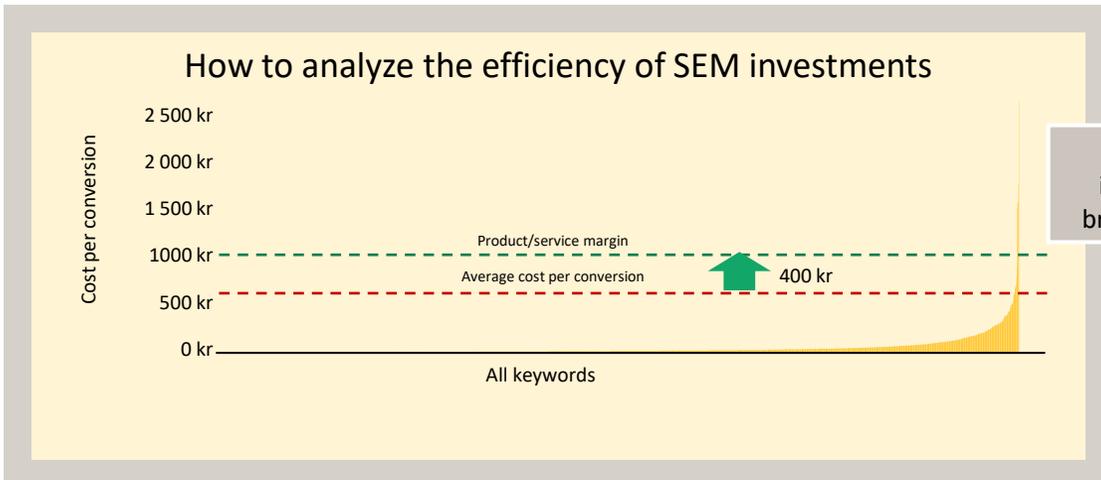
Separate SEM investments into brand or non-brand
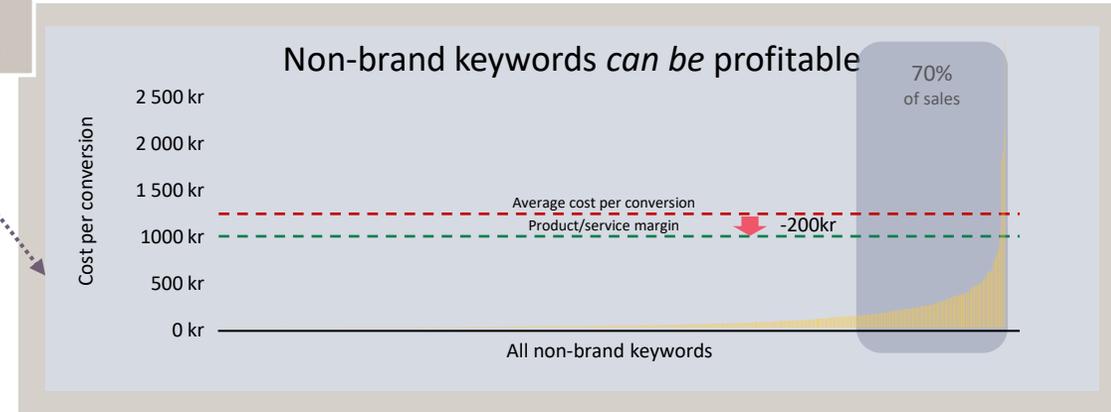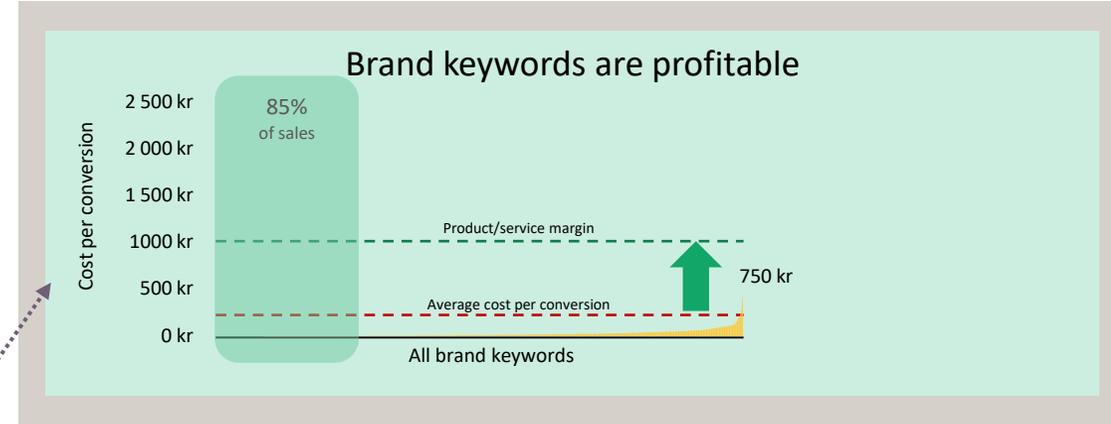
Brand keywords are profitable

Non-brand keywords *can be* profitable

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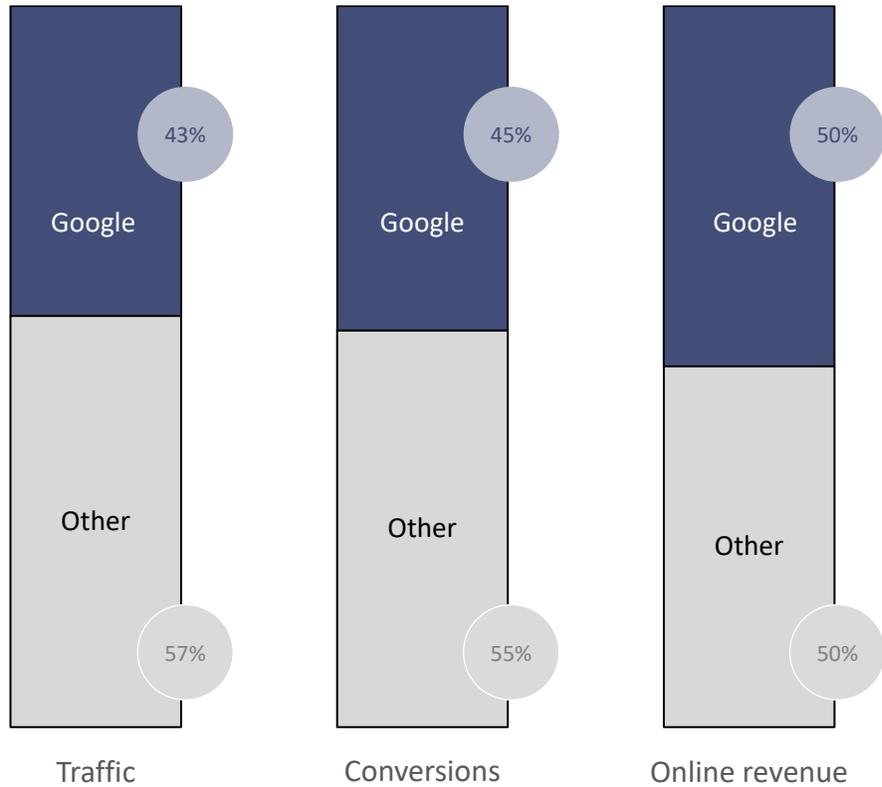# All companies: need to compare like with like

When looking at all companies' outcomes (below), some overarching similarities emerge. However, the results give a rather scattered impression. To make sense of the results, we sought similarities and patterns to cluster. The clustering that created the most similarities and made the most sense was connected to business models.
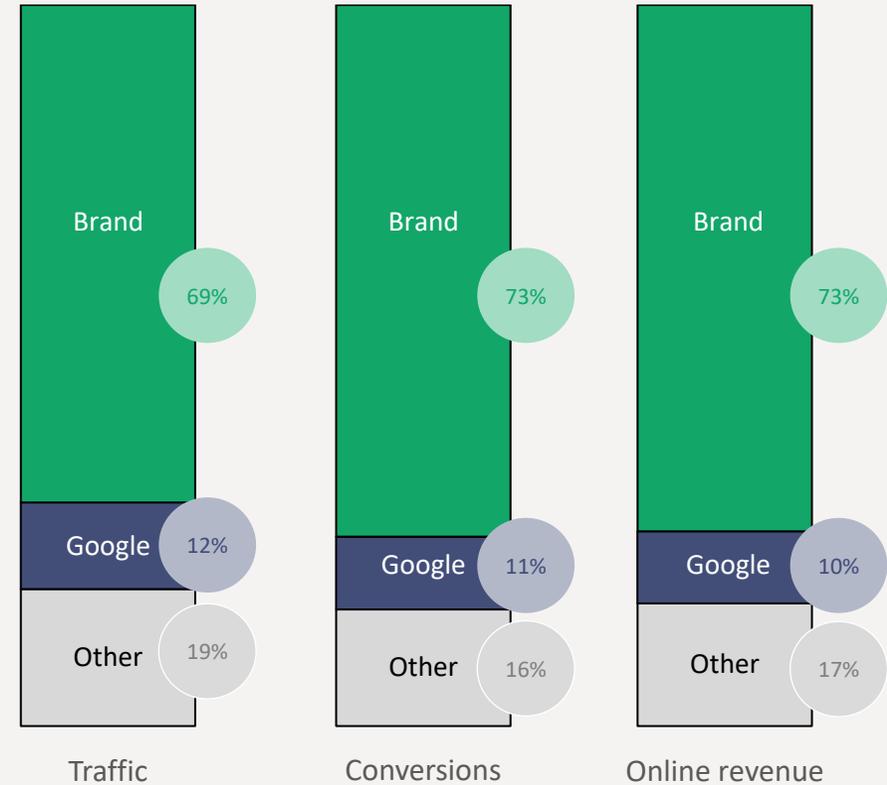

Legend:

TG → Traffic from Google's perspective

TB → Traffic from a Brand perspective

CB → Conversions from a Brand perspective

RB → Online revenue from a Brand perspective

13

Brand analysis of traffic – clustered

Results from the study
Subscription Services

From Google's perspective

Google 43%	Google 45%	Google 50%
Other 57%	Other 55%	Other 50%
Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue

From a brand perspective

Brand 69%	Brand 73%	Brand 73%
Google 12%	Google 11%	Google 10%
Other 19%	Other 16%	Other 17%
Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue

- The Subscription Services cluster consists of three companies at different stages of development, operating in three distinct, stable categories in Norway.

- Two of the companies are well-established brands with high brand awareness and large subscriber bases. The third company is a newer challenger with lower brand awareness.

- From Google's perspective, the single largest source of website traffic, conversions and online revenue is from Google (paid and organic).

- From a brand perspective, brand traffic is the primary performance driver across all three brands - delivering most of traffic, on-site conversions and online revenue.

- This also shows us Google's actual impact when brand words are not included - which is limited and has a lower conversion rate.

- Cost per conversion for paid non-brand traffic is between 3 and 19 times more costly than paid brand traffic's cost per conversion in this cluster.
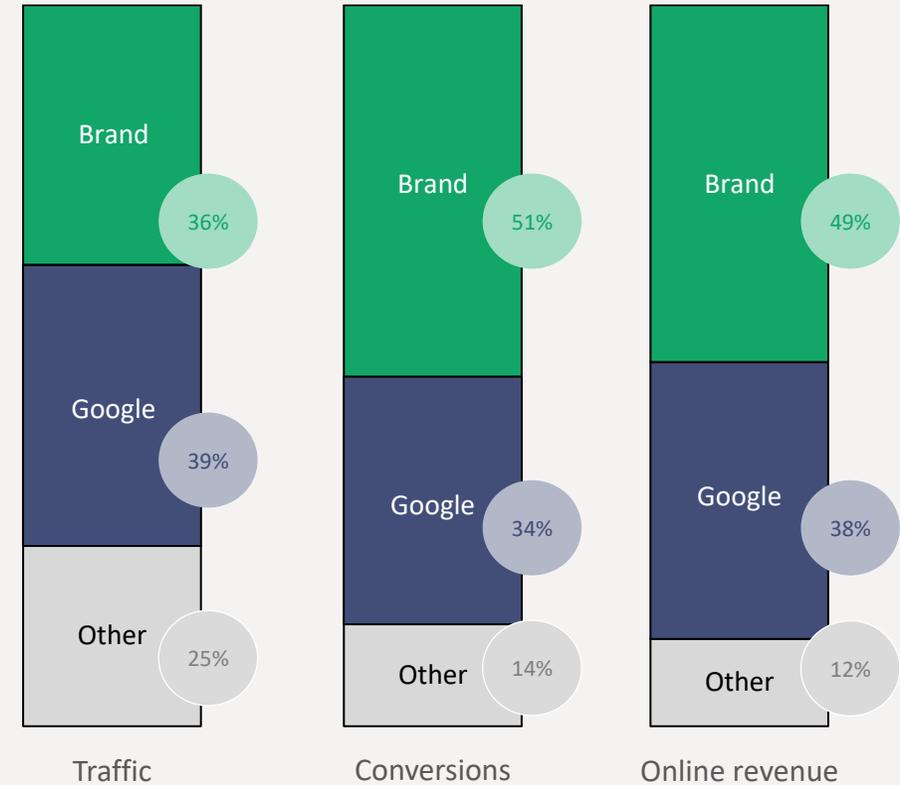
Results from the study
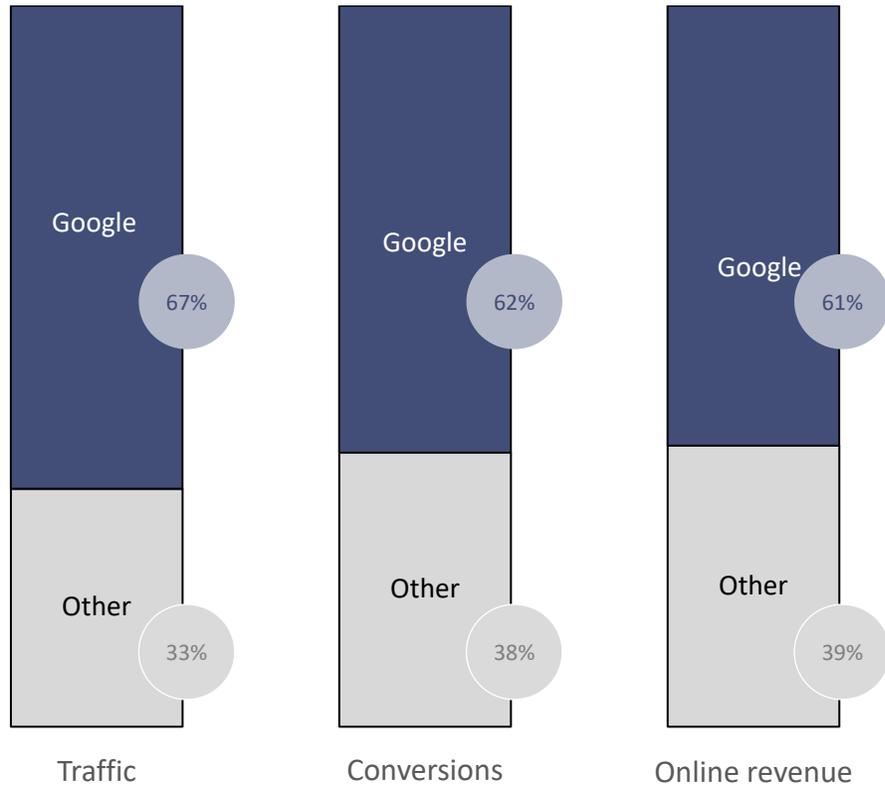# Retail B2C

From Google's perspective

Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue
Google 57%	Google 58%	Google 64%
Other 43%	Other 42%	Other 36%

From a brand perspective

Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue
Brand 36%	Brand 51%	Brand 49%
Google 39%	Google 34%	Google 38%
Other 25%	Other 14%	Other 12%
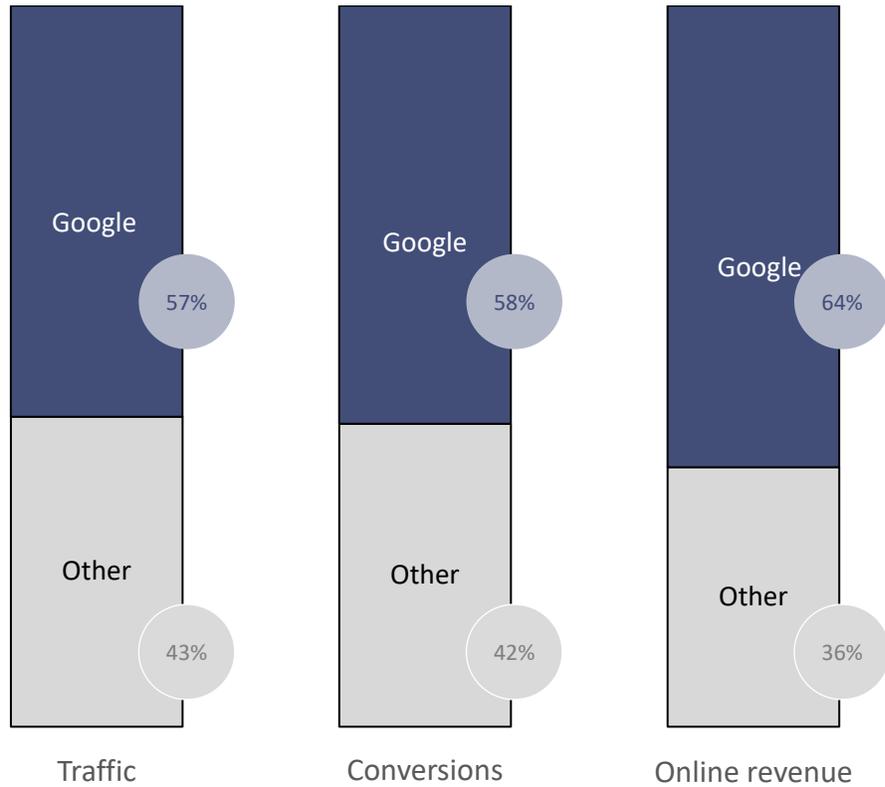
- The Retail B2C cluster includes four consumer-facing companies with strong brand recognition in the Norwegian market.

- All companies operate via digital and physical channels; three companies have transactions online, and one does not.

- From Google's perspective, the single largest source of website traffic, conversions and online revenue is from Google (paid and organic).

- Although the volume of brand and non-brand traffic is similar, brand traffic has higher conversion and revenue shares on average.

- The non-brand conversation and revenue share are higher than most other clusters due to high non-brand investments and the customer behavior of searching for products.

- In effect, non-brand words fill the funnel, but brand words harvest purchase, sustain higher conversion efficiency, and deliver stronger value per visit.
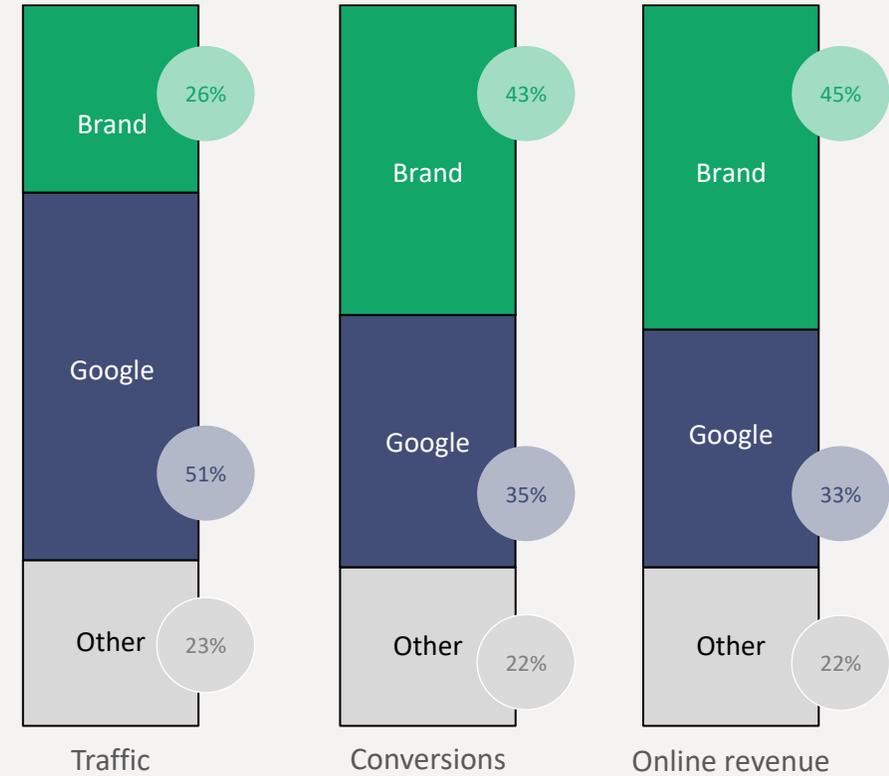
Results from the study
Retail B2B

From Google's perspective

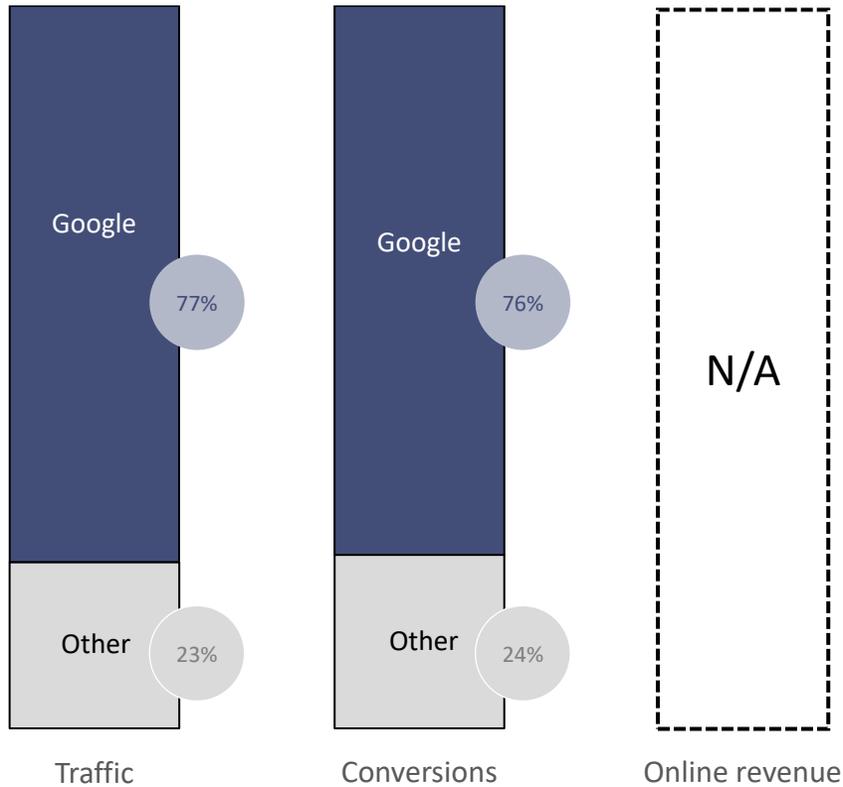Traffic — Google 67%, Other 33%
Conversions — Google 62%, Other 38%
Online revenue — Google 61%, Other 39%

From a brand perspective

Traffic — Brand 26%, Google 51%, Other 23%
Conversions — Brand 43%, Google 35%, Other 22%
Online revenue — Brand 45%, Google 33%, Other 22%

- The Retail B2B cluster includes two business-facing companies with strong recognition in the Norwegian market.
- Both companies have transactions online. One operates primarily online, while the other combines e-commerce with a nationwide chain of stores.
- Although traffic from Google converts to a lesser extent than other sources, it still accounts for the majority of conversions and online revenue.

- Although the volume of brand traffic is substantially lower than non-brand traffic, the conversion and revenue shares are higher on average.
- As with the Retail B2C cluster, non-brand conversion and revenue shares are higher than in most other clusters due to significant non-brand investment and customer behavior involving product searches.
- This challenges the conventional idea that B2B retail performance is mainly a function of non-brand search and instead is highly dependent on brand strength.
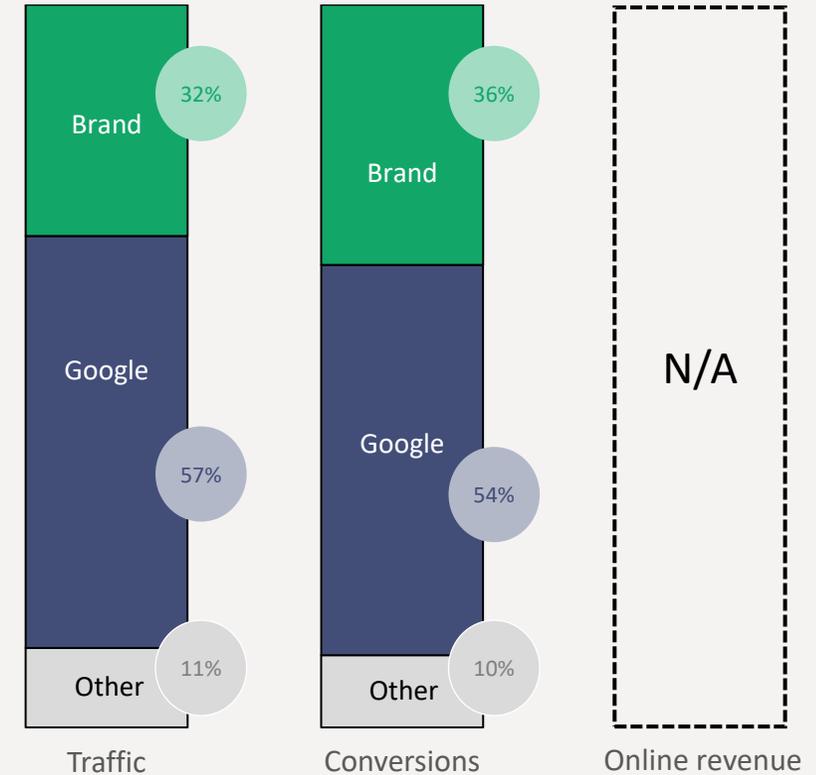
Via resellers

From Google's perspective

Google	Google	
77%	76%	N/A
Other	Other	
23%	24%	
Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue

From a brand perspective

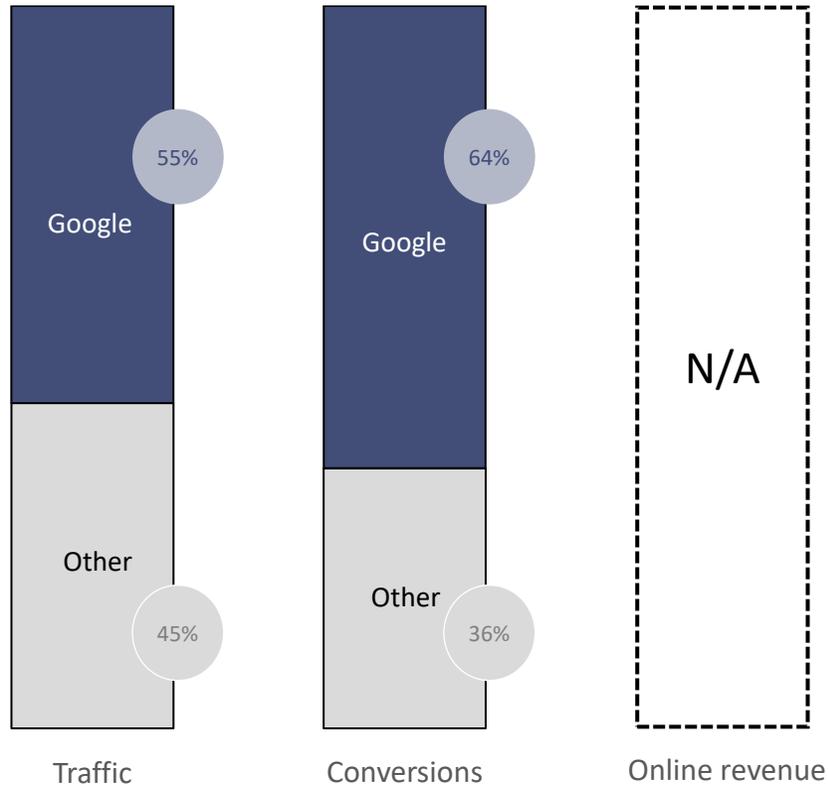|		
Brand 32%	Brand 36%	
Google	Google	N/A
57%	54%	
Other 11%	Other 10%	
Traffic	Conversions	Online revenue

- This cluster comprises three companies that sell primarily through resellers (online/offline).
- Only one company in this cluster has a notable investment in paid search, whilst the remaining have very small investments.
- Only one of the companies sells products on its site and tracks revenue, while the others do not, which makes it impossible for us to analyze the cluster's average.

- Lower brand traffic due to limited interest and relation to the parent brand.
- Although the volume of brand traffic is substantially lower than non-brand traffic, it has higher conversion rates and shares on average.
- In most cases, heavy SEM investment is questionable in this cluster, as it stands in the way of the customer journey.
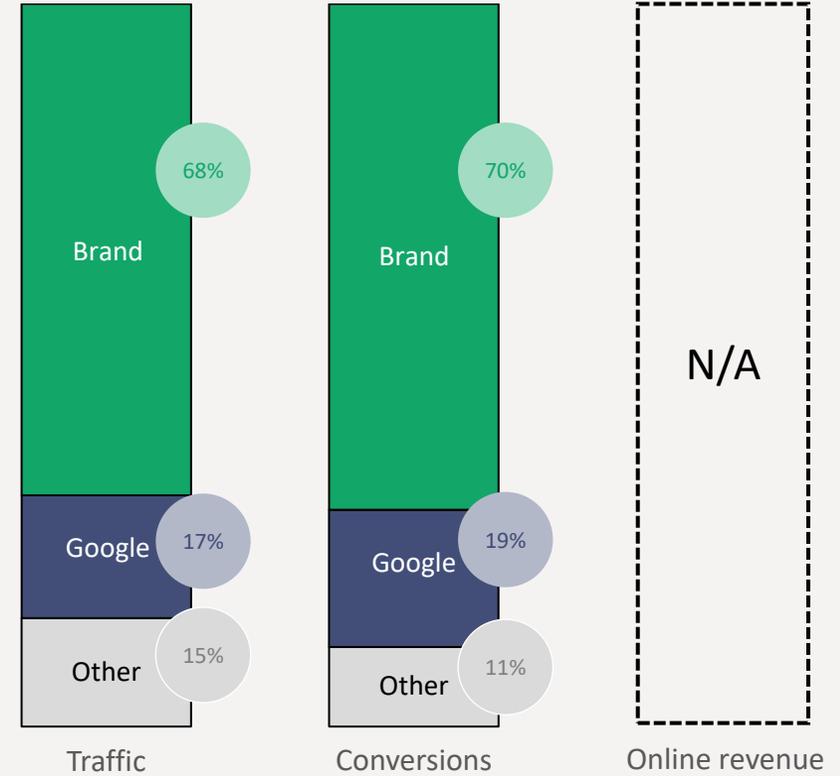
Results from the study
Corporate info

From Google's perspective

55%

Google

45%

Other

Traffic

64%

Google

36%

Other

Conversions

N/A

Online revenue

From a brand perspective

68%

Brand

17%

Google

15%

Other

Traffic

70%

Brand

19%

Google

11%

Other

Conversions

N/A

Online revenue

- This cluster consists of one organization whose website functions primarily as a public window into the company.
- The site's core role is to present identity, mission, leadership, and accountability, rather than to facilitate product transactions.
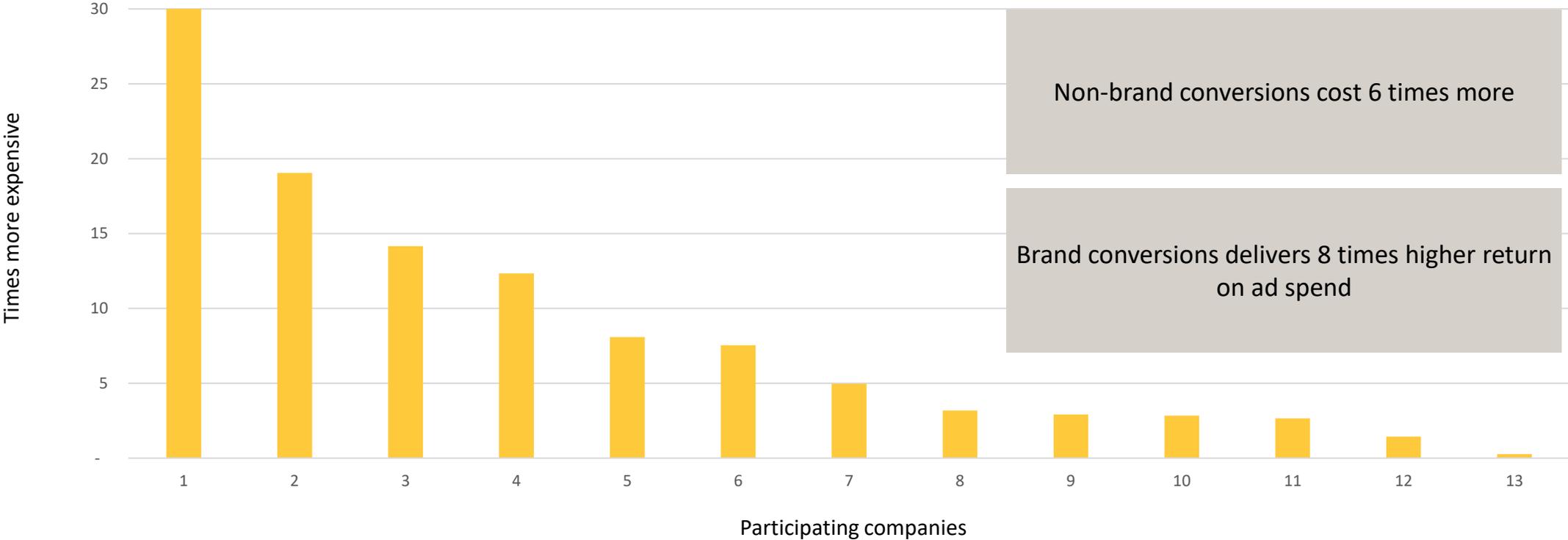- The majority of website traffic and conversions are from Google (paid and organic).

- The impact of the brand on website traffic is significant.
- This also shows us Google's actual impact when brand words are not included, which is limited yet maintains an above average conversion rate.
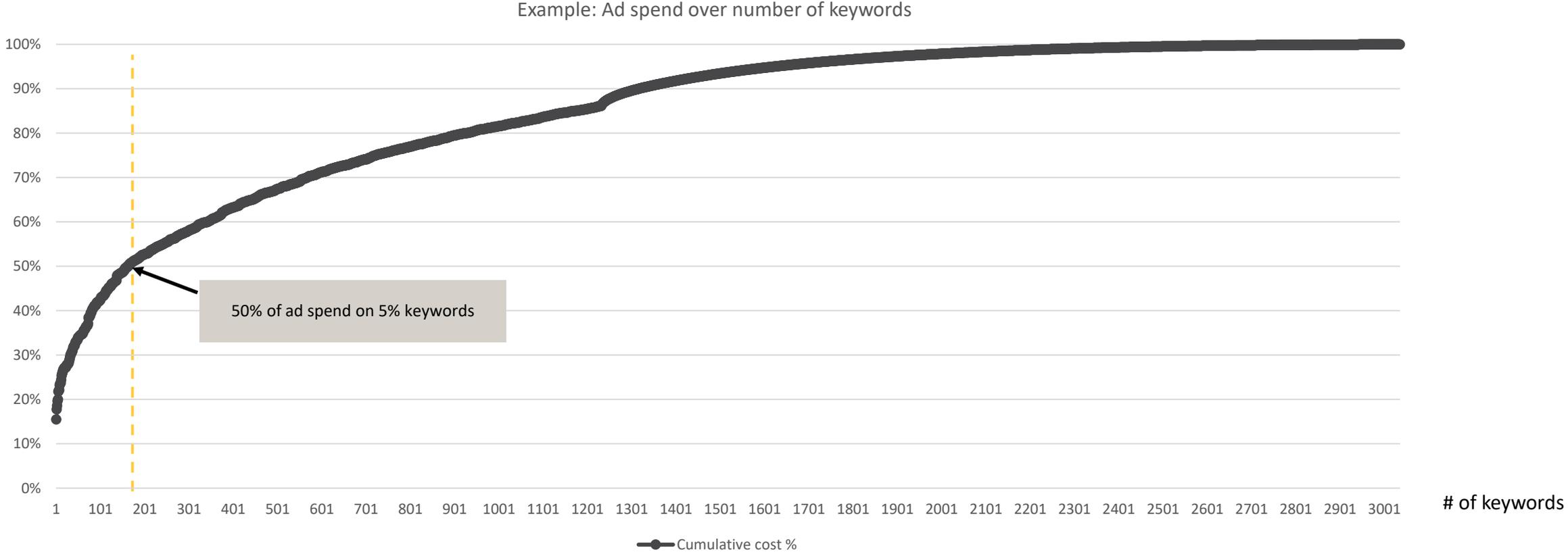
Agenda

Return on Ad Spend in SEM

Example: Ad spend over number of keywords

50% of ad spend on 5% keywords

Cumulative cost %

# of keywords

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Return on Ad Spend in SEM

Example: Revenue and Ad spend over number of keywords

90% of revenue

50% of ad spend on 5% keywords

50% of ad spend on remaining
95% of keywords gives
remaining 10% of revenue

# of keywords

Cumulative revenue %   Cumulative cost %
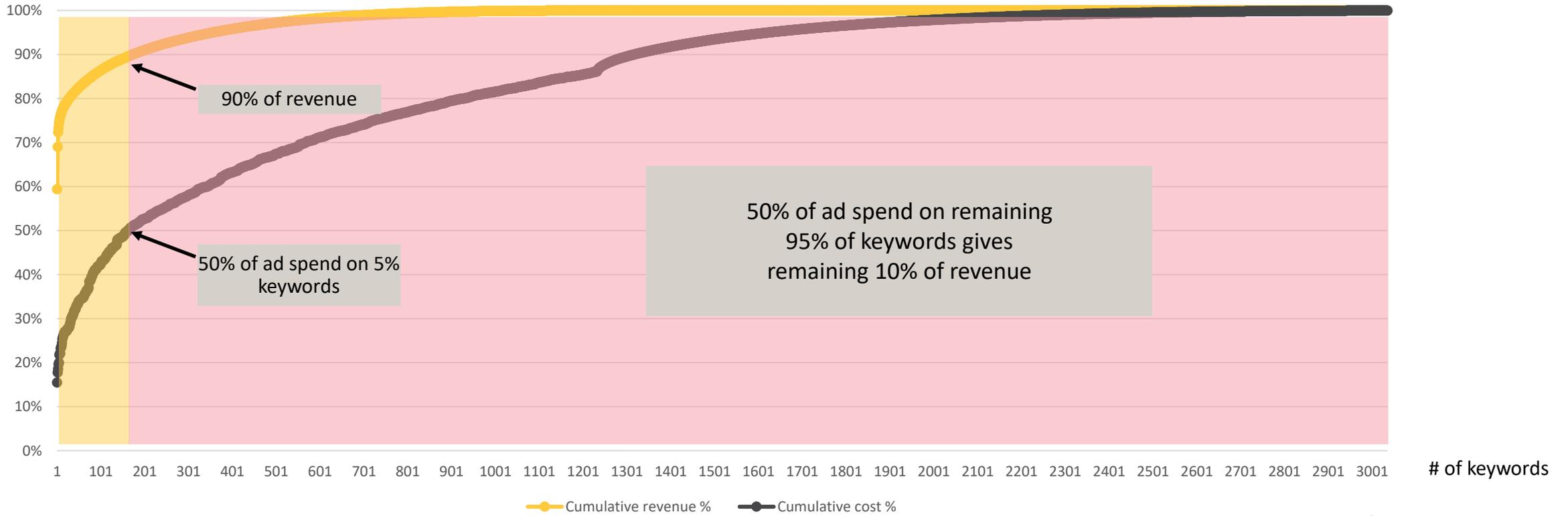
More keywords = more admin time (and cost)

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Cross-company Analysis

Contribution across all sources

% of total results on average

■ % of total traffic ■ % of total conversions ■ % of online revenue

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4 outliers in our study
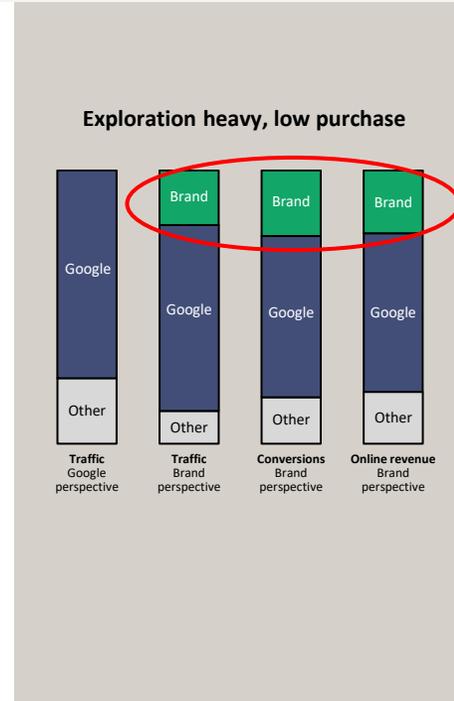
Outlier A

What we see

- Very low brand traffic and brand revenue
- Small SEM investment; where 53% is on non-brand
- Non-brand clicks skew to navigation/exploration, not purchase

Why it likely happens.

- House-of-brands: recognition at product level, not corporate
- Site functions as a content destination (despite e-commerce)
- Purchases mostly via resellers/intermediaries, not on-site.

Conclusion

- Most sales occur off-site
- Reallocate SEM investments where you compete with resellers to avoid cost inflation; reallocate to demand capture that doesn't raise click prices.

Exploration heavy, low purchase
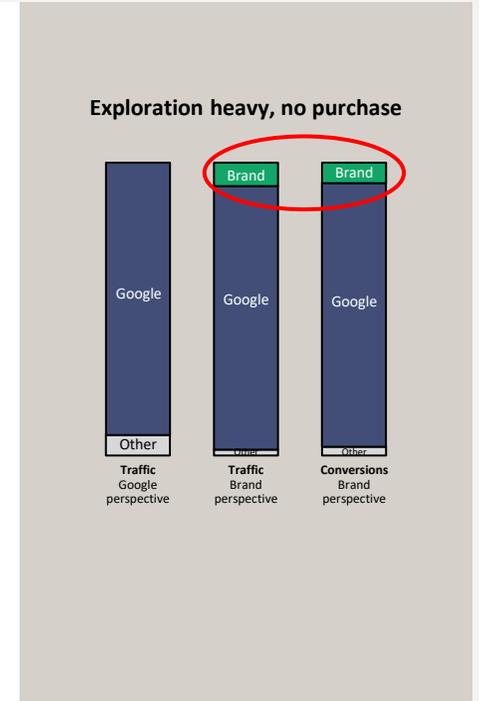

Outlier B

What we see

- Very low brand traffic and brand conversions
- Large SEM investment; where 98% is on non-brand
- Site doesn't transact → no checkout or revenue tracking and no commercial conversions
- Brand conversions costlier than non-brand (only case in the study)

Why it likely happens.

- House-of-brands: recognition at product level, not corporate
- Site functions as content destination, all sales happen off-site
- Conversions don't reflect commercial value

Conclusion

- SEM is questionable without commercial conversions. You risk "stealing" clicks from resellers that drive your sales.
- Reallocate SEM investments where you compete with resellers to avoid cost inflation; reallocate to demand capture that doesn't raise click prices.

Exploration heavy, no purchase

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4 outliers in our study

Outlier C

What we see

- 3% of GA4 traffic is Unassigned → 17% of conversions and 19% of online revenue
- ~1 in 5 commercial outcomes has no channel attribution → brand vs non-brand and channel comparisons are unreliable
- This is high-converting, high-value traffic → the company-level analysis is undermined

Why it likely happens

- Missing or faulty tracking (late/misfiring tags)
- Cookie consent issues (GA4 record actions but not sources)
- Missing/incorrect UTM link-tagging
- Cross-domain/payment hops that break attribution
- Referrer-stripping sources

Conclusion

- With ~1 in 5 of commercial outcomes unassigned, channel and brand/non-brand comparisons can't be trusted.
- Fix attribution first to enable effectiveness & efficiency optimization

Measurement issues undermines analysis
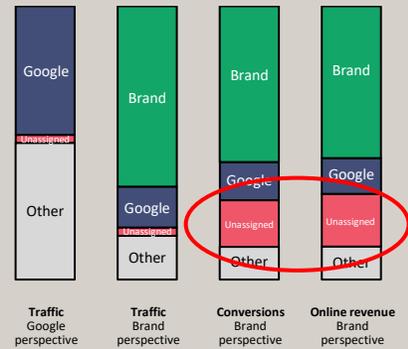
Outlier D

What we see

- Traffic mix stands out: larger share from display & social, with low conversion rates
- Relatively large SEM investments; where 89% is on non-brand

Why it likely happens

- Partner markets contributions earmarked for specific channels → larger awareness budget
- High-cost goods with long consideration; purchases rarely happen in a single visit
- Display/social sustain continuous visibility & selectability

Conclusion

- Channel mix fits the buying cycle & funding rules.
- Brand traffic still does most of the closing

Different channel mix, similar brand impact
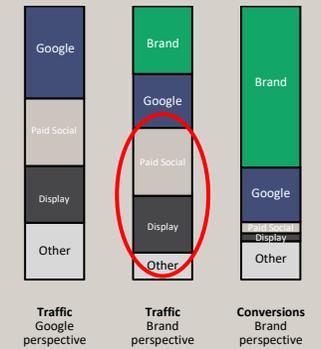
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Agenda

- Project context
- Methodology
- Results from the study
- Cross-company analysis
- **Summary & applications**

The brand is the main driver of online traffic, conversions and revenue

Key insights: Brand effect

- Most companies allocate a significant portion of their marketing budget to search engine marketing (SEM) and search engine optimization (SEO). However, many struggle to understand the effects of these investments.
- Measuring traffic and conversions from brand-related searches reveals the brand's contribution to sales and its effect.
- In our study, brand-related searches accounted for most of the traffic, conversions, and revenue.
- However, this is not reflected in traditional web traffic analysis, which makes it appear as if Google generates most of the traffic and revenue.
- Our study shows that AI search is a factor, but currently has no significant influence on traffic, conversions, or revenue.
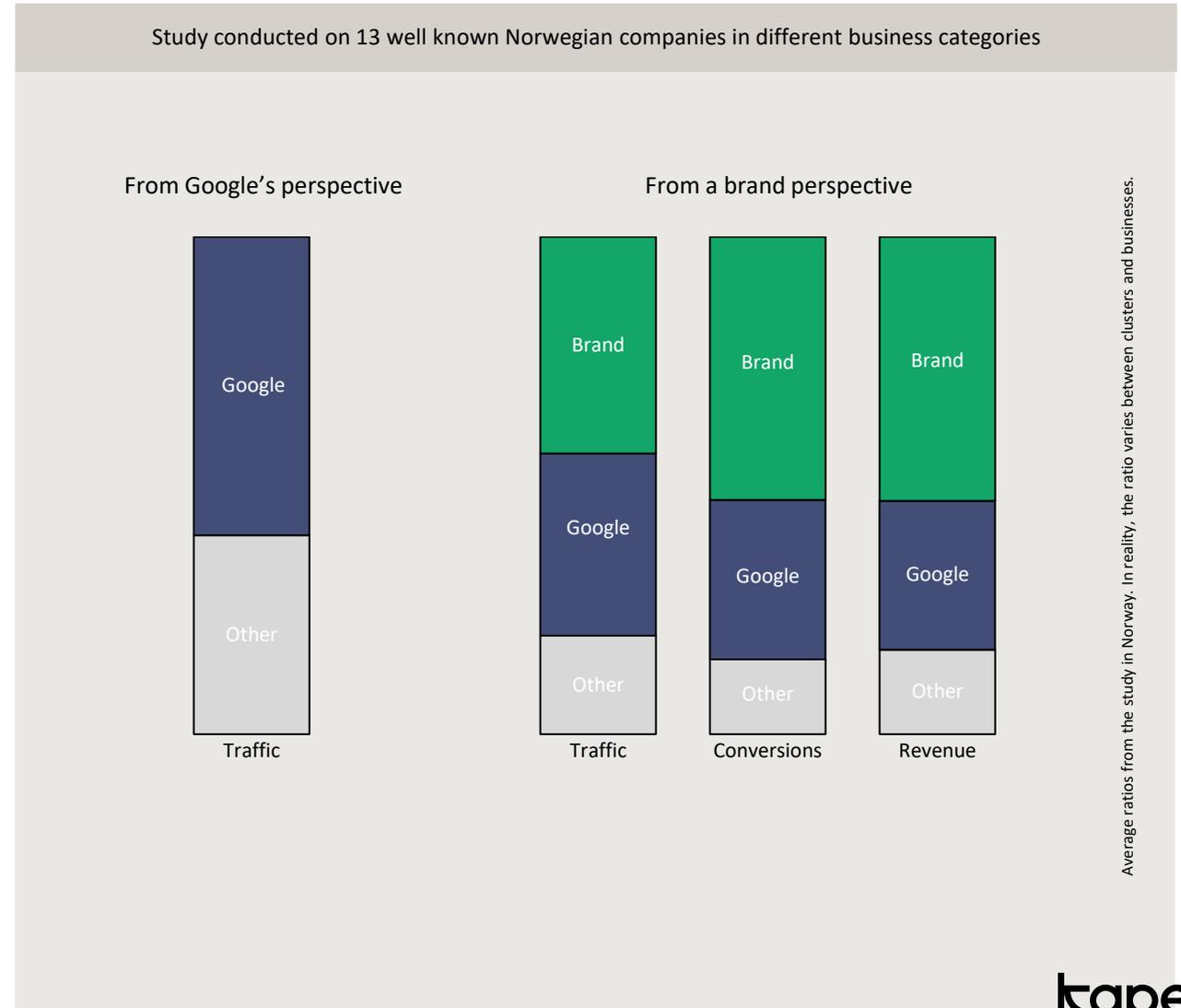
Key insights: SEM efficiency

- Separating brand and non-brand traffic, conversions, and revenue allows you to evaluate the efficiency of brand and non-brand SEM investments.
- Brand SEM investments have a lower cost of sales than non-brand investments.
- For some companies in competitive categories, brand traffic is the only type that delivers an average positive margin. Therefore, sustainable growth is directly tied to growth in brand traffic.
- In short, a strong brand is crucial for a profitable online business.

Key actions

- Increasing brand traffic over time will increase a company's sales, making brand traffic an excellent business KPI.
- If your analysis of online advertising indicates that you can safely invest more in search engine marketing (SEM), you should conduct a more thorough analysis at the word level to avoid eroding profitability.
- Although we have detected a clear pattern showing that the brand is crucial, every company should conduct its own analysis to better understand its situation.

There is both money to be made and to be saved.

Study conducted on 13 well known Norwegian companies in different business categories

From Google's perspective

From a brand perspective

Google | Other | Traffic

Brand | Google | Other | Traffic

Brand | Google | Other | Conversions

Brand | Google | Other | Revenue

Average ratios from the study in Norway. In reality, the ratio varies between clusters and businesses.

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Applications for the marketing department

By applying a brand perspective to web traffic, conversions and online revenue – and following up on this over time - there are several benefits for today's marketing departments.

1. The (monetary) value of brand explained
Explaining the value of brand, and brand investments, in financial logical terms to C-level counterparts is notoriously difficult. But by measuring the brand's impact on sales over time, brand investments can be assessed in the same way as other business critical initiatives.

2. Holistic budget allocations and steering
Our study shows that a strong brand is crucial for a profitable online business. We don't say how a company can build a strong brand as that is very dependent on specific market conditions, but by following the impact of brand as shown in this study, marketing investments can be allocated in a way to best meet business objectives.
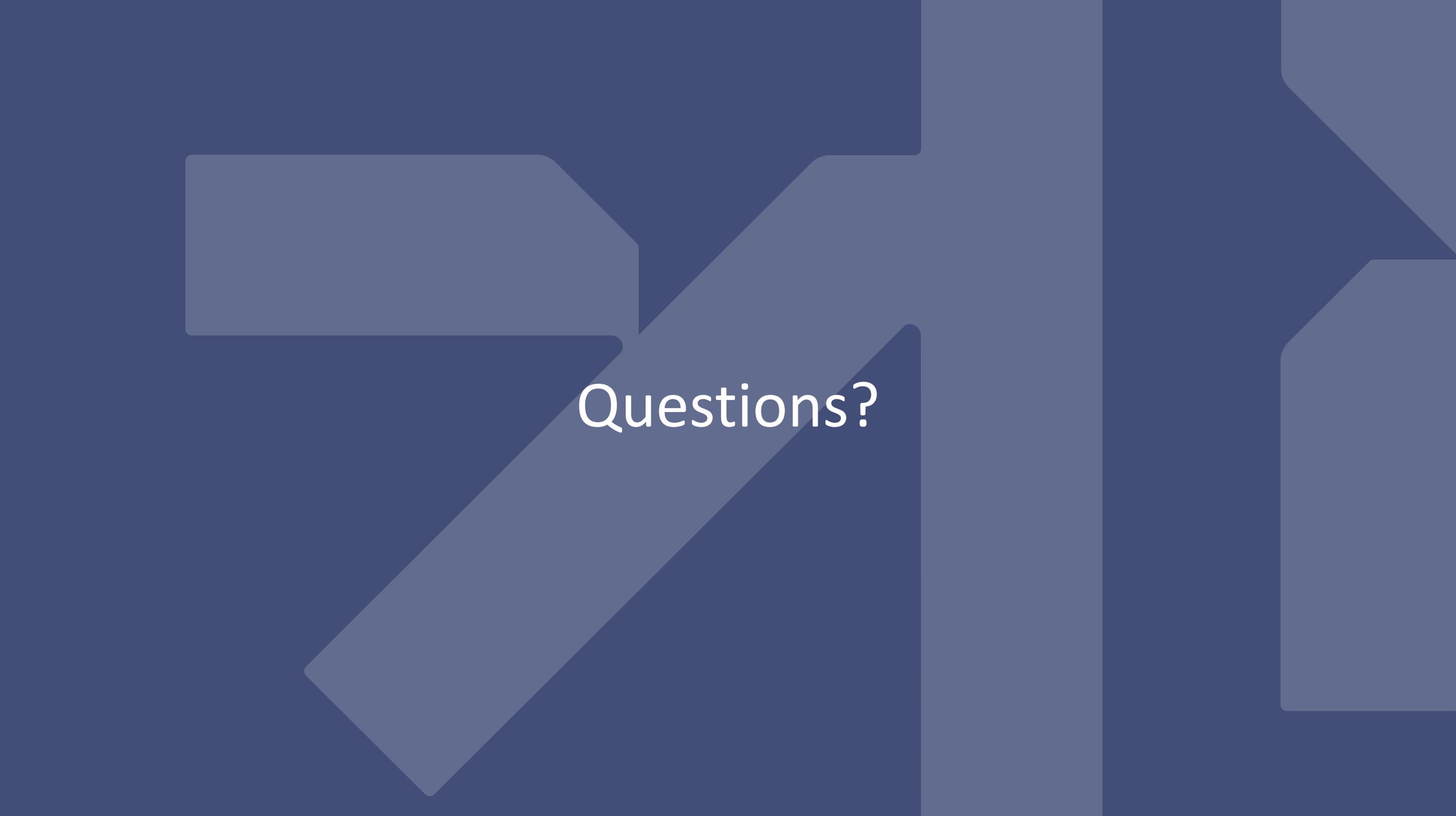
3. Improved internal cross-discipline collaboration
Today's marketing departments are often split between different specialists, with different objectives and ways of working. By having the same internal view on what activities are driving results, internal collaboration can be improved, fragmentation reduced and overall effect and efficiency increased.

2024

Traffic   Conversions   Online revenue

In the example above, a company followed web traffic and conversions from a brand perspective starting in 2024.

In 2024, the company had 290k visits from brand traffic, generating 110M in revenue.

2025

Traffic   Conversions   Online revenue

The company followed brand traffic and conversions over time and saw a decrease in brand traffic of -76k visits year on year. Indicating a worsened brand position in the market.

The online revenue from brand traffic was 100 M, a decrease by -10M year on year. .

The financial impact of the worsened brand position was in this case -10M as the company operates an online only transaction model.

Implications in this case were amongst others a review of the marketing budget allocations.

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Questions?