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**Navigating Online Success:  
Assessing the Impact of Google and Meta Ads  
on a Family-Owned Pharmacy Chain in Romania**

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**Abstract**

*This paper analyses the advertising campaigns built through Google and Meta Ads (Facebook and Instagram) and the results they have generated for a family-owned chain of pharmacies in Romania. In 2022, the brand, which has been operating for almost three decades, started using online advertising to reach a wider audience and to generate online sales. The primary objective of the paper is to measure the performance of online advertising in terms of brand visibility, website traffic, and online sales over a two-year period from April 2022 to March 2024. The following key performance indicators were analysed: clicks, impressions, CTR (click-through rate), conversions, conversion rates, transactions, and ROAS (return on ad spend) in order to understand how different marketing strategies on Google and Meta Ads can improve online sales. This research aims to provide insights and incentives for other family businesses, especially those with large well-established track records of customers and using traditional forms of advertising to transition to digital marketing and e-Commerce.*

**Keywords:** Google Ads, Meta Ads, Google Analytics, pharmacy chain, family-owned business.

**JEL Classification:** M31, M37.

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## **1. Introduction**

Advertising can be defined as the process of creating and spreading messages that promote products, services, and even ideas to influence the attitudes and behaviours of a target audience (Yousef et al., 2021).

The expansion of the Internet has created not only a variety of multimedia formats for photos, sounds, or videos, but also a large pool of advertising locations ranging from social media to websites, mobile applications, or games. The ability to turn every piece of advertising into a very targeted, interest-driven message with a relatively lower cost than traditional advertising, has led the online into becoming the dominant sector in the advertising industry (Yang & Zhai, 2022).

The main reasons for choosing online advertising in the marketing strategy include the launch of a virtual presence, the facilitation of commercial promotion, the dissemination of commercial-related information, the provision of customer services, the enhancement of the public interest, access to key target populations, response to pre-existing inquiries, the creation of a permanent information dissemination mechanism, and the agile updating of content required by changing needs (Savciuc, 2016).

The data-based marketing concept refers to the process of collecting, integrating, and analysing customer data from various sources, including email marketing, digital content (websites, blogs, podcasts), social networks, and mobile ads, to inform and optimise the way marketing activities are performed (Lee & Cho, 2019).

Social media activity increases web traffic but does not significantly increase product orders or sales (Dolega et al., 2021).

Paid search advertising has a more positive impact on sales than offline advertising. Paid search is closer to the real purchase decision and has improved targeting capabilities (Bayer et al., 2020).

Once consumers know that ads are commercially sponsored messages, they will probably avoid Facebook native ads by skipping, scrolling down, or not following them (Youn & Kim, 2019).

## **2. Problem Statement**

It is known that nowadays, television, a very popular form of advertising, is more expensive than online advertising which is a strategy to increase the awareness of the brand, traffic, and sales for any company, whether e-Commerce platforms (online stores), services (presentation websites), web applications, or mobile apps.

Google Ads is an online advertising platform where businesses can implement ads in order to reach people who are interested in their products or services. In Google Ads, different objectives can be set up: product and brand considerations, brand awareness and reach, website traffic, leads, sales, and app promotion. Google Ads is a web-based application, so advertisers can change settings, text, banners, videos, or budgets anytime. There is no minimum expenditure commitment, and advertisers can set and control their budgets. Moreover, companies can choose where the ads appear and measure the impact of their ads (Google, 2024a).

Meta Ads is a digital marketing tool that can help companies build relationships with their customers. The ads set up in Meta Ads can be shown in different placements from Facebook, Instagram, Audience Network (third-party applications), Messenger, and WhatsApp. Over one billion people worldwide use Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to connect with peers and explore topics they are interested in. Meta, the umbrella company, provides a lot of resources for advertisers to have performing campaigns and they can choose different objectives depending on the marketing strategy: brand awareness, reach, traffic, engagements, app installs, video views, lead generation, messages, conversions, catalogue sales, and store traffic (Facebook, 2024).

Google Analytics (GA4) is a necessary tool for analysis that helps businesses understand the user who visits the website or mobile application and how he navigates through them. This platform collects data to create custom reports or predefined reports such as audience, demographics, behaviour, acquisitions, conversions, and technology giving in this way valuable insights for the business (Google, 2024b).

By understanding how site statistics are collected and what they mean, marketers can make site statistics work for the company (Ledford et al., 2011).

To facilitate the technical implementation of the tracking code, whether it is a remarketing code, a conversion tag from Google Ads or a code referring to events in Google Analytics (GA4) such as purchases, form leads, clicks to call, etc., Google has developed a new tool named Google Tag Manager that allows marketers to implement these codes without the help of a developer. There is a limitation for the marketers and developers' help is needed for tracking website purchases because they implement code that pushes transaction information after a successful one, to the Data Layer.

Events and variables can be sent via Data Layer which is a function used by Google Tag Manager and `gtag.js` to transmit information to the tags. Also, triggers can be set based on the value of variables (Google Developers, 2024).

Google Tag Manager can be defined as a tool that collects data strategically and develops analysis systems that give information about user activity on the website (Silverbauer, 2017).

Weber (2015) said that Google Tag Manager should be used because tags can be organised without errors and duplicates, and it can be easily verified if they are activated correctly with the debug mode. Also, adding or updating new codes does not change the website source code. Moreover, there is a control that marketers can have because older published versions of the tags can be used and permissions can be changed at different levels (view, edit, and publish tags).

PPC (pay-per-click) advertising is one of the most performance-oriented forms of advertising that allow ads to appear on the SERP (search engine results pages) above SEO (search engine optimisation) listings (Kapoor et al., 2016).

Social media is a marketing tool that can generate engagement and it can be implemented with low-cost technology (Huo et al., 2020).

### **3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research**

This pharmacy chain started advertising on Meta Ads (Facebook and Instagram) and Google Ads to increase brand visibility, website traffic, and online sales.

The experiments were conducted because online advertising can generate orders, increase sales value or revenue and achieve a ROAS (return on ad spend) better than traditional advertising such as OOH (out-of-home) advertising, TV or radio.

In online advertising, it is known that operating expenses and the health of business influence a good ROAS, and the average ROAS for pay-per-click advertising in the pharmaceutical industry is around 11-12 points. For this family pharmacy chain, a ROAS established that could be profitable for the business was 16. It was an ambitious ROAS, considering that the pharmacy chain had no online presence and had previously addressed only a specific area in Romania (central-south region) and, at the same time, they had a small range of products on their website and a high price for most of the products compared to the competition. Also, the large invested budgets and the notoriety of the competitors made it difficult to achieve this goal.

This pharmacy chain decided to advertise throughout Romania to increase the chances of finding the right audience for its products.

### **4. Research Methods**

This paper explores the potential of advertising on Google and Meta Ads (Facebook and Instagram) for a family-owned pharmacy chain that had been active for almost three decades. This pharmacy chain has physical pharmacies only in the central-south region of Romania, and approximately 60% of them address the rural communities. In 2022, this pharmacy chain understood that it needed more exposure to increase its profit and decided to advertise its products through its e-Commerce website. It was an ambitious goal since the pharmaceutical business vertical is a market monopolised by giants.

The main goal was to measure and analyse the performance of online ads for the period between April 2022 and March 2024 regarding brand visibility, website traffic, and sales.

This research conducted experiments over two years, a period in which the performance of the campaigns was analysed. The main benchmark in campaign performance was the achievement of the desired ROAS by the pharmacy chain representatives (16 points). This required big efforts from both sides, the performance marketing and the representatives of the pharmacy chain because, as it was already mentioned, an average ROAS for the pharma businesses is around 11-12 points. The monthly budget of the pharmacy chain for PPC advertising gradually increased as the performance of the campaigns improved, especially in what regards ROAS.

Google Analytics (GA4 and Google Universal Analytics) was chosen to gather data about website users.

The platforms for which accounts were created were Google Ads, Meta Ads, Google Tag Manager, Google Analytics, and Google Merchant Center (for the Shopping / Performance Max campaigns).

Afterwards, the tracking codes were implemented and tested, ad copies and banners were developed. Finally, the campaigns were set up on both platforms, Google and Meta Ads.

During the aforementioned months, ongoing optimisations were made to scale the campaigns.

## 5. Findings

Meta Ads was included in the digital marketing mix to increase brand visibility and website traffic. The product offer was reminded of to users through Facebook and Instagram campaigns in which remarketing lists were added, and this helped increase conversions from Google Ads.

Compared to Google, the investment in Meta Ads was much smaller because this channel is a push marketing tool based on interests and demographics, users are there to explore content, unlike Google Ads, which is a type of pull marketing tool, and users are there because they need products or services. Unlike Google, which had active campaigns throughout the analysed period, Facebook was not always active and it was only used when necessary. Even if a significant number of direct conversions did not come from Meta Ads, this channel helped to increase the number of conversions overall.

### 5.1 Meta Ads (Facebook and Instagram) Performance

The following table contains the results obtained in terms of traffic to the website and the improvement of brand awareness because these are the main objectives pursued on Facebook and Instagram. These results offer perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the campaigns set and the strategies used in Meta Ads.

**Table 1. Facebook & Instagram KPIs**

Month	Reach	Impressions	Frequency	Amount spent (RON)	Link clicks	CTR	CPC
Jun-22	19,700	29,541	1.50	155.61	174	0.59	0.89
Jul-22	108,640	225,319	2.07	1,352.32	3,070	1.36	0.44
Aug-22	71,550	160,417	2.24	1,002.20	3,623	2.26	0.28
Sep-22	130,717	271,065	2.07	1,178.11	7,951	2.93	0.15
Oct-22	140,146	294,603	2.10	1,158.85	8,745	2.97	0.13
Nov-22	91,792	209,077	2.28	1,249.06	9,154	4.38	0.14
Dec-22	21,788	53,825	2.47	590.55	2,138	3.97	0.28
Jan-23	50,320	117,660	2.34	851.48	3,778	3.21	0.23
Feb-23	45,577	106,320	2.33	705.45	3,335	3.14	0.21
Mar-23	97,183	231,595	2.38	1,940.22	6,585	2.84	0.29
Apr-23	28,672	93,611	3.26	1,132.70	1,420	1.52	0.80

Month	Reach	Impressions	Frequency	Amount spent (RON)	Link clicks	CTR	CPC
May-23	11,172	44,581	3.99	475.06	1,221	2.74	0.39
Jun-23	5,525	34,817	6.30	450.71	777	2.23	0.58
Jul-23	29,703	102,989	3.47	767.04	1,170	1.14	0.66
Aug-23	24,241	74,830	3.09	368.98	737	0.98	0.50
Sep-23	13,208	41,061	3.11	200.00	284	0.69	0.70
Mar-24	23,285	52,708	2.26	509.94	304	0.58	1.68

Source: Meta Ads platform, Jun-2022 - Sep-2023 and Mar-2024.

The advertising strategy developed focused on the use of carousel ads, also called dynamic product ads with a product catalogue. Thus, the ads were displayed according to the user's interest and represent a good strategy for remarketing audiences.

Regarding the performance indicators obtained, one can see that the CPC (cost per link click) was relatively constant, and thus the traffic on the website was reached. However, the CPC increased in March 2024 because the campaigns were interrupted, and it had to re-assume its learning process.

Also, many impressions and reach can be observed every month, marking that the objective of increasing the visibility of the brand has been achieved.

Moreover, in June 2023, there was a focus on remarketing audiences, especially on the users from the traffic generated from Meta Ads and from Google Ads campaigns. As the frequency indicator shows, if an ad was shown to a user about 2-3 times over the other months, an ad was shown to a user an average of 6 times in June.

These achievements reassured our decision-makers about the effectiveness of our marketing efforts.

## 5.2 Google Ads Performance

The following table contains results from Google Ads which was focused on ROAS (return on ad spend).

**Table 2. Google Ads KPIs**

Month	All conv. (sales)	Conv. rate	Conv. value	Cost	Cost / conv.	Conv. value / cost
Apr-22	1,217.51	1.38%	49,579.57	4,964.85	12.22	9.99
May-22	977.82	1.23%	48,488.95	7,121.7	15.97	6.81
Jun-22	1,122.38	1.28%	55,579.74	8,398.39	17.33	6.62
Jul-22	941.34	1.16%	65,150.13	6,412.15	14.77	10.16
Aug-22	1,065.78	1.45%	70,096.47	6,625.03	14.13	10.58
Sep-22	925.4	1.16%	52,455.56	6,634.06	16.45	7.91
Oct-22	963.88	1.09%	66,046.23	6,883.43	14.62	9.59
Nov-22	959.23	1.15%	68,563.25	8,128.6	18.83	8.43

Month	All conv. (sales)	Conv. rate	Conv. value	Cost	Cost / conv.	Conv. value / cost
Dec-22	851.27	1.03%	61,150.30	6,840.73	18.04	8.94
Jan-23	1,362.59	1.28%	97,547.99	8,197.63	13.36	11.9
Feb-23	1,429.90	1.24%	107,328.74	9,478.18	14.49	11.32
Mar-23	1,353.83	1.35%	93,531.86	8,030.83	12.86	11.65
Apr-23	1,448.59	1.63%	97,296.77	8,658.63	13.14	11.24
May-23	1,415.13	1.69%	98,296.55	8,870.39	13.02	11.08
Jun-23	1,614.28	1.85%	107,650.85	11,260.79	15.24	9.56
Jul-23	1,639.85	2.59%	120,505.64	10,451.05	12.99	11.53
Aug-23	1,662.53	2.56%	134,436.72	10,257.83	12.68	13.11
Sep-23	2,112.95	2.06%	163,603.52	10,629.06	10.49	15.39
Oct-23	1,058.17	1.85%	130,207.12	8,948.12	10.77	14.55
Nov-23	1,265.16	1.85%	151,219.47	13,024.99	14.85	11.61
Dec-23	1,438.94	1.58%	122,831.64	11,608.68	15.28	10.58
Jan-24	2,282.28	1.89%	196,319.41	11,722.87	9.86	16.75
Feb-24	2,297.56	2.08%	195,549.40	11,889.56	9.98	16.45
Mar-24	2,198.80	2.64%	194,791.41	11,930.44	10.13	16.33

Source: Google Ads platform, Apr-2022 - Mar-2024.

Notably, the weakest months of May and June 2022 were significantly impacted by the ongoing work optimising the product data attributes for the feed in Google Merchant Center, including refining titles and descriptions with keywords, ensuring the recommended character length, and enhancing image quality. The misinterpretation of Google bots led to the disapproval of certain healthcare-related products, which were later approved. The advertising strategy was focused on setting Google Display, Search, and Shopping / Performance Max campaigns.

The best months in terms of achieved ROAS of 16 points were January, February, and March 2024.

One of the significant changes that influenced the performance of the campaigns was the introduction of the locker delivery method. Users appreciate this type of delivery more and more because it offers them the convenience of taking the package when they want without waiting for the courier, but also because it is much cheaper than the delivery with a dedicated person.

Also, at the end of 2023, we started to focus only on the Performance Max campaigns, as it was the best ad campaign in terms of ROAS.

Moreover, another tactic was to establish a top of products that were in demand and sold well, and these products were constantly monitored to have a lower profit margin to attract customers and generate more sales. The lower price compared to the competition for these top products brought more sales. This change was reflected in the increase in average basket size because this top of well-sold products acted as a “hook”, and users bought other products as well.

As expected, the campaigns needed a longer period to reach the desired ROAS of 16 points, a value that was reached in January 2024. This long period of time

was also necessary because the visibility of the brand was reduced throughout Romania, this pharmacy being known only in the central-south region through its physical pharmacies. At the same time, certain business decisions were taken later than expected, by the representatives of the pharmacy chain, such as the introduction of locker delivery, the price reduction for top products, thus making achieving the performance of the campaigns very challenging.

Moreover, in Romania there are remarkable pharmacy chains, which offer a more varied range of products, better prices, and which have been active in the online environment for a long time. Competitors also have large advertising budgets which makes their digital marketing mix more complex.

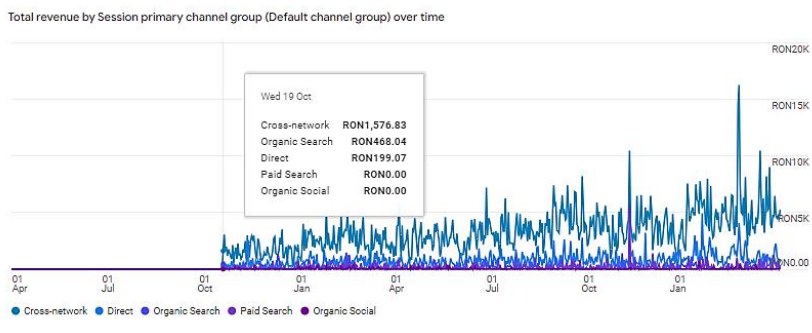
It can be observed that the obtained ROAS of 16 points was maintained throughout 2024 and it is expected that it will continue to be similar in the future if there are no major changes. However, during the summer, when the purchase intention is lower because it is the period of holidays, it is possible for the ROAS to register slight decreases.

### 5.3 Google Analytics (GA4 and Google Universal Analytics)

The analysis from Google Analytics (GA4) is reflected on the revenue from Google Ads campaigns that have been optimised for ROAS. This traffic monitoring tool gave insights on which channels performed best.

The main interest was the generation of transactions and revenue, and the analysis of campaigns at the primary channel group level regarding these key performance indicators it can be observed.

**Figure 1. Total revenue by Session for the period 19 Oct. 2022 - 31 Mar. 2024**



Source: Google Analytics 4 - GA4 (2024).

The figure above shows that, starting with October 19, 2022, GA4 started to be used even if it was not mandatory at that time. The main objective for its implementation was to have historical data and audiences before Google Universal Analytics was deprecated, and so we could optimise PPC campaigns. The correct configuration of events and the creation of audiences generated better-performing campaigns.



As it can be seen above, the channel with the best results is Cross-network, and it can also be observed a spike indicating that the best performing day was February 21, 2024 when revenue of 16,243.20 RON was recorded from this channel. According to Google's definition, "Cross-network is the channel by which users arrive at your site/app via ads that appear on a variety of networks (Demand Gen, Performance Max and Smart Shopping)" (Google, 2024c). Thus, it can be concluded that this channel is related to Performance Max / Shopping, which were active in Google Ads.

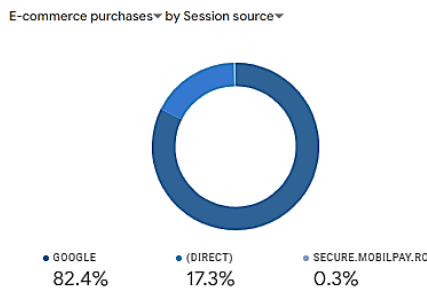
**Figure 2. Total revenue by Channel Group for the period 19 Oct. 2022 - 31 Mar. 2024**

Session primary_channel_group	Users	Sessions	Engaged sessions	Average engagement time per session	Engaged sessions per user	Events per session	Engagement rate	Event count All events	Key events All events	Total revenue
	723,210 100% of total	888,358 100% of total	446,105 100% of total	46s Avg %	0.62 Avg %	16.02 Avg %	50.23% Avg %	14,228,554	58,474.00	RON2,350,796.37 100% of total
1 Cross-network	549,497	671,694	338,957	43s	0.62	15.41	50.46%	10,351,034	44,753.00	RON1,757,994.50
2 Direct	61,021	69,355	38,230	1m 03s	0.63	25.76	55.12%	1,786,716	9,439.00	RON404,781.95
3 Organic Search	81,722	93,049	44,912	39s	0.55	13.06	48.27%	1,215,030	2,428.00	RON101,470.21
4 Paid Search	6,456	9,301	5,564	1m 28s	0.86	32.36	59.82%	301,003	861.00	RON55,229.14
5 Organic Social	18,413	25,708	8,981	20s	0.49	12.70	34.93%	326,572	149.00	RON11,178.98
6 Referral	2,079	3,337	1,675	33s	0.81	17.84	50.19%	59,539	521.00	RON10,042.54
7 Organic Shopping	1,153	1,293	808	1m 05s	0.70	23.87	62.49%	30,859	223.00	RON3,383.43
8 Unassigned	842	923	14	46s	0.02	13.20	1.52%	12,187	81.00	RON3,268.94
9 Paid Shopping	335	413	156	38s	0.47	15.61	37.77%	6,448	14.00	RON86.16
10 Paid Social	2,807	3,872	1,555	26s	0.55	14.41	40.16%	55,803	2.00	RON543.93

Source: Google Analytics 4 - GA4 (2024).

Above it can be seen in the report regarding Google Ads campaigns that target revenue, through Cross-network and Paid Search (Paid Shopping reflects Facebook Paid data). These two relevant channels for Google Ads amount 1,813,223.64 RON (77.13%) of total revenue.

**Figure 3. E-Commerce purchases (Transactions) by Session source for the period 19 Oct. 2022 - 31 Mar. 2024**



Source: Google Analytics 4 - GA4 (2024).

The most transactions came from Google (82.40%), followed by direct traffic (17.3%) and this means that Google is the first source of sales, and Google Ads campaigns (paid ads) were the most successful.

**Figure 4. Total revenue by Source / Medium for the period 1 Apr. 2022 – 18 Oct. 2022**

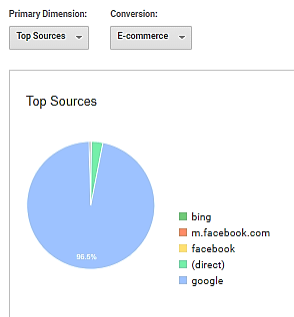
Source/Medium	Acquisition		Behavior				Conversion			Revenue
	Users	New Users	Sessions	Source Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	E-commerce Conversion Rate	Transactions		
	217,031 % of Total: 100.0% (217,031)	214,862 % of Total: 98.9% (214,862)	276,536 % of Total: 100.0% (276,536)	24.67% Avg for View: 1.0 (24.67%)	1.51 Avg for View: 1.0 (1.51)	00:01:10 Avg for View: 0:01:10 (0.01%)	1.14% Avg for View: 1.0 (1.14%)	3,152 % of Total: 100.0% (3,152)	RON 416,281.12 % of Total: 100.0% (416,281.12)	
1. google / cpc	181,887 (83.8%)	179,700 (83.6%)	220,143 (83.2%)	25.0%	1.88	00:01:07	1.20%	2,491 (79.0%)	RON 279,266.00 (67.1%)	
2. google / organic	18,810 (8.6%)	17,842 (8.3%)	22,886 (8.3%)	17.89%	1.81	00:01:09	0.62%	140 (4.4%)	RON 21,211.00 (5.1%)	
3. (direct) / (none)	6,206 (2.8%)	6,501 (3.0%)	8,231 (3.0%)	30.49%	1.96	00:01:09	1.11%	91 (2.9%)	RON 12,014.00 (2.9%)	
4. bing / organic	870 (0.4%)	930 (0.4%)	678 (0.2%)	10.47%	1.96	00:01:21	0.39%	4 (0.1%)	RON 674.80 (0.1%)	
5. m.facebook.com / referral	2,283 (1.0%)	1,813 (0.8%)	2,983 (1.0%)	21.89%	1.54	00:00:42	0.13%	4 (0.1%)	RON 508.80 (0.1%)	
6. facebook / cpc	4,791 (2.1%)	4,599 (2.1%)	6,784 (2.4%)	17.85%	1.82	00:01:09	0.07%	5 (0.1%)	RON 529.60 (0.1%)	
7. m.facebook.com / referral	939 (0.4%)	787 (0.3%)	1,228 (0.4%)	13.84%	1.88	00:01:03	0.16%	2 (0.0%)	RON 216.74 (0.0%)	

Source: Google Universal Analytics.

Google announced that on 1 July 2023, Google Universal Analytics properties would stop processing new data. They prepared their customers in advance, saying they would lose access to Universal Analytics interfaces and APIs on 1 July 2024 and must switch to GA4 (Google, 2023).

In Google Universal Analytics, it can be observed that Source / Medium, named Google / CPC, brought the most revenue in the analysed period (379,266.65 RON), representing 91.11% of all Sources / Medium.

**Figure 5. E-Commerce (Transactions) by Source for the period 1 Apr. 2022 - 18 Oct. 2022**



Source: Google Universal Analytics.

The figure above shows that Google Universal Analytics generated a significant percentage in terms of transactions, namely 96.50%, followed by Direct and Facebook traffic, which have a small percentage. Therefore, differences regarding Google transactions can be observed between the two periods analysed with GA4 (82.40%) and Google Universal Analytics (96.50%). These percentages are not influenced by other channels because there were no changes related to SEO, email marketing, affiliate marketing, or traditional marketing that would generate direct traffic.

Also, the more visible percentage of direct traffic in the last period is related to the ongoing campaigns, as people started to browse the website directly (17.30%). In addition, the difference in attribution also applies to revenue sources (channels) because the grouping in GA4 is different from Google Universal Analytics.

To sum up, the campaigns have been successful in terms of brand visibility and website traffic through Facebook. As predicted, Google Ads reached its sales target later, in January 2024. The site was launched in 2022 and had no historical data before this period to see other comparisons in terms of traffic or sales.

## **6. Conclusions**

The Meta Ads channel with both Facebook and Instagram generated good results for brand visibility and website traffic, had a less serious impact on direct conversions, but in turn helped the Google campaigns, especially on remarketing, because the users who saw the ads in Google were also targeted in Meta. On the other hand, Google Ads, unlike Meta Ads, were more successful in bringing sales, especially after the implementation of different strategies such as the introduction of product delivery through lockers, the creation of a ranking with the best-selling products, lowering the selling price for top products and optimising the attributes in the Google Merchant Center feed.

The study has met multiple limitations from the legislative, ethical, and regulatory authorities, as the algorithms of the advertising platforms can misinterpret the advertising copy or banners and text from the website in the pharmaceutical industry, thus leading to the interruption of the campaigns.

The conclusions indicate the importance of digital advertising for companies trying to improve brand visibility, attract website traffic and generate sales in competitive markets such as the pharmaceutical industry. This advertising strategy can also be applied to other family businesses that operate in competitive markets.

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