

Odyssey Attribution

The attribution insights you are missing in Google Analytics



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Introduction

The absolute majority of e-commerce brands worldwide use Google Analytics. It therefore makes sense that a lot of marketers will wonder what the added value will be of an additional attribution tool, when they already have attribution within Google Analytics at their disposal.

“If you really want to know which channels are driving incremental revenue, you have to look beyond Google Analytics”

Let us start by saying that Google has outstanding tracking software and Google Analytics is, without doubt, an excellent free tool that has made web analytics available to the masses. We even recommend using Google to track your data. However, there is an important difference between collecting and interpreting data. There are two vital downsides to relying on Google for the interpretation of your data (i.e. for attribution purposes).

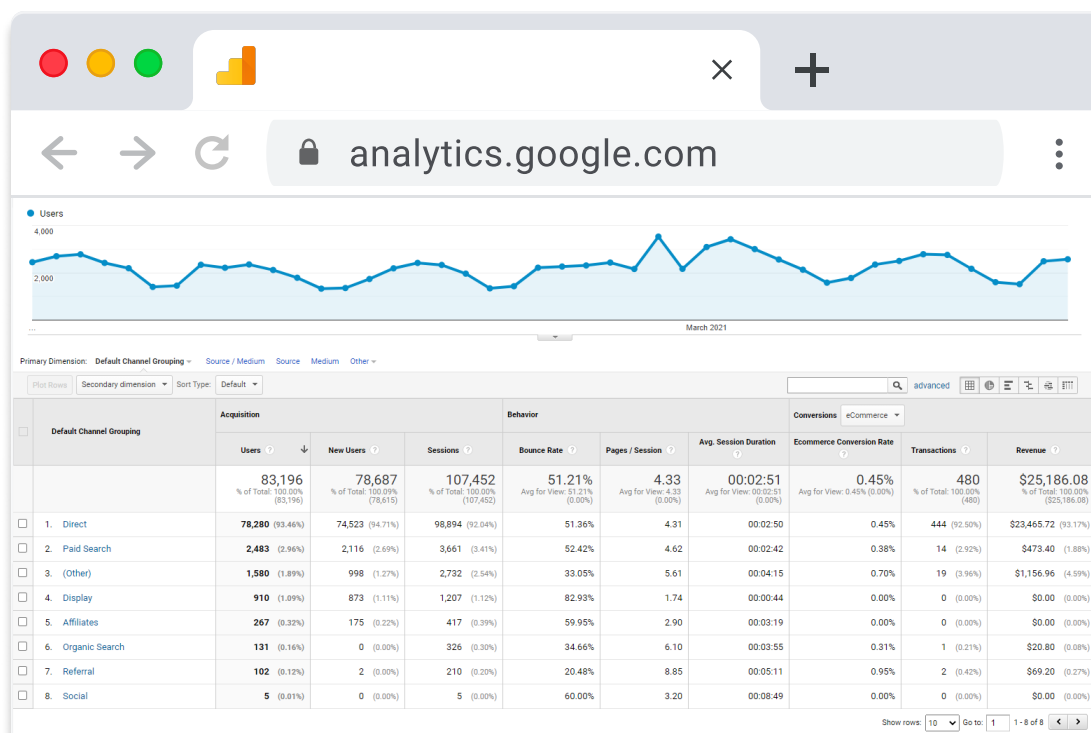
The most crucial issue; Google isn't an independent player. At the very least, it will be optimized to favor its own products such as Google Ads which is one of their cash cows. As an independent tool, marketing attribution tools like Odyssey Attribution have no incentive to mask data or safeguard any parties. Unbiased data will be presented to you as it is and all calculations are based on a complete picture. Secondly, Google Analytics doesn't allow a connection with any cost data sources except their own. A complete integration of cost data is very useful in attribution and even vital to make strategic business decisions. Odyssey imports cost data from tools such as Google Ads, Facebook, Instagram, Awin and Impact Radius. This allows users to see valuable and actionable insights such as the difference between their current media spend and a suggested media spend.

Let's zoom into the attribution reports of Google Analytics:

1. Acquisition Report

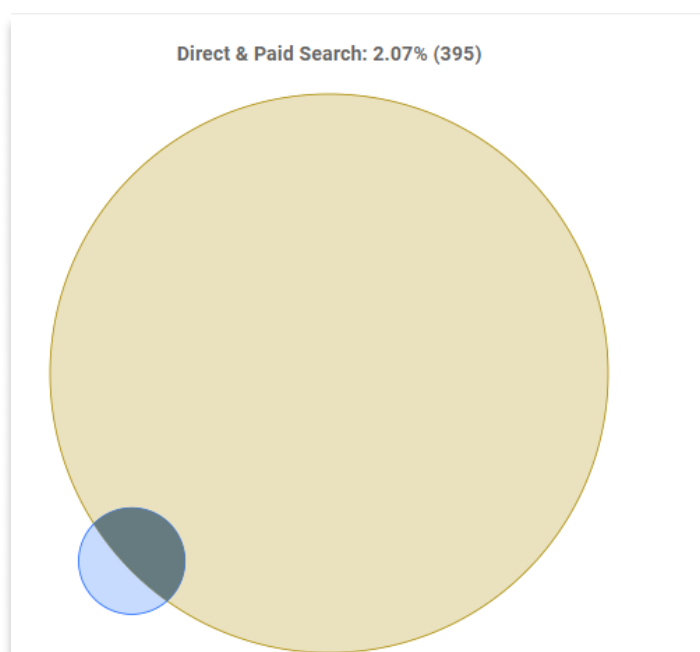
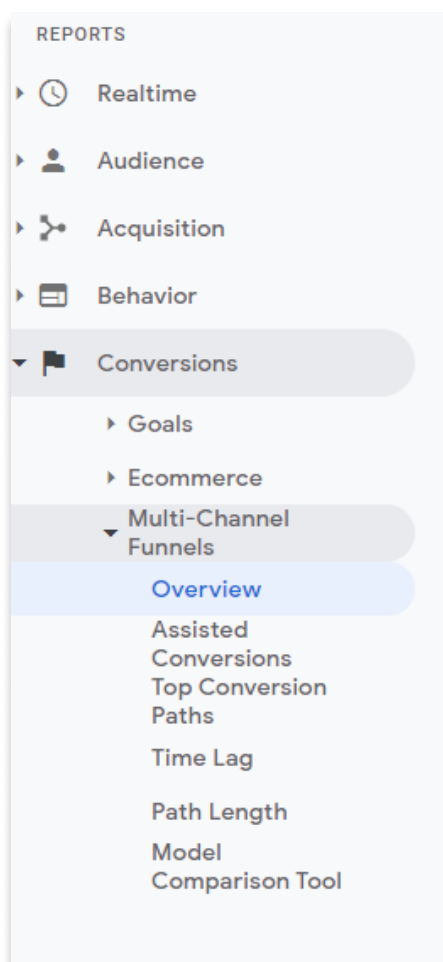
For many marketers the acquisition report is the familiar go-to report when it comes to assessing the performance of marketing channels and campaigns. It shows crucial KPIs on the performance of these sources. Yet, one very important element of the acquisition report is often overlooked: the attribution model.

For all reports, Google Analytics uses their default last non-direct click attribution model. This means 100% of the value (revenue) of a sale is attributed to just one touchpoint -this is called single-touch attribution. On top of that, this attribution model also has a deceitful 'rule' for the way direct traffic is attributed when it's the last touchpoint. When a user is directed to a website directly or from an unknown source (this also counts as direct traffic), Google Analytics will attribute this last touchpoint to the previously identified traffic source (as described on google's support pages). We call this "source precedence," something we do know will always take precedence of something we don't know. If that user hasn't visited your site recently, then a visit to your site without any referral or campaign information will just show up as Direct. In summary, it makes the data way less transparent.



2. Multi-Channel Funnels

The Multi-Channel Funnels report in Google Analytics is created by Google Analytics in order to provide users with more information on the touchpoints that were not the last click. It consists of a few reports that are described below.



2.1 Overview

The overview report shows conversions and how channels worked together. But it doesn't give you actionable insights. Just seeing how different channels overlap isn't helping you, as a marketer, to make better marketing decisions. What you do need is insights into specific channels or campaigns and how they support each other. You want to see if campaign X is involved, what other campaigns are involved so you can optimize campaigns accordingly.

2.2 Assisted Conversions Conversions

Google isn't transparent about the calculation of assisted conversions, which means you don't know exactly what data you are looking at. As a marketing team, not being able to know exactly what data you see you makes it difficult to make the right decisions. The definition of assisted conversions by Google is: "the number of conversions for which this channel appeared on the conversions path, but was not the final conversion in the interaction."

Nonetheless, Google's report provides some interesting insights. The assisted conversions tab in Google Analytics provides insight into the type of customer journeys your customers have. Assisted conversions indicate that journeys are longer than one click, making multi-touch attribution that much more interesting.

The last click or direct conversions column shows where the channel was the last click. Seeing a big difference between this column and the assisted conversions proves that the customer journeys are longer and therefore make multi-touch attribution interesting. It's confirmation that the single-touch attribution model Google applies to your data in Google Analytics is not telling the complete story.

The assisted / last click or direct conversions metric shows how much value the channel delivers in assisted conversions (remember, we don't know exactly how that is calculated). This metric again confirms that applying multi-touch attribution is sensible.

	November 2020	December 2020	January 2021	February 2021	March 2021
Assisted Conversions	29,615	67,300	\$193,566.11	0.44	
Assisted Conversion Value	\$129,182.19				
Last Click or Direct Conversions					
Last Click or Direct Conversion Value					
Assisted / Last Click or Direct Conversions					
Primary Dimension: MCF Channel Grouping	Default Channel Grouping	Source / Medium	Source / Medium	Other	Channel Groupings
Secondary dimension					
MCF Channel Grouping	Assisted Conversions	Assisted Conversion Value	Last Click or Direct Conversions	Last Click or Direct Conversion Value	Assisted / Last Click or Direct Conversions
1. Direct	28,063 (94.75%)	\$125,320.96	61,908 (91.99%)	\$184,404.34	0.45
2. (Other)	2,039 (6.16%)	\$8,068.81	2,452 (3.64%)	\$4,599.39	0.83
3. Paid Search	1,397 (4.72%)	\$6,902.07	1,610 (2.39%)	\$4,253.21	0.87
4. Organic Search	701 (2.12%)	\$102.20	579 (0.86%)	\$25.45	1.21
5. Referral	617 (1.86%)	—	231 (0.34%)	—	2.67
6. Other Advertising	204 (0.62%)	\$149.60	218 (0.32%)	\$283.72	0.94
7. Display	83 (0.25%)	\$192.68	261 (0.39%)	—	0.32
8. Social Network	8 (0.02%)	—	41 (0.06%)	—	0.20

2.3 Top conversion paths

The Top Conversions Paths report shows your customers' most common conversion paths. This report provides interesting insights, however, neither recommendations nor actions can be drawn from this report. Even though the insights in the report are interesting see, marketing teams don't create campaigns that focus on a single customer. It therefore doesn't make sense to look at the customer journey of an individual customer.

It doesn't mean you should ignore an individual customer journey. It might be interesting and even fun to see. And it might definitely be useful in some cases, such as deduplication of affiliate sales.

Conversions

29,615

% of Total: 44.00% (67,300)

Conversion Value

\$129,182.19

% of Total: 66.74% (\$193,566.11)

Primary Dimension: MCF Channel Grouping Path

Default Channel Grouping Path

Source/Medium Path

Source Path

Medium Path

Other

Channel Groupings

Secondary dimension

advanced

MCF Channel Grouping Path	Conversions	Conversion Value
1. Direct x 2	10,231 (34.55%)	\$34,690.96
2. Direct x 3	5,265 (17.78%)	\$22,799.06
3. Direct x 4	2,908 (9.82%)	\$21,276.56
4. Direct x 5	1,658 (5.60%)	\$10,590.29
5. Direct x 6	1,155 (3.90%)	\$6,481.20
6. Direct x 7	708 (2.39%)	\$4,922.46
7. unavailable Direct	538 (1.82%)	\$2,062.10
8. Direct x 8	489 (1.65%)	\$4,400.76
9. Direct unavailable	366 (1.24%)	\$285.00
10. Direct x 9	345 (1.16%)	\$881.52

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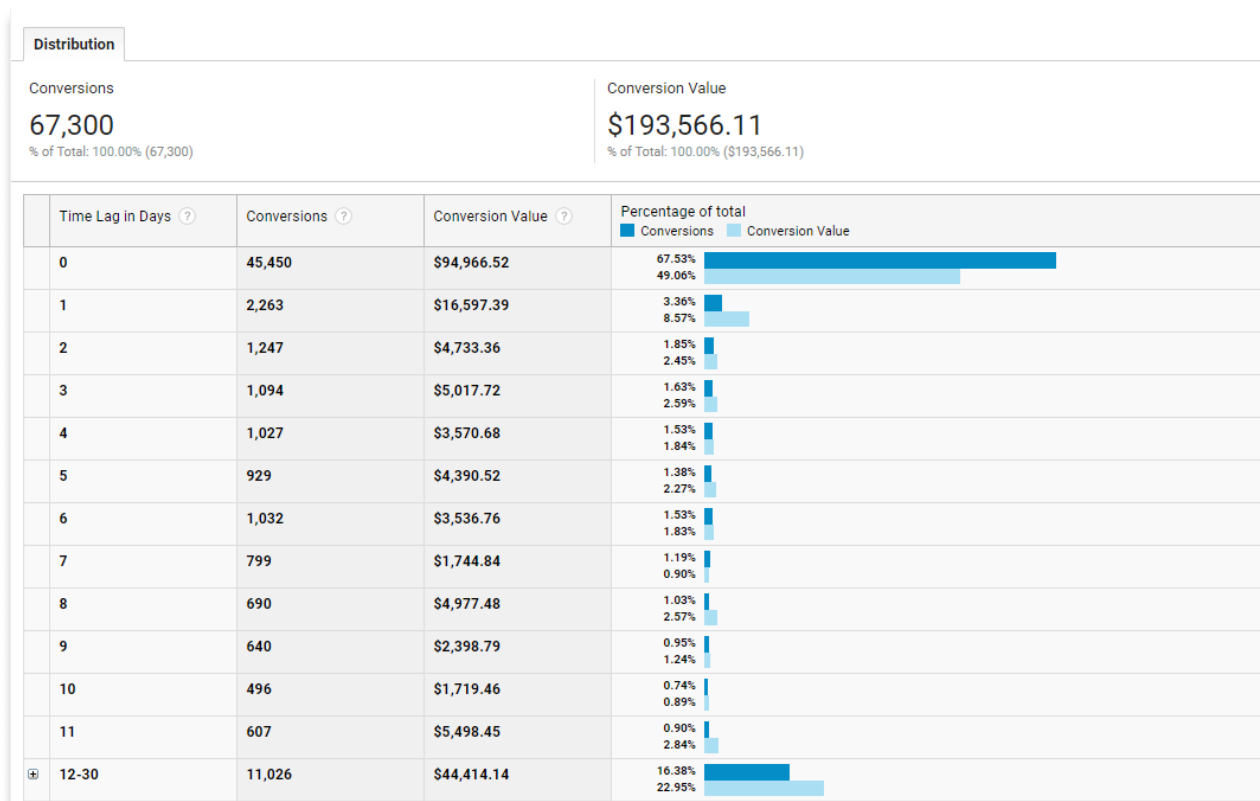
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2.4 Time Lag

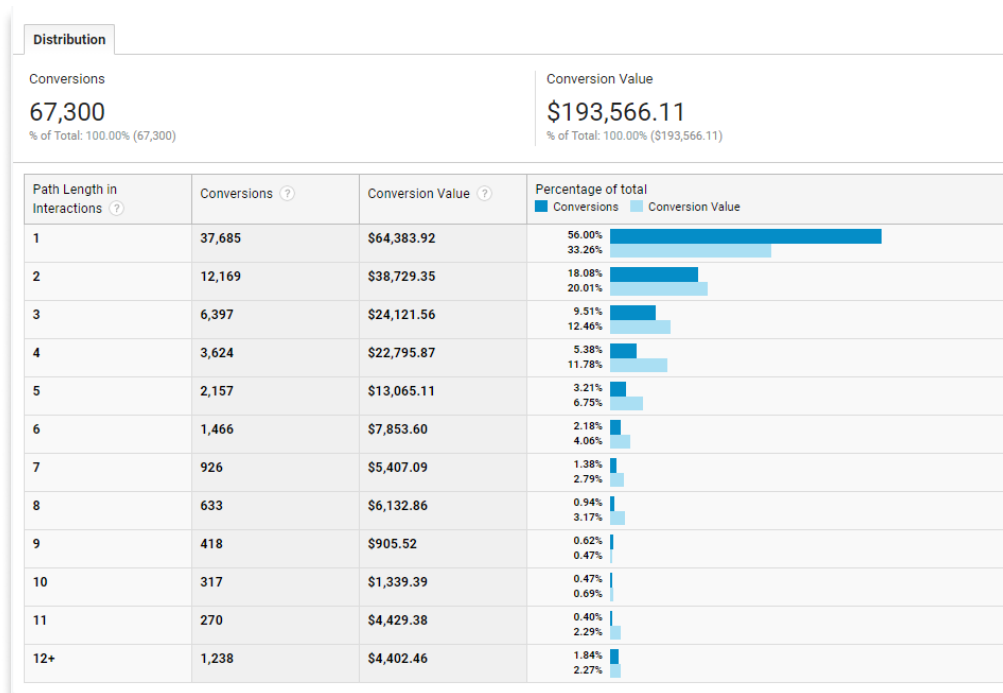
The time lag report shows the number of days it took the customer to convert. Usually, a more complex product and a high AOV, lead to a longer customer journey in both touchpoints and days.

The row named “Time Lag in Days is 0” are all conversions / customer journeys in which the customer journey started and ended on the same day. A one-day conversion path doesn’t mean that the journey consisted of only one touchpoint. At Odyssey, we often see customer journeys consisting of multiple touchpoints on the same day. That’s why the Path Length report (“or length in clicks” as we call it at Odyssey), is a very important report as well.



2.5 Path Length

The Path Length report is similar to the Time Lag report but instead of showing the number of days it shows the number of touchpoints. This is even more interesting as additional touchpoints (clicks) often mean additional costs. So the path length in Google Analytics is also a good qualifier to see if multi-touch attribution is interesting for your organization.



Evaluate if Multi-Touch Attribution is relevant for your organisation

Multi-touch attribution is not or relevant to all businesses. If the average length of your customer journeys is 1.00, last-click is obviously the same as multi-touch attribution. However, even if customer journeys are longer than that, there are other cases in which multi-touch attribution was not the right solution. That's why we have created a checklist to evaluate if applying at multi touch attribution is interesting for you.

- Go to Google Analytics
- Click Conversions > Multi-Channel Funnels > Path Length
- Create an export (.csv)
- Open this document in Google Sheets (you might have to remove the commas and the "+" after the 12)
- Create a WEIGHTED.AVERAGE formula to calculate the weighted average of the Path Length.

If the average Path Length in Google Analytic is longer than 2.00, it's worth applying multi touch attribution. At Odyssey we often see that, when looking at the actual raw data, the path length is even longer, by 37% on average.

2.5 Model Comparison Tool

The Model Comparison Tool in Google Analytics shows some basic attribution insights. At the top, a few different models can be selected. Unfortunately, completely custom models can't be made.

A large shortcoming of GA in this report, is the impossibility to add spend for all channels. Because Google only shows its own channels and there are no integrations for other channels (i.e. Facebook, other search engines, affiliate networks, etc), the insights into the performance of your channels and campaigns very limited.

Google Analytics does show the number of transactions and/or the revenue for each channel based on the selected attribution model. This provides the user with more information on the value of the channel other than last click.

As we've seen with more reports in the Multi-Channel Funnels part of Google Analytics, the question is what do these analyses really tell us? GA only shows a fragment of the information and there is no transparency about Google's calculations. Most importantly, it lacks the essential actionability. What should be the next steps based on these insights?

Conversion: All Type: All Google Ads Lookback Window: Set 30 days prior to conversion ?

% of conversions: 100.00%

Model Comparison: Last Interaction vs Time Decay vs Select model

Primary Dimension: MCF Channel Grouping Default Channel Grouping Source / Medium Source Medium Other Channel Groupings

Secondary dimension

MCF Channel Grouping ?	Spend (for selected time range)	Conversions & CPA				% change in Conversions (from Last Interaction)
		Last Interaction		Time Decay		
		Conversions ? ↓	CPA ?	Conversions ?	CPA ?	
1. Direct	—	61,908.00 (91.99%)	—	61,451.29 (91.31%)	—	-0.74% +
2. (Other)	—	2,452.00 (3.64%)	—	2,626.33 (3.90%)	—	7.11% +
3. Paid Search	\$132,602.41	1,610.00 (2.39%)	\$82.36	1,678.10 (2.49%)	\$79.02	4.23% +
4. Organic Search	—	579.00 (0.86%)	—	683.33 (1.02%)	—	18.02% +
5. Display	—	261.00 (0.39%)	—	268.31 (0.40%)	—	2.80% +
6. Referral	—	231.00 (0.34%)	—	301.91 (0.45%)	—	30.70% +
7. Other Advertising	—	218.00 (0.32%)	—	248.96 (0.37%)	—	14.20% +
8. Social Network	—	41.00 (0.06%)	—	41.71 (0.06%)	—	1.73% +

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3. Google Analytics Attribution

Attribution is a new closed beta in Google Analytics to bring free, cross-channel data-driven attribution to all users. It's intended for users that want to move past last-click attribution and begin accessing data-driven models, which has not been available to non-GA360 customers before. Yet, it's important to understand what this exactly means and how you can('t) use it.

The attribution beta requires a set-up first. This consists of several steps , including choosing your google analytics property and view. After completing these steps it takes 72 hours to get started.

When the data is ready you'll see that Google applied a data driven attribution model. Just like AI, data-driven is a term that's used often without the actual knowledge of the meaning. When data-driven is applied to attribution, it basically means machine learning is applied to determine the value of touchpoints in a customer journey.

One of the biggest issues with data driven attribution, is that it is a black box. As a user, you don't get any information about the KPI's that were used or the calculations that were made. This means you don't know what GA's recommendations are based upon. Another issue with DDA (Data Driven Attribution) is machine learning. It may sound very interesting but the challenge when it comes to customer journeys is that there is a lot of data (both online and offline), that is not available to marketers. You never know what percentage of data you do or don't have and this is different for every customer journey. We believe that good advice can never be given by a computer that teaches itself to make the right choices based on very limited information.

Reports / explore

Furthermore, the attribution insights provide very similar insights compared to the multi-channel funnel reports in Google Analytics. The biggest difference is the data-driven attribution model in the Beta version. While it's a step in the right direction, it still doesn't offer marketers what they should need when applying multi-touch attribution.

4. Walled Garden

Google Analytics is a walled garden. Our lead developer at Odyssey describes a walled garden as follows:

“Google Analytics is an environment where you insert your data, but you are not free to have access to all of your data and/or to share data with 3rd party platforms. Besides that, the owner of the environment - Google Analytics - has access to more of YOUR data than you do.”

Food home delivery

Another well-known example of a walled garden are home delivery platforms for food. In their starting phase, they put all of their effort into acquiring a large client base. When enough people are hooked, , the platforms start to increase the fees for the restaurants. The restaurants have no other choice but to approve the fee increase because it is their only way to reach their customers. Another example is Uber's taxi service.

A walled garden, like Google Analytics, is constantly looking for ways to increase revenue. In the case of Google Analytics, this is through Google Ads. That's also why they use the last non-direct click as the default attribution model.

As you can imagine, this is not an ideal situation.

Google Analytics is an excellent and often indispensable tool for marketers. It's free, it looks good and everyone knows how to use it. So what should you do?

How to get your data out of Google Analytics Walled Garden?

The first option is to upgrade to Google Analytics 360. But that's extremely expensive, so not the best option for most smaller and mid-size businesses.

Another option is to use a workaround in order to get - some - of your data out of Google Analytics. The only thing is, this will result in a raw data set which is very hard to interpret. You will have to do a lot of advanced big data analysis in order to make anything out of that data.

And the third option is to connect your Google Analytics to a tool that can help you to extract the data from Google Analytics and do the big data analysis for you. That is exactly what Odyssey can do for you.

About Odyssey Attribution

Odyssey Attribution is the world's first and only multi-touch attribution tool that uses Google Analytics data as the primary source. By extracting the raw data from GA, Odyssey is able to create customer journeys and apply multi-touch attribution.

As an advertiser you will see an overview of the performance of your channels, campaigns and even individual ads. Odyssey will provide you with incrementality insights into those sources. Based on that, you will also get ad spend suggestions in order to optimize your marketing budgets.

