

# IMPACT REPORT

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# FOREWORD



# WHY DO MARKETERS EXIST?

## Why do marketers exist?



**Jennifer Berry**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Digitas UK



**Sophie Devonshire**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
The Marketing Society

The answer seems simple on the surface. Marketers exist to market and sell products and services.

But the reality is more complex. Selling stuff and making money is always going to be near the top of the to-do list. But the to-do list is getting longer by the year.

They need to stay abreast of a rapidly evolving media landscape. They need to have their finger on the pulse of changing consumer values, attitudes, behaviours and sustainability. New technologies. Globalised markets. Increasingly complicated acronyms. Marketers need to be across it all.

And they need to do it on a budget. Inflation and the rising cost of living is squeezing marketers from both ends.

The truth is that modern marketers need to do more with less. They need to be more profitable. More innovative. More sustainable. More conscious. More integrated. More experimental. More predictable. More effective. The list goes on.

But being one of any of these things alone isn't enough. Marketers need to balance their efforts to move the dial on multiple metrics at once. They need to be able to do it all.

And do it all in less time. The average tenure of a CMO has fallen to 22 months - the lowest level in over a decade.

It could all be very depressing if it wasn't for the fundamental role that marketers and marketing play in modern, successful organisations.

Because we believe that marketers exist to make a mark and create impact.

Digitas UK and The Marketing Society are collaborating on this report because we are passionate about supercharging marketing's positive impact. We believe that brilliant marketers and brave leaders grow organisations and change the world at the same time.

In this report, we unveil data which reveals the current priorities for leaders, and explore how marketers can walk the modern marketing tightrope to deliver meaningful impact, both commercially and culturally.

We wrote the report to provide valuable insights and practical strategies for marketers striving to make a positive, meaningful impact.

We hope you find it useful.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Marketers are expected to do more for their business – with less budget and less time – than ever before. They must walk a tightrope, carefully managing their strategies to ensure a healthy balance between delivering commercial and cultural impact.

Commercial impact refers to the financial performance of a business, both revenue generation and cost reduction. Whilst cultural impact encompasses 3 areas. First of all how the organisation impacts people, society and communities at large, secondly how it impacts the environment and, thirdly, how it impacts employees. Both commercial and cultural impact are important. And marketers need to find equilibrium between these forces.

This report explores the actions, objectives and sentiments of business leaders, investigating how they are approaching decision-making in today's dynamic landscape to achieve this balance.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 86% of business leaders say that prioritising both commercial and cultural impact is essential.
- Nearly three-quarters of businesses (72%) find demonstrating the value of cultural impact to be the most challenging aspect for their organisation.
- 97 out of 100 business leaders believe it is essential for organisations to change their internal culture to adapt to changing customer preferences and behaviours.
- 53% of respondents believe that delivering technological impact is the most important priority for their business.
- Though 40% of leaders identify sustainability and environmental responsibility as a priority, 44% say they are underperforming in terms of delivering a positive environmental impact.

## METHODOLOGY

We commissioned independent research among 400 senior business decision-makers (director level and above) in companies taking over £500 million in revenue across financial services, health & wellness, travel and retail sectors to learn more about their impact strategies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

With the right mindset, skillset and tools, marketers can achieve both commercial and cultural impact. The synergy between commercial success and cultural relevance is more critical than ever. Balancing these dual objectives presents a unique opportunity to create demand, boost differentiation, improve employee retention and drive growth.



People commissioned  
for the independent  
research of this report.

# 400

**DECISION  
MAKERS**

Directors and above from £500M+ companies in financial services, health & wellness, travel, and retail sectors.

# INTRODUCTION



# What do we mean by impact?

Marketers are expected to do more for their business – with less budget and less time – than ever before.

Under extreme pressure, they're expected to deliver across more channels. To explore emerging technologies and innovate. To collect more data. To build brands whilst selling in the short term. So how is that pressure changing priorities?

In this report, we commissioned independent research among 400 senior business decision-makers (director level and above) in companies taking over £500 million in revenue across financial services, health & wellness, travel and retail sectors to learn more about their impact strategies.

At Digitas we believe Impact can take many forms. But we split the different types of impact into two key categories: commercial and cultural.

**Commercial impact** refers to the financial performance of the organisation. So here we're looking at the activities that drive revenue growth, profitability, market share and cost efficiencies. Conversely **Cultural impact** encompasses three main areas. First of all how the organisation impacts people, society and communities at large, secondly how it impacts the environment and, thirdly, how it impacts employees.

Our Digitas **Impact Wheel** demonstrates how cultural and commercial impact can be delivered through marketing and customer experience efforts. Digitas is an agency that likes to start at the end... with the impact we're trying to create.

The Digitas Impact Wheel helps us to pinpoint the desired impact, whether related to commercial goals such as revenue generation and cost reduction, or cultural objectives such as societal, sustainable, and organisational change. It could also encompass a combination of both. Then, we identify the levers we can pull and determine which aspects of the consumer experience require our focus to achieve it.

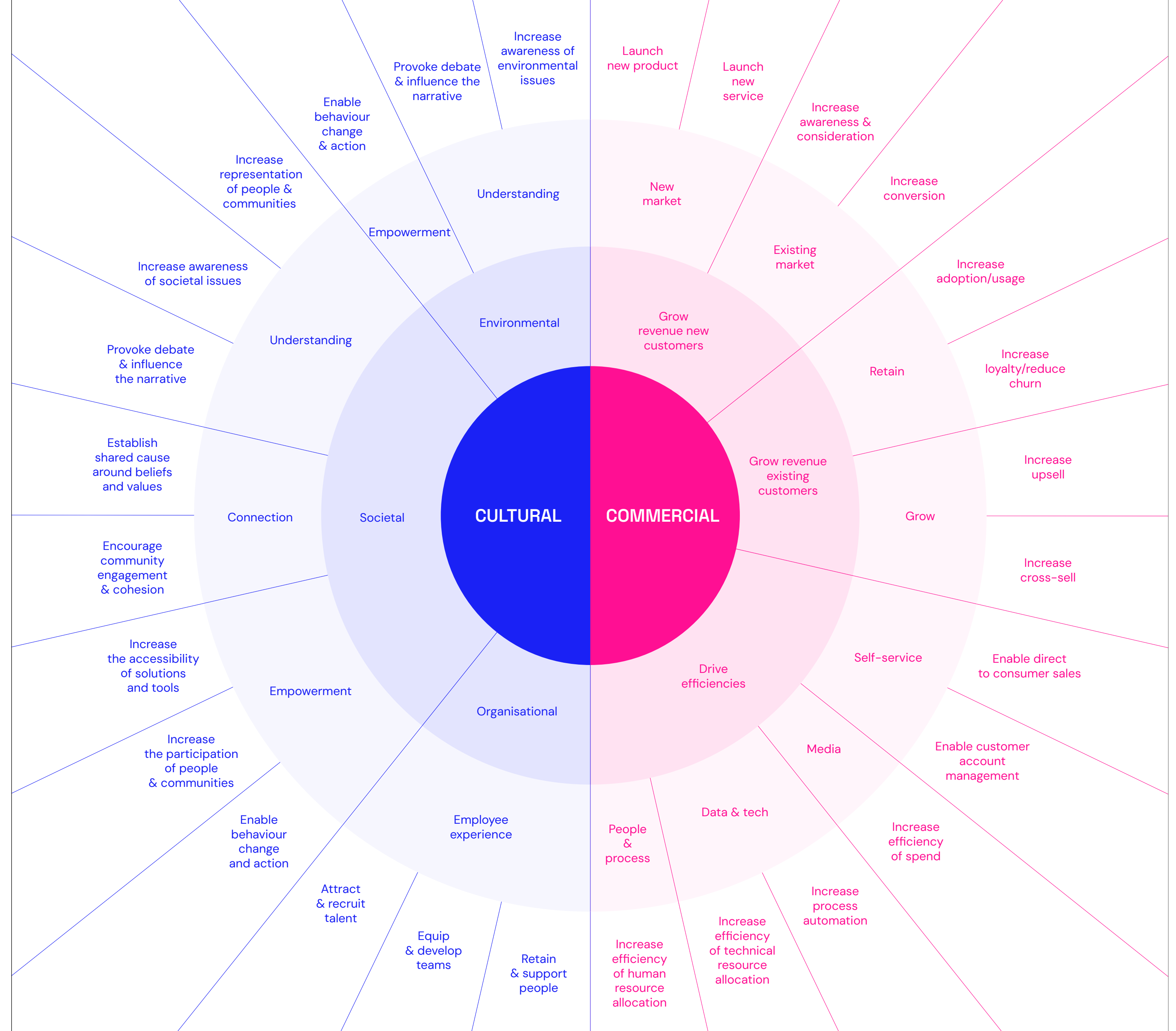
We developed the Impact Wheel because we needed a more nuanced and mature way of looking at the impact we all deliver as marketers every day..

We felt that we needed to move on from the brand purpose debate, something that stemmed from many marketers experiencing an identity crisis over the role their brands play in consumerism and the negative impact they can create.

The research shows that consumers want to buy from organisations that have a positive impact and align with their values. And marketers want to work for them.

But brand purpose as a term has become too big, broad and polarising. People can point at Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and equate them to "putting lipstick on a pig" – especially if there were obvious disjuncts between statements and actions. This is a big challenge for global businesses operating across multiple territories and cultures.

But this debate isn't about brand purpose. It's about impact.





Impact goes beyond brand purpose to look at the effectiveness of marketing and customer experience efforts in totality. How can we create work that has an impact on consumers? Communities? Colleagues? The climate?

This isn't about some vague benevolent purpose. It's about winning attention, creating demand and positively impacting people and society.

**So where are businesses delivering impact right now?**

Our research explores the views of business leaders on their top priorities, challenges, and opportunities for creating impact in 2024. By analysing these responses, we have a snapshot of how businesses are trying to manage the impact balancing act. Where is there a strong focus? Where are people wobbling? How are we balancing commerce and culture? Data and creativity? Sustainability and profitability? Pessimism and optimism?

Here's what we found.





# WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

# 25

## What priorities are marketers balancing?

It can feel like there is no room for missteps as a modern marketer. Every action must be measured, precise and predictable. And have an ROI. Which isn't always easy in a world that is changing faster than ever before.

Like walking a tightrope, marketers must carefully manage their strategies to ensure a healthy balance between commercial and cultural impact. This section explores the actions, objectives and sentiments of business leaders, and how they are approaching decision-making in today's dynamic landscape.



## Balancing Commerce and Culture

Navigating short term profitability while investing in long term growth

“If you want long-term growth, what you've got to do is change people's minds in some way. You've got to build up memory structures that will bias their behaviour into the future, and that's a much more difficult and long-term job, because it involves training people's responses in such a way that you not only influence behaviour now, but you also influence behaviour tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and on into the future.”

Les Binet & Peter Field,  
The Long and Short of It

Marketers know that brands require a balance between short-term activations and long-term brand building.

However, what we know and what we do are often two different things. Especially when we are under pressure. And as brands and businesses have grappled with profitability through an era of fiscal uncertainty, marketers naturally lean towards short-term marketing activations which keep them in the black.

The job of balancing commercial targets with cultural impact is a similar issue. How do you achieve both commercial and cultural impact at the same time? How do you manage apparently competing strategies? And is it even something that business leaders want to deliver?

The answer to that is a resounding yes. There is a strong consensus among business leaders that prioritising both commercial and cultural impact is essential – with 86% agreeing.



Business leaders agreeing that prioritising both commercial and cultural impact is essential.

86%

## Balancing Commerce and Culture

Navigating short term profitability while investing in long term growth

“It’s impossible to separate commercial and cultural impact. Especially for large organisations. You need to keep a long term view on the world, and on people. Whenever we see an opportunity emerging in a new market – we first need to understand the culture and community and ensure we are as safe and responsible as possible.”

Alessandro Villa,  
Global eCommerce Lead,  
Viatis

But though leaders agree that delivering both types of impact is critical – the data reveals that commercial objectives are overwhelmingly the focus.

Part of this is to do with demonstrating the value of cultural impact. Nearly three-quarters of businesses (72%) find demonstrating the value of cultural impact to be the most challenging aspect for their organisation. It isn’t necessarily immediately quantifiable to see how societal, organisational or environmental initiatives move the metrics that matter most to business leaders.

Consequently, businesses of all sizes (with turnovers ranging from \$500m+ to \$3bn+) believe they are not placing enough emphasis on cultural impact – and rank it as the least important metric.

However, the research does show that over ¾ of respondents believe they have the skills, vision and strategic insight to deliver cultural impact if required.

So it seems that the tools are there. But the urgency isn’t.

The survey suggests this stems from a disconnect in organisational KPIs. Almost 70% of respondents found that aligning KPIs with commercial and cultural impact goals is a significant challenge. Without a system to measure performance, marketers are unable to shift organisational mindsets to prioritise both commercial and cultural goals equally.



Businesses finding demonstrating the value of cultural impact to be the most challenging aspect for their organisation.

**3/4** (72%)

## Balancing Commerce and Culture

Navigating short term  
profitability while investing  
in long term growth

“There are a lot of facets to making a cultural impact. At Marriott internally we have a strong cultural ethos that underlines everything we do which has evolved over our 97 year history: how we do business is as important as what business we do.

Having a strong culture internally is key for all the obvious talent retention and engagement reasons, but a company’s culture also influences how a business is perceived by it’s customers, partners, the media and the general public. A positive culture enhances the organisation’s reputation, which then in turn impacts customer loyalty and brand success.”

Andrew Watson,  
Vice President Digital, Loyalty & Portfolio  
Marketing Europe, Marriott



We believe that the stronger your cultural impact is in the long term, the stronger your commercial impact in every term.

## Balancing Technology and Time

Harnessing innovation  
without losing agility

“Technology is anything  
that wasn’t around  
when you were born.”

Alan Kay,  
‘The father of personal computers’

Businesses are in a race  
with technology and time.  
And there is no finish line.



## Balancing Technology and Time

### Harnessing innovation without losing agility

"We're focused on how we use AI and Machine Learning internally. But this is something we really don't want our customers to feel or even notice. We are using AI tools to make our backend processes slicker – empowering us to make better decisions at a faster pace. Ultimately, these technologies are empowering us to create more efficient and more effective customer journeys.

We are looking at ways we could use this technology externally in a more customer facing role. But we operate in a heavily regulated industry. It's not as simple as a one click checkout on Amazon. Tech is the area we invest most in – but it's not just for the sake of it. If we invest in tech, it's because we want to be great at everything else."

Vicki Joshi,  
Head of Customer Management  
Strategy, Insights & Data, AXA

The job for marketers and leaders is to understand changing trends in consumer behaviour. They need to predict how emerging technology might change what is possible businesses – and how it impacts consumer behaviours and decision making processes.

The survey reinforced the common assumption that technology is viewed as a major driver of impact. Investing in technology which delivers against commercial and cultural goals is viewed by 46% of business leaders as the most important priority for businesses in 2024.

This collective focus reflects a world where marketers need to do more with less. New tools empower organisations to streamline operations, enhance customer experiences, and create new opportunities for growth. Indeed, nearly 8 out of 10 (79%) business leaders view the shift towards a digital landscape

as the most positive factor shaping performance in 2024.

Another increasingly prominent agent of technological change is of course the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). OpenAI's recently unveiled GPT-4o is able to view the surrounding world, and it is conversationally capable <sup>7</sup> on a level we haven't seen before.

Marketers are experimenting and piloting new approaches and engagement mechanics using AI. But are still trepidatious on how they can embed AI into the operational fabric of the organisation.

Though its conversational skills are improving, they are still unable to compete with human customer service. Our research reveals that only 1/5 (19%) of business leaders are using AI to provide personalised support with the goal of improving customer satisfaction and driving commercial success.



Business leaders viewing the shift towards a digital landscape as the most positive factor shaping performance in 2024.

**8** OUT OF 10

Business leaders are using AI to provide personalised support with the goal of improving customer satisfaction and driving commercial success.

**1/5** (19%)



## Balancing Technology and Time

Harnessing innovation  
without losing agility

“Using AI is more than asking ChatGPT to help with a presentation. Businesses need more than access to historical data. If enough people tell ChatGPT the sky is green, it will soon give that as an answer. What is really exciting about AI is how it understands complex branches of data and connects the dots in an intelligent way. Not reading the past – but helping us predict the future.”

Alessandro Villa,  
Global eCommerce Lead,  
Viatis

AI tools are already helping businesses cut costs and increase efficiency. But this is still only scratching the surface of what is possible with the technology. We haven't (yet) got the balance right when it comes to balancing efficiency, with supercharging value creation.

The most successful businesses will be those who are able to find this balance, combining mind and machine to deliver impact which goes beyond reducing cost to create value both commercially and culturally.



## Balancing Technology and Time

Harnessing innovation  
without losing agility

“AI tools will have a significant role in future relationships between people and businesses. However in the hospitality world, AI can’t replace the human interaction that is so key to a hotel experience.

But, it can help us deal with a lot of manual backend and admin work – which then frees up our teams to focus on the things that make us stand out – such as in person customer interaction and engagement. We’re asking: how can AI enable better experiences by serving up the right information? How can our booking experience be more tailored? How can we interpret data better? How can we lessen administrative burdens on our staff?

We are excited about the opportunities that will result in a better customer experience, but our approach is always to leverage technology that complements and enhances, not replaces, the human interactions between our guests and our teams. ”

Andrew Watson, Vice President Digital,  
Loyalty & Portfolio Marketing Europe, Marriott



## Balancing Sustainability and Size

Scaling growth while upholding environmental responsibility

“Sustainable development is a fundamental break that’s going to reshuffle the entire deck. There are companies today that are going to dominate in the future simply because they understand that.”

Francois-Henri Pinault,  
Chairman and CEO,  
Kering

Sustainability is a big challenge. So big, in fact, it can be paralyzing.

On an individual level, it’s difficult to tangibly feel how you are making an impact. On a business level, this feeling can amplify ten-fold. Evolving into a sustainable future is a complicated challenge. CMOs are contending with the short-term pressures of the role and the economy – as much as the mounting pressure for all businesses to become sustainable before it’s too late.



## Balancing Sustainability and Size

### Scaling growth while upholding environmental responsibility

“At a local level, people see, breathe and feel the relationship. When you are global, big and broad it is harder. We can outline our ambitions when it comes to sustainability or community engagement. As time goes on, there will be less tolerance for the businesses which haven’t invested in a cultural impact.”

Andrew Watson,  
Vice President Digital, Loyalty & Portfolio Marketing Europe, Marriott

And this feeling of paralysis is reflected in our data. The survey showed that businesses with the highest turnover (more than £3bn) viewed societal (16%) and environmental (27%) impact as the least important. These businesses arguably have the greatest opportunity to deliver cultural impact by becoming more sustainable – but feel they are too big or are too slow moving to make effective change.

Though the overall data shows that business leaders recognise the importance of sustainability, with 40% identifying sustainability and environmental responsibility as a priority this year, an equal percentage (40%) acknowledge that they are not meeting their goals or expectations when it comes to environmental impact.

The challenge for marketers is capturing the opportunities in this change. How can a brand tap into more eco-conscious consumers? How can it encourage them to make positive choices? How can marketers make the business case clear for their own organisations to become more sustainable?

Marketers can argue that by investing in eco-friendly initiatives, brands are both reducing their environmental footprint and gaining a competitive advantage by meeting the growing demand for sustainable products and services – effectively delivering against commercial and cultural impact goals.



Business leaders identifying sustainability and environmental responsibility as a priority this year.

40%

Businesses with the highest turnover (more than £3bn) viewing environmental impact as the least important.

27%

Business leaders acknowledge that they are not meeting their goals or expectations when it comes to environmental impact.

40%

## Balancing Employees and Experiences

Fostering talent while delivering exceptional customer journeys

“To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace.”

Doug Conant,  
former President and CEO,  
the Campbell Soup Company

Technology and sustainability are issues that score as important across businesses and departments. But there was a greater variety of perspectives when it came to assessing the importance of employee experience.

While HR (42%) and IT (51%) departments view investing in employee experience as a vital priority for 2024, marketing (8%) departments consider enhancing employee experience as more of an optional extra rather than a necessity.



### Departments viewing investment in employee experience as a vital priority for 2024



## Balancing Employees and Experiences

Fostering talent while  
delivering exceptional  
customer journeys

“AXA has got a clear vision for the role that it wants to play in society. Globally and locally. To Act for Human Progress by Protecting what matters. And you can’t underestimate how important this purpose is. Not only to our customers – but the workforce of the future. Now more than ever people are looking for organisations that aren’t just there to make as much money as possible. They want to buy and work for a brand with integrity – one which thinks about its impact on society and the environment. This isn’t optional.”

Vicki Joshi,  
Head of Customer Management  
Strategy, Insights & Data,  
AXA

Which makes sense. HR and IT departments, which are more directly involved in managing and supporting employees, naturally recognise the value of creating a positive work environment for staff.

However, this difference in perception highlights the importance of effective communication and collaboration across all departments within an organisation. What use is positive advertising if a business develops a reputation for a toxic employee experience?

Consumers want to engage with businesses and brands who leave a positive impact on their people as much as consumers, society and the planet.



## Balancing Employees and Experiences

Fostering talent while delivering exceptional customer journeys

“We see a direct relationship between these [cultural and commercial] forces . We are lucky to have an important role to play in society – and we embrace the responsibility that comes with it.

New EE is not just about our own customers. It’s a brand that’s open to everyone. This is why we work with the FA on Hope United, and sponsor the men’s and women’s national football teams across the UK, as well as grassroots and disability football.

We can clearly see how these campaigns impact our master brand performance. They boost the whole funnel. Consideration goes up, recommendations go up. If you don’t lean into issues that matter to your customers, you are missing the top end of the funnel. You are just a transactional business. Salience matters and you need to be a trusted force.”

Kelly Engstrom,  
Brand & Demand Generation  
Communications Director, EE

Our research shows that 97 out of 100 business leaders believe it is essential for organisations to change their internal culture to adapt to changing customer preferences and behaviours.

This suggests business leaders are conscious of the need to stay agile and responsive to evolving market trends and consumer expectations – but highlights a potential disconnect in understanding how employee experience shapes brand perception.



Business leaders believing it is essential for organisations to change their internal culture to adapt to changing customer preferences and behaviours.

**97** OUT OF 100

# Balancing Impact and Industry Dynamics

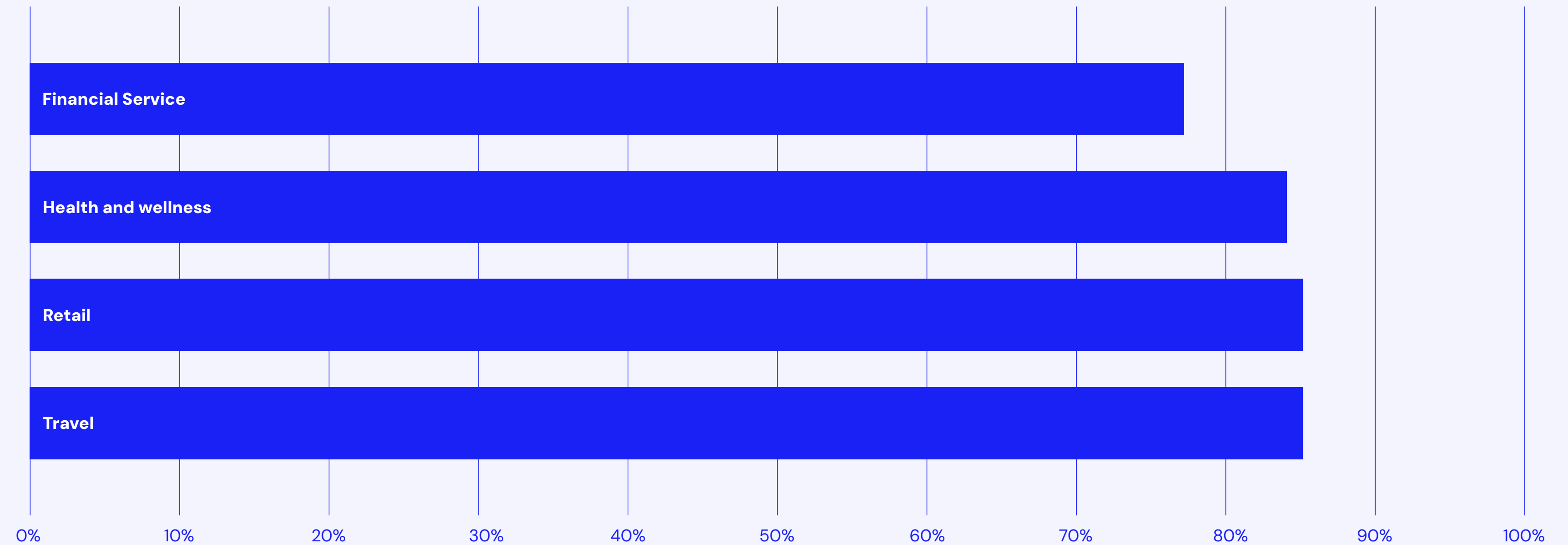
## How do sectors shape priorities?

Our research revealed a familiar pattern across every industry. Everyone is equally concerned about impact.

And that is a good thing. It illustrates the fact that business leaders are actively aware of the different types of impact they can have on profits, people – and the planet.

However, there were some subtle differences. In the Health & Wellness sector, there was a ~10% greater emphasis on delivering societal impact (e.g supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives, or supporting the wellbeing of individuals and communities through CSR initiatives). This is perhaps a reflection of the wider raison d'être for these businesses. If you want to be good for the bee, you have to be good for the hive.

### Organisations agreeing that prioritise both Cultural and Commercial Impact are more likely to achieve long-term success





## Balancing Impact and Industry Dynamics

### How do sectors shape priorities?

“The landscape for EE has changed dramatically over the last few years. But nothing compared to the changes that lie ahead.

With 4G came the real age of smartphones – it enabled us to do everything through our devices. This accelerated with 5G. Now the market is about to be turned on its head again with the introduction of eSim, which makes moving to a new network provider as easy as selecting a brand from a drop down menu.

Competitors are merging. The landscape is changing. It’s becoming easier for customers to move. So we need to prove our value to them everyday, and in every way we can.”

Kelly Engstrom,  
Brand & Demand Generation  
Communications Director,  
EE

The retail sector leaned towards the impact of technology. Around 53% of respondents believe that delivering technological impact is the most important impact priority, which is the highest among all categories.

And you can understand why. In a half-decade characterised by uncertainty and change, technology kept retailers connected to consumers. Ecommerce has become a fundamental pillar of every plan. Marketers understand the importance of digital experiences meeting customer expectations. And we can see how AI and smarter tools can drive efficiencies and reveal opportunities to improve.

However, though almost half of retailers identified environmental impact as a priority, 44% said they were underperforming in terms of delivering a positive environmental impact.

Financial brands identified organisational impact as the biggest priority – reflecting the sector's desire for increased efficiency. Financial brands face strict regulations, complex processes, and a need for strong risk management, which may contribute to the emphasis on organisational impact to enhance overall performance and adaptability.



Respondents believing that delivering technological impact is the most important impact priority.

53%

Respondents saying they were underperforming in terms of delivering a positive environmental impact.

44%

# Balancing Channels and choices

## Where are Marketers' priorities?

Technology has reshaped the media landscape. So what channels do marketers view as most impactful today?

As you'd expect, digital sits at the heart of everything. The latest IAB UK [Digital Ad Spend report](#) shows that digital ad spending now accounts for the vast majority of media spending – 82.6% this year – and our research reflects this.

Social media emerges as the top priority, with 51% of respondents indicating that they will focus on this channel. Traditional channels like out-of-home (12%) and print (13%) are viewed as the least important for impact by respondents.

So social is a priority area. But marketers need to balance the sheer amount of channels that consumers now play in with complexity and budget. As well as using social to do right by the next generation of consumers, in order to deliver both commercial and cultural impact.

Digital ad spending amongst media spending

82.6%

Respondents focusing on social media

51%

# HOW TO MANAGE THE IMPACT BALANCING ACT



# You can't solve a problem if you don't realise you have one.

At Digitas we believe that delivering meaningful impact starts with identifying where the opportunities lie within your business and its customers. It begins with a shared vision of the types of impact the business is trying to deliver.

We advise our clients to start at the end. That's why, before any new engagement with existing or new business, we co-create an Impact Vision with our clients, using our Digitas Impact Wheel as the inspiration and framework to get to shared vision that balances both cultural and commercial impact.

Making an impact externally requires buy-in internally. Approaching a CFO with an idea focused on cultural impact can raise predictable questions. Why does it matter? How is this hitting the bottom line?

But it's all in the framing. Cultural impact isn't done for the sake of it. It still falls firmly within the marketing remit of demand creation. We're creating future demand, as well as short-term demand. Cultural impact drives commercial impact, and the brands who do it well invariably capture larger shares of their market.



“Impact sits at the very foundation of insurance. It’s all about helping people in the moments that really matter. For me personally, impact means leaving some form of emotional connection. For our organisation, it means delivering good outcomes for customers as well as for the business. People can think those two things struggle to co-exist. That if you’re going to deliver real customer impact, that might cost too much. In my experience real impact can be achieved by getting that balance right between the delivery of good customer outcomes, good colleague outcomes and good commercial outcomes for our business.”

Vicki Joshi,  
Head of Customer Management Strategy,  
Insights & Data,  
AXA

Having a vision is a great start, but it is just a start. The vision needs to be translated into the business and marketing model. That’s why we take the Impact Vision and use it to build Impact Models for our clients. These model the commercial and cultural impact and size the impact opportunity through time, identifying the levers we can pull and which parts of the consumer experience we need to focus on to realise it. Models reveal opportunities to bridge the gap between commercial and cultural objectives. For example, a model for a transport company could reveal how behavioural change in customers can simultaneously lead to fewer carbon emissions AND more revenue.

Having defined the Impact Model, clients should then get cross-functional experts together to create the consumer experience that will deliver the required commercial and cultural impact, as laid out in the Impact Vision. At Digitas we run Impact Hack sessions in collaboration with clients where we bring experts from across different specialisms to create solutions to business problems in new and unexpected ways.

The research showed that marketers struggle to know how to measure cultural impact. That’s why we devise and build Digitas Impact Dashboards, which give real-time insights highlighting opportunities to optimise, creating efficiencies for our partners by automating and consolidating the measurement process.

This is about more than digital metrics and brand perception. It’s about measuring behavioural change. How are we moving people to buy more? Recycle more? Do more good?

Impact has to be assessed in totality—and this can require adopting fresh approaches to measurement. Everybody in marketing wants to make an impact. To society, consumers, colleagues. But as the old adage goes ‘you can’t manage what you don’t measure’. This is why we need a more nuanced approach to measurement if clients are going to deliver both commercial and cultural impact – ongoing and at scale.



# IMPACT IN ACTION

# ESG

# H&M

We wanted to demonstrate the impact of successfully managing the Impact Balancing Act. So here's our work, in partnership with H&M.

## H&M – Creating commercial and cultural impact by putting the customer at the heart of the business

### PROBLEM

Despite its enormous success as high street retailer, in 2018 H&M's digital presence lagged behind digital native competitors like ASOS and Boohoo, threatening market share. With online fashion sales rapidly increasing, H&M's reliance on traditional storefronts posed a risk. H&M realised they had to transform digitally, particularly in the area of search engine optimisation (SEO). However, a lack of customer centricity, entrenched legacy systems and siloed teams hindered progress.

### SOLUTION

We delivered a customer-first transformation of H&M's strategy, culture and processes. Harnessing insights driven by online fashion culture, the strategy used SEO to meet the diverse needs of its broad audience across fashion, homewares, sportswear, and beauty products. To understand and respond to specific consumer behaviour and search queries in real-time, delivering relevant products directly

to consumers. We delved deep into H&M's organisational structure and identified bottlenecks, streamlining processes and embedding SEO specialists across teams. This overhaul enabled the creation of thousands of new landing pages tailored to consumer searches, driving increased traffic and sales.

### IMPACT

#### Increased Google Visibility

Google rewarded the digital transformation by elevating H&M to the first page for relevant customer searches, leading to a 1,232% increase in the number of target non-brand terms ranking on page 1 since 2019. H&M's visibility surged ahead of key competitors across various European markets.

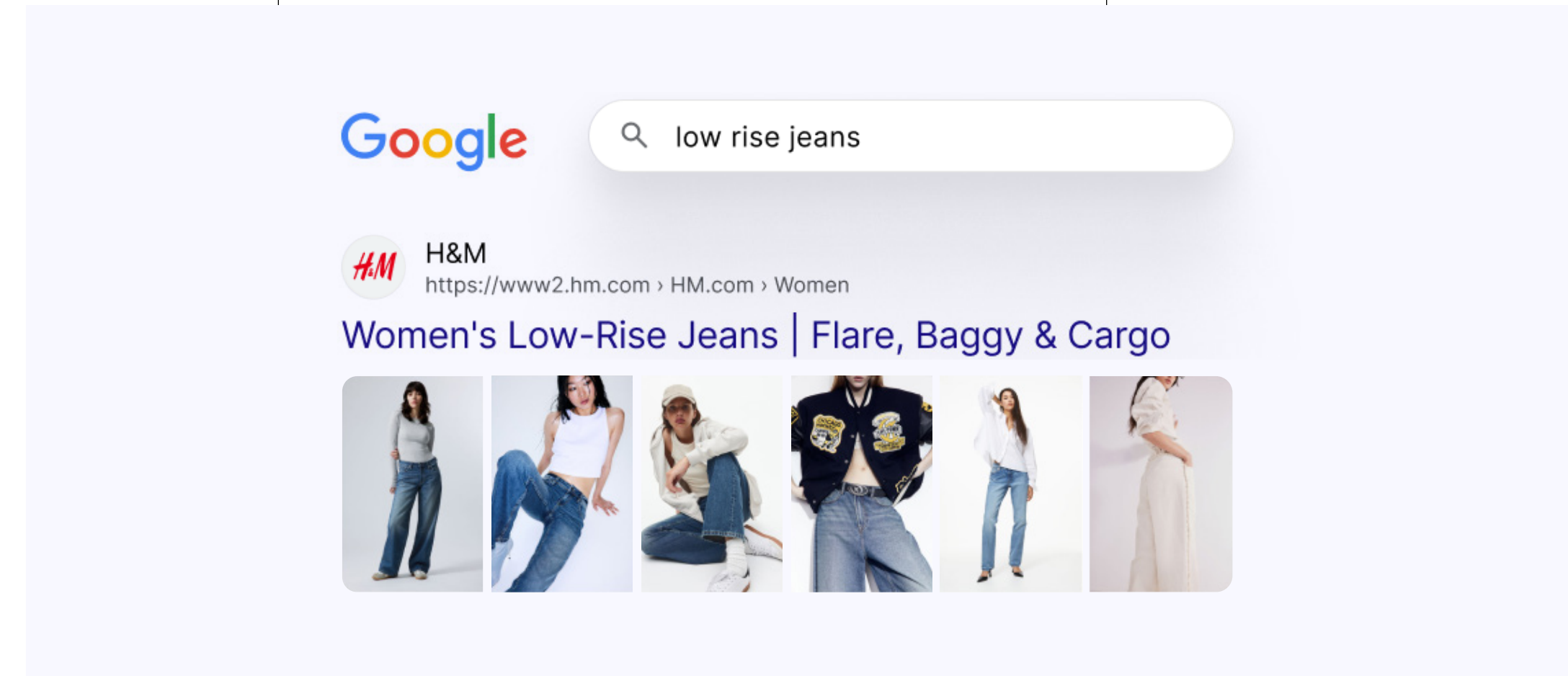
#### £408M incremental SEO revenue

The initiative aimed to drive £204M incremental revenue from organic search over 4½ years. Impressively, it surpassed expectations, generating £408M incremental SEO revenue,

doubling the initial target. The European segment of the global program achieved a remarkable 30:1 ROI.

#### Harnessing Trends in Fashion Culture

We uncovered highly search-for white spaces in fashion where H&M did not have any products. For instance, based on our search insights and responding to trends in fashion culture, we advised H&M to create a new line of tennis bracelets, a product which they didn't sell before. The tennis bracelet quickly became one of the top selling products in H&M's jewellery range.



Incremental SEO revenue.

**£408M**

Increase in the number of target non-brand terms ranking on Google page 1 since 2019.

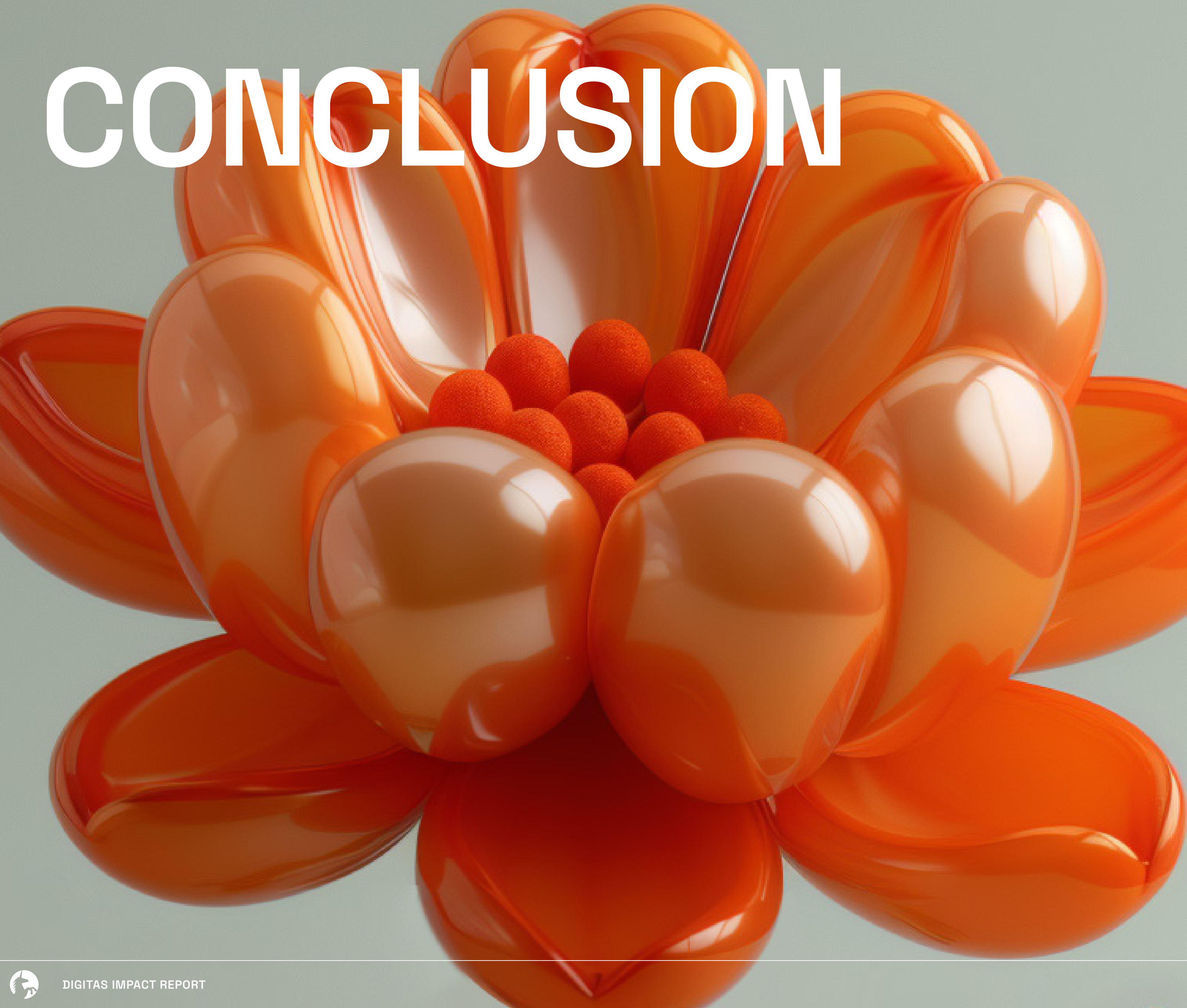
**1,232%**

European segment of the global program.

**30:1 ROI**

Harnessing fashion culture, the tennis bracelet quickly became one of the top selling products in H&M's jewellery range.

# CONCLUSION





## CONCLUSION

Marketers exist to make an impact.

In today's dynamic landscape, the synergy between commercial success and cultural relevance is more critical than ever. Balancing these dual objectives presents a unique opportunity. The convergence of commercial impact and cultural influence allows for a more holistic approach to measuring and demonstrating marketing effectiveness.

Navigating the complexities of the modern market, we have a powerful arsenal of tools to transform challenges into opportunities—and opportunities into tangible impact. With a clear vision of both cultural and commercial goals, business leaders and marketers can strategically pull the right levers to drive success.

Our research underscores that 86% of business leaders acknowledge the importance of balancing commercial and cultural impact. Yet, commercial objectives still dominate the focus, primarily due to the difficulty in quantifying cultural ROI. However, businesses that master the art of balancing both aspects are the ones truly driving demand and growth.

If this report has done anything, we hope it highlights the insights and strategies needed to turn these challenges into victories. Embrace this moment. Leverage these insights. Make a bold, measurable impact.

Have any questions about what you've read? Want to learn more about Digitas and our approach to impact? Get in touch with the team at [sarah.hackett@digitas.com](mailto:sarah.hackett@digitas.com).

# IMPACT

# DIGITAL TAGS



Do you have questions or comments?  
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