



Narrative Distortion:

The Reputation Risk Reshaping Prescribing

In 2026, physicians are not only treating patients but also the distorted health narratives that patients bring with them. Misleading information and outright disinformation now shape what patients want and resist as well as what physicians must undo before care can begin. **It's also increasingly shaping which company's product they are willing to prescribe, recommend or administer.**

We call this **narrative distortion**: a term we are introducing in this report to cover the full spectrum of false and confusing health narratives. It includes misinformation, inaccurate content shared by people who believe it to be true, and disinformation, false information deliberately created or spread to deceive. The distinction matters less in the treatment room than the effect, where both arrive in the same way, require the same amount of time to dispel and can result in unwanted health outcomes.

[We. worked with Sapio Research to survey 500 physicians](#) (52% specialists, 48% general practitioners) across Australia, Germany, India, the United Kingdom and the United States to understand how narrative distortion is changing the way medicine is practiced and what it now means for bio/pharma reputation, prescribing decisions and the bottom line.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

The Vaccine-Autism Myth

Decades of evidence haven't dislodged the claim that vaccines cause autism. Hesitancy rises, and preventable diseases return.

Narrative distortion is disrupting care in the physician's office

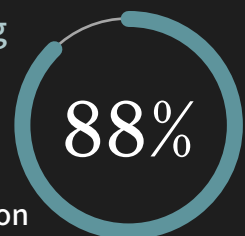
On average, physicians globally say **more than 1 in 3 of their patients each week (35%) present with misinformation or disinformation that the physician must spend time addressing** before treatment can begin. That number rises to 48% in India.

Ninety-five percent of physicians say this disinformation has increased the amount of time they need to spend with patients to address misunderstandings.

And **88% of physicians say they have modified a treatment recommendation because of patient resistance rooted in misleading information.** Clinical work at the point of care is absorbing a [health] communications problem that originates outside the treatment room.

Distortion is reshaping treatment decisions

88% of physicians say they have modified a treatment recommendation because of patient resistance rooted in misleading information.



Physicians are *looking for help* to address narrative distortion

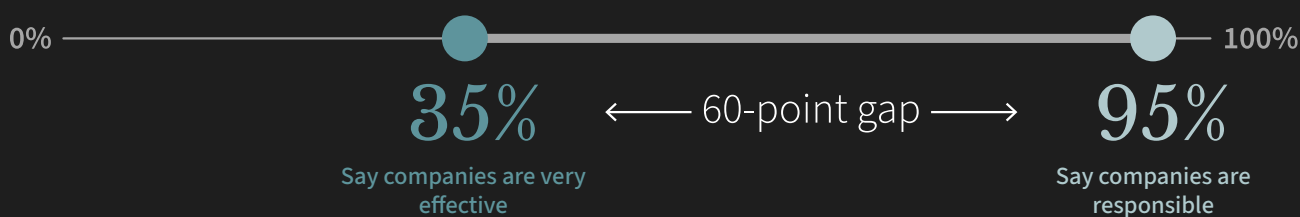
Ninety-five percent of physicians say bio/pharma companies are responsible for publicly addressing misleading narratives related to their therapeutic areas, but they believe only 35% of those companies are very effective at doing it. That is a 60-point gap between expectation and execution.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

Conspiracy Contagion

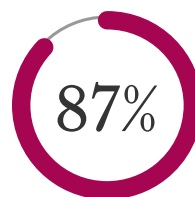
Every health emergency now arrives with a conspiracy — it was engineered or pharma profited. The suspicion spreads as fast as the disease.

Expectation far outruns execution



Eighty percent of physicians say companies show up very differently on this issue, meaning posture is now a differentiator. And what matters most to physicians is **how visible companies are in correcting misinformation**, not how loudly they market around it. When we asked physicians what the companies they rate most favorably do best, the answers were concrete:

- Public education campaigns that defend the scientific process (41%)
- Joint statements with medical associations to correct misleading narratives (39%)
- Rapid public corrections when those narratives first emerge (36%)
- Senior leaders willing to defend the science in interviews, op-eds and public forums (33%)



Eighty-seven percent of physicians agree that a company's willingness to take action beyond its own commercial self-interest demonstrates a **genuine commitment to public health**. How a company responds to narrative distortion is being read as a **proxy for corporate integrity**.

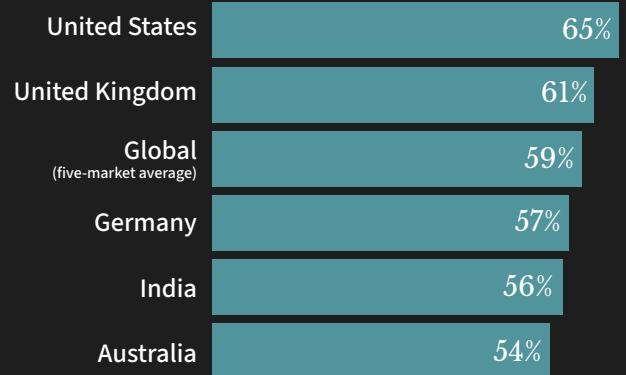
There is a penalty to *staying silent*

When a company stays silent on misleading narratives in its therapeutic area, physicians notice and read it as a reputation risk. **Thirty-five percent believe the company is prioritizing its own commercial interests over public health.** More concerning, almost an additional quarter (**24%**) believe silence means the company is complicit, **enabling the misleading narrative to spread.** Added together, these two readings reflect the views of 59% of physicians globally and make up what the Silence Penalty Index tracks in each market. Only **23% believe a silent company is being cautious and responsible** in holding back.

In every market we surveyed, staying silent, what has traditionally been **the safest reputational posture, has now become the riskiest one.** Silence is no longer safe.

The Silence Penalty Index

Share of physicians in each market who read corporate silence on misleading narratives as a commercial self-interest and complicity.



Each bar combines both negative readings. The global figure is the 35% who see commercial self-interest and the 24% who see complicity.

Corporate reputation *influences* prescribing decisions

Over the past two years, **We. Communications** has been studying and quantifying the influence of corporate reputation on physician prescribing behavior. **We have consistently found that when physicians are choosing between treatment options with similar safety, efficacy and cost profiles, the number one and number two deciding factors in their minds are the reputation of the drug maker at the therapeutic level and at the corporate level.**

Narrative distortion is the issue where that reputation is now most visibly earned or lost.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

HRT in the Crossfire

Menopause advice now floods social media: HRT is “dangerous,” or “vanity,” or replaceable by supplements. Women lose the thread between evidence and noise.



Reputation and response to narrative distortion intersect and *impact the bottom line*

This year, we confirmed that **89% of physicians globally say corporate reputation is very or somewhat influential in their prescribing choices**. This rises to 97% in the UK and 93% in India.

And **93% say a visible commitment from a company to addressing misleading health narratives is a major or moderate factor in their prescribing decisions**, rising to 98% in India.

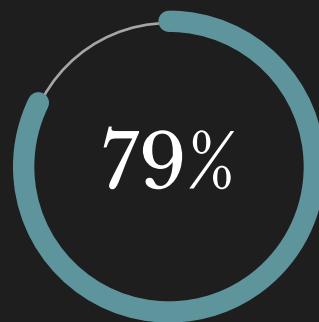
Even more pointedly, **79% of physicians say a company's failure to address harmful narratives in its therapeutic area would reduce their prescribing of that company's treatments**, rising to 91% in the UK and 84% in Australia.

And **56% say that when choosing between similar products, they would prescribe from a company taking a visible stand on health misinformation over a silent competitor**, rising to 71% in the UK and 60% in India.

Taken together: Narrative distortion has crossed from a public health concern into a **prescribing variable**. Reputation and willingness to defend the science now sit alongside efficacy and price in the calculus physicians bring to treatment decisions.

Inaction carries a prescribing cost

79% of physicians say a company's failure to address harmful narratives in its therapeutic area would reduce their prescribing of that company's treatments



DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

GLP-1 Backlash

Exaggerated fears — stomach paralysis, blindness — and “natural alternatives” now surround GLP-1s. Patients who could benefit walk away for the wrong reasons.

Physicians are looking to bio/pharma to *help them counter narrative distortion*

The expectation that companies engage is settled. What physicians are specific about is the kind of help that works at the point of care. **Ninety-nine percent selected at least one form of industry support they would find valuable in navigating misleading health information with their patients.** Asked which forms of support from bio/pharma companies would be most valuable, physicians name three priorities:

- **Patient-facing materials** they can share with patients during consultations, including in local languages (30%).
- **Talking points and evidence summaries:** clear guidance when scientific data is being interpreted in conflicting ways (35%) and direct-to-physician evidence alerts when misinformation emerges (28%).
- **Transparent, accessible data to counter misleading information,** including investment in credible, independent fact-checking resources focused on health (36%, the single most-requested form of support).

The opportunity belongs to innovator companies, and so does the bar. **Fifty-four percent of physicians hold innovator companies to a higher standard than generic manufacturers** on addressing misinformation. That's permission to lead.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

Cancer “Cures”

Herbal remedies, alkaline diets and mega-dose vitamins are hawked online as cancer treatments. Patients who believe them delay real care, and outcomes suffer.

Independent fact-checking resources

36%

Guidance on conflicting scientific data

35%

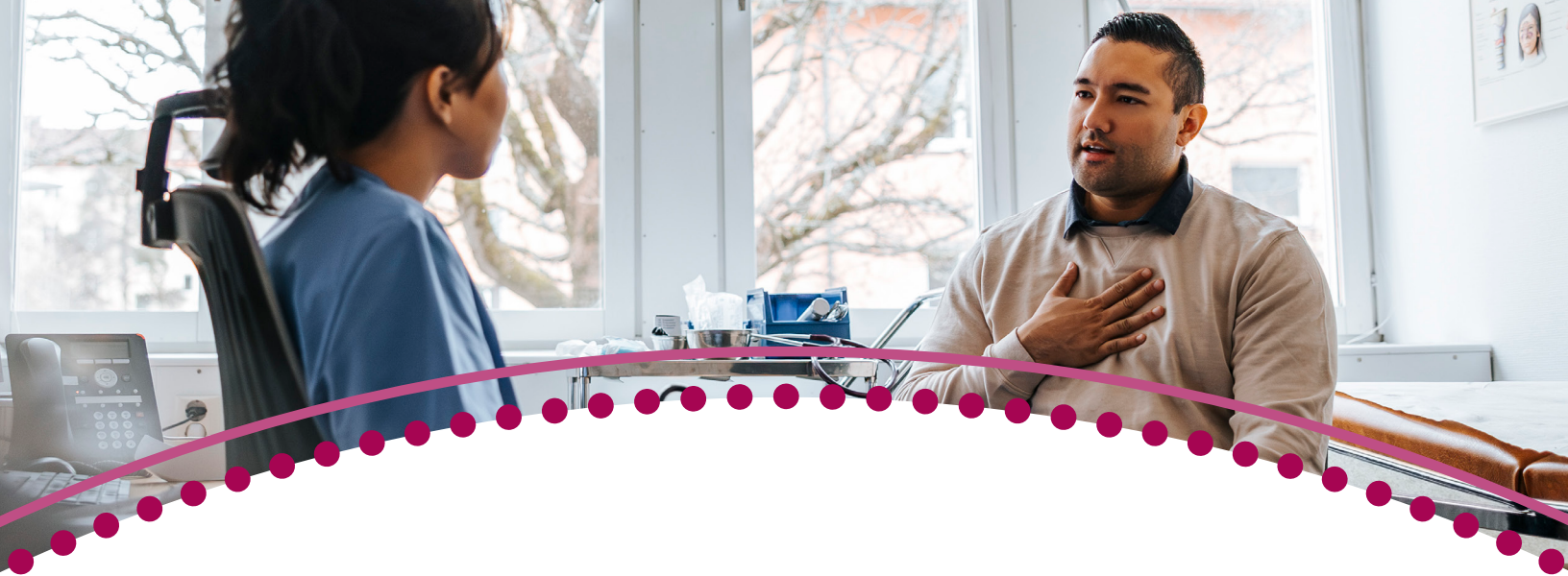
Patient-facing materials in local languages

30%

Direct-to-physician evidence alerts

28%





Global pattern, local texture

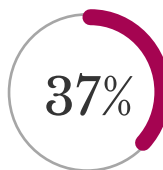
Narrative distortion, the reputation-prescribing link and the silence penalty show up in every market we surveyed, but the appetite for corporate visibility and the route to credibility look different in each one.

United States: *Speak up or pay up*

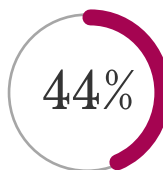
The US is where silence reads worst and where action is rewarded most.

With the sharpest silence penalty of the five markets, keeping quiet is no longer a defensible posture. But the same pressure that makes silence costly makes visibility valuable.

More than half (57%) say they would prescribe from a bio/pharma company that visibly defends the science over a competitor that stays silent, when products are otherwise comparable. In a market where physicians are looking for credible allies, the companies that show up earn measurable trust and prescribing preference.



of patients arrive weekly with false health information requiring correction
Second-highest of any market



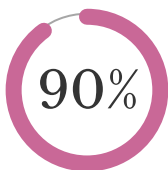
read a company's silence as prioritizing commercial interests over public health
Highest of any market

United Kingdom: *Less noise, more proof*

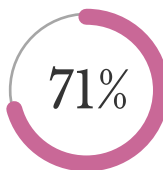
With NHS time pressure and lingering post-pandemic trust questions, the bar for credibility is higher than the bar for visibility.

Although UK physicians are the most generous of any market in their assessment of how bio/pharma companies are performing today, they point to government health agencies as the stakeholders best positioned to address misleading information.

The opportunity for bio/pharma companies is not to lead the conversation loudly, but to equip trusted voices (medical associations, international bodies, government health agencies) with clear evidence and practical resources.



say bio/pharma companies are at least somewhat effective at addressing misinformation
Highest of any market



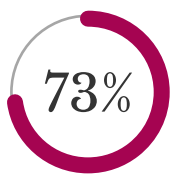
are more likely to prescribe treatments from the company visibly active in correcting narratives
Highest of any market

Germany: *Substance over style*

Physicians see narrative distortion as a real problem, but they are also more skeptical of broad corporate visibility as the answer, preferring to defer to clinical evidence above almost everything else.

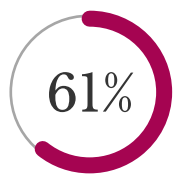
It is not that bio/pharma companies are unwelcome in the conversation. Rather, the gap between expectation and execution is wider here than in other markets surveyed. And the route to closing that gap is specific. Only 36% of German physicians want companies to be very visible and vocal, while 59% prefer moderate, targeted positions.

Companies can help physicians cut through the noise by supplying them with credible, clinically-useful proof to earn prescribing preference quietly but consistently.



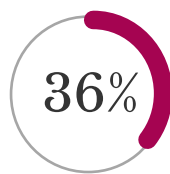
have modified a treatment recommendation because of patient resistance tied to misleading health information

Lowest of any market

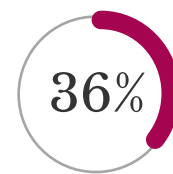


say bio/pharma companies are at least somewhat effective at addressing misinformation

Lowest of any market



say companies should be very visible and local



say “clinical evidence is all that matters” when choosing between comparable treatments

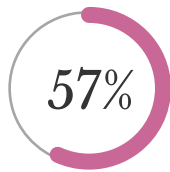
Highest of any market

Australia: *Loud where it counts*

Shaped by social media noise and uneven trust after COVID-19, physicians here are seeing narrative distortion as a worsening problem and want bio/pharma companies to defend evidence-based care.

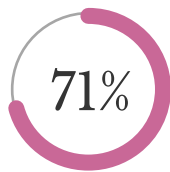
The appetite here is for involvement, not caution. One hundred percent of Australian physicians say bio/pharma companies are responsible for publicly addressing misleading narratives, the only market in the study at full consensus, and 54% say companies should be very publicly visible and vocal in addressing misleading narratives.

The nuance is in being vocal in the right places. Industry voices should travel through approved channels such as medical associations, public health partnerships, peer-reviewed publications, engagement with regulators and trusted scientific spokespeople.



say the challenge has gotten worse over the past 12 months

Highest of any market



identified misleading health information as an extremely/very serious threat

Highest of any market



say bio/pharma companies are responsible for publicly addressing misleading health narratives

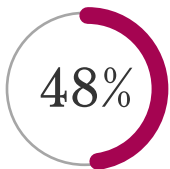
Highest of any market

India: *Lean in with care*

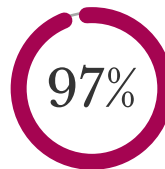
India is the most intense narrative distortion environment in the study, and the need here is practical, local and fast-moving. Patients arrive with false health beliefs more often than anywhere else (48% in a typical week), and 97% of Indian physicians have modified a treatment recommendation because of patient resistance rooted in misleading information. Yet physicians here are also the most positive about industry's current efforts: 62% rate bio/pharma companies as addressing misinformation very effectively, and they are [among] the most likely of any market (39%) to see healthcare companies as best positioned to lead the response.

For bio/pharma companies, the prescribing connection is more pronounced here than anywhere else in the study: Nearly all (98%) physicians surveyed say a company's visible commitment to addressing narrative distortion is a major or moderate factor when choosing between comparable treatments.

Although there is a strong appetite for vocal participation, narrative distortion occurs in an environment where government, community and healthcare access are deeply interconnected. Companies should frame their actions as responsible public health support, align with trusted institutions, stay sensitive to the local policy environment, and build content for the closed-channel spaces where misinformation actually spreads.



**of patients arrive weekly
with false health information
requiring correction**
Highest of any market



**have modified a treatment
recommendation because of
patient resistance tied to
misleading health information**
Highest of any market



**say companies should be very
visible and vocal**
Highest of any market



**say a company's visible
commitment is a major or moderate
factor when choosing between
comparable treatments**
Highest of any market

Across the five markets, one finding holds:
A company's posture on narrative distortion
is now part of the prescribing equation.
Staying quiet used to be the safe choice. In
2026, it is the costly one.



How to respond if your company is impacted by narrative distortion

Move Fast. Speak Boldly.

In the times we are living in, silence can feel like safety. Wanting to avoid becoming the target of adversaries. However, playing it safe no longer protects a company from becoming the target of misinformation or disinformation. When distorted narratives take hold around your company, your product, your science or your industry, inaction carries real business risk.

Physicians, your most powerful brand ambassadors, need you in the fight. They are on the front lines reeducating patients and expect companies to share in the responsibility to correct narrative distortion.

Start by identifying which distortions are spreading, if they impact your company, why they resonate, who is most vulnerable, and which trusted voices can shift beliefs. Use that intelligence to make the case to your C-suite that courage is not just the right response; it is the better business strategy.

But do it quickly. Don't sit back and hope it will blow over. The longer distortion circulates unchallenged, the deeper it takes hold and becomes harder to change minds.

Humanize the *Complexity*

Distorted narratives move fast because they hit on emotion first. Fear, outrage and selective truth can travel faster than accurate health information — and quickly start to feel like fact.

Narrative distortion is often nuanced with shades of accuracy clouded by biased interpretation. To change people's minds, the solution is not more data alone. Science matters, but beliefs change when evidence is paired with an equally compelling human story.

Build a corrective narrative that combines scientific credibility, patient-centered storytelling and trusted voices to show what is really at stake: delayed diagnosis, untreated disease and the harm of misinformation.

It will take time. Minds rarely change in one moment, but a credible story told well, and often, can shift beliefs over time.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

The Medication-Fear Cycle

Psychiatric treatments are framed as dangerous or addictive and mental illness as something willpower can overcome. People who believe these claims may avoid treatments that could help.

Don't Go It *Alone*

Beliefs do not shift in isolation. Find the voices who represent the facts and are grounded in science and bring them into the fight.

Physicians tend to trust other physicians and organizations who represent them. Global and government health associations may also be a good option, but be clear-eyed about which institutions carry trust and which may be politicized.

Don't be limited. Also identify voices at the edge of the conversation who champion your point of view and bring them into the fold.

Once you've mapped your influencers and given them a platform and a narrative that strikes both rationale and emotional cords, they will help you shift the beliefs of those you are trying to influence.



Show Up *With Conviction*

To move from narrative distortion to narrative fidelity, your company needs to enter the arena with clarity, credibility and force.

1

Educate, don't debate: Provide clear, concise content and tools that enable HCPs to have effective patient conversations; if allowed in your market, co-create public-facing content with trusted physician or advocacy groups.

2

Elevate independent experts: Give respected scientific voices a visible platform.

3

Invest in disease awareness: Build trust in demonstrating sustained commitment to patients.

4

Go where misinformation lives: Be present in the channels and communities shaping belief, within local regulatory guardrails.

5

Build a coalition: Show the issue transcends a single company's interests.

6

Activate employees: Give them accurate resources and messaging so they can help expand your organization's reach and credibility.

Get Out *Ahead*

You may not be in the bullseye yet — but you could be. The strongest companies do not wait for distortion to take hold. They earn trust early by becoming stewards of credible information in the disease communities they serve.

Monitor how your narrative is being received, repeated, challenged and reshaped, including at the fringe. Use GEO audits, real-time narrative monitoring and closed AI pressure-testing to see how your message may land before they go public.

Then build the muscle to move fast: a cross-functional rapid internal response team ready to protect the narrative before others redefine it. Bottomline, if narrative distortion has put your company in the bullseye, do not retreat. Lead with transparency. Name the distortion, explain the science, show the human consequence, and be honest about what is known and what is not.

DISTORTION IN PRACTICE

Misinformation at Machine Scale

Fabricated studies, fake physician endorsements, deepfaked experts. AI now manufactures convincing health falsehoods faster and cheaper than the truth can answer.

Trust is not rebuilt by waiting. It is rebuilt by showing up early, clearly and with conviction. In healthcare, narrative management is more than reputation management. It can shape treatment decisions, delay or accelerate access to care, or protect lives. That makes our work not only strategic, but urgent.

The work starts before *the next narrative does.*

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Who We. surveyed

We. Communications, in partnership with Sapio Research, conducted a global survey of 500 physicians (52% specialists, 48% general practitioners) to gain insight into the factors that influence prescribing habits. This data refers to physician respondents across five markets: Australia, India, Germany, United Kingdom and the United States. At an overall level, the results are accurate to $\pm 4.4\%$ at 95% confidence limits, assuming a result of 50%. Across markets, 71% of respondents practice in urban areas (including 71% in India), which should be considered when reading market-level results.

