

# Trends in physicians' use of online content



Over 1700 healthcare professionals reveal where and why they are online – and how you can reach them.



Pharma & Life Sciences Solutions

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## Physicians are busy, but they need up-to-date information

In today's digitally - powered world, healthcare professionals are under increasing pressure to keep up with the latest medical advances, new drugs, and treatment guidelines.

The pressure is coming from two sides: a growing pool of scientific information data, and a lack of time.

In 2021, [79 zettabytes of data was created and used](#) globally, and it's predicted to increase to 180 zettabytes by 2025. And this data includes scientific information – as of March 2023, [Scopus](#) had more than 90 million records, and as of May 2023, [PubMed listed](#) 35,664,033 results.

What makes it even more challenging is that physicians are busy: they see 22 patients per day, on average, ranging from 15 in the UK to 38 in India.

With too little time to leaf through full-text articles in printed journals or attend every specialty medical conference, physicians are going online to find relevant, easy-to-digest information.

This presents an opportunity. But with [shrinking marketing budgets and evolving technologies](#), how can you best support physicians and reach them with your message?

Elsevier's global research aims to give you the insights you need.

# Physician Use of Online Resources, Social Media & Patient Education Materials

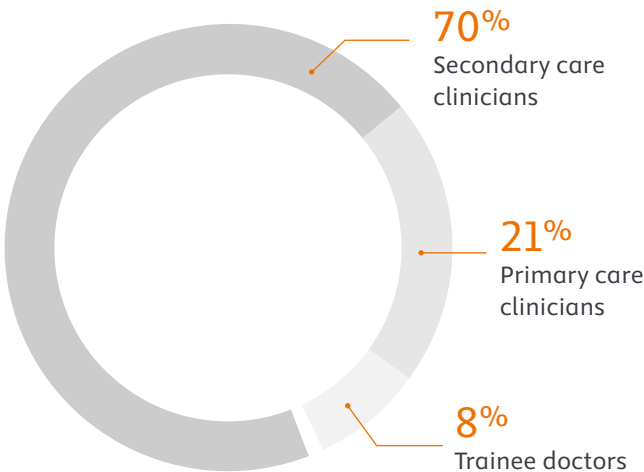
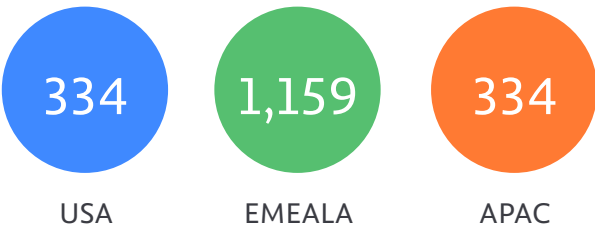
## Survey Methodology

For the third time since 2019, Elsevier carried out a global survey to answer questions about physicians' use of online resources, social media, and patient education materials. In their most recent survey, they queried 1,727 physicians to understand why they go online, what they look for, the information they access, and more.

In this white paper, we share insights from the survey and reflect on why certain behaviours have shifted over the past few years, to help you determine the best channels for engaging with HCPs who are networking, searching for information, or gathering resources for patients.

A 15-minute online survey carried out between August and October 2022.

1,727 physicians responded:



## About the previous research

	2019	2021
Methodology	15-minute online survey	15-minute online survey
Dates	September and October	May and June
Participants	1,937 physicians	1,778 physicians
USA	409	420
EMEALA	1,183	1,066
APAC	345	292
Respondent %	About 70% of respondents were secondary care clinicians, consultants or specialists	62% were secondary care clinicians 25% primary care clinicians 12% trainee doctors

## Key Insight 1: Social media's growing influence

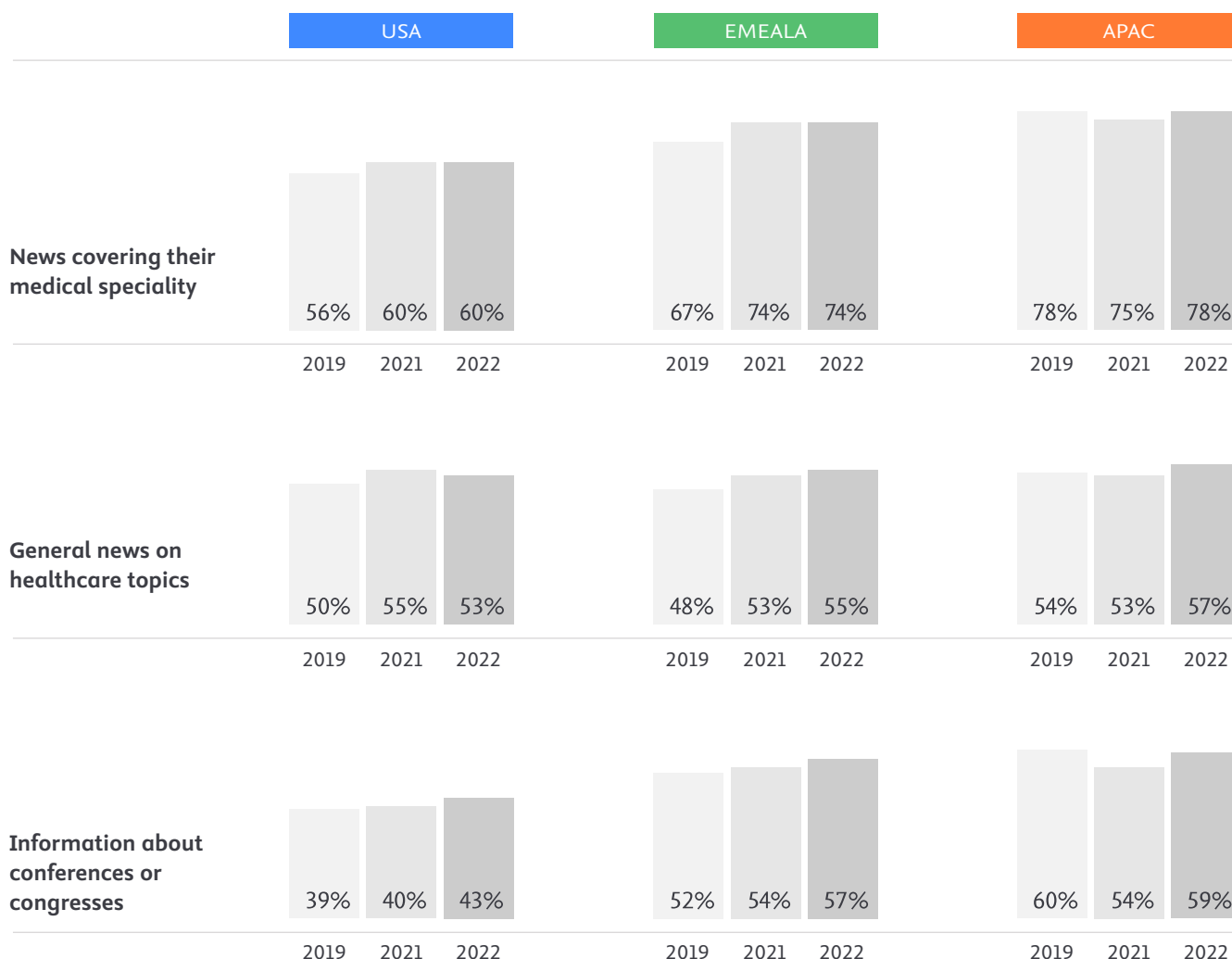
Social media continues to rise as an important source of information for physicians, with 71% of survey respondents heading to social media for news in their medical specialty in 2022, and 93% using social media at least weekly.

**"Even five years ago, we had to work for that social budget. After years of fighting, it's normalized now. Social media has become table stakes."**

Marketing Director, Top-10 Pharmaceutical Company,  
as quoted by MM&M

This increase in physician use of social media has also driven an increase in marketing expenditures to address this HCP audience in the channel. In fact, [79% of marketing leaders](#) are using these channels to reach physicians. It's also the fastest-growing marketing channel, with a year-on-year increase of 42.1%.

### Top reasons why physicians are using social media



## Key Insight 2: Social media platform preferences - YouTube and LinkedIn lead the way

YouTube and LinkedIn retained their top positions as the main social media platforms physicians use for professional and professional/personal use in 2022. Globally, 40% of respondents used YouTube, and 18% LinkedIn.

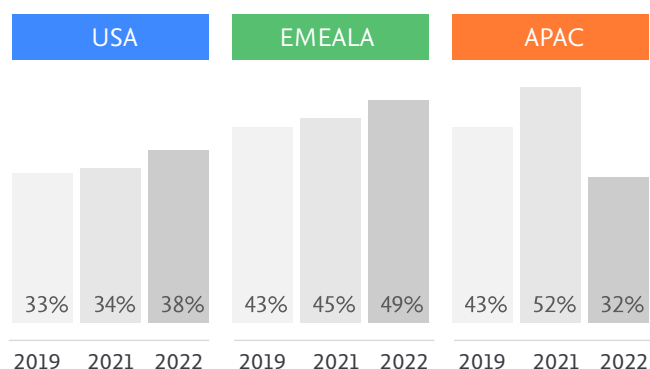
WhatsApp continued to grow in popularity too, particularly in the EMEALA region.

However, regional and country-specific data revealed a trend towards greater use of healthcare-specific social media channels.

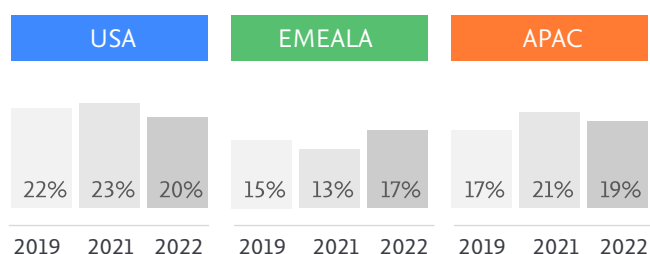
“It’s not for seeking information. I have several groups on WhatsApp when I have to communicate with my fellow colleagues. I use WhatsApp because it’s very, very useful for that. But if I am in search of serious information, I don’t use that. I don’t trust social media for giving reliable information.”

Dr. Dominique Spaeth  
A medical oncologist based in Nancy, France.

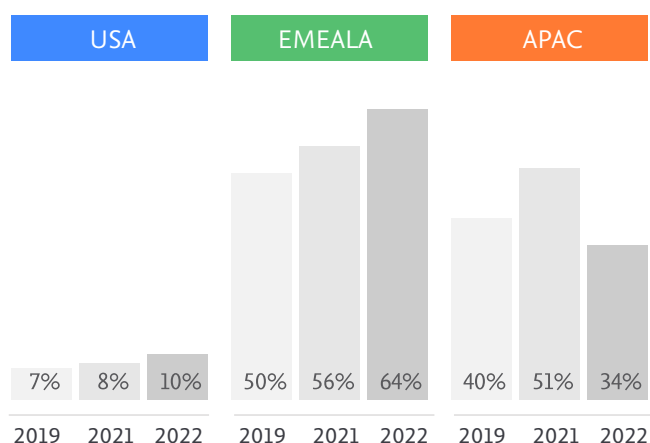
### YouTube



### LinkedIn



### WhatsApp



# Key Insight 3: Healthcare-specific social media communities are on the rise

Globally, 77% of physicians who responded to the Elsevier survey said they are exposed to online clinicians' communities at least weekly – and this was as much as 100% of respondents in Poland and China.

Namely, the healthcare-specific channels are:

**Sermo:**

<https://www.sermo.com/>

A “physician-first online community” of more than 1.3 million HCPs across 150 countries.

**Doximity**

<https://www.doximity.com/>

The largest community of HCPs in the USA, with over 80% of doctors as verified members.

**Doctors.net.uk**

<https://www.doctors.net.uk/>

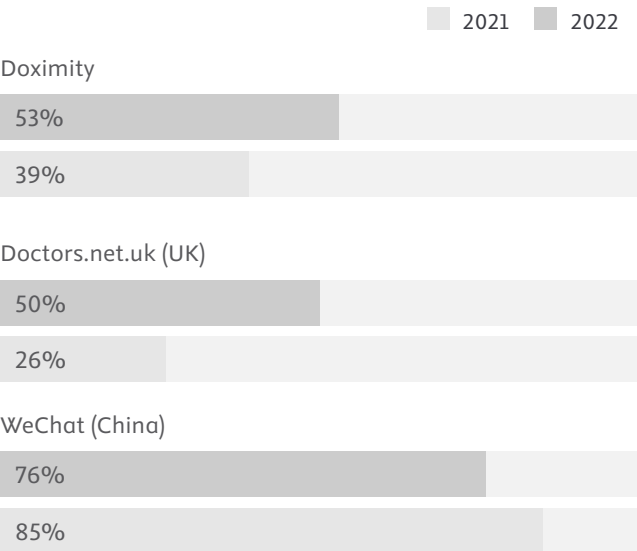
The UK's largest professional network of about 250,000 doctors

**DailyRounds**

<https://dailyrounds.org/>

India's largest academic network of doctors that supports collaboration and provides content and courses.

**Percent of respondents who use each platform for personal and/or professional use**



The rise of healthcare-specific networks also reflects a continued desire to separate professional and personal social media activity: in 2022, 69% of physicians said they like to do this.

**USA**

In the USA, 53% of respondents say they use Doximity for personal and/or professional purposes, up from 39% in 2021.

And, while usage is increasing, the need for trusted information via social networks is still of the utmost importance to HCPs.

“If something is just out there without a link to the trusted source of that information, I may see it, but I will discount it until I’m able to read that original source information. I would say there are countless times when I saw an interpretation of a study in a tweet that simply did not match up to what the study showed.”

Dr. Jonathan Silverberg  
Dermatologist, Washington, D.C., USA

## EMEALA

In the UK, local physicians' use of Doctors.net.uk has grown considerably, from 26% in 2021 to 50% in 2022. While Sermo has achieved high levels of popularity, with 33% of physicians using it professionally.

Like in the US, the rise of healthcare-specific social channels in Europe reflects the need for credible information, as Dr. Dominique Spaeth described in an interview.

"We have to [practice] medicine based on proven science. So, credibility is [important] for me... it is the first criteria when I seek some news or some information."

Dr. Dominique Spaeth  
Medical Oncologist, Nancy, France.

## APAC

Sermo is also popular in Australia and New Zealand, where 37% of physicians report using it. In India, DailyRounds is popular among 31% of respondents who use it professionally and personally. And in Japan, 22% of physicians use LINE professionally and personally.

### Percent of respondents who use each platform

#### Australia & New Zealand

Sermo

37%

Use Sermo for professional use only

#### India

DailyRounds

31%

Use DailyRounds for both personal and professional use

#### Japan

LINE

22%

Use LINE for both personal and professional use

Physicians in APAC are also much more likely to follow pharmaceutical companies on social media (32%) than the global average (24%). Following of pharmaceutical companies on social media is most popular in India (43%) and China (44%).

However, for clinical cardiologist Dr. Aparna Jaswal, who is based in New Delhi, India, social media takes a backseat to a challenging workload.

"The reason I'm not busy [on social media is] because I am working in a very busy center. My clinical practice consumes most of my time."

Dr. Aparna Jaswal  
Clinical Cardiologist, New Delhi, India





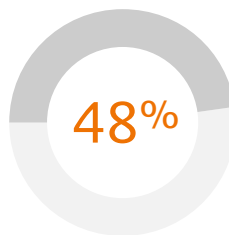
## Key Insight 4: Social media connections raise concerns

While physicians' usage of social media platforms has increased, so have concerns about privacy and security.

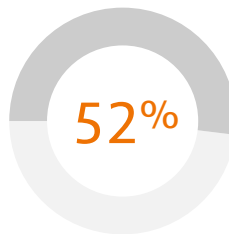
In 2022, 52% of physicians said they believe social media can be beneficial for their professional career, down from 55% in 2021. And 48% expect their participation in social media for professional purposes will increase in future, down from 49% in 2021.

There was also a slight increase in concern: in 2022, 76% of physicians were concerned about the security of their private information on social media, up from 75% in 2021. And 38% of respondents globally said they find social media to be more of a burden than a benefit.

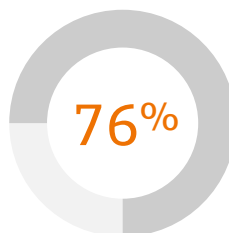
However, there is a strong recognition that social media is here to stay. Globally, 44% of respondents agreed that it is vital for a physician to participate on social media to remain informed and current, and 38% said their practice has been improved due to social media.



48% of physicians said they believe their use of social media for professional purposes will increase in the future.



52% of physicians acknowledge that social media can be beneficial to their career.



76% were concerned about the security of their private information.

*Physician use of Online Resources, Social Media and Patient Education Materials Research, 2022*



## Key Insight 5: Physicians are looking for credible resources online

Despite the growing popularity of social media among physicians, relatively few use these channels to offer advice on specific medical cases (21% globally). This is where other online sources remain a critical part of the information gathering process.

When it comes to choosing online sources of information, credibility is more important than ever: 82% of survey respondents said credibility has the biggest influence on where they turn for information, a small increase from 81% in 2021.

The importance of credibility is clear from the main resources physicians use: treatment guidelines and medical journal articles remain the top two resources for keeping physicians around the world informed of the latest advances, at 85% and 82% respectively.

“We have to [practice] medicine based on proven science. So, credibility is [important] for me... it is the first criteria when I seek some news or some information.

Dr. Dominique Spaeth  
Medical Oncologist, Nancy, France.

“Whenever I am told of anything, the first thing I like to do [...] is immediately type it into Google to identify [the] source credibility. When we practice medicine, the most important [thing] is to look at the articles that we like to refer to, to look into the journals, to read the source of information.”

Dr. Aparna Jaswal  
Clinical Cardiologist, New Delhi, India

**Percentage of physicians that listed each resource as a top information source to keep up-to-date with latest advances**

85%

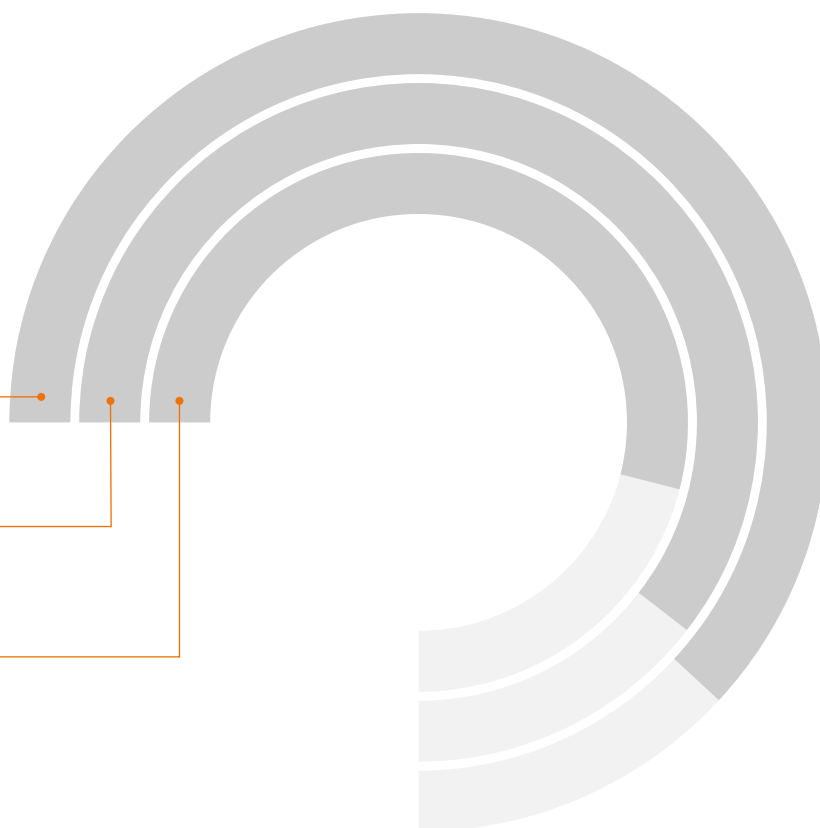
Treatment guidelines

82%

Medical journal articles

75%

Journal article summaries and commentaries



# Key Insight 6: The need for speed (and usability, and familiarity...) when using online resources

Credibility isn't the only factor that affects physicians' choice for online resources. They are also looking for resources that will provide them up-to-date information and research (72%), let them search and navigate easily (58%), and that are familiar (55%).

For busy physicians, time is of the essence. They tend to be exposed more frequently to resources that give them information quickly, such as Google (94%), hospital intranet (92%) and clinical reference portals (87%).

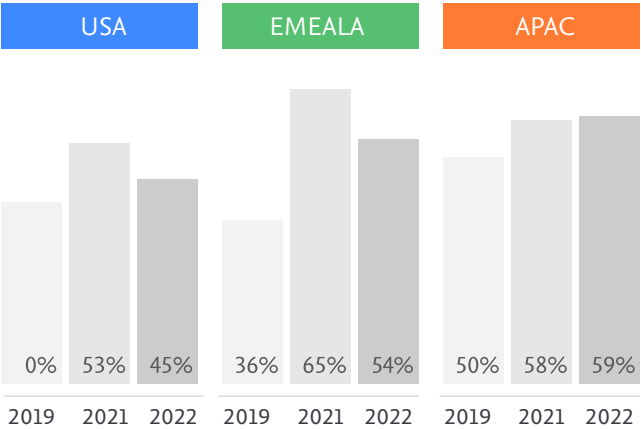
"In a very rapid clinical setting, it's really time sensitive. Sometimes the first thing that pops up in a Google search is [...] what we will read — a sample of convenience when I have no other choice, I don't have time or I don't have another of my trusted sources to go to."

Dr. Jonathan Silverberg  
Dermatologist, Washington, D.C., USA

In 2021, we saw a notable increase in the popularity of webinars, as they often replaced in-person events such as congresses and seminars during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the importance of webinars for keeping physicians informed of the latest advances decreased slightly, from 59% in 2021 to 53% in 2022.

The change since 2021 differed regionally, with the biggest decreases in webinar preferences the EMEALA region. This may be due to the return of many in-person meetings – 60% of physicians in EMEALA said international medical conferences are important for keeping up-to-date.

Percentage of physicians that use webinars as a resource

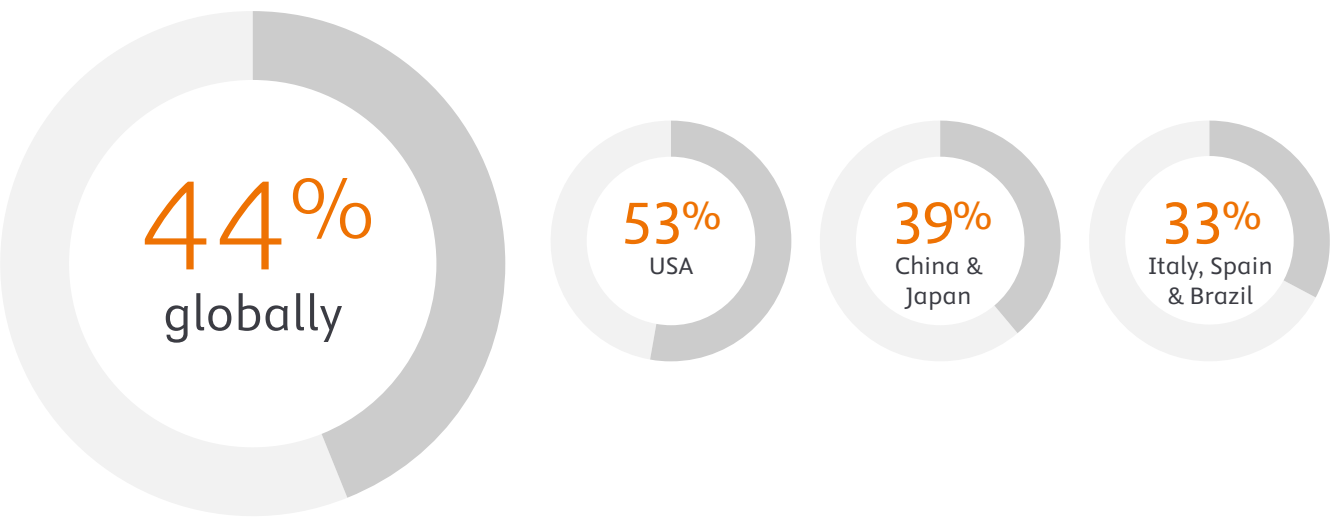


# Key Insight 7: Using medical content to connect with patients

Physicians also need to ensure their patients are suitably informed, and 69% of physicians globally reported being exposed to patient education materials.

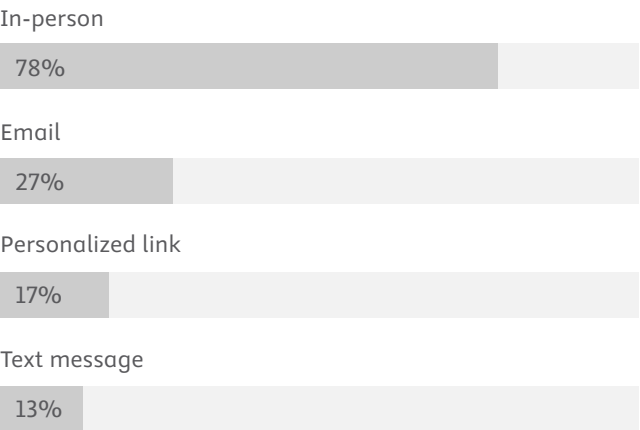
Patients around the world are benefiting from the content. Globally, 44% of physicians share medical education materials with their patients, ranging from 53% in the USA to 33% in Italy, Spain, and Brazil.

**Physicians share medical education materials with 44% of their patients globally.**  
This rate varies by Country

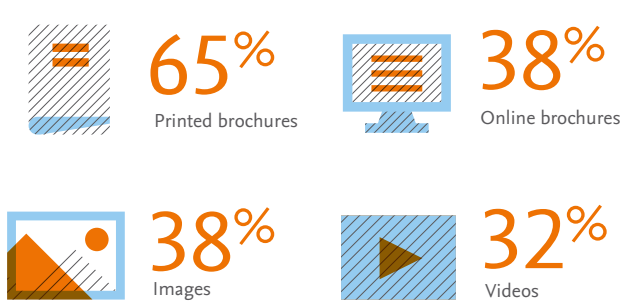


Like in 2021, physicians still preferred to share education materials with their patients in-person (78% in 2022) and in the form of printed brochures (65%). Only 27% globally preferred email and 38% online brochures.

**Percentage of global physicians who share patient education materials via listed channels**



**Percentage of global physicians who share patient education materials via listed format**



# Key Insight 8: Sharing reliable information with patients

Physicians continue to seek suitable patient education materials in a number of places. While medical society resources remained popular at 49% (a slight decrease from 50% in 2021), the use of free resources fell from 54% to 44% globally.

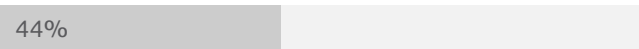
And physicians were more likely to seek materials from pharmaceutical companies: 42% globally in 2022, up from 34% in 2021.

## Percentage of global physicians who seek patient education materials via listed provider

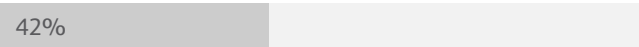
Medical society resources



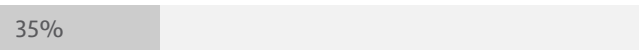
Free resources found on the internet



Resource from pharmaceutical companies



Medical Publishers



While there are various providers of patient education materials, physicians are most likely to make their tool or resource selections based on a few key factors.

## Percentage of global physicians who chose the following factors as key influencers when selecting patient education materials

Credible source



Up-to-date information or research



Easily accessible



# The future is digital

As the digital landscape evolves, physicians are not just following—they are leading the charge. Our digital era has ushered in a transformative way for physicians to connect with their peers, stay informed, and empower their patients with educational materials. In fact, the American Medical Association's Digital Health Research from 2016 to 2022 underscores a significant shift towards digital fluency among healthcare providers.

“The percentage of physicians who feel digital health tools are an advantage for patient care grew from 85% in 2016 to 93% in 2022, and increases were measured across all physicians irrespective of age or specialty.”

AMA Digital Health Research

This is not just a trend; it's the future of medicine unfolding before us. As this digital paradigm continues to expand, the opportunities for healthcare professionals and organizations to engage with online physicians are abundant and ripe with potential.

Our expertise lies in navigating this digital domain. Contact us now to discover how your marketing tactics can optimally align with the insights highlighted in this report.

## Let us help you reach physicians online

With our strong understanding physicians' needs and online behaviour, we can help you craft a strategy to support them and get your message out.

### Contact us to get started

[Explore our infographics](#) for a spotlight on each area of our physician survey.

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