

Health consumers' trust in big pharma remains low —here's what this means for digital health adoption

Article

The data: US consumers' trust in pharma is low, despite the industry's contributions to ending the pandemic: **Only 15% of US consumers say they trust pharma companies more than they**

did before the COVID-19 pandemic, [according to](#) Accenture's 2021 survey.

Why this matters: This lack of trust means big pharma's investments in digital therapeutics (DTx) over the past year may not pay off.

- For example, last November, **Janssen Pharmaceuticals** [teamed up](#) with DTx provider **Koa Health** to research the effectiveness of deploying mental health DTx for major depressive disorder.
- And **Boehringer Ingelheim** [inked](#) a **\$500 million deal** with DTx vendor **Click Therapeutics** to develop and commercialize a digital treatment for schizophrenic patients.

But it's unlikely consumers will try out digital therapies developed by companies they don't trust.

- Consumers' mistrust in pharma is only compounded by the fact that **adoption of digital therapeutics is already on the lower end (10%)** compared with other health tech, like **telehealth (32%)**, likely since digital therapies are still relatively new technologies in the grand scheme of digital health tech.

What's next? Pharma companies can foster greater trust among consumers—and in turn, adoption, by teaming up with primary care doctors, who consumers trust more than pharma companies.

For context, the pharma industry spends a ton annually on consumer ads for their products: **Pharma's digital advertising spending (targeted to consumers) topped [\\$9.53 billion](#)** last year, per Insider Intelligence's estimates. This means **US healthcare digital ad spending made up 71% of all US digital ad dollars** in 2020, which is higher than industries like media (4.7%) and travel (2.4%).

Pharma giants will need to pivot their efforts away from directly attracting consumers and allure to doctors, since docs' hold the key to consumer adoption.

- About **33% of consumers** say a recommendation from their medical providers would make them more likely to use digital health tech, per Accenture.
- Digital therapy makers can get in doctors' good graces by proving their DTx solutions are more clinically effective than traditional medicine alone, something pharma giant **Sanofi** is doing in collaboration with DTx vendor **Happify Health** to [improve](#) mental health of multiple sclerosis patients, for instance.

Healthcare & Pharma Industry Digital Ad Spending in the US, by Format, 2020

billions, % change and % of total

Search	\$5.30
—% change	13.3%
—% of total search	9.7%
Display	\$4.04
—% change	15.7%
—% of total display	5.4%
Video	\$1.69
—% change	14.8%
—% of total video	4.8%

Note: includes pharmaceutical products, facilities, services, researchers, drug manufacturers and marketers, doctors, hospitals and biological products, as well as establishments providing healthcare services and social assistance for individuals; also includes health insurance advertising; includes advertising that appears on desktop and laptop computers as well as mobile phones, tablets and other internet-connected devices, and includes all the various formats of advertising on those platforms

Source: eMarketer, August 2020

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