

# THE PERILS OF USING GUT FEELINGS TO MAKE CRITICAL COMMERCIAL DECISIONS, INCLUDING UNDERSTANDING YOUR PATIENT POPULATION

How commercial and brand leaders can defend decisions with confidence in a rapidly changing market.

# Overview

Pharma leaders face growing pressure to defend brand performance in KPI and commercial review meetings. Yet the tools they rely on, syndicated reports, social listening, traditional research, or internal judgment, rarely provide timely, objective explanations for why performance is off track. The result is flawed decisions, missed forecasts, costly missteps, and weakened credibility.

This paper explores the shortcomings of traditional approaches and outlines a better path: objective, real-time patient insights that provide clarity and defensibility. With timely, trustworthy data, leaders can explain performance with confidence, adjust strategy quickly, and secure stakeholder alignment.

## The Perils of Gut-Feel Leadership

Every month, commercial and brand leaders step into meetings where performance metrics are scrutinized against forecasts. When KPIs do not conform to plan, senior executives expect answers. Too often, those answers are based on gut-feelings, partial data, or outdated reports, leaving leaders exposed and credibility strained.

Traditional tools describe what happened but rarely explain why. Without context into the patient experience, leaders are left making billion-dollar decisions with incomplete insight, delayed correction tactics, and greater exposure to costly errors.

# The High Cost of Compromise

When faced with unexpected performance, pharma leaders reach for the tools at their disposal. Each option has earned a place in the commercial toolkit because it offers something of value. Yet none are designed to provide timely, defensible answers in today's fast-moving market.

## Gut-Feel / Internal SME Opinion

Relying on internal expertise is often the fastest way to explain performance gaps. Leaders draw on their own experience, or lean on trusted colleagues, to interpret what might be happening in the market. The benefit is immediacy: in the heat of a KPI meeting, a confident answer can diffuse pressure. But speed comes at a cost. Gut-feelings are inherently subjective, shaped by personal bias and limited exposure. They cannot be independently verified or traced back to patient evidence. While experience should inform judgment, it is not enough to withstand scrutiny when millions in investment are on the line.

## Social Listening

Digital chatter has become a tempting source of rapid feedback. Social listening tools can surface emerging topics, highlight patient frustrations, or track conversations around new therapies. For directional signals, this approach can provide early warning signs. The challenge lies in its reliability. Online discussions are noisy and unverified. They often reflect a vocal minority, not the representative patient population that matters to pharma brands. Without rigorous validation, social listening can mislead as easily as it can inform. Insights drawn from tweets or forums may spark ideas but cannot serve as the foundation for defensible strategic decisions.

**Syndicated Reports**

Syndicated data sources are widely used for good reason. They provide a consistent view of prescription trends, market share, and overall category dynamics. For macro-level monitoring, they are an invaluable tool. Yet syndicated reports are not designed to explain why numbers change. They offer breadth without depth, delivering generalized data that often lacks actionable patient context. In fast-moving categories, syndicated updates lag behind real-time events, meaning brand leaders are often left explaining last quarter’s story instead of this week’s reality.

**Traditional Primary Research**

Market research studies remain the gold standard for credibility. Carefully designed surveys, interviews, or ethnographies can reveal rich, nuanced patient perspectives. These projects provide depth that few other methods can match. However, their limitations are equally clear. Large-scale studies are costly and take weeks or months to field, analyze, and deliver. By the time results are available, market conditions may have shifted, rendering findings outdated. Commissioning research for every performance anomaly is simply impractical, and commercial teams rarely have the luxury of waiting months for answers.

Gut-Feel / Internal SMEs	Social Listening	Syndicated Reports	Primary Research
Speed	Speed	Speed	Speed
Relevance	Relevance	Relevance	Relevance
Depth	Depth	Depth	Depth
Confidence	Confidence	Confidence	Confidence

This comparison reveals the persistent compromise leaders have accepted: choosing between timeliness and depth, or speed and confidence, but never achieving both.

# When Subjectivity Becomes Strategy

The challenge is intensifying. Patient journeys are fragmenting across therapies, providers, and geographies. Commercial timelines are compressing. Traditional approaches, designed for a slower research cycle, now deliver static snapshots that miss the moment. This leaves leaders exposed to:



**Stale, generic reports** that quickly become obsolete.



**Rigid data** that describes behaviors but fails to explain them.



**Noisy, unverifiable signals** from social media or generic AI.



**Gut instincts** substituting for evidence when answers are demanded.

These inadequacies do not just slow decision-making. They undermine leadership confidence and increase the risk of flawed strategy.

## The High Cost of Compromise

Relying on incomplete or outdated inputs does not just make KPI meetings uncomfortable. It introduces a cascade of risks that affect brand performance, internal credibility, and ultimately patient trust.

**Strategic Missteps** When decisions are made without objective, timely patient understanding, leaders run the risk of misreading the market. A new therapy may be underperforming not because of access barriers, but because patients do not understand how to use it. A competitor's spike in prescriptions may be driven by a temporary promotion, not a fundamental shift in preference. Without clarity, leaders can overreact or underreact, diverting resources in the wrong direction. These missteps may take months to surface in revenue data, at which point it is too late to recover the lost ground.

### **Delayed Corrections**

Pharma organizations operate on long cycles of planning and execution. If problems are identified only through lagging indicators, corrective actions come slowly. By the time a brand team realizes a messaging campaign failed to resonate, the budget has already been spent and the opportunity has passed. In commercial meetings, leaders often promise to “come back with answers” after commissioning research or digging into reports. This delay weakens confidence in the brand team’s ability to course-correct quickly, and allows small issues to compound into larger threats.

### **Weakened Internal Alignment**

Perhaps the most underappreciated consequence of gut-feel leadership is its impact on internal alignment. Cross-functional teams need a shared narrative about what is happening in the market and why. Without objective, patient-driven insights, conversations become debates of opinion rather than discussions of evidence. Marketing, analytics, and market access leaders may all have different interpretations, making it difficult to align on next steps. This slows decision-making and reduces the organization’s ability to respond with agility.

## **The Consequence of Subjectivity**

- Missed forecasts weaken credibility
- Wrong calls waste millions in resources
- Misaligned stakeholders slow response time

**“Too often, pharma leaders are asked to explain billion-dollar performance gaps armed only with gut-feelings or stale reports.”**

# The End of Compromise

Pharma leaders need a way to move beyond trade-offs. The next era of decision-making requires:

## Timeliness

Insights delivered in hours or days, not months.

## Credibility

Data grounded in real patients, objective and defensible.

## Context

Narrative-rich perspectives that explain why behaviors occur.

## Actionability

The precision to prioritize resources and adjust quickly when performance diverges from plan.

With access to real-time and near real-time patient intelligence, leaders can walk into KPI meetings prepared to explain performance clearly, respond with agility, and inspire confidence in their decisions.

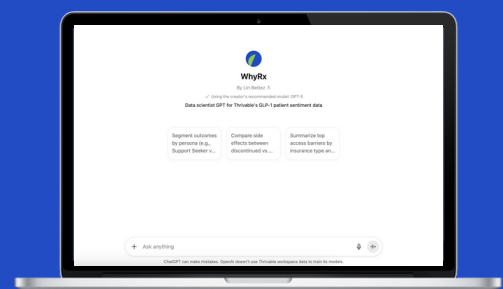
# Closing: Patient Understanding, Without Delay

Objective, patient-driven insights are no longer difficult to access. They are becoming the new standard for confident pharma leadership.

Leaders who embrace timely, AI-enabled patient intelligence will be positioned to withstand KPI scrutiny, make defensible decisions, and guide their organizations with clarity and confidence.

Thrivable provides the platform that makes this standard achievable today, helping leaders move beyond compromise to decisions grounded in real patient understanding.

**Schedule a demo and see how Thrivable can transform your research process.**



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