

Tailored Personas for Health Information-Seeking Behavior in Breast Cancer Patients: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Health information-seeking behavior is a critical disease coping strategy for breast cancer patients. However, the impact of individual differences on health information-seeking behavior in breast cancer patients is particularly significant. Previous studies have predominantly treated breast cancer patients as a homogeneous group, overlooking the need to comprehensively understand the heterogeneity of their health information-seeking behavior from a multidimensional perspective. **Objective:** This study aimed to explore the heterogeneity of health information-seeking behavior among breast cancer patients and construct user personas to address the diverse health information needs of distinct patient groups. **Methods:** A qualitative descriptive study was conducted in two breast cancer wards across two tertiary hospitals in China from January to February 2025. A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit breast cancer patients. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate their health information-seeking experiences across different disease stages. Content analysis was used to extract factual labels and construct dimensional models. Based on these dimensions, a labeling system for user personas was established, and patients were classified into distinct personas. Visualization of the personas was achieved through a combination of word clouds and tables. **Results:** Sixteen eligible breast cancer patients participated in the study. Five key dimensions were identified to construct the personas: basic characteristics, health information-seeking behavioral traits, cognitive traits, psychological traits, and social support traits. Five distinct personas were classified as follows: active information-seeking patients who autonomously integrate information, community-interactive patients oriented toward communication, passive acceptance patients who comply with authority, family-dominated patients with intergenerational collaboration, and emotion-driven information-avoidant patients. **Conclusion:** Significant heterogeneity exists in health information-seeking behavior among breast cancer patients. Precision interventions based on patient personas are crucial to address their diverse needs during the health information journey. Healthcare providers should develop tailored information support strategies aligned with the characteristics of each persona.

Keywords

Breast Cancer, Health Information-seeking Behavior, Patient Persona, Qualitative Study