

Abstract of Doctoral Thesis
Study on Chinese Patients' Decision-Making in Online Health
Communities

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a threat to the conventional health system and offline consultation. In this context, online health communities provide a fresh avenue for both patients and physicians. However, because the problem of information asymmetry is more severe online than offline, patients are confronted with more information online and find it difficult to locate effective information as signals of a suitable physician. Prior research has focused on patients' consultation, but there is a shortage of in-depth studies addressing the determining factors of patients' consultation from a signaling theory standpoint.

Objectives: To explore the physician-generated information (service quality, social support, and physicians' personal quality) of the patients' consultation in an online health community, as well as the moderating effect of platform-generated information and patient-generated information.

Methods: A theoretical model was designed based on the signaling theory to explore the influence of physician-generated information (service quality, social support and physicians' personal quality) on

patients' consultation. We used a Python crawler to retrieve information from the Haodf.com website automatically. Between April 5 to 8, 2022, cross-sectional data on 2982 physicians were collected.

Results: Results show that physician-generated information (service quality, social support and physicians' personal quality) positively affect patients' consultation. Moreover, the platform-generated information and patient-generated information weakens the positive relationship between physician-generated information and patients' consultation.

Conclusions: This study has a profound importance for a deep understanding of the impact of patients' conclusion and contributes to the literature on signaling theory, multi-information sources, patients' consultation. Also, this study provides implications for practice.

Keywords: Online health communities; Signaling theory; Online patients' consultation; Service quality; Social support theory; social influence theory