

A Thematic Review of Persona Creation Methodologies for Startups

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Abstract

Persona creation is a well-researched field ranging from traditional qualitative persona creation methodologies to data-driven personas to light-weight agile/lean personas. Classical qualitative personas are often labelled as time-consuming, data-driven methods require superior research and technical expertise, whereas personas in agile methodologies are adopted to improve usability by understanding user needs, goals, and behaviours keeping in mind the time and budget constraints.

Despite, availability of diverse methodologies, it is reported that startups use personas less frequently in comparison to well-established firm. This is often due to lack of knowledge, time and resources. However, existing literature fails to address that different startups have different maturity levels. A certain method might be suitable for a pre-seed startup whereas another method might be suitable for a series A startup.

Moreover, we lack a framework/matrix to reconcile persona methods across fields. A comparison of qualitative and quantitative personas exists, but persona integration into agile methodologies occurs in a disciplinary silo. A lack of taxonomy/matrix leads to missed opportunities for researchers from different disciplines to create valuable knowledge and persona application in real world for startups.

Therefore, in this review, we present a thematic analysis of the classical qualitative, data-driven, and agile personas to identify any potential gaps, themes, contradictions, and future research directions. We then extend the knowledge by taking a step further to map out which of these methods are suitable for different startup at different maturity stages based on criteria such as time, budget, lack of market, and knowledge constraints that impact persona implementation and use in startups.

Keywords: Persona, persona methodologies, startups, user research, customer research