

# COUNSELLING SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COUNSELLORS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This study investigated the counselling services in the digital era: implications and opportunities for counsellors in Nigeria. Innovation became a necessity and a challenge for guidance and counselling. The era of disruption demanding each profession must be innovating because changes happen very quickly. School counsellors in the digital era are challenged to work hard and have a strong commitment to making creativity. Guidance and counselling have great opportunities in innovating with many generations the millennial while the majority of the counselees are Generation Z who are born between 1997 and 2012. These two generations are born in the digital era and they are known as dynamic groups to changes, quick to adapt, fast receive, and very vast in using technology than any generation that came before them and that is why counselling services in this era must be digitalized for the smooth running of counselling services. Digital counselling services for clients are of great benefits in this era; challenges of digital counselling services for counsellors include; access to pornography and porno-action making children experience mental changes, excessive internet use etc digital counselling in this era has brought about many opportunities for counsellors. It was recommended that counsellors should be trained on how well to use the equipment to facilitate effective and efficient counselling services so also the Government should help digital counselling work effectively by providing proper cybersecurity in ensuring the confidentiality of the clients.

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## Introduction

The development of information technology is one of the advancements made by humans in the 21st century. In the last decade, various branches of research and development have been carried out related to this technology. One of the most striking developments in information technology is the dynamics of the internet globally. This rapid development has experienced a very significant increase since the launch of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s (Ardi & Sukmawati, 2019). The opening of content development and innovation in the internet sector has opened up opportunities for social media to move into a new era. Social media is a new area for internet usage that is targeted more by internet users around the world (Ngai, Moon, Lam, Chin, & Tao, 2015). This condition makes

social media a platform that provides a variety of specific content on the internet with a large capacity and continues to grow because of the very active interaction between users in it.

Innovation became a necessity and a challenge for guidance and counselling. The era of disruption demanding each profession must be innovating because changes happen very quickly. School counsellors in the digital era are challenged to work hard and have a strong commitment to making creativity. Innovations that have aimed to let the impact of counselling services really meaningful for the counselee and School counsellors in the 21st century are expected to innovate reciprocal with school improvement, both in helping students achieve, leading the students to overcome obstacles in achieving

good results and creating a positive school climate (Suryahadikusumah, & Nadya, 2020). Adolescents' lives are now experienced in increasingly sophisticated digital environments. Thus, some researchers have argued for current adolescents' consideration as a distinct cultural group. As such, clinicians who work with this population may be expected to be conversant with their clients' digital habits to establish an efficacious therapeutic alliance and bolster treatment outcomes (Pagnotta, 2018).

Today, guidance and counselling have great opportunities in innovating with many generations the millennial who became the school counsellor are born between the Year 1981 and 1996 while the majority of the counselees are Generation Z who are born between 1997 and 2012 (Petrescu-Mag et al., 2023). Studies have shown that these two generations are born in the digital era and they are known as dynamic groups to changes, quick to adapt, fast receive, and very vast in using technology than any generation that came before them and that is why counselling services in this era must be digitalized for the smooth running of counselling services. Also, the skills of technology owned by them will help them to understand the challenges in the counselling process, and the needs of their clients and be able to profer effective and convenient forms of innovative guidance programs. Moreover, the presence of millennial school counsellors ideally can produce a diversity of service content with interesting and relevant guidance. The relevance of the development of media information in the guidance and counselling with a technology developed at this time became important, in connection with the lifestyle of rapidly changing learners as digital natives.

### **The Rise of Technology in Counseling Services**

Before focusing on technology specifically, it can be helpful to review the historical impact of other technological innovations in daily life. History is peppered with examples of the benefits and perceived risks of technology on professions. While maybe not the most obvious, the introduction of automatic teller machines

(ATMs) is an interesting analogy to the introduction of technology in counselling services. Smartphones, artificial intelligence, automation, digital communication, and other types of technology are playing an increasingly important role in humans' daily lives. It is no surprise that technology is also shaping the practice of guidance and counselling and more specifically grooming of counsellors in this era while digital tools such as the internet have been part of the practice of counselling services in recent times. ( Gordon, Babu, & Laney, 2018).

According to Ciriello et al. (2018), in the context of guidance services, digital literacy is shown by combining and integrating technology into the practice of guidance and counselling services. It is accompanied by a commitment to quality in the concept and practice of TPACK (Technology, pedagogy, Content, and Knowledge). Digital literacy and competence of school counsellors will not only help to find information that can be shared with students, but they will also be habitual in finding new ideas that will be created more attractive and high-quality guidance program services. Therefore, it can be assumed that digital literacy and innovation in guidance services are interrelated. Good digital literacy develops from the habits of school counsellors in using technology and social media. This study explores counselling services in the digital era: implications and opportunities for counsellors in Nigeria. The Millennials ingeniously in technology ideally can solve the problem in the development of guidance services, especially the limitations of time and space (Suryahadikusumah, & Nadya, 2020).

Currently, innovation in the digital era is known as Combinatorial innovation. Ciriello et al.(2018) describe that combinatorial innovation is new digital solutions that are often created by combining existing modules with embedded digital capabilities or blending different modules with the same standard. This opens up opportunities for counsellors to innovate guidance service strategies. Research showed that 49.3% of respondents

always had difficulty in developing media caused by limited facilities. If digital literacy is maximized, these difficulties will not arise. Guidance and counselling program innovations based on digital literacy focus on the relevance and efficiency of services. Koç & Kaçdi (2022) reported that within the school guidance curriculum, school counsellors reported using technology to increase students' depth of understanding of the material, increase students' exposure to the material, and communicate with parents. Today, the counsellor is faced with counselees that generally are Generation Z. Generation Z has never known a world without social media, smartphones, and the Internet. They primarily rely on the Internet and videos (i.e., YouTube) to provide information rather than textbooks or manuals (Arensberg, Kalender-Rich, Lee, & Gibson, 2022).

Consequently, they are accustomed to fast-changing technology and learn experientially (Shatto, 2017). White (2022) mentioned that clients from Generation Z and Millennials have experiences and abilities that differ from their predecessors. These generations relate best to counsellors who understand these differences and incorporate them into counselling sessions. The same can be said for Traditionalists, Boomers, as well as for those from Generation X. Because digital technologies are so embedded in young people's lives, perhaps schools should simply allow students to engage with technology and achieve competence in its use independently of the classroom. Suryahadikusumah and Nadya (2020) said school counsellors may sometimes feel that their students know more about ICTs than they do themselves, and we should be open to learning from our students where this is indeed the case. But the reality now more than ever, is that young people need guidance in the areas of treating others with respect, avoiding bullying, being safe and critically evaluating information found online.

This is not to view digital devices and communication methods negatively – the possibilities are truly exciting and full of promise, opening up new worlds of human

activity and areas of scholarship. Therefore, school counsellors must be able to learn digital literacy to meet the needs of students in the Z generation (Kavanagh, & O'rourke, 2016). They should seek to develop their digital literacy skills and to familiarize themselves with taking a leading role in researching and implementing social media policies for their guidance services. Social media is an example of an opportunity to be combined as a service strategy, without requiring huge facilities and school funding. Almost all teachers and students use social media, even schools have official social media accounts. Tillman et.al (2013) as cited in Suryahadikusumah and Nadya, (2020) stated that the use of social media is also raising new opportunities and challenges in clinical mental health practice. Facebook as the most popular social media and has many features provides opportunities to develop guidance service strategies.

It can become a source of vital information in understanding the client's behaviour, as well as a more intimate depiction of what the client is experiencing, through their feeds, words, emojis, and images uploaded by students. In the group counselling process, Facebook can be used as a reminder tool for completing journals, doing exercises, and evaluating group work, whether in the form of text, audio, or video (Bang & Couture, 2021). The most popular application is cyber counselling, where scheduled chats on Facebook and other social media like Instagram, Twitter and YouTube can be used to manage service content. The media provides a variety of information, content, and uploads that can be discussed with students. A school counsellor also can provide scheduled posts or use live features on Instagram.

### **Benefits of Digital Counseling Services for Clients**

Digital counselling services for clients are of great benefit as literacy and innovation are been maximized. With the use of technology, clients can connect with their therapist more comfortably. They can see their therapist's facial expressions, which may lead to a greater sense of empathy and understanding. According to Toshkhujueva (2022), the

significance and benefits of digital counselling for the client are becoming increasingly clear as technology continues to permeate both children's and adults' everyday lives. The capacity to use technology efficiently has become crucial for modern success in everything from social relations to entertainment to education and narrow down to counselling. New counselling strategies are adopted by Counsellors which is made possible by digital literacy. Counselees are becoming used to new techniques for interacting with their interests through the internet and other digital media. When it comes to solving their problems or discovering more about potential interests, they are no longer limited to only physical interaction with the counsellor.

In the past, proper education about the benefits of every up-to-date digital application is necessary. The cause of weak digital literacy is the lack of knowledge about the functions, features, and benefits of each digital process. Limited education and training cause many school counsellors not to understand how to incorporate technology effectively but in this digital era, schools and professional organizations can hold massive and intensive workshops, equalizing perceptions about innovating. Perception about innovation was limited before whereas with digital applications innovation is in the form of collaboration and exploration of various features that can be used as a guide service strategy. However, design thinking can stimulate sensitivity to problems, and find relevant alternative solutions, in this case, the development of programs and media services would improve. Model design thinking has been proven successful to solve complex problems about systems, policies, and product development in guidance and counselling. The Counsellor's knowledge about various features and opportunities of digital media can be described in design thinking, and then compared with the context of the situation of students, so that various development ideas that will be relevant and realistic will emerge.

These activities help to innovate in the digital age and make the profession of guidance and counselling more dynamic. Digital literacy brings about awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process with the clients (Toshkhujaeva, 2022). The introduction of the use of various applications that can help human work needs to be studied so that the benefits and uses are known and can use them effectively and efficiently to avoid negative and excessive impacts.

### **Challenges of Digital Counseling Services for Counselors**

Technological developments provide various facilities in these kinds of humanitarian services, including in the counselling service process. With the presence of the internet, counselling services can be offered through the network (online) to clients without having to meet face to face. Various clients' problems can also come from internet use and other things related to them, including the use of social media (Cundy, 2014; Dowling & Rickwood, 2013; Richards & Viganó, 2013). Counsellors as educators and social workers have their challenges in providing services, especially in the millennium with the goal of digital generation services (digital native). The counsellor's challenges can be in the form of maladjustment conditions that arise from excessive internet use, social problems originating from the internet, and other addictions that arise. Another case that can arise is the rampant cyberbullying behaviour on various social media platforms so that further effects emerge which can harm individuals and those around them (Yanti, Erlamsyah, Zikra, & Ardi, 2013). These facts require counsellors to be responsive to the development of information technology and various cases that arise because of this technology. In addition, counsellors are

also expected to have various insights, knowledge, values and attitudes that can be used as appropriate references in handling clients with cases related to information technology (Ardi & Yendi, 2017)

On the other hand, the world of children is very concerning, especially in character and mental changes. Aggressive children's behaviour and physical violence often witnessed in association with each other is an interconnected phenomenon. The preaching of elementary school children who carry out bullying with elements of physical violence often appears on television and online media as one of the consequences of online games with elements of violence.

Access to pornography and porno-action makes children experience mental changes that are worrying especially in their association which leads to free sex. The decline of moral values in children is indeed a serious concern of the government and society, but in today's digital era with the flow of information technology that is difficult to stem, the problem is not simple. Media without control can easily brainwash children through online gaming. Children are more interested in mobile phones (android) than traditional games, fairy tales, and children's songs that are full of education.

Even advertisements of illicit goods such as alcohol and narcotics packaged attractively for children through the internet in the form of online games add to the complexity of the issue of child mortality. In the era of the 80s children often met playing outside the house interacting with peers of their age with the fun of playing traditional games that were loaded with messages of honesty, cooperation, confidence, and trust. The atmosphere is very suitable for the child's mental growth that must be planted with moral values. Now the songs that are plain, natural, and cheerful are rarely sung, even though children's songs are one of the effective methods in character education with poems adapted to child psychology.

Traditional educational-based models have rarely been introduced to children. They interact more with the virtual world such as online games, Facebook, and the internet. The frequency of children's gadgets can be anti-social and lack self-confidence because many confine themselves in rooms because they are absorbed in cell phones and online games. The result can undermine the value of social sensitivity, caring, and empathy for fellows. Selfish and stubborn characters can possess children if they interact too often with online games. Moreover, the element of violence and sadism is often the favourite game of children, of course, it is unconsciously the child will imitate the action of the game and apply it

### **Ethical and Legal Considerations in Digital Counseling Services**

Professional organizations, such as the ACA, NBCC, and the American Psychological Association (APA) are hesitant to endorse new practices for good reasons. They must be very responsible about reviewing research and carefully examining the new practice before they endorse it. These organizations are responsible for ethical code establishment, and they are beginning to address the issue of online counselling by approving new codes to address these issues. The following codes will be described for easy access and comparison: American ACA (1999), NBCC (1997), and ISMHO (2000a). Following the listings of the codes is a discussion of common, important practical, ethical, and legal issues about e-therapy. The ACA is a not-for-profit, professional and educational organization that is dedicated to the growth and enhancement of the counselling profession founded in 1952. ACA is the world's largest association with approximately 55,000 members that represents professional counsellors in various practice settings.

The association has made considerable strides in accreditation, licensure, and national certification. It also represents the interests of the profession before Congress and federal agencies and strives to promote recognition of professional counsellors to the public and the media. In

addition, ACA has been instrumental in setting professional and ethical standards for the counselling profession. According to ACA (1999), The Ethical Standards for Internet Online Counseling established appropriate standards for the use of electronic communications over the Internet to provide online counselling services, and they should be used only in conjunction with the latest ACA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Following is an outline of the standards.

**1. Confidentiality:** Under this major issue are privacy information, informational notices, client waiver, records of electronic communications, and electronic transfer of client information. In short, privacy information means that counsellors ensure their clients are provided sufficient information to adequately address and explain the limitations of computer technology in the counselling process in general and the difficulties in ensuring complete client confidentiality of information transmitted through electronic communications. To mitigate the risk of potential confidentiality breaches, counsellors should utilize security websites and e-mail encryption. Information notices include the security of the counsellor's site, counsellors' identification, and clients' identification. Notice of the security site includes that counsellors inform clients whether the site is secure or not, encryption methods, and special software that clients may need. The counsellor identification notice informs clients about the identities of the counsellor with access to the information, credentials and qualifications of the counsellor (s), and the supervision methods.

**Client identification means that counsellors verify the client's identity.** The client waiver portion requires the client to acknowledge and accept the potential risks of confidentiality breaches due to internet transmission. The fourth issue in this section, records, explains that counsellors should inform clients how session transcripts and other information are stored and the length of storage. Also, counsellors should maintain appropriate procedures

for ensuring the safety and confidentiality of client information acquired through electronic communications, including but not limited to encryption software, proprietary on-site file servers with firewalls, and saving online or e-mail communications to the hard drive or file server computer systems. The final issue in this section, electronic transfer of client information, states that confidential information to authorized third-party recipients may occur only when both the professional counsellor and the authorized recipient have "secure" transfer and acceptance communication capabilities and the recipient can effectively protect the confidentiality of the client confidential information to be transferred. Clients must also give consent for these transactions.

**2. Establishing an online relationship.** The next major section, establishing the online relationship, consists of five sub-divisions: appropriateness of online counselling, counselling plans, continuing coverage, boundaries of competence, and minor or incompetent clients. The appropriateness of online counselling states that professional counsellors: (a) develop an appropriate intake procedure for potential clients to determine whether online counselling is appropriate for the needs of the client, (b) warn potential clients that online counselling services may not be appropriate in certain situations, and (c) inform the client of specific limitations, potential risks, and/or potential benefits relevant to the client's anticipated use of online counselling services.

### **Opportunities for Counselors in Nigeria in the Digital Era**

The provision of ICT facilities in the resource centres presupposes that counsellors and students can use them to improve awareness, adjustment and learning. Shiran [2001] has opined that investment in ICT facilities will help in counselling and other support services necessary for the effective delivery of an ICT-based curriculum should be at utmost in government priorities. Globalization and the information revolution are increasingly changing the learning process in higher education in Europe and

America. Globalization has challenged higher institutions in Nigeria and in particular South East Universities to face a new type of learning involving the use of ICT facilities to improve counselling. It has been observed that there is a lack of ICT infrastructure in Nigerian Secondary Schools. It is recommended that attention must be given to the availability of ICT facilities in schools. The availability of Internet services at school will help the counsellors and students. One of the areas in the various services being provided by the school is guidance services or school counselling services.

Through the implementation of the school guidance program various goals and objectives of developing and honing young children to become good and productive citizens of the country could be attained. Through the efficient and effective use of ICT, school counsellors are in a better position to provide administrators, teachers, parents, and students with the appropriate timely information needed to help all students to set ambitious goals and to realize their goals. The benefits of using ICT in school counselling are so great that there is no need for more justification as to why there is an urgent need to undertake our study on integrating ICT in school counselling for basic education. Martin [1998] describes the school counsellor of the future as one who will be prepared in a pre-service program to possess proactive, socially critical behaviour and skills needed to strategically plan to challenge the status quo in systems where inequities impede students' academic success.

Moreover, Offer & Watts [2001] presents the current use of ICT in relevant forms of personal information, advice, and guidance leading to personal development for young people aged 13 to 19.

During the pandemic, research carried out by Enokela (2022) revealed that many students are likely to face a lot of mental health problems if therapists do not rise to help with an appropriate approach. Considerably, tertiary students' community life is crucial for their overall

socialization processes, but when there is an outbreak of an infectious disease, this pattern would be altered. Thus, school counsellors have the duty of facilitating a virtual community life among tertiary students to reduce boredom, isolation, depression, frustration and even suicidal thoughts that may be threatening their mental well-being.

Digital therapy according to Enokela (2022) could be called by various names like online counseling, e-therapy, and e-counseling. It simply refers to mental health delivery through electronic devices which may involve the internet. Digital therapy involves text messaging, telephonic interaction, video conferencing, emails and so on. With the advancement in the digital world, artificial intelligence has tremendously impacted digital therapy.

### **Strategies for Successful Implementation of Digital Counseling Services**

The digital age is characterized by the unprecedented velocity of change in the business environment and seamless connectivity among the players in the value chain. Advanced digital technologies are the main driver of organizational innovation and new value-creation opportunities (Lee and Lim 2018).

The traditional concept of good-quality customer service by friendly salespersons has become the minimal requirement to attract customer attention. Now, customers demand customized services that support their tastes, needs, and lifestyles (Lee 2018b; Lee and Lim 2018). Let's take for instance,

### **Digital Technologies**

Online platforms such as social media have altered the culture of communication as well as the way people interact with each other (Horn et al. 2015; Amar et al. 2019). With the activation of online platform-mediated single-person media, the usage of YouTube and Creators is growing rapidly, and collaboration between a form and personal broadcasting service provider is also increasing. As such, the digital age is changing not only the way firms

communicate with consumers but also the way counsellors relate with clients. (Bollard et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2018, 2019). Online connectivity through advanced technologies and platforms such as AI, robots, IoT, and big data creates value without the need for people to directly interact with each other (Bollard et al. 2017). A time is coming when counselling would be promoted to the level where clients would be responded to by robots and get their problems solved. Due to the increasingly active use of social media and the spread of the Internet and mobile technology (Amar et al. 2019), now clients can easily find information about their psychological well-being online without the help of a counsellor, thus decreasing the need for physical contact and promoting the spread of intact technology.

Adolescents who are accustomed to digital devices tend to feel uncomfortable around a person especially those who are secretive and prefer “solo shopping” that is finding online solutions to their problems (Kim et al. 2018). Many people are reluctant to expose their private lives to the outside world. Personal information, such as video images, location, and biometric information are often shared, thus generating increasing concerns about privacy and security. There is an increasing demand for services that can alleviate these issues. For example, an individual can buy a book online and read it on a Kindle. Then, no one knows what book the person bought or is reading. Protecting one’s privacy is essential in the digital age and this makes digital counselling services possible, with value created without direct interactions.

**Online counselling-** Today, mobile psychological counselling is spreading rapidly as more people are struggling with mental health issues such as depression and panic disorders in the breakneck pace of the digital age (The Korea Economic Daily 2019). Millennials (those born in the early 1980s to the early 2000s), who are familiar with mobile technology and tend to prefer digital services, often receive psychological counselling through mobile applications. The following is an example of a consultation over a mobile psychological counselling

application: Consultation Customer: “I have been working for 5 years. I am being greatly hurt by personal attacks from my superior. As this is my first job, I didn’t dare to transfer and tried to bear the attacks. Lately, however, I cry every day and have no motivation.” Psychological counsellor: “As this is your first job, I am sure you are putting your best efforts into your work. However, while changing departments or switching jobs won’t be easy, continuing to bear this treatment is not the right solution.” The mobile application provided this consultation. Typical users include those who have no time to visit psychological counselling centres or find face-to-face counselling uncomfortable, and 80% of consultation consumers are aged 25–34 years.

“Trost,” a mobile psychological counselling application that uses untact technology, has been downloaded more than 50,000 times and provides mobile psychological counselling services for company employees in cooperation with enterprises. Another psychological counselling application, “Mind Café,” has nearly 500,000 members and also operates a “Mind Cafe Pro” business, in which professional counsellors provide paid psychological counselling services (The Korea Economic Daily 2019). This form of online and/or mobile psychological treatment is expected to gradually become widely available due to the guarantee of anonymity and easy access to the counselling targets, with a relatively small financial burden.

2. Digital Counseling Services such as mental health technologies are TESs. Improvement in mental health conditions usually requires sustained behaviour change over many weeks or months. Currently, available mental health technologies require a patient’s time, attention, and motivation—all things that are in short supply when psychiatric disorders sap motivation and are accompanied by hopelessness and helplessness. Furthermore, mental health technologies are mainly didactic or informational, which might not be ideal for promoting sustained engagement and behaviour change for many people.



Although improved design and technology may make mental health technologies easier and more engaging to use in the future, many of today's mental health technologies require some human support from a coach or therapist to sustain engagement and obtain substantive, reliable outcomes (1). Thus the goals, methods, and provider qualifications for this support must be established. The implications of the goals and strategies of the service, the role of the provider, and the technology must all be designed and evaluated simultaneously as an integrated service.

2: Design a TES for its users and evaluate it in the healthcare setting where it will be deployed. For TESs that are intended to be delivered in a larger healthcare context, a design must include input from key stakeholders, including patients, providers, administrators, and information technology managers. Mental health technologies must be designed for the people who will use them. Tools must fit into and leverage people's daily behavioural patterns, and behavioural science can aid in nudging users to useful actions. For providers (care managers, physicians, and mental health providers), a new TES must fit into their workflows and offer some meaningful benefit rather than just adding another task to their work days. And rather than expecting implementation and sustainment to emerge after a trial, these processes should be built into the TES design from the beginning. User-centred design can be employed from the earliest exploratory stages to help understand and design for the needs, goals, limitations, capabilities, and preferences of all stakeholders (Richards, 2012).

Once a TES is designed, its evaluation should be conducted within the intended setting and examine both its effectiveness and implementation. This can be achieved through hybrid trial designs that integrate simultaneous testing of treatment effects and implementation models (Curran et al. 2012). Such trials give preference to pragmatic approaches that emphasize the usefulness, applicability, and feasibility of new technologies and

evaluate them with patients and measurements common to routine treatment settings (Glasgow, 2013). Initial deployments of intervention technologies, services, and implementation strategies are likely to require adjustments during the trial to address unforeseen and changing circumstances. Rather than locking down TESs during trials, we must employ methods that harness knowledge acquired throughout the trial to optimize interventions, care models, and implementation strategies (Mohr, 2015).

Evaluation within a treatment context requires new approaches to recruitment challenges. Most researchers (authors included), when confronted with recruitment challenges, expand the sources of recruitment. This has had the unintended consequence of searching until we find people who are willing to use the tools, thereby damaging the generalizability of the findings. Instead, clinical researchers should view recruitment challenges as indications of failures in the design of the TES, the implementation strategy, or both.

3: Technology can revolutionize mental health care. Most Web-based intervention technologies provide primarily didactic information and some interactive tools—essentially more sophisticated, digital versions of self-help manuals. New technologies and methods, such as artificial intelligence (Saeb, 2015), natural language processing (Hirschberg, 2015), and virtual reality (Botella, 2015), open fundamentally new intervention paradigms. A true paradigm shift cannot be achieved by clinging to old models, however; innovation will require new models of behaviour change that move away from traditional psychotherapy models and incorporate a more granular understanding of the lives of patients and applications of these technologies. We need close collaborations across multiple disciplines, including engineering, computer science, ethics, anthropology, business, psychology, and medicine not only for the expertise they bring but also to challenge mental health experts' most dearly held assumptions, ideas, and models.

### **Challenges of Digital Counseling Services in Nigeria.**

While digital counselling service promises to offer new opportunities to improve counselling competitive advantage, it also has several challenges that must be effectively managed. Some of these challenges are based on megatrends of the digital age, and some are manageable by individual organizations. The most difficult challenges facing digital counselling services are as follows;

**1. The digital divide is a global issue** - Advanced digital technologies have become part of everyday routine for most organizations and individuals. However, there are more than four billion people who live in digital darkness without Internet access (Luxton 2016; World Development Report 2016). These people have no opportunities to receive global or local news and communicate with others through e-mails, Instagram, or other social network services. Even for those who have digital devices available, using online counselling services may see it as a difficult task. Thus, the “digital divide” can be a major barrier to the widespread use of digital counselling services, especially for clients who find the process of using digital devices too cumbersome. Many senior citizens with limited foreign language proficiency, and those who have a negative predisposition about online counselling would belong to this group.

**2. Cybersecurity** – Digital counselling services can provide convenience and time savings to many clients. However, using this channel demands the release of some personal data. Thus, the issue of privacy and data security is a real challenge in Nigeria. Cyber hacking can paralyze the digital counselling system, and/or it could release the personal data of the clients. Consequently, digital enterprises generally must build cybersecurity as a core feature of their value chains especially in counselling services (Kaplan et al. 2019).

**3. Information overload and abuse of the digital counselling service** - The digital age provides various sources of information and intelligence to the individual

and society at large. To facilitate digital counselling services, there must be the provision of sufficient professional information to potential clients through various channels. However, too much information, especially confusing or misleading kind, can be a source of frustration for clients. On the other hand, digital counselling service has the vulnerability of being abused by professional hackers or para counsellors who are not trained or licensed to be a counsellor (Castillo 2018; Cheatham et al. 2019). Thus effective risk management systems for digital counselling services, including vigilance for new technological advances that can help prevent such risks should be provided.

**4. The role of technology in digital counselling service** - While technology enables convenient service, it also eliminates person-to-person contact (Kim et al. 2018; Lee 2018a). Value creation used to be based on the customer-centric philosophy (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008). However, advanced technology-supported digital counselling service has become a new avenue of value creation and showcasing of professional skills. Nevertheless, the ultimate centre of the concept is still people, a group of specific types of clients with the same peculiarities who prefer direct live-person interaction encounters would find digital counselling services so difficult.

**5. Finances attached to data subscription** – The hours spent on physical counselling services can never be compared with the usage of data that online counselling would consume. When the client is having one on one physical interactive sessions with the counselling, he /she talks at length freely without any financial implication, his emotions are shown and the body language of the counsellor could also be noticed which is one of the great advantages.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we examined how advanced digital technologies have altered counselling services, and in the process, have become a new strategic approach for

delivering new value and experience to clients. Internet-enabled services and social media have dramatically increased in recent years. Thus, clients now rely less on information provided by digital counselling services such as online counselling books, motivational tips etc. (Lee and Han 2013; Horn et al. 2015; Amar et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2019). Counsellors are enjoyed to learn more about the new and latest trends in the digital era and ensure they take counselling to the next level by facilitating online counselling to the best of their ability.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study it is hereby recommended that new equipment such as artificial intelligence, robot and so on should be provided for counselling services. Also, counsellors should be trained on how well to use the equipment to facilitate effective and efficient counselling services. The client should also be sensitised on how well the new technologies could aid counselling and update their knowledge on the digital counselling services incorporated in counselling services. Government should help digital counselling work effectively by providing proper cybersecurity in ensuring the confidentiality of the clients.

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