

## The Use of Information Communication Technology and Social Media in Counselling in the 21 Century: Implication for Counsellors

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### **Abstract**

*The advent of social Media platforms and Information Communication Technology (ICT) has redefined in no small measure, the way things are being done. In the world of work environment, most works, in order to remain relevant and productive have resorted to going for refresher courses in ICT related subjects. This is because almost all professions are taking advantage of the technological explosion and social media platforms to deliver quality services. Even in the educational sector, most of the examinations that are being written are Computer Based Test (CBT), and for counsellors to remain relevant, competent, and able to meet the socio- personal, educational, and vocational needs of their clients, there is the need to embrace and to be trained in the use of the ICT, social platforms and employ other technological innovations to make their work easy and more effective. This paper therefore x-rays ICT, social media: opportunities and ethical issues and outlined some recommendations among which is that counsellors should go for short term courses so as to learn more about the ICT and the social media in order to be able to make use of it judiciously in meeting the socio-personal, vocational and educational needs of clients.*

**Keywords:** *Counselling; Counsellors; ICT; Social Media; ethical issues*

### **Introduction**

The advent of the social media and Information Communication Technology (ICT) has changed the work culture of most professions including counselling. This is simply because people spend most of their time on the social media and the ICT. This change in the work culture due to the introduction of ICT and social media has brought challenges to the counselling profession system as the traditional way of having a client physically present during a counselling session is being threatened. Also, guidance practitioners are battling with ways to apply or tap into the potentials of ICT and social media to enrich counselling and reach potential counselees. For counselling to be therefore attractive to the present population of potential counselees, the ICT and social media platforms must be infused and used as tools to facilitate the counselling process if the counselling profession seek to remain relevant and impart more lives positively.

Guidance practitioners therefore need to be adequately trained in the use of ICT and social media in order for them to maximize the enormous potential of the internet, so as to be able to connect easily with clients as anyone that does not have any form of web or internet presence may be presumed to be none existent.

The opportunities ICT and social media present are great as it encourages practitioners such as counsellors to be more competent on their job, advance in their careers, and assist a wider range of counselees in addressing or meeting their developmental needs. This however, calls for counsellors to upgrade their guidance practice by going for short term courses to aid their continuing professional development and expose themselves to trainings on how to make judicious use of the ICT and social media in carrying out counselling services more effectively. As doing traditional things in new ways needs the clarification of new competences and expertise.

It is in the light of this that this paper intend to discuss the innovations in counselling as it has to do with ICT and social media platforms with the aim of highlighting the implication of this innovations to counsellors.

### **Social Media, ICT, and Counselors**

Counsellors are trained practitioners saddled with the responsibility of assisting clients or counselees to gain deeper insight of crises or challenges they may be facing with the intent of assisting them to decide on ways to handle the issues more strategically by providing a safe, confidential space to help clients.

The social networking culture has in the last eight years become the hub, meeting point, platform, and space through which people now communicate, interact, connect, network etc. Sites such as Face book, Twitter, Google+, 4Square, MySpace and LinkedIn, have hundreds of millions of users all over the world, and they have succeeded in transforming how people relate, companies advertise their products, relate with their customers and has influenced a great deal how professionals such as counsellors conduct their services.

Shearsby (2009) commented that media such as Face book, with the ability to search for and invite other users to be “friends” are uncharted territory for health professionals and may have implications for professional relationships with clients (Robinson, 2009).

ICTs are revolutionizing Career Education and Guidance (CEG) by providing new ways of exploring career options through video, graphics, and sound. Many CD-ROM titles and specific web sites dedicated to the following aspects of CEG are now available: information databases, self-evaluation aids, decision-making aids, work simulations and games, psychometric tests and checklists, self-presentation aids, and career resources (BECTA, 2001). ICT support to career education and guidance includes:

- \* Storing large amounts of information in a range of formats
- \* Searching for and retrieving information quickly and accurately
- \* Matching information to individual preferences
- \* Printing out information in a personalized form
- \* Simulating work environment
- \* Updating information quickly
- \* Providing a mechanism for sharing and communicating information (BECTA, 2001a, p. 1).

However, the emergence of ICT and social media are rapidly changing the face of counselling, especially with regard to the use of social media. The use of these medium has generated debates among counsellors as some are in support while others argue against it citing the issue of confidentiality which is one of the major ethic guiding the practice of counselling by counsellors. One of the worries of some counsellors is that the social media can ruin the therapeutic relationship that is enjoyed during face to face traditional way of counselling. This is not to say that counsellors cannot achieve such using the social media if they develop themselves on strategic ways to use these medium to their professional advantage.

### **The Opportunities of the Social Media and ICT to Counsellors**

Social media, if strategically embraced by counsellors can make the counselling process easy and highly effective as its potentials are enormous some of which are:

#### **1. Social media creates new opportunities for counselling professionals**

There is no doubt that the social media has taken over the internet that some people spend more of time with the social media than any other thing. Due to the advancement and huge

population off those on the social media, businesses and organizations have a Face book page, a Twitter account, a blog and/or a LinkedIn profile in order to tap into the opportunities the social media is making available. Many organizations link these platforms with their official sites, connect with their customers, pass information, issue press releases, receive feedbacks from customers, market old product and launch new ones. The counsellors also can cash into these opportunities that has been made available by the social media.

**2. Social media opens new doors for client communication**

The improvement that is taking place in social media is making the mode and way of communicating with others to also improve. Communication has been made to be more effective, easy and interesting that people have become addicted to communicating using the social media. There was this image of two couple sharing the same bed and using the social media to interact with themselves. This is how the social media has made communication more interesting and effective. Counsellors who employ such platforms will tap into this potential and make the counselling process to become more interesting to people.

**3. Social media opens new doors for networking with other counsellors**

Counsellors can make use of the social media in networking with other colleagues in different countries, in order to share ideas, experience, and insights that would enable them perform better in their counselling experiences. Social media professional platforms such as LinkedIn, RSS, Blogs, webinars can serve as great platforms to help facilitate connections, conferencing, conversations, and networks with other colleagues in other part of the globe.

**4. Social media can be used to make the counselling profession more relevant**

Through the use of the social media, counselling would become more relevant to more people who are not conversant with the conventional way of counselling. Some people do not have the luxury of time or space to go and see counsellors face to face; but through the social media, such people can connect easily with a counsellor and get his/her issue addressed.

**5. Social media can make some clients to open up more easily**

Some counselees who are shy can find the social media more convenient for them to share their feeling, discuss their problems, and upon up on some issues they would have not opened up on if the counsellor was physically present with them. Some clients may be more at home with the social media than they would have been if the counsellor was right before them. So, engaging or using the social media creates the avenue for counsellors to counsel some clients who would have not availed themselves physically.

**6. Social media broaden the scope of counsellors**

Counsellors in one country may have thousands of clients from other countries. This can only be made possible with the use of the social media. It makes the counsellor to be able to affect, influence, reach, and enrich more lives. Some clients abroad may find it safer to open up to counsellors that are far off in other countries or locations than the ones that are in their schools, communities, or country. Such population of clients will definitely find it interesting to seek counsellors that are available on the social media than the one that are near them.

People become more aware of counsellors and the prospects in going for counselling. Many products have become more popular on the social media, as the social media is a veritable tool for marketing products, profession, or services. Therefore, counsellors too can use the

social media to market the profession, share with potential counselees the prospects of seeking for professional counsellors.

**7. Social media sites can be harnessed to create intervention initiatives**

Clients who utilise social media sites in their daily lives can benefit from tools available on a platform with which they are already familiar. That this strategy is successful is attested to by the sharp rise in both texting help lines (communicating through text messages from mobile phones) and via online chatting on the sites. This is as opposed to calling the traditional 800 hotline numbers. Clearly, digital technologies are improving the therapeutic experience as well as the access to therapeutic interventions (Giota & Kleftaras, 2014).

**8. Follow-ups, protocols, and reminders can flow**

For many clients, successful treatment is a consequence of the medication taken, the regular journal entry made, or the commitment to daily exercise kept. Online technologies greatly facilitate the sending-out of daily, weekly, or monthly reminders to carry on with agreed programs and initiatives. Text messages and audio and video clips can explain the protocols to be followed, remind the client of what is to be done, and re-inspire those struggling to keep a commitment for which energy and motivation may be flagging (Postel, de Haan, & De Jong, 2008).

**Ethical issues involved in the use of ICT and social media by counsellors**

\* **Issue of Confidentiality**

Violations of confidentiality have been a problem ever since the first paper-based client case notes and assessments were stored in a practitioner's office. The subsequent addition of audio and video records created further opportunities for violating confidentiality. Creating, storing, and retrieving client's case notes and assessments on the Internet exacerbates the confidentiality problem by increasing the opportunities for remote access to records. Using e-mail, chat, videoconferencing, and multi-user virtual environments to communicate with clients opens the door to further inappropriate access to client's records. Career practitioners need to be vigilant in using appropriate security measures, such as frequently changing passwords and using data encryption for transmissions over the Internet (e.g., Barak, 2003; Osborn et al., 2011; Pelling, 2009; Sampson & Bloom, 2001; Sampson, Kolodinsky, & Greeno, 1997).

\* **Issue of Resource**

Resources include assessments and information that individuals use to clarify their knowledge about themselves, their options, and their approach to decision making (Sampson, 2008). ICT-based resources are used both on a self-help basis and as part of face-to-face and distance service delivery. Ethical issues relate to the validity of the resources and the availability of user support when needed (Sampson & Makela, 2014).

\* **Social equity issue**

Hooley, Hutchinson, & Watts (2010) noted that while the digital divide has lessened, it has not vanished. As of December 31, 2011, 33% of the world's population had access to the Internet (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2012). With a global population in 2011 of almost 7 billion, this still means that around 4.6 billion people in the world do not have ready access to the Internet. Even in the most economically advanced countries of the world there are still individuals with little or no access to the Internet. Long waiting lines and time limits when a computer is available at a public facility, such as a public library, limits the ability of those with inadequate financial resources to access the career resources and services they need (Sampson & Makela, 2014).

### **Ethical Measures on Curtailing the Issues**

The National Board of Certified Counsellors (NBCC) came up with Code of Ethics to guide the operations of counsellors in their use of the social media and the ICT.

The ethical measures to curtail the risk posed by the use of the ICT and social media as outlined by NBCC are as follows:

1. In situations where it is difficult to verify the identity of the Internet client, steps are taken to address impostor concerns, such as by using code words or numbers.
2. Internet counsellors determine if a client is a minor and therefore in need of parental/guardian consent. When parent/guardian consent is required to provide internet counselling to minors, the identity of the consenting person is verified.
3. As part of the counselling orientation process, the Internet counsellor explains to clients the procedures for contacting the Internet counsel or when he or she is off-line and, in the case of asynchronous counselling, how often e-mail messages will be checked by the Internet counsellor.
4. As part of the counselling orientation process, the Internet counsellor explains to clients the possibility of technology failure and discusses alternative modes of communication, if that failure occurs.
5. As part of the counselling orientation process, the Internet counsellor explains to clients how to cope with potential misunderstandings when visual cues do not exist.
6. As a part of the counselling orientation process, the Internet counsellor collaborates with the Internet client to identify an appropriately trained professional who can provide local assistance, including crisis intervention, if needed. The Internet counsellor and Internet client should also collaborate to determine the local crisis hotline telephone number and the local emergency telephone number.
7. The Internet counsellor has an obligation, when appropriate, to make clients aware of free public access points to the Internet within the community for accessing Internet counselling or Web-based assessment, information, and instructional resources.
8. Within the limits of readily available technology, Internet counsellors have an obligation to make their Web site a barrier-free environment to clients with disabilities.
9. Internet counsellors are aware that some clients may communicate in different languages, live in different time zones, and have unique cultural perspectives. Internet counsellors are also aware that local conditions and events may impact the client.

#### *Confidentiality in Internet Counselling*

10. The Internet counsellor informs Internet clients of encryption methods being used to help insure the security of client/counsellor/supervisor communications. Encryption methods should be used whenever possible. If encryption is not made available to clients, clients must be informed of the potential hazards of unsecured communication on the Internet. Hazards may include unauthorized monitoring of transmissions and/or records of Internet counselling sessions.
11. The Internet counsellor informs Internet clients on how long session data are being preserved. Session data may include Internet counsellor/Internet client e-mail, test results, audio/video session recordings, session notes, and counsellor/supervisor communications. The likelihood of electronic sessions being preserved is greater because of the ease and decreased costs

involved in recording. Thus, its potential use in supervision, research, and legal proceedings increases.

12. Internet counsellors follow appropriate procedures regarding the release of information for sharing Internet client information with other electronic sources. Because of the relative ease with which e-mail messages can be forwarded to formal and casual referral sources, Internet counsellors must work to insure the confidentiality of the Internet counselling relationship.

#### *Legal Considerations, Licensure, and Certification*

13. Internet counsellors review pertinent legal and ethical codes for guidance on the practice of Internet counselling and supervision. Local, state, provincial, and national statutes as well as codes of professional membership organizations, professional certifying bodies, and state or provincial licensing boards need to be reviewed. Also, as varying state rules and opinions exist on questions pertaining to whether Internet counselling takes place in the Internet counsellor's location or the Internet client's location, it is important to review codes in the counsellor's home jurisdiction as well as the client's. Internet counsellors also consider carefully local customs regarding age of consent and child abuse reporting, and liability insurance policies need to be reviewed to determine if the practice of Internet counselling is a covered activity.
14. The Internet counsellor's Web site provides links to websites of all appropriate certification bodies and licensure boards to facilitate consumer protection.

#### **Implications for counsellors**

The followings are the implications of the emergence of the use of social media and ICT to counsellors:

- \* Counsellors need to go for short term courses so as to learn more about the ICT and the social media in order to be able to make use of it judiciously.
- \* There is need for on the job training or in house service training whereby counsellors are afforded the opportunity to develop their competence as it relates to how to use ICT and social media to counsel their clients ethically.
- \* Counsellors are to be trained on the ethics that govern internet counselling as outlined by National Board of Certified Counsellors.
- \* Counsellors are to champion the courses of integrating ICT through the use of chat rooms, emails and other social media by appealing with the school authorities to put functional internet facilities in schools.
- \* Counsellor after been trained on the use of the ICT and social media should endeavour to practice what they have learnt for them to become competent in the use of these mediums.
- \* ICT and social media should infuse into the curriculum that is used to train counsellors.
- \* Counsellors can as well use the social media to interact with each others, share ideas, experiences, tips on how to use the ICT and social media more effectively and

#### **Conclusion**

Professionals of different field of work are employing the use of the ICT and social media to serve their products, meet with the needs of their customers in order to remain relevant and serve a larger population of people. Consequently, for counsellors to remain relevant, keep in touch with

client, and serve a wider range of people that may need their services efficiently and effectively, counsellors need to exploit the ICT and the social media in order to remain significant in the scheme of things.

### **Recommendations**

- \* ICT and the use of the social media should be included among the courses that would be professional counsellors should be exposed to.
- \* Counsellors should be computer literate and have a social media platform through which they can carry out counselling services such as orientation and information services.
- \* Counsellors should not use their private social media platforms to carry out their counselling services rather they should have a platform meant for counselling purposes only.
- \* Counsellors should have a social platform through which they can exchange ideas, information and share upcoming events that may interest members.
- \* All the website of schools should have a portal set up exclusively for the counsellor to address the need of pupils or students.

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