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FORMATION OF ONLINE CONSULTING SKILLS AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN MODERN UKRAINE

ФОРМУВАННЯ НАВИЧОК ОНЛАЙН КОНСУЛЬТУВАННЯ ЯК КОНКУРЕНТНА ПЕРЕВАГА В СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНІ

The article focuses on the development of skills in online consulting as a competitive advantage in modern Ukraine, especially in conditions of war, digital transformation, and increased demand for accessible psychological support. A review of modern studies reveals that online consulting is highly effective, but only when professionals receive adequate training. The article highlights anthropomorphism, the effect of unwarranted confidence, and the impostor syndrome, which amplify anxiety, clashes of expectations, and distorted perceptions of expertise. The focus is on how users, adapted to «filter bubbles» and surface level information selection, seek confirmation of their beliefs rather than critique, demanding unique skills from counselors to understand and influence. To gain a competitive edge, online psychologists must manage these effects using digital literacy, ethical standards, inclusivity, and open feedback systems.

Keywords: *online consulting, competitiveness, competitive advantage, telepsychology, cyberpsychology*

Стаття присвячена аналізу формування навичок онлайн консультування як конкурентної переваги в сучасній Україні, зокрема в умовах воєнного стану, цифрової трансформації та зростаючої потреби у доступній психологічній підтримці. Автори вказують, що широке впровадження цифрових технологій у сферу послуг створює новий професійний вимір, де віртуальне спілкування вже не є просто «очним, але через екран», а передбачає власну технічну, психологічну та комунікативну специфіку. У моніторингу сучасних досліджень виявлено, що онлайн консультування має високу ефективність, але за умови адекватної підготовки фахівців. Водночас у багатьох навчальних програмах навички роботи в режимі відео та чат консультацій, управління віртуальним діалогом, оцінка невербальних сигналів та технічні ризики залишаються недостатньо розробленими, що породжує пробіл між теорією та практикою та знижує якість послуг. У статті детально розглядається технічна специфіка кіберпростору (віртуальність, інтерактивність, електронний сигнал, синхронність, анонімність, соціалізація), яка зумовлює зміну базових психологічних процесів, включаючи увагу, мотивацію, емоційні реакції та поведінку. Особливо підкреслюється, що клієнти, адаптовані до «пузиря фільтрів» та поверхневого відбору інформації, шукають підтвердження власних думок, а не критику, що вимагає від консультанта



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специфічних навичок розуміння та впливу. Включаються також антропоморфізм (перенесення людських рис на техніку), ефект невинуватої впевненості та синдром самозванця, які підсилюють тривожність, зіткнення очікувань та неадекватне сприйняття рівня експертизи. Для отримання конкурентної переваги онлайн психолог повинен навчитися керувати цими ефектами, використовуючи цифрову грамотність, етичні стандарти, інклюзивність, а також відкритість зворотньому зв'язку. Автор пропонує впровадження спеціалізованих навчальних модулів, курсів та професійних стандартів для формування навичок онлайн консультування, що включають комунікативні навички, модифікацію методів оцінювання, клінічне мислення, етичний дизайн та боротьбу зі стигмою. Висновок: онлайн формат може бути стратегічною перевагою у сучасній Україні, але вимагає системної підготовки фахівців, що забезпечить високу якість, безпеку та доступність послуг для широких шарів населення.

Ключові слова: онлайн консультування, конкурентоспроможність, конкурентна перевага, телепсихологія, кіберпсихологія.

Problem statement. The widespread introduction of digital technologies into all spheres of public life necessitates the formation of specific skills for professional activity online. The stereotype that working on the Internet is the same as offline, but instead of a phone, there are now messengers and applications remains quite widespread. However, a number of scientific studies show that this is not at all the case. The cyberworld has its own rules and patterns, and the technical specifics of the Internet leave a significant imprint on classical spheres of activity and services, in particular consulting.

At the same time, the service market in Ukraine is rapidly transforming: clients are increasingly choosing remote forms of support due to their comfort, anonymity, flexibility in time and reduced costs for transportation and organization of meetings. Therefore, the ability to work effectively in an online format becomes not only a professional competence, but a real competitive advantage for a specialist.

The modern Ukrainian socio-psychological context is characterized by a constant need for high-quality, accessible and fast psychological support, especially in conditions of martial law, displacement, information overload and anxiety-post-stress stress. One of the most effective tools for providing such assistance is the online counseling format, which allows for a clear reduction in geographical, time and psychological barriers to access to a psychologist, while maintaining professional standards of work [6; 7; 8].

Today, most Ukrainian psychologists have received basic training in traditional forms of face-to-face counseling, and the systematic development of skills in working in video and chat counseling, managing virtual dialogue, and dealing with specific risks of the online format (technical failures, loss of nonverbal context, ethical challenges) remains underdeveloped in professional training programs [4; 9; 13]. This creates a gap between real practice and theoretical training, which limits the quality and safety of online psychological assistance. In this regard, the study of the process of developing online counseling skills has not only psychological and methodological, but also significant socio-economic significance. It will contribute to improving the quality of psychological support in the digital sphere, expanding access to services, in particular in regions without a sufficient level of offline resources, developing the digital competence of psychologists as a key factor of professional competitiveness in the context of the digital transformation of education and healthcare, creating appropriate training modules, courses and professional standards for improving the skills of online psychologists.

Thus, the relevance of the topic lies in the fact that the formation of online counseling skills is a strategically important stage in the adaptation of the Ukrainian psychological profession to modern realities, and its systematic study will contribute not only to the professional growth of individual specialists, but also to increasing psychological resilience and accessibility of help for broad segments of the population of Ukraine.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Online counseling is considered an innovative technology in the work of a psychologist. Researchers from the USA (Smith, J.A.,

Brown, L.R., & Williams, C.K., [11]), Europe (Sampaio M., Navarro Haro M.V., De Sousa B., Vieira Melo W. and Hoffman H. G.; Sora B., Nieto R., Montesano A. and Armayones M. [10; 12]), Asia (Chen, M., Lee, R., & Tanaka, Y. [3]), Australia (Davies, L., Lawford, B., Bennell, K.L., Russell, T., & Hinman, R.S. [5]) and Arab countries (Al-Mahrouqi T., Al-Sharbati Z.M., Al-Alawi K., AlHarthi A., Al Siyabi A., Al-Alawi M., Al Humimia S, Al Salmi M., Al-Hashemi T., Al Nuumani R, Al Balushi F. and Al Sinawi H. [2]) are actively studying the features of providing psychological and consulting services using telephone and Internet technologies, for this purpose special terms have even been introduced – telepsychology, psychology of information and communication technologies.

Scientists emphasize the economic feasibility and some other advantages of using modern technologies to provide psychological consultations [2; 10; 11]. They specify the profile of clients loyal to this form of work [12]. They even determine the requirements for the educational training of specialists for working in a distance format [5]. However, the specifics of the process of such counseling, its psychological peculiarity, still remain outside the scope of scientific research

Formulation of the purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate the specificity of online counseling skills as a competitive advantage, and to take into account the technological and psychological specifics cyberspace characters in the process of their formation.

Presentation of the main material. Human activity in cyberspace is significantly different from its activity in the offline world. Most modern specialists are not aware of this difference, perceiving online work by analogy with traditional models. However, for the psyche, the difference is obvious and significant. This observation is especially true for the generation born in the 20th century, before the widespread use of cyber technologies. Generation Z or “digital natives” (as they were called in the scientific literature for some time) are much better adapted to the use of Internet technologies and, as a rule, already live in parallel in 2 worlds – online and offline. But, given that our brain has undergone thousands of years of evolution in the process of adapting to modern conditions, it is clear that a gap of even 30 years is insufficient for full adaptation. As a result, numerous difficulties, pathologies and even mental illnesses arise as a result of insufficient adaptation, for example, information overload, “impostor syndrome”, Internet addiction, etc.

To form online work skills, in particular counseling, it is necessary to clearly understand the difference between the online and offline worlds. This difference is due to the technical specifics of the Internet environment [1]:

- virtuality – the conventionality of the communication situation;
 - interactivity and nonlinearity of communication, the dispersion of the structure, which involves a connection using hyperlinks, this sometimes leads to the fact that the beginning and end of the text are presented in different browser windows, that is, in a different context. Electronic links, unlike printed ones, not only point to related texts, but also encourage them to go to them, distracting attention from the primary source;
 - electronic signal as a communication channel determines the possibility of constant access from any point in the world, distance and indirectness, within which a person is no longer dealing with the original source of information, but with a somewhat edited version;
 - efficiency as a property of quickly communicating new information;
 - synchronicity as a technical possibility of simultaneous speech by all communicants;
 - unlimited circulation and low cost;
 - personal anonymity (the communicant expresses himself through his speech image (nickname, motto, etc.), often this image is completely fictional and does not coincide with a real personality) and openness (when registering on the site, personal information about the user becomes open either to everyone or to registered users), which is due to the technical possibility of creating a virtual profile, which on the one hand personifies the speaker, on the other hand – leaves him the opportunity to be anonymous as much as he wants;
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- the possibility of electronic search;
- socialization as the use of technologies that allow forming a community of interests.

This technical peculiarity creates a number of specific stimuli and conditions that are unusual for our nervous system, so the psyche is forced to adapt, changing some even basic reactions. Thus, the psychological specificity of the Internet arises (Table 1) [1].

European researchers have reached similar, even more stark, conclusions, highlighting that in recent years the relationship between technology and mental health has become a serious source of concern, especially given that digital platforms increasingly influence public perceptions and personal experiences. While technology has provided unprecedented access to mental health resources, it has also exacerbated the stigma of mental health in subtle but pervasive ways. This often happens by promoting toxic optimism, spreading misinformation, and harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, the anonymity of online interactions can lead to cyberbullying and the trivialization of serious mental disorders [10].

Therefore, the provision of professional online counseling services involves knowledge and understanding of these effects, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of counseling that they entail.

A similar position is held by Australian scientists, who emphasize that the provision of online care requires the adaptation of their usual clinical habits of “face-to-face” assessment and treatment, various communication skills, especially with reduced or absent (in the case of telephone care) visual cues to build trust and mutual understanding, as well as to ensure that patients understand any prescribed exercises or treatments [5]. The problem of understanding that in the online world occurs by different mechanisms than offline is rightly emphasized. If offline text comprehension is largely based on the level of cognitive and speech development, then online comprehension is governed by the laws of browsing and the “filter bubble”, in other words, in the real world one needs to think about the text, while online texts are selected according to superficial criteria of correspondence, the user searches (and usually finds) and selects those texts that meet his expectations, which, as he thinks, are already understood and which do not need to be thought about (the author came to such conclusions by comparing the factor loading of the indicated indicators [1]. The emotional consistency of the author’s and reader’s positions on the Internet also has a much greater impact on comprehension, people on the Internet are looking for confirmation of their emotions, not criticism or discussion. Understanding these features is of critical

Table 1

Psychological specificity of the Internet

Technical specificity	Psychological specificity
Virtuality/conditionality limiting sensory experience to visual and auditory only	Limiting sensory experience to only visual and auditory
Interactivity and nonlinearity of communication, dispersion of structure, synchronicity	A sense of space and time different from the real world, a state of "continuous scattered attention", "constant workload"
Electronic signal, which determines the possibility of constant access, distance and indirectness, unlimited circulation and low cost	The appearance of negative emotions with limited access to cyberspace
Storage of transcripts and ease of updating the content of the text, which determine efficiency	Constant fixation of the results of cyber-activity
Personal anonymity and openness	Multiplicity of personality, virtual identity, disinhibition of the "online self"
Conditional socialization	Leveling of statuses, contact availability
Multiplicity of personality, virtual identity, disinhibition of the "online self"	Changing priorities and behavior, "browsing", "web surfing", "filter bubble"

Source: formed by Akimova N.

importance in online counseling and determines not only the degree of intelligibility of the consultation itself, but also allows predicting the likelihood of repeat applications and quality assessment by service recipients.

In addition, certain effects are observed in the online space that are not very characteristic of a person in the real world. In particular, scientists from Asia emphasize the effect of anthropomorphism, which is interpreted as a sincere belief that an object on the Internet has human characteristics [3]. In this way, bots, artificial intelligence models and even search engines are animated, users tend to feel that technical structures work in their interests or vice versa, projecting their own emotions onto technical structures. In turn, anthropomorphism leads to unjustified excitation of the limbic system, increased fears and anxiety, and part of the brain structures (mirror neurons), which are programmed to read emotional reactions in the absence of appropriate stimuli, changes its work. Therefore, an online consultant should remember that cyber communication will be accompanied by "thinking" of emotions, intentions and other human characteristics, provided that the client in communication there will not be enough real ones from the consultant.

We also observe in online counseling the effect of unjustified confidence of Internet users [1], which consists in the tendency to overestimate themselves on the Internet. This phenomenon is inherent in both providers and recipients of services, so overcoming this effect requires the creation of additional feedback systems and realistic assessment. On the other hand, in response to this phenomenon, the imposter syndrome spreads across the Network, which is probably an attempt by the psyche to overcome such a situation.

This is far from an exhaustive list of specifics and effects that arise in the cyber environment and affect the counseling process. But this list convincingly indicates the need for special training for online counselors. The lack of appropriate training, according to Australian colleagues, explains the stereotype of lower quality of online counseling compared to offline and is an obstacle to the spread of online services. Online counseling training should be aimed at the formation of specific communication skills, modification of methods personality assessment for the digital environment, clinical thinking skills for assessing clients remotely [5], and digital literacy, ethical design, and inclusive policies to combat stigma and support mental well-being in the digital age [10].

With appropriate training, online counseling has significant advantages over the traditional format, with experts reporting high effectiveness of such counseling (7.45 on a scale from 0 to 10) [10]. According to European researchers, the main advantages of distance counseling were: lower financial costs, the ability to conduct it at home and access to specialized treatment not available in my geographical location. These were mentioned by more than 50% of participants out of 514 subjects [12].

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However, there are currently almost no specific courses on online counseling. A survey conducted by Australians showed that 53% of graduates did not receive any practical training during their program. The remaining available programs vary greatly in scope and content [5]. Most of all, clients lack emotional connection with the consultant, understanding non-verbal signals, and sometimes technical difficulties interfere. But interestingly, clients do not complain about the problem of confidentiality [12], although in contact counseling this problem arises from time to time, and on the Internet it should be predicted to be even more acute. Perhaps the phenomenon of personal anonymity allows us to sufficiently close this issue.

Conclusions. Digital transformations in the world and modern Ukraine have led to the spread of remote work formats, in particular online counseling. This activity is gaining

increasing popularity, as it has a number of technical, economic and psychological advantages. However, the development of online counseling skills can become a concrete advantage only if special training programs for working in cyberspace are developed. Such programs should take into account the technical specifics of the Internet, understand the psychological patterns and effects caused by it, and also include information on the formation of specific thinking, communication skills, more sensitive diagnostics of the problem and the client's condition, ethical issues, digital literacy, stigmatization propaedeutics and inclusion.

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