Mini-Review Article

Ethical Difficulties of Utilizing Virtual Habitats in Cyber-Psychology.

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Abstract

Mental Health professional are keenly shifting to the Cyber-Psychology and exploring the possibilities of virtual habitats for psychological practices and studies. Since, virtual habitats allows mental health professionals an avenue to distinguish technologies for their clients therefore its prevalence is inevitable. Social virtual habitats, which connect virtual surroundings to social networks, are also gaining popularity. Though there is a huge debate on assessing and treating psychological clients by utilizing virtual habitats. Increased use of technology in psychological practice, includes issues with maintaining electronic database and communication security, illegal access to client data, inappropriate disclosures of identifiable information, and unethical social media activities. Significantly low amount of dialogues has been taken place to address the ethical aspects of cyber-psychology, to be decisive in regard of these technologies which are being applied clinically. The progress of cyber-psychology's ethical regulations does not match the speed of advancement of technologies. This review article discusses the ethical difficulties of using virtual habitats in cyber-psychology clinical practise, as well as the therapeutic ramifications of using virtual habitats' technology. In addition, an outline of possible solutions to the discussed issue is provided.

Keywords

Introduction

The field Psychology is experiencing completely new times and it has move in the entirely different era. In January 2021, there were 4.66 billion digital natives worldwide, accounted for 59.5 percent of the world's population. Smart phones were utilized by 92.6 percent of people (4.32 billion) to connect with the internet[1]. Cyber-Psychology is a growing discipline of psychology that is becoming more important as new technologies emerge and become more prevalent in our daily lives. Cyber-psychology straddles the lines between social-media psychology, digital psychology, emotional computing, and human–computer interaction as a field. While cyber-psychology is still a young field, it is experiencing exponential growth. We must accept that cyber-psychology is a specialized branch of psychology for ethical issues in cyber-psychology. This is significant since psychology began as a laboratory-based study, and cyber-psychology arose from that foundation[2].

What is Cyber-Psychology?

Cyber-psychology is a multidisciplinary scientific field that studies psychological phenomena that arise as a result of human interaction with digital technology, human–computer interaction, notably the involvement of Internet[3].
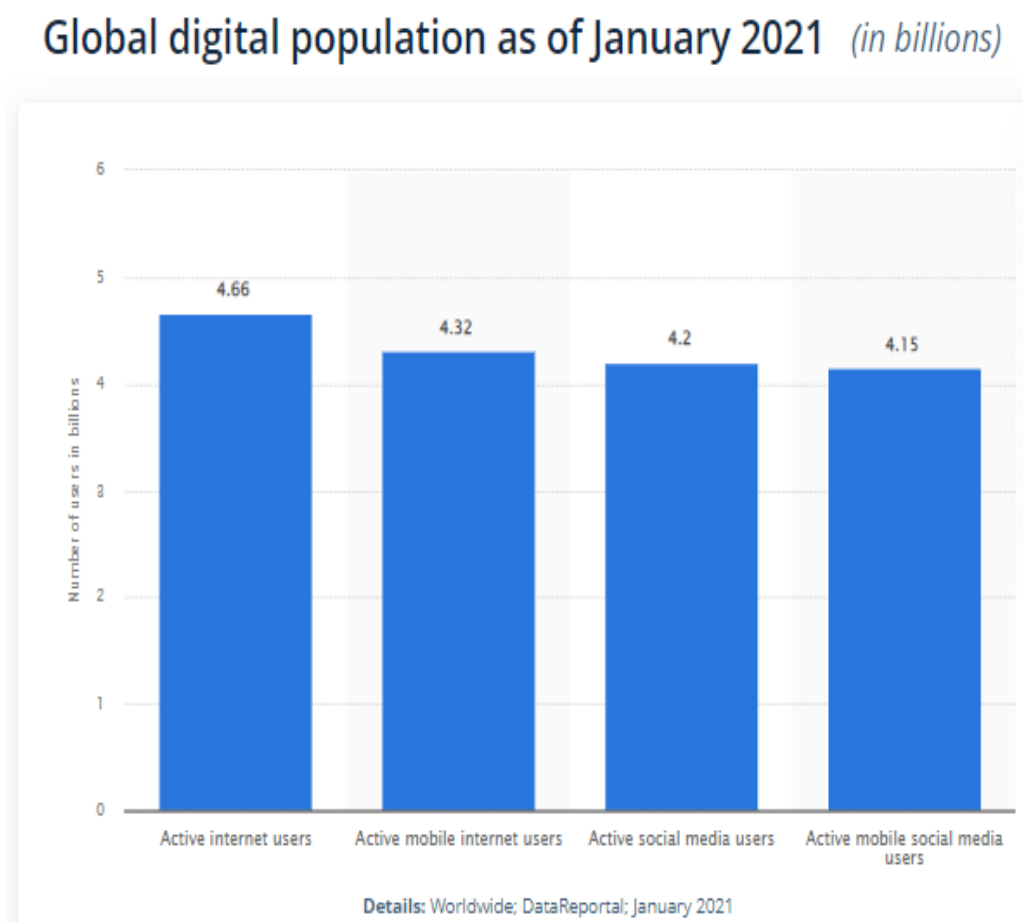
Figure 1: Worldwide; Data Reportal; January1.

Ethical Challenges in the Use of Virtual Habitats' Technologies in Clinical Practise

First and foremost the digital footprints left by a variety of virtual habitats and smartphones to predict secondary data such as political beliefs, religion, purchasing interests, well-being, sexual orientation, intellect, and personality traits. And such information can be exploited easily[4]. However, various ethical questions are on the table; online separation between public and private domains which is hugely questionable, online confidential data and secure data, processes for getting legitimate consent, procedures for ensuring rights of withdrawal and debriefing, stages of researcher authority, and repercussions for scientific value and probable damage. Studies that engage virtual habitats, smartphone abilities, and wearable sensors to track physical movements and nutritional intake, as well as to assess adversarial medication responses, served numerous unique ethical concerns about client's confidentiality, informed authorization, and data security[5]. The ubiquitous availability of large patterns of human activity, combined with an interest in understanding more about clients, creates significant privacy and data control concerns[6]. Furthermore, as increasingly powerful AI has been used to masses of precise personal data to predict a spectrum of human behavior from consumer preferences to the possibility of criminal action, this has become a contentious field of study. The development of ethical processes and procedures has not kept pace with technical advancements. New types of research enabled by technical advancements in information technology, data science, and other sectors have overtaken government rules for human subject protection. Psychologists are particularly prepared to contribute to cyber-psychology knowledge, express caution about the reliability of this analysis and its implications, and assist in the development of recommendations to safeguard people and communities from possible detrimental outcomes[7].

Even though the huge popularity of virtual habitats' adoption, Predictive policing can be skewed and therefore difficult to assess. Incorporating psychologists in the construction and analysis of such algorithms might contribute to decrease algorithmic biases.

Clinical Repercussions in the Use of Virtual Habitats' Technologies

As smartphones, laptops, and tablet computers can readily connect psychologists and other mental health experts to clients, they are increasingly being utilized to assess, manage, evaluate, and provide services to societies. The psychology profession will continue to be interested in learning the most effective and ethical methods to incorporate technology into in-person treatment, such as mobile technology and associated "apps," virtual habitats, virtual reality, "smart homes," and smart monitoring equipment. As psychologists use virtual habitats with people from all over the world, intercultural communication will become increasingly important for effective and ethical engagement. In fact, connecting via human-computer interaction may help reduce the embarrassment and taboo associated with conventional psychotherapy for particular groups or individuals[8].

The responsiveness of psychologists to variations in cyber technology exposure and attitudes in reference of age group, socioeconomic background, and multigenerational status is important in creating therapeutic relationship with the client and influencing therapies. Furthermore, in online healthcare contexts, knowing generational variations in views of proper communication patterns such as the usage of acronyms, memes, and emojis is also important. As therapists utilize technology in a variety of contexts ranging from private practise, hospitals, community mental health facilities, and military institutions to academia, ethical criteria in the use of virtual habitats are expected to increase[9]. In order to guarantee that services are given both efficiently and ethically, continuing dialogues and studies will be needed on issues such as clinician competence, data security and communication, inter - jurisdictional practise, and informed consent. Furthermore, when dealing with more significant mental health concerns, determining the benefits

and limitations of online counselling is critical. Psychologists play a critical part in this, since they collaborate with technology businesses to ensure that services to address these issues are provided responsibly. We may predict continuous expansion in the development of advanced technology linked with VR systems, in addition to cyber-psychological services. Virtual reality has the ability to address a much broader spectrum of physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and psychological difficulties than it now does[10].

The significance of health professionals working within their area of qualifications, competence, and knowledge becomes increasingly important as cyber technologies grow and become more widely available. It's critical to understand the restrictions and potential drawbacks. Some participants have experienced nausea-related cyber-sickness, postural control, and perceptual-motor abnormalities linked with sensory cue incongruity as virtual habitats (especially VR) related side effects. Psychologists' contributions to the establishment of a variety of cyber usage guidelines are required to steer clinical practise. This investigation might help in reducing the risk of harmful online behavior.

Remedy in Progression

According to a study conducted in South Africa, to develop and validate Code of Ethics' Draft for Cyber-Psychology; 38 Psychologists participated among those majority were Clinical Psychologists. The keen concerns were;

Confidentiality, privacy, and records: Confidentiality is the most often expressed worry among practitioners now practicing online counselling. The security of records in online treatment is also at a standstill, with terms like 'privacy of records,' 'danger of being hacked,' and 'security of information sharing online' being used frequently[11].

Competence: Concerns about competence centered on 'mastery of the medium,' in connection to technological challenges and the therapeutic relationship's nature[11].

Training: In the new era of cyber-psychology, psychologists and other related professionals must seek and get proper education and training[11].

Emergency situations: In internet counselling, psychologists are especially worried about how to handle emergency circumstances. If a professional is unable to see and communicate directly with a client, as well as judge nonverbal conduct, the client's whole mental state is unclear[11].

Verification of identity: The psychologist's and the client's identities were both verified, which was a source of worry[11].

Informed consent: Informed consent ethical and legal criteria must be modified for online engagement. Clients should be informed about the advantages and drawbacks of internet counselling by psychologists[11].

Online therapy adjunctive to face-to-face therapy: The use of internet therapy as a solo modality vs as an addition to face-to-face treatment was a hot subject[11].

Conclusion

This study concludes that psychologists are well equipped to be a force for good and innovation as we navigate this new environment, due to their training and expertise. Furthermore, psychologists must collaborate with other specialists such as computer scientists, engineers, and bioinformatics experts in order to advance research in the twenty-first century. Psychologists and other social scientists must take the lead in building the infrastructure that will allow cyber-psychology to thrive in its most scientific and ethical way possible, with real-world applications.

Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

None to declare.

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