

## CYBERNETIC ANALYSIS: A CASE STUDY OF ONLINE COUNSELLING BY PSYCHOLOGISTS THROUGH THE RILIV APP

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### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of online counselling and client satisfaction of RILIV app users. This research uses a cybernetic psychology approach to explore the process of information exchange between psychologists and clients, as well as the trust built through technological intermediaries. The method used in this research is a qualitative method with data collection through interviews. The research subjects included 1 psychologist involved in the RILIV app and 1 client who had received services through the platform. Through cybernetic analysis, the results showed that the cognitive process of information processing plays an important role in the communication process between psychologists and clients. However, challenges in online counselling, such as the lack of signals and the inability to see facial expressions and gestures directly, can affect the effectiveness of cognitive processes. Therefore, effective online counselling requires a careful integration of technology with an approach that takes into account the changing mindsets and reflections of individuals, as well as efforts to overcome communication barriers that may arise in a virtual environment.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a never-ending problem. Survey results from I-NAMHS (2022) state that around 34.9 per cent or around 15.5 million adolescents experience mental problems. Another survey from Our Better World also revealed that there were 9,162,886 cases of depression with a prevalence of 3.7 per cent in Indonesia. This means that out of Indonesia's total population of 278,16,661 people, one million people experience depression. Out of 3 million people born every year experience depression. As a real impact of depression, there are many suicides. This condition is increasingly concerning and can have a negative impact on national productivity and can be an obstacle for Indonesia in achieving its goal as a developed country in 2045.

The increase in mental health problems in Indonesia requires an increase in mental health services that are qualified, equitable, and easily accessible. Although efforts have been made to improve services, the number of mental health professionals is still limited and difficult to reach by the community. In addition, low public awareness of mental

health makes this problem difficult to detect and address effectively. To address these gaps, it is important to give mental health services the same importance as physical health.

Currently, technology continues to develop by providing convenience in everyday life. Technology can simplify the communication process, facilitate the buying and selling process, become a source of information to broaden horizons, and act as entertainment. One example of technology that cannot be separated from humans is smartphones. The journey of smartphones continues to experience updates in terms of features, design, and applications in it. This makes smartphones important for various groups, from children to adults who cannot be separated from their respective smartphones.

At the same time, the field of psychology today is also inseparable from technology and the internet. Nowadays, the internet is an important tool in providing mental health services (Mansyur, et al , 2019). According to Beck (2020) the increasingly digitalized changes in the field of psychology are not new. Psychological counselling has actually been conducted online since the beginning of the 21st century. The practice is to utilize e-mail and chat.

Online psychological counselling has also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID, all human activities were limited such as the implementation of regulations related to working from home, studying from home, social distancing, and physical distancing and these adjustments may have triggered symptoms of mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, stress, and so on (Arnout et al., 2020). HIMPSI deployed licensed psychology practitioners to provide psychological support through online psychological counselling. This continues and continues to grow today, marked by the emergence of awareness to trust consulting mental health service applications, one example of which is the RILIV application.

RILIV is a mental health service application launched in 2015. The RILIV app is an original application by Indonesian people which is claimed to be the first psychological counselling application in Indonesia. Based on download data on Google Playstore, the RILIV application is the most popular counselling application and received a prestigious award from Google Playstore. In addition, RILIV also received several awards from national and international organisations. Some of them are awards from Surabaya City Government, Singapore International Foundation, and Global Entrepreneurs Network. Based on reviews on the Google Play Store, RILIV has helped more than 150 thousand users to overcome their mental health problems.

Several studies to examine the effectiveness of online counselling have been conducted, one of which is a study conducted by Apsari et al (2018) with counsellor participants, the result is that text-based online counselling conducted with the Riliv application is quite effective. Similar research was also conducted by Harahap (2021) which states that online counselling is effective in helping clients. Furthermore, this study will look at how the effectiveness of cyber counselling from two sides, namely the counsellor side and the counselling client side, this is also a novelty from similar studies conducted previously.

Based on initial interviews with psychologists who provide online counselling services, she said that there are currently more people interested in online counselling than face-to-face psychological counselling. This is because some people are more comfortable doing online psychological counselling with certain considerations such as distance, unavoidable busyness, and so on. In addition, this also indicates that there are still many people who experience mental health problems and need professional help.

However, there are still pros and cons regarding online counselling compared to offline counselling. On the cons side, many psychology practitioners value the process of face-to-face counselling, where the psychologist and client are present in the same physical space. This is because they are trained and learnt how to work or provide

psychological services face-to-face with an approach that prioritizes deep engagement and relational contact (Hanley, 2021). As for the research supporting online counselling, it states that online counselling has been proven effective in helping university students to improve their resilience (Savarese et al, 2020).

From the description above, it can be concluded that there are pros and cons of online counselling. The researcher is interested in investigating further and in-depth about the effectiveness of online counselling on clients, especially RILIV application users and client satisfaction. This research uses a cybernetic psychology approach to explore the process of information exchange between psychologists and clients, as well as trust built through technological intermediaries.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach, because the theme discussed is online psychological counselling, so a deeper and more comprehensive approach is needed to be able to find out the online psychological counselling process and collect accurate data. According to Sugiyono (2015) qualitative research is a research method used to research on natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are triangulated (combined), data analysis is inductive and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. The type of research used is a case study. Through case studies, researchers will gain a full understanding of the psychologist's online psychological counselling process.

The participants in this study were taken using purposive sampling, namely sampling with certain considerations (Sugiyono, 2015), with specific criteria determined according to the research objectives:

1. Registered as a psychologist at HIMPSI and has an active SIPP
2. Working as a psychologist for at least 1 year
3. Working as a psychologist in the RILIV digital app
4. Willing to be a research participant

This study collected data using semi-structured interviews, namely interviews by finding problems more openly, discussing the opinions and ideas of participants (Sugiyono, 2015). This research analyses data using content analysis. The approach taken was intracase content analysis. This approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to see how respondents gave meaning to the theme of online psychological counselling, about what, why, and how the online psychological counselling process worked. Then the researcher wrote down verbatim interviews, and coded the verbatim. This was done to make the data more organized and systemized in a complete and detailed manner, so as to bring out a comprehensive picture of online psychological counselling.

This study sharpens the validity of data using triangulation, namely checking data from various sources and reference materials, namely the existence of supporters to prove the data that have been found by researchers (Sugiyono, 2015). Researchers used clients of the research participants, namely people who have interacted with the subject and used counselling services from the subject. Researchers determined the criteria for significant others in this study, i.e.:

1. Having done online psychological counselling through the RILIV application more than once
2. Having resolved their psychological problems
3. Willing to be a research participant

In accordance with research ethics, there are several things related to research ethics that need to be considered by researchers, including research permits, informed consent, maintaining privacy and personal data and confirming sensitive issues from interview data (Eriyanto, 2021). Therefore, before conducting interviews, researchers gave

informed consent to all research participants, with several proposed agreements including maintaining privacy and personal data. After the interview, the researcher reconfirmed the results of the interview data that could be presented as data and results of the research. The informed consent was signed by the participant indicating that the participant was willing to be a participant in this study and agreed if the information data was used for the needs of this study.

## **RESULT**

Due to researcher limitations, data collection by interview was conducted online through the Zoom Meeting application. The interviewee was a psychologist who works in the digital psychology counselling application, RILIV. The interview process was recorded as research documentation. Researchers also collected data through observation in the form of notes during the interview process. Observations were made on the emotional responses that appeared on the respondents.

The psychologist involved as the subject of this research is a psychologist who has been working on the RILIV application for 4 years, is female, 30 years old, has a licence to practice from HIMPSI and expertise in clinical psychology. The interview with the psychologist provided a rich perspective on the transition of counselling from offline to online. It is worth noting that online counselling platforms such as Riliv are paid, and before using the platform clients are required to go through a registration process, the mechanism for selecting a psychologist, and the types of services offered (online counselling, mood tracker, daily journal, meditation), providing practical insights for practitioners and clients who wish to use the service.

Based on the interview, it was found that in the implementation of online counselling there are several things that need to be done by the psychologist and become the main focus during the counselling session. First, to maintain interaction and communication emotionally, the psychologist builds rapport by reading the client's personal data first so that a mapping of what the client's character is like is obtained and when online counselling takes place the psychologist will adjust to the client's character. As well as the use of voice intonation and language so that clients can easily understand what is conveyed by the psychologist and are able to process and convey well.

Secondly, there are barriers to online counselling. Psychologists revealed that there are some significant differences, especially when observing clients. During offline counselling, psychologists are able to read the client's gestures so that in-depth observations can be made. Whereas online counselling, the psychologist is only limited to looking through the screen (zoom, g-meet) and only that. However, this can be overcome if you have found the flow of counselling. Obstacles occur when they find clients who attend counselling sessions not from their own wishes, but rather direction from other parties, be it parents or colleagues. So that the psychologist is more maximal to approach to bring up trust in the client. In addition, poor signalling also affects the effectiveness of counselling. To find out how the client's thought process (whether the message from the psychologist is well conveyed, the message can be received well and then responded to by the client positively to reduce the client's negative emotions for example, or the anxiety felt) can be identified by the psychologist even though it is limited through an online platform. This would not be possible if the psychologist did not have a high level of practical experience and competence in conducting online counselling.

Third, to find out whether the client has felt relieved or better after doing online counselling is from the rating or satisfaction indicator for the psychologist in the Riliv application, of course after the session ends. The higher the score, the better the performance of the psychologist, and if the score drops, it will be a future evaluation for the psychologist.

In addition to the psychologist, the researcher also interviewed one of the clients who had done online counselling with the psychologist. This client is 26 years old, lives in Solo and has a bachelor's degree in Psychology. The client conducted this counselling session because of indications of panic attacks when he was exposed to Covid. The client with his own awareness and desire browsed on Instagram to find an online counselling platform. Until online counselling runs for approximately two to three sessions, the client says that after completing online counselling the client feels relieved after conveying his anxiety. This was supported because it felt right to be handled by an expert (licensed psychologist) then the competence of the psychologist who was able to build a good relationship at the beginning of the session until the end of counselling. The client felt comfortable and was able to follow instructions, namely the provision of self-therapy provided by the psychologist even though it was limited to the online platform.

## **DISCUSSION**

The digital world has widened the counselling space, in this context cybernetic analysis offers a deep insight into the experience as well as the barriers or advantages of implementing online counselling based on cybernetic psychology from both the psychologist's and client's perspectives.

According to Prayitno and Amti (Mayasari, 2022) counselling is a process of assistance provided by experts to individuals or groups face to face which aims to optimise developmental tasks and independent individuals. Meanwhile, according to Gerald Corey (Permadi, 2023) counselling is a process in which psychologists help individuals or groups overcome personal, social, emotional, or educational problems through structured interactions. In this case the client is helped to understand himself, his current situation, and the possibility of a future situation that can be created using his potential, for personal and community welfare. Furthermore, clients can learn how to solve problems and discover future needs.

With the development of technology and information, psychologists must now be able to adapt "traditional" psychological services by serving clients remotely using technological assistance (Cooper & Campbell, 2019). According to Situmorang (2020) by utilizing email, phone calls, and g-meet or zoom meetings, many psychological counselling professionals run clinical sessions, conduct assessments, and engage in other applied work to connect with clients who are in different locations. Most psychological counselling practitioners integrate technology, such as telephones, computers, the internet, and in their daily activities, whether in clinical practice, educational efforts, or research. From the above understanding, it can be concluded that online counselling is a virtual counselling model or counselling that takes place through the help of an internet connection where the psychologist and client are not physically present in the same space and time, this process takes place via the internet in the form of websites, emails, video conferences and other innovative ideas.

From the interview results, psychologists who are members of the RILIV application are strictly selected and selected candidates who have good qualifications. This is in accordance with Cooper's (2019) statement that in its implementation, psychologists who conduct online counselling must also follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines and standards for online counselling practices, with the following criteria:

1. Competence

Psychologists who are clinically competent in treatment interventions and relationship skills may require additional training or consultation in telepractice. Therefore, psychologists should conduct a needs assessment to determine the appropriateness of online counselling on a case-by-case basis.

2. Standard of Care

Psychologists should consider the benefits and risks before initiating online counselling, including access to services, information security and limited technology skills. Other considerations include medical conditions, medication history, and client support systems. Psychologists need to explain these factors to potential clients to ensure suitability and apply the appropriate standard of care in the client file if online counselling is implemented.

3. Informed Consent

Informed consent for telepractice includes eligibility, confidentiality, emergency procedures, communication, language and cultural factors, and agreement on conditions during counselling sessions. This consent is important to ensure that the psychologist not only explains the features of electronic communication but also educates the client about the new expectations regarding online therapy.

4. Confidentiality

The risk of breach of confidentiality in electronic communication is much greater than in face-to-face meetings. Psychologists who are new to online counselling often consult with technology experts to evaluate the risks specific to their practice. A good informed consent document explains that psychologists cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in electronic interactions, as systems can fail and unintentional breaches can occur.

In online counselling, the psychologist is less able to read the client's gestures so needs to find the flow of the counselling in order to create trust in the client. This is so that the psychologist can know how the client's thought process is. In online counselling, the cognitive process of information processing plays an important role in the communication process between psychologists and clients. The cognitive process of information processing in online counselling services involves many aspects that need to be considered. When interacting online, individuals process information from the Psychologist through the virtual platform. This includes understanding the verbal information conveyed, interpreting the message conveyed, and understanding the context and purpose of the interaction. These aspects are related to cognitive processes such as:

1. Language Processing

- a. Message comprehension (receiving and interpreting messages delivered orally by psychologists)
- b. Listening skills (ability to listen carefully to clients online)

2. Interpretation and Evaluation:

- a. Context Understanding (understanding the context and purpose of the online counselling, as well as interpreting the message as appropriate to the situation)
- b. Information Evaluation (assessing the veracity and relevance of the information provided by the psychologist)

3. Response and Action:

- a. Response and Action (responding to the counsellor's messages and suggestions verbally or in the form of actions after the online counselling session)

This overall process relates to how individuals process, understand and respond to information provided as part of online counselling. The ability to understand correctly, interpret correctly and respond effectively is key to the cognitive processes associated with online counselling. By understanding information processing, psychologists can increase the effectiveness of online counselling and psychologists can better understand the client and provide interventions that are appropriate to the client's needs.

Psychologists must be able to understand the information conveyed by clients, both verbal and nonverbal. Psychologists must also be able to process this information to produce appropriate responses that meet the client's needs. According to Richard (2022), cognitive theory argues that environmental "clues" and instructional components alone

cannot explain all the learning that occurs in instructional situations. Additional key elements include how learners attend to, encode, transform, repeat, store and retrieve information.

## CONCLUSION

Online counselling has become an increasingly popular alternative for providing psychological support services. In a cybernetics analysis, it is seen that the effectiveness of online counselling depends on the integration between technology and human interaction and how the cognitive processes of individuals are involved in this context.

It is important to understand that interactions in online counselling involve new variables, such as technological platforms, communication mechanisms, and different environments and competencies of psychologists. The results of the cybernetics analysis highlight that the effectiveness of online counselling is related to the extent to which the technology can facilitate interactions that enable reflection, analysis and management of thoughts by individuals. The ability to provide greater accessibility to counselling services may also influence cognitive processes by providing more opportunities for self-reflection and mindset change.

However, challenges in online counselling, such as poor signals and the inability to see facial expressions in person, can affect the effectiveness of cognitive processes. Therefore, the conclusion of the cybernetics analysis emphasizes that effective online counselling requires careful integration of technology with an approach that pays attention to the changing mindsets and reflections of individuals, as well as efforts to overcome communication barriers that may arise in a virtual environment.

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