

Applying Design Thinking to Psychological Counselling Services

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Abstract

Design thinking is a process which can be applied in various ways in order to bridge the gap between the users and their needs. Using design thinking to tackle a social issue is the need of the hour. This paper explores various ways in which human centered design techniques have been previously applied to social sciences. The need for counselling services in India is increasing day-by-day. Accessing trained and licensed practitioners who can cater to specialized needs of clients is a primary step in the process of counselling. The paper presents a novel way of applying human computer interaction to services of counselling in psychology. User centric, accessible, inclusive, innovative design solutions can be used to make the process of finding the need for counselling services in India more efficient. Visual perception lies at the base of making a product user-friendly. The choices one makes are highly influenced by the information perceived by the optic senses. The paper analyzes ways in which various theories such as colour

theory can be applied in the context of the product. The implications of having such a product in the area of counselling psychology have been discussed.

Keywords: Product Design, Counselling, User-centric, Psychology, Visual Thinking

Introduction

Design thinking is a process which can be applied in various ways in order to bridge the gap between the users and their needs. Using design thinking to tackle a social issue is the need of the hour. This paper explores various ways in which human centered design techniques have been previously applied to social sciences. Literature from design thinking has been followed by literature from counselling and clinical psychology to identify the gap between needs of clients in finding a therapist and needs and challenges of therapists in finding a client. How design thinking can be used to develop effective tools to meet the needs of both clients and therapists has been discussed.

Literature Review

Design Thinking is a cycle that includes phases of perception/interaction, empathy, problem formulation, solution deduction, testing, alteration and reiteration (*Critical Thinking*, 2020). Here, Critical Thinking is a piece of each phase of the Design Thinking process. Basically, compelling Design Thinking can't occur in that frame of mind of basic or inventive reasoning. There is additionally a typical misinterpretation that critical and innovative reasoning are unmistakable from one another.

(*Critical Thinking*, 2020) briefly highlights that critical thinking requires some structure as well as level of imagination. Critical and Design Thinking remain inseparable and can't be isolated or

recognized utilizing any conventional rules. Design Thinking alludes to the utilization of various strategies and procedures from different disciplines: design, engineering, informatics, and psychology. (Design Thinking Mindset, 2017) highlights that design thinking requires an exploratory, cooperative, and hopeful attitude. We characterize mentality as the thoughts and perspectives with which an individual advances a circumstance. As stated in (*Critical Thinking*, 2020), Sooner rather than later, Design Thinking is supposed to be sent as an inventive strategy in companies and furthermore become an essential piece of the board training, especially development. (2022) Empathy isn't just a great expertise for understanding your clients better, it can likewise assist you with taking care of issues according to their point of view and gain knowledge into the design process. At last, your item or service ought to be designed to help improve others' lives and encounters, so never neglecting to focus on an empathetic perspective on the world is critical.

In research from Chakraborty (2020), he states the importance of how aesthetics proves to be vital for making any product usable. This is called the Aesthetic-Usability Effect which can be directly related to human psychology of colors, patterns, shapes and functionality. Aesthetics additionally assume a significant part in the manner a design is utilized. Tasteful designs are more powerful at cultivating uplifting outlooks than unaesthetic designs, and make individuals more open minded toward design problems.

Chakraborty (2020) is clear to state that positive associations with a design bring about a cooperation that catalyzes inventive reasoning and critical thinking. The item is dealt with like a companion, or a buddy.

In actuality, negative connections bring about a communication that straightens reasoning and smother's innovativeness. This is particularly significant in unpleasant conditions, since stress increments weariness and lessens mental execution.

According to Jakob Nielsen (First Rule of Usability? Don't Listen to Users, 2001) In the 90s, cool design was the greatest usability barrier. Most ventures were administered by convenience rivals who favored intricacy over effortlessness. Thus, billions of dollars were squandered on garish plans that were challenging to utilize. Kate Moran (The Aesthetic-Usability Effect, 2017) mentions form and function ought to cooperate. At the point when interface experiences the ill effects of extreme usability issues, or when ease of use is forfeited for style, clients will more often than not become annoyed. In an article from Yablonski (2019), he mentions the three main reasons for mental burden can be followed back to three primary variables: 1) an excessive number of decisions, 2) a lot of thought required, or 3) absence of lucidity. Every one of these variables will require handling and takes up mental assets that don't really assist clients with figuring out the substance. Hick's law can be utilized to limit huge volumes of data without over-burdening the client. At the point when you really want to improve on complex cycles, utilize Hick's law. (Rigopoulos, 2020) Hick's Law portrays that the time it takes for an individual to go with a choice relies upon the decisions accessible to the person in question. So, in the event that the quantity of decisions expands, an opportunity to settle on a choice increments logarithmically. (Andy Rutledge :: Gestalt Principles - 3: Proximity, Uniform Connectedness, and Good Continuation, 2009) states that components organized on a line or curve are seen to be more related than components not on the line or curve.

In research from London Image Institute (2022), In its least complex terms, color psychology research has turned into a well-known area of color theory that allocates enthusiastic and mental

implications among tones and feelings. A large number of these implications are widespread in light of the fact that they meaningfully affect the mind however some are just cultural. While perception of colors is fairly emotional, a few impacts have all-inclusive importance. London Image Institute (2022) also states that blue is the most all-around preferred shade of all, it is the most secure to use in business. It connects with trust, trustworthiness, and constancy, thus assisting with building clients unwaveringly. Blue functions admirably for the corporate world and is much of the time utilized in significant gatherings. Being the lightest tone of the range, yellow is inspiring and enlightening, offering trust, joy, and fun. A warm and blissful variety makes a feeling of merriment and perkiness, lighting up individuals' spirits.

Nonetheless, an excessive amount of yellow can cause tension, anxiety, fear, tumult, and conflict especially in individuals who are already anxious.

It is critical to recall that the client has an objective, whether it is to purchase an item, grasp something or basically to study the substance. The less they need to ponder how they need to accomplish their objective, the almost certain it is they will accomplish it. Color, shape, size, style, font treatment also makes a design functional and usable.

The next part of the literature review focuses on psychological counselling, the area in which this paper aims to apply design thinking.

Spalter (2013) highlights the freedom to choose the mental health professional and thus it is important to look at the wishes and challenges faced by the clients while finding and choosing mental health professionals. The clients base their decision of choosing a therapist on the level of trust, safety and non-judgmental attitude they perceive of the therapist. Clients are not sure about

sources from where they can collect information regarding a therapist and how to go about the process of finding a therapist.

Vera et al. (1999) have suggested that matching similarities between clients and therapists yields better outcomes. Self-perceived needs of clients need to match the expertise and personality characteristics of the therapists. Swift, Callahan and Vollmer (2011) have found that clients have a preference regarding the characteristics that the therapist should possess and the type of treatment they want. Preferences of the client are related to the efficacy of therapy and drop out rates. (Swift et al., 2018). Clients prefer to screen the attitude of therapists towards various sexual orientation, i.e., homosexual clients after pre-screening the positive attitude of the therapist towards homosexuality reported higher satisfaction with the therapist. Clients also preferred to choose therapists who matched their own ethnic backgrounds (Coleman et al., 1995).

To bridge the gap between matching the needs of the clients to the characteristics of therapists, it becomes necessary to look at the challenges faced by the therapists with respect to clients to enhance the process of matching.

Pereira & Rekha (2017) studied the problems, challenges and difficulties faced by counsellors in India. The paper has looked at a wide array of factors such as stigma associated with mental health, lack of willingness of family members to be supportive of counselling, lack of awareness regarding difference between various types of mental health practitioners such as counsellors, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, clients not willing to pay the fees, prejudice towards young counsellors, lack of counselling in vernacular languages and issues of clients which trigger the counsellor. These problems faced by counsellors at a later stage may be avoided if the counsellor

was made aware of the client's willingness to pay the fees and awareness of the client regarding the process of counselling and the chief complaints of the client.

Thus, if a portal provided information of the clients' needs and expectations and the therapists' qualification and authenticity, fees, area of specialization, mode of operation in a single platform, then the process of selecting a therapist or a counsellor and the process of accepting clients will become smoother. A single interface to connect the clients to the appropriate therapist would resolve incompatibility issues and lead to a comfort level of both.

Present Study

Based on the literature reviewed, the present study explored challenges faced by both clients and mental health professionals. The goal was to analyze the pain points of both parties in order to bridge the gap between needs and challenges. User-centric design thinking methods of primary and secondary research as well as user journeys were integrated to assist further research.

Method

A mixed research was conducted in order to understand the needs of the users. A structured pilot survey involving 19 participants in the age demographic of 15 to 25 years was conducted. In the survey, questions regarding the time required for the participants to find a therapist, the amount of money they were willing to pay, would they test different therapists or stick to one therapist, the social taboo or stigma revolving around mental health in India with respect to their family and their socio-economic status were asked.

The qualitative analysis included interactive interviews with two sets of people - clients who are seeking therapy and experienced mental health professionals. To make the sample representative of the population with respect to gender, the interviews were conducted for male, female and transgendered clients. In addition to that, a wide range of issues faced by the clients were explored in the survey and interviews.

Mental health professionals were enquired about how the process of therapy works in clinical settings. The professionals were also asked about the demographic and other details they need of the clients, the challenges they face in the process of therapy, the process of networking to get more clients.

Data was later analyzed to create two personas namely, the client and the mental health professional. These personas were studied in detail and were used to create user journey maps highlighting the actions taken by the persona, their pain points, emotions and a possible solution to the hindrance.

Results

1. Findings from the Survey

The pilot survey exploratory included 19 participants from the age group 13 to 25. According to the survey conducted, 63.2% of the participants reported that they would need around 2 weeks to find a suitable therapist while 26.3% of them would take around 3 weeks to find a suitable therapist.

73% of the participants reported that they would continue with the same therapist that they began therapy with.

33% of the participants preferred having therapists aged 21 to 25 while 33% preferred having therapists between the age group of 26 to 30. Descriptive answers revealed that participants

preferred having therapists closer to their own age. This finding is corroborated with the quantitative data where participants were from the age group of 15 to 25 and were looking for therapists aged 20 to 30 years.

Data also shows that participants have a pre-decided budget for therapy and they prefer therapists with affordable services fees.

Figure 1

Bar Graph depicting various issues faced by clients.

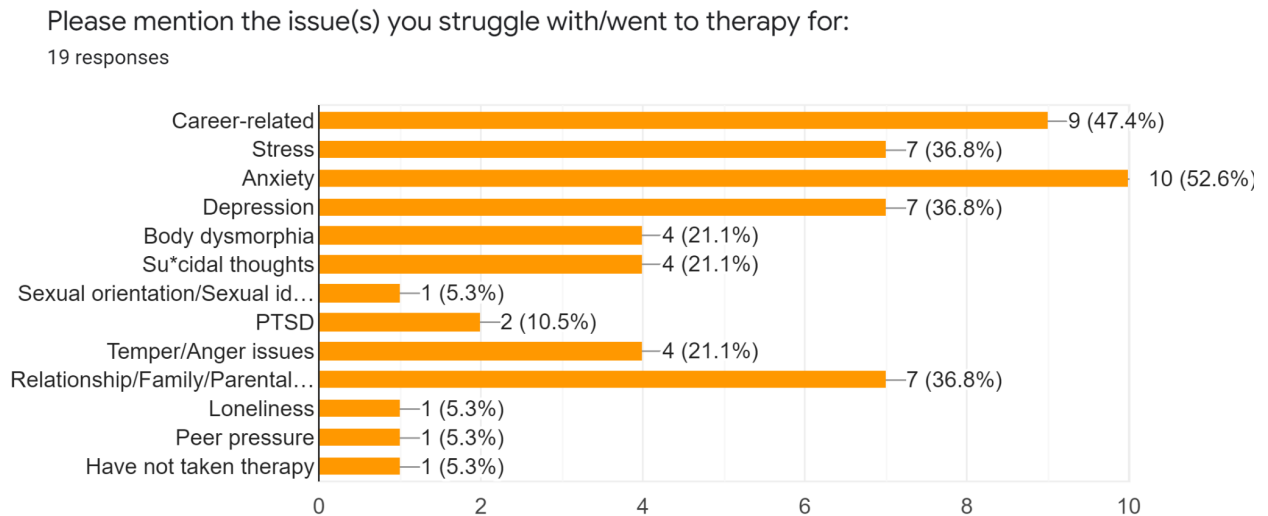


Figure 2

Pie Chart depicting average time taken to find a therapist

On an average, how much time would you spend on searching for the perfect therapist for you, either via Google or by physically attending seminars?

19 responses

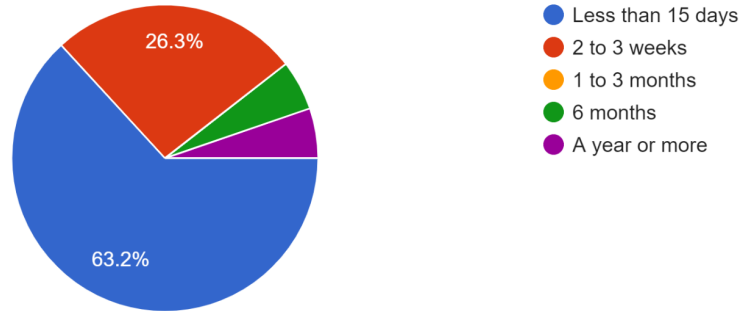


Figure 3

Pie chart showing preferred age of clients and % of client respondents

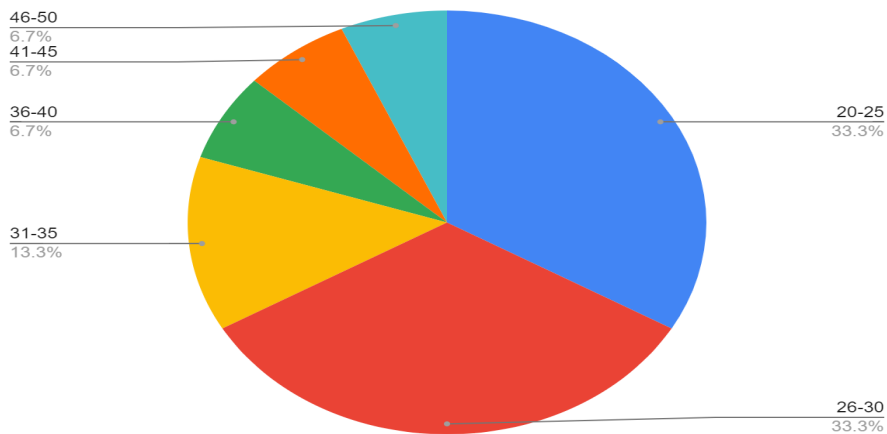


Table 1

Preferred age of therapists and number of clients

Preferred age of therapist	Number of client
20-25	5
26-30	5
31-35	2
36-40	1
41-45	1
46-50	1

From the data gathered through the survey it is evident that clients between the age of 13 to 25 face a various problems ranging from career related issues to stress, anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia, suicidal thoughts, sexual identity, PTSD, temper issues, family or parental pressure and peer pressure among other. Clients prefer therapists closer to their own age. Most clients felt that they would take 2 to 3 weeks to find a therapist and would rather continue with one good therapist rather than changing therapists.

2. Findings from the Interviews with the psychologists.

The qualitative data shows the nuances in various needs the clients have. Interviews with 3 clients and 1 mental health professional were analyzed to understand the process of finding and selecting therapists and clients respectively.

The primary need of the clients was to find a therapist who specializes in treating problems; for example clients required specialization in sports psychology or in treating gender identity issues. The clients also preferred therapists with affordable fees as they did not have economic support from the family. A participant reported requiring a 7 month period to find a suitable therapist of the problem.

Interviews with professionals show that most professionals get clients by word-of-mouth publicity or referrals from other professionals. The professionals also reported that clients often ask for concessions in fees or drop out if they can't afford the fees. The professionals also highlighted that clients often ask for therapists who specialize in issues such as treatment for suicide, problems with sexuality and gender identity, addiction among many others.

Thus the qualitative and quantitative data has explored the user challenges and hindrances in the process of finding and matching clients and mental health professionals.

3. User Persona

User Persona - Therapist

Avantika

Avantika is a licensed therapist who holds a MA Counselling Psychology degree from a university which specializes in Psychology. She has significant experience in working with young adults and teenagers. Her approach to therapy is largely based on the Humanistic school of thought in Psychology. Avantika believes that educational institutes should pay closer attention to a child's mental wellness as it molds the child's personality in the future.



Demographic Info

Age: 25

Gender: Female

Income: Rs. 800-1000 / session

Education: MA Counselling Psychology

Location: India

Goals and Pain Points

Goals 📌

- Avantika loves to work with teens and young adults
- She wants her clients to be comfortable with her and continue with regular therapy
- She is open to clients from the LGBTQ+ community as she herself identifies as one of them

Pain points 😞

- People have stigmatized seeking help for their mental health
- She loses clients after 1 or 2 sessions because they want to explore other options
- Some parents try to interfere in their kids' session and so the child cannot fully open up

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User Persona - Client

John Doe

John is an engineering student at a prestigious institute in India. He comes from a middle class family. John tends to overthink about the smallest things and thus, struggles with panic attacks. John often loses sleep thinking about his future. He wishes to seek help from a mental health professional to tackle his issues so that he won't flunk his future job interviews. His parents are supportive of this decision but they aren't willing to pay a large fee for the same.



Demographic Info

Age: 21

Gender: Male

Income: NA

Education: Computer Science student

Location: India

Goals and Pain Points

Goals 📌

- John wants to seek therapy without trial and error
- He wants a reasonably priced therapist who would be comfortable with listening to his issues without judgement

Pain points 😞

- John spends hours on the internet everyday researching good therapists who specialize in anxiety
- His parents are not willing to spend an extravagant amount of money per session

Written in **slite**

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4. Empathy Map



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Discussion, Limitations, Suggestion for future research

The present study explored literature in the area of design thinking and psychological counselling. The literature has shown that the efficiency and efficacy in the process of therapy increases when clients and therapists are matched on certain parameters. To explore this further, a mixed method design was used in this study. The exploratory pilot survey looked at various needs of clients. Interviews with clients and clinicians revealed further details regarding needs of clients and expectations and challenges faced by the therapists.

The results of the present study validate the findings of research from the literature. Spalter (2013), Vera et al. (1999), Swift, Callahan and Vollmer (2011), Swift et al., (2018), Coleman et

al., (1995), Pereira & Rekha (2017) have demonstrated how matching the specialized perceived needs of the clients to the characteristics of the therapist can increase the efficacy of the process of therapy. The participants of the survey of the present study have also shown a preference towards matching their needs prior to the therapy.

Thus, design thinking can be used effectively to create a tool where on one hand clients will be able to enlist their needs and based on the available data of therapists, the tool can match the client to the desired therapist. This tool will thus reduce the efforts and trial and error involved in the process of finding a therapist and make help available faster to the clients.

Through articles published by (Andy Rutledge :: *Gestalt Principles - 3: Proximity, Uniform Connectedness, and Good Continuation*, 2009, 2022; *Critical Thinking*, 2020; *Design Thinking Mindset*, 2017; Jakob Nielson, *First Rule of Usability? Don't Listen to Users*, 2001; Kate Moran, *The Aesthetic-Usability Effect*, 2017; Chakraborty, 2020; London Image Institute, 2022; Rigopoulos, 2020; Yablonski, 2019) it is observed that the process of design must be meticulously planned to make any product or service user-centric, usable, inclusive and accessible to the end user. Therefore, design thinking is not just restricted to the field of design but is an essential tool in other areas like social sciences and innovation. By taking utmost advantage of human perception and psychology, one can design products which ensure successful outcomes via human-computer interaction.

The present study was carried out only for a small, homogenous group of participants. Hence to make the product more user-friendly, having a survey which includes a diverse, heterogeneous sample where members from various socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds contribute to the process of identification of problems is necessary. Future research can focus on these

demographic details and then make a concrete prototype of a user-friendly solution to the problem areas identified in this research.

Conclusion

Literature from psychological counselling has shown that therapists and clients need to be matched on certain parameters before starting therapy. Data collected through the survey and interviews has also supported the literature review. Design thinking can be used effectively to bridge the gap between needs of users and available services. Thus a tool can be developed in design thinking where when the needs of clients and therapists are matched, the process of finding the right therapist will become faster and more efficient.

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