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Infotherapy: Information as a tool for therapy

Susan N. Umeozor[1] and Stanislaus N. Ezeonye[2]
[1]Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, [2]Donald E. U. Ekong Library
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract
Information is no longer considered as a commodity solely for the privileged few. The realization that information is key to economic, cultural, political, societal, and mental functioning, productivity and growth in a sustainable world order has led to the propagation of information creation and dissemination. The extraordinary power of information is being utilized therapeutically in treatment of mental disorders and psychosis, as well as a tool for reformation, rehabilitation and resettlement of societal offenders. Information sets the pace for competitive advantage in the global economy and as a developmental index, while lack of information and inaccessibility incurs severe individual and developmental retardation. Information, therefore, has arguably become an index for measuring both the individual and societal development. It is puzzling, however, that we live in an era of abundance information, yet, the society is witnessing increased rate in mental breakdown, crime, substance abuse, depression, suicide, among others. This bears a far more significant concern on how information is created and disseminated as it can affect the psychological well-being and the society at large. A cursory look at the society today exposes an emotional-laden environment. Also, health, according to United Nations is not limited to the absence of illness, but sound mind and body, giving credence to the adage *mens sana in corpore sano* (healthy mind in a sound body). Hence, this article considered the concept of infotherapy as a precursor to solving human problem. The outcome of the article is expected to emphasize the importance of information and the far-reaching role it plays in human developmental processes.

Keywords: Information, information-vulnerable, information use, information behaviour, info-
therapy, psychology, cognitive-behavioral therapy, well-being.

Introduction

Human beings must be emotionally, affectively, and physically fit for optimal functioning, and the modern society within which they operate is an emotionally charged one. Health, according to the United Nations, goes beyond the mere absence of illness; it includes a sound mind and a sound body, resonating with the Latin adage *mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body). Psychological well-being is, therefore, crucial to human functioning. It encompasses an individual's internal emotions and disposition, shaping perception, judgement, and readiness to undertake tasks. The human mind absorbs information from daily experiences and learning, interacting with various factors such as peers, social background, and, importantly, the information available to it, in forming interpretation and judgement. The rapid production of information in the contemporary age underscores its potential to influence public health, given that every piece of information carries within it the thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of its producer.

Information holds a pivotal role in the 21st century, akin to natural resources such as land, capital, and labour. Its importance to economic, cultural, political, and societal growth is evident in a sustainable world order, and the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has fueled the creation and dissemination of information at an unprecedented rate. However, timing is crucial: the right information delivered at the wrong time can be counterproductive. Human decisions are shaped by the information individuals receive or retain, and such decisions may be positive or negative depending on the usefulness of that information. The correctness of

information is not intrinsic to the information itself, but is determined by the credibility of its source and the rigor of its authenticity. Information, therefore, could be argued to possess a symbolic link to human well-being, occupying a space within the mind that extends far beyond its factual content.

It is on this premise that information could be argued to possess therapeutic qualities, prompting the exploration of its influence on mental well-being through what this article terms infotherapy. Noruzi (2021) defines infotherapy as the use of information as a therapeutic tool for addressing psychological issues and enhancing mental well-being. This article, therefore, seeks to uncover the potential of information as a therapeutic tool for promoting personal growth and mental well-being. Despite living in an information-rich society, the utilization of this abundance of information within mental health and therapy remains largely unexplored, and it is this gap that the present discussion seeks to address, with the broader aim of advancing therapeutic practice and improving the quality of mental health care provision. Infotherapy holds particular significance in the contemporary landscape of mental health care and psychotherapy. With the proliferation of digital technologies and the internet, individuals now have unprecedented access to information on a wide range of topics, including mental health resources, self-help materials, and therapeutic interventions. However, the sheer volume and diversity of available information can be overwhelming and may, in itself, exacerbate psychological distress and confusion. In this information society, the concept of infotherapy is highly relevant, as individuals increasingly turn to online resources for mental health support and information. Understanding how to navigate and utilize this vast amount of information effectively is essential for promoting positive psychological outcomes and empowering individuals to take control of their mental health (Chen et al., 2024).

The importance of information in stimulating and activating the human thought process and decision-making has made information a rare and competitive commodity in the 21st century. In the midst of scarcity of needed information, internet and communication technologies have enabled remote access and utilization of information, creating the tendency of individual self-sufficiency and adequacy. However, this does bequeath information assessment skills - a crucial skill acquired by professional librarians. Therefore, the credibility of information outside the management of libraries and verified information centres cannot be accounted for.

Consequently, the transformative nature of professional librarianship has changed the library philosophy from information resource-based to client-based. This has made the librarian a mediator between users' information needs and the varied information sources in assisting users to locate the needle in the haystack (Umeozor, 2020). This mediation function is termed apo-mediation (Kwanya *et al*., 2015). Therefore, the pivotal role of libraries and librarians in information retrieval, use and dissemination has not been replaced with the intricacies of communication technology and the internet. Perhaps, it can be deduced that it has further espoused the unique role of the librarian and librarianship as a constantly evolving and dynamic profession. Hence, providing library services to all is a necessity in human society. Therefore, random access to information on the internet and over dependency on other communication technologies that lack credibility could lead to misinformation.

The concept of misinformation is not new. With the prevailing mutated information need of the 21st century, the effect is pronounced more than ever, causing global information disorder that is now of a global concern for which the library profession must have to deal with. According to Emasealu (2022) "misinformation is that information that

does not contribute meaningfully to growth and decision-making. It is usually baseless, carries falsehoods, rumours, hearsays, and unsubstantiated accounts emanating from the sheer imagination of the information provider". Therefore, misinformation is a weaponized information that is false, inaccurate, and misleading. Realizing the dangers of misinformation, most countries are proposing bills for fact-checking, placing punitive measures for mis-informers. In Nigeria, considering the roles of communication technology in the propagation of misinformation, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) established the 2021 Bill for fact-checking. The aim of the bill is to ensure that information circulated on media of communication that does not emanate from credible sources such as the library, is properly verified. This is because the effect of misinformation could pose several developmental retardations for the society especially the information-vulnerable who are mostly recipient of false information (Emasealu & Ezeonye, 2022).

Studies on the efficacy of infotherapy provide empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in promoting mental well-being and addressing psychological issues. Research in this area encompasses a wide range of methodologies, including randomized controlled trials, longitudinal studies, and qualitative investigations, and these studies consistently demonstrate positive outcomes associated with infotherapy interventions across various populations and settings (Richards & Richardson, 2012). An early meta-analysis of bibliotherapy for depression found that self-help interventions utilizing written materials produced significant reductions in depressive symptoms, with an effect size comparable to face-to-face cognitive therapy for mild to moderate cases (Cuijpers, 1997). Andersson et al., (2019), investigated the impact of online CBT programmes and reported improvements in anxiety, depression, and stress levels among participants. These underscore the value of infotherapy as a cost-effective and accessible approach for enhancing mental health outcomes.

In understanding the framework of infotherapy, insights from Albert Ellis's ABC theory and Maslow's concept of the proverbial hammer are paramount. Ellis, a pioneering figure in cognitive-behavioural therapy, developed the ABC model to explain how human reactions are shaped not by events themselves, but by individuals' beliefs about those events (Ellis, 1962). The model comprises three components: A for activating events, B for beliefs, and C for the emotional and behavioural consequences that follow. The tenet suggests that it is not the event itself that directly causes an emotional reaction, but rather the interpretation or belief the individual holds about that event. This school of thought implies that providing individuals with accurate and constructive information about the events they face can lead to a restructuring of their beliefs and perceptions, ultimately resulting in more favourable emotional outcomes. Similarly, Maslow's concept of the proverbial hammer offers insight into the importance of expanding the repertoire of information to effectively address complexities of life (Maslow, 1966). Maslow posited that individuals often approach diverse challenges in life with a limited set of solutions or perspectives, akin to using a hammer for every task, and emphasized the need to broaden one's understanding and response options by exploring alternative strategies and perspectives. Maslow's analogy suggests that providing individuals with a diverse array of information can empower them to navigate life's challenges more effectively.

Despite the profound potential of information to facilitate psychological well-being, the therapeutic role of information has often been overlooked in traditional therapeutic approaches. Classical antiquity, nonetheless, recognized this potential: the library at Thebes bore, over its entrance, an inscription meaning

healing place for the soul, reflecting the ancient Greek understanding of the library as a form of intellectual pharmacy for the mind (Weimerskirch, 1965). Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, likewise described tragedy as producing catharsis, a purging of emotion through the vicarious experience of narrative, effectively treating literature as medicine for the soul. However, with the advent of modern psychotherapy, the focus shifted primarily to interpersonal dynamics and introspective processes, relegating information to a secondary role. This neglect of information as therapy has persisted to some extent in contemporary therapeutic practice, despite the exponential growth of information sources and technologies since antiquity.

Insights from Ellis's ABC theory and Maslow's concept of the proverbial hammer, therefore, offer valuable perspectives on the theoretical underpinnings of infotherapy. Infotherapy holds promise as a transformative approach to promoting mental well-being through the understanding of how human reactions are influenced by beliefs and perceptions, and how individuals can expand their repertoire of coping strategies and perspectives. However, recognizing the therapeutic potential of information requires a paradigm shift in traditional therapeutic practice, acknowledging information as a primary tool for empowerment and healing, and not merely a secondary aid to interpersonal treatment.

It is against this backdrop that this article aimed to explore the psychological mechanisms underlying infotherapy and its potential applications, addressing a pressing need within library and information science to adapt therapeutic practice to the digital age and to harness the power of information in the service of mental well-being. Consequently, this article examined the cognitive mechanisms of infotherapy, the crossroad for psychology and library science, information as therapeutic tool (infotherapy),

Cognitive mechanisms of infotherapy

Understanding the cognitive mechanisms involved in infotherapy provides insight into how information affects the psyche, ultimately influencing mental health outcomes. Cognitive processes such as attention, perception, memory, and reasoning play pivotal roles in how individuals process and interpret information. Attentional mechanisms filter incoming information, determining what is attended to and processed further (Posner & Petersen, 1990). Perception involves the organization and interpretation of sensory information, shaping individuals' understanding of their environment (Gregory, 1997). Memory processes encode, store, and retrieve information, influencing the accessibility and impact of that information on subsequent cognitive processes (Tulving, 1972). Reasoning encompasses higher-order cognitive processes such as problem-solving and decision-making, crucial for applying information to real-world situations (Evans, 2003).

The impact of information on mental health is profound, with both positive and negative effects depending on factors such as content, timing, and individual differences. Access to accurate and relevant information can empower individuals to make informed decisions, enhance problem-solving skills, and promote adaptive coping strategies (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Psychoeducational interventions that provide information about mental health conditions and treatment options have been shown to reduce stigma, increase treatment adherence, and improve overall mental health outcomes (Corrigan et al., 2012). However, misinformation or exposure to distressing content can exacerbate anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). Additionally, information overload, characterized by an overwhelming volume of information, can lead to cognitive fatigue, decision paralysis, and increased stress levels (Eppler & Mengis, 2004). Understanding how

information-processing mechanisms interact with mental health is, therefore, essential to optimizing the therapeutic potential of infotherapy. This study, accordingly, explores the therapeutic properties and applications of information as a tool for therapy, and the process of infotherapy process.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and information processing - The crossroad for psychology and library science.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and information processing intersect at the crossroads of psychology and library science, offering innovative possibilities for infotherapy. CBT is a widely utilized therapeutic approach that focuses on identifying and modifying maladaptive thought patterns and behaviors (Beck, 1979). Central to CBT is the recognition that individuals' interpretations of events, rather than the events themselves, influence their emotional reactions and behaviors (Beck, 1976). This cognitive restructuring process aligns closely with the principles of information processing, as it involves challenging and revising individuals' beliefs and schemas based on new information (Clark & Beck, 2010). Thus, CBT serves as a natural complement to infotherapy, harnessing the power of information to promote cognitive and behavioral change.

CBT techniques can be integrated with information processing principles to enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. Bibliotherapy, a form of self-help intervention that utilizes written materials for therapeutic purposes, leverages CBT strategies to promote cognitive restructuring and symptom reduction (Mains *et al*., 2016). Digital interventions such as internet-based CBT programs offer scalable and cost-effective platforms for delivering Infotherapy to a wider audience (Andersson *et al*., 2019). Through interactive modules, psychoeducational materials, and therapeutic exercises, these programs facilitate information processing and cognitive restructuring, leading to improvements in mental health outcomes. Thus, the integration of CBT principles with information processing techniques holds promise for advancing the field of infotherapy and enhancing the quality of mental health care provision.

Information as a therapeutic tool (Infotherapy)

The role of information as a survival resource in the 21st century alongside other natural resources such as land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated. Information is very crucial for the day-to-day survival of the human populace. Information is the new gold, that is no longer considered a commodity solely for privileged few. Information has been used for several purposes, particularly, in the penal institution (reform, resettlement and reintegration of societal offenders), economic institutions, political institutions, social institutions, and other units of the society.

This realization that information is a key to institutional and mental functioning, productivity and growth in a sustainable world order has led to the propagation of information creation and dissemination. Importantly, information bears far more significance than is perceived in physical institutions. The extraordinary influence of information is being utilized therapeutically in treatment of mental disorders and psychosis. This is known as bibliotherapy – the use of reading information materials in behavioral modification processes. Although, bibliotherapy is based on the will of the individual to participate in the process by reading the provided information materials. Hence, bibliotherapy requires the cognition that there is need for help and conscious effort (reading) to achieve needed result. Also, bibliotherapy is carried out in a group setting such as group of individuals with a common problem. However, there is another role of information that adopts a personal approach to individual's mental problem. This is known as 'infotherapy'.

Infotherapy

According to Noruzi (2021), most of the problems of many individuals could be traced to not paying attention to the words (information) of others, because of the erroneous tendency of information self-sufficient, yet it is a popular saying that no one individual has monopoly of knowledge. Infotherapy is utilized in cases where the individual has or does not have the cognition that they need help. Hence, the situation of using information to help individuals who are not aware that they need help is known as infotherapy (information counselling). Infotherapy is the treatment of mental, psychological and behavioural problems through the optimistic power of the mind and human thinking based on information.

Noruzi (2021) asserted that listening is benefiting from the wisdom and knowledge of the people we live with and have a relationship with. The field of psychology and counselling derive so much from the hearing therapy for clients with mild mental and psychological problems. This is directly related to providing right information to correct erroneous thinking or belief. The author conceptualized this act of 'information' and 'solving problems' defining the therapeutic role of psychologist, counsellors and librarians. Accordingly, Mohsanzadeh *et al.*, (2017) explained that:

> since the 1954s, with the establishment of libraries in hospitals and medical centers in the United States of America and some Western European countries, hospital librarians, with the advice of psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts, provide hopeful and uplifting books to various patients to give hope to their lives, increase and improve their physical and mental treatment process.

This buttressed the concept of infotherapy. According to Mitchell (1994), infotherapy is the "therapeutic provision of information to people for the amelioration of physical and mental health and well-being", thus, identifying the place of librarians in information counselling. The information is provided to bring about the desired change. Noruzi (2021) asserted that "the human brain has a special power and position in solving issues and problems. In fact, it is the human brain that makes decisions and solves the problem based on the received information"

The processes of infotherapy

Infotherapy plays a significant role in self-help and self-improvement initiatives, offering individuals valuable resources and guidance for personal growth and development. Through self-directed infotherapy, individuals have the opportunity to access a wealth of information and tools to address their mental health concerns, enhance their coping skills, and cultivate a greater sense of well-being. Maslow's concept of the proverbial hammer offers insights into the importance of expanding one's repertoire of information to effectively address life's complexities (Maslow, 1966). Maslow posited that individuals often approach diverse challenges in life with a limited set of solutions or perspectives, akin to using a hammer for every task. Maslow's analogy suggests that providing individuals with a diverse array of information can empower them to navigate life's challenges more effectively. Self-help books, online resources, and mobile applications are among the many avenues through which individuals can engage in infotherapy (Levant, 2004). These resources often provide practical strategies, exercises, and insights for managing stress, overcoming

challenges, and fostering resilience. Infotherapy processes include the following:

i. *Identification of problem* – this is the first phase where the client is identified with his/her problems. The librarian helps the client to realize that there is need for intervention as the clients that require infotherapy usually are not aware of the need for help. Often, clients requiring infotherapy for mental health care may not fully grasp the extent of their challenges or the potential benefits of seeking help (Jones & O'Neil, 2011). Through empathetic listening and gentle guidance, the librarian helps the client acknowledge their struggles and the importance of seeking assistance.

ii. *Cognitive dissonance* – this is the actual therapeutic stage. The librarian carefully selects thought-provoking information materials and provides them to the client. These materials are designed to challenge existing beliefs and thought patterns, leading to a cognitive conflict known as cognitive dissonance. As the clients grapple with conflicting information, they undergo a process of introspection and self-reflection. This would lead to catharsis within the client to conflict with the defeating thought. The client would resolve this cognitive dissonance when the right (new) information replaces the conflicting (old) information. Subsequently, the process of insightfulness emerges as the client gains a deeper understanding of their situation and begins to make conscious decisions.

iii. *Insight* – insightfulness involves the integration of new knowledge and perspectives gained through infotherapy into the client's self-awareness and decision-making processes (Seligman, 2018). This is gained by replacing the defeating information, the client would gain insight by gaining an understanding of his/her situation and making conscious decision on how to stay healthy through the information made available by the librarian.

iv. *Concretization* – individuals who are not in touch with reality lack congruence. Taking them through infotherapy brings them closer to reality, thereby, establishing concretization – the situation of being in congruent with reality within oneself. This serves as the culmination of the infotherapy process, where the client moves closer to reality and achieves a state of congruent with their inner selves and external environment. Through infotherapy, individuals who may have been disconnected from reality or struggled with incongruence gain clarity and alignment between their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Rogers, 1951). This process involves harnessing the innate problem-solving abilities of the human brain, as individuals utilize the information received during infotherapy to make informed decisions and address their challenges effectively. In essence, infotherapy serves as a transformative journey guided by the librarian, where clients are empowered to confront their issues, challenge their beliefs, gain insight, and achieve congruence with reality.

Conclusion

This article discussed information as an important factor for human and societal development. The contemporary concepts of information including information cycle, information retrieval, use and

dissemination and misinformation were discussed. Finally, the concept of bibliotherapy and infotherapy, as essential element in the treatment of minor mental problems was discussed. The article recognized the healing power of the mind which is reached through right information in helping individuals. The processes of applying infotherapy were listed as problem identification, cognitive dissonance, insight, and concretization. Based on the above, it is recommended that professionals such as librarians, psychologists, guidance counsellors and social workers could collaborate effectively in the application of infotherapy as an alternative to medicine in the cure of minor mental problems.

Based on the foregoing, the study therefore recommends that;

1. Librarians, psychologists, guidance counsellors and social workers should collaborate in the provision of infotherapy services, particularly for individuals experiencing minor mental, psychological and behavioural problems.
2. Libraries should incorporate infotherapy into appropriate library and information services by providing carefully selected, credible and constructive information materials that can support users' psychological well-being.
3. Librarians should be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills in psychology, counselling and information behaviour to enable them identify information-vulnerable users and appropriately guide them towards beneficial information resources.
4. Libraries should develop curated information resources for self-help and personal development, including books, online resources and digital materials that can assist users in managing stress, overcoming challenges and developing positive coping strategies.
5. Information-literacy programmes should emphasize the evaluation and responsible use of health and psychological information, particularly in the digital environment where misinformation and information overload may negatively affect users' mental well-being.
6. Further studies should be conducted on the application and effectiveness of infotherapy in library and information centers, particularly through collaborative interventions involving librarians and relevant mental-health professionals.

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