

**SECTION: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
ADVICE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY**
**РОЗДІЛ: ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ТА МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОГО
КОНСУЛЬТУВАННЯ ТА ПСИХОТЕРАПІЇ**

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**INFODEMICS AND CHALLENGES OF HUMAN-CENTERED PSYCHOTHERAPY PRACTICE IN TIMES
OF THE «PERFECT STORM»**

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The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the dynamics of collective psychological processes, giving rise to the phenomenon known as the infodemic. Infodemics represent an intensified form of mental epidemics in which excessive, distorted, or manipulative information spreads rapidly through digital media, amplifying uncertainty, anxiety, polarization, and psychosocial vulnerability. This process unfolds against the background of multiple overlapping global crises, conceptualized in this paper as a «perfect storm» encompassing armed conflicts, pandemics, technological acceleration, erosion of institutional trust, and structural uncertainty. The aim of this study is to conceptualize infodemics as an evolutionary stage of mental epidemics in digitally mediated societies and to analyze their psychological impact on individuals and populations, as well as the challenges they pose to contemporary psychotherapeutic practice, particularly within person-centered and humanistic approaches. The paper employs a theoretical and interdisciplinary methodology combining historical-comparative analysis of mental epidemics, conceptual modeling, and critical synthesis of research from psychology, media studies, and mental health. The article proposes heuristic conceptual models for assessing infodemic intensity and its psychological impact, highlighting the interaction between information-technological affordances, crisis-related stress, psychosocial vulnerability, and levels of institutional trust. It is argued that infodemics contribute to the reconfiguration of mental health norms, therapeutic demand, and modes of psychological distress, increasingly characterized by fragmentation of meaning, affective dysregulation, and erosion of shared reality. Special attention is given to the implications of these processes for person-centered psychotherapy. The paper suggests that infodemics challenge core therapeutic conditions—empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence—while simultaneously underscoring their critical importance as non-algorithmizable resources for maintaining human subjectivity. The study concludes that person-centered psychotherapy can be understood not only as a clinical practice but also as a protective humanistic framework capable of supporting meaning-making and psychological resilience in digitally saturated and crisis-prone environments.

Keywords: cognitive war; infodemic; mental epidemics; digital media and mental health; psychological warfare and information influence; global crises and psychological vulnerability; person-centered psychotherapy; perfect storm

The large-scale military aggression against Ukraine, which was launched by the Russian Federation under the name of a «special military operation» on February 24, 2022, and continues to this day, belongs to a relatively new type of warfare. From a geopolitical point of view, it is an attempt at revanchism after the collapse of the USSR, a specific political and economic regime that took shape during Putin's rule (under the conditional name of Rashism) and a revision of the current political and economic architecture of the world. From a purely military

point of view, it is only the next stage of escalation, another continuation by other means of the foreign policy conflict that began in 2014 in connection with Ukraine's European choice and was accompanied by the covert military annexation of Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. From a historical point of view, it is the Ukrainian nation's resistance to deliberate genocide, the struggle for independence and the right to exist as a modern project instead of the archaic neo-colonial project of the former Russian Empire, which is being imposed in

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this way. From a cultural point of view, it is a war for historical memory and national identity. From a psychological point of view, it is a war for consciousness and freedom, or, conversely, total control over the main resource – human resources.

The complexity, systematicity, and multidimensionality of the war have been summarized under the term hybridity. It would be incorrect to say that this is a completely new strategy and tactic of warfare; the authors of the collection edited by Murray and Mansur (Kocharian, O.S., Barinova, N.V., 2023) highlight nine examples of wars from antiquity to the second half of the 20th century in which various aspects of hybridity were formed. Today, the most complete definition of hybrid warfare is a war that combines the use of conventional weapons, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, cyber warfare, trade wars, patent wars, revanchist movements, propaganda, human rights violations, crimes against humanity, military exercises, resettlement, usurpation, acts of censorship, and criminal behavior to achieve certain political goals. Its main tool is the creation of internal contradictions and conflicts by the aggressor state in the state chosen for aggression, with their subsequent use to achieve the goals that would be achieved by conventional warfare.

An important component of this type of war is information and psychological operations. There is even a term, information and psychological warfare, which can be understood in a narrow military sense or more broadly as «information confrontation», depending on the context of a particular official document or scientific publication. Therefore, the definition of special information and psychological operations includes confrontation between the parties through the dissemination of specially prepared information and countering similar external influence on oneself. The target audience of these operations includes not only the military but also the civilian population. The more networked a society is and the more it enters the content civilization, the more it creates a communicative mass (a new type of crowd) and the more vulnerable it is to this influence. Back in 2014, G. Pocheptsov (Maksymenko, S. D., & Terletska, Y. M., 2023) assessed the military confrontation between Ukraine and the Russian Federation as «the first semantic war in the world» where images and visualizations trigger emotional perception of information, eliminating a rational approach to reasoning.

Some of the important targets of such operations are thoughts, emotions, and behavior at the individual and group levels. By striking these targets with various manipulations, certain military goals can be achieved with greater efficiency and fewer losses of human and material resources. According to American intelligence officer and scholar Paul Linebarger (Khazratova, N. V., & Sidenko, Y. O. 2023), who wrote the classic work Psychological Warfare: Theory and Practice of Mass Mind Control in 1948, psychological warfare differs from conventional warfare primarily in that it begins long before the declaration of hostilities and continues after their end.

N.V. Maruta and M.V. Markova (Cinelli, M., & Quattrociocchi, W., 2020) point out that in information and

psychological operations, it is difficult to talk about the boundaries between normality and pathology. Therefore, the loss of adequacy in reflecting oneself and the world in one's consciousness and attitude towards the world and oneself can serve as an indicator of damage. In extreme cases, this can mean «personality distortion with a simplified reflection of reality, coarser reactions, and a shift from the need to fulfill higher needs (for self-actualization, social recognition) to lower ones (physiological, everyday needs). In addition, there are «shifts in values, life positions, orientations, and worldview of the individual. Such changes lead to manifestations of deviant antisocial behavior».

However, in our opinion, hybrid military actions are another current wave of a more global civilizational process, which can be metaphorically described as quantum, because all of humanity is simultaneously its material, driving forces, goal, executors, and observers. In the social sciences and humanities, it is generally referred to as a «perfect storm». There are many different definitions, so we will give our own: it is a complex set of changes of a global, in fact, civilizational nature, which occur heterochronously, in different places, but systematically, at different levels of human and social existence and are associated with processes that are objective and poorly understood by the majority of humanity. At each stage of these changes, the number of these processes increases, they tend to merge, interact, and create a certain synergy, and have fundamental consequences. One of the waves of this «perfect storm» is the crisis of the old-world order and the desire for a new division of the world based on the law of the strong.

Our vision of the «perfect storm» is that it originated at the beginning of the 20th century in connection with fundamental scientific discoveries in technical (primarily physics) and natural (physiology) sciences and, accordingly, the creation of cheap and mass technologies for the rapid transmission of information over long distances (e.g., radio) and illusory immersive experiences (e.g., cinema). From this perspective, all the great achievements and tragedies of world history in the 19th and 20th centuries (social revolutions, world wars, authoritarian ideologies, space exploration, the race between socialist and capitalist economic models, nuclear confrontation, silicon electronics, genetic engineering, terrorism, etc.) were manifestations of one wave or another. The first attempts at reflection appeared in the 1930s (remember the philosophical works of José Ortega y Gasset, the literary works of Hermann Hesse (Briand, S., Cinelli, M., Nguyen, T., Lewis, R., Prybylski, D., Stricher, M., Rebello, C., & Quattrociocchi, W., 2021), surrealism, etc.), and in the 1960s, under various names, the «perfect storm» entered the field of scientific research (in psychology, this was linked in a certain way to the emergence of a third force - the «existential-humanistic» direction). In the 1970s, due to the rapid development of technology, some aspects of this «storm» were idealized (for psychology, this marked the beginning of an era of evidence, efficiency, protocol, etc., i.e., everything that could be algorithmized). Enthusiasm for scientific

progress and rapid improvement in the quality of life for a long time prevented people from seeing the «dark side.» Only in the first quarter of the 21st century did various dimensions of the «perfect storm» begin to be actively researched and discussed in connection with acute socio-political relevance. Therefore, today we see desperate political attempts to stop the next wave of the «perfect storm» with populist proposals and actions aimed at returning to an isolated and stagnant idealized past.

Today, we can identify the following dimensions/challenges of the «perfect storm»: 1) radical confrontation between the consumer economy and nature, 2) futuroshock and information overload, 3) phenomena of the second demographic transition (transformation of «traditional» family models and values, digital sexuality, maturity inflation, etc.), 4) exploitation of differences between «digital migrants» and «digital natives,» 5) formation of a new anthropological type (conditionally *Homo digital*) thanks to AI algorithms, digital «doubles» of people, digital identity, network society, surveillance capitalism, and the social class of «useless people»; in a broader context, the civilization of content, 6) the psychological tyranny of opportunity and choice, 7) the problem of the death of expertise, post-truth, and hyperreality, 8) algorithmization of specialists and the comfort of the «information bubble,» 9) dopamine manipulation, and 10) the spread of digital dementia.

Unfortunately, no matter how terrible and dire the times may seem to us, according to this logic, the perfect storm has not yet reached its peak—the final great migration of humanity not to Mars, but from the physical, materially limited reality to the literally boundless (for now) digital virtual reality. Or, paradoxically, we can phrase it the other way around, which does not change the essence: to finally replace human reality with its simulacra.

Accordingly, the «perfect storm» is changing the understanding and assessment of mental health, psychopathology, and psychological problems, as well as models, approaches, and methods of psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance. Next, we will consider these changes from the perspective of a relatively new phenomenon, such as infodemics.

The object of study is infodemics as new evolutionary forms of mass mental health and functioning disorders (mental epidemics) in the context of systemic global crises caused by the development of information technologies.

The subject of the study is the challenges of modern psychotherapeutic practice associated with the psychological impact of infodemics in the context of a «perfect storm».

The purpose of the study is to predict future infodemics and identify key challenges and possible guidelines for the development of human-centered psychotherapy methods in the context of a «perfect storm» based on theoretical understanding and conceptual modeling.

Research objectives:

1. Analyze the evolution of mental epidemics and outline the specifics of infodemics as a phenomenon of the «perfect storm».

2. Identify key psychological factors influencing the emergence and spread of infodemics and propose conceptual models for assessing the intensity of infodemics and their psychological impact on the population.

3. Describe scenarios for future infodemics in different time horizons.

4. Reveal the challenges to modern human-centered methods in psychotherapy associated with the psychological impact of infodemics in the context of a «perfect storm».

Personal contribution of the authors:

M.E. Zhidko – development of the idea of the dynamics of the «perfect storm», description of its dimensions, forecasting challenges for human-centered psychotherapy.

Y.I. Gulyi – conceptual modeling and forecasting of infodemics.

Main material:

As medievalists say, epidemics are the price we pay for globalization. When we talk about epidemics, we most often refer to biological pandemics (the Great Plague, cholera, Spanish flu in the early 20th century, etc.). But at the same time, there were also mental epidemics.

Mental epidemics (also known as mass psychogenic illness, mass hysteria, or social-behavioral contagion) are phenomena in which symptoms (often neurological, psychosomatic, or behavioral in nature) spread instantly among groups of people through social contagion and other socio-psychological mechanisms. Based on the chronology known to us, we will attempt to classify the most famous mental epidemics. These include: medieval epidemics of dancing and religious ecstasy (for example, the dancing mania of 1374 in a number of cities along the Rhine or the Plimpton demonic possession among nuns in European monasteries in the 15th–16th centuries, the so-called case of Urbain Grandier), witch hunts and political panics of the Modern Age (the infamous Salem witch trials (1692–1693), hysterical phenomenology in the Age of Enlightenment and industrialization (e.g., the so-called Great Fear among peasants in France in 1789, tics, tremors, paralysis, and hallucinations among French and British factory workers in the 19th century), media-induced panic (e.g., during the broadcast of «The War of the Worlds» in 1938 or the epidemic of laughter at a boarding school for girls in Tanzania in 1962), mass poisoning of a sociogenic nature, for example, in Macedonia in 1999), fake news and moral panic on social media (we remember all those conspiracy theories about «spiked oranges,» the «Blue Whale» challenge, etc. from the early 2000s to the present day).

Despite the variety of forms, they are united by a number of common factors:

1. The presence of stress associated with a deep crisis (e.g., plague, famine, war, political instability, repressive conditions, etc.).

2. A specific historical and cultural context that determines the forms that symptoms take (demonology, hysteria, conspiracy theories, etc.).

3. A closed or networked environment (monasteries, schools, factories, online communities, etc.).

4. Vulnerability of the target audience (discriminated or marginalized groups that have limited other opportunities to influence the situation).

5. Development of information and technological mechanisms of mass influence for manipulative purposes.

According to the World Health Organization, an «infodemic» (a portmanteau of ‘information’ and ‘pandemic’) is the emergence of an excessive amount of information about a problem, which complicates the search for a solution. An infodemic contributes to the spread of rumors, inaccurate data, and fake news during an emergency. Coronavirus is the first pandemic in human history to occur in the age of social media, which means that misinformation spreads faster than the virus itself.

In our opinion, infodemics are just another stage in the evolution of mental epidemics, which is now taking place in the digital environment. Accordingly, the content and forms of infodemics are directly related to the current wave of the global «perfect storm». But the essential difference between this stage and previous ones is that both biological and mental viruses today are not only created artificially, but also actively used as weapons. COVID-19 is a striking example of a «perfect storm» in which a biological epidemic worked in tandem with an infodemic.

Theoretical considerations are valuable only when they enable assessment and prediction. I am sure that everyone understands that the future global «arms race» will be associated not only with the use of artificial intelligence, but also with conditional mental weapons. Therefore, based on the analysis of mental epidemics and the experience of infodemics, as well as taking into account the defined dimensions of the «perfect storm», we have

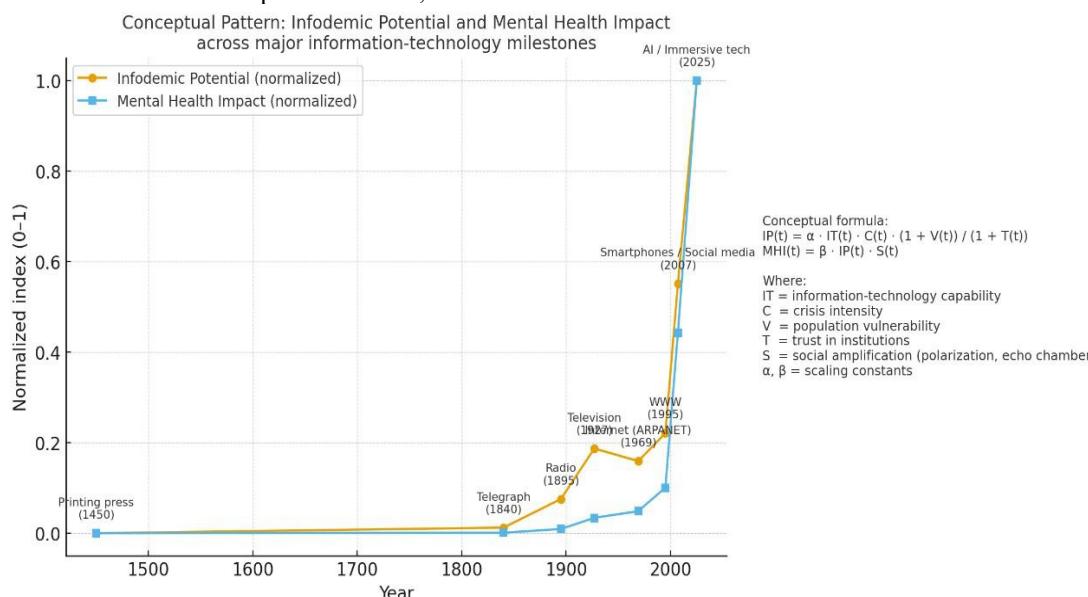


Figure 1. Graph showing the correlation between technological development and mental epidemics

Figure 1 shows a graph of the relationship between technological development and mental epidemics according to these formulas. As can be seen immediately, as information technology developed (from printing to AI), the potential for infodemics grew, but not linearly, but in

attempted to derive hypothetical conceptual formulas that allow us to assess and predict the intensity of current and future infodemics and their psychological impact on the population.

The formula for assessing intensity is as follows:

$$IP(t) = \alpha \cdot IT(t) \cdot C(t) \cdot (1 + V(t)) / (1 + T(t)),$$

where:

IP(t) – intensity of infodemic

IT – information and technological capabilities (speed, coverage, immersiveness).

C – intensity of stress/crisis (war, pandemic, climate disasters).

V – vulnerability of the social group (urbanization, economic/psychosocial stressors).

T – trust in institutions (higher trust reduces the risk of infodemic).

α – scale constant (a constant used in modeling for normalization, comparability, and correct scaling of values).

Accordingly, the formula for assessing the psychological impact of infodemics on the population is as follows:

$$MHI(t) = \beta \cdot IP(t) \cdot S(t)$$

where:

MHI(t) – psychological impact on the population.

S – social amplification (openness of society, presence of polarization, algorithmic reinforcement, etc.).

β – scale constant.

The correlation between technological development and mental epidemics is presented in Fig. 1.

leaps and bounds: various technological leaps and corresponding historical crises create surges. The psychological impact depends on the intensity of the mental epidemic, but is significantly amplified by social amplification (which is why the era of smartphones and

social networks has had such a huge psychological impact on the population).

The situation becomes even more interesting if we superimpose this graph on other models for predicting crises (including epidemics) that are based on cyclicity. It turns out that mental epidemics and infodemics are not chaotic—they are formed at the intersection of three long cycles: passionate waves (approximately 300 years), social-generational rhythms (approximately 30 years), and astro-biological fluctuations (approximately 11 years). When these cycles overlap, a «perfect storm window» emerges, in which societies become particularly vulnerable to information technology and collective affects.

All these conceptual conclusions require careful empirical testing, but even now, with a great deal of risk, certain predictions can be made.

They can be divided into three groups.

The first is the nearest infodemics (2025–2027), the probability of which we estimate at 60–85%. From our point of view, there are two triggers and, accordingly, two scenarios.

The first scenario is «Simplification/Cognitive Economy» (probability ~70%). In fact, we are already living in this infodemic, but we do not have the courage to say it out loud. Simplification (or «cognitive miserliness» according to S. Fisk) permeates all dimensions of individual and social life: from «simple decisions» about oneself to «simple decisions» about geopolitical conflicts. In this scenario, the weakness and inadequacy of the values and mechanisms of Western civilization and sympathy for authoritarian leaders and populists who willingly offer simple ways of thinking are natural. We can joke all we want about the historical nonsense of the Kremlin psychopath, but let's admit that they do a good job of functioning as mental viruses. And regardless of how the war in Ukraine ends, the infodemic of the «power of simple truth» will continue as long as simplification provides opportunities for monetization and escalation, and most of humanity has not «recovered» from it with various consequences (even if this simplification results in one or a series of major catastrophic events). Due to simplification, fact-checking is now more readily perceived as hostile propaganda rather than a tool of truth.

The second scenario is «AI-personalized electoral shock». I estimate its probability at 60%. Most likely, the date will be 2026–2027, when the world will see a series of national elections.

Targeting key demographic groups and the rapid spread of personalized deepfake materials (which will be impossible to verify in time) through messengers and platforms, the strategy is not to convince people of one thing, but to generally undermine trust in everything. This will lead to a degradation of trust in election results and an increase in social tension (including local but very intense outbreaks of radicalization). In the most negative scenario, global society will fragment into micro-colonies of reality («truth clusters»), where each social group will exist in a separate informational and emotional cocoon. It will become impossible or very difficult to make joint

decisions. This could result in both domestic political crises and foreign policy aggression. We are already seeing the beginning of this infodemic in conversations about digital concentration camps. In addition, the active use of shock content will lead to the emergence of psychogenic «affective blindness» – a dulling of emotional response to any extraordinary events. Unfortunately, we can also observe this now under the name «war fatigue» (also known as compassion fatigue and moral injury).

The second group consists of infodemics in the medium term (2027–2032). Their probability is approximately 40–65%.

One of the scenarios is a «climate catastrophe» (probability ~50%). Timeframe: 2027–2033. The deterioration in quality of life will lead to the use of the «climate apocalypse» in geopolitical manipulations and the false mobilization of society. There will be a proliferation of conspiracy theories about the sources of the apocalypse (from industrial sabotage to genetic engineering accusations), collective helplessness, and dramatic events related to aid (including evacuation). The result will be the polarization of the world depending on the state of the environment. The emergence of AI-synthesized religious cults. Perhaps something else will be the main catastrophic factor (at least one biological virus like COVID or even a «fake» or simulated catastrophe), but the scenario will remain fundamentally the same.

Another scenario in this group is «psychotechnological escalation» (probability ~45%). Timeframe: 2028–2032. We predict that during this period, «psychotechnologies» (neuromodulation, personalized manipulative interventions) will be directly applied in hybrid military-political operations. The result will be concentrated psychological damage in targeted groups (complete or partial disorganization, externally controlled behavior, etc.). One variant of this scenario is the integration of algorithms into government decision-making.

The third group is infodemics in the long term (2033–2045). Their probability is currently around 25–40%.

This includes the «Society of Digital Doubles» scenario, which, in our opinion, will begin after 2035. Large-scale and deep digitalization will lead to an ontological crisis of trust. At present, we can only cautiously predict that this will lead to collective cognitive fatigue and an alienated life in chronic (or habitual) disorientation.

And the last scenario is «neurodemic» (probability ~30%). Term: 2035–2045. We predict that by this time, as in the case of many biological viruses, humanity will have developed a natural «psychic immunity» to infodemics, or more or less effective information vaccinations. At the same time, technological development will make such a leap that mental epidemics will also evolve into the form of neurodemic – that is, fully immersive «viral» virtual realities that will be provided by direct neurotechnological influence. In the literal sense, infodemics will become neurosomatic. Most people will completely lose the illusion of «free will». AR epidemics of hysterical behavior may arise (analogous to medieval dancing, but triggered by AR systems).

Psychotherapy as a separate practice originated in the late 19th century. Most of its directions and approaches were formed precisely in the context of the «perfect storm» (in a sense, it can be said that psychotherapy is one of the offspring of the beginning of this storm) as a response to certain psychological challenges that were actualized by one wave or another.

For example, client-centered psychotherapy emerged in post-war America in the mid-20th century, when Western society sought healing after the horrors of totalitarianism, searched for new forms of freedom, and people began to experience themselves not only as objects of social norms, but as subjects with the right to experience, development, and dignity. In his works, C. Rogers (Kochubeinyk, O. M., 2022) responded in one way or another to the challenges of that era—alienation, excessive directiveness, authoritarianism, psychological violence, and the depersonalization of individuals in institutions. He wrote his last works in the model of the so-called VUCA (acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world.

However, since then, the context itself has changed radically. If back then the threat was external regulation and a lack of agency, today we are dealing with an inflation of agency, where everyone has a voice but no space for genuine dialogue; with an oversaturation of identities but a loss of integrity; with individualism without depth. Instead of authoritarian control, we now have the tyranny of choice—anxiety from an excess of possibilities and a chaos of meanings. So, the challenges that Rogers (Smulson, M. L., & Nazar, M. M., 2021) responded to have either transformed or lost their relevance, and we need to ask ourselves honestly: what challenges shape the current demands for understanding humanity in BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) and SHIVA (Split, Horrible, Inconceivable, Vicious, Arising) worlds, and from what positions do we respond to them?

It is also worth realizing that Rogers' ideas about human beings—their nature, capacity for growth, and endowment with inner goodness—were shaped not only by empirical observations but also by the strong influence of humanist philosophy, liberal Protestantism, phenomenology, and scientific optimism of the mid-20th century. His human being is an autonomous, holistic organism capable of self-actualization in a supportive environment. Today, however, the value landscape has shifted radically: transhumanist ideas about humans as projects for improvement, technological interventions in the psyche and body, and the blurring of boundaries between the natural and the artificial all challenge the very idea of the «holistic self» that underlies the human-centered paradigm. Can we continue to rely on the same ontological ideas about humanity as Rogers in a world where «human» is no longer an immutable category?

Jean Baudrillard (Murphy, D., & Joseph, S., 2021), in his hypothetical interview with Alex Bell in the characteristically titled book *What Geniuses Think: Talking About What Matters with Those Who Are Changing the World*, says: "The only thing that no technology can fake is people themselves. You and me.

Our consciousness. Since human consciousness is a kind of transcendental essence and we still don't have the key to how it works, it's not possible to create a full-fledged simulacrum of it. Human consciousness, the brain, is the last line of defense for reality in the universe. If technology ever allows us to create an artificial human with a full consciousness, the appearance of such a monster will spell the end of human civilization. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in the age of infodemics and language simulators, full consciousness is synonymous with humanity and the main target of both infodemics and information-psychological operations. Therefore, it is not technological but human-centered approaches in psychology and psychotherapy that, by definition, oppose the «perfect storm».

The «perfect storm» stimulates and encourages us to view people, mental health assessment standards, and the content of psychological problems through the prism of system «functions», content consumption, and algorithmic elements. This is not just a technological shift. It is what Martin Heidegger (Smith, T., et al., 2024) called the forgetting of being: when human existence is reduced to presence, to a «resource», losing its profound existential openness. Human-centered types of psychotherapy are, in essence, an act of resistance to this forgetting. They not only «help a person adapt», but also return them to an existential dialogue with themselves as who they are, not just who they function as.

In this sense, human-centered approaches in psychotherapy today are ontological gestures of remembrance. They appeal to what in a person cannot be reduced to simulation, neural networks, or behavioral patterns. They create a space in which the client can ask again: Who am I? How do I exist? What does it mean to be alive in a world that is rapidly losing ground? And it is precisely this quality of questioning—not a technique, but an attitude—that makes psychotherapy relevant in an age where the very question of human existence is being pushed out of sight (Zarocostas, J., 2020).

Next, we will formulate a series of challenges for the person-centered therapist that broaden and deepen the question of humanity today.

In our opinion, the following challenges exist in relation to the trend of self-actualization today:

— Can we trust our inner desire for growth when external conditions are destructive and traumatic? (For example, the well-known experience of war, loss, forced migration, etc. among our Ukrainian colleagues).

— To what extent is the trend toward self-actualization today not organic but virtual, determined by artificial intelligence algorithms?

— How can we maintain hope and faith in a client's potential when he or she is experiencing extreme stress or trauma?

Challenges for the trinity of therapeutic conditions:

— Empathy: How can a therapist understand an experience that goes beyond his or her own (e.g., combat experience, life under occupation, or being a virtual being, etc.)? Is there such a thing as empathy for a virtual experience? How does the simulation of empathy by

artificial intelligence language models (which, unlike human empathy, quickly encompasses any phenomenology) differ from «live» empathy? To what extent does «compassion fatigue or burnout» develop in extreme conditions? How do experiences and communication in the digital world affect empathy? How can we empathize with the existential anxiety associated with global threats?

– Unconditional positive regard (UPR): Is it easy to maintain UPR when clients express radical views shaped by propaganda or conditioned by trauma? Or when their coping mechanisms seem destructive? How can we accept despair, aggression, and apathy caused by a global crisis with a very uncertain outcome?

– Congruence: How can a therapist be authentic when they themselves are experiencing anxiety, fear, fatigue, and other strong emotions associated with the «perfect storm»? Where is the line between sincerity and burdening the client with one's own experiences? When and to what extent does congruence, like empathy, become a factor in therapist burnout?

Challenges for process-oriented therapy:

– Focus on the «here and now» vs. working with past trauma and future uncertainty.

– The growing need for crisis intervention and stabilization – how to integrate this into a non-directive approach?

– Ethical dilemmas (confidentiality in wartime, working with limited resources, etc.).

These challenges are fairly easy to simulate by conducting a simple thought experiment: if you were tasked with to write an appropriate prompt for any type of artificial intelligence in order to create a model of a human-centered specialist for modern people (for example, those born in the digital age, i.e., whose socialization took place during the existence of digital information technologies), how would you describe the characteristics of thinking, emotions, and interaction? Would this description differ from your answer to this question twenty years ago? And even more interesting – what would you say for a model of a specialist in 20 years?

When uncertainty seems unbearable, temptations arise. We will mention only a few of them. The temptation to technologize psychotherapy – to make it predictable, measurable, controllable – is growing. Under the guise of efficiency, standardized protocols, KPIs, and emotion checklists are being introduced. The psychotherapist is turning into a system operator who «performs interventions» rather than a person who meets the Other. This is nothing more than another form of forgetting – this time, interpersonal forgetting: the reduction of dialogue to technique, of relationships to transactions, and of lived experience to clinical units of accounting (Scales, D., & Gorman, J. M., 2022).

In this context, the human-centered approach once again finds itself on the brink – not as an archaic alternative, but as resistance to the automation of the inner world. After all, its values – presence, authenticity, trust in the process – cannot be quantified, but are indispensable for human healing. This approach is not against science or structure –

but it is against betraying humanity in the name of controllability. Where other models promise control, human-centeredness leaves room for encounter. And in the age of the perfect storm, perhaps it is precisely this approach that is capable of maintaining direction – not toward a result, but toward meaning.

Human-centered psychotherapists, as people and professionals, should accept that the perfect storm cannot be «survived» by hiding behind classical ideas or trying to restore a world that no longer exists. The human-centered approach should not be nostalgia for the era of humanism or the «end of history» – it should become the frontier of a new understanding of humanity, capable of holding its ground on the border between the real and the virtual, the biological and the digital, the autonomous and the distributed, the networked «I.»

Modern therapists have to work not only with clients, but with people who have lost most of their bearings in life – in time, space, identity, etc. They have to work through their own personalities, which are also trying to stay afloat in the «perfect storm». That's why it's important to understand that the current phase of the storm isn't just a threat, but also another existential awakening: a moment when we can finally look honestly at who modern people have become. And to ask the main therapeutic question: not «Who are you?» but «How do you feel about being human – here, now, in this turbulent world?» The answer to this question will not be easy for our clients or for us, and by definition, it cannot be easy. But as we ponder this answer, we become a point of calm within the storm, a space and time where we can meet with hope for a future that is still worth living.

Summing up our thoughts on humanity in times of the «perfect storm», we can say that being a psychotherapist in the 21st century is not about having the appropriate education and being able to apply it in practice. In the near future, this may and will be replaced by artificial intelligence algorithms. Being a psychotherapist today is a calling to keep the door to humanity open (Zhydko M. E., 2019).

Humanity today resembles a ship that is simultaneously weathering a storm and being rebuilt in the middle of the ocean. Technology accelerates the waves, stress raises their height, and politics makes them toxic. The only thing that keeps the ship upright so far is mental health. Therefore, when the next wave of the perfect storm hits us, no matter how it unfolds, it is important to remember that no storm lasts forever, and no ship can stay afloat without maintenance. Therefore, the question is not whether there will be new infodemics and what they will be like, but whether we will have enough mental and institutional strength to meet them not as victims, but as subjects who are ready and able to repair and rebuild their ship. We believe that our primary professional duty now – as researchers, practitioners, and educators – is to learn and teach precisely this kind of repair.

Conclusions

1. Infodemics are an evolutionary continuation of mental epidemics, radically amplified by digital technologies.

2. The intensity of infodemics is determined not only by the information flow, but by the combination of crisis, vulnerability and trust in institutions.

3. Psychotherapy in the 21st century faces not a deficit of subjectivity, but its inflation and fragmentation.

4. Human-centered approaches perform not only a clinical, but also an ontological function of preserving humanity.

5. Algorithmization of care without an existential dimension creates the risk of new forms of mental alienation.

6. Future infodemics will be personalized, immersive and affective-neural in nature.

7. The key professional competence of a psychotherapist is the ability to maintain the space of meaning in conditions of radical uncertainty.

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Personal contribution of the authors:

M.E. Zhidko – development of the idea of the dynamics of the «perfect storm» description of its dimensions, forecasting challenges for human-centered psychotherapy.

Y.I. Gulyi – conceptual modeling and forecasting of infodemics.

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ІНФОДЕМІЙ ТА ВІКЛИКИ ПРАКТИКИ ЛЮДИНОЦЕНТРОВАНОЇ ПСИХОТЕРАПІЇ В ЧАСИ «ІДЕАЛЬНОГО ШТОРМУ»

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Швидке поширення цифрових комунікаційних технологій кардинально змінило динаміку колективних психологічних процесів, породивши явище, відоме як інфодемія. Інфодемія є інтенсивною формою психічної епідемії, під час якої надмірна, спотворена або маніпулятивна інформація швидко поширюється через цифрові медіа, посилюючи невизначеність, тривогу, поляризацію та психосоціальну вразливість. Цей процес розгортається на тлі численних глобальних криз, що перетинаються між собою, які в цій статті концептуалізуються як «ідеальний шторм», що охоплює збройні конфлікти, пандемії, технологічне прискорення, ерозію інституційної довіри та структурну невизначеність. Метою цього дослідження є концептуалізація інфодемії як еволюційної стадії психічних епідемій у суспільствах, опосередкованих цифровими технологіями, та аналіз їхнього психологічного впливу на окремих осіб і населення, а також викликів, які вони ставлять перед сучасною психотерапевтичною практикою, зокрема в рамках персоноцентричного та гуманістичного підходів. У статті пропонуються концептуальні моделі для оцінки інтенсивності інфодемії та її психологічного впливу, підкреслюючи взаємодію між інформаційно-технологічними можливостями, стресом, пов'язаним з кризою, психосоціальною вразливістю та рівнем інституційної довіри. Стверджується, що інфодемія сприяє реконфігурації норм психічного здоров'я, терапевтичного попиту та форм психологічного дистресу, які все більше характеризуються фрагментацією сенсу, афективною дисрегуляцією та ерозією спільної реальності. Особлива увага приділяється наслідкам цих процесів для психотерапії, орієнтованої на

людину. У статті висловлюється думка, що інфодемія ставить під сумнів основні терапевтичні умови – емпатію, безумовну позитивну оцінку та конгруентність – і водночас підкреслює їх критичну важливість як неалгоритмізованих ресурсів для збереження людської суб'єктивності. У дослідженні робиться висновок, що психотерапія, орієнтована на особу, може розумітися не тільки як клінічна практика, але й як захисна гуманістична структура, здатна підтримувати створення сенсу та психологічну стійкість у цифровому насиченому та схильному до криз середовищі.

Ключові слова: *інфодемія, психічні епідемії, цифрові медіа та психічне здоров'я, психологічна війна та інформаційний вплив, глобальні кризи та психологічна вразливість, психотерапія, орієнтована на особу, ідеальний шторм*

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