

A Preliminary Study on the Use of Second Life for Career Counseling

Fu-Yun YU^{a*}, Ben CHANG^b, Hsiao-Ting HSIEH^a & Yan Yin CHEN^b

^aInstitute of Education, National Cheng Kung University

^bDepartment of E-learning Design and Management, National Chiayi University

**fuyun.ncku@gmail.com*

Abstract: The present study intends to explore the potential of Second Life as compared to traditional face-to-face and internet counseling practices for university counseling. Different spaces and avatars have been constructed in Second Life to support university students' exploration of their career choices in a virtual environment. The perceptions of 45 university students with regards to their preference and perceived potential of different counseling channels as well as factors affecting their choice were collected. As evidenced in the study though Second Life is least preferred by the respondents when seeking counseling, its potential is well received. Suggestions for future developments are provided.

Keywords: career counseling, internet counseling, Second Life, virtual reality

1. Introduction

To supplement traditional face-to-face counseling, internet counseling has been present since 90s. With the fast advancements in computer and network technologies, forms of internet counseling and helping services become more versatile in recent years. Current common forms for Internet counseling are e-mail, electronic bulletin boards, instant messaging and Internet chat rooms and so on [1, 2]. With its distinct features like convenience, anonymity and instantaneity, Internet counseling is growing popularity [2]. However, non-verbal messages and cues (e.g. clients' movements, facial features, appearances, etc.), which are considered crucial, cannot be transpired or detected in cyber counseling contexts. In light of the potential of immersive technology for enriching sensory experience during interaction, the present study explored the potential of Second Life. Specifically, participants' preference and perceived potential of different counseling channels (namely, traditional face-to-face, internet counseling and counseling in Second Life) was explored. In addition, factors influencing participants' choices in counseling venues were investigated.

2. Career Counseling Spaces Built in Second Life

Several spaces, each with a specific designated purpose, were created in Second Life (28,141,79) to support counseling practices: lobby, questionnaire room, dressing room, resources room and counseling room. The lobby is check-in space and reserved for social interaction among participants (Figure 1). The questionnaire room, housing a battery of vocational interest inventory and personal resume, enables participants to take any online career interest assessments for future analysis and reference (Figure 2). The dressing room

allows participants to change their appearances (e.g., clothing, accessories, hair style, etc.) by being transported to other spaces in Second Life. The resources room, by showing a video clip of a typical day of different vocations, is designed to familiarize students with the normal life associated with the job of interest. Five counseling rooms, each with a distinct style (i.e., standard counseling room, western tarot emphasis, oriental fortune-telling style, Buddhist style, Christianity emphasis) are built in consideration of people's tendency to resort to religious or mysteries power when in distress or puzzlement (Figure 3). Finally, to allow the clients to choose who to interact with (i.e., the helper in the case), six counselors with different gender and styles (i.e., female and male with a professional look, traditional Chinese look, and causal look) were created (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1 Lobby



Fig. 2 Questionnaire room

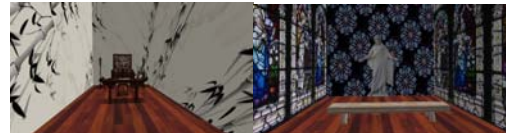


Fig. 3 Counseling rooms



Fig. 4 Counselors with different gender and styles

3. Method

45 psychology major university students were recruited for participation in the study. A 10-minutes slideshow depicting the current practices of traditional face-to-face and internet counseling was briefly reviewed before the newly constructed counseling environment was introduced. A questionnaire was disseminated for individual completion to collect data on participants' preference and perceived potential toward three different counseling channels and factors influencing their choice when seeking counseling.

4. Results, Discussion & Conclusions

Data from the question on students' most preferred counseling venue showed that almost all (93.33%) preferred most the traditional face-to-face over the other two possibilities for their counseling needs. However, when it comes to perceived potential, traditional face-to-face and Second Life were chosen by most respondents (37.78%) (See Table 1). After converting the score of all participants (most preferred and potential as 3, second preferred and potential as 2 and least preferred and potential as 1), Second Life had the highest averaged score on the potential index (2.04) and lowest averaged score on the preference index.

Table 1 Preference and perceived potential of different counseling venues

	Traditional F2F	Internet counseling	Counseling in SL
Most preferred	42 (93.33%)	2 (4.44%)	1 (2.22%)
Second preferred	1 (2.22%)	23 (51.11%)	18 (40%)
Least preferred	1 (2.22%)	18 (40%)	23 (51.11%)
Averaged mean	2.93	1.63	1.48
Most potential	17 (37.78%)	11 (24.45%)	17 (37.78%)
Second potential	10 (22.22%)	22 (48.89%)	13 (28.89%)
Least potential	18 (40%)	12 (26.67%)	15 (33.33%)
Averaged mean	1.98	1.98	2.04

Students responses to the question—“important factors to consider when choosing counseling channels: (a) anonymity, (b) convenience in terms of time and space, (c) seclusiveness of counseling site, (d) diversity and freedom to choose counseling sites, (e) interactivity (both verbal and non-verbal messages detectability, such as facial expression, physical movement, tone of voice, appearance, etc.), (f) freedom to choose the helper, (g) appearance personalization (such as gender, hair style, wardrobe) and (h) others (choose all that apply),” indicated that anonymity, convenience, seclusiveness of counseling site and interactivity were viewed as important by more than half of all respondents.

Table 2 Factors influencing counseling sites choice

	N	%	Rank
Anonymity	31	68.89	3
Convenience	31	68.89	3
Seclusiveness of counseling site	38	84.44	2
Diversity of counseling sites	11	24.44	6
Interactivity	39	86.67	1
Freedom to choose the helper	20	44.44	5
Appearance personalization	3	6.67	7
Others	0	0	

Several important results were obtained. First, though Second Life is least preferred by the respondents, its potential is well received, as evidenced in the study. Second, despite the fact that comparatively fewer respondents regarded variety and freedom of choice with regards to helpers and counseling sites as importance factors (as compared to anonymity, convenience, seclusiveness and interactivity), still nearly one fourth (24.44%) and more than 40% (44.44%) of the respondents viewed them as important factors for counseling. In light of the present study and the affordances of Second Life, its potential for university counseling should be explored more.

References

- [1] Lei, Y. M. (1998). Issues on real-time individual counseling in cyberspace. *Student Guidance*, 56, 100 -109.
- [2] Wang, C. H., Lin, C. W., Liu, S. H., Yang, C. F., & Ling, X. Y. (2008). A survey research study on the development of Cyber Counseling services in Taiwan. *Bulletin of Educational Psychology*, 39(3), 395-412.