# The Therapy Relationship in Digital Interventions

**Background and aims**

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of research on digital interventions showing that they are efficacious for a variety of psychological disorders. Digital interventions can involve various degrees of contact with another human being in the therapist or coach role. Thus, they can range from being completely self-help to having minimal, moderate, or similar levels of contact relative to face-to-face therapy. Furthermore, such contact can take the form of video, text, emails, and phone calls. Also, when contact happens, such contact can range from about 5-10 minutes to an hour per week. Although many studies have suggested that the therapy relationship predicts and may be a mechanism of change for outcome in face-to-face psychotherapy, researchers have wondered if the therapy relationship is equally important to digital interventions.

Studies on this topic have shown that internet interventions that included some form of human contact were not significantly different from face-to-face interventions even when the digital treatments had various degrees of therapist contact (Berger, 2017). However, less is known about the therapy relationship in AI-generated text messages that simulate therapist messaging, chatbot delivered therapy or AI-generated personalized messaging. At the same time, it isn't clear that the relationship is a mechanism of change in digital interventions as the therapeutic bond frequently does not significantly predict outcome. Furthermore, there may be subgroups of participants for whom the therapy relationship is more important than others. It is also possible that machine learning strategies of coding therapist/client messages may be a more objective strategy to assess aspects of the relationship within a digital intervention than the use of measures developed for face-to-face ratings of the alliance, the real relationship, and other aspects of the therapy relationship.

The aim of this special section is to examine emerging research on the therapy relationship within digital interventions, particularly research that looks at such questions as change in the relationship across treatment, association between degree of human contact and therapeutic bond, the relationship as a mechanism of change, alliance or other aspects of the relationship assessed by machine learning techniques, individual differences in the importance of the relationship, and alliance/relationship within automated personalized digital interventions.

**Scope for contributions:**

-must incorporate a digital intervention (can include completely self-help or guided app-based, internet-delivered, chatbot, text messaging, or some form of virtual therapist).
-must include some form of alliance or other relationship measurement

The Special section covers topics such as:

-Comparison of the therapy relationship in a digital versus face-to-face intervention
-The therapy relationship as a predictor of outcome in a digital intervention
-Variations in the therapy relationship across degree or type of human contact

-Individual differences as a predictor of the association between the relationship and outcome
-Changes in the therapy relationship across time
-Machine learning approaches
-Facets of alliance (e.g., agreement on task and goals vs. bond) and outcome

**Submission process:**

- Submit your paper online at https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/tpsr
- Address your cover letter to the guest editors: Michelle G. Newman and Jeff Hayes
- Deadline for submissions to this special issue: August 1, 2022
- Submissions will be screened according to the scope for contributions criteria. Papers that fit the scope will be peer reviewed by at least 2 reviewers.