Digital therapeutic alliance in the context of unguided mental health apps

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Our findings suggest that: 1) Interactive elements are crucial for users to build

emotional connections with (mental) health apps; 2) Apps may need to help users to set up a concrete goal at the beginning; 3) **Rewarding systems** could help to maintain users' accountability.



relationship between a client and a healthcare professional, and has been shown to be an important predictor of outcome in clinical outcomes in face-to-face therapy. Given the significance of TA in traditional therapy, it follows that the notion of a digital therapeutic alliance (DTA) in the context of unguided mental health apps merits investigation.

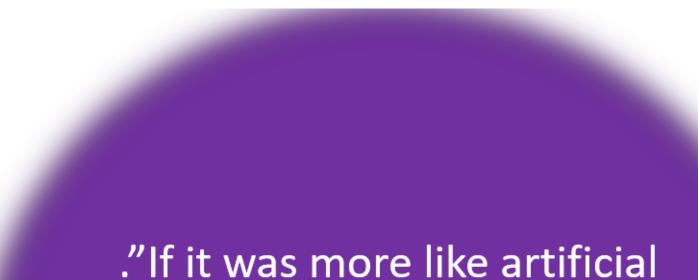
convenient relationship with an app. 2. Building DTA requires a high level of selfinitiative.

- 3. Apps can be emotionally supportive. 4. Users can uniquely open up to apps.
- 5. Most users do not have a goal.

METHODS

We conducted interviews with twenty unguided mental health apps' users to explore dimensions of DTA and performed thematic analysis.

"I just wanted to de-stress and stuff, but no specific goals or things...... I feel like the (relationship with an) app is similar



(to the relationship with therapists). Obviously, it's not a real human. But I think it can help you. It's not rude. The app is very helpful. You can do it at your own pace, it's very considerate." [participant J1]

intelligence or there was more interactivity to it, then it might be more of a relationship." [participant B1]

REFERENCES

Tong, F., Lederman, R., D'Alfonso, S., Berry, K., & Bucci, S. (2023). Conceptualizing the digital therapeutic alliance in the context of fully automated mental health apps: A thematic analysis. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*.



