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**Philosophical Counselling, Personal Brand,
and Social Networks in the Digital Era**

Abstract

The paper argues that philosophical counselling practices must be developed in the context in which we witness a reconstruction of the perspectives on the world and human being through the revolution of internet development, social networks, communication technologies and access to the virtual world. Given this, philosophical counselling and ethical consulting are invited to join the various new areas of activity, including personal brand construction in social media, the focus of this paper. Since the virtual communication space is becoming a medium of effectively affirming personality, social media is the field in which philosophical counselling and ethical counselling can become the main resource for growing a strong personal brand. Whether it is about self-promotion or counselling specialised in commercial and brand communication, technological development facilitates the technology of self-development, substantiated in the relational universe of social media. In the digital world, philosophical counselling brings an increased contribution in terms of the possibility that individuals build themselves, gain recognition, and enjoy a complex exposure governed by the spirit of social responsibility.

Keywords

philosophical counselling, ethical consultancy, personal brand, digital world, social networks, self-promotion, personal growth, ethical communication, brand communication

**Philosophy, Human Development,
and Social Media in the Digital World**

The need for counselling is manifesting itself today as a growing trend globally. In this context, theories regarding philosophical counselling and philosophical practices are continually evolving. We have to keep in mind that, living in a crisis culture, a significant part of secular prophetism tried to assure us that the solution for humanity is spiritual. Thus, we came to believe that human existence itself shall depend either on its quasi-religious character or on its ethical shaping. This prophetism came in on the grounds of a crisis culture and on a pessimism triggered by nihilistic tendencies in the 20th century. Nevertheless, there is also an optimistic culture based on scientific and technological development. A new mythology is about to appear. On the one hand, it must found the digital world as a new world. On the other, it supports the improvement of the human condition, beginning with the elements of the new digital culture. Authors such as Sidney Eve Matrix, Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, Bettina Fabos, or Timothy Scott Barker build up relevant perspectives for the way in which the human being is reconsidered in the frame of a new culture, specific to the world that is being built in the context of the globalisation of communication.¹ Practitioner philosophers could use such texts in the cultural substantiation of their practices.

We have the privilege to live in the dawn of what may be called a digital world or digital era, the most fascinating of the worlds or eras known so far. Philosophy is called to clarify and define the characteristics of this new world. To highlight only a few aspects of the role of philosophy in the new context of technological development specific to the digital age, I would like to recall the statement of Luciano Floridi, according to which:

“We clearly need philosophy to be on board and engaged, for the tasks ahead are serious. We need philosophy to grasp better the nature of information itself. We need philosophy to anticipate and steer the ethical impact of ICTs on us and on our environments. We need philosophy to improve the economic, social, and political dynamics of information. And we need philosophy to develop the right intellectual framework that can help us semanticise (give meaning to and make sense of) our new predicament. In short, we need a philosophy of information as a philosophy of our time for our time.”²

Moreover, philosophy is called to participate in the effort in which, after the modern and the postmodern world, we have to find a generic tag for the stage that is unravelling right before our eyes and to capture its essence as the world. For the time being, I do not find a better discourse on this world other than naming it through an expression already in use: *the digital world*. If with postmodernism the use of “post” indicated a surpass of modernity (through selection, inclusion and innovation), this time, surpassing postmodern world involves a positive concept. This would be the concept of the digital world built by the digital era’s man. As a successor of the modern and postmodern worlds, the digital world may also be called the digital era, even though this expression implies too lengthy a period in terms of time. One should bear in mind that typical of the new world is that man no longer lives and self-defines as a time-connected being because he lives in the network. He is no longer delivered to the time of life but destined to communication. Also, to speak about the essence of a very fast-moving world means to accept the usage of a generic label, needed to delineate specific phenomena of this world that for the moment will not let themselves be defined unequivocally. This implies a new perspective on the world and the need for a new vision of life and the philosophy of life that can be followed. Thus, when we talk about the existence of a good life and the search for authenticity, we must always take into account the existence of a new dimension. If until now we could define the human condition in relation to the physical dimension, the social dimension, the personal dimension and the spiritual dimension, now we cannot ignore the virtual or the digital dimension. Especially with the digital-born generation, the digital dimension becomes a part of human reality without which the human being can no longer define themselves and can no longer find themselves as an authentic being. The digital world no longer has the effect of alienation or slipping on a plane of reality with a very wild consistency. The virtual dimension is part of objective reality, which has incorporated the virtual as a given of the existence of man in the digital age.

When we talk about the digital world or digital era, we do not mean only the virtual space that internet development provides as a separate world. We mean that human existence is ontologically marked by a new way of being, including the digital dimension as an integral component of living in the world. Here we assume at least two aspects. Firstly, the real world and the virtual world with all that scientific and technological developments involve and make the complementarity of the two worlds possible. And secondly, there is the fact that man is situated in a new perspective on existence that unifies

the two registers while reconstructing the range of elements perceived as an existential given of postmodern man. Identifying oneself as a constructor of one's life, man is a being belonging to a new world, shaped by the digital revolution.

Philosophical practices and philosophical counselling must first consider the impact that technological development has on the new world and human identity growth. It is about technological development at multiple levels, from information and communication technology to technology of the self or personal development techniques. I took the phrase “technology of the self”³ from Michel Foucault's works because it proves to be very relevant to what philosophy can make as a significant contribution to the redefinition of man in the context of digital culture. In my book on philosophical counselling,⁴ I stressed how important it is, in the context of the very rapid development of technology, for the philosophy to propose a series of technologies of the inner development of the human being. In particular, widespread access to the benefits of communication technologies, with all the positive and sometimes negative aspects of their use, should be counterbalanced by philosophers by developing reflective techniques that give people the opportunity to live authentically in the world dominated by technology and digitalisation. In the future, philosophical advisers will have to focus on developing such technologies of the self.

Understandably, philosophers can no longer ignore the profound transformation that social media brings to our life. If we connect it with the topic of branding, then philosophical counselling must take into account that the usual topics in the discussion about branding must be resumed and adapted to the new context of communication. For example, we are accustomed to saying in branding discussions that the brand is a promise. Both in the product branding and in personal branding, this leads us to think of a promise that the product has to fulfil in relation to the consumer's expectations. Among other theorists, we can mention Martin Lindstrom, Wally Olins, or Tom Peters to illustrate

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Sidney Eve Matrix, *Cyberpop. Digital Lifestyles and Commodity Culture*, Routledge, New York 2006, pp. 25–60; Charlie Gere, *Digital Culture*, Reaktion Books, 2008, pp. 51–78; Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture. Mass Communication in a Digital Age*, Bedford – St. Martin's – Boston 2013, pp. 43–76; Timothy Scott Barker, *Time and the Digital: Connecting Technology, Aesthetics, and a Process Philosophy of Time*, Dartmouth 2012, pp. 191–195.

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Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution. How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. ix.

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Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the College de France, 1981–82*, trans. Graham Burchell, Frederic Gros (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, p. 46. For a nuanced understanding of

this technology of the self see: Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 1998.

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Sandu Frunză, “We need as much philosophy as technology”, in: Sandu Frunză, *Philosophical Counseling and Communication*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca 2019, pp. 9–20. I combine here the idea of technologies of the self, as I was inspired by Foucault, with ideas on the development of technologies of the self in works such as Yasmine Abbas, Fred Dervin (eds.), *Digital Technologies of the Self*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2009, pp. 171–193; or Erik Deckers, Kyle Lacy, *Branding Yourself. Using Social Media to Invent or Reinvent Yourself*, Pearson Education, Indianapolis 2011, pp. 3–20.

this perspective on the brand.⁵ Philosophical counselling must go beyond the ontological regime set by the real/virtual distinction. This promise is evident to us both in the relationships developed in the objective and the virtual world. It is enhanced in the virtual world because its possibility becomes something that is already in our proximity. In the virtual space, the brand promise wins in its consistency. It is precisely this increase in intensity that entails the need for increased attention that the philosophical counsellor and the ethics counsellor must pay to the real/virtual dynamics.⁶

In an excellent communication anthropology study, Alice E. Marwick shows that social media has become a factor that coagulates millions of people's energies in a joint effort to change the way human subjectivity is conceived and constructed. Therefore, new techniques are developed to valorise image and personal reality similar to those in sales or those setting the marketing mix mechanism in motion. An entrepreneurial imaginary is thus being developed that accounts for what is significant in human life and how the individual rediscovers himself/herself at the core of his/her concerns and other people's interest. We see social networks developing today as common goods that can always have an economic or commercial dimension. Ongoing changes also have the attributes of exchange, profit, efficiency typical of economic relations. This world of exchanges influences how we posit ourselves in the network. All seems to be dominated by a type of relations similar to those governing the free market.⁷ The human being develops in stages of success and excellence according to the internal order of personal brand construction. When we talk about the personal brand, it is quite important how the market reacts to the privileged product represented by the person put on the brands market. Indeed, a person's image is not sold just like that of a chocolate box or a juice bottle carrying a logo already publicly recognisable. However, as we can understand from works by authors such as Mateusz Grzesiak, Thom Braun and Roberto Álvarez del Blanco, the mechanisms we think of to valorise the personal brand are often similar, even if not the same as those in commercial brands.⁸

In such a context, philosophers are called upon to set in motion a series of "technologies of the self"⁹ to create a state of balance between the specifics of the valorisation of the human being in relation to other entities that intervene in a market of economic and cultural exchange. Philosophy must provide services that make possible such a construction required by brand communication. Philosophical counselling is not limited by a unique method of personal development. It has no rigid schemes to apply in the construction of image and brand identity. That is why it is appropriate to apply it depending on the specifics of the personality, the objectives it has to achieve and especially depending on what the individual has to offer on the market when he wants to be recognised as a personal brand.

Ethical Consultancy, Philosophical Counselling, and Personal Growth

I believe that in personal brand development, ethical consultancy and philosophical counselling must take into account the need for personal development as a market requirement and as a trend of the offer of motivational programs. At the same time, I consider that the new context of the digital age also brings an increased need for ethical advice and philosophical counselling

understood as personal development counselling. In the digital era, nothing seems to remain unaffected by relations marketing: from our private life to the symbolic products we post on the network, from subjective projections to building our personal identity as an interface in the communication with the others. We should not see this as a simple reduction of man to a product similar to an object of trade. The phenomenon is wider. It must be understood in the context in which economic relations are humanised by developing business ethics in which economic organisations' ethical behaviour is structured along with a series of metaphors anthropomorphising economic relations. There is no obstacle afterwards to reverse the process. A projection of economic principles on inter-human relations' shaping and even on the individual's inner life governing does not seem at all foreign to the logic of ethical and efficient communication and action. Apparently, my perspective on ethics can be diminished by statements like the one made by John C. Maxwell, who claims that there is no business ethics because ethics either exists as is or does not exist at all. Individual behaviour is either ethical in all life situations or it is not ethical at all. The individual's ethics speaks for the ethical behaviour of his/her organisation. No ethical regulation coming from the business environment or from an ethical codification imposed by organisations should be deemed functional.¹⁰ However, there is no contradiction between my approach and Maxwell's because in his perspective, ethics is a part of people's ethical action who make an economic organisation effective. This means that morality pertains to individuals, not to economic legislation. Consequently, a

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Martin Lindstrom, *Brand Sense: How to Build Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight and Sound*, Kogan Page, London 2005, pp. 195–214; Wally Olins, *Brand New. The Shape of Brands to Come*, Thames & Hudson, London 2014, pp. 13–39; Tom Peters, "The Brand Called You", *Fast Company* (31 August 1997). Available at: <https://www.fastcompany.com/28905/brand-called-you> (accessed on 30 May 2020).

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For a good understanding of this dynamic and how I believe it can be used by the practical philosopher in personal brand counselling, valuable suggestions can be found in papers such as: Catherine Kaputa, *You Are a Brand. In Person and Online, How Smart People Brand Themselves for Business Success*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, Boston 2012, pp. 67–82; Nicoleta Corbu, *Brandurile globale. O cercetare cross-culturală*, Tritonic, Bucharest 2009, pp. 58–61; Dan Schawbel, *Manual de branding personal – reguli noi pentru o carieră de succes*, Amaltea, Bucharest 2013, pp. 17–32.

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Alice E. Marwick, *Status update. Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London 2013, pp. 10–19.

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Mateusz Grzesiak, *Personal Brand Creation in the Digital Age: Theory, Research and Practice*, Palgrave Pivot, 2018, pp. 7–37; Thom Braun, *Philosophy of Branding: Great Philosophers Think Brands*, Kogan Page, 2004, pp. 173–184; Roberto Álvarez del Blanco, *Personal brands. Manage your life with talent and turn it into a unique experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, pp. 1–25.

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When I talk about the need for the intervention of the philosophical advisor in the life of the man under the pressure of the technologies assumed by the digital age, I take the idea of the need to develop technologies of the self-starting from formulations we find in Michel Foucault in passages such as: "I would like to dwell a little on this today for the obvious reason that this notion of conversion, of the return to the self, of the turning around towards oneself, is certainly one of the most important technologies of the self the West has known." – M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 208.

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John C. Maxwell, *There's No Such Thing as "Business" Ethics. There's Only One Rule for Making Decisions*, Warner Books, New York 2003, pp. 3–18.

professional environment of people with moral values in their individual lives shall have an ethical climate beneficial to organisational life.

In terms of minimal ethics (as it is theorised, with various nuances, by thinkers such as Gilles Lipovetsky, Theodor W. Adorno, Andrei Pleșu),¹¹ typical of postmodern human, such ethics assumed by the individual may function without getting in conflict with the perspective of a moral based on firm values. However, to be practical and efficient, ethics must respond to cultural and specific life situations. It must be situational in the sense that it should be able to solve problems each time there is a crisis or violation of ethical regulations. Unless we fall into relativism, such a movement of ethics' practical dimension is achieved through business ethics, social responsibility practices, deontological practices, or ethical communication. Minimal ethics harmonises best with ethical constructions instituted by professionals in various fields. It makes it possible to get out of the pressure of absolute ethical values and facilitates the establishment of individual values beginning from the needs of moral construction of the professional space and of individual action. It fits very well with the tendency of modernity to make the individual the centre of moral action and decision. Placing creativity, construction, and moral decision at the individual level gives the possibility to cultivate the individual vocation in a generally accepted axiological framework. In this way, we eliminate the major tension between relativism and absolutism in the field of action modelled by the new means of ethical instrumentalisation represented by the deontological codes.

Even if the virtual space is not yet subject to very restrictive ethical and judicial regulations, the very fact that a significant part of it is already associated with public space determines strict ethical regulations imposed by various platforms or by various categories of communicators, including by calling for codification. From the perspectives proposed by Paula Boddington and Roman V. Yampolskiy, I understood that when faced with the issue related to artificial intelligence and the new challenges it brings in the field of communication and in rethinking the way man is in the world, this concern is amplified even more.¹² These regulations either carry principles from the real world adapted to virtual space or they create ethical models typical of the digital world.

At the level of a generic discussion of ethics, we can agree with John C. Maxwell that business ethics does not make sense as long as individuals act according to the ethical principles assumed individually. However, in brand construction, ethical values intervene through both their personal and organisational dimensions. Thus, a discussion about organisational ethics and business ethics is inevitable. And the intervention of organisational ethical counselling as part of the action of defining and imposing on the market a personal brand – strong and authentic is also desirable.

When we talk about branding and personal brand construction, we have to note that a double process influences ethics application. Firstly, ethics serves as a general framework to define integrity as assuming moral practices in a professional environment and as a philosophy of life. Secondly, professionalised ethics extends philosophical practices to professional contexts in which experts in various particular fields of professional abilities become promoters of ethical principles to institute an ethical climate in the organisation adequately. The ethical models, responsive to changes in economy pressed by developments in science and technology, penetrate organisational life. Ethical

exigencies adapt to organisational life mechanisms, to the mission and objectives of economic organisations compelled to connect to the logic of consumerist society redefined in the developing world. Changes that occur are radical. They include a new human way of being. Both processes are triggered by the development of society constructed on communication. In the world built on communication, we must keep in mind that:

“Philosophical Practice should transform counselees, whether individuals or groups. It has to achieve more than modifying thoughts because ideas do not always change the world nor those who hold them. Its goal should be to alter the person’s inner self or being. This is an ontological challenge.”¹³

Communication and ethical counselling mediate communication technology development and engage with human beings in this new adventure of ontological repositioning. It is about a human ontology which adapts to technological development while attributing more significance to the personal position in the new intersubjective structure of global relations.

In an attempt to express the changes occurring at the personal level in the life of digital era human in postmodern human’s language, Alice E. Marwick borrows Michel Foucault’s idea of using technology in the form of technologies of the self-action applied on the virtual media. These subjectivity technologies are used in social media to govern oneself and various aspects of one’s inner life and to expose the self to relations in the outer world. In this case, technologies of the self include all adapting mechanisms that the individual uses to find a good position in one’s existence and to find oneself. These technologies of the self have, among others, the role in finding ways for personal development, ethical and existential adaption and adequacy to new social and political mechanisms, as well as a defining role in establishing the new terms of existential counselling and crisis therapies.¹⁴ They are also relevant in governing in the large sense of political practices and of economic regulations by which personal life becomes an important concern for increased community prosperity.¹⁵ The key position of the economic in the digital era determines, in addition to human’s market behaviour, the way human offers themselves to communication as one’s main tendency to strengthen one’s position in the

11 Gilles Lipovetsky, *Amurgul datoriei. Etica nedureoasă a noilor timpuri democratice*, trans. Victor-Dinu Vlădulescu, Babel, Bucharest 1996, p. 150; Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott, Verso, London 2005, p. 18; Andrei Pleșu, *Minima moralia. Elemente pentru o etică a intervalului*, Humanitas, Bucharest 1994, p. 138.

12 Paula Boddington, *Towards a Code of Ethics for Artificial Intelligence*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, Switzerland 2017, pp. 27–38; Roman V. Yampolskiy, “Artificial Intelligence Safety Engineering: Why Machine Ethics Is a Wrong Approach”, in: Vincent C. Müller (ed.), *Philosophy and Theory of Artificial Intelligence*, Springer, Berlin – Heidelberg 2013, pp. 389–396.

13 Jose Barrientos-Rastrojo, “Experiential Philosophical Practice”, in: Aleksandar Fatić, Lydia Amir (eds.), *Practicing Philosophy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015, pp. 280–302, here p. 287.

14 Vasile-Petru Hațegan, “Involving Philosophical Practice in Solving Life Situations. The Action of 4C Theory”, *Postmodern Openings* 9 (2018) 3, pp. 20–35; Cristian Iftode, *Filozofia ca mod de viață. Sursele autenticității*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești 2010.

15 Iulia Medveschi, Sandu Frunză, “Political Brand, Symbolic Construction and Public Image Communication”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 17 (2018), no. 49, pp. 137–152.

market. Integrated in the market relations typical of the new society, the human being is called to adapt to communication principles and personal promotion in the personal brand culture. Thus, to strengthen personal identity means to have greater concern for the presence in the communication flow, in the media, and the attention of various categories of the public. The personal ideal is tied to the personal value given by the interaction with the others, the others' recognition, the deep changes at the personal level, and the reputation and popularity gained through persuasive techniques developed in real life and online.¹⁶

I believe that the intervention of these technologies of the self in brand development highlights the role of philosophy as a spiritual exercise. Philosophical counselling must find appropriate solutions to this human requirement of the digital society because, despite the wide marketising of life, digital era human does not ignore the spiritual dimension of existence. Current theories on how humans assume religion in the digital society show that the forms that human spiritual and religious are multiple.¹⁷ Thus, we find that digital societies bring us new orientations in the sphere of religious preferences and practices.

There is a dialectic of relations vertically and horizontally, even under everyday life conditions in the consumerist society. The need for spiritual accomplishment appears to be permanently present, despite the metamorphose of the idea of transcendence, even if it is about a passage from traditional spiritual practices to horizontal forms of transcending and transcendence, as we can see in Veress's analyses.¹⁸ As I have shown in other works, written together with my collaborators, such a horizontalisation of transcendence has, most often, deep implications upon morals and ethical behaviour.¹⁹ This is one reason why we can accept they are important, the two practices that could be mixed within the basics of personal branding counselling. On the one hand, we have philosophical counselling, and on the other hand, we have pastoral counselling.²⁰ The philosophical dimension and the religious or spiritual dimension can be combined in the case of brand construction carried out by or in collaboration with a specialist in counselling and self-counselling practices. However, as a general phenomenon, we can see that in the self-branding or self-promotion activities carried out online, the spiritual dimension is a secondary element in the exposure of a successful brand. The focus in this situation is on the network, on the communication structures offered by it and on the multiplication of the connection wires in the network. Subtle connections, cosmic relationships, or universal connections that presuppose spiritual forces are rather secondary or missing.

Ethical Counselling, Branding, and Self-Promotion in the Generalised World of Communication

The success of personal brand communication and affirmation shows us that, in fact, what matters are the network, the relationship as is and the recognition that a good location in the network brings you – which ensures efficient use of digital space. In Marwick's opinion, the fact that personal branding development and self-promotion as the main tendency in brand communication is not at all accidental, and that it takes place especially at the same time with the development of social networks and the virtual world.²¹ I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that the generalised tendency for personal brand development would not even be possible without extending access to digital

space. Personal branding becomes a force that every individual may set to motion in the subculture typical of the virtual world. It is difficult for me to imagine the effectiveness of philosophical counselling outside the framework presupposed by the minimal ethics of postmodernity. Gilles Lipovetsky pointed out that this type of ethics favours the subjective experience of moral values and the assumption of ethical action. Minimal ethics facilitates self-promotion and cultivating one's own personal brand in the axiological context of a business ethic. It should be emphasised here that the instrumentalisation of ethics becomes more important than the development of ethical virtues, as Lipovetsky very well points out concerning organisations' ethical communication. In the chapter "Ethics, the supreme stage of communication", of his book *The Twilight of Duty*, Lipovetsky states that ethics "from a categorical imperative, it has become a strategic vector of corporate communication [...] a tool of brand management".²² This possibility of an instrumentalisation of ethics in brand building is relevant for a practicing philosopher, who can resort to a use of the principles of institutional brand building ethics in the context of personal brand building. In such a perspective, ethical counselling can intervene in the construction of instruments and the instrumentalisation of ethics. Against this background, the construction of a personal and self-promotion brand can also have the greatest benefit, which individuals can access in the offer of professional expertise. Ethical consulting and counselling are an indispensable part of brand communication and construction.

Technological development has made possible a higher complexity of types of communication. Opening access to the internet and increasing social media power provided the best medium to cultivate a personal voice, express authenticity, shape new identities, and create new public categories and new consumer categories. Exigencies of such categories are apparently less rigorous and demanding culturally, but in reality, they build alternative viewpoints and a new culture typical to groups creating a subculture relevant to the in-

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A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, pp. 13–14; Irving Rein et al., *High Visibility. Transforming Your Personal and Professional Brand*, McGraw-Hill, New York 2006, p. xi.

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Stef Aupers, Dick Houtman (eds.), *Religions of Modernity. Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital*, Brill, Leiden 2010, pp. 1–30.

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Karoly Veress, "On Horizontal Transcendence", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 17 (2018), no. 50, pp. 46–62.

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Mihaela Frunză, Sandu Frunză, Nicolae Ovidiu Grad, "The Role of Spirituality in Therapeutic Practices", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (2019), no. 53, pp. 60–74.

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Mary Thomas Burke, Jane C. Chauvin, Judith G. Miranti, *Religious and Spiritual Issues in*

Counselling. Applications Across Diverse Populations, Brunner Routledge, Abingdon 2005.

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From the perspective of an anthropology of communication, Alice E. Marwick shows that: "Regardless of how realistic or specific self-branding and self-commodification techniques are, they have been taken up enthusiastically by people in the technology industry and the distributed network of people who want to be in the technology industry. These ideas have trickled down and are being played out in interpersonal interactions both on and offline. [...] It is no coincidence that self-branding is contemporaneous with the Web. Internet technologies have made it possible for people to apply sophisticated branding strategies used by modern multinational companies to themselves." – A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, p. 183.

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G. Lipovetsky, *Amurgul datoriei*, p. 192.

ternet culture. This digital culture appears today as an alternative. We must expect it to become a dominant one shortly, with the rising influence of the generations of children born in the digital world.

Such a culture is a culture par excellence of communication and counselling. Here they find a beneficial place for development, both organisational ethical counselling and philosophical counselling for individuals who begin on the path of personal development and personal brand promotion. In this context, philosophical counselling can enjoy a special status because the participation in such a culture is what Alice E. Marwick has in mind when claims that with social media development, self-promotion becomes a common good to all who wish to assume the construction of their own image consciously. Virtual space networks bring along a strategic type of construction focused on creating a business-oriented culture in which self-promotion involves the individual's use of marketing and communication methods to sell himself/herself as a valuable product. Such a self is constructed in the communication process. It involves setting in motion some technologies of the self that are typical of digital culture. Technologies at the base of self-creation and presentation are those with which the individual gets familiarised in the process of his/her becoming a being that assumes life predominantly in the virtual space.²³ When a spiritual dimension is involved, this self-enhancement can be realised as “self-transcendence (self-perfection) of human beings”.²⁴

With the development of social networks, brand counselling takes a significantly adjusted position. If, at other times, the personal brand used to be managed by staff, with the development of brands facilitated by the virtual world, the individual focuses on self-promotion, at least until he/she has the organisational and financial capacity to build a team around himself/herself. The personal brand cultivated through means provided by social networks must be available at all times, must have increased transparency, in accordance with the total opening and visibility promised by the internet. The personal brand is an exposed person so that all imperfections and faults are very visible and make maintaining a coherent image difficult. This is where the additional need for support arises, including in terms of image reconstruction through an ethical perspective and the perspective of the values assumed as part of the brand identity. Image construction supposes an additional effort in the relational sphere. Social media proposes to compensate for all these shortcomings by providing additional support and counselling, showcasing intimacy, and strengthening connectivity. Thus, it is possible for social networks to convert these weak points, expectations, and associated virtues into a very strong social capital. Overexposure is valorised as an offer bringing about the possibility for profit gain, both for the individual and for the network's administrators. So much that Alice E. Marwick gets to the conclusion that

“... this series of exchanges thus commodifies identity, emotion, and relationships within a digital context.”²⁵

According to her, we must expect such a process to bring changes to the way various platforms and social networks are used and influence daily life behaviour. The change caused by the status of the personal brand manifesting online, even when its notoriety and visibility do not extend to those who are not consumers of such products, also brings a change in the way the individual perceives themselves, in the perception of others and in the way they build their own image of the world. Likewise, social media users integrate their experiences in the virtual space to a wider offer already proposed by traditional

media, motivational books, the entertainment industry and all forms of public communication. Communication in digital space influences consumers as to

“... how their homes should look, how they should dress, and how pets and kids should behave; equally important, they provide models of inappropriate behavior. Although most social media technologies allow a broad range of self-presentation strategies, users look to friends and peers to learn appropriate use of these technologies, and alter their online identities accordingly.”²⁶

Philosophical counselling has the responsibility to intervene in meeting these needs for growth and authenticity of the human society.

Given how communication technologies are being developed and assumed today, I believe we can see that ethical counselling and philosophical counselling can have a dual-use. On the one hand, they can be tools of the direct intervention of the practising philosopher in the construction and promotion of the personal brand. On the other hand, they can be learned in educational programs of philosophical counselling and philosophical practices and then be used as tools for personal development and self-promotion. Therefore, in Foucault’s terms, philosophical counselling can set in motion a series of the technologies of the self that contribute significantly to brand building and promotion, and personal growth and the success of self-promotion activities.

Philosophical Counselling and the Challenges at Personal Level Brought by Personal Brand Development in Virtual Space

We must keep in mind that technology can have extremely beneficial effects on human life, but it can also bring insecurity, vulnerability or even crisis. We find that the development of communication technologies entails a growing demand in counselling, including philosophical counselling. Because of the crisis the Western human being is experiencing, they emphasise this need for dialogue with a professional. Philosophical counselling also benefits from the fact that individuals increasingly use social media for information, leisure time, social networking, express opinions or for relaxation, and develop a personal brand, for self-search, for personal experience and authenticity for personal confirmation and recognition. Hatun Boztepe Taskiran, Jennifer M. Whitmer, Paolo Roma, Davide Aloini revealed the wide range of opportunities that social media opens up for personal development.²⁷ All this is correlated with a search for the meaning of life, authenticity and achieving a good standard of living that individuals can find in philosophical counselling

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A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, p. 192.

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Serhii Shevchenko, “Self-Identity Through the Prism of Other in Merold Westphal’s Existential Philosophy of Religion”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (2019), no. 53, pp. 156–170, here p. 159.

25
A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, p. 277.

26
Ibid., p. 278.

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Hatun Boztepe Taskiran, “Uses and Gratifications Approach, Social Media and Personal Branding. A Study on Social Media Users in Turkey”, *Communication Today* 10 (2019) 1, pp. 142–154; Jennifer M. Whitmer, “You are your brand. Self-branding and the marketization of self”, *Sociology Compass* 13 (2019) 3, UNSP e12662; Paolo Roma, Davide Aloini, “How does brand-related user-generated content differ across social media? Evidence reloaded”, *Journal of Business Research* 96 (2019), pp. 322–339.

books. They can also be organised in the form of offices in the virtual space that offers online counselling.²⁸

After the institutionalisation of philosophical counselling, philosophers were more concerned with creating their philosophical counselling office. Therefore, philosophical counselling has rarely resorted to online counselling. However, in recent years, online counselling has become a regular part of the offer of philosophical counselling. There is already a tradition of good practice by psychologists and psychotherapists in individual counselling, couple counselling or organisational counselling.²⁹ Therefore, practitioner philosophers can easily adapt these practices to philosophical counselling or organisational ethical counselling. We can also add that the offer of online courses or training on philosophical topics, offered to both specialists and the general public, has increased significantly, especially with the educational system's transition to the online medium.³⁰

Moreover, not only individuals but also organisations promoting brands look more frequently at the benefits of the online medium. Abandoning, to a certain extent, the traditional channels of brand promotion, they use professional communication resources in the virtual space. The popularity enjoyed by influencers shows the potential that may be valorised by those who use virtual space and digital communication, be it individuals or organisations.³¹ Until recently, we would invest in opinion leaders capable of shaping communication in the public sphere. Today, things seem to change in favour of social networks and of those that can influence the personal decisions of those connected to the new technologies in the virtual space. Both at the organisational level and at the individual level, digital space is relevant in the communication strategy.

Along with individuals' growing presence on social networks, a series of existential problems related to autonomy, control, and privacy appear. They can be framed either through psychological terms or through philosophical reflection. For instance, as inhabitants of the digital world, we may ask ourselves about the determining factor of this change: technological development or social networks development? The answers promptly support both positions. On the one hand, there is a trend according to which technological development attracts, among others, a type of individual behaviour inclined to use the new technologies as a platform for personal assertion. On the other hand, there is a trend arguing in favour of the internet's central role in general and of social media in particular. According to the latter view, classical communication methods have an opening that benefits cultivating people with special features, carriers of values of interest to the large public. However, they could not facilitate the self-promotion efforts of a significant number of individuals, irrespective of how developed the technology they employed was. The new communication forms provided by digital technology, based on increased complexity and wider access to virtual space networks, have made possible a communication revolution based on each individual's commitment as communication source and as discourse writing source – be it the discourse using words as a means of communication, or the rhetoric of images in languages set to motion.

One of the problems encountered in my online philosophical counselling activities is the disappearance of the difference between representing one's own person and life and the product put on the market as a personal brand. Social media may bring a wide audience with expectations that may differ from

those in the personal ideal. A strong brand may shape audience demand, but this must always give ground to its public's ever-renewing demands. It needs repositioning itself as a self-consistent product and authentic in its offers on virtual space and aware of the need to be a commodity that meets consumer's expectations. In different contexts, Alice E. Marwick, and Miriam Salpeter highlighted that whether it communicates in objective reality or virtual space, the personal brand cannot escape the person marketising process. It becomes a commodity and offers itself to a public that wants it ever wider, diverse and faithful.³²

From the perspective of ethical counselling, when we speak about personal brands, we have to note a very important change occurring in promotion strategies. The most significant impact is that of the success enjoyed by self-promotion as a communication instrument in digital space. What we have to consider, however, is that there is a reconstruction of counselling on brand construction. With the increased importance of self-branding shares, there is a diminution of ethical and judicial exigencies imposed by experts based on ethical codes protecting the individual, organisation and various types of public with which the brand interacts. For example, to promote a personal brand in the digital space means to give up many aspects that pertain to private life. There is a series of mechanisms for data collection, processing, and storage behind the platforms that we, as individuals, cannot control. Even deleting personal data and content we posted on a certain platform does not solve the problem of access to our digital profile. Our traces stay, even if hidden to the eyes of those with access to the surface dimension of our digital presence. Furthermore, we must not forget that personal identity is not derived from what defines our own person but from the relational structures we knowingly cultivate or from those who grow like weeds on our identity. Identity in the network is relational. Those we interact with keep very important traces accessible to whoever wishes to collect them from the respective media. Our very list of friends that we have abandoned may be relevant for our relational structure and may cause interpretations of our behaviour, preferences, entourage, leadership capacities or many other aspects. The list of friends in our

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For example, Aleksandar Fatić, https://www.proventherapy.com/Prof_Aleksandar-12.html; Sandu Frunză, <https://sandufrunza.ro/dialoguri-online/>; Eliza Mcdermott, <https://www.armchairphilosophicalcounseling.com/philosophical-counseling>.

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Haim Weinberg, Arnon Rolnick, *Theory and Practice of Online Therapy. Internet-delivered Interventions for Individuals, Groups, Families, and Organizations*, Routledge, New York 2020.

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For the Romanian speakers, I proposed: Sandu Frunză, "Practician în consultanță și consiliere filosofică", Udeemy (February 2021). Available at: <https://www.udemy.com/course/practician-in-consultanta-si-consiliere-filosofica/?referralCode=946A0FAC-33DA4E2C1059> (22 February 2021); Sandu

Frunză, "Practician în leadership etică și etică managerială", Udeemy (February 2021). Available at: <https://www.udemy.com/course/practician-in-leadership-etica-si-etica-manageriala/?referralCode=2A7937D54612FC7F5862> (accessed on 22 February 2021).

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Delia Balaban, Maria Mustăța, "Users' Perspective on the Credibility of Social Media Influencers in Romania and Germany", *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* 21 (2019) 1, pp. 31–46, here p. 34, doi: <https://doi.org/10.21018/rjcp.2019.1.269>; Frédéric Harper, *Success in Programming. How to Gain Recognition, Power, and Influence Through Personal Branding*, Apress, New York 2014, p. 134.

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A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, p. 4.

virtual space is a network that we should perceive as one we cannot exit, in fact, ever. Abandoning the list, we enter is what we might refer to, symbolically, as a dormant mode of inactivity, a deactivation. But we cannot fully control the ways in which someone else with access to the network might valorise the elements of our presence, even if it is minimal and even if it does not involve personal engagement or even if it is interpreted as absence.

When we participate in the virtual dimension or when we construct our identity online, we should know that we accept an overexposure typical of the way of being in the digital world. On the one hand, there are specialists behind the system who sell the data on our actions and our online behaviour and predict the steps we supposedly would be taking in the future and our reactions in certain circumstances. On the other hand, we should be aware that we cannot control what is happening behind the structures that we set in motion in the network we are part of or which we have left.

As practising philosophers, we must make the public aware – but especially those who enter our philosophical counselling office – that all these are secondary effects of the interventions in our personal life and the self-shaping experienced by every person engaged in using the new technologies. As we have pointed out, technological development brings along both the valorising of some technologies of the self as highlighted by classical authors and post-modern thinkers. They are set to work with a precise purpose: to lead to an awareness of the level at which the individual stands for a decision on the target he/she wishes to reach in the development of his/her personal brand. The improvement of one's personal brand is directed towards satisfying needs that are not only the individual's but also of those who may access the services of the respective personal brand. They may meet their requests on a market of products proposed by professionals in the field in which the brand valorises itself under the sign of excellence and desire to respond to those looking for his or her services. From analyses such as those provided by Alice E. Marwick, Erik Deckers, Kyle Lacy, or Daniel Rowles we can see that the advantage lies in the fact that while social networks bring up ever-renewed offers, they are also open to new entries on the market, namely to new personal brands seeking confirmation, recognition and real transaction possibilities on the market for the products and services they provide.³³ Such a complex action in the digital space is accompanied by a series of unknown factors and risks.

In such a context, philosophical counselling must fulfil its mission of balancing the rational reflection and emotional response that the human being endowed with a symbolic consciousness of the world can give. Promoting critical thinking as a philosophical practice for our daily lives should keep us away from the temptation to embrace conspiracy theories but boost our desire to take responsibility for what we wish to become and what we want to be in other people's perception. It is not about self-censorship, nor about cultivating fear, but about stimulating responsibility.

Philosophical counselling is meant to offer new perspectives on the changes brought by the digital world, to provide a horizon of personal development, to build landmarks of ethical modelling of brand behaviour, to intervene in streamlining the tools specific to ethical consulting and individual and organisational counselling. In personal brand communication, we cannot ignore the fact that what sells a strong brand, in relation to products that are not considered to be brands, is, among others, a philosophy of life, a reconstruction of identity, a practice of personal values in the new axiological context. With

the massive and ever-growing presence of new technologies at all levels of our existence, increasing the responsibility of our customers, and the general public must begin from the premise that we need as much philosophy as technology is present in our lives.³⁴ In this way, philosophical counselling should enter into our daily lives with all its natural aspects.

Sandu Frunză

Filozofijsko savjetovanje, osobni oznak i društvene mreže u digitalno doba

Sažetak

U radu se argumentira da filozofijsko savjetovanje mora razviti prakse u kontekstu u kojem svjedočimo rekonstrukciji perspektiva o svijetu i čovjeku putem revolucije razvoja interneta, društvenih mreža, komunikacijskih tehnologija i pristupa virtualnom svijetu. Filozofijsko i etičko savjetovanje pozvano je uključiti se u raznovrsna nova područja aktivnosti, uključujući izgradnju osobnog oznaka u društvenim medijima, što je fokus ovog rada. S obzirom na to da virtualni komunikacijski prostor postaje medij učinkovitog izražavanja osobnosti, društveni mediji polje su u kojem filozofijsko i etičko savjetovanje mogu postati glavni resurs za rast snažnog osobnog oznaka. Bilo da se radi o samopromociji ili savjetovanju specijaliziranom za komercijalne komunikacije i oznakovljenje, tehnički razvoj omogućuje tehniku samorazvoja poduprtu relacijskim univerzumom društvenih medija. U digitalnom svijetu filozofijsko savjetovanje donosi povećanje doprinosa mogućnosti da se pojedinci izgrađuju, bivaju prepoznati i uživaju kompleksnu izloženost rukovodenu duhom društvene odgovornosti.

Ključne riječi

filozofijsko savjetovanje, etičko savjetovanje, osobni oznak, digitalni svijet, društvene mreže, samopromocija, osobni razvoj, etička komunikacija, komunikacija putem oznaka

Sandu Frunză

Philosophische Beratung, persönliche Marke und soziale Netzwerke im digitalen Zeitalter

Zusammenfassung

In der Abhandlung werden Argumente vorgebracht, dass die philosophische Beratung ihre Praxis in einem Beziehungsrahmen entwickeln muss, in dem wir Zeugen werden von der Rekonstruktion der Perspektiven über die Welt und den Menschen durch die Revolution der Entwicklung des Internets, sozialer Netzwerke, Kommunikationstechnologien und des Zugangs zur virtuellen Welt. Die philosophische und ethische Beratung sind eingeladen, sich in verschiedenartigen neuen Tätigkeitsbereichen zu engagieren, einschließlich des Aufbaus eines persönlichen Markenzeichens in den sozialen Medien, was im Fokus dieser Arbeit steht. Da der virtuelle Kommunikationsraum zu einem Medium für einen wirkungsvollen Ausdruck der Persönlichkeit wird, sind die sozialen Medien ein Feld, auf dem die philosophische und ethische Beratung zur Hauptressource für das Wachstum einer einprägsamen persönlichen Marke werden können. Unabhängig davon, ob es sich um Eigenwerbung oder Beratung handelt, die auf kommerzielle Kommunikation und Markengebung spezialisiert ist, ermöglicht die technische Entwicklung die Technik der Selbstentwicklung, die durch das relationale Universum der sozialen Medien

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A. E. Marwick, *Status update*, pp. 245–272; Erik Deckers, K. Lacy, *Branding Yourself*, pp. 6–9; Daniel Rowles, *Digital branding, A complete step-by-step guide to strategy, tactics and measurement*, Kogan Page, London 2014, pp. 37–42.

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Sandu Frunză, *Philosophical Counselling and Communication*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca 2019, p. 9.

gestützt wird. In der digitalen Welt bringt die philosophische Beratung eine Verstärkung der Förderung der Möglichkeit Einzelner, sich selbst auszubauen, erkannt zu werden und eine komplexe Ausgesetztheit zu genießen, die von einem Geist sozialer Verantwortung gelenkt wird.

Schlüsselwörter

philosophische Beratung, ethische Beratung, persönliche Marke, digitale Welt, soziale Netzwerke, Eigenwerbung, persönliche Entwicklung, ethische Kommunikation, Markenkommunikation

Sandu Frunzã

**Le conseil philosophique, la marque personnelle
et les réseaux sociaux à l'ère du numérique**

Résumé

Ce travail soutient que le conseil philosophique doit élaborer des pratiques dans le contexte au sein duquel nous sommes témoins d'une reconstruction de perspectives sur le monde et l'homme à travers la révolution liée au progrès d'internet, des réseaux sociaux, des technologies communicationnelles et de l'approche au monde virtuel. Le conseil philosophique et éthique est invité à s'engager dans divers domaines nouveaux d'activités, y compris la construction de la marque personnelle dans les médias sociaux, ce qui constitue le thème central de ce travail. Étant donné que l'espace virtuel de communication sert de moyen pour exprimer la personnalité de manière efficace, les médias sociaux constituent un champ au sein duquel le conseil philosophique et éthique peut devenir une ressource principale pour le développement d'une forte marque personnelle. Qu'il soit question d'auto-promotion ou de conseil spécialisé pour les communications commerciales et le branding, le progrès technique rend possible la technique du développement personnel soutenue par l'univers relationnel des médias sociaux. Dans le monde numérique, le conseil philosophique contribue considérablement à la possibilité pour les individus de se construire, d'être reconnus et d'avoir du plaisir au sein d'une complexe exposition conduite par l'esprit de responsabilité sociale.

Mots-clés

conseil philosophique, conseil éthique, marque personnelle, monde numérique, réseaux sociaux, auto-promotion, développement personnel, communication éthique, communication de marque