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Suggesting Chat with a Professional in Response to Queries about Emotional Well-being

ABSTRACT

Users may issue queries to a virtual assistant, search engine, or other technological interface to seek help when experiencing acute emotional distress. Current approaches of surfacing relevant information are unsuitable due to lack of trustworthy local resources that provide support, lack of supportive information content in the user's language, etc. This disclosure describes techniques to present users with the option to chat with a professional from an accredited global or multi-regional entity that offers free online emotional support.

KEYWORDS

- Emotional well-being
- Mental health
- Search engine
- Virtual assistant
- Emotional support services
- Online chat
- Emotional support helpline
- Online counseling
- Online therapy

BACKGROUND

People are increasingly attentive to their mental health and place greater importance on seeking support for their emotional well-being. There has been a global rise in those who report suffering from mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, etc. These matters are exacerbated by adverse external circumstances, such as economic uncertainty, extended pandemics, etc.

As a large proportion of the global population has access to the Internet and mobile devices, users often turn to technology to seek help when experiencing acute mental health challenges. For instance, users may ask a virtual assistant for help with specific mental health

challenges or emotional problems. When users issue queries indicative of emotional distress, current approaches are limited to surfacing relevant information, such as contact information for a local helpline that can help connect the users to professionals, organizations, or information sources that can help them deal with the matter.

However, not all places have trustworthy local resources that have been vetted and approved. Similarly, emotionally supportive information content, such as suggestions for coping mechanisms, is unavailable in many languages. For users located in regions that lack appropriate local resources for emotional and mental health needs, queries related to emotional distress often produce no results. For example, if a user located in a region that lacks vetted support resources asks a virtual assistant, “What should I do if I am feeling depressed?” the lack of suitable results might lead to a response such as “Sorry, I don’t understand.” Alternatively, if the query is treated at face value without recognizing that the user is seeking help for emotional distress, the results might provide pointers with detailed information on the problem, which can potentially act as a trigger that may exacerbate the issue.

DESCRIPTION

This disclosure describes techniques to point users to a trusted resource for emotional support in response to queries indicative of emotional distress even when the users are located in regions that lack vetted local resources for these purposes. If users permit, when they issue queries suggestive of emotional distress to a virtual assistant or search engine, they are presented with the option to chat with someone from an accredited global or multi-regional entity that offers free online emotional support, such as counseling and/or therapy.

In the case of text-based queries conducted via search boxes, the chat option can be presented as a conversation box. If the query is issued via speech to a voice-based virtual

assistant, the chat option can be presented with voice interaction, such as by asking “Would you like to speak to a professional who can help?” In either case, a user who chooses to avail of the chat option can be connected for a text or voice conversation with a support executive at the relevant accredited entity who speaks the user’s language, providing professional support and connecting the user to a professional that can determine how best to handle the user’s specific emotional need.

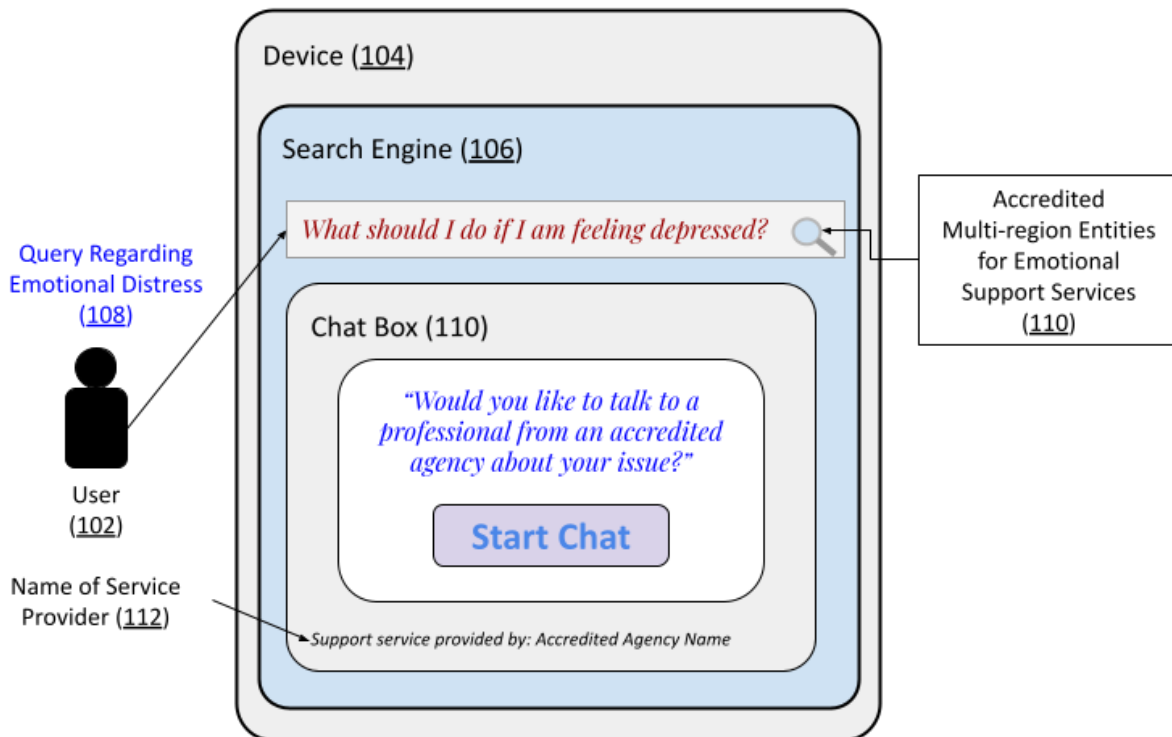


Fig. 1: Suggesting chatting with a relevant professional for queries about emotional distress

Fig. 1 shows an example of a user issued query that pertains to emotional distress. A user (102) issues a query indicative of emotional distress (108) to a search engine (106) accessed via a device (104). Since no vetted helplines for the issue are available for the user’s locale, the user is instead presented with a chat box (110) with an offer to chat with a professional from an accredited agency that provides multi-regional coverage for emotional support services (110).

The chat box indicates that the service is provided by an accredited third party (112). The user can press the “Start Chat” button to be connected to an executive from the agency capable of conversation in the user’s language.

The techniques described in this disclosure can be implemented within any search engine, application, or platform that includes functionality to search for information on emotional well-being and mental health. The techniques can also be integrated within any virtual assistant provided via any device. The implementation can leverage appropriate partnerships between providers of search and assistant functions and trustworthy, accredited third parties that provide services for emotional support and mental health with broad coverage across the world.

The described implementation can connect users with appropriate support resources to deal with emotional distress and support their mental well-being even if they are located in regions that lack vetted helplines and information sources relevant for these purposes. Delivery of potentially inappropriate or traumatic results is avoided by embedding relevant chat services within the search user experience to help ensure that user’s emotional needs are appropriately addressed.

CONCLUSION

Techniques are described herein to recognize user queries that relate to requirements of emotional support. Upon detection of such queries, users are presented with the option to chat with a professional from an accredited global or multi-regional entity that offers free online emotional support.