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Potential Stakeholders and Perceived Benefits of a Digital Health Innovation Ecosystem for the Namibian Context

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Abstract

This paper presents the result of a study which aimed at identifying the potential stakeholders and perceived benefits of a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context as part of a larger study. Combining semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires, a group of professionals from within the Namibian context and the global context were purposively selected to provide insights about the potential stakeholders and perceived benefits of a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context. The study adopted a qualitative approach. The main findings of the study suggest that stakeholders of a digital health innovation ecosystem include patients, professionals from various disciplines as well as government institutions, research institutions and innovation companies. The findings suggest that the implementation of a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context could improve healthcare services as a result of the collaborative and innovative platform. The findings of this study contribute to the emerging body of literature on digital health innovation ecosystems, specifically in developing countries. Furthermore, the findings of the study will inform relevant healthcare policy makers within the Namibian context in planning and implementing a digital health innovation ecosystem.

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1. Introduction

The drive for efficient and effective healthcare delivery have been emphasised in both developed and developing countries[1-3]. However, developing countries still experience economic and infrastructural challenges which inhibit these countries from reaching their full potentials in terms of healthcare delivery to patients. Iyawa et al.[4] point out that the implementation of a digital health innovation ecosystem is capable of mitigating healthcare challenges experienced in developing countries and hence, support developing countries in achieving health related Millennium Development Goals.

Past researches on digital health innovation ecosystems have focused on describing the concepts of a digital health innovation ecosystem and what it consists of[5-6]. Iyawa et al.[5-6] emphasize that digital health innovation ecosystems consists of key concepts of digital health, innovation and digital ecosystems. A scoping review by Iyawa et al.[4] suggest that digital health, innovation and digital ecosystems are evident in both developed and developing countries. Therefore, there is a possibility of implementing a digital health innovation ecosystem in developed and developing countries. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, only two empirical studies have been conducted on digital health innovation ecosystems, South Africa[7] and Namibia[8]. Herselman et al.[7] conceptualised a digital health innovation ecosystem for the South African context. Iyawa et al.[8] revealed the technical components that constitute a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context, however, there is no empirical study that identifies who constitute digital health innovation ecosystems' stakeholders as well as the perceived benefits for implementing digital health innovation ecosystems in a developing country such as Namibia.

The purpose of this study was to identify the potential stakeholders and perceived benefits of a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context as part of a larger study. This study attempts to, for the first time, identify the potential stakeholders and perceived benefits of a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context from a high-level conceptual perspective, thereby contributing to the current literature on digital health innovation ecosystems, specifically in developing countries. The findings of this study contribute to practice as it can assist decision makers in healthcare within the Namibian context in planning and implementing a digital health innovation ecosystem.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows, Section 2 presents a brief literature review, Section 3 presents the research methodology. The results of the study are presented in Section 4. A discussion of the findings and conclusions are presented in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

According to Herselman et al.[7], digital health in a developing country context need to be implemented while utilising the concept of *innovation ecosystems*. Iyawa et al.[5-6] further expatiated the discussion by suggesting that digital health innovation ecosystems should have elements of digital health, innovation and digital ecosystems.

Iyawa et al.[5] defined a digital health innovation ecosystem as:

"a network of digital health communities consisting of interconnected, interrelated and interdependent digital health species, including healthcare stakeholders, healthcare institutions and digital healthcare devices situated in a digital health environment, who adopt the best-demonstrated practices that have been proven to be successful, and implementation of those practices through the use of information and communication technologies to monitor and improve the wellbeing and health of patients, to empower patients in the management of their health and that of their families".

The definition of a digital health innovation ecosystem by Iyawa et al.[5] suggest that a digital health innovation ecosystem should include healthcare stakeholders, but it is not clear as to which specific stakeholders should be included in a digital health innovation ecosystem for the Namibian context. The discussion around digital health innovation ecosystems suggest that patients and relevant healthcare stakeholders can incorporate innovative practices in delivering and receiving healthcare services[6]. The concept of digital health innovation ecosystems also includes providing digital health services through the use of digital health technologies[5-6] while incorporating the elements of