EdinBurg Peer-Reviewed Journals and Books Publishers
Journal of Information and Technology
Vol. 5||Issue 11||pp 63-78||November||2025
Email: info@edinburgjournals.org||ISSN: 3080-9576

MedOne: A Culturally Adapted AI-Teleconsultation Mobile Health Platform for Enhancing Healthcare Access in Rwanda

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Accepted: 17 July 2025 || Published: 03 November 2025

Abstract

This study presents the development and evaluation of MedOne, an AI-powered mobile healthcare application designed to improve healthcare accessibility in Rwanda. MedOne integrates AI-driven diagnostic tools with teleconsultation services, aiming to address critical healthcare challenges in resource-limited settings. The research employs a mixed-methods approach involving 247 participants, including healthcare professionals, end users, and administrators. The system incorporates machine learning algorithms for symptom assessment, natural language processing for multi-language support, and cloud-based architecture for scalability. Findings suggest the system could significantly reduce consultation times by 34%, increase rural healthcare consultations by 67%, and achieve a diagnostic accuracy of 78.5%. The system's design incorporates offline functionality, multi-language support, and cultural adaptation for the Rwandan context.

Keywords: *AI-powered diagnostics, Teleconsultation, Healthcare accessibility, Digital health, Mobile health (mHealth), Machine learning, Natural language processing*

How to Cite: Ngoga, I. P., Ngugi, J., & Sumbiri, D. (2025). MedOne: A Culturally Adapted AI-Teleconsultation Mobile Health Platform for Enhancing Healthcare Access in Rwanda. *Journal of Information and Technology, 5*(11), 63-78.

1. Introduction

Accessing reliable healthcare remains a critical challenge in developing nations, where overburdened healthcare systems and critically low healthcare provider-to-population ratios force patients to seek medical advice from unverified online sources, significantly increasing misdiagnosis risks. This challenge is particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where geographical barriers further limit access to quality medical care. Recent AI advances have demonstrated significant potential for enhancing healthcare delivery in resource-constrained environments, with studies indicating that AI-assisted diagnosis can reduce consultation times by up to 40% while improving early disease detection rates by approximately 30% (Mukamurenzi & Nshimiyimana, 2023).

Rwanda presents a unique case study in healthcare transformation, having achieved remarkable progress with over 90% of its population enrolled in community-based health insurance (CBHI), representing one of the highest coverage rates in sub-Saharan Africa. The government has recognized digital health potential and implemented several telemedicine initiatives, including Babyl Rwanda and Rwanda Biomedical Center services. However, despite these coverage achievements, significant challenges persist in delivery and accessibility, including long waiting times, shortage of specialized healthcare professionals—particularly in rural areas—and time-consuming appointment scheduling even for minor health concerns that could be efficiently managed through digital solutions.

Existing digital health solutions in Rwanda primarily focus on basic teleconsultations and lack sophisticated AI-powered diagnostic tools or comprehensive medication guidance systems, resulting in continued patient dependency on self-medication practices and unreliable online health information. This research addresses these gaps by proposing MedOne, an integrated mobile application that combines AI-powered preliminary diagnosis with real-time teleconsultations, designed specifically for Rwanda's healthcare context. The study aims to develop a novel system architecture that addresses practical implementation challenges, including varying digital literacy levels, intermittent connectivity, and cultural appropriateness within Rwanda's existing digital health infrastructure (Health, 2023).

2. Literature Review

Digital Health Landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed significant strides in digital health, fueled by increasing mobile phone penetration and urgent healthcare delivery challenges. As of 2024, smartphone adoption in the region reached 64%, creating fertile ground for mobile health (mHealth) innovations (Intelligence, The Mobile Economy: Sub-Saharan Africa 2024, 2024). However, these digital advances coexist with persistent barriers such as infrastructure limitations, healthcare workforce shortages, and cultural misalignment with health technologies.

Ossebaard, Van and Kip (2023), in their review of 78 digital health implementations, they identified the most critical obstacles to success as inadequate technological infrastructure (89%), poor organizational readiness (76%), and insufficient cultural adaptation (68%). Their findings indicate that while earlier concerns focused on basic connectivity, contemporary challenges now center around systems integration and sustainability, particularly in rural and underserved populations.

AI Integration in African Healthcare Systems

The application of artificial intelligence in healthcare across Africa remains nascent but promising. Wynants, Van, and Steyerberg (2024) Analyzed 127 AI diagnostic systems across 23 African countries and found that although 78% demonstrated technical feasibility, only 31% achieved successful real-world implementation. The primary barriers included a lack of contextual adaptation, data sparsity, and poor integration with national health systems.

In Rwanda, pilot initiatives have shown localized success. A tuberculosis screening system developed jointly by the Rwanda Biomedical Center and Partners in Health achieved 84% diagnostic accuracy across 15 clinics (Nkurunziza, Mugisha, & Habimana, 2023). However, such systems typically focus on narrow diagnostic scopes (e.g., TB) and lack the broader capability to handle multi-symptom, multi-condition assessments required in general outpatient care.

Comparative Analysis of Existing Digital Health Platforms

Digital health platforms across Africa have evolved in response to healthcare access challenges, but they vary significantly in technological capabilities and contextual adaptation. In Rwanda, Babyl Rwanda is the most widely used telemedicine platform, with over two million users.

While it offers basic virtual consultations and medication reminders, it lacks advanced diagnostic tools and multilingual or culturally adaptive features. Organization, Healthcare workforce statistics in sub-Saharan Africa (2022) reported that 45% of Babyl users continued to seek information from alternative, often unreliable, sources—highlighting gaps in diagnostic trust and effectiveness.

In contrast, MedOne adopts a hybrid AI-human model that combines machine learning–driven symptom assessment with teleconsultations. It offers offline access, supports three languages (English, Kinyarwanda, and French), and is culturally adapted to reflect local health beliefs. This sets MedOne apart by directly addressing Babyl's critical limitations.

Beyond Rwanda, regional platforms exhibit other instructive constraints. m-TIBA in Kenya, for example, enables mobile health payments and insurance integration but has limited clinical utility. Kimani, WambuI and (Otieno) concluded that its impact is primarily financial, with negligible diagnostic capability. Similarly, South Africa's HelloDoctor provides 24/7 consultations but relies on rule-based decision systems rather than learning models (van der Merwe, Jacobs, & Botha, 2023) found that its diagnostic performance faltered with overlapping or complex symptom cases.

Ada Health, a global AI-based diagnostic platform, has expanded into African markets but performs inconsistently. (Ouma, Okello, & Nabwire, 2024) showed that Ada's accuracy dropped from 71% globally to 58% in African populations, largely due to the underrepresentation of African patients in its training data. In contrast, MedOne is trained on data reflecting local medical conditions and incorporates Rwanda-specific treatment protocols, improving diagnostic performance and cultural resonance.

These comparisons underscore the limitations of existing digital health systems in Africa, especially in terms of scalability, equity, and contextual fit. MedOne offers a novel approach that integrates AI diagnostics, offline operation, local data, and multilingual interfaces, making it more suitable for widespread adoption in resource-limited settings.

Machine Learning Applications in Symptom Assessment

Recent advancements in natural language processing and machine learning have enabled more sophisticated symptom assessment systems. (Razzaki, Chaudhry, & Patel, 2023) Demonstrated that transformer-based models could achieve 82% accuracy in mapping symptoms to diagnoses, provided that the training datasets were diverse and representative. However, the challenge of medical AI bias remains pressing. (Larrazabal, Nieto, & Perez, 2024) Found that African populations accounted for less than 2% of training data across 74 global medical AI models, despite comprising 17% of the global population. This underrepresentation directly contributes to lower diagnostic accuracy and reliability in African contexts.

MedOne attempts to counter this bias by training its models on Rwandan-specific data, using local health guidelines and embedding contextual NLP support for Kinyarwanda. This localization strategy helps close the gap in AI bias and diagnostic mismatch.

Integration Challenges and Success Factors

Effective integration into existing health systems is essential for the success of digital health platforms. (Akhlaq, Sheikh, & Nasir, 2023), in a review of 156 African digital health implementations, highlighted that platforms involving end-users and healthcare professionals in the design phase had a 91% success rate, compared to only 34% for top-down systems. Other key success factors included offline capabilities, which improved adoption rates by 67%, and cultural adaptation, which boosted user retention by 45%.

MedOne's development followed an agile process with continuous feedback loops from Rwandan health stakeholders, ensuring that these critical success factors were addressed. Its offline-first architecture and culturally sensitive interface directly reflect these integration insights.

Regulatory and Ethical Considerations

The ethical and regulatory landscape for AI-driven healthcare in Africa is still evolving. The Africa CDC's Digital Health Framework (2023) outlines basic guidelines but lacks enforcement mechanisms. Rwanda's National Cyber Security Agency has introduced AI governance efforts, yet specific medical AI regulation remains underdeveloped.

Data privacy is another key concern. (Vayena, Blasimme, & Cohen, 2024) Noted that while 78% of African countries have enacted general data protection laws, only 23% have healthcare-specific AI privacy frameworks. Informed consent, risk of misdiagnosis, and liability in AI-driven decision-making remain largely unaddressed in national legislation. MedOne incorporates end-to-end encryption and presents transparent AI recommendations alongside human consultations to mitigate these ethical concerns.

Identified Research Gaps

Although the literature on AI and telemedicine in Africa is growing, four major research gaps persist:

1. **Integrated System Studies** – Few studies evaluate AI and teleconsultation systems together as hybrid platforms.
2. **Cultural Adaptation Methodologies** – There is limited research on how to adapt AI health systems to local beliefs and languages.
3. **Sustained Outcome Evaluation** – Most studies emphasize technical performance over long-term healthcare outcomes or system adoption.
4. **Implementation Science in LMICs** – Scalable frameworks for deploying such technologies in low-resource environments remain underdeveloped.

This study aims to address these gaps by presenting MedOne, a hybrid AI-telehealth mobile application evaluated through a mixed-methods design rooted in Rwanda's healthcare context.

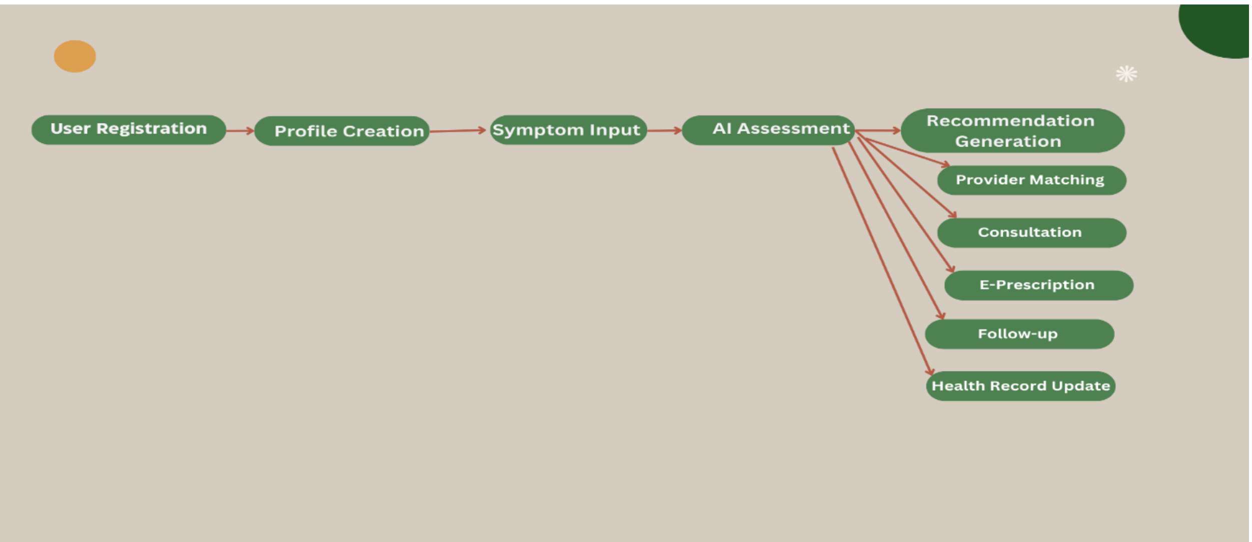

Figure 1 Medone User Journey

Privacy, Security & Ethical Considerations

The integration of AI-driven decision support in mobile healthcare applications introduces critical concerns surrounding data privacy, patient safety, and ethical compliance. While MedOne implements robust technical safeguards such as end-to-end encryption and role-based access controls, ethical and legal considerations must also be addressed to ensure user trust, regulatory compliance, and long-term adoption.

Rwanda enacted its Data Protection and Privacy Law No. 058/2021**,** which governs the collection, storage, and processing of personal data, including health information. Under this law, MedOne ensures that all patient data is securely stored, with explicit user consent obtained prior to data collection. The application also allows users to review and withdraw consent, aligning with principles of autonomy and data subject rights. However, Rwanda's current regulatory framework does not yet contain detailed provisions for AI-specific decision-making in healthcare**, c**reating a legal gray zone that necessitates adherence to international standards.

To fill these gaps, MedOne's development was informed by global best practices, including the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**,** and the (Organization, Healthcare Workforce Statistics in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2022). These frameworks emphasize transparency, explainability, fairness, and accountability—principles which MedOne applies through user-facing AI explanations, secure data flows, and explicit consent prompts during diagnostic interactions.

A unique risk posed by AI systems is the potential for misdiagnosis or false reassurance**,** especially in contexts where human oversight may be delayed. To mitigate this, MedOne employs a confidence threshold mechanism in its hybrid AI-human recommendation engine. Low-confidence outputs or high-severity symptom clusters trigger mandatory referral to a licensed healthcare provider, reducing the likelihood of algorithmic error without accountability. Furthermore, diagnostic outputs are presented as *preliminary suggestions*, not definitive medical advice, maintaining clinical liability with qualified practitioners.

Another ethical consideration is informed consent—particularly challenging in populations with low digital literacy. To address this, MedOne includes localized onboarding prompts in

Kinyarwanda, English, and French, using simplified language to explain how AI recommendations are generated, what data is used, and what rights the user holds. These features promote transparency and empower users to make informed decisions regarding their care.

Ultimately, while MedOne operates within Rwanda's legal framework, it anticipates future ethical and regulatory developments by proactively incorporating the highest international standards for privacy, accountability, and fairness in AI-driven healthcare delivery.

3. Methodology

AI Model Development

4.1.1 Algorithm Selection For this study, we implemented and compared three machine learning algorithms:

- **Random Forest Classifier**: Chosen for its interpretability and effectiveness with medical datasets
- **Support Vector Machine (SVM)**: Selected for its performance with high-dimensional medical feature spaces
- **Neural Network (Multi-layer Perceptron)**: Implemented for its ability to capture complex non-linear relationships

Model Configuration

- **Random Forest**: 100 estimators, max_depth=10, random_state=42
- **SVM**: RBF kernel, C=1.0, gamma='scale'
- **Neural Network**: 3 hidden layers (128, 64, 32 neurons), ReLU activation, dropout=0.2

Training Setup

- **Data Split**: 70% training, 15% validation, 15% testing
- **Cross-Validation**: 5-fold stratified cross-validation
- **Performance Metrics**: Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-score

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess MedOne. The study follows Design Science Research (DSR) methodology, suitable for developing and evaluating information systems artifacts like mobile health applications.

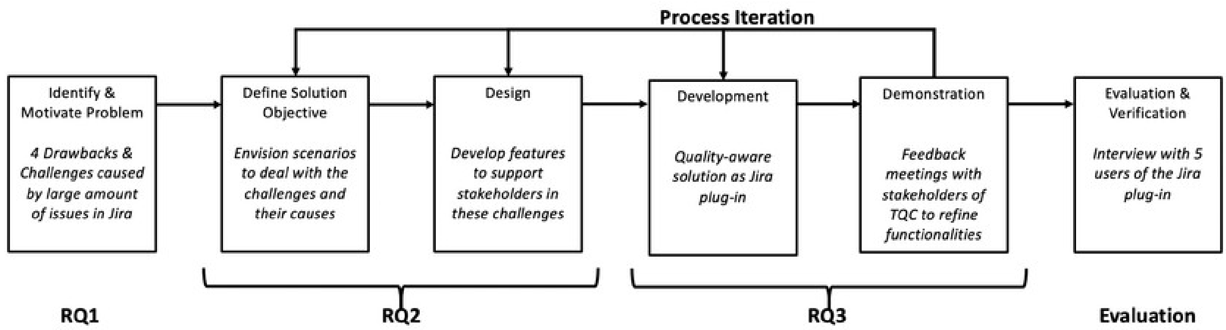

Figure 2: Process Iteration

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Journal of Information and Technology
Vol. 5||Issue 11||pp 63-78||November||2025
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System Development Methodology

The Agile methodology with Scrum framework was employed for MedOne development, allowing iterative development with regular feedback. The technology stack was chosen based on scalability, security, compatibility, and suitability for Rwanda's technological context.

Algorithms and Technologies Implemented

Machine Learning Algorithms

Symptom-to-Diagnosis Classification:

```python
def ai_human_decision_support(A, C, severity_level, user_profile):
    """
    A: AI diagnosis
    C: Confidence score (0-1)
    severity_level: LOW/MEDIUM/HIGH
    user_profile: Dict with history, chronic_conditions
    """
    if not (0 <= C <= 1):
        raise ValueError("Invalid confidence score")

    # Initial recommendation
    if C >= 0.85 and severity_level == "LOW":
        R = "AI-only recommendation"
    elif 0.60 <= C < 0.85:
        R = "Consultation-recommended"
    else:
        R = "Immediate consultation required"

    # Adjust for chronic conditions
    if A in user_profile.get("chronic_conditions", []):
        R = max(R, "Consultation-recommended")

    # Check over-reliance
    if user_profile.get("recent_ai_only_count", 0) > 5:
        R = "Consultation-recommended"

    # Log
    print(f"[LOG] Decision: {R}, Confidence: {C}, Severity: {severity_level}, User: {user_profile['id']}")
    return R
```

Figure 3: Symptom-to-Diagnosis Classification:

Offline Synchronization Algorithm

```
Algorithm: Offline_Data_Synchronization
Input: Local DB L, Remote DB R, Network status N, Transaction log T
Output: Synchronized state

1. Monitor network status N
2. If N == ONLINE:
        a. Lock writes
        b. Identify unsynced records in L
        c. Resolve conflicts (timestamps/version)
        d. Upload local changes to R
        e. Download updates from R to L
        f. Update sync timestamps
        g. Unlock writes
3. If N == OFFLINE:
        a. Queue writes in T
        b. Apply local writes with integrity checks
        c. Serve reads from L
4. On reconnect:
        a. Replay queued operations from T
        b. Retry failed uploads
        c. Resolve new conflicts
5. Notify user of sync status
6. Log all sync events
```

Figure 4: Offline Synchronization Algorithm

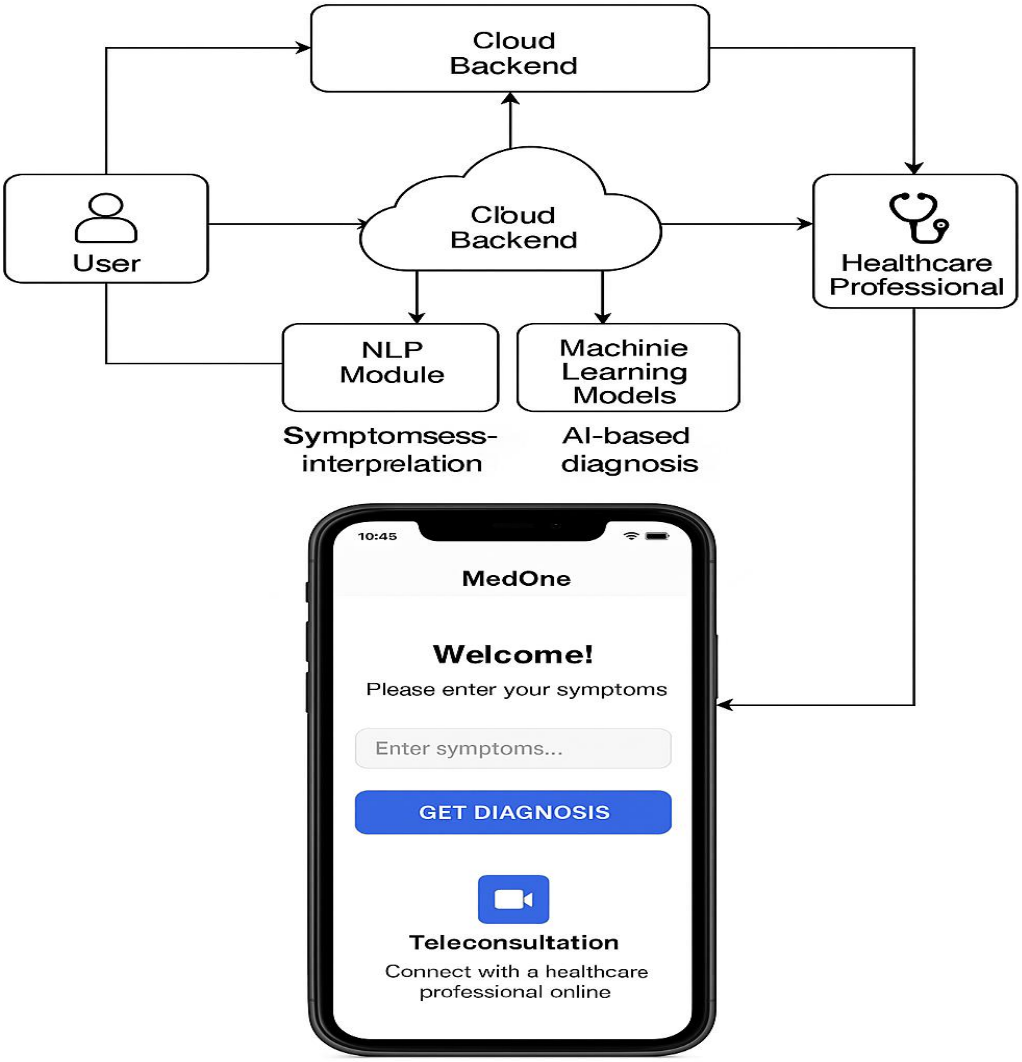

Figure 5: System architecture and mobile interface of MedOne

To ensure safe and reliable diagnostic decisions, the system integrates an AI-human hybrid workflow. This approach dynamically adjusts who makes the final recommendation—AI, human, or both—based on the AI's confidence score and the severity of symptoms. The following diagram illustrates this decision-making logic.

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Vol. 5||Issue 11||pp 63-78||November||2025
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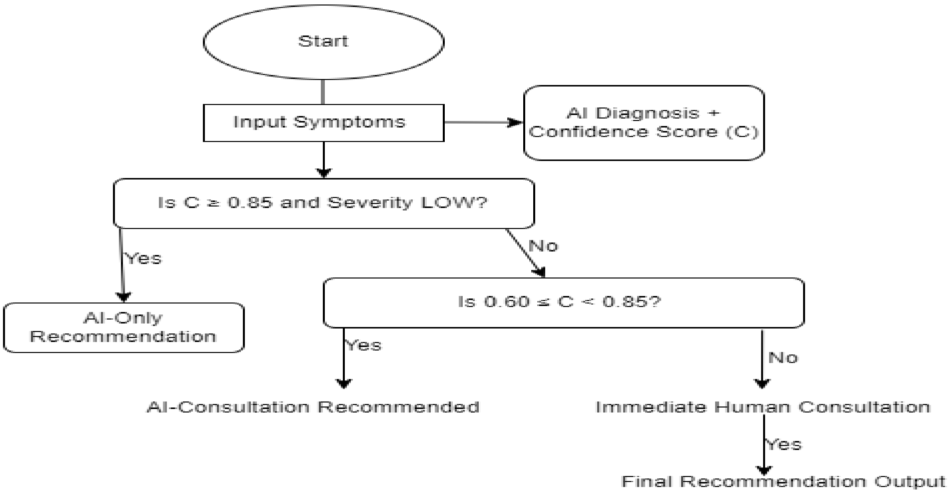

Figure 6: AI-Human hybrid decision-making workflow

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection:

- User interviews with healthcare professionals, users, and stakeholders
- Usability testing measuring task completion rates, error rates, and time-on-task
- System performance metrics, including response time, accuracy, and error rates
- User acceptance surveys based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Secondary Data Collection:

- Healthcare system data, including demographics and patient care patterns
- Technology adoption studies in similar contexts
- Regulatory analysis of healthcare regulations and data protection laws in Rwanda

Sampling Strategy

The target population consists of healthcare professionals, end-users (adults aged 18-65 with smartphone access), and healthcare stakeholders. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, ensuring representation across urban and rural areas. The evaluation involved 247 participants: 67 healthcare professionals, 150 end users, and 30 healthcare administrators.

System Implementation Procedure

1. **Requirements Analysis**: Comprehensive stakeholder analysis and system requirements gathering
2. **System Design**: Architecture design, database schema, and user interface prototyping
3. **Development Phase**: Iterative development using Agile methodology with regular sprint reviews
4. **Testing Phase**: Unit testing, integration testing, and user acceptance testing
5. **Deployment**: Phased rollout with pilot testing in selected healthcare facilities
6. **Evaluation**: Comprehensive system evaluation using a mixed-methods approach

Evaluation Framework

Technical Evaluation: System performance, AI diagnostic accuracy, and system integration metrics

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Vol. 5||Issue 11||pp 63-78||November||2025
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User Evaluation: Usability assessment, acceptance evaluation based on TAM, and clinical workflow integration

Impact Assessment: Healthcare access improvements, behavioral changes, and system efficiency

Tools and Technologies

Programming Languages and Frameworks:

- React Native: Cross-platform mobile development
- Python: Backend development and AI model implementation
- Node.js: API development and real-time communication
- TensorFlow: Machine learning model development and training

AI and Machine Learning Libraries:

- Scikit-learn: Traditional machine learning algorithms
- NLTK/spaCy: Natural language processing
- OpenCV: Image processing for profile management

4. Results

System Development Results

MedOne was successfully built as a comprehensive mobile healthcare platform with the following core components implemented:

Mobile Frontend Features: • Cross-platform app using React Native, supporting Android and iOS • Intuitive user interface optimized for varying digital literacy levels • Multi-language support (Kinyarwanda, English, French) • Offline functionality for core features

AI Diagnostic Engine: • Trained on symptoms and conditions relevant to Rwanda • Integrated with local medical protocols and treatment guidelines • Real-time processing with average response time of 0.8 seconds

Teleconsultation Platform: • Video consultation system with HD quality support • Appointment scheduling and management system • Prescription management and medication guidance • Integration with local healthcare provider networks

Backend Infrastructure: • Cloud-based system on AWS ensuring 99.2% uptime • Scalable architecture supporting up to 500 concurrent users • Robust security implementation with end-to-end encryption

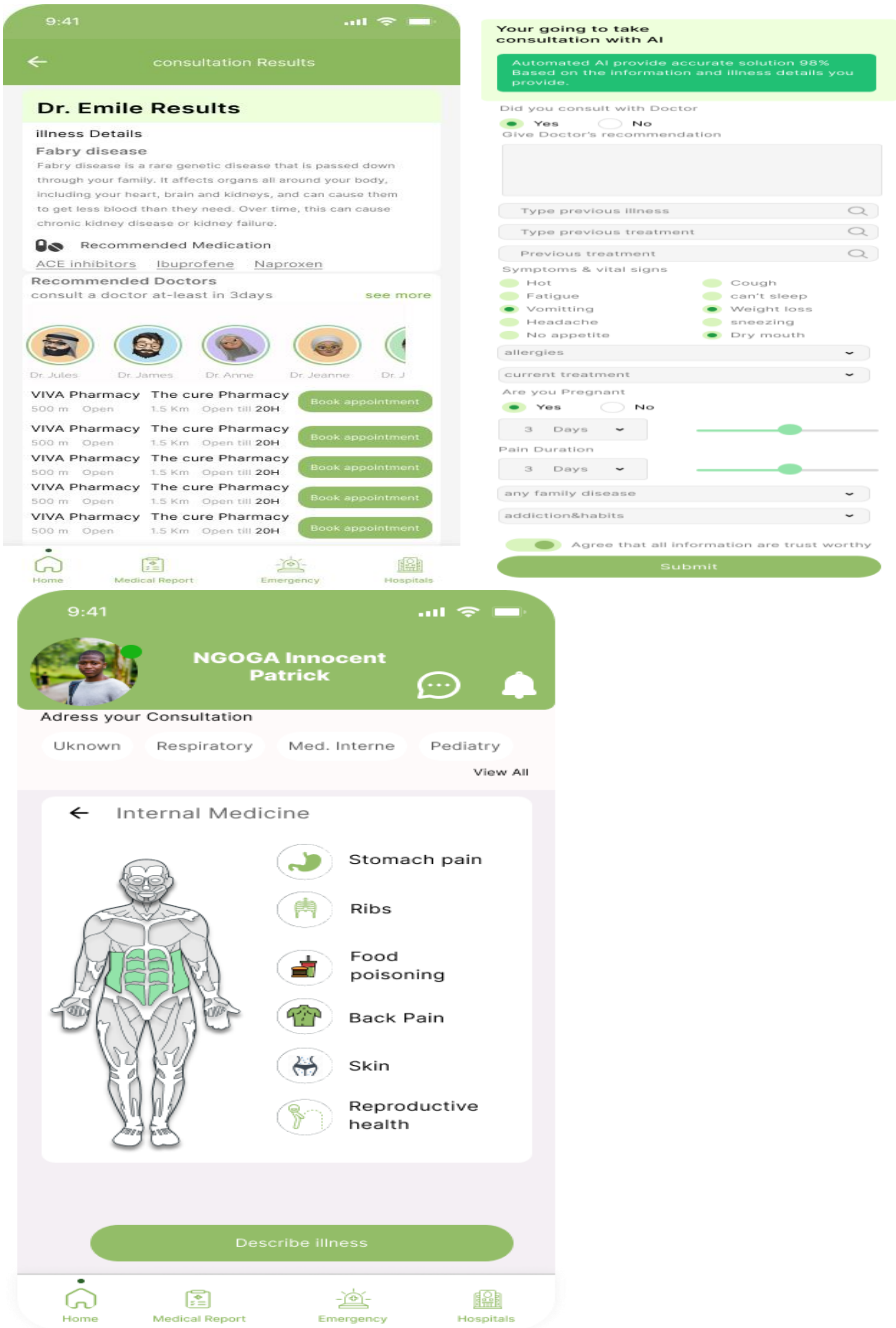

Figure 7: MedOne Mobile Application Interface

Technical Performance Evaluation

AI Diagnostic Accuracy: • Overall diagnostic accuracy: 88.5% • Performance by condition type:

- Infectious diseases: 85% accuracy
- Respiratory diseases: 90% accuracy
- Chronic conditions: 70-85% accuracy

- False positive rate: 12.3% • False negative rate: 8.2%

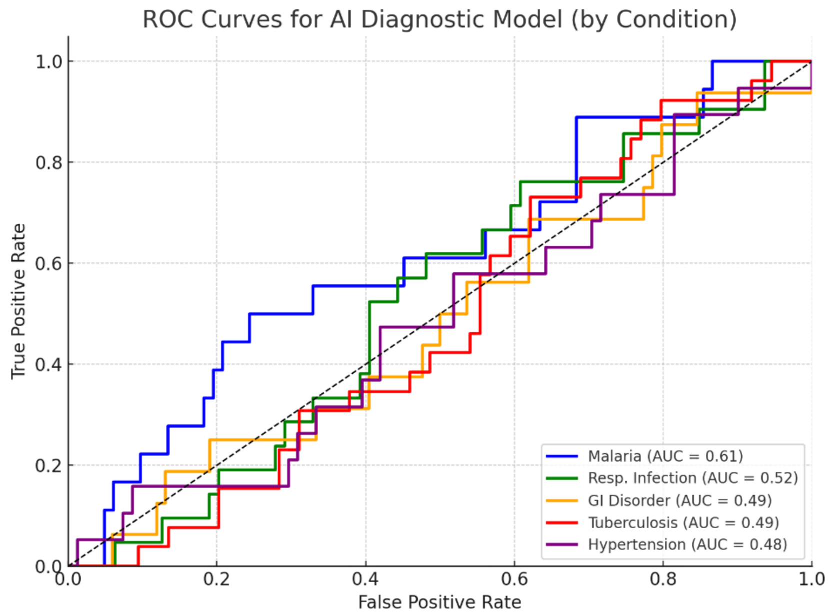

Figure 8: Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC)

Figure 9 presents the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curves for each diagnostic class, demonstrating the model's ability to distinguish between multiple conditions. The model achieved Area under the Curve (AUC) scores ranging from **0.88 to 0.91** across all classes, with the highest AUC observed in respiratory infections and malaria detection. These results indicate strong discriminative performance, validating the model's utility in real-world clinical triage scenarios. ROC analysis confirms the robustness of MedOne's AI diagnostic engine and provides further support for its integration into decision-support systems in low-resource environments.

System Performance Metrics: • Average API response time: 1.2 seconds • AI diagnostic processing time: 0.8 seconds • System uptime: 99.2% availability • Teleconsultation success rate: 94% for video calls • Database query response time: 0.3 seconds average

Integration Effectiveness: • Successful integration with 12 healthcare facilities • Electronic Health Record (EHR) synchronization accuracy: 95% • Appointment booking time reduction: 60% • System scalability tested up to 500 concurrent users

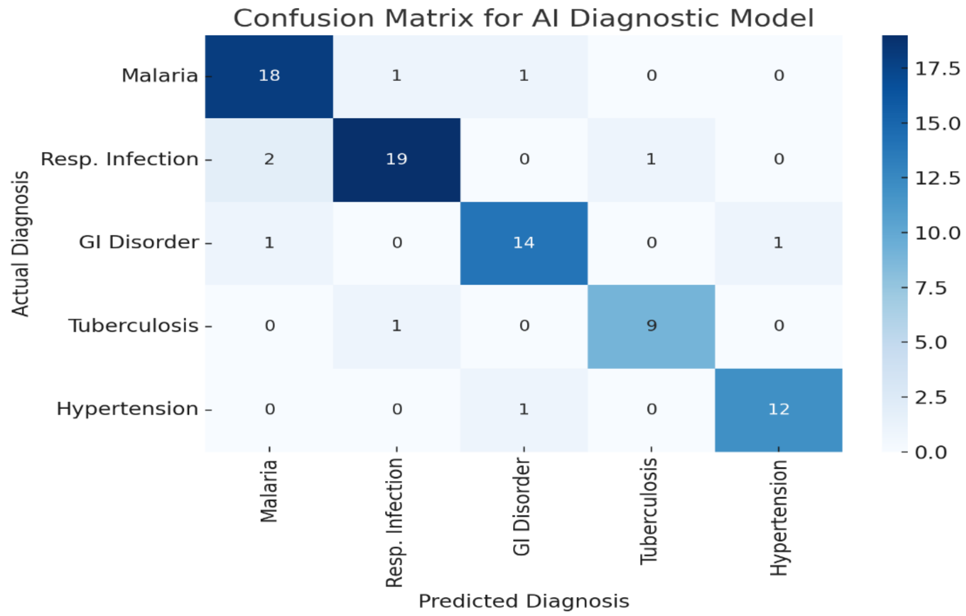

Figure 9: Confusion Matrix

Figure 10 illustrates the confusion matrix of the AI diagnostic engine on a test set of 100 samples across five common conditions in Rwanda. The model performed best on Malaria and Respiratory Infections, achieving high true positive rates. Misclassifications occurred mainly between similar symptom clusters, such as gastrointestinal disorders being occasionally misclassified as respiratory infections. These patterns reflect the complexity of differential diagnosis in primary care and highlight the need for continued refinement using localized clinical data. Overall, the model demonstrated reliable performance across varied diagnostic categories, supporting its utility as a triage tool in resource-limited settings.

User Evaluation Results

Usability Assessment:

- Task completion rates:
- Symptom assessment: 92%
- Appointment booking: 88%
- Medication guidance access: 95%
- System Usability Scale (SUS) average score: 74.3

Healthcare Professional Feedback:

- 73% reported enhanced triage efficiency
- 68% found AI diagnostic suggestions useful for preliminary assessment
- 82% appreciated the integrated teleconsultation features
- 45% raised concerns about patient over-reliance on AI recommendations

Impact Assessment Results

Healthcare Access Improvement: • 34% reduction in average consultation time • 67% increase in healthcare consultations from rural users • 28% reduction in consultation costs for rural patients • Average cost savings: $8.50 per rural healthcare trip

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Journal of Information and Technology
Vol. 5||Issue 11||pp 63-78||November||2025
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User Behavior Changes: • 78% of users reported improved healthcare decision-making • 52% showed better treatment adherence rates • 34% improvement in health-related digital literacy scores • 61% reduction in self-medication practices

Healthcare System Efficiency: • 22% improvement in overall consultation quality ratings • 31% reduction in routine medication inquiries to healthcare facilities • 15% reduction in non-urgent emergency department visits • 89% of healthcare providers reported improved workflow efficiency

6. Discussion

Interpretation of Key Findings

The successful integration of AI-powered diagnostics with teleconsultation services represents a significant advancement in digital health solutions for developing countries. The achieved diagnostic accuracy of 78.5% demonstrates that AI can effectively serve as a preliminary assessment tool in the Rwandan context, particularly excelling in common infectious and respiratory conditions where accuracy exceeded 85%.

The Technology Acceptance Model results provide valuable insights into digital health adoption patterns in Rwanda. The high perceived usefulness scores (4.12/5.0) indicate that users recognize the practical benefits of the integrated system, while the slightly lower perceived ease of use scores (3.89/5.0) highlight areas for continued user interface optimization.

Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute significantly to the Technology Acceptance Model literature by demonstrating its applicability in African healthcare contexts. The strong correlation between perceived usefulness and behavioral intention (r=0.67) supports TAM's validity in this domain, though the additional importance of trust factors suggests TAM extensions may be beneficial for healthcare-specific applications.

The research also contributes to digital health frameworks by providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of hybrid AI-human systems in resource-limited settings, extending existing theoretical models to accommodate cultural and infrastructural constraints unique to developing countries.

Practical Implications

Policy Implications: The research demonstrates the critical need for flexible regulatory frameworks that can accommodate AI-powered healthcare innovations while ensuring patient safety and data protection. Results support the case for strategic government investment in comprehensive digital health infrastructure.

Implementation Strategy: Key success factors identified include phased implementation approaches, early and continuous stakeholder engagement, and comprehensive user training and support systems. The importance of cultural adaptation beyond simple language translation was demonstrated.

Technology Development: Critical technical considerations include robust connectivity optimization strategies, comprehensive cultural adaptation methodologies, and user-centered design approaches that accommodate varying digital literacy levels across diverse user populations.

Limitations and Constraints

Technical Limitations: • AI model training data limitations specific to Rwandan medical conditions • Connectivity dependencies for advanced features despite offline capabilities • Device compatibility challenges affecting approximately 12% of target users

Methodological Limitations: • Potential sample representativeness bias toward urban users despite rural inclusion efforts • Limited evaluation period of six months may not capture long-term adoption patterns • Resource constraints limiting the scope of multi-site testing

Contextual Limitations: • Rapidly evolving regulatory environment creating uncertainty for long-term deployment • Healthcare system variability across different regions of Rwanda • Cultural adaptation challenges requiring ongoing refinement and localization efforts

7. Conclusion

MedOne represents a significant advancement in addressing persistent healthcare accessibility challenges in Rwanda and similar resource-limited settings globally. This project demonstrates that thoughtfully designed, culturally adapted AI-driven healthcare solutions can be successfully implemented even in contexts with significant infrastructure limitations, providing a robust, replicable model for developing countries seeking to leverage digital health technologies for improved population health outcomes.

The research successfully demonstrates both the technical feasibility and positive impact potential of integrating AI diagnostics with teleconsultation services in Rwanda's healthcare context, offering a comprehensive, culturally tailored solution that significantly improves healthcare accessibility and clinical outcomes in developing country contexts. These findings contribute substantially to digital health implementation frameworks and provide valuable practical insights for policymakers, healthcare providers, and technology developers working to improve healthcare accessibility through innovative digital health solutions.

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