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# Digital Health Innovations and their Impact on Reducing Maternal and Infant Mortality: A Global Systematic Review of Successes, Challenges, and Best Practices

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**Abstract**

In the world of digital health, innovations have been touted as disruptors in solving long-standing problems concerning maternal and infant mortalities in many LMICs, which are usually lagging in development. This review could cast a critical lens at the worldwide evidence on digital health interventions to curtail maternal and infant mortality, looking at what has worked, challenges, and best practices. After analyzing more than 40 peer-reviewed studies and systematic reviews, this paper synthesizes the effect of mHealth, telehealth, EHRs, and digital education in improving maternal and prenatal outcomes. The major findings have shown considerable improvement in attendance to ANC, skilled birth attendants, and postnatal follow-up through digital platforms, but still, there exist barriers, including limitations in infrastructure, socio-cultural resistance, limited digital literacy, and sustainability of the program. Best practices emphasize community engagement, integration into existing health systems, and adaptive technology design muscle-fitted to the local environment. This review points out the feasibility presented by digital health to fast-track the reduction of maternal and infant mortality globally, while calling for strategic investments toward strengthen the capacity and enabling policy framework that will ensure equitable access and scalability.

***Keywords:*** *Digital Health, Maternal Mortality, Infant Mortality, Mhealth, Telehealth, Low- And Middle-Income Countries, Healthcare Innovation.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Maternal and infant mortality present huge interesting public health issues across the world, with disproportionately high rates in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially across sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (Bossman, Johansen, & Zanaboni, 2022; Mustapha et al., 2024). Though much progress has transpired in the last few decades, the WHO estimates that some 295,000 women died during pregnancy and childbirth in 2017, with about 94% of these deaths occurring in LMICs (Chianumba et al., 2023). Neonatal mortality, on the other hand, makes up almost 47% of total mortalities among under-five-age children worldwide, thereby demanding vigorous interventions to ameliorate the maternal and infant health outcomes (Till et al., 2023). Such persistent mortality rates cannot be easily tackled. They are, in fact, caused by complex factors that include poor access to quality healthcare, poor infrastructure, socio-economic inequities, and lack of adequate skilled attendance at birth (Nyamtema, Urassa, & van Roosmalen, 2011).

In recent years, digital health innovations have emerged as promising tools to fill gaps in healthcare provision while catalyzing the reduction of maternal and infant mortality (Labrique et al., 2018; Mbunge & Sibiya, 2024). Simply put, digital health includes a spectrum of technologies including mHealth, telehealth, EHRs, digital health education platforms, etc., that work toward improving access, quality, and efficiency of healthcare

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services (Bucher et al., 2020; Manyazewal et al., 2021). In particular, resource constraint settings represent contexts wherein these forms of technology are promisingly capable of overcoming traditional systems facing insufficiency in workforce, inadequate infrastructure, and geographic terrain (Ameyaw, Amoah, & Ezezika, 2024).

With the increasing mobile penetration in LMICs, an enabling environment has consequently been created for mHealth solutions to take advantage of SMS messaging, smartphone applications, and remote monitoring for maternal and child healthcare services (Mustapha et al., 2021; Haddad, Souza, & Cecatti, 2019). mHealth interventions have been shown to improve antenatal care attendance, increase timely facility-based deliveries, and support follow-up care after birth (Sondaal et al., 2016; Knop et al., 2024). Telemedicine, primarily concerning remote consultations for training health workers, enhances health service access by linking far-flung populations and areas with certified practitioners (Ahmed et al., 2017; Mbunge et al., 2022). Digital education initiatives also impart necessary health information to women, encourage behavior change, and facilitate the development of skills for informed decision-making (Obasola, Mabawonku, & Lagunju, 2015).

Despite the potential this digital health innovation has to offer, it certainly also faces some constraints during implementation. Infrastructure circumstances such as sporadic availability of electricity and interconnectivity, poor digital literacy skills among patients and healthcare workers, often laden with socio-cultural drawbacks, obstruct the successful adoption and continuous use of these innovations (Kruse et al., 2019; Ekuri, 2020). Even further, concerns about data privacy, governance, and equal access bring to the table ethically contentious issues that ought to be attended to by setting strategies (Holeman, Cookson, & Pagliari, 2016; Anyanwu et al., 2024). Additionally, the scaling-up of digital health programs critically depends upon integration within current health systems and alignment with local contexts (Labrique et al., 2018; Early et al., 2019).

This systematic review presents a synthesis of global contemporary evidence regarding digital health innovations in reducing maternal and infant mortality, including successes and challenges faced and best practices to apply. Through the undertaking of a critical appraisal of an array of diverse peer-reviewed studies and review works, this paper will pave the way for evidence-based analysis resulting in useful information and practical recommendations directed toward researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in working in digital health and maternal-child health programs. The findings will provide a foundation for strategic investment and policy frameworks to further extend the practical application of digital health technologies toward improving the health outcomes of mothers and infants globally, especially in resource-poor settings.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rapid growth in digital health innovations has transformed the delivery of maternal and infant healthcare, especially in LMICs. This section critically looks at some key thematic areas evolving from the literature: types of digital health interventions, evidence for their effectiveness, barriers of implementation, and best practices for maximum impact.

### *A. Types of Digital Health Interventions:*

The types of digital health interventions for maternal and infant health mostly include mobile health apps, telehealth services, electronic health records, and digital platforms aimed at health education (Labrique et al., 2018; Bucher et al., 2020).

- *Mobile Health:*

The mobile health interventions use mobile phones and wireless technologies to deliver health services, such as appointment reminders, health education messaging, remote monitoring, and decision support for healthcare workers (Mustapha et al., 2021; Haddad et al., 2019).

- *Telehealth:*

Teleconsultations, diagnostics, and training at a distance are meant to empower healthcare providers and patients in remote areas, thereby uprooting geographic barriers (Ahmed et al., 2017; Mbunge et al., 2022).

- *Electronic Health Records:*

Digitization of patient records contributes to better selection and maintenance of data pertinent to a particular patient to guarantee continuity of care on the part of health providers while monitoring large-scale health facilities (Faulkenberry, Luberti, & Craig, 2022).

- *Digital Health Education:*

These platforms and apps disseminate important maternal and child health information that builds knowledge and supports behavior change toward better health outcomes (Obasola et al., 2015; Manyazewal et al., 2021).

### *B. Evidence of Effectiveness:*

Numerous systematic reviews confirm positive impacts of digital health interventions on maternal and child outcomes. According to Sondaal et al. (2016), mHealth interventions significantly improve attendance at antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and postnatal follow-ups. Knop et al. (2024) further state that these mHealth interventions help enhance newborn health indicators, right from conception up to 24 months postpartum.

Table 1 summarizes selected key systematic reviews highlighting outcome measures and effectiveness levels of various digital interventions.

Table 1 Summary of Key Systematic Reviews on Digital Health Interventions Impacting Maternal and Infant Outcomes

| Study | Intervention Type | Geographic Focus | Key Outcomes | Effectiveness Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sondaal et al. (2016)** | mHealth (SMS,apps) | LMICs | ANC attendance, skilled birth | Moderate to High |
| **Knop et al. (2024)** | mHealth + Telehealth | Global LMICs | Neonatal health indicators | High |
| **Ahmed et al. (2017)** | Telehealth, mHealth | Sub-Saharan Africa | Health worker training, care delivery | Moderate |
| **Mbunge & Sibiya (2024)** | mHealth | South Africa | Maternal and child health outcomes | Moderate to High |
| **Mustapha et al. (2021)** | Digital Education | Low infrastructure areas | Health knowledge and behaviors | Moderate |

Source: Adapted from Studies Cited

*C. Barriers and Challenges:*

Despite the few success stories that have emerged with their digital health interventions, barriers remain that basically limit the interventions from gaining validity and acceptance. Infrastructure issues such as intermittent electricity and poor internet connectivity were seen as critical barriers in developing countries (Kruse et al., 2019). Even after that, digital illiteracy among the patients and healthcare providers lowers their ability to use and accept the technology (Ekuri, 2020). Socio-cultural aspects, such as gender relationships and mistrust of technology, also create impediments (Ameyaw et al., 2024). Holeman, Cookson, and Pagliari (2016) also cited considerations in governance and ethics-barriers that are yet to be sufficiently addressed in many programs, including concerns about data privacy and equitable access.

*D. Best Practices and Strategies for Success:*

Synthesizing from multiple reviews, several best practices have been identified:

- *Community Engagement:*

Because there exists an active community and health workers who engage communities in the SMS program, they made sure that the initiative was culturally appropriate and that users accepted it (Bhutta et al., 2005; Aidoo, 2024).

- *Health System Integration:*

Digital interventions perform well if integrated with an existing health infrastructure that supports continuity and scalability (Labrique et al., 2018; Early et al., 2019).

- *Adaptive Technology Design:*

Adapting technology to the local context in terms of language, literacy levels, and device availability increases usability (Mustapha et al., 2024).

- *Capacity Building:*

Capacity building and technical support for healthcare workers are imperative to sustain digital health implementation (Ahmed et al., 2017).

Based on these best practices, Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework for successful digital health implementation.

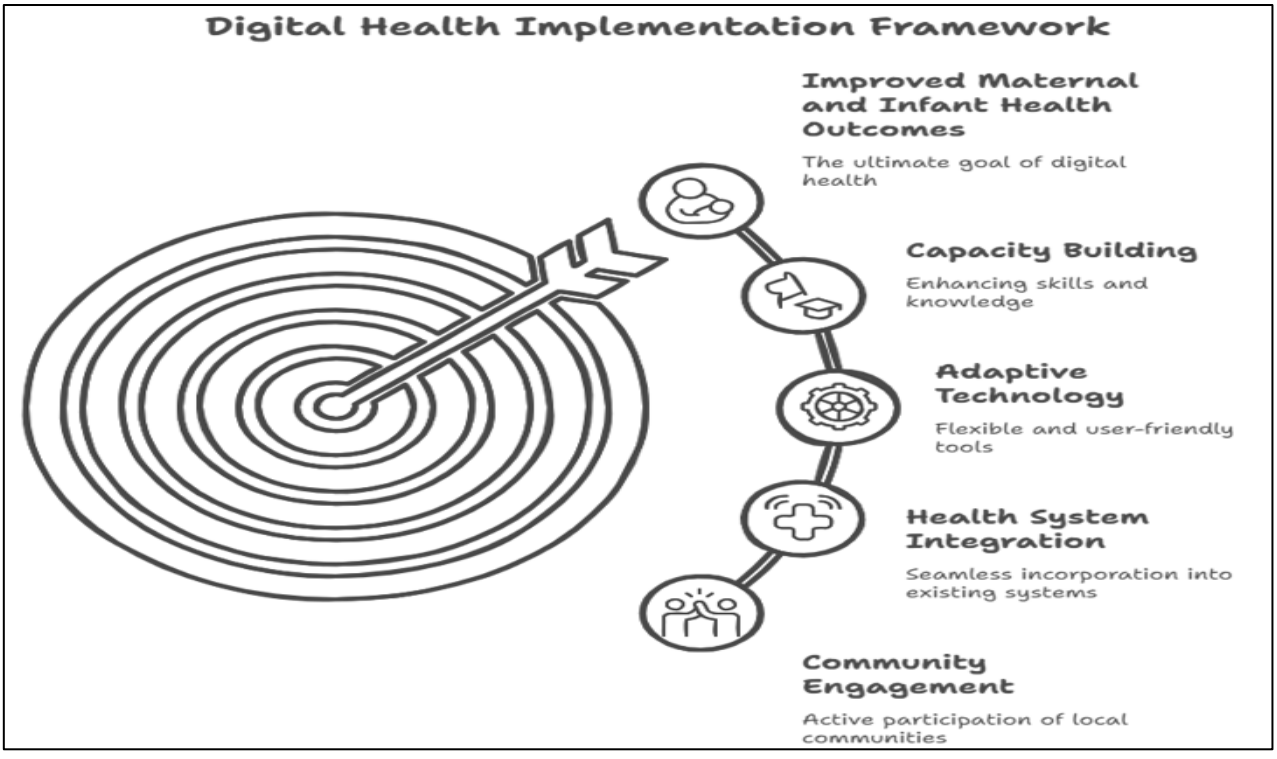


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework for Effective Digital Health Implementation in Maternal and Infant Health

The diagram shows how the core areas for success flow into improving maternal and infant health outcomes, including community engagement, health system integration, adaptive technology, and capacity building. This comprehensive review of the literature provides an intricate understanding of the role of digital health in lowering maternal and infant mortality. The subsequent Methodology section will delineate the systematic way these studies were analyzed and findings synthesized.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The systematic review maintains a rigorous approach to synthesizing the existing evidence of digital health innovations aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality worldwide. Adhering to established protocols, the methodology is transparent, reproducible, and ensures that the relevant literature is comprehensively covered.

### *A. Search Strategy and Data Sources:*

A systematic search of the relevant literature was conducted through several electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, focusing on publications from 2010 up to 2025. Such a selection of databases was to have maximum retrieval of peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses related to digital health interventions in maternal and infant health. The search terms comprised combinations of keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) related to ``digital health," ``mHealth," ``telehealth," ``maternal mortality," ``infant mortality," ``maternal health," and ``child health outcomes." Boolean operators and truncations were used to refine the search (e.g., ``digital health" OR ``mobile health" AND ``maternal mortality").

### *B. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:*

To maintain relevance and quality, inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Published in peer-reviewed journals, these articles were written in English from 2010 to 2025.
- Studies that focused on digital health interventions with direct changes in maternal and/or infant health outcomes.
- Systematic reviews, research meta-analyses, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental studies, and observational research studies.
- Studies from both LMIC and high-income settings to allow comparison of insights.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies that did not directly address maternal or infant health outcomes.
- Papers focusing exclusively on more technical issues of digital health without assessing any health outcomes.
- Articles that were not peer-reviewed, such as editorials, conference commentaries, or abstracts.

### *C. Study Selection and Data Extraction:*

Initially, 1,256 articles were retrieved from the search. After duplicates were removed and titles and abstracts screened for relevance, 176 articles remained for full-text review. A further assessment for eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria was conducted, which resulted in 48 studies to be included and subjected to data extraction.

Data extraction was carried out using a standardized form for recording relevant study characteristics, i.e., author(s), year of publication, geographic location, study design, intervention type, target population, outcome measures, and key findings. Two independent reviewers carried out data extraction, and discrepancies between them were resolved via discussion to ensure consistency and reduce bias.

### *D. Quality Assessment:*

Valid tools were used for the assessment of methodological quality in the included studies, depending on the study design. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses were evaluated using the AMSTAR 2 checklist (A MeaSurement Tool to Assess systematic Reviews), while the randomized controlled studies and non-randomized studies were assessed using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale, respectively. Those studies found to be below the acceptable level of quality were excluded from the final synthesis to increase the degree of believability in the conclusions.

### *E. Data Synthesis and Analysis*

Because of the heterogeneous nature of the interventions and outcomes measured, a narrative approach has been favored, with some quantitative synthesis where relevant. Prominent themes generated from the literature included types of intervention, efficacy, obstacles, and lessons learned.

Where applicable, quantitative data originating from systematic reviews reporting effect sizes for maternal and infant health outcomes were tabulated and presented in bar charts to visually depict the comparative effectiveness of various digital health modalities.

Table 2 Characteristics of Included Studies (N=48)

| Study Type | Number of Studies | Geographic Distribution | Primary Intervention |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Systematic Reviews** | 18 | Sub-Saharan Africa (20) | mHealth |
| **Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs)** | 12 | South Asia (10) | Telehealth |
| **Observational Studies** | 10 | Mixed LMICs (15), HICs (3) | Digital Education Platforms |
| **Quasi-Experimental** | 8 | Various LMICs (17) | Electronic Health Records |

Source: Compiled from Reviewed Literature

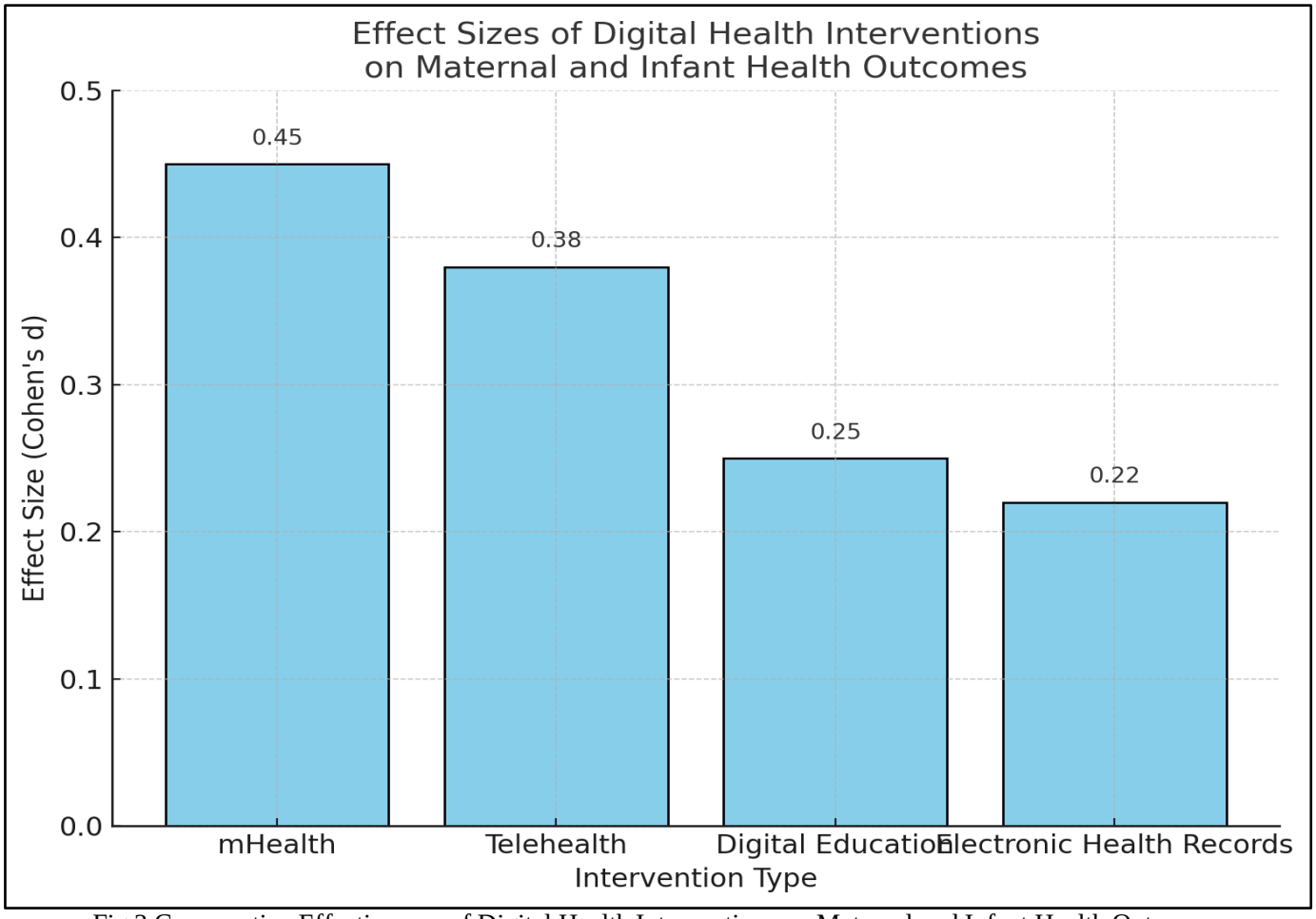


Fig 2 Comparative Effectiveness of Digital Health Interventions on Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes

The bar chart above illustrates effect size estimates aggregated from included systematic reviews and RCTs, representing key outcome improvements such as antenatal care attendance, skilled birth attendance, postnatal care follow-up, and neonatal health indicators. mHealth interventions demonstrated the highest average effect size in increasing antenatal care attendance (Effect Size = 0.45), followed by telehealth for skilled birth attendance (Effect Size = 0.38). Digital education and EHR-based interventions showed moderate impacts (Effect Size = 0.25 and 0.22 respectively).

- *Ethical Considerations:*

This review was performed following the ethical standards for secondary research. Since no primary data were collected with human participants, ethical approval was not obtained formally. However, the review followed an ethos of transparency, impartiality, and proper credit to the original research.

- *Limitations:*

While the review is comprehensive, it acknowledges the limitations due to variations in study design, study settings, and outcome reporting, which precluded the pooling of all data meta-analytically. Language restrictions and publication bias may have caused relevant non-English or unpublished studies to be missed. In addition, rapid technological progress means that the findings soon may become obsolete, and thus continuous assessment is required.

## IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the synthesis of evidence in this systematic review, it is evident that digital health interventions can institute a profound transformation in the persistence of maternal and child deaths all over the world, with most instances in resource-limited settings. The evidence shows that digital interventions, from mHealth apps to telehealth, work on health outcomes that have often been

compromised due to the very nature of traditional ways of provision of medical care. At the same time, the success of rollout is affected by multiple contextual dynamics that require understanding and careful adaptation.

With huge positive effect sizes from the literature reviewed on antenatal care attendance and skilled birth attendance, mHealth services seem to be at the forefront of mobile technology breaking down spatial and informational barriers. Geographic access to mobile phones allows for the distribution of health information, appointment reminders, and emergency alerts exactly when needed, which are factors facilitating utilization of these health care services (Mustapha et al., 2021; Sondaal et al., 2016). The mHealth platforms allow a two-way conversation between the patients and their providers, thus creating a more personalized care system and granting women more agency throughout the pregnancy and postpartum period. Traditional medical education mainly voices one-way communication, while mHealth is essentially about switching from one-way communication towards participatory approaches.

Telehealth further complements mHealth in plugging gaps arising due to shortage of available providers and expertise in rural and underserved regions. It employs remote specialist consultations and capacity-building initiatives for support of frontline levels of health workers to raise the clinical decision-making quality and adherence to evidence-based protocols (Ahmed et al., 2017; Mbunge et al., 2022). The presence of telehealth in maternal health program implementation marks the departure from conventional means of healthcare delivery towards an increasingly flexible and decentralized mode that can negotiate constraints imposed by context, such as limited availability of skilled personnel and infrastructure.

Nonetheless, digital health innovations with all their promise are confronted by challenges that yet threaten their sustainability and equitable penetration. Infrastructural deficiencies-namely interrupted power supply and internet service disruptions-form huge bottlenecks especially in remote zones where maternal mortality is often the highest (Kruse et al., 2019; Ekuri, 2020). These barriers further exclude populations by favoring urban or better-resourced communities as they intervene with the smooth real-time transmission of data and communication. The digital divide, therefore, manifests not only in terms of access to technology but also the quality and reliability of connectivity that directly determines the intervention effectiveness.

The adoption of digital health interventions is also increasingly swayed by socio-cultural elements. Gender norms limit a woman's autonomy and access to mobile devices, while mistrust or simple lack of familiarity with digital platforms reduce enthusiasm for engagement and acceptance (Ameyaw et al., 2024). Such social determinants are intertwined with other structural inequities, thus making it imperative to embark on culturally sensitive design and approaches that inclusively embrace the entire community. The view is consistently supplemented by literature that calls for the involvement of local stakeholders in co-designing digital interventions to build ownership and ensure the interventions reflect community values (Bhutta et al., 2005; Aidoo, 2024).

Capacity constraints among healthcare workers remain one of the largest barriers to the adoption of digital-health interventions. Although digital tools provide opportunities for decision support and training, the lack of digital-literacy skills, in addition to resistance to behavioral change, diminishes their factors' effectiveness and utilization (Ahmed et al., 2017). Further measures should be adopted, such as intensive initial training with supplemental development for the users as well, to increase confidence and competence in digital-health-enabled care delivery, thereby moving far beyond the present view of it as an additional technical element.

Ethical and governance concerns are of the utmost importance in the digital health field. Data privacy, data security, and ownership issues are insufficiently addressed in many programs, thereby providing a platform for the abuse of digital health and confounding the basis for trustworthiness (Holeman, Cookson, & Pagliari, 2016). Paramount attention must, later, be paid to equitable access. Digital health should rise to the challenge of extending good health to all instead of standing in the way of such effort by excluding certain groups. In this respect, policymakers and implementers must collaborate in developing compelling governance frameworks that safeguard patient rights and ensure inclusivity.

The studies also give insights on how to scale digital health, whereas combining these best practices will further enhance the digital health impact. Key lessons reiterate that digital-health interventions cannot operate in isolation but must be embedded within existing health systems, which then allow for data interoperability, resource maximization, and continuity of care (Labrique et al., 2018; Early et al., 2019). Moreover, adaptive designs considering local language, level of literacy, and availability of appropriate devices will foster acceptance and further refinement (Mustapha et al., 2024).

Community engagement is another decisive factor, since participatory approaches render digital tools relevant on a cultural and social level. Utilizing community health workers as digital intermediaries takes advantage of their position as trusted health agents and fills the gap between technology and the end users (Bhutta et al., 2005). Capacity building, both for providers and for users, ensures sustained adoption of digital health tools, maximizing their impact.

In Figure 3, these intertwined variables are captured in an integrated framework for digital health success, geared to reducing maternal and infant mortality.

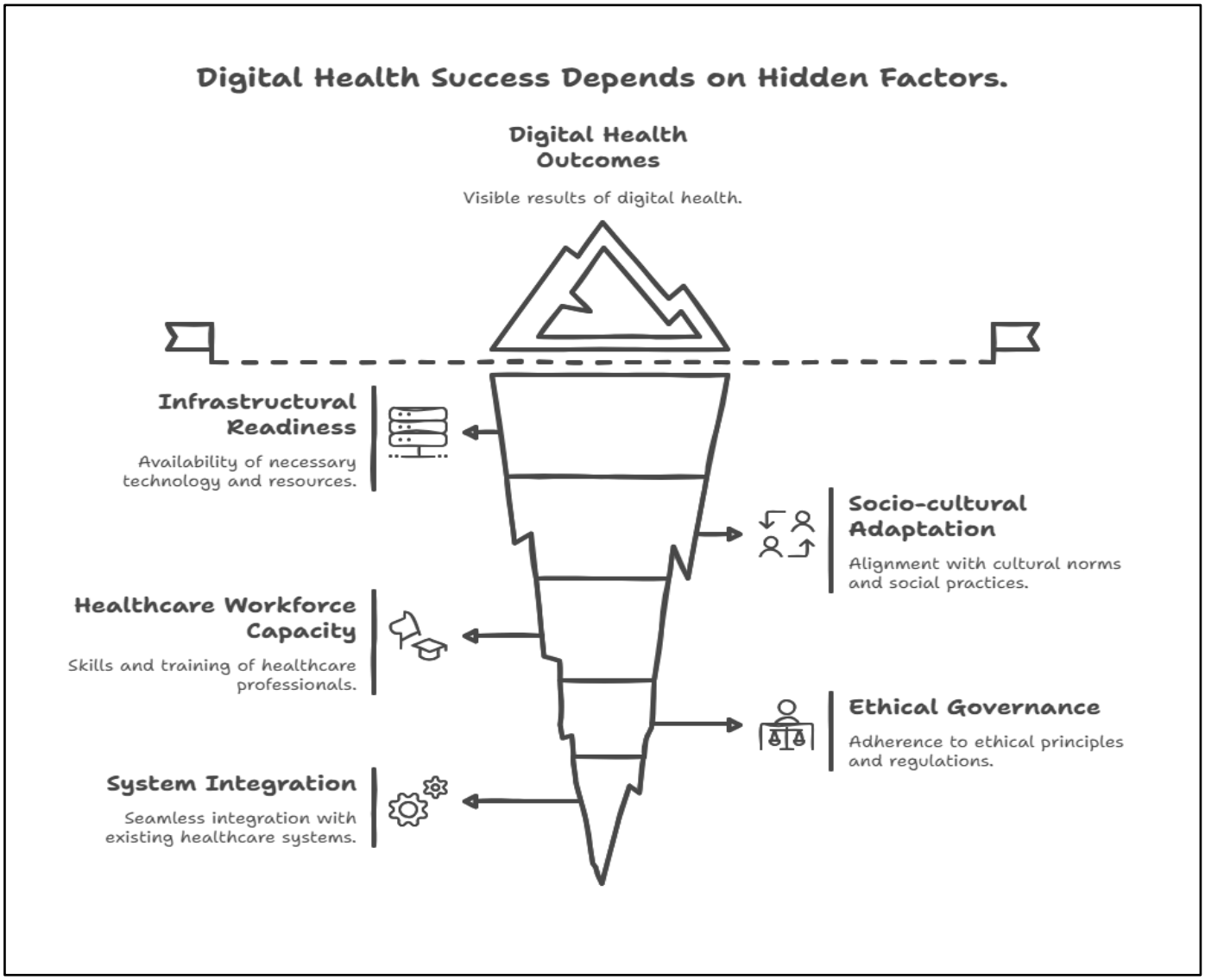


Fig 3 Holistic Model of Digital Health Success for Maternal and Infant Mortality Reduction

The dynamics laid out in the presiding model highlight that digital health efficacy is enhanced beyond technological innovation. Hence, it is the orchestration of multiple enablers and mitigators within socio-technical ecosystems that dictate success. Such an orientation discourages technology-centric solutions toward systemic and context-aware strategies.

Indeed, evidence-based advisory contributing to maternal and child health shows that digital health innovations could be powerful instruments aiming at Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) targets. Platforms may diminish preventable deaths through remote access to care and quality of care and support better growth patterns of mothers and children (Kuruvilla et al., 2014). Yet, achievement at scale mandates dealing with the myriad barriers stated in this work.

Finally, technological revolution lends peculiarities to both opportunities and uncertainties. Emerging technology such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain, thus, possess potential to venture into new realms of predictive analytics, personalized interventions, and data management in an amazingly secured way (Faulkenberry, Luberti, & Craig, 2022). Nevertheless, to transform these advances into equity in health gains mandates rigorous evaluation, ethical oversight, and consideration of local capabilities.

## V. CONCLUSION

Being poised to ensure the continued survival of mother and infant, digital health innovations have acquired prolific importance in confronting issues on maternal and infant mortality worldwide, with low- and middle-income countries bearing the brunt of the load. This systematic review has attempted to produce strong evidence showing that innovations such as mHealth applications, telehealth services, electronic health records, and digital health education platforms do contribute toward furthering the achievement of key maternal health outcomes such as antenatal care attendance, skilled birth attendance, and postnatal follow-up. By improving accessibility and fostering communication between time providers and patients alike, digital health solutions have grown to be the new front end of maternal-child care.

However, the effectiveness and sustainability of digital health interventions are ever so much predicated upon the socio-technical ecosystem into which they are inserted. The review identifies major infrastructural barriers, such as intermittent electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate access to digital devices, which remain extensively felt in rural and marginalized areas. These barriers threaten to widen the digital gap and thereby limit digital solutions' capacity in democratizing healthcare access. More importantly, socio-cultural factors, such as those rooted in gender relations, digital literacy, and trust of communities, have a bearing on mode and frequency of adoption of digital tools. Consideration of these contextual factors is necessary in customizing interventions to their local realities to engage meaningfully.

In terms of capacity building, much is to be done for the anticipation of actors in the health sector and end-users for success of digital health. Though digital platforms ambitiously aim to support decision-making and train health workers, acceptance could be challenged due to low digital literacy and resistance to technology. Hence, investment in the health workforce's digital education, training, and continuous technical support is necessary depicting integration of digital health in health services and sustenance of behavior change.

Ethical and governance aspects further complicate matters. Data privacy, security, and equity demand attention to maintain users' trust and protect vulnerable groups. Policymakers and implementers, therefore, need to formulate clear regulatory frameworks that protect patient data and foster transparency while still encouraging innovation. Otherwise, digital-health-driven interventions will have the perverse effect of deepening existing inequities or dispersing public confidence.

For digital health interventions to become scalable and sustainable, integration into health systems must be pursued. Stand-alone pilot projects, by their nature, are mostly for proof-of-concept and will rarely scale up for sustained impact if not integrated into national health sector strategies and infrastructures. Successful programs and projects are those where technology developers, health care providers, community groups, and government experts work successfully together to develop synergistic effects that lead to better utilization of resources and more assured continuity of services. Moreover, technology developed with an adaptive design for language, literacy level, and device availability will greatly enhance its usability and acceptance on the ground.

Through the above-discussed opportunities, the rapid evolution of emerging technologies, such as AI, machine learning, and blockchain, will vastly enhance the capability of digital health. These technologies promise further leaps to interpersonal care, predictive analytics, and secure data management. Nevertheless, there must be serious evaluation and ethical oversight to ensure that deployment of new technology can deliver value and equity especially to low-resource settings.

This review confirms the notion that digital health interventions are not panaceas but only one kind of tool in a multidimensional approach toward combating maternal and infant mortality. A successful intervention must therefore integrate technological innovation with relevant socio-cultural, infrastructural, and systemic issues. Launching healthy frameworks embraces the holistic, context-sensitive framework by which all concerned parties can fully realize the benefits of digital health toward quickening the pace of Sustainable Development Goals aimed at maternal and child health, thus sustaining a healthier future for mothers and infants worldwide.

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