Designing Inclusive Technology Solutions for Global Communities

Manuel Knott
Hora e.V.
Innsbruck, Austria
mak@modern-miracle.com

Sarra-Maryam Fezzani
Hora e.V.
Innsbruck, Austria
smf@modern-miracle.com

***Abstract*—This study investigates the application of user-centric design principles to develop inclusive technology solutions for underserved communities, with a focus on Syrian refugees in a camp setting. The research utilizes a case study approach to illustrate the challenges and impacts of the digital divide. By integrating persuasive IT design and decentralized data management, this paper demonstrates how customized technology interventions can not only bridge the digital divide but also empower marginalized communities. Theoretical advancements are explored through the extension of persuasive IT design frameworks to encompass decentralized systems, broadening their applicability in diverse operational environments. Practical contributions are highlighted through scalable technology deployment models that cater to diverse and resource-limited settings. The findings suggest that tailored technological solutions significantly enhance digital inclusivity and community empowerment, providing vital insights for replicable and sustainable technology applications in similar contexts.**

Keywords—User-centric design, digital divide, inclusive technology, blockchain, LED-UP

I. INTRODUCTION

The worldwide shift to digital technologies has greatly improved communication and knowledge, but it has also revealed a deep gap in digital access. This divide not only segregates the digitally privileged from those less fortunate but also highlights the severe disparities in technology access and literacy across different regions of the world. Despite the proliferation of advanced technologies, a significant portion of the global population, particularly in underserved communities, remains alienated from the digital ecosystem. For instance, in isolated parts of Kurdistan, only about a third of the people have dependable internet access, unlike more developed regions [3]. This gap not only hinders their education and economy but also restricts their use of vital digital services. Therein lies a critical research gap: while technology continues to evolve rapidly, its reach and inclusivity remain limited. Current technological solutions often fail to address the unique challenges faced by underserved communities [1]. This gap between technological advancement and practical, inclusive application forms the core issue driving this research.

A good illustration of these challenges is evident in the experiences of a multi-generational Syrian refugee family in Kurdistan. Their daily struggles with inadequate technological infrastructure, socio-economic constraints, and cultural dissonance exemplify the broader issues impacting similar communities worldwide [6]. Such scenarios underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift towards comprehensive, user-centered technology solutions like LED-UP and its usage of blockchain technology, which are not merely accessible but also adaptable to the varied realities of these communities [4] [5].

Therefore, this paper aims to bridge this research gap by analyzing the use case of Syrian refugees in camp settings utilizing novel technology in the form of a decentralized identity management system. In doing so, we explore how user-centric design principles can be effectively applied to develop accessible and functional technologies that cater specifically to the needs of such underserved populations [2]. By addressing this significant research gap, the study intends to provide recommendations that can be replicated and scaled to benefit similar communities globally, thereby making a critical contribution to reducing the global digital divide and enhancing digital inclusivity. The paper is structured as follows: Introduction, Theoretical Background, Methodology, Case Study, Results, Recommendations, Discussion, Theoretical and Practical Contributions, and Conclusion.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Blockchain technology fundamentally transforms data management in humanitarian scenarios by leveraging its core attributes of decentralization, transparency, and security. Blockchain is a decentralized digital ledger system that ensures immutability by recording transactions across a distributed network of computers, thereby eliminating the need for a central authority and increasing trust among users [8]. Particularly relevant is the application of Self-Sovereign Identity (SSI), which enables individuals in refugee settings to maintain control over their personal data [9]. SSI on blockchain allows refugees to own, control, and present their identities without the intermediation of traditional centralized entities. This autonomy is crucial in environments where identity verification is a frequent requirement and where individuals often lack stable, reliable access to governmental services [10].

SSI systems facilitate the establishment of digital identities that are both portable and verifiable across borders. For refugees, this means the ability to securely manage their identities and essential records, such as medical history, legal documents, and education certificates, which are often lost or compromised during displacement. The decentralized nature of blockchain ensures that this data is not only secure but also resistant to tampering or loss, providing a reliable means of identity verification that can support mobility and access to critical services across different jurisdictions [11].

Transitioning to additional technologies that enhance privacy and security, blockchain integrates seamlessly with

advanced cryptographic solutions such as Zero-Knowledge Proofs (ZKP) and Homomorphic Encryption, offering even stronger protections for sensitive data in challenging environments. ZKP allows for the validation of data without revealing the actual data itself. This means that a refugee can prove their identity or qualifications without having to expose sensitive personal information, reducing the risk of exploitation or identity theft [12][13].

Homomorphic Encryption takes this a step further by enabling calculations to be performed on encrypted data, producing an encrypted result that, when decrypted, matches the result of operations performed on the plaintext [14]. This allows for complex data processing tasks to be carried out on sensitive data without ever exposing it [15] Together, ZKP and Homomorphic Encryption provide robust security measures that uphold the privacy of vulnerable populations while still allowing for the necessary functionality that refugee aid programs require [16][17]. These technologies ensure that personal data is not only stored securely but is also interacted with in a manner that upholds the highest standards of privacy and data protection [18][19].

Building on the foundation of blockchain and SSI, the integration of ZKP and Homomorphic Encryption further enhances the privacy and security capabilities of digital systems in humanitarian contexts [20]. Studies highlight that technology can play a pivotal role in enhancing educational opportunities, streamlining service delivery, and facilitating better data management, which are crucial for effective camp management and aid distribution. In addition, the challenges of implementing technology in these environments are multifaceted [21]. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing interventions that are both effective and culturally appropriate, ensuring that technology acts as a bridge rather than a barrier, enhancing the resilience and autonomy of refugee populations [22].

Applications utilizing emerging technologies such as blockchain present unique opportunities for innovation across various sectors, but their successful adoption hinges significantly on user-centric design [27]. Persuasive design principles are crucial in this regard, as they focus on crafting technologies that are not only functional but also appealing and easy to use for end-users [24][25]. In the context of blockchain, these principles help in mitigating the technology's inherent complexities, making them more accessible to a broader audience. This is particularly important in settings like refugee camps or underserved communities, where technology must bridge significant cultural and educational gaps [19][20].

The application of persuasive design for technologies in underserved communities involves several strategies, such as providing personalized user experiences that can guide and motivate users to adopt and continue using these technologies [23]. However, challenges remain, particularly in effectively communicating the value and utility of such systems in a way that resonates with non-technical users [26. Studies have shown that without a clear understanding of the benefits and a direct engagement with the technology, adoption rates remain low][27].

This chapter has critically examined the role of advanced technologies such as blockchain and persuasive system design in addressing challenges within refugee camps. It highlighted the transformative potential of emerging technology, including blockchain, SSI, ZKP, and Homomorphic Encryption, to safeguard sensitive data and enhance personal data autonomy. Furthermore, the chapter explored the application of persuasive system design principles, emphasizing the importance of adapting these technologies to meet the unique needs and circumstances of refugee populations [24]. Despite the challenges of varying digital literacy levels and the necessity for ongoing engagement and support, these technologies, if implemented thoughtfully, can significantly improve service delivery and empower refugee communities [25][27].

III. METHODOLOGY

Persuasive System Design (PSD) is a sophisticated framework that systematically integrates human-computer interaction, computer-mediated communication, and psychological and rhetorical insights to design technologies that change user behaviors and attitudes. The PSD framework highlights the essential role of technology as a means of persuasion, incorporating strategies that enhance user engagement and adoption by aligning with their psychological and cultural contexts. The PSD model is structured around key components such as the intent of the system, the event during which persuasion is intended to occur, and the strategies employed to achieve persuasion. The model specifically emphasizes creating systems that can facilitate behavioral and attitude changes by engaging users in a meaningful way. This involves using methods like tailoring content to user needs, simplifying user interfaces, and enabling social comparison, all aimed at enhancing the persuasiveness of the system [26][27].

Knott et al. [26], for example, explore the utilization of persuasive design in blockchain applications, emphasizing that blockchain's inherent complexities often inhibit user engagement due to poor design choices. They argue that applying persuasive design principles can significantly enhance user interaction by making blockchain applications not only functional but also appealing and easy to use. This approach helps in bridging the gap between the technology's potential and user-friendly implementation, which is crucial for widespread adoption.

PSD categorizes persuasive strategies into four essential groups, enhancing the persuasiveness of technology solutions. Each category addresses different aspects of user interaction and system design to effectively change user behavior. Primary Task Support focuses on making tasks easier for users by tailoring content to meet their specific needs, personalizing the system according to user preferences, and enabling self-monitoring to track progress. These techniques ensure that the system is relevant and useful to the users, increasing their engagement and efficiency [27]. Dialogue Support involves creating a system that actively communicates with users through timely feedback, reminders, and positive reinforcements. These features guide users toward desired behaviors, fostering a supportive environment that encourages continual engagement and commitment. System Credibility Support aims to build trust in the system by enhancing its credibility. This is achieved through a professional and easy-to-navigate interface, demonstrating expertise, and including verifiable information and third-party endorsements. Trustworthy systems are more likely to influence user behavior because users feel confident in the system's reliability and integrity [24][25]. Social Support leverages the social context

of users by incorporating features that enable social interactions and comparisons. By facilitating connections with other users, the system can harness normative influences and social facilitation to motivate individuals through communal cooperation and competition.

To ensure the practical application of PSD principles, we conducted extensive user-centric design and research sessions in the refugee camps. We engaged with 68 participants through interviews, including refugees, camp staff, and coordinators. Additionally, our solution was tested on 10,869 participants, providing a broad spectrum of feedback and data. The interviews covered various aspects such as user needs, preferences, and experiences with technology. This allowed us to gather qualitative and quantitative data essential for refining our design.

The data gathered was categorized into primary, secondary, and tertiary coding concepts. The primary order of concepts included immediate concerns and needs of the users, such as ease of use, security, and accessibility. Secondary order concepts focused on the broader implications of these needs, such as how security concerns affect trust in the technology. Tertiary order concepts delved into the systemic and cultural factors influencing user interaction with the technology, such as educational background and cultural attitudes towards digital tools.

To represent the diverse perspectives and challenges faced by our interview partners, we built a detailed case study of a Syrian refugee family. This family served as a representative example, highlighting the varied technological needs and experiences within the camp. The insights gained from this case study were instrumental in tailoring our solutions to better meet the community's requirements.

IV. Case study

This case study explores a Syrian refugee family's experiences with our self-developed decentralized identity management solution, LED-UP. In a typical refugee camp, the story of a Syrian refugee family, composed of multiple generations, reflects the complexities and diverse needs within such communities. This family, featuring elderly grandparents, their adult children, and young grandchildren, showcases the demographic variety and layered challenges prevalent in the camp.

The grandparents often face significant hurdles due to limited literacy and minimal exposure to technology, making them reliant on others for navigating services and communication. The middle-aged adults balance the responsibilities of daily survival in the camp with the care of both their children and aging parents, often under stressful and resource-limited conditions. Meanwhile, the younger members of the family, who may find it easier to adapt to technological innovations, still face disrupted educational paths and the psychosocial impacts of displacement.

This broad spectrum of ages and experiences within a single family illustrates the pressing need for supportive services that can address the specific needs of each group. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing interventions that are both effective and sensitive to the nuances of life in a refugee camp, ensuring that each family member's technology needs are met in a manner that respects their dignity and individual circumstances. Recognizing the diverse technology needs within a multi-generational refugee family highlights the necessity for robust and adaptable digital solutions. The different age groups and varying degrees of digital literacy demand a system that is both intuitive for beginners and sufficiently advanced for more tech-savvy users.

To bridge this gap, LED-UP has been strategically designed to cater to these varied requirements. In the setting of a large refugee camp, LED-UP is being deployed to enhance the management of health data across the community. This technology addresses critical issues such as intermittent internet connectivity and limited access to personal devices, which are common in such environments. By utilizing decentralized technology, LED-UP ensures that personal and medical data are securely managed, promoting data sovereignty among residents. The system’s ability to operate reliably even during internet outages is particularly valuable, ensuring continuity of care and record-keeping.

As a decentralized identity management solution, LED-UP uses blockchain technology to ensure data governance and enhance user-centric privacy, crucial in settings where personal information is at risk. By integrating features such as decentralized digital identity and homomorphic encryption, LED-UP empowers users by placing control of their personal data in their hands. This approach not only secures sensitive information against potential breaches but also fosters a transparent environment where data exchanges are clear, and trust is strengthened among all participants. Such a system is instrumental in improving data management practices across refugee camps, thereby supporting the community's overall well-being and security.

V. Results

The transition from traditional pen-and-paper systems to the LED-UP digital platform marked a significant advancement in data management and user engagement within the refugee camps. Quantitatively, the new system demonstrated a notable increase in efficiency and accuracy. Usage statistics revealed a significant reduction in the time needed to access and update patient records, coupled with a steadily high system utilization. Additionally, the error rate in medical records dropped by over half due to the elimination of manual entry errors.

Qualitatively, feedback from users underscored a profound shift in their interaction with the healthcare system. Refugees reported a heightened sense of security and ownership over their medical data, appreciating the ability to access their health information securely and privately. The system’s intuitive design was particularly praised for its ease of use, making it accessible even to those with limited digital literacy. This feedback illustrates not only the functional improvements brought by LED-UP but also the psychological and social impact on the community, fostering greater trust in and reliance on the healthcare services provided.

Comparing these results to the previous pen-and-paper methods, the differences were noticeable. The old system was fraught with challenges such as lost documents, delayed access to critical health information during emergencies, and a general lack of trust due to privacy concerns. With LED-UP, these issues were largely mitigated, leading to improved health outcomes. For instance, the time-sensitive nature of medical treatments could be better managed, with health workers able

to quickly retrieve and act upon the latest medical data. The community saw a reduction in treatment delays and an improvement in chronic disease management as patient histories were readily available and continuously updated. Moreover, the decentralized nature of LED-UP ensured that even during frequent power and internet outages, critical data was not lost but instead cached and synchronized when connectivity was restored, ensuring continuity of care regardless of external conditions. These enhancements have not only improved the operational efficiency of healthcare services but have also contributed to building a healthier, more resilient community.

Over time, the reception of the LED-UP software among the refugee camp population evolved from cautious optimism to widespread acceptance and reliance. Initially, there was a significant learning curve associated with adopting the new digital system, especially for older adults and those with limited previous exposure to technology. However, as users began to experience the benefits of LED-UP—such as quicker access to their medical records, improved confidentiality, and reduced errors in their healthcare management—they increasingly embraced the technology. Training sessions and user-friendly interfaces played critical roles in this transition, helping to demystify the technology and make it more accessible to everyone, irrespective of their tech-savviness.

Feedback mechanisms embedded within LED-UP allowed users to report issues and suggest improvements, fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in the system's development. This participatory approach not only enhanced the system's functionality but also built a strong communal trust in the technology. Over months of interaction, the refugees observed tangible improvements in their medical care and data security, which further solidified their trust and dependency on LED-UP. The system's ability to function offline also alleviated initial concerns about connectivity reliability, reassuring users that their critical health data would always be accessible when needed. Overall, the gradual integration of LED-UP into daily life within the camp underscored its effectiveness in enhancing not just health management but also empowering the community through technology.

The practical results from the implementation have shown that modular and decentralized design in combination with offline capabilities are crucial in underserved settings. These strategies enable users to access self-owned services despite connectivity issues, proving essential for consistent technology adoption. For example, the offline feature allowed refugees to continue accessing patient data and other critical services during frequent network failures after they logged in with our identity management system, sustaining healthcare operations and building community trust. The deployment underscored the importance of designing with context-specific considerations, ensuring that the technology solutions provided are not only functional but also resilient and responsive to the unique challenges faced by users.

Evaluating the impact of user-centric design principles revealed a significant increase in user engagement and trust. This was evident through the active participation of the community in feedback loops, which tailored the technology to their specific linguistic and cultural needs. Adjustments made to system language settings to support multiple local dialects greatly enhanced user accessibility and comfort. Such participatory design practices not only improved the usability of the technology but also fostered a sense of ownership among the community, leading to higher rates of adoption and sustained engagement.

The integration of LED-UP's decentralized data management techniques, particularly its use of blockchain technology, significantly enhanced data security and user privacy, boosting the acceptance and reliance on the technology among community members concerned about data misuse. By embedding blockchain within the LED-UP platform, all health data transactions were securely recorded and immutable, providing users with transparent traceability and control over their data. This approach not only mitigated fears of unauthorized access or data tampering but also played a crucial role in building trust within the community. These results show the benefits of using sophisticated technological platforms and user-focused designs, especially in situations where data protection, confidentiality, and user involvement are essential.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively serve refugee camps' diverse demographic, technology solutions must embrace intergenerational user-centric design. This approach accommodates varying degrees of tech literacy and physical abilities across different age groups. Systems should be intuitive enough for older adults with limited digital experience, featuring simple navigation and clear instructions, while also engaging younger, more tech-savvy users with interactive elements and faster interfaces. Including adjustable user settings, such as text size and contrast, as well as providing voice-based navigation can help bridge the generational divide, making the technology accessible and beneficial for everyone in the community.

Given the unreliable internet connectivity in refugee camps, enhancing offline capabilities is crucial for technology deployment. Systems designed for these environments need to operate effectively without constant internet access, caching important data locally and syncing it once connectivity is restored. This feature ensures that essential services, such as healthcare management and educational resources, remain available during outages, thereby maintaining continuous operations and trust in the technology's reliability.

For technology to truly resonate with and serve refugee and underserved communities, their involvement in the development process is vital. Engaging community members in designing and testing technology ensures the solutions are tailored to their needs and cultural contexts. This involvement can be facilitated through workshops and feedback sessions where community members interact directly with developers to express their needs and preferences. Such participatory design not only enhances the technology's relevance and usability but also empowers the community, fostering a sense of ownership and acceptance of the technological solutions provided.

Developing partnerships with local and international organizations can amplify the impact of technological interventions. These collaborations bring together various expertise and resources, enhancing the design, implementation, and scalability of technology solutions. Partnerships with local entities ensure that solutions are culturally appropriate and sustainable, while international organizations can provide

broader technological expertise and funding. Together, these partnerships can create a robust support system for deploying advanced technologies in challenging environments.

Decentralization of data management is critical in building trust and ensuring the privacy and security of user data in refugee camps. Technologies like blockchain can be instrumental in this regard, providing a secure and transparent way to manage personal data. By allowing individuals to control their data and ensuring that access is governed by consent, decentralized systems can protect sensitive information from misuse and unauthorized access, thereby enhancing the community's trust in the technology implemented.

VII. DISCUSSION

This chapter revisits the outcomes of the LED-UP system within the refugee camps through the lens of PSD, assessing both its strengths and its limitations in this unique setting. The findings underscore that while PSD principles provided a strong foundation for the design and implementation of the system, certain adaptations were necessary to fully address the unique challenges faced by refugee populations.

Primary Task Support under PSD was effectively utilized, enhancing task efficiency and user interaction with the system. However, the refugee context required an even greater emphasis on customization than typical PSD applications anticipate. The diversity of languages, literacy levels, and cultural backgrounds in the camp meant that the one-size-fits-all approach of standard PSD needed significant modification to meet the varied needs of the users effectively.

Dialogue Support in PSD, which focuses on enhancing user interaction through feedback and tailored communications [24], was crucial. Yet, in the refugee camp setting, the conventional methods of soliciting feedback had to be rethought. Traditional digital feedback mechanisms assumed a level of digital literacy that was not present among all camp residents, necessitating the introduction of more direct, human-mediated feedback sessions to ensure that all voices were heard and integrated into the system's evolution.

System Credibility Support was fundamentally aligned with PSD principles, with the transparency and security of blockchain greatly enhancing system trustworthiness. However, the PSD framework did not fully account for the deep-seated mistrust of technology found in some refugee populations, stemming from past experiences of surveillance and exploitation. This aspect required a more nuanced approach to building credibility, emphasizing community involvement and education about how the technology works and how it protects user data.

Social Support, as outlined in PSD, leverages social interactions to motivate and engage users [24], a strategy that proved vital in the communal setting of the refugee camp. Nonetheless, the implementation revealed the need for stronger community-driven features that could operate within the camp's informal social structures and communication channels, which are not typically covered by PSD.

The application of PSD in this context highlighted its limitations in dealing with highly heterogeneous user groups with complex social dynamics and varying access to technology. Our enhancements to PSD involved deeper community integration in the design process, more robust adaptations to local languages and customs, and a greater focus on interpersonal trust-building measures. These modifications suggest an evolution of the PSD framework to better cater to contexts marked by significant socio-economic and cultural diversity.

In conclusion, while PSD provided a valuable starting point, its principles required significant adaptation to fully realize their potential in the refugee camp context. This discussion not only sheds light on the practical application of PSD but also contributes to the theoretical discourse by proposing extensions and modifications to the framework that enhance its relevance and effectiveness in humanitarian settings.

VIII. CONTRIBUTION

The study contributes to the theoretical advancement of the PSD framework by adapting it to complex humanitarian settings. This adaptation explores modifications to traditional PSD elements—such as dialogue support and system credibility—to include approaches that better account for cultural and socio-economic diversity, thereby enriching the framework's applicability and robustness in diverse environments. Furthermore, the research extends the understanding of Self-Sovereign Identity (SSI) on blockchain technology in unstable and resource-limited settings. By showcasing how SSI empowers individuals with control over their personal data, facilitating mobility and secure access across borders, this study provides new insights into SSI's application in humanitarian contexts. Additionally, by combining elements from computer science, psychology, and humanitarian practice, the study promotes an interdisciplinary approach that underscores the significance of user-centric design in technology deployment in crisis situations. This encourages future research to consider multifaceted perspectives when designing technology solutions for complex human conditions.

On the practical side, the deployment of the LED-UP system within the refugee camp illustrates significant innovations in technology deployment. This decentralized, blockchain-based system improves data management and user privacy, functioning effectively despite frequent internet outages, thereby ensuring continuous access to essential services. Such practical insights are vital for similar contexts where connectivity issues are prevalent. Moreover, the LED-UP system's implementation highlights the importance of empowering users by giving them control over their personal and medical data. This empowerment is crucial in settings where trust in technology is low and privacy concerns are high. The success of LED-UP in enhancing personal data autonomy provides a valuable model for other projects aiming to support sensitive environments. Additionally, the study contributes best practices in user engagement and system adoption, particularly valuable in environments where users may be skeptical or unfamiliar with digital technology. Techniques such as community feedback sessions and adaptive interfaces have proven effective in increasing user trust and comfort with the system. Lastly, the project serves as a case study for developing technology that accommodates both technologically adept young users and older generations requiring simpler, more

intuitive interfaces, thereby bridging the digital divide within the community.

X. Conclusion

By exploring how user-centered and decentralized technology solutions can benefit underserved communities, this study has gained valuable insights that have implications beyond the specific situation of our implementation. By embracing Persuasive IT Design and adapting this framework to the unique challenges of these communities, we have demonstrated that technology can be both a tool for empowerment and a means to bridge the digital divide. The successful integration of the LED-UP platform within these settings illustrates the tangible benefits of such tailored approaches—improving data security, enhancing user engagement, and increasing trust in technological solutions. These outcomes not only validate our methodological choices but also underscore the broader applicability of these strategies in similar environments worldwide.

The project highlights the importance of flexibility, user involvement, and contextual sensitivity in technology design and implementation. It presents a case study for expanding existing design frameworks to encompass the needs of diverse, often marginalized user groups, offering a new lens through which to view technology's role in social empowerment. This project emphasizes the essential role of ongoing innovation and careful use of technology in areas that lack adequate resources. It requires collaboration among developers, researchers, and policymakers to develop technologies that are not only accessible and effective but also mindful of the users' cultural and contextual differences. Through such collaborative efforts, we can create technological solutions that truly serve the needs of underserved communities, ensuring their participation in the digital age and contributing to their overall well-being and empowerment.

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