Review of: "Building a digital republic to reduce health disparities and improve population health in the United States"

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Potential competing interests: The author(s) declared that no potential competing interests exist.

The paper addresses a current and important topic with a use case in healthcare and the solution approach through digital identities. Many good aspects are addressed.

I have the following recommendations for the authors:

The topic of minorities and voting is partially addressed repeatedly: I think the key statement is: through a digital republic minorities get digital access to voting and also to health care, therefore this can solve a fundamental socio-political problem in the US. This statement could be made even clearer.

Regarding the structure of the paper: depending on the journal in which it is published, I recommend a traditional structure and a more pronounced analytical or empirical component. In addition, I recommend that the key statements be put into the following structure: Description of the purpose of digital identities, applicability to U.S. healthcare, assessment pros and cons, hurdles to implementation, recommendation for introduction.

Ranking the U.S. in comparison to other countries: the U.S. has relatively good rankings in comparison to other countries, especially European countries, with regard to the digitization of public administration (e.g., eGovernment Rank or Governments Online Service). Therefore, another question can be why the U.S. receives such high rankings even without being a "digital republic".

Comparison with Estonia, Sweden, China and South Korea: Estonia has been pursuing a consistent digitization policy for 30 years and has introduced e-residency in the process; the northern states of Europe also have a high level of digitization, as does Korea, the only Asian country. Therefore, these example states are suitable for an in-depth analysis. China, however, lists transparent, digital citizens as an essential part of the surveillance state. Therefore, I recommend a delineation here.

Recommendation for "improving privacy": There are two basic requirements for a complete digital identity: either by legal obligation of an autocratic state or by voluntariness of the citizens. The latter will only be possible if citizens trust the state to handle the collected data with care. The paper could therefore shed light on whether all (50% Republicans/ 50% Democrats) of the U.S. would trust the other political group with the personal data. This seems to me to be one of the major hurdles to introducing digital identities if it is to be voluntary. That is why the concept of "self-sovereign identity" should be further elaborated in the paper.

I wish continued success in addressing this important issue.