

MOBILE HEALTH APPLICATIONS DIGITAL EVIDENCE TAXONOMY WITH  
KNOWLEDGE SHARING APPROACH FOR DIGITAL FORENSICS  
READINESS

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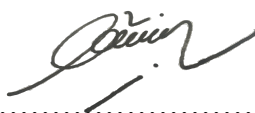
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I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

All praises to Allah SWT, may Allah send His peace and blessings upon the beloved Messenger, Prophet Muhammad S.A.W and upon his companions, his family, and all who follow his guidance until the Day of Judgement.

I would like to give a special dedication to my parent,  
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This thesis is dedicated to all of you.



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## ABSTRACT

M-health is the current application that capable to monitor and detect human biological change and used the Internet as a platform to transfer and receive the data from the cloud providers. However, the advancement of Internet of Things (IoT) technology poses a great challenge for digital forensic experts in order to preserve, acquire and analyse digital evidence. Digital evidence taxonomy is one technique in digital forensics that facilitates digital forensics readiness and integration with knowledge sharing approach is necessary to allow digital forensics experts to share their knowledge. Therefore, this research was carried out that consists three phases, namely (1) initial phase, (2) intermediate phase and (3) final phase. In the initial phase, a systematic literature review was conducted to identify any potential gaps from the existing studies. Subsequently, digital evidence taxonomy in the IoT forensics layers was adopted, which consisted of three artefact categories to represent the IoT forensics layers. In the intermediate phase, 34 top rating m-health apps were used as a case study to validate the digital evidence taxonomy. From the analysis of the result, various types of information for forensic investigation were acquired, such as type of outdoor activity, activity timestamp, client IP address and date accessed. In the final phase, the M-Health Digital Evidence Taxonomy System (MDETS) was developed as a proof of concept to demonstrate the integration of digital evidence taxonomy with the knowledge-sharing approach to facilitate digital forensic readiness. Interviews were used as the instrument tool to evaluate knowledge sharing in terms of people, process and technology elements in enabling digital forensic readiness. The results from the interviews support that knowledge sharing facilitates digital forensic readiness in terms of people, process and technology elements. As a conclusion, the integration of digital evidence taxonomy with the knowledge-sharing approach gives the opportunity for the digital forensic community to enhance the existing approach or procedure to increase the findings of a digital forensic investigation and make digital forensic readiness more proactive within the organisation.

## ABSTRAK

*M-health* adalah aplikasi terkini yang mampu memantau dan mengesan perubahan biologi manusia dan menggunakan Internet sebagai platform untuk memindahkan dan menerima data dari penyedia awan. Namun, kemajuan teknologi *Internet of Things (IoT)* menimbulkan cabaran besar bagi pakar forensik digital untuk memelihara, memperoleh dan menganalisis bukti digital. Taksonomi bukti digital adalah salah satu teknik dalam forensik digital yang memfasilitasi kesediaan forensik digital dan integrasi dengan pendekatan perkongsian pengetahuan diperlukan untuk membolehkan pakar forensik digital berkongsi pengetahuan mereka. Penyelidikan ini terdiri daripada tiga fasa, iaitu (1) fasa awal, (2) fasa pertengahan dan (3) fasa akhir. Pada fasa awal, semakan literatur yang sistematik dijalankan untuk mengenal pasti sebarang jurang yang berpotensi dari kajian yang sedia ada. Selepas itu, taksonomi bukti digital dalam lapisan forensik IoT telah diterima pakai yang terdiri daripada tiga kategori artifak untuk mewakili lapisan forensik IoT. Dalam fasa pertengahan, 34 aplikasi *m-health* penarafan teratas telah digunakan sebagai kajian kes untuk mengesahkan taksonomi bukti digital. Dari analisis hasil eksperimen, pelbagai jenis maklumat diperhatikan untuk siasatan forensik diperoleh seperti, jenis aktiviti luaran, cap waktu aktiviti, alamat IP pelanggan, dan tarikh yang diakses. Pada fasa terakhir, *M-Health Digital Evidence Taxonomy System (MDETS)* telah dibangunkan sebagai bukti konsep untuk menunjukkan integrasi taksonomi bukti digital dengan pendekatan perkongsian pengetahuan untuk memudahkan kesediaan forensik digital. Temubual telah digunakan sebagai alat instrumen untuk menilai perkongsian pengetahuan dari segi orang, proses dan teknologi dalam membolehkan kesediaan forensik digital. Keputusan dari temubual ini menyokong perkongsian ilmu memudahkan kesediaan forensik digital dari segi manusia, proses dan teknologi. Kesimpulannya, penyatuan taksonomi bukti digital dengan pendekatan perkongsian pengetahuan memberi peluang kepada masyarakat forensik digital untuk meningkatkan pendekatan atau

prosedur sedia ada untuk meningkatkan penemuan penyelidikan forensik digital dan menjadikan kesediaan forensik digital lebih proaktif dalam organisasi .



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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### Journals:

- (i) Muhammad Thariq Abdul Razak, Nurul Hidayah Ab Rahman, Nurul Azma Abdullah (2019) “A Digital Evidence Taxonomy of M-Health Apps in IoT Environment” Journal of Telecommunication, Electronics & Computer Engineering. vol. 7, no. 6S2, pp. 285–290, 2019.



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## LIST OF AWARDS

(i) **Bronze Medal in International Research and Innovation Symposium and Exposition 2018 [RISE 2018]:**

Muhammad Thariq Abdul Razak, Nurul Hidayah Ab Rahman, Nurul Azma Abdullah. "A Digital Evidence Taxonomy of Mobile Health Apps in IoT Environment: A Survey of Challenges, Current Trends and Future Directions."

(ii) **Best Paper Award International Conference on Applied Science and Technology 2019 [ICAST 2019]**

Muhammad Thariq Abdul Razak, Nurul Hidayah Ab Rahman, Nurul Azma Abdullah. "A Digital Evidence Taxonomy of M-Health Apps in IoT Environment."



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Background

The implementation of digital forensic readiness within an organisation is significant to ensure the effectiveness of a digital forensic investigation process. This was echoed in [1], which highlighted that proper implementation of digital forensic readiness will increase the possibility of optimising time and cost and having good results in a digital forensic investigation. Digital forensic readiness is a proactive forensic activity which enables an organisation to be forensically ready in terms of tools, procedures and standard guidelines [2]. Furthermore, the evolvement in computing infrastructures requires a more proactive approach in digital forensics.

The advancement of Internet of Things (IoT) and smart devices technology, for instance, may pose challenges for digital forensic experts to preserve, acquire and analyse digital evidence due to the lack of standard methods, procedures and reliable digital forensic tools [3]. As an example, acquiring evidence artefacts from cloud data centres is one of the challenges from digital forensics' perspective [4]. Another example is that since IoT uses network as a platform to transfer and receive data from electronic devices, then the network may consist valuable evidence towards specific cybercrime. However, according to Servida and Casey [5], most network traffic are encrypted and use different types of protocol for communication. This requires more advanced equipment and extended expertise. Therefore, these challenges could present some difficulties to digital forensic practitioners in the acquisition, examination, analysis and presentation of IoT-related digital evidence [6].

Digital evidence is gathered from digital sources for the purpose of facilitating the reconstruction of events [7]. With multi-sources of digital evidence, a digital

evidence taxonomy is an example of a technique used by digital forensic experts to identify any potential evidence by categorising information of data remnants in the digital forensic investigation [8]. It would also initiate a proactive digital forensic practice such as forensic-by-design and set up a forensically ready environment by defining appropriate forensic requirements before the implementation of the IoT environment [9].

Mobile health (m-health) is an example of application that deploys the IoT infrastructure by providing services to meet user needs by using smartphones as the medium to collect health data in real time from users and store the data in a specific server through the Internet [10]. Data transmission involves multiple resources, ranging from end users' devices, network layers at both clients and servers, and service providers' servers. Furthermore, it may involve different computing infrastructures such as mobile, client-server and cloud computing, which require different procedures for data acquisitions as well as involving different knowledge experts. This further indicates the need of sharing forensic knowledge to ensure the effectiveness in digital forensic investigations.

To increase the effectiveness of digital forensic investigations, Buang and Daud [11] mentioned that knowledge sharing among the experts needs to be established. This is because different experts may have different knowledge or experience in digital forensics and the lack of collaboration between experts may complicate the investigation process [11]. With the lack of collaboration, the digital forensic investigation may become longer, increasing the cost and also resources usage.

Therefore, this research applies the knowledge-sharing approach to facilitate in enabling digital forensic readiness. Digital evidence taxonomy for IoT forensics layers is adopted, and m-health apps is used as a case study to acquire and analyse evidence artefacts. The findings are then applied in the knowledge database of a system, M-Health Digital Evidence Taxonomy System (MDETS). MDETS is developed as a proof of concept to demonstrate the role of knowledge sharing and digital evidence taxonomy in enabling digital forensic readiness.

## 1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this research is to design, develop and validate the m-health digital evidence taxonomy and MDETS based on digital forensic readiness perspective. This study consists of three research questions, as follows:

- (i) What types of data remnants of forensic interest can be forensically acquired from the IoT forensics layers?
- (ii) How can the data remnants be categorised based on the IoT forensics layers using forensically sound approach?
- (iii) How can the knowledge-sharing approach be integrated with digital evidence taxonomy to facilitate in enabling digital forensic readiness?

## 1.3 Problem Statement

Cybercriminals are continuously developing sophisticated attack methods and the fact that emerging technology involves network communication results in yet another landscape of digital forensic challenges. The increasing usage of m-health and the adoption of IoT infrastructure, however, have also enabled a platform for cybercriminals to launch illegal actions [12]. For example, a MyFitnessPal data breach incident in February 2018 has compromised about 150 million users' data such as username, password, email address and hashed password [13]. The data breach incident of the PumpUp application, which exposed 6 million users' sensitive information, was caused by the absence of password and username implementation on the servers' site [14]. Other than that, a recent data breach of a healthcare app in Singapore has compromised about 1.5 million data, including the Prime Minister's private data, such as name, birth, identification number and race [15]. Since all smart devices are connected to the Internet to transfer and receive information, it will pose a challenge to digital forensic experts to preserve, acquire and analyse the digital evidence to extract useful information for forensic interest.

In digital forensics, various standards of well-established procedures and techniques are used by digital forensic experts when performing a digital forensic investigation. Digital evidence taxonomy is one example of approaches being used to identify any possible data remnants in a smartphone. However, there is no existing

digital evidence taxonomy related to the IoT forensics layers for specific applications since the existing digital evidence taxonomies are more focused on smart devices only [16]. Therefore, the need to enhance the existing digital forensic approach for the IoT forensics layers is compulsory to ensure the effectiveness of a digital forensic investigation and to ensure that the digital evidence is acceptable in a court of law [17].

To ensure that the investigation process is more effective, collaboration and knowledge sharing among digital forensic experts must be established. This is because different experts may have their own different experience and knowledge towards specific cases or problems. According to Karie [18], most of the new knowledge generated during forensic investigations are not explicitly recorded by a specific system. The author also highlighted that past knowledge and experience should be recorded by a specific system to train new digital forensic experts and act as a guideline when conducting forensic investigations in the future in order to increase the proactivity of digital forensic readiness within the organisation [18].

In the context of digital evidence taxonomy related to the IoT forensics layers the need to design a knowledge-sharing system is significant to facilitate digital forensic investigations and to minimise the digital forensic investigations' cost, time consumed and resource usage.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study consists three objectives, as follows:

- (i) To propose an adapted digital evidence taxonomy for IoT forensics layers based on previous studies in the mobile forensics.
- (ii) To develop the M-Health Digital Evidence Taxonomy System (MDETS) as a proof of concept for the integration of digital evidence taxonomy with knowledge sharing approach.
- (iii) To evaluate the integration of digital evidence taxonomy with the knowledge-sharing approach via interview sessions in enabling digital forensic readiness from the perspective of people, process and technology elements and to validate the functionality of MDETS via User Acceptance Test (UAT) and Unit Testing.

## 1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of this research includes:

- (i) A smartphone with the Android platform (version 4.4.1) will be used to perform the simulation of the m-health apps.
- (ii) A personal computer (PC) with Operating System (OS) Windows 10 Pro is used to perform the simulation of the m-health apps in the Google Chrome browser.
- (iii) The digital evidence of m-health applications are acquired from three different layers of IoT forensics layers, which are mobile artefacts, network artefacts and browser artefacts.
- (iv) A personal computer (PC) with Operating System (OS) Windows 10 Pro is used to acquire and analyse the digital evidences and to capture network packet data from the Internet.
- (v) A total of 34 top rating and free m-health apps are used to validate the digital evidence taxonomy.

## 1.6 Organisation of Thesis

This written thesis consists of six chapters overall. Chapter 1 of this thesis is the introduction, which includes the research background, problem statement and research objectives. The scope of the study and the organisation of the thesis are also incorporated in this chapter. Chapter 2 discusses digital forensics, digital forensic readiness, IoT forensics layers, the research trends of digital evidence taxonomy and knowledge sharing. Chapter 3 discusses the research process for digital evidence taxonomy and the development of the knowledge-sharing system. Chapter 4 discusses the analysis of the result of specific m-health apps in three parts, which are mobile artefacts, network artefacts and browser artefacts. Chapter 5 explains the result from the interview sessions with digital forensic experts and the unit testing and User Acceptance Test (UAT) sessions with end users. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the research and provides suggestions for future works.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the background of this study, that includes digital forensics and digital forensics readiness. The next part focuses on the Internet of Things (IoT) by explaining the IoT forensics layers, which is device forensics, network forensics, and cloud forensics. The research trends of existing digital evidence taxonomies are also discussed in order to identify the research gaps related to the IoT forensics layers. Moreover, the existing knowledge-sharing system is discussed based on the functionality and the effect in the forensic society. Subsequently, the gaps of study and research contribution are discussed in detail to identify possible gaps that may exist related to the digital evidence taxonomy and knowledge-sharing approach, and the possible solutions to overcome the problems.

#### **2.2 Digital Forensics**

Digital forensics can be defined as the use of scientifically derived and proven methods towards the preservation, acquisition, validation, identification, analysis, interpretation, documentation and presentation of digital evidence [7]. This digital evidence is gathered from a digital source for the purpose of facilitating the reconstruction of events found to be criminal [7]. This acquisition of digital evidence must be done through a carefully prescribed procedure so that the probative value of the digital evidence is preserved [19]. This is to ensure its admissibility in a legal proceeding. The goal of digital forensics is the analysis of digital storage device to locate evidence and analyse for intrusion.



Digital forensics consists of various branches, for example, digital forensic readiness.

### 2.3 Digital Forensic Readiness

There have been a number of studies that attempt to define digital forensic readiness within an organisation. According to Rowlingson [20], digital forensic readiness refers to planning digital forensic strategies before an incident occurs in order to facilitate the investigation. Similarly, Elyas et al. [21] defined digital forensic readiness as being able to facilitate the entire digital forensic investigation, as compared to only focusing on the production of credible digital evidence. Tan [22] defined digital forensic readiness as setting up digital forensics in the organisation to minimise the cost and maximise the output of the digital forensic investigation. As reviewed in the existing studies, digital forensic readiness can be defined as digital forensic strategies to facilitate a digital forensic investigation, minimise the cost and maximise the output of the investigation.

A previous study by Rowlingson [20] described that digital forensic readiness consists of two main objectives, namely (1) maximising an environment's ability to collect credible evidence and (2) minimising the cost of forensics during an incident response. A previous study by Tan [22] highlighted the factors that affect digital forensic readiness, which are:

(i) How Logging is Done

With a large number of smart devices connected to the network, time synchronisation becomes an issue [22]. This is because increasing the number of devices in the network would make it less possible to keep them all in sync. If the device's login time into the network is not in sync, the reporting will be confusing. Since all system generate log files, write permission to the specific log file should be minimised. This is to prevent unauthorised users to delete or hide their tracks and activities through the system log.



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**Example of Questions for the digital forensic expert.**

Based on your recent experience with m-health forensic taxonomy knowledge sharing system:

- (i) In your opinion, what the problem faced by the expertise when perform the investigation by refer to the documented taxonomy (manually)?
- (ii) How the proposed knowledge sharing system able to automate the taxonomy and help expertise when performing the investigation?
- (iii) After test the proposed knowledge sharing system, do you agree the proposed system will enable the forensic readiness?
- (iv) Is it the proposed system able to make the investigation become more effective and save cost and time?
- (v) With the proposed system, can it make the expertise more prepared in term of experience, technology used and procedure in future when the same accident happens?
- (vi) After test the proposed knowledge sharing system, in your opinion, how the system can speed up the investigation performed by the expertise?
- (vii) In your opinion, does the proposed system can give a useful information to the expertise related to the m-health apps in IoT environment?
- (viii) To make the knowledge useful among the expertise, it is important to assign specific user that responsible to manage the existing data stored?
- (ix) To make the knowledge accessible, it is compulsory to allow the user to gain access to the proposed system to find related m-health information?
- (x) To enable the knowledge sharing among expertise, it is compulsory the proposed system allow user to system to add new knowledge and update the existing knowledge (with the admin approval)?
- (xi) With the proposed system, the expertise will become more aware toward the knowledge added, updated and deleted by the administrator?
- (xii) With the existing of the technology (like knowledge sharing system), how the technology can affect the expertise (based on performance, time and cost)?