

Perceptions Regarding the Use of Digital Records in Zimbabwe's Public Sector

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Abstract

The adoption of digital records management in Zimbabwe's public sector is critical for promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance. However, its success hinges on the perceptions and attitudes of government employees who interact with these systems. This study aimed to explore how government workers perceive digital records and to propose strategies that enhance their use and acceptance. Guided by the technology acceptance model (TAM), which focuses on perceived usefulness and ease of use, the research adopted a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design. Data were collected through interviews and observation across 16 ministries, involving 26 purposively selected participants from records and ICT departments. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings. The results revealed that although employees acknowledged the advantages of digital records, they harboured significant concerns about their trustworthiness. Key issues included fears about data security, privacy risks, high implementation and maintenance costs, power outages, and doubts over legal compliance. The absence of an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) in most departments also contributed to scepticism because digital records created outside such systems were viewed as untrustworthy. Many departments thus retained a hybrid system of both paper and digital records owing to low confidence in digital-only solutions. The study concludes that negative perceptions driven by technological, legal, and infrastructural challenges undermine the full adoption of digital records. It recommends the implementation of EDRMS, investment in ICT training for records professionals, and change management initiatives to support the shift from paper-based to digital records systems.

Keywords: digital records; public sector records; EDRMS; digital records trustworthiness; use of digital records

Introduction

As the world continues to embrace digital technologies, governments are increasingly turning to electronic records to run their operations more efficiently and transparently. Digital records are becoming the backbone of modern public administration, helping to speed up services, reduce paperwork, and ensure that vital information is preserved and easily accessible. In Zimbabwe, the journey towards digital records management has been a mixed one, marked by notable advancements as well as persistent challenges. While some government departments have adopted digital tools and e-government systems, many still rely heavily on paper records. This slow transition is not just about technology. It reflects the real concerns, fears, and hesitations of the people working within these systems. For many government employees, questions remain about whether digital records are secure, reliable, or even legally valid. These perceptions, often shaped by lived experiences and institutional culture, have a powerful influence on whether digital records are fully embraced or cautiously avoided. Even with substantial investments in ICT infrastructure, digital and paper records often coexist in ways that duplicate efforts and create inefficiencies. Much of the existing research in Zimbabwe has looked at technical barriers or policy issues. However, little has been said about the human side of the story, how attitudes, beliefs, and workplace practices shape the use of digital records in the public sector. This study seeks to fill that gap by focussing on the voices and experiences of government employees to understand how they perceive digital records and what prevents or encourages their use.

Background

The government of Zimbabwe has 20 ministries which discharge various mandates for the development of the country. In an endeavour to improve service provision, the government of Zimbabwe is adopting e-government (Magama and Nduna 2020; Mahlangu and Ruhode 2020; Mahlangu et al. 2018). Digital records as well as paper records have an important role in supporting accountability, transparency, and good governance (Ambira et al. 2019; Nengomasha and Chikomba 2018; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020). Additionally, digital records can be a vehicle to ensure that records management services can reach more people who cannot physically visit government offices as the number of records users in most African countries is now dwindling (Molefe and Schellnack-Kelly 2019). Digital records management is being promoted to reduce the fragmentation and duplication of records (Mutsagondo 2021).

Most government departments in Zimbabwe have adopted or are in the process of adopting digital records management systems (Mahlangu and Ruhode 2020). According to the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC 2022), the following departments have a digital records management system: the Registrar General's Office has introduced a virtual passport application system; the immigration department has introduced an E-

migration system; E-health is still in the trial stage at the Ministry of Health and Child Care; an E-procurement system and the Public Finance Management System (PFMS) are being used by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development; the Judiciary Service Commission is using an integrated electronic case management system (IECMS); and the National Archives of Zimbabwe is working on an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS).

The Zimbabwean government through the Government Internet Service Provider (GISP) makes available websites to all government ministries (Mahlangu and Ruhode 2020; Mutsagondo 2021). Preliminary studies have shown that there is still underutilisation of the GISP websites owing to negative perceptions towards technology. The situation in Zimbabwe is that the GISP internet is too slow and there is a shortage of ICT experts in the government (Mutsagondo 2021). Above all, there is indifference to GISP services as it is perceived to be slower than other private service providers (Mahlangu and Ruhode 2020).

Scholars such as Magama (2017), Nengomasha and Chikomba (2018), Mahlangu (2020), Tsvuura and Ngulube (2020), Mutsagondo (2021), and Huni and Dewah (2019) argue that there is a lack of enthusiasm or negative perception pertaining to the use of digital records in Zimbabwe. Previous studies have shown that paper is still used in several daily activities in government departments in Africa (Albar et al. 2017; Ambira 2016; Baheer et al. 2020). The continued use of physical records, despite the introduction of digital records management services, is worrisome because the government may think that the initiative is a waste of resources (Molefe and Schellnack-Kelly 2019).

This study seeks to fill a gap left by numerous previous studies on digital records management in Zimbabwe by focussing on the voices and experiences of government employees to understand how they perceive digital records and what prevents or encourages their use.

Problem Statement

The aim of embracing digital records services in Zimbabwe was to improve service delivery (Magama 2017; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020). Notwithstanding these efforts, digital records are still poorly utilised by government employees in Zimbabwe's public sector (Mahlangu 2020). It seems that there are negative perceptions towards digital records, given that previous studies have reported that paper is still often used in everyday government work despite the introduction of ICTs (Albar et al. 2017; Ambira 2016; Baheer et al. 2020; Mahlangu 2020; Mutsagondo 2021). In this study, the researcher is interested in understanding the perceptions underlying poor utilisation of digital records management systems. Preliminary investigations by the researcher

indicated that government workers still prefer paper records management systems to digital records management systems. This leads one to wonder whether digital records are accorded the same status as paper records concerning their acceptance as genuine records. Consequently, this article aimed to uncover perceptions concerning the use of digital records.

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of government employees towards digital records management services in Zimbabwe's public sector to come up with suggestions to promote their use and acceptability. The investigation was guided by the following research objectives:

- To explore the perceptions of government workers towards the use of digital records in Zimbabwe
- To assess the impact of government workers' perceptions on the use of digital records in Zimbabwe
- To recommend strategies for promoting the use of digital records in Zimbabwe

Theoretical Framework

The technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis 1989) provided a useful lens for this study, helping to understand why some government employees are hesitant to fully embrace digital records. An illustration of the TAM is given in Figure 1 below.

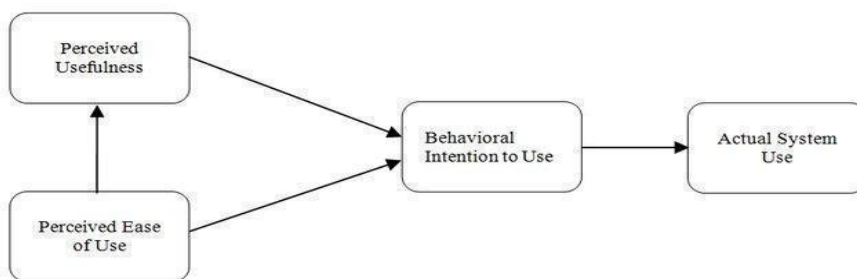


Figure 1: The technology acceptance model adapted from Davis (1989)

Lewellen (2015) considers the TAM to be the most influential model for describing an individual's reception of new technology. In this respect, the model was considered relevant to this research as it proposes factors that affect the intent to implement a system, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the system. The TAM can assist in understanding the underlying reasons affecting attitudes towards using

digital records management services in Zimbabwe. In this study, perceived usefulness (PU) was judged by reactions regarding the significance of digital records. Organisations and people use digital records when they perceive them to be useful. There is, therefore, a need for developers of digital records management systems to develop systems that are useful and authentic, in addition to including security features for them to be acceptable. The TAM directs the study to have an insight into the reasons why digital records may not be used in organisations. In this study, perceived ease of use (PEOU) was judged by responses regarding how stress-free and easy it is to use digital records. This study aimed to gather information on perceptions towards digital records management, and hence the TAM gives a background that people use technologies they perceive to be effortless to use. Research has shown that most of the records professionals in African countries lack information technology skills, and therefore they tend to shun digital records management for paper records (Abbasy and Mesbah 2016; Albar et al. 2017; Ambira et al. 2019; Masuku 2019; Newa and Mwantimwa 2019). Developers of digital records management systems need to design systems which are user-friendly to promote their usage.

Short Literature Review

The increasing reliance on technology has positioned digital records as central to public sector operations in Zimbabwe (Sithole 2021). However, their widespread use has raised critical concerns about their trustworthiness. For digital records to be regarded as trustworthy, they must meet four foundational criteria derived from archival science: authenticity, accuracy, reliability, and usability (Duranti 2015). Authenticity refers to the assurance that a record remains unchanged and retains its original identity over time. This is typically achieved through metadata, digital signatures, and audit trails that document authorised modifications (Duranti 2015; InterPARES 2002). Accuracy relates to the correctness and completeness of content, which depends on organisational controls such as restricted access, regular backups, and staff training to prevent data corruption or unauthorised alterations (Duranti 2015; Sigauke 2015; Sithole 2022). Reliability denotes a record's capacity to serve as trustworthy evidence of transactions or activities, which requires consistent procedures for record creation and preservation, and safeguards against tampering (Rogers 2015). Usability ensures that digital records can be efficiently retrieved, interpreted, and used, supported by features such as secure access, version control, and interdepartmental sharing (Magama 2018; Sigauke 2022).

In addition to these qualities, maintaining digital record trustworthiness requires robust security measures such as encryption, password protection, and compliance with legal frameworks to prevent unauthorised access (Sibanda 2017; Sigauke 2022). Moreover, the evolving nature of technology underscores the importance of ongoing staff development in ICT competencies (Sithole 2022). Long-term digital preservation strategies, including persistent metadata practices and adherence to models like

Trustworthy Digital Objects (TDOs), are also essential to ensure continued accessibility, verifiability, and usability of digital records over time.

Ambira et al. (2019) tribute digital records management with the improved quality of data and information used across government ministries, agencies, and institutions in Kenya. According to Ambira et al. (2019), digital records in Kenya have reduced mistakes made by humans, increased security, provided easy access to data and information, minimised duplicates, ensured data documentation, and reduced information and communication costs. Furthermore, digital records in Africa have also enhanced data security and preservation, minimised the use of paper, enabled timely delivery of data, reduced storage space demand, and ensured easy data access and sharing (Magama 2017; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020; Zejnullahu and Baholli 2017). Most users of digital records have credited them as an enabling component of increased efficiency, accountability, and improved service delivery (Abbasy and Mesbah 2016; Joshi and Islam 2018; Newa and Mwantimwa 2019; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the positives brought by digital records mentioned above, most users still doubt the trustworthiness of digital records in the absence of sound policies, guidelines, and frameworks (Katuu 2019; Ngoepe et al. 2022; Mutsagondo 2021; Magama and Nduna 2020). Huni and Dewah's (2019) research on the admissibility of digital records in Zimbabwe's law courts revealed that most of them were not admissible as sources of evidence, as there is no legal framework yet for digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector. Furthermore, Mutsagondo's (2021) study on email management in the government departments of Zimbabwe revealed that negative attitudes towards digital records management were caused by lack of a budget for records management work, low ranking of the records management profession, lack of senior management support for records management activities and lack of ICT skills.

In addition, research by Mutsagondo (2021) suggests that negative perceptions towards digital records management are complicated by the tendency in many public institutions that leave ICT staff to manage digital records ahead of records management staff. ICT staff were said to lack expertise in records management processes, which is central to effective digital records management (Mutsagondo 2021). This situation is worsened by the poor working relationship between records officers and IT officers, who seem to be fighting for space and relevance in the management of digital records (Mutsagondo 2017).

Funding for digital records management is also not always available in most African countries. This is evident at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, which has been failing to implement an ERMS since 2014, because of a shortage of funds (Mutsagondo 2017; Magama and Nduna 2021; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020). As a result, most of the government departments and parastatals are also still waiting for the National Archives

of Zimbabwe to lead the way in digital records management (Magama 2017). The way digital records are managed in Zimbabwe directly propels negative perceptions towards their trustworthiness. Guided by the discussion above, this study seeks to fill the gap by proposing recommendations to improve the perception of users towards digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector.

Methodology

This article followed a qualitative research methodology as it sought to investigate participants' perceptions on the use of digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector. The study targeted government ministries. The government of Zimbabwe has 26 ministries. A multiple-case study research design was adopted, as the survey targeted 16 ministries. Given the focus on understanding electronic records management perceptions in various ministries and departments, the holistic multiple case study design was most appropriate. In this holistic multiple case study design, each department was treated as a single unit of analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of its overall digital records management perceptions without dissecting internal subunits. This approach enabled the researcher to compare institutional-level practices and perceptions of digital records trustworthiness across different cases. A total of 26 participants from selected ministries were purposively sampled and interviewed. Records management and ICT officers were targeted as they dealt with records management issues daily. Interviews and observation were used as data collection tools. Research ethics were followed during data collection. The findings were thematically presented in line with the research questions.

Findings

The findings are presented thematically based on the study's research questions.

What are the Perceptions Regarding Digital Records Management Services in Zimbabwe?

The question was raised to check the perceptions of the participants towards the use of digital records that were created in Zimbabwe's public sector. The majority of the participants agreed that they do not trust digital records created in Zimbabwe's public sector, as they do not pass the trustworthiness test. Digital records trustworthiness refers to the records' ability to be reliable, accurate, authentic and usable (Duranti 2015). Participants were requested to give their opinions on whether their digital records match all the qualities that are expected in a record. The gathered data confirmed that most of the participants perceive their digital records as not reliable, authentic, accurate, and usable. Most of the participants agreed that more still needs to be done for their digital records to be deemed trustworthy. In addition, the researcher observed that the digital records lacked security features; for example, there was no evidence of audit trails, use

of digital signatures, data encryption, access control mechanisms, firewalls, antiviruses, and backup in most public sector departments. During observations, the researcher also witnessed official records that had no unique identifiers, letterheads, and digital signatures in most of the departments.

Furthermore, there was also no evidence that metadata was being captured for digital records in most departments. The lack of these security features made the participants perceive digital records as untrustworthy. Participants also explained that their digital records were not created in an EDRMS and therefore cannot be trusted. Most of the departments were using business information systems (BIS) with no records management functionalities.

Most of the participants also agreed that paper records were still predominantly in use despite the presence of ICT technologies in the offices. This was ascribed to the fact that most of the senior officials in government have technophobia, and they prefer all their records in hard copies. One of the participants said:

Most of the bosses prefer hard copies. They are afraid of technology as they fear that they can be hacked. Even if they receive an email, they still give instructions for the email to be printed and filed. By the end of the day, we remain with two versions of the same record (the hard copy and the soft copy).

Another issue raised was that there was a lack of trust that records management professionals would have the capacity to manage digital records, as most of them were not ICT specialists. There were sentiments and misconceptions that digital records management must be a preserve of ICT personnel. These misconceptions were causing negative perceptions towards the use of digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector, as records management professionals were leaving the digital records to ICT personnel.

During observations, the researcher also witnessed that paper records were still being used in most of the public sector departments. All the departments were using a hybrid approach where they had two versions of the same record. Participants were asked to explain why they prefer paper records to digital records. Below is a summary of the responses that were received from various participants:

- Digital records management systems are expensive to set up
- Maintenance costs are very high (hardware and software updates)
- Digital storage space is expensive
- They need personnel with ICT skills
- The trustworthiness of digital records is not easy to maintain
- Digital records can be hacked
- There is a need to constantly update antiviruses
- They need backup strategies as they are vulnerable
- There is a need for power backups as power cuts can affect them

Despite the government workers' negative perceptions towards digital records, it was reported that some government departments were using digital records daily in their departments. Digital records were said to be more efficient than paper records. The participants highlighted that digital records were created, sent, and received daily via email, as well as via WhatsApp, Facebook, and X, among other social media platforms. However, the researcher observed that the participants were still using a cautious approach (hybrid system) by keeping both paper and digital copies of their records, as they still had no confidence in the technology. Some of the participants also expressed the fear that technology is changing at a fast pace and Zimbabwe as a developing country cannot match the pace. They went on to explain that a lot of government information will be lost if public sector departments go paperless and the technology fails.

What Impact Do Government Workers' Perceptions Have on the Use of Digital Records Management Services in Zimbabwe?

The findings revealed that government workers' negative perceptions towards the use of digital records were derailing government efforts to digitise records management services. Senior government officials were said to have a lack of trust in digital records because of their lack of security, and therefore were reluctant to speed up digital records management efforts. The delays in the adoption of EDRMS in Zimbabwe were also said to be affected by the negative perception towards digital records. Funds towards the procurement of the software and hardware for the EDRMS were reported to be delayed because of a lack of appreciation for the digital records. Participants reported that there seems to be no zeal or urgency to adopt EDRMS in Zimbabwe, as the government was reported to be comfortable with the paper records management system. No departments have adopted EDRMS in Zimbabwe at the time of writing. It can be said that as a result of negative perceptions, most developing nations are still lagging behind in digital records management systems. Consequently, when funding is available, records management is not prioritised. In Zimbabwe, poor funding is delaying the implementation of EDRMS at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (Magama 2017; Mutsagondo 2021). Negative perceptions were also reported to be affecting service delivery, as most of the queries done through emails were not quickly responded to. One of the participants said:

Clients who make queries through the email and social media platforms always complain that they do not get responses on time. Queries made through hard copies get quick attention, as the officers do not take email and social media communication seriously. This affects service delivery, as most of these clients would also need quick responses to their issues.

Participants were also asked whether digital records created by their organisation were acceptable in Zimbabwe's law courts. This question was raised because the law courts

demand evidence that is beyond a reasonable doubt. In the case of records, they must prove that they represent what they purport to be, they were not manipulated, edited or tampered with, they are original, and they were created within a records management system. The record itself must also have security features such as letterheads, date stamps or signatures which can prove their office of origin. Participants also said that negative perceptions affected the acceptance of digital records as true evidence in the courts of law in Zimbabwe. In response to this question, many departments said that their digital records would be found wanting if they were to find themselves in a competent court of law. The main reason given was the lack of security features on their digital records. One of the participants summed up by saying:

Our records lack digital signatures, watermarks, supporting metadata, and audit trails, and therefore it would be difficult for them to be trusted. We create ordinary digital records which can be counterfeited by criminals. For this reason, I think our records might have challenges if they are to be challenged in the courts of law in Zimbabwe.

It is also pertinent to report that most of the departments said that their records have not been to courts of law and therefore their trustworthiness has never been scrutinised. The researcher observed that most of the digital records had challenges of not being trusted because they were created outside an EDRMS. Records created using the EDRMS had audit trails and security features and their metadata is captured, which enhances their trustworthiness. In general, the researcher noted that most of the public sector records would face challenges to be accepted as evidence in competent courts of law. This phenomenon could be attributed to the lack of an EDRMS in the public sector of Zimbabwe and hence the negative perception towards them.

What Recommendations Can Be Advocated to Promote the Utilisation of Digital Records Management Services in Zimbabwe?

Participants were requested to suggest recommendations to correct the negative perceptions towards the utilisation of digital records in Zimbabwe. Below are their suggestions, backed by those from scholars.

Adoption of EDRMS to Improve the Trustworthiness of Digital Records

Most of the participants suggested that there is a need to improve the trustworthiness of digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector. They argued that the utilisation of public sector records is directly linked to their trustworthiness. One of the participants said:

There is a need to improve the accuracy, reliability, authenticity and usability of digital records so that people gain their trust. No one will trust records that can be easily deleted, edited or manipulated. The trustworthiness of digital records is directly linked to their usability.

Most of the participants recommended that the government of Zimbabwe must invest in technology and software such as the EDRMS which can be adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of digital records. The EDRMS has records management functionalities and hence can ensure the trustworthiness of digital records (Sigauke 2022). According to Duranti (2015), the trustworthiness of digital records can be ensured through embedding or integrating records management procedures into the ERMS or by establishing organisation-wide control of records management. Procedures such as classification, indexing, registration, profiling, preservation appraisal and disposal also strengthen digital records reliability over time (Duranti 2015).

Acquisition of ICT Skills by Government Workers

Another recommendation was the acquisition of records management and ICT skills for government workers. Many of the participants argued that negative perceptions towards the use of digital records in Zimbabwe's public sector were mainly caused by a lack of knowledge and technophobia. Many of the government workers were not familiar with how to operate computers and therefore resisted the adoption of digital records. Some were also afraid that the utilisation of digital records management systems would replace their jobs, and hence developed a negative attitude to digital records. Scholars agree that government personnel should obtain expertise that empowers them to comprehend matters associated with digital records management (Ambira et al. 2019; Asogwa 2012; Magama 2017; Mutsagondo 2017). Digital records management is a technological field; consequently, it must be appropriately staffed by members with ICT skills (Chikomba et al. 2021; Magama 2017; Nengomasha and Chikomba 2018). For digital records management to thrive, there is a need for records management practitioners to have an appreciation of technology (Mutsagondo 2021).

Change Management

It was also recommended that there is a need for change management training. Transitioning from traditional paper-based records to electronic records often requires significant training and change management efforts (Mutsagondo 2021). Staff members need to be trained on how to use the electronic record systems effectively, and there may be resistance or reluctance to adopt new technologies. Proper training and change management strategies are essential to overcome these challenges (Sithole 2022). Most of the senior government workers went to school before the advent of computers and therefore have technophobia. There is a need for change management for them to accept the benefits of technology. Participants reported that there is a need to address some of the misconceptions associated with digital records through change management training. There is a need to allay the fears that adopting digital records would not lead to job losses but would enhance the quality of records created in Zimbabwe's public sector.

Adoption of Records Management Policies Which Promote the Use of Digital Records

Participants also recommended that the government of Zimbabwe should introduce records management policies and regulations that promote the use of digital records. There is a need to have digital records management frameworks for government workers to understand how digital records can be adopted in the public sector. Government workers also need to be exposed to ICT gadgets for them to get used to technology and appreciate its importance. The government can subsidise laptops and smartphones for civil servants so that they embrace technological advancements. Owning laptops and smartphones may cultivate a technology acceptance culture among government workers.

Adequate Funding

The government of Zimbabwe was also recommended to provide adequate funding towards the adoption of digital records. Adequate funding would lead to proper digital records management infrastructure and hence improve the quality of digital records. Quality digital records would gain the trust of government workers and hence lead to a positive perception. There is a need for sufficient funding to procure records management systems. Most of the hardware and software needed to manage digital records require a lot of funding. Inadequate funding may also lead to the loss of skilled personnel to greener pastures (Magama 2017; Mutsagondo 2021; Tsvuura and Ngulube 2020). More so, it would be difficult to train staff members on relevant records management and ICT skills, as this requires money.

Engage Stakeholders

Participants also recommended the need to involve stakeholders in the management of digital records. These stakeholders must be government employees from various departments such as the Judicial Service Commission, Ministry of Finance, Parliament, and the National Archives of Zimbabwe, among other IT personnel and records management professionals. When stakeholders are engaged, this may give them a chance to gather their insights and perspectives on how they can correct negative perceptions related to digital records management (Mutsagondo 2021). Stakeholder engagement would also give a chance to correct the misconceptions related to digital records management. It is also essential because it helps to identify the specific challenges affecting digital records management. The challenges may include inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, lack of standardised processes, compliance issues or difficulties in ensuring the accuracy, authenticity and reliability of electronic records (Mutsagondo 2021).

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings align with earlier research by Katuu (2019) and Mutsagondo (2021), confirming that the absence of EDRMS and supporting policies undermines the perceived trustworthiness of digital records. Although some digital tools are in use, the lack of a coordinated and standardised framework leads to inconsistencies, confusion, and redundancy in records management practices. Participants' concerns about the reliability, accuracy, and authenticity of digital records underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms. These include establishing robust technical infrastructure, adopting internationally recognised metadata and procedural standards, and enacting legal frameworks that recognise and uphold the integrity of digital records. Without these foundational elements, digital records remain vulnerable to doubt and rejection, especially in official and legal contexts.

The hybrid records approach is evidence of a transitional stage where both familiarity and caution coexist. On the one hand, employees are beginning to recognise the efficiency and convenience of digital records; on the other hand, a deep-rooted reliance on paper records persists, especially among senior officials who are less technologically inclined. Perceptions are further shaped by technophobia among these senior officials, many of whom received their professional training before the digital era and remain uncomfortable with new technologies. This technophobia manifests in resistance to using digital communication platforms and a preference for printed copies of electronic correspondence. Such attitudes can hinder the digital transformation agenda. This observation aligns with Sithole's (2022) argument that change management is critical for successful digital transitions, as it addresses the human factors and behavioural resistance that often accompany technological change.

Moreover, the study highlights how limited funding and skills gaps significantly impede the progress of digital records adoption. Many departments lack the financial resources to procure modern infrastructure, implement secure digital platforms, and train personnel adequately. The perception that digital records lack legal and procedural integrity owing to the absence of formal policies, metadata standards, and secure system environments diminishes their perceived legitimacy in official decision-making and legal contexts. This leads to hesitancy in fully adopting digital systems, even in departments that recognise their potential. The issue is exacerbated by inconsistent leadership commitment and the absence of legal mandates that enforce the use of digital records. Consequently, boosting user confidence through targeted investment in staff capacity building, robust digital systems, and comprehensive regulatory frameworks is essential to bridge the gap between intention and implementation.

These findings also resonate strongly with the TAM used in this study. The model posits that two key factors, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use

significantly influence the acceptance of new technologies. The scepticism towards digital records' authenticity and security directly relates to low perceived usefulness, while the expressed discomfort and technophobia reflect poor perceived ease of use. Therefore, interventions aimed at increasing PU such as adopting EDRMS and improving PEOU such as user-friendly system design and training are essential. By addressing these TAM variables, stakeholders can foster a more positive attitude towards digital records and increase their utilisation across the public sector.

Conclusion

This study has explored the perceptions of public sector officials in Zimbabwe towards the use of digital records, shedding light on the benefits, challenges, and factors influencing their attitudes and behaviours. The study found that the increased usage of digital records is directly linked to the trustworthiness of digital records. Government and business deals with trustworthy records to avoid losses. The findings highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to address the challenges and concerns of government workers, including adopting EDRMS, improving digital records management infrastructure and technical support, providing comprehensive training and capacity-building programs, enhancing data security and privacy measures, ensuring leadership support, commitment and embracing change. By addressing these areas, policymakers and implementers can increase the adoption and effective usage of digital records. This can enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in Zimbabwe's public sector. The study's findings contribute to the growing body of research on digital records management in developing countries, highlighting the importance of contextualising solutions to local needs and challenges. As Zimbabwe continues to navigate its digital transformation journey, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to promote effective digital records management practices in the public sector.

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