

Chapter 2

Cloud Computing–Based Personal Information Management: Perspectives of Online Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the cloud computing-based personal information management practices of online faculty in selected universities in Ghana. Using the qualitative research design, online faculties from six universities were selected and interviewed. Data collected was analysed thematically, bringing out faculty's perception and use of cloud computing services in managing personal information. The study revealed the implementation of the three basic cloud computing models-infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS), platform-as-a-service (PaaS) and software-as-a-service (SaaS). Online faculty had positive perceptions about the use of cloud computing services for their teaching, research, and management of their electronic information. It was, however, revealed that online faculty faced challenges in using cloud services due to their inadequate computing and technical know-how. The study recommended computer and digital literacy training for online faculty to enable them to use the various cloud services available for managing their personal information.

INTRODUCTION

The need for information in recent times cannot be overemphasised. Information is needed to support our decision-making processes. Information is the data, facts, and figures individuals collect and gather to be processed and utilised to their advantage. Although information is relative to the individual collecting or gathering it, its value is inherent in having the right information at the right time and in the right quantity. The subjective nature and value of information make it necessary for individuals to col-

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lect their information to satisfy their information needs and to support their decision-making processes. Information purposefully collected, organised and stored by individuals to satisfy an information need is known as personal information. Personal information is the information an individual collects or owns or the information an organisation holds or has access to about a particular individual (Teevan, Jones and Capra 2008). This includes information created, collected or acquired by individuals to satisfy their personal, recreational or work-related needs. This information is often not in the public domain but kept in the individual's personal information space (PIS) such as computers, diaries, desks, and cabinets, among others, for use in personal use (Bergman, 2013; Donkor, 2019; William, 2008b).

To derive maximum value from personal information collected or gathered, individuals need to organise and store the information they collect or gather for their immediate or future use. Personal Information Management (PIM) encapsulates all the processes individuals need to carry out to properly manage their personal information. PIM is defined by Jones and Teevan (2007) as the “practice and the study of the activities people perform to acquire, organize, maintain, retrieve, use, and control the distribution of information items such as documents (paper-based and digital), web pages, and e-mail messages for everyday use to complete tasks (work-related and not) and to fulfil a person's various roles (as a parent, employee, friend, member of the community, etc.).”

Bergman (2013) describes the organisation of information as a critical stage in the management of personal information. This stage involves managing metadata about the information to be stored. Appropriate names that resonate with the contents of the information collected or created should be assigned to the information items to aid in easy retrieval at a future date. Studies have shown that using idiosyncratic names or names that have no bearing or relationship with the contents of the information items accounts largely for the difficulties individuals experience during information retrieval at a later date. Time and effort must be spent in categorising, classifying, labelling and tagging personal information before storage for easy and efficient retrieval and re-finding (Diekema & Olsen 2014; Malone 1983; Bergman 2013).

Information stored in one's personal information space will serve optimal purposes when the information is retrieved promptly irrespective of when and where the individual finds him/herself. Since time, effort and money are most often spent in the creation, collection, organisation and storage of information; it must be retrieved in a timely matter to serve the purpose for which it was created. In the bid to achieve the optimal use of stored information despite time and space; storage mechanisms have been improved by scientists and engineers over the years evolving from the use of the cabinet/lockers, diskettes CD-ROMs, and external hard drives, computer hard drives to the most recent mechanism-cloud computing.

Online faculty are among the category of individuals who spend a lot of time collecting, organising and storing their information for their personal use in teaching, learning and recreation. Online faculty are educators who are responsible for the teaching, learning and research processes of students at the college level and beyond (Akande & Van Belle, 2015a; Bergman et al., 2019; Donkor, 2019; Kearns, Frey, & Alman, 2014). These faculty involved in online teaching collect a lot of information from their interactions with students. These pieces of information include email messages, study chats and dialogues, assignments and project works of students, research papers and literature, contacts and other information items (Kearns, Frey, Tomer, et al., 2014). As their information items increase in size, it becomes a challenge to recollect all the information they have stored in the personal information collection (PIC) over time (Donkor, 2019; Kearns, Frey, Tomer, et al., 2014).

Demographic characteristics such as gender and age have implications on faculty's personal information storage practices (Aharony, 2015; Donkor, 2019). Age predominantly affected the storage and retrieval of personal information due to the limitations of the human mind to recollect information as

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