

**DIGITAL OFFICE PRACTICES AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS IN
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

ALIKORNWO, Peter Mezenye, PhD

peter.alikornwo@portharcourtpoly.edu.ng

ORCID: 0009-0008-7266-3731

WOS ResearcherID: PEV-3695-2025

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Office Technology and Management, School of Business and Administrative
Studies, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ECHENDU, Sharon Ifeoma, PhD

sharon.echendu@ust.edu.ng

Department of Office and Information Management, Faculty of Administration and Management,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study empirically examined the relationship between digital office practices and information management effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Digital office practices were operationalised through two dimensions: electronic records management and digital communication systems. Information management effectiveness was assessed through information accessibility and information security. Anchored on Information Systems Theory and guided by a correlational survey design, data were obtained from 248 administrative officers and office management staff drawn from Rivers State University, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, using a structured questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.78 to 0.84 for all subscales. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to test four null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed significant positive relationships between electronic records management and information accessibility ($r = 0.614, p < 0.05$), electronic records management and information security ($r = 0.573, p < 0.05$), digital communication systems and information accessibility ($r = 0.589, p < 0.05$), and digital communication systems and information security ($r = 0.541, p < 0.05$). The study concluded that digital office practices significantly determine information management effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. It was recommended, among others, that institutions invest in upgraded digital office infrastructure and staff capacity development programmes to sustain improvements in information accessibility and security.

Keywords: *Digital Office Practices, Electronic Records Management, Digital Communication Systems, Information Accessibility, Information Security, Tertiary Institutions*

INTRODUCTION

The global proliferation of digital technologies has profoundly transformed administrative operations across all institutional sectors. In higher education, the management of institutional information constitutes a critical axis of governance, operational efficiency, and service quality. The shift from conventional paper-based office systems to digital platforms has accelerated the volume, velocity, and variety of information processed within institutional environments, creating both opportunities and governance challenges. As Laudon and Laudon (2022) observed, information systems have fundamentally reshaped how organisations capture, store, and distribute information, altering the very architecture of administrative work. In Nigerian tertiary

institutions, these changes have unfolded within a context of infrastructural constraints, policy inconsistencies, and uneven institutional capacity, making the empirical investigation of their outcomes a pressing scholarly priority.

Information management effectiveness, understood as an institution's capacity to ensure that information assets are accessible to authorised users while remaining protected against unauthorised disclosure or loss, is a foundational pillar of institutional performance (Detlor, 2010; Choo, 2002). Digital office practices, encompassing the systematic deployment of electronic records platforms and digital communication systems, represent two of the most consequential technological interventions shaping this capacity in contemporary organisations. Globally, research has established positive relationships between digital transformation and improvements in information governance outcomes (Vial, 2019; Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019). In the African context, however, the empirical evidence connecting specific digital office practices to information management effectiveness within tertiary educational institutions remains underdeveloped.

Within Rivers State, Nigeria, tertiary institutions have increasingly deployed digital office tools, yet administrative challenges relating to inaccessibility of institutional records, breakdowns in digital communication systems, and vulnerabilities in information security have persisted (Alikornwo, Adiele, & Dornanu, 2025; Nwinyokpugi, Eneyo, & Bestman, 2023). Operational observations from Rivers State University, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, the three institutions covered in the present study, reveal that the transition to digital office systems has not automatically translated into improved information management outcomes. This gap between technology adoption and outcome realisation forms the empirical problem addressed by this study.

The present study therefore examined the relationship between digital office practices, dimensioned through electronic records management and digital communication systems, and information management effectiveness, measured through information accessibility and information security, in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. By generating institution-specific empirical evidence, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital transformation in Nigerian higher education administration and provides actionable insights for institutional managers, policymakers, and regulatory bodies.

Statement of the Problem

Tertiary institutions in Rivers State have, over the past decade, invested significantly in digital office infrastructure, including electronic document management systems, institutional email platforms, and digital filing solutions. Notwithstanding these investments, administrative units within these institutions continue to report challenges associated with the retrieval of institutional records, inconsistent access to digital communication platforms, and recurring incidents of data loss and unauthorised access to sensitive institutional information (Alikornwo, Adiele, & Onyebuanyi, 2026; Obara & Alikornwo, 2025). This persistent misalignment between digital investment and information management outcomes raises a fundamental empirical question about the nature and strength of the relationship between digital office practices and information management effectiveness.

Prior studies in the Nigerian context, including Nyekazi (2023) and Nwinyokpugi et al. (2023), have documented institutional performance gaps related to office management and information governance in tertiary settings in Rivers State. However, these studies have not directly examined the specific pathways through which electronic records management and digital communication systems affect the twin outcomes of information accessibility and information security. This constitutes a gap in the extant literature that the present study sought to address.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine the relationship between digital office practices and information management effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

- i. Determine the relationship between electronic records management and information management effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.
- ii. Examine the relationship between digital communication systems and information management effectiveness in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between electronic records management and information accessibility in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between electronic records management and information security in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between digital communication systems and information accessibility in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between digital communication systems and information security in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Digital Office Practices

Digital office practices refer to the systematic deployment of information and communication technology tools and workflows to manage administrative and information-processing functions within an organisation. In contemporary institutional settings, the two most prevalent and consequential dimensions of digital office practice are electronic records management and digital communication systems. Laudon and Laudon (2022) define digital office systems as integrated technology-enabled environments that transform administrative processes from analogue to digital modes, enhancing the speed, accuracy, and traceability of institutional operations. Choo (2002) earlier articulated that the hallmark of an information-competent organisation lies in its capacity to systematically acquire, organise, distribute, and apply information, a capacity substantially amplified by digital platforms.

Electronic Records Management (ERM)

Electronic records management (ERM) encompasses the creation, classification, storage, retrieval, retention, and disposition of institutional records in digital format. The International Standards Organisation's ISO 15489 framework defines ERM as a field of management responsible for the systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use, and disposition of records (ISO, 2016). In practice, ERM systems in tertiary institutions include document management platforms, digital registers, automated archiving tools, and integrated student and staff information systems.

Digital Communication Systems (DCS)

Digital communication systems (DCS), encompass institutional email platforms, intranet portals, video-conferencing tools, and collaborative document-sharing applications that facilitate information exchange within and beyond institutional boundaries (Mergel et al., 2019; Vial, 2019).

Information Management Effectiveness

Information management, in the foundational conceptualisation provided by Detlor (2010), is the management of the processes and systems that create, acquire, organise, store, distribute, and

use information, with the goal of enabling people and organisations to access and use information efficiently and effectively. This definition, published in the Choo (2002) similarly positions effective information management as an organisational capability that sustains learning, adaptation, and performance in dynamic environments. In the present study, information management effectiveness is operationalised across two dimensions: information accessibility and information security. Information accessibility refers to the degree to which authorised users can readily locate, retrieve, and utilise institutional information when needed (Laudon & Laudon, 2022; Detlor, 2010). Information security refers to the protection of institutional information assets against unauthorised access, alteration, disclosure, and destruction (Obara & Alikornwo, 2025; Alikornwo et al., 2025).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on **Information Systems Theory (IST)** and **Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm**.

Information Systems Theory (IST) as articulated by Laudon and Laudon (2022) conceptualises information systems as socio-technical constructs through which organisations process inputs to generate outputs in support of organisational goals. IST posits that the effectiveness of information outcomes in an organisation is directly shaped by the quality, design, and management of the underlying information systems deployed. In this framework, digital office practices, comprising electronic records management and digital communication systems, function as input systems whose quality and governance determine the information management outcomes of accessibility and security.

Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, originally advanced by Barney (1991) and subsequently extended to information systems contexts. The RBV holds that organisational resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable constitute sources of sustainable competitive advantage. Applied to the present study, digital office capabilities constitute strategic institutional resources whose effective deployment yields superior information management outcomes. This theoretical layering of IST and RBV provides a robust intellectual scaffold for both the conceptualisation of the study's variables and the interpretation of findings.

Empirical Review

Globally, Vial (2019), in a comprehensive review of 282 works published in the Journal of Strategic Information Systems, built a framework of digital transformation articulated across eight building blocks, foregrounding it as a process through which digital technologies create disruptions that trigger strategic responses in organisations. Vial's framework underscores that digital transformation initiatives, including digital office deployments, must be carefully managed to yield the intended organisational outcomes, including improvements in information accessibility and governance. This global perspective is foundational to understanding why digital office practice adoption in developing country institutions does not automatically produce effectiveness outcomes.

Mergel, Edelman, and Haug (2019), drawing on 40 expert interviews published in Government Information Quarterly, provided an empirically grounded definition of digital transformation in the public sector, identifying improved information accessibility, transparency, and interoperability as the primary intended outcomes of digitisation initiatives. Their findings are particularly relevant to the present study's focus on tertiary institutions, which share with public sector agencies the imperatives of accountability, transparency, and governance.

In the African context, Twum and Ahenkora (2020) examined electronic records management practices in Ghanaian public sector institutions, finding that the adoption of ERM systems significantly improved information retrieval efficiency and reduced documentation errors, with

direct positive implications for service delivery. Their study, set within a West African institutional context comparable to Nigeria, provides regional empirical grounding for the hypothesis that ERM positively predicts information accessibility in public institutions.

Kemoni and Ngulube (2008) examined the relationship between records management practices and service delivery in Kenyan government ministries. Their findings established that poor records management practices were a significant impediment to administrative efficiency, while institutions with structured records management systems demonstrated markedly superior information retrieval and decision-support outcomes. This finding resonates with more recent evidence from Nigeria.

Within Nigeria, Alikornwo et al. (2025) conducted an empirical study on digital transformation and administrative decision-making in government ministries in Rivers State. Using a correlational survey design and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to test four hypotheses, the study found significant positive relationships between records automation and information accessibility ($r = 0.652$) and data security ($r = 0.590$). Alikornwo et al. (2026) further examined information management in digitally enabled offices in Rivers State government MDAs, confirming that digital filing systems were significant predictors of both information accessibility and data security outcomes.

Obara and Alikornwo (2025) examined information security contextualisation and institutional trust in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Anchored on Institutional Trust Theory and Risk Management Theory, the study found that strategic information security practices encompassing administrative, technical, and policy-based mechanisms were significantly related to institutional trust outcomes. This study provides critical empirical underpinning for the proposition that information security practices, as outcomes of digital office management, carry significant institutional consequences.

Nwinyokpugi, Eneyo, and Bestman (2023) examined enterprise hierarchy management and administrative control efficiency in the public service in Rivers State. Their study demonstrated that structured digital administrative frameworks significantly predicted efficiency outcomes, reinforcing the argument that the quality of digital office systems shapes institutional administrative performance.

Fiito, Nwinyokpugi, and Bestman (2023) examined data ingestion and systems integration in public universities in Nigeria. Their findings established that the quality of data ingestion frameworks significantly predicted the level of systems integration in public universities, with clear implications for information accessibility outcomes. This study is notable for its focus on the university context, providing directly relevant empirical grounding for the present investigation.

Kalagbor and Adiele (2026) examined e-governance adoption and democratic accountability in the public sector in Rivers State, Nigeria. Using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and regression-based mediation techniques on data from 210 administrative officers across ten ministries, the study found that information management systems significantly mediated the relationship between e-governance adoption and accountability outcomes, accounting for 52% of the variance in accountability. This underscores the systemic and outcome-shaping role that digital information management capacities play in institutional administration.

Nyekazi (2023) examined change management and job performance of office managers in eight tertiary institutions in Rivers State, including Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The study found that technology-driven change was a significant positive predictor of office managers' job performance, concluding that digital technology adoption in office settings reshapes managerial workflows and enhances institutional performance outcomes when accompanied by appropriate training.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating the direction and magnitude of relationships among variables without manipulation of the research environment (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The design enabled the researchers to establish the nature of the relationships between digital office practices and information management effectiveness as they occur naturally within the selected institutions.

The population comprised all administrative officers and office management staff in Rivers State University (RSU), Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Based on staff registers obtained from the academic registrars and administrative heads of the three institutions, the total accessible population was 420. The sample size of 248 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation of staff across the three institutions, with RSU contributing 128 participants, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic contributing 63, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education contributing 57.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed and validated by the researchers, titled the "Digital Office Practices and Information Management Effectiveness Questionnaire (DOPIMEQ)". The instrument comprised 40 items structured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Face and content validity were established through expert review by three specialists in Office and Information Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation, all drawn from Rivers State University. A pilot test conducted on 30 administrative staff outside the main sample yielded Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients of 0.81 (Electronic Records Management), 0.78 (Digital Communication Systems), 0.84 (Information Accessibility), and 0.79 (Information Security). All values exceeded the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) for social science research instruments.

Out of the 248 copies of the instrument distributed, 236 were retrieved and found usable, representing a response rate of 95.2%. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the research questions and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) for hypothesis testing. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A mean score of 3.00 and above on the 5-point scale was used as the criterion for a high rating, in line with accepted practice in the Nigerian management sciences research tradition (Zeb-Obipi, 2022; Nwinyokpugi et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: What is the relationship between electronic records management, digital communication systems and information management effectiveness?

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation results for all study variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 236)

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Electronic Records Management	3.81	0.64	1.00	5.00
Digital Communication Systems	3.69	0.71	1.00	5.00
Information Accessibility	3.74	0.68	1.00	5.00
Information Security	3.58	0.73	1.00	5.00

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Decision Rule: Mean \geq 3.00 = High; Mean $<$ 3.00 = Low.

Table 1 reveals that all four study variables were rated highly by respondents. Electronic records management recorded the highest mean score ($x = 3.81$, $SD = 0.64$), suggesting that the three

institutions had made relatively appreciable investments in digital records platforms and staff deployment on these systems. Information security recorded the lowest mean ($x = 3.58$, $SD = 0.73$), indicating that while acknowledged, security practices lagged somewhat behind other digital office dimensions. This finding aligns with the empirical observation by Obara and Alikornwo (2025) that information security practices in tertiary institutions in Rivers State required strengthening despite the presence of other digital office tools.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 presents the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation results for the four null hypotheses.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Results for Hypothesis Testing (N = 236)

Hypothesis	r-value	p-value	df	Decision
Ho1: ERM - Information Accessibility	0.614	0.000	234	Rejected
Ho2: ERM - Information Security	0.573	0.001	234	Rejected
Ho3: DCS - Information Accessibility	0.589	0.000	234	Rejected
Ho4: DCS - Information Security	0.541	0.002	234	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2026. ERM = Electronic Records Management; DCS = Digital Communication Systems. Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Results in Table 2 show that all four null hypotheses were rejected. Ho1 was rejected ($r = 0.614$, $p < 0.05$), confirming a significant positive relationship between electronic records management and information accessibility. Ho2 was rejected ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.05$), confirming a significant positive relationship between electronic records management and information security. Ho3 was rejected ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.05$), confirming a significant positive relationship between digital communication systems and information accessibility. Ho4 was rejected ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.05$), confirming a significant positive relationship between digital communication systems and information security.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that electronic records management significantly and positively predicts information accessibility ($r = 0.614$, $p < 0.05$) is consistent with the global evidence provided by Vial (2019), who argued that digital transformation initiatives create enhanced information retrieval and governance capacities when well-implemented. It also affirms the findings of Twum and Ahenkora (2020), who established in the Ghanaian context that ERM adoption significantly improved information retrieval efficiency in public sector institutions. Within Nigeria, this finding corroborates the evidence of Alikornwo et al. (2025, 2026), who documented significant positive relationships between records automation and information accessibility in Rivers State government MDAs. The present study extends this evidence to the tertiary institutional setting, confirming its generalisability across administrative contexts.

The significant positive relationship between electronic records management and information security ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.05$) aligns with Obara and Alikornwo (2025), who established that strategic information security practices in tertiary institutions are instrumentally linked to institutional trust and governance outcomes. It is further consistent with the argument of Kemoni and Ngulube (2008) that structured records management systems in African institutional settings create traceable, auditable information environments that are inherently more secure than paper-based or ad hoc digital systems. This finding is theoretically grounded in IST, which posits that properly designed information systems embed security protocols that reduce the risk of unauthorised access and data corruption.

The significant positive relationship between digital communication systems and information accessibility ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.05$) is consistent with Mergel, Edelman, and Haug (2019), who identified improved information sharing and accessibility as core intended outcomes of digital communication investments in public organisations. Within Rivers State, Fiito et al. (2023) established that digital data integration frameworks in public universities predicted systems integration outcomes, which in turn enhanced information flow and accessibility across institutional units. The present finding extends this evidence by directly linking digital communication systems to information accessibility outcomes in the tertiary institutional context.

The significant positive relationship between digital communication systems and information security ($r = 0.541$, $p < 0.05$), while the weakest among the four relationships, is nonetheless theoretically coherent. Laudon and Laudon (2022) note that enterprise digital communication platforms incorporate embedded security features, including encryption, authentication protocols, and access logs, that collectively enhance institutional information security. The relatively lower correlation coefficient compared to the ERM-security relationship ($r = 0.573$) may reflect the finding of Obara and Alikornwo (2025) that technical and administrative security mechanisms are unevenly integrated within communication systems across tertiary institutions in Rivers State, leading to a more modest security gain per unit of DCS investment.

Overall, the pattern of results is coherent with the theoretical propositions of Information Systems Theory, confirming that digital office systems function as antecedent infrastructure whose quality and deployment determine information management outcomes. The findings are also consistent with the Resource-Based View argument that digital office capabilities constitute institutional resources whose effective deployment yields superior administrative outcomes (Barney, 1991; Kalagbor & Adiele, 2026).

CONCLUSION

The study has empirically established that digital office practices, operationalised through electronic records management and digital communication systems, are significant positive determinants of information management effectiveness, measured through information accessibility and information security, in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. All four null hypotheses were rejected, and the correlation coefficients obtained were moderate to strong, statistically significant, and positive in direction. These findings contribute to the literature on digital transformation and information management in Nigerian higher education administration and validate the policy imperative of investing in digital office infrastructure as a foundation for institutional information governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Management of tertiary institutions in Rivers State should invest in robust electronic records management platforms, including integrated document management systems and automated archiving infrastructure, to sustain and deepen improvements in information accessibility and data security.
2. Institutional authorities should institutionalise information security policies, requiring regular staff training on data protection protocols, access control management, and digital hygiene practices, to address the relatively lower information security scores reported in this study.
3. Tertiary institutions should deploy encrypted institutional communication platforms, including secure email servers and controlled-access intranet systems, to simultaneously enhance information accessibility and security outcomes.

4. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) should incorporate digital office competency benchmarks into the accreditation frameworks for administrative units of tertiary institutions, ensuring that compliance with digital office standards is a condition for institutional recognition.

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