Ensuring Institutional Accountability through Information Governance: Conceptualising the Role of Social Media Records Management and Records Reliability

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ABSTRACT

The sudden rise of social media usage within institutions presents new challenges in sustaining accountability and assuring the reliability of records. Institutions now face massive social media content that can be treated as official records. Still, with no clear governance models and records management procedures established, there is a question regarding compliance, data integrity, and institutional transparency. The study further confirms that social media records management is critical in amplifying the interaction between governance and institutional performance. Using a narrative review method, data were collected using the Scopus database with a broad search string focused on social media, records management, governance practices, and compliance. Integrative thematic analysis was used to identify key concepts, theories, and relationships between these variables. The findings demonstrate that effective information governance is vital in record reliability and institutional accountability, particularly in conjunction with appropriate social media records management practices. The theoretical contribution provides a lucid conceptual framework for future empirical research, and practical implications emphasize strong institutional policies and standardized social media recordkeeping procedures. This study's limitations are that it is conceptual and has not been empirically tested; therefore, it is recommended that future research prove the given framework and further examine its use in various institutional settings and platforms.

Keywords: Information Governance; Social Media Records Management; Institutional Accountability; Records Reliability

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, information has become both a vital asset and a complex challenge for institutions to manage. Public organizations, in particular, must deal with vast amounts of information generated not only through traditional systems but also via dynamic platforms such as social media. Information governance (IG) provides a framework for ensuring that institutional information is created, managed, and disposed of securely, legally, and effectively across its life cycle (Proença et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016). While IG has been applied extensively to formal record-keeping systems, the rise of social media has introduced new complexities that organizations are struggling to address.

Social media now plays a central role in institutional communication, enabling engagement with stakeholders, transparency, and responsiveness. However, its transient, informal, and easily altered nature complicates record-keeping and accountability (Mosweu, 2021; Maurel & Zwarich, 2021). Content may be deleted, updated, or lost, making it difficult to preserve credible evidence of communication and decision-making. Yet, in an environment of heightened scrutiny and public expectation, authentic records whether emails, memos, or online messages remain essential to demonstrate compliance, defend institutional decisions, and safeguard reputation (McKemmish, 1997; Azeez et al., 2008).

Current practices for managing social media records are fragmented. Many organizations lack clear policies, technical tools, and governance mechanisms for capturing, preserving, and authenticating such records (Bebissemegnie, 2020). This absence of structured approaches undermines institutional accountability, raises questions about the reliability of records, and exposes organizations to legal and reputational risks (Greiver et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2025). Scholars argue that the problem is both technical and conceptual: social media records are often treated as unofficial and excluded from formal record-keeping rules, creating gaps in accountability frameworks (Mosweu, 2021).

Despite recognition of social media's importance in institutional communication, research on its systematic management remains limited. Existing IG models largely overlook the distinct characteristics of social media its informality, fluidity, and evidential potential (McKemmish, 1997; Mosweu, 2021). This gap highlights the need for an integrated framework that connects IG, social media records management, institutional accountability, and record reliability. Institutions must find ways to ensure their social media records are credible, accessible, and capable of supporting compliance and transparency.

To address this gap, this paper develops a conceptual model that positions information governance as the overarching framework, with social media records management as a critical support function for institutional accountability and record reliability. Specifically, the paper aims to: (1) explore how IG principles can be applied to social media records; (2) examine their relevance to institutional accountability; (3) identify key challenges in ensuring reliability and authenticity; and (4) propose a framework for integrating social media governance into accountability and compliance structures. By doing so, this study contributes to both academic discourse and institutional practice, offering a model that strengthens accountability, transparency, and trust in a digital-first environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Records management and information governance are central to organizational effectiveness, ensuring compliance, transparency, and accountability (Maurel & Zwarich, 2021). In the digital era, social media has become integral to institutional communication, producing records in the form of posts, comments, images, videos, and metadata. Scholars emphasize that these records hold evidential and probative value and must therefore be treated as legitimate organizational records (MacNeil & Eastwood, 2017; Evans, Franks, & Chen, 2018).

The intersection of information governance and social media records management is increasingly significant for institutional accountability. Effective information governance provides the structures for decision rights, accountability, and compliance (Proença et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016). Records management acts as its operational arm, ensuring systematic control over record creation, use, and disposition (ISO15489, 2016). Together, they sustain organizational transparency, traceability, and reliability (Mosweu, 2021). However, while governance principles are well developed for traditional records, their application to social media records remains fragmented and inconsistent (Netshakhuma, 2019; Kriesberg, 2023).

Social media records present distinct challenges. Their ephemeral nature, shifting platform terms of service, and the absence of clear retention and preservation protocols complicate integration into institutional record-keeping systems (Valpy, 2019; Zinaman, 2024). Public organizations frequently lack policies, technical capacity, and preservation strategies, leading to risks in reliability and compliance (Doran, 2012; Liew et al., 2015). Inadequate strategies not only threaten long-term access but also weaken institutional legitimacy and trust (Netshakhuma, 2019).

Best practices identified in the literature include cross-functional governance structures, clearly defined responsibilities, integrated digital information systems, and ongoing capacity-building for records professionals (Mosweu, 2021; Farrell et al., 2023). Ethical imperatives—such as participatory recordkeeping and inclusive governance—further emphasize the role of records in advancing accountability and social justice (Farrell et al., 2023). Still, few frameworks comprehensively connect information governance, social media records management, and accountability outcomes.

Thus, existing research underscores the necessity yet difficulty of managing social media records within broader information governance frameworks. Significant conceptual gaps remain in linking governance principles to practical mechanisms for ensuring record reliability and institutional accountability. This study addresses these gaps by conceptualizing a framework that integrates social media governance into institutional accountability structures.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Narrative Review Method

The narrative review method is used to gather much literature and research results on information governance, social media record management practices, institutional responsibility, and records' accuracy. The narrative review method worked well for us because it effectively gathers different theoretical frameworks, methods, and empirical evidence from various multidisciplinary areas. Unlike systematic reviews that depend on protocols, a narrative review permits the researcher to factor in findings, analyze earlier scholarly disagreements, and identify gaps that need the concept development of a framework. The review also allows us to look closely at important ideas and methods for keeping records, running institutions, and ensuring that social media use is legal.

3.1.1. Key Steps in Conducting a Narrative Review

The main things that had to be done to complete the narrative review were creating clear study questions, making the best search plan, and finding relevant literature through a long screening and selection process. It was chosen because it has a lot of peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and government publications about information governance, social media governance, and oversight tools. The Scopus database was used to get the data. We conducted the preliminary filtering based on the title, abstract, and the relevance of the keywords to the study. We further read the articles in full to select those aligned with the study's aim. We subsequently identified and thematically coded the significant concepts, models, and practices to construct patterns, theoretical perspectives, and gaps, thereby simplifying the construction of the conceptual framework.

3.1.2 Data Collection and Review Strategy

The data collection and review strategy were systematic and multidynamic to garner a broad and integrative range of knowledge. The search was conducted according to a predefined search string in the Scopus database for an exhaustive literature capture. The search string used was:

("social media" OR "social network" OR "online platform" OR "digital communication") AND ("records management" OR "information management" OR "data governance" OR "record keeping") AND ("practices" OR "strategies" OR "policies" OR "procedures") AND ("compliance" OR "regulation" OR "standards" OR "guidelines") AND ("archiving" OR "storage" OR "retrieval" OR "preservation")

An integrative thematic analysis method was used to ascertain and synthesize key themes, ideas, and theoretical perspectives within the literature. Data coding, categorization of findings within the broader thematic categories (i.e., legal and regulatory frameworks, conservation principles, problem of record management, and institution of accountability mechanisms), and synthesizing the themes for comprehension of how the variables interact with one another were involved. The integrative process facilitated the identification of repetitive structures, policy loopholes, and institutional habits, which further contributed to the conceptual framework to be suggested regarding how information governance, social media records management habits, and institutional accountability and records reliability relate.

3.1.3 Key Findings from the Narrative Review

The narrative review recognizes principal concerns in social media use and records management in academic and institutional settings. Having comprehensive and responsive social media policies is critical to guide institutions on recordkeeping and governance, yet legislative and framework loopholes persist, particularly in

the developing world (Husin & Hanisch, 2011; Mosweu, 2022). Social media record management issues include a shortage of preservation strategies, technically insufficient capacity, and the absence of systematic procedures (Netshakhuma, 2019; Elaturoti, 2021). Records reliability is guaranteed through compliance with traditional records management principles and systematic reliability testing, particularly for information utilized in institutional decision-making and research (Oladejo & Hofman, 2023; Cheliotis et al., 2015).

Institutional accountability relies on effective governance frameworks that support transparency and adequate social media use, but most municipalities and government institutions still lack adequate policies and mechanisms (Mosweu, 2021; Kriesberg, 2023). Social media content moderation also significantly impacts the formation of accountability because these policies establish record integrity and public confidence (Clune & McDaid, 2024). Overall, all these results underscore the need for policy development, capacity building of institutions, and technology infrastructure investment to enhance social media records management and organizational accountability.

Table 1: Thematic Results for the Study

Theme	Description	Study
Information Governance	Information Governance is policies, procedures, and technology that assure management, security, integrity, and information compliance in institutions. IG enhances institutional accountability by bringing order to the management of data and digital records, such as those in social media	Smallwood (2020); Kooper et al. (2011)
Role of Information Governance in Institutional Accountability	It is central to institutional accountability to ensure there are avenues of transparency, traceability, and evidence-based decision-making that are important in universities and public institutions.	Smallwood (2020); Mosweu (2021)
Social Media Records Management	Social media records management involves structured policies and procedures for capturing, keeping, and handling records generated on social media, to make them credible, authentic, and retrievable for use in institutions.	Netshakhuma (2019); Oladejo & Hofman (2023); Kriesberg (2023)
Challenges in Social Media Records Management	Challenges are the absence of systemic policies, the inability to capture dynamic information, technical limitations, a lack of training, and a legal vacuum in handling records created on social media. These vacuums hinder accountability and trust.	Husin & Hanisch (2011); Mosweu (2022); Elaturoti (2021)
Relationship between Information Governance and Social Media Records Management	Information Governance provides the paradigm through which social media records management is applied. Strong IG frameworks determine institutions' social media records management and preservation to enhance accountability.	Smallwood (2020); Mosweu (2021)
Records Reliability	Records reliability refers to the reliability of a record as credible and authentic evidence that does not change over time. Ensuring reliability in the digital and social media age requires correct capture, storage, and preservation procedures.	Cheliotis et al. (2015); Oladejo & Hofman (2023)
Institutional Accountability	Institutional accountability refers to the responsibility of public and educational institutions to provide accurate, reliable, and timely records for decision-making, reporting, and	Kriesberg (2023); Mosweu (2021)

	public trust. It is heavily dependent on information governance and reliable record-keeping systems.	
Moderating Role of Social Media Platforms	Social media sites, in the moderation of content and data retention practices, influence how institutions can seize and maintain records, and affect accountability and the reliability of the records.	Clune & McDaid (2024)
Need for Conceptual Framework Integration	The literature is consistent in that IG, SMRM, and accountability of institutions should be integrated with record reliability so that institutions can become transparent in the online world.	Netshakhuma (2019); Oladejo & Hofman (2023); Mosweu (2021)

3.1.4 Development of the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework begins by establishing its premise and relevance to the study. The theoretical framework is a scientific perspective employed to see the interdependence of key variables—Information Governance, Social Media Records Management, Institutional Accountability, and Records Reliability. Drawing on Information Governance theory (Smallwood, 2019), it focuses on how systematic policies, procedures, and accountability frameworks shape digital information management. In addition, Records Continuum Theory (Upward, 1996) prescribes the requirement for records management dynamically across their life cycle, especially in rapidly developing social media environments. All these theoretical underpinnings provide the rationale for subjecting social media data to be managed as institutional records requiring governance, systematic management, and preservation to attain accountability and dependability.

The implementation of these theories in the research scenario at hand depicts the intervening functions of social media records management in depicting the information governance values as measurable evidence of institutional activity. Social media sites generate mountains of informal and incomplete data. However, through strict information governance and effective social media records management systems, they are elevated to valid testimonials supporting institutional openness and service performance (Oladejo & Hofman, 2023). The conceptual framework (Figure 1) integrates information governance as an independent variable, social media records management as a mediating variable, and institutional accountability and records reliability as dependent variables. The framework points out how government structures and record-keeping procedures influence institutional accountability, in line with Mosweu's (2021) study, which states that quality record management practice enhances governance outcomes. Such conceptualization is also underpinned by literature that posits the central function of policies, compliance steps, and archiving strategies (Netshakhuma, 2019).

The theoretical insight gained from the literature synthesis has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the model bridges the theoretical gap between records management and digital information governance within social media environments. Practically, the model educates policymakers and institutional administrators on crafting policies and procedures to address the complexities of digital recordkeeping, ensuring accountability, legal compliance, and institutional trust (Kriesberg, 2023). The framework also provides a research agenda that requires empirical examination of the Information Governance-Social Media Records Management-institutional performance output linkages. Last, in summary, the theoretical framework outlines the nature of the study and provides a robust foundation to clarify the role of governance and management practices in providing institutional accountability and record reliability in the digital age.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for the Study

RESULTS

4.1. Information Governance Affects Institutional Accountability & Records Reliability

Information governance is a key part of ensuring that institutions are accountable and that records are accurate. It does this by creating the framework, policies, and compliance systems needed to ensure that information is created, stored, and kept forever as proof of institutional decisions and public trust. Risk management, information security, compliance, and recordkeeping policies are all part of information governance models (Smallwood, 2019). These policies help institutions show that they are open and responsible in running their businesses. As digital communication and social media use rises, bad information management leads to lost files and scattered information, which makes institutions less accountable and less likely to follow the law (Mosweu, 2021). Research provides empirical evidence that sound information governance policies play a crucial role in ensuring the reliability, authenticity, and accessibility of records, regardless of their media or form, thereby facilitating audits, legal processes, and reporting by institutions (Netshakhuma, 2019). Furthermore, information governance aids the building of institutional trust through the integrity and congruence of recordkeeping with the outputs of governance (Oladejo & Hofman, 2023). Accordingly, this research supposes that the practical application of information governance favors institutional accountability and record reliability.

Proposition 1: Information Governance positively affects Institutional Accountability and Records Reliability.

4.2 Information Governance Affects Social Media Records Management

Information governance guarantees the success of managing social media records. It sets rules, guidelines, and policies that make it easier to control how content is made, captured, categorized, and kept as official records on social media channels. With institutional communication expanding exponentially on social media sites, lacking formal information governance can result in fragmented information management, institutional memory loss, and regulatory compliance (Bamigboye et al., 2019). Information governance ensures organizations embrace appropriate practices for capturing record-worthy material on social media sites by applying metadata standards and integrating such records into active record-keeping systems (Oladejo & Hofman, 2023). In addition, information governance frameworks reduce the risks of unauthorized erasure, misinformation, and security compromises in online systems (Smallwood, 2019). By aligning social media records management procedures with general governance programmes, companies enhance the integrity, reliability, and auditability of their online records (Mosweu, 2021). Therefore, This study assumes that information governance has a direct and positive effect on how well and quickly social media records management is carried out.

Proposition 2: Information Governance positively affects Social Media Records Management.

4.3. Social Media Records Management Affects Institutional Accountability & Records Reliability

Social media records management is critical in improving institutional accountability and records reliability by ensuring that social media messages are recorded, kept, and made retrievable as original institutional activities and decisional records. Institutions' growing use of social media platforms to publish official information, engage with stakeholders, and communicate to the public necessitates efficient management of such records to offer proof and accountability in governance (Bamigboye et al., 2019). Efficient record handling ensures regulatory compliance, upholds institutional integrity, and facilitates activity verification in case of audit or inquiry (Oladejo & Hofman, 2023). Without effective social media records management, institutions risk losing information, disseminating misinformation, and being unable to demonstrate due process, thus compromising accountability (Mosweu, 2021). Moreover, reliable records from social media platforms enhance institutional memory and provide credible evidence for internal decision-making and external reporting (Abul et al., 2021). Therefore, this study posits that effective social media records management positively impacts institutional accountability and records reliability.

Proposition 3: Social Media Records Management positively affects Institutional Accountability and Records Reliability.

4.4 Information Governance Affects Institutional Accountability and Records Reliability Mediated by Social Media Records Management

Information governance is a foundational framework for the governance of information assets to maintain institutional information and communications controlled, secured, and responsibly used for enhancing accountability and record trustworthiness. Information governance frameworks institute policies, procedures, and technologies that promote institutional information compliance, security, and validity (Smallwood, 2020). Within the modern digital environment, where social media is used extensively for institutional communications, Social media records management becomes the critical intervening variable that links information governance practices to attaining institutional accountability and records reliability. Effective information governance establishes clear standards and functions for record-keeping across platforms. At the same time, actual impact on accountability and record credibility depends on the extent to which institutions treat social media content as official records (Mosweu, 2021). Social media records management ensures that social media communications are captured, classified, retained, and retrievable as per information governance policies so that institutions can demonstrate openness, regulatory compliance, and decision traceability (Abul et al., 2021). Therefore, without proper social media records management, information governance's influence on institutional accountability and records reliability can be compromised by weaknesses in record management practice loopholes. Hence, this study hypothesizes that information governance positively affects institutional accountability and records reliability, mediated by social media records management.

Proposition 1: Information Governance positively affects Institutional Accountability and Records Reliability through the mediation of Social Media Records Management.

DISCUSSION

The study opens several avenues for future research to expand its conceptual contributions. First, empirical validation of the proposed framework is critical to test its applicability across diverse institutional contexts, such as governmental bodies, educational institutions, and private enterprises. Comparative studies could explore sector-specific challenges, including variations in compliance requirements, resource availability, and technological adoption. Second, the framework could be adapted to address emerging digital communication platforms (e.g., decentralized social networks, AI-driven chatbots) and evolving technologies like blockchain for immutable recordkeeping or machine learning for automated metadata tagging. Third, cross-cultural analyses could examine how regional legal frameworks, sociopolitical norms, and infrastructural disparities influence the implementation of Information Governance and Social Media Records Management. Additionally, investigating the role of stakeholder collaboration—such as partnerships between Information Technology departments, legal teams, and archivists—in operationalizing IG policies would deepen practical insights. Finally, future studies could integrate qualitative methodologies, such as case studies or interviews, to explore institutional resistance to policy adoption, workforce training needs, and the ethical implications of archiving user-generated content.

This study makes a timely theoretical contribution by synthesizing Information Governance Theory and Records Continuum Theory into a unified framework tailored to social media environments. It bridges a critical gap in the literature by elucidating how information governance principles mediate institutional accountability and record reliability through structured social media records management practices. The model provides policymakers and administrators with a roadmap to develop effective governance policies, standardized archiving protocols, and digital communications compliance policies. The study stresses the importance of treating social media content as institutional assets by focusing on how evidence-based it is. This will help protect against the dangers of spreading false information, legal risks, and damaging one's reputation. It also shows how transparency and good governance are connected and gives suggestions on boosting public trust and following the rules in a increasingly digital world.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central role of information governance and social media record management in

empowering institutional accountability and supporting the credibility of electronic records. The idea behind this paper is that information governance is the base on which great governance processes are built, and social media records management is the key figure in the middle who makes sure that content posted on social media is real, accessible, and of archival value. Institutions depend more on social media to talk to and interact with the public. This makes it more important than ever to have strong frameworks that combine governance, record-keeping, and accountability. The study contributes to theoretical discussion by synthesizing the concepts of information governance, social media records management, institutional accountability, and record reliability in a single framework.

This integration helps fill a literature gap, offering a starting point for future empirical investigations. Practically, the findings emphasize that institutions must develop comprehensive governance policies and invest in the technological tools and cross-functional collaboration needed to manage digital records effectively. Despite their transient nature, social media records must be treated with the same seriousness as traditional records, given their potential evidentiary and compliance value. However, it is important to acknowledge that this study is conceptual and relies on secondary data. The framework and relationships proposed here have not yet been tested in real-world settings. Future research should focus on empirically validating this model through quantitative testing, qualitative case studies, or mixed-methods approaches. Studies could also explore best practices across different institutional and regulatory environments and assess how emerging technologies — such as blockchain, AI-based archiving, and automated capture tools — can support trustworthy and reliable social media records management.

In conclusion, institutions cannot afford to overlook the governance challenges of evolving digital communication platforms. By aligning governance strategies with emerging technologies and robust record management practices, organizations can strengthen their accountability, protect their reputations, and ensure the reliability of their information assets in an increasingly digital world.

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