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An analysis of accountants' resistance to cloud accounting

Valentina Vinšalek Stipić[1,*] and Mile Vičić[2]

[1] Senior lecturer; "Nikola Tesla" Polytechnic in Gospic, Croatia; Business department; vvs@velegs-nikolatesla.hr; Orcid: 0000-0001-7065-2918
[2] Senior lecturer; "Nikola Tesla" Polytechnic in Gospic, Croatia; Business department; mvicic@velegs-nikolatesla.hr
* Correspondence: vvs@velegs-nikolatesla.hr

Abstract: Using computers and computer programs for bookkeeping and accounting is not a novelty, but if we consider the possibilities of cloud computing there is room for improvement. Progress in ICT development, broadband internet access availability, widespread use of various modalities of electronic business creates opportunities for faster, safer and more efficient accounting data management. Cloud accounting gives us means to simplify activities, increase data security, increase the availability of information from the accounting information system to managers and accountants. Benefits in using cloud accounting solutions are visible especially for small and medium enterprises who use outsourced accounting services, but nothing less applicable for use in large enterprises. With this research, we want to find out why accountants do not want to do accounting in the cloud, and show what are the advantages of working in accounting in the cloud, especially for small and medium-sized companies. It will be tried to prove how resistance to cloud accounting by accountants is caused by resistance to new technologies, low will to learn new things and fear of lack of absolute control over accounting data. The research results show a significant correlation of resistance to cloud accounting and fear of new technologies, as well as resistance to cloud accounting and fear of a lack of complete control over accounting data. While resistance to cloud accounting is not significantly related to the age structure of accountants, in fact, resistance to cloud accounting is equal among younger and older populations.

Keywords: cloud accounting, cloud computing, accounting information system

1. Introduction

Today, accounting in the cloud is a new business reality, powered by cloud computing technology. Also known as cloud accounting or online accounting, this software acts like accounting applications installed on users' computers, but it is performed on servers offering online services and users can access them through web browsers. This way, accountants or business owners can connect to their financial affairs from any location, over the Internet (Pacurari and Nechita, 2013).

First, we will briefly define what is cloud computing. Cloud computing can be defined as a model for enabling convenient, on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (e.g., networks, servers, storage, applications, and services) that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction. Model promotes availability and is composed of five essential characteristics, three service models, and four deployment models (Mell and Grance, 2009). Widespread differentiation within the literature between Cloud computing service models are Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS) and Software as a Service (SaaS). As Cloud accounting belongs to a SaaS model, we will further explain what characterizes it. Mell and Grance (2009) said about the SaaS model: "The supplier provides working applications, running on its own cloud infrastructure, to the customer". SaaS shares the characteristics of every cloud computing delivery model, namely flexibility, scalability, ease of use, and redundancy (Weimei and Grant, 2015). Accounting information system can be completely run as a cloud computing application so that there is no need for installation of the software on a local computer. One of the world's leading research companies, Gartner, states that by 2025, 51% of IT spending on application software, infrastructure software, business process services and system infrastructure will shift from traditional solutions to the public cloud, compared to 41% in 2022 (Moore, 2022).

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Accounting in the cloud gives us the means to simplify activities, increase data security, increase the availability of information from the accounting information system to managers and accountants. The advantages of using cloud accounting solutions are visible especially for small and medium-sized companies that use outsourced accounting services, but no less applicable for use in large companies as well. This research aims to find out why accountants do not want to do accounting in the cloud, and this research aims to show the advantages of working in cloud accounting, especially for small and medium-sized companies. It will be tried to prove how resistance to cloud accounting by accountants is caused by resistance to new technologies, low will to learn new things and fear of lack of absolute control over accounting data.

2. Advantages and disadvantages of cloud accounting

The intuitive design, the possibility to access real-time information and several other advanced features make accounting accessible for both experts (accountants) and non-experts (small business owners). By taking a systematic approach to risk assessment, including creating effective policies for cloud usage and a risk response plan, companies can experience the leverage of this new technology and increase operational efficiency (Kinkela and College, 2013). Cloud accounting advantages stated by Sharma, S. (2022) are: ease of access, better security, platform agnostic, auto backups and no capital expenditure. Cloud accounting benefits identified by one of the software companies that offer SaaS accounting software (Minimax, 2020) are: 24/7 availability, intuitive and simple interface, time savings, lower costs, data security, simplified collaboration between accountants and entrepreneurs, automatic updates and legislation compliance, multiuser access and access rights limitations, paperless office. Reading through other literature, and above mentioned, we have come to our own cloud accounting advantages over conventional accounting information system: increased data security, direct connection with clients or other departments, data availability through multiuser access to database, up-to-date version , work from anywhere with internet connection and paperless office.

The main drawback of using cloud accounting is data security from the point of view where all data is transferred through the internet, but that problem is easily dealt with by implementing proper security procedures like encryption of transferred data. The advantages of accounting in the cloud obviously overshadow the disadvantages, however, there are potential risks that users of this software may encounter, some of which are: accounting in the cloud requires a constant and strong Internet connection, security - the possibility of hacker attacks, loss of control over the accounting software.

3. Literature review of previous research

Like with all new business models there is a problem in acceptance of new technologies, with this survey we will try to identify why accounting professionals are having second thoughts with adopting the use of cloud-based software. Population sample is not by any means limited to SMEs, but it was our goal to get the most information from them, because we consider that they can benefit the most from adopting cloud accounting applications.

Sastararuji et al. (2021) conducted a survey among SMEs in Thailand to demonstrate the adoption of cloud accounting caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In their research, they found that their analysis of multiple cases showed that the intention to adopt cloud accounting was initially driven by internal needs to improve business activities, rather than external factors. The key rationales are to improve efficiency through lower operating costs and reduced errors, stay competitive in a data-driven world, and increase mobility in response to the pandemic. In recent decades, numerous foreign and a few domestic authors have researched the topic of accounting in the cloud and its application in business operations. Boban and Vinšalek Stipić (2020) come to the research results that most accountants are not familiar with the advantages of cloud storage, while younger people show greater trust and a sense of security in cloud accounting and accountants who work in larger companies. Glogić (2016) researching the application of cloud accounting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, conclude that it is still not applied to a large extent, although accountants there are familiar with the aforementioned. They suggest investing as much as possible in advertising and informing about the benefits of using this accounting. In his work, Lukić (2016) states that cloud accounting in the Republic of Croatia encounters the same difficulties as Bosnia and Herzegovina, but that accountants are not sufficiently familiar with cloud accounting technology. A theoretical overview of cloud accounting was comprehensively described by Khanom (2017) from the University of Bangladesh, where she concisely described how cloud accounting software uses the cloud to store accounting data. By conducting their research, Prichici and Ionescu (2015) drew attention to the changes brought by the virtualization of certain operations in the financial and accounting process. The significant impact of virtualization, i.e. cloud technology, can be seen at the cost level through significant savings due to the fact that the need for local installation of IT equipment is

eliminated, while in turn the technical function is outsourced. Christauskas and Miseviciene (2012) investigated the latest trends in accounting software for Lithuanian SMEs. The research showed that companies in Lithuania have an excellent opportunity to use the possibilities of computing, and thus cloud accounting. Information, therefore, is data that have been processed into meaningful and usable form, and it contains knowledge that reduces uncertainly in particular situation (Senn, 1999). However, information technology (IT) is a term which, generally, covers the harnessing of electronic technology for the information needs of business at all levels. It is computer based system as well as telecommunication technology for storage, processing and dissemination of information (Primchard and Cole, 2006). The new generation of smart mobile devices has fueled the expansion cloud service (GTI, 2011). The impact of cloud computing lies in the way these services are provided: remotely and just on claim. Gartner, a leading research firm, has identified cloud computing as the number one trend that willchange the face of business (Pacurari and Nechita, 2013). According to IDC research, cloud computing will redesign the global business context (Tulsian, 2012). It is the ability to increase business flexibility this determines the widespread adoption of the cloud, thereby affecting all economic actors (Dimitriu and Matei, 2015). In recent times, the use of computers and other advanced technology is increasingly accepted most practices including accounting. Before that, accountants were heavily involved in overall accounting activities because traditional methods were in place (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016). Daily records had to be kept by people, preparation financial statements such as the statement of financial position and the statement of comprehensive income were it is done manually by an accountant (Linus, 2012). According to Francis (2013), the implication of technology indeed caused obvious changes in organizations related to their accounting systems and organizational effect, which caused great concern and interest. Accounting decisions and plans must be made with regard to ICT in order for companies to remain relevant and competitive. Taiwo and Agwu (2016) confirm that computerized systems have improved the functionality of accounting departments in organisations. ICT is being increasingly set up to improve the infrastructure of foresight. It will likely be used to implement more routine and continuous foresight processes in companies and organizations in the future (Keller and Gracht, 2014).

4. Hypotheses and research methods

The use of cloud accounting has several advantages, but there is still a great deal of resistance among accounting professionals. Due to the above, empirical research has been conducted to determine what is the cause of resistance to cloud accounting. The research results presented in this paper include a sample of 137 respondents, all accounting professionals. The research was conducted by a survey in the Republic of Croatia in the period from March 1st to May 1st, 2022, and the data processed by logical analysis and statistical methods is presented below. Statistical analysis of the data was performed in the specialized software IBM SPSS Statistics 26.

In this study, the following variables were defined and were all obtained from the survey questionnaire weighted by the average grade of the answers of the respondents:

a) Dependent variable (VAR Y) => C_account – resistance to cloud accounting

b) Independent variables:
- VAR X1 => New_tech – fear of new technologies
- VAR X2 => Control_accounting - fear of non-complete control of accounting data
- VAR X3 => Age_account - age structure of accountants
- VAR X4 => Exper_account - work experience in accounting

Testing of previously defined dependent and independent variables was performed using the following regression model:

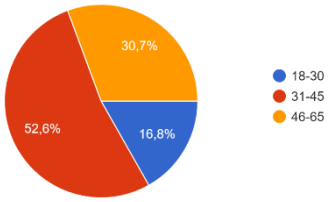
$$Y(_{C\_account})=\beta_0+\beta_1(New_{\_tech})+\beta_2(_{Control\_accounting})+\beta_3(_{Age\_account})+\beta_4(_{Exper\_account}) \quad (1)$$

To determine the impact of all independent variables on the resistance to use cloud accounting software, a multiple regression model was used. The value of the Pearson correlation between dependent and independent variables, as well as a linear correlation were calculated.

5. Results of the research

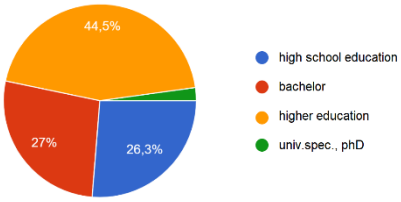
This empirical research was conducted by a survey among accountants, 89.8% of whom were women and 10.2% were men. The age group and education levels are shown in charts 1 and 2, which show that only 2.2% are professional specialists or Doctor of Science.

Chart 1. *Age group*



Source: Authors' construct

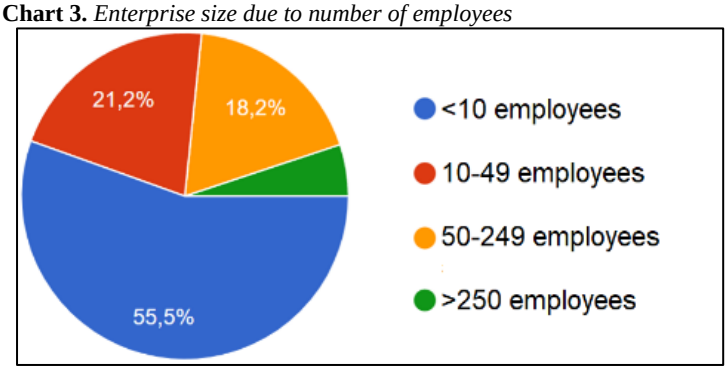
Chart 2. *Education level*



Source: Authors' construct

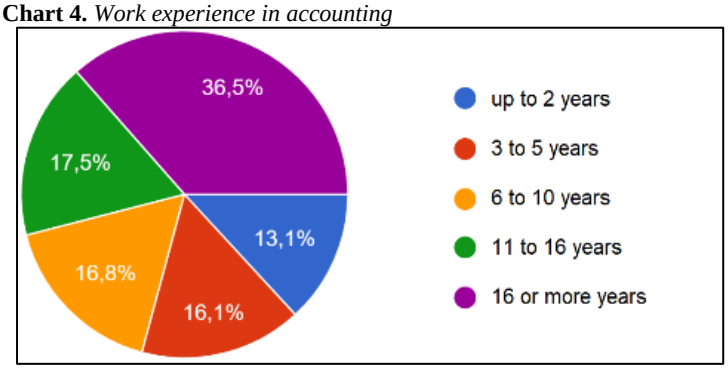
Among the respondents, there were 27% of owners of an Accounting and bookkeeping service provider enterprises, 24.8% of them are employees in privately owned companies, while 24.1% perform accounting tasks in public companies and institutions. 18.2% of respondents are employees in accounting and bookkeeping service provider enterprises and last and least there were 5.8% of small and medium-sized business owners. The structure of respondents in regard to the size of the company due to the number of employees is shown in chart 3, and the structure by work experience in the accounting profession is shown in charts 4.

Chart 3. *Enterprise size due to number of employees*



Source: Authors' construct

Chart 4. *Work experience in accounting*



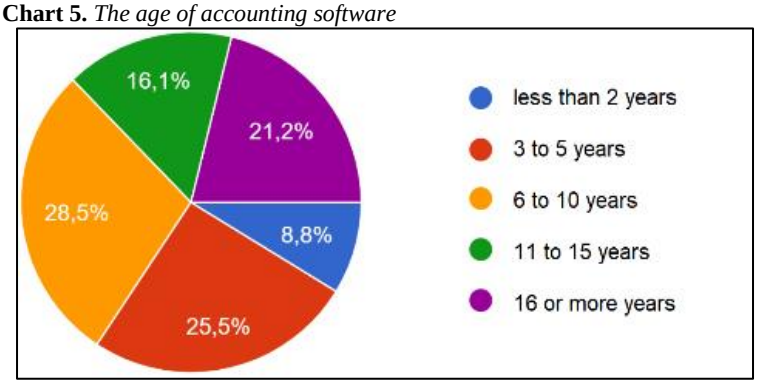
Source: Authors' construct

When asked about the accounting software updates due to changes in legislation, rules and regulations in profession or taxation rules, 32.1% of respondents answered that the updates are performed automatically, 31.4% said that it is necessary for a software technician to perform the installation by remote connection , highest percent answer, 34.3%, was the option for manually downloading and installing the update themselves, while only 2.2% are those to whom the technician of the software manufacturer has to perform the update installation by physical visit. Very interesting is the information obtained that only 86.1% of respondents have contractually regulated rights and obligations of data protection and confidentiality between them and the software producer, which means that 13.9% of them do not have contractual protection of data secrecy.

The age of accounting software structure is shown in chart 5, which shows that 28.5% of software is between six and ten years old, 25.5% is between 3 and 5 years old, and the devastating fact is that 25.5% of software is older than sixteen years. Chart 6 shows the knowledge and familiarity of the term cloud computing, where 38.7% of respondents are familiar with the term and functioning principles, 27% are familiar with the term but don't know how it works, 24.8% are

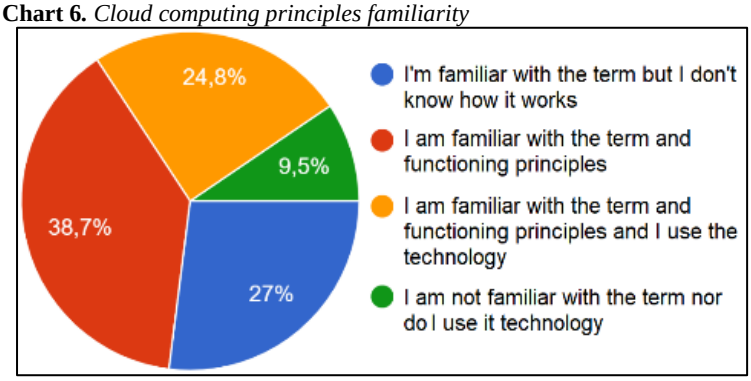
familiar with the term and functioning principles and use the technology on a regular basis where 9.5% of respondents are not familiar with either the term or functioning principles of cloud computing.

Chart 5. *The age of accounting software*



Source: Authors' construct

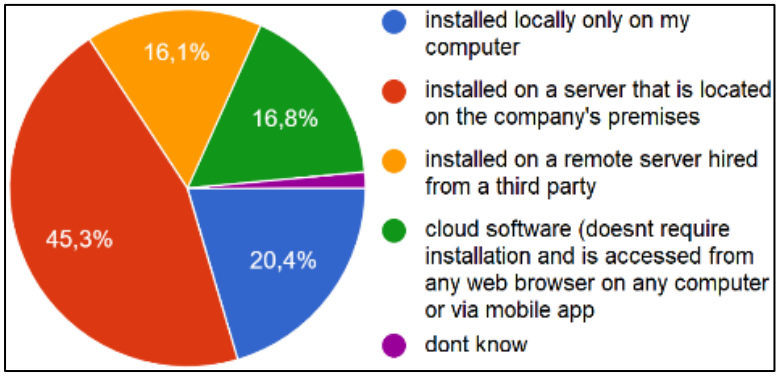
Chart 6. *Cloud computing principles familiarity*



Source: Authors' construct

The facts about software installation on local computers, local servers, remote servers or in the cloud are shown in chart 7, which shows that only 16.8% of respondents are users of cloud accounting software.

Chart 7. *Database location*



Source: Authors' construct

Respondents were also asked to rank what are the most important cloud accounting benefits. The most significant advantage is teleworking possibility, followed by software and data updates, then in this order: data availability to all interest groups, adjustability of needed and available hardware resources, data access security by user authorization and finally data storage security.

Data backup habits were questioned in two ways, first was the question about how the backup is carried out, 68.6% answers were automatically, 24.8% manually, and very alarming is that 6.6% of respondents don't perform backup at all. Second dimension of backup habits questioned is the location of backup files, 35.8% stores their backup on external storage device, 25.5% on a remote server in their ownership, 20.4% on leased cloud storage, 10.9% locally on the same device they use the data in production and 7.3% locally but on different devices.

5.1. Hypothesis testing

To prove the hypotheses, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed. Analysis shows a significant mutual correlation of the dependent variable, resistance to cloud accounting with independent variables fear of new technology (0.488) and fear of lack of complete control of accounting data (0.774) with a significance of 0.01. Furthermore, although negative, there is no significant correlation between the resistance to cloud accounting and the age structure of accounting staff and their work experience in accounting. This is shown in table 1, which provides a basis for further proof of the hypotheses of the research.

Table 1. *Pearson correlation for the observed variables*

Correlations

		C_account	New_tech	Control_accounting	Age_account	Expert_account
C_account	Pearson Correlation	1	,488**	,774**	-,160	-,140
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,062	,104
	N	137	137	137	137	137
New_tech	Pearson Correlation	,488**	1	,282**	-,160	-,189*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,001	,062	,027
	N	137	137	137	137	137
Control_accounting	Pearson Correlation	,774**	,282**	1	-,079	-,035
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,001		,356	,680
	N	137	137	137	137	137
Age_account	Pearson Correlation	-,160	-,160	-,079	1	,718**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,062	,062	,356		,000
	N	137	137	137	137	137
Expert_account	Pearson Correlation	-,140	-,189*	-,035	,718**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,104	,027	,680	,000	
	N	137	137	137	137	137

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' calculation

Also, the calculation of multiple regression analysis was performed, results of calculations are shown in tables 2. The multiple regression model shows a significant positive statistical correlation (R) of resistance to cloud accounting with fear of new technology, lack of complete control over accounting data, the age structure of the respondents as well as their work experience in accounting (0.826). Adjusted R Square is smaller than the coefficient of determination. As we have a multiple regression model it is concluded that the selected independent variables explain 67% of the variations in the resistance to cloud accounting. With a default significance level of 0.05 and Durbin-Watson being closer to 2, it indicates the absence of autocorrelation of relational errors.

Table 2. *Multiple regression model of independent variables – part 1*

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	,826[a]	,683	,673	,46330	1,993

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expert_account, Control_accounting, New_tech, Age_account

b. Dependent Variable: C_account

Source: Authors' calculation

Further multiple regression analysis shows an F ratio greater than 0.05 which confirms the existence of statistical significance of variations of independent variables in explaining variations of the dependent variable and the number of degrees of freedom ($F_{4,132} = 71{,}109$, $p<0.001$) and concludes that the multiple regression model of all independent variables from the observed sample shows significant statistical importance.

5.2. Proving hypotheses

From previously shown results of correlation and multiple regression preconditions for the continuation of proving all set research hypotheses have been created. To prove the set hypotheses, the results of a simple regression analysis for each of the set hypotheses are presented below. The regression model shows a good positive correlation between the dependent variable resistance to cloud accounting and the independent variable fear of new technologies, with an appropriate level of significance ($r = 0.488$; $p < 0.001$). We see good representativeness of the model from the coefficient of determination of 23.8%. From the F ratio, with the number of degrees of freedom ($F1,137 = 42,270$; $P < 0.001$) and the corresponding level of significance, the existence of a statistically significant contribution is confirmed, so the independent variable predicts the dependent variable.

Durbin-Watson is approximately 2, which means that there are no autocorrelations of relational errors. Through the overall analysis of the regression models C_account and New_tech, we conclude that resistance to accounting in the cloud has a significant statistical relationship with the fear of new technology. Summarizing the above, we conclude that hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

Analyzing the regression model for hypothesis H2, the correlation coefficient (0.774) shows a significant positive correlation between resistance to cloud accounting and fear of lack of complete control over accounting data. An extremely good representativeness of the model and a statistical significance of 0.05 for R square 60% are visible, with the number of degrees of freedom (1.135) a significant statistical correlation between the dependent and independent variables for hypothesis H2 was confirmed. Durbin-Watson shows no autocorrelation or dependence between errors. The second hypothesis was confirmed, so we conclude that resistance to accounting in the cloud has a significant statistical relationship with the impossibility of complete control of accounting data.

The regression model for the dependent variable C_account and the independent variable Age_account, shows a positive but small statistical correlation between the correlation coefficients (0.160). A significantly small coefficient of determination is visible with the appropriate level of significance and number of degrees of freedom ($F1,135 = 0.062$; $P < 0.001$), so hypothesis H3 is not confirmed. The ratio F is smaller than the theoretical value, which shows good representativeness of the model, and Durbin-Watson does not show the existence of autocorrelation or dependence between errors. We concluded that the resistance to accounting in the cloud is not significantly related to the age structure of accountants, in fact, the resistance to accounting in the cloud is equal in the younger and older population.

The regression model for the dependent variable C_account and the independent variable Expert_account shows that the R coefficient is positive but small (0.140), R2 is also small, almost insignificant (0.019), the F ratio is smaller than the theoretical value with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, and the number of degrees freedom 1.135 does not confirm the fourth hypothesis, H4. Resistance to cloud accounting work does not show a statistically significant relationship to work experience in accounting, despite a positive relationship.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The results and findings of this research should contribute to a rather under-researched area, as cloud accounting is not a common research topic. A possible limitation of the research is the population sample, because the survey was conducted online, so only people who already have a tendency to use IT were surveyed. The research results give us an insight into the attitudes of accounting professionals about cloud accounting applications, their awareness of technology which is in line with the research of Boban and Vinšalek Stipić (2020). It can be a starting point for initiatives by software developers to increase the adoption of cloud-based software. One of the possible directions of future research is to examine even more respondents and expand the sample to people who are not heavy users of IT as stated by Primchard and Cole (2006), GTI (2011), Pacurari and Nechita (2013), Tulsian (2012).

The low percentage of use of accounting applications in the cloud (only 16.8%) is the result of several different reasons, as our statistical analysis showed that the two main reasons are the fear of new technologies and the inability to fully control accounting data. Also, the benefits of cloud accounting according to the survey are not the same as the benefits identified by IT professionals or identified in other research results as confirmed by Sastararuji et al. (2021), Prichici and Ionescu (2015). The respondents showed that they are aware of the need to back up their data, but the procedures for making a backup are not defined in the right way, more than 50% of users only store their backup locally and this is the only partial protection, not to mention those who they store on the same device, which does not give them any protection for the backed up data. There is certainly a gap to be filled in the field of cloud accounting software, but not for lack of solutions offered, so software companies should make an effort to educate potential future clients so that they can embrace the benefits of this new way of doing accounting as confirmed by Christauskas and Miseviciene (2012). The contribution of this paper is twofold, firstly, it collects the views of different

authors on the advantages of accounting in the cloud, and secondly, the conducted survey gives an insight into the problems in the acceptance of software for accounting in the cloud.

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