

FACTORS INFLUENCING CAATS ADOPTION AMONG AUDITORS IN MALAYSIAN SMPs THROUGH BEHAVIORAL INTENTION: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract: *The increasing digitalisation of financial reporting and auditing has heightened the importance of Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs) in improving audit efficiency, effectiveness, and the analysis of large volumes of data. In Malaysia, initiatives such as e-Invoicing and the Malaysian Business Reporting System (MBRS) have accelerated the need for technology-enabled audit practices, particularly among Small and Medium Practices (SMPs). Despite these developments, some of the SMPs still rely on traditional auditing techniques, resulting in a relatively low level of CAATs adoption compared to larger firms. Existing studies have focused primarily on technological and organisational factors that influence the adoption of audit technology, while the behavioural intention mechanisms underlying auditors' acceptance decisions remain underexplored. Based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and related technology adoption literature, this conceptual paper proposes a framework to explain the adoption of CAATs among auditors in Malaysian SMPs. Specifically, the framework examines the influence of performance expectancy and technological skills on auditors' behavioral intention to adopt CAATs. Behavioral intentions are proposed as a mediating mechanism linking these factors to actual CAATs adoption. Through a structured review of the literature on audit technology use, technology acceptance, and CAATs implementation, this paper synthesizes theoretical and empirical insights to develop a context-specific conceptual framework for understanding the adoption of CAATs among auditors in Malaysian SMPs. In practical terms, this study provides insights for SMPs, professional accounting bodies, and regulators in designing initiatives to strengthen auditors' digital readiness and promote sustainable adoption of CAATs in the Malaysian auditing profession.*

Keywords: CAATs Adoption; Behavioral Intention; UTAUT; Performance Expectancy; Technological Skill; Malaysian SMPs.

Introduction

The accelerating digitalization of business transactions and financial reporting has fundamentally transformed the auditing profession, prompting auditors to shift from conventional manual procedures to more sophisticated, technology-driven methodologies. Central to this transformation is the use of Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs), which enable auditors to automate routine procedures, process large volumes of structured electronic data, and conduct more comprehensive transaction analyses compared to traditional methods (Atta et al., 2024). As audit quality, timeliness, and regulatory compliance become more important, CAATs are a key tool for improving audit effectiveness and efficiency across different practice settings.

In Malaysia, the need to adopt CAATs has been reinforced by various regulatory and national digitalization initiatives. The implementation of the Electronic Invoicing (e-Invoice) system under Section 82C of the Income Tax Act 1967 by the Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (IRB), and the Malaysian Business Reporting System (MBRS) introduced by the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM), collectively mandate the generation, submission, and storage of financial data in structured digital formats (Uyob et al., 2019). These developments significantly increase the volume of available electronic audit evidence, thereby creating an environment conducive to technology-driven audit practices. Complementing these regulatory efforts, the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) has actively promoted the use of CAATs through professional guidance, digital competency frameworks, and structured training programs, aiming to strengthen the profession's commitment to sustainable digital transformation (MIA, 2023).

Despite this conducive environment, the level of CAATs adoption among auditors in small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) in Malaysia remains significantly unbalanced. The recent data from MIA (2022) indicate that although approximately 97% of accounting professionals are at various stages of technology adoption, fewer than 25% actively use advanced analytics tools, including CAATs, and only 45% of organizations have a documented technology adoption strategy. These figures contrast sharply with the digital maturity levels of large firms; for instance, one 'Big Four' firm estimates that 50% or more of audit procedures for complex, high-volume engagements are executed using IT-supported or data-driven techniques (PwC, 2023). The gap between the availability of digital technology and the actual adoption of CAATs, particularly within the SMPs sector, suggests that the barriers to adopting this technology extend beyond mere organizational infrastructure and technological resources.

Existing research on the use of CAATs has largely focused on organizational and technological determinants such as management support, infrastructure availability, and firm-level readiness, particularly within the context of large-scale audit firms (Siew et al., 2020; Al-Okaily et al., 2022). While these studies have enhanced our collective understanding of CAATs adoption, relatively little attention has been paid to the behavioral mechanisms at the individual level, specifically those operating within the unique constraints of small and medium-sized audit practices (SMPs). Auditors in SMPs typically shoulder multiple professional roles, operate under tighter resource constraints, and face distinct personal and contextual pressures that shape their readiness and willingness to adopt new audit technologies (Ghani et al., 2022). Consequently, the behavioral intentions of individual auditors emerge as a crucial yet under-explored factor in understanding CAATs adoption within this specific context.

Drawing upon the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), this paper argues that behavioral intention does not merely coexist with the acceptance process but serves as a critical mediating mechanism that enables individual-level factors to translate into the actual use of CAATs. Within the logical framework of UTAUT, an individual's belief that a technology will enhance job performance (performance expectancy) and their confidence in their own technical capabilities (technological skills) first shape the intention to adopt the technology; this intention, in turn, drives actual adoption behavior. Consequently, positioning behavioral intention as a mediator rather than as a moderator or an independent predictor provides a more theoretically accurate and consistent explanation of the adoption pathway, an approach particularly well-suited to the SMPs context, where individual-level volition plays a more significant role.

Accordingly, this conceptual paper proposes a mediation framework in which performance expectancy and technological skills serve as independent variables to behavioral intention, which in turn influences CAATs adoption among auditors in small and medium-sized audit firms (SMPs) in Malaysia. The paper draws upon established theoretical and empirical literature regarding technology acceptance and CAATs adoption to develop and justify this context-specific conceptual framework. In doing so, it aims to advance the audit technology literature by elucidating the intention-based pathway at the individual level leading to CAATs adoption within resource-constrained SMPs environments, while offering practical and policy insights to audit firms and professional bodies, including the MIA, committed to strengthening digital readiness and accelerating sustainable technology adoption within the Malaysian auditing profession.

Literature Review

The literature review for this conceptual paper is organized around five thematic areas essential to understanding CAATs adoption among auditors in small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) in Malaysia: (1) the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed framework; (2) the conceptualization and current status of CAATs adoption; (3) performance expectancy as an independent variable influencing behavioral intention; (4) technological skills as an independent variable influencing behavioral intention; and (5) behavioral intention as a mediating mechanism translating individual-level variables into actual CAATs adoption. This structure reflects the logic of the proposed mediation framework and constructs the conceptual argument justifying the paper's hypotheses.

Theoretical Foundation: UTAUT

The primary theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), which provides the most comprehensive and empirically validated basis for explaining technology acceptance behavior across diverse professional contexts. UTAUT integrates several technology acceptance theories into a unified framework to explain individuals' behavioral intentions and actual technology adoption. The theory posits that performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions influence behavioral intention, which in turn determines technology acceptance. Due to its strong explanatory power, UTAUT has been widely applied to study the acceptance of new technologies across various professional contexts, including auditing; in this context, it explains auditors' acceptance of

Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs), Generalized Audit Software (GAS), and other digital audit technologies (Khalil & Nafti, 2020; Pathmasiri & Piyananda, 2021).

Aligned with the logic of the UTAUT theory, this conceptual paper positions behavioral intention as the mediating mechanism through which individual-level factors influence CAATs adoption among auditors in small and medium-sized practices (SMPs) in Malaysia. Specifically, performance expectancy is proposed as a key determinant of behavioral intention, as auditors are more likely to adopt CAATs when they perceive the technology as capable of enhancing audit performance. Although technological skills are not among the original UTAUT constructs, prior audit research indicates that auditors' digital competence bolsters their readiness and confidence to use technology effectively, particularly within resource-constrained SMP environments (Ghani et al., 2022; Saat et al., 2025). Accordingly, this paper extends the UTAUT perspective by incorporating technological skills as an individual capability factor that complements performance expectancy in explaining behavioral intention regarding CAATs adoption.

Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques and Adoption

Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs) are broadly conceptualized as technological tools and techniques that support auditors in executing audit procedures, processing large volumes of data, and analyzing financial information within a computerized environment (Almagrashi et al., 2023; Daoud et al., 2021). They encompass a wide range of applications, extending from generalized audit software (GAS) and electronic working papers to more advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence-powered tools (Atta et al., 2024). In this study, the use of CAATs refers to the extent to which auditors accept and integrate these technologies into their routine audit processes, reflecting the depth of their usage rather than merely awareness or access (Almagrashi et al., 2023; Ghani et al., 2022).

The adoption of CAATs among Malaysian auditors is gaining increasing attention, aligning with the nation's rapidly evolving digital financial reporting agenda. Studies in Malaysia consistently indicate that performance expectancy is a primary driver for CAATs adoption. Auditors who believe that CAATs will enhance audit quality, productivity, and efficiency are the most likely to utilize these tools (Ghani et al., 2022). However, adoption rates and levels vary significantly between large audit firms and small and medium-sized practices (SMPs). Large firms benefit from greater financial resources, robust technological infrastructure, dedicated IT support staff, and formal technology governance structures factors that collectively facilitate CAATs integration (Siew et al., 2020). Conversely, SMPs often lack these enabling factors, resulting in uneven and, in many instances, superficial adoption, despite auditors demonstrating a positive attitude towards CAATs (Wan Ahmad et al., 2024). This gap between intention and actual adoption within the SMP environment serves as the primary motivation for this paper.

Performance Expectancy and Behavioral Intention

Performance expectancy (PE) is defined as an individual's belief that using a technology system will enhance job performance by making it more effective, efficient, or higher quality (Normahazan et al., 2020; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Grounded in the utility logic of UTAUT and aligned with the "perceived usefulness" construct of TAM, PE reflects the extent to which expected professional benefits drive the decision to use technology; this renders it an

assessment of the technology's value proposition that is fundamentally cognitive and instrumentally rational (Al-Hiyari et al., 2019).

Empirical evidence across various jurisdictions consistently identifies PE as one of the strongest predictors of behavioral intention regarding CAATs adoption. In Sri Lanka, PE was found to have a positive relationship with internal auditors' intention to adopt CAATs, reflecting expectations of improved audit efficiency and task effectiveness (Pathmasiri & Piyananda, 2021). In Indonesia, public-sector auditors identified PE as a key driver of usage intention for achieving effective and timely audits (Purnamasari et al., 2022). External auditors in Yemen also demonstrated that PE is a significant determinant of the intention to adopt CAATs within the UTAUT framework (Khalil & Nafti, 2020). Specifically in Malaysia, PE has been confirmed as a strong predictor of GAS and CAATs adoption among small and medium-sized audit firms (SMPs); auditors who believe these tools will enhance their work quality and the depth of their analysis were found to be far more likely to use them (Normahazan et al., 2020; Ghani et al., 2022).

In the context of the proposed mediation framework, PE is theorized to first shape auditors' behavioral intention through the instrumental belief that CAATs will lead to performance improvements relative to the past, which, in turn, drives actual adoption. This hypothesis aligns with the architecture of the UTAUT theory, which explicitly positions PE as an independent variable influencing behavioral intention rather than as a direct predictor of usage behavior. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is advanced:

Hypothesis 1: Performance expectancy positively influences behavioral intention toward CAATs adoption among auditors in Malaysian SMPs.

Technological Skill and Behavioral Intention

Technological skills (TS) refer to an individual's ability to integrate and leverage technological innovations effectively, provided they possess the technical competence required to perform professional tasks within a digital environment (Saat et al., 2025). In the context of auditing, TS encompasses digital literacy, IT competence, and the practical ability to use CAATs and related software when performing audit tasks (Deniswara et al., 2023). Grounded in IT Competence Theory, this definition positions TS as an individual-level capability construct that extends beyond mere mastery of specific applications; it encompasses the broader cognitive and technical scope necessary to function effectively in an increasingly digitized audit environment (Saat et al., 2025).

Empirical studies demonstrate a clear and consistent positive relationship between auditors' technological skill levels and their propensity to use CAATs. Evidence from Malaysia indicates that IT training and technical competence are critical variables for CAATs adoption, with auditors possessing higher digital skills displaying greater confidence and readiness to integrate technology into their audit workflows (Ghani et al., 2022). Research in Indonesia also highlights the role of IT knowledge and training in facilitating CAATs adoption, confirming that auditors with higher digital competence are better positioned to effectively leverage automated audit tools (Pedrosa et al., 2019). Broader literature on the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework reinforces this perspective by identifying skill

development as a determinant of organizational readiness and individual capability to effectively utilize CAATs in practice (Pedrosa et al., 2019).

In the environment of small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs), variations in auditors' IT literacy levels are likely more pronounced than in large firms, where formal IT training programs and dedicated technical support are more consistently available. This situation makes TS a crucial determinant at the individual level within the context of Malaysian SMPs. Consistent with the conceptual logic of UTAUT, which posits that an individual's technical competence shapes their intention to adopt a technological system, TS is assumed to positively influence auditors' behavioral intention to adopt CAATs:

Hypothesis 2: Technological skill positively influences behavioral intention toward CAATs adoption among auditors in Malaysian SMPs.

Behavioral Intention as Mediator of CAATs Adoption

Behavioral intention (BI) is defined as an individual's stated plan or likelihood of performing a specific behavior; in technology adoption research, it is considered the cognitive variable closest to actual system usage (Deniswara et al., 2023; Venkatesh et al., 2003). More specifically, BI reflects a goal-oriented motivational state, a deliberate cognitive readiness to perform the target behavior that bridges the gap between an individual's perceptions and expectations on the one hand, and their actual usage behavior on the other (Almagrashi et al., 2023; Venkatesh et al., 2003). In the context of auditing, BI is operationalized as an auditor's stated intention to adopt CAATs in the performance of audit tasks (Saat et al., 2025).

Within the UTAUT framework, BI occupies a critical intermediate position; it is the construct through which all upstream determinants exercise their influence on actual technology use. Across empirical studies conducted in audit settings comparable to Malaysian SMPs, including Jordan (Damer et al., 2021), Yemen (Khalil & Nafti, 2020), Indonesia (Deniswara et al., 2023), Portugal (Pedrosa et al., 2019), Romania (Fülöp et al., 2024), and Malaysia (Saat et al., 2025). BI has consistently been shown to translate professional expectations and technological readiness into actual adoption decisions.

However, a critical gap in the existing literature is that most prior studies treat behavioral intention (BI) either as a dependent variable shaped by various determinants or as a final variable of usage behavior, without systematically examining its mediating role between specific individual-level variables and the actual adoption of CAATs (Almagrashi et al., 2023; Normahazan et al., 2020). This limits the theoretical scope, as the logic of UTAUT-TAM clearly indicates that the influence of constructs such as PE and TS on actual adoption is not direct but is instead mediated through the formation of behavioral intention. Failure to model this mediating pathway results in an incomplete picture of how individual-level perceptions translate into observable adoption behavior. This paper addresses this gap by explicitly positioning BI as a mediator, thereby proposing a framework that is both theoretically coherent and practically interpretable for understanding CAATs adoption among small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) in Malaysia. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced:

Hypothesis 3: Behavioral intention mediates the relationship between performance expectancy and CAATs adoption among auditors in Malaysian SMPs.

Hypothesis 4: Behavioral intention mediates the relationship between technological skill and CAATs adoption among auditors in Malaysian SMPs.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical and empirical synthesis presented above, this paper proposes a conceptual framework positioning performance expectancy and technological skills as individual-level variables that shape auditors' behavioral intention to adopt CAATs. Subsequently, behavioral intention serves as a mediating mechanism translating these variables into actual CAATs adoption. This framework is grounded in the integrated UTAUT theoretical perspective and is designed to reflect the specific context of small and medium-sized audit firms (SMPs) in Malaysia, where individual preferences and competencies are key determinants of technology integration, given the absence of the firm-level enabling structures typically found in larger audit firms.

The proposed framework encompasses four key hypotheses: (H1) performance expectancy positively influences behavioral intention; (H2) technological skills positively influence behavioral intention; (H3) behavioral intention mediates the relationship between performance expectancy and CAATs adoption; and (H4) behavioral intention mediates the relationship between technological skills and CAATs adoption. Collectively, these hypotheses form an integrated, theory-driven explanation of the intention-mediated acceptance pathway that is not only theoretically coherent but also context-sensitive to SMPs environments in Malaysia.

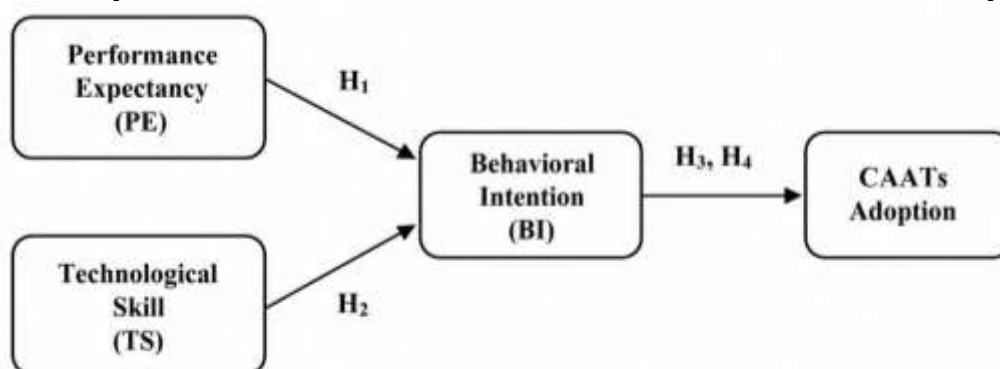


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework. Performance expectancy and technological skill are proposed to influence auditors' behavioral intention to adopt CAATs positively. Behavioral intention, in turn, positively influences actual CAATs adoption and mediates the relationships between the two variables (performance expectancy and technological skill) and CAATs adoption.

Table 1: Summary of Proposed Conceptual Framework

Construct	Role in Framework	Theoretical Basis
Performance Expectancy (PE)	Independent Variable	UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003); TAM (Davis, 1989)
Technological Skill (TS)	Independent Variable	IT Competency Theory; TOE Framework; UTAUT
Behavioral Intention (BI)	Mediating Variable	UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003); TAM (Davis, 1989)
CAATs Adoption	Dependent Variable	UTAUT; CAATs Adoption Literature

As illustrated in Table 1, this framework is purposely designed to be concise, focusing on the two individual-level variables closely linked to auditors' voluntary decisions to adopt CAATs within the SMPs context. Performance expectancy reflects the utility-based cognitive assessment that drives auditors to form an intention to adopt. In contrast, technological skills reflect the capability-based confidence that enables them to act upon that intention. Behavioral intention serves as the sole mediating pathway linking these two variables to actual adoption, thereby elucidating the cognitive-volitional mechanism that has not been explicitly addressed in prior research on CAATs adoption. This streamlined design ensures the framework remains practical for future empirical testing while contributing a unique and novel theoretical perspective to the literature on CAATs adoption.

Methodology

This paper employs a literature review methodology based on desk research, a standard and widely accepted approach for conceptual papers aimed at developing a theoretical framework and advancing scholarly arguments without relying on primary data collection (Jaakkola, 2020). This methodology entails a structured and systematic review of existing theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the use of CAATs, technology acceptance behavior, and auditing practices within small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs), with the clear objective of synthesizing this body of knowledge into a coherent and internally consistent conceptual framework.

Literature Search and Source Selection

This literature review was conducted using various academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, supplemented by institutional reports from the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA), and the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC). Search keywords included combinations of terms such as “CAATs adoption,” “computer-assisted audit techniques,” “behavioral intention,” “performance expectancy,” “technological skill,” “UTAUT,” “TAM,” “Small and Medium Practices,” and “audit technology Malaysia.” The review prioritized peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and reports published between 2001 and 2025, with a specific emphasis on studies published within the last ten years to ensure currency and relevance. At least 70% of the cited works were sourced from published academic materials, in accordance with the requirements of this template.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies are included if they: (1) examine technology acceptance behavior within the field of auditing or a closely related professional context; (2) utilize UTAUT, TAM, or a related theoretical framework; (3) focus on constructs relevant to the proposed framework performance expectancy, technological skills, behavioral intention, or the acceptance of CAATs; and (4) provide empirical or theoretical insights applicable to the context of SMPs in Malaysia or structurally similar environments. Studies are excluded if they focus solely on large audit firms without insights transferable to SMPs, or if their findings are limited to technology acceptance in non-auditing contexts lacking a clear theoretical link to this paper.

Synthesis Approach

The synthesis of the literature is organized thematically according to the five areas discussed in the Literature Review section: CAATs conceptualization and adoption; the theoretical foundations of UTAUT; performance expectancy; technological skills; and behavioral intention as a mediating variable. For each theme, the review follows a structured sequence encompassing definitions, empirical evidence, cross-jurisdictional comparisons, and the identification of research gaps. This thematic and sequential synthesis approach ensures that the arguments leading to each of the four hypotheses are constructed logically and cumulatively based on existing evidence, rather than on unsupported theoretical inferences (Jaakkola, 2020). Consequently, the resulting hypotheses and conceptual framework are grounded in a coherent and systematically organized body of literature, thereby providing a strong and contribution-oriented foundation for future empirical research.

Discussion and Contribution

The proposed conceptual framework makes several interrelated contributions to the literature on audit technology acceptance, as well as to aspects of practice and policy. These are discussed below through three distinct yet complementary dimensions.

Theoretical Contribution

The primary theoretical contribution of this paper lies in the reconceptualization of the role of behavioral intention (BI) within the CAATs acceptance pathway. Existing literature predominantly positions BI either as a dependent variable shaped by initial UTAUT determinants or as a direct predictor of actual usage behavior (Almagrashi et al., 2023; Normahazan et al., 2020). This paper argues that BI functions as a mediating mechanism, specifically, a cognitive-volitional bridge through which performance expectations and technological skills are translated into the actual adoption of CAATs. This is theoretically significant as it clarifies a concept implicit in UTAUT but rarely operationalized in the context of CAATs: the process of converting individual beliefs and capabilities into behavioral outcomes is not direct but is instead mediated by the formation of goal-oriented intention.

This paper also contributes by applying and extending the integrated UTAUT lens to the context of small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) in Malaysia, an environment that differs both theoretically and practically from the large audit firms that have dominated prior empirical research. SMPs in Malaysia operate under conditions characterized by resource constraints, limited IT infrastructure, diverse skill levels, and greater individual-level decision-making autonomy; these conditions heighten the importance of individual-level constructs such as PE, TS, and BI relative to organizational-level facilitating conditions. By adapting the

theoretical framework to this context, the paper contributes to the growing body of research calling for the development of technology acceptance theories that are more context-sensitive within professional service environments (Ghani et al., 2022; Siew et al., 2020).

Practical Contribution

From a practical perspective, this proposed framework provides a solid theoretical foundation for the management of audit firms and practitioners in small and medium-sized practices (SMPs) to prioritize their technology adoption strategies. By demonstrating that performance expectancy and technological skills indirectly influence CAATs adoption through behavioral intention, the framework suggests that interventions aimed at shifting auditors' attitudes and perceptions regarding their capabilities rather than merely investing in hardware or software are likely to be most effective within the SMPs context. Specifically, SMPs should prioritize structured technology orientation programs that demonstrate the tangible performance benefits of CAATs adoption to each auditor; this approach represents the most promising mechanism for strengthening performance expectancy (PE) and, consequently, enhancing the intention to adopt the technology.

Furthermore, this framework emphasizes the importance of targeted IT skills development initiatives. If auditors lack confidence in their own technical competence, they are unlikely to reach the threshold required for actual adoption of BI, regardless of how strongly they believe that CAATs can enhance their performance. This highlights the need for small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) to invest not only in technology acquisition but also in human capital development, providing mentoring, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and phased skills development pathways that build auditors' technology self-efficacy alongside their formal technical competence.

Policy Contribution

At a fundamental level, this framework provides actionable insights for the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) and relevant professional bodies committed to advancing technology adoption within the Malaysian auditing profession. Identifying behavioral intention as a mediating mechanism between individual-level determinants and actual usage suggests that policy initiatives should be designed not merely to mandate technology adoption, but to foster voluntary readiness among auditors through a structured competency development framework. Specifically, the MIA and IFAC can leverage this proposed framework to design Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs that simultaneously address performance expectations demonstrated through outcome evidence and use cases and technological skills, such as practical, hands-on training on Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs) tailored to the operational environments of Small and Medium-sized Practices (SMPs). If aligned with the MIA's existing digital competency action plan, such programs have the potential to significantly bridge the gap between auditors' awareness of CAATs and the actual, sustained adoption of these technologies in audit practice.

Conclusion

This paper presents a conceptual framework examining the mediating pathways through which performance expectancy and technological skills influence CAATs adoption among auditors in small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs) in Malaysia, with behavioral intention serving as the mediating variable. Grounded in the integrated UTAUT theoretical perspective

and developed through a literature review based on systematic document analysis, this framework addresses a significant gap in the existing literature on CAATs adoption: the absence of a clear, theoretically supported model explaining how individual-level determinants translate into actual usage through the formation of behavioral intention.

The paper advanced four hypotheses: that performance expectancy positively influences behavioral intention (H1); that technological skills positively influence behavioral intention (H2); and that behavioral intention mediates the relationship between each of these determinants and actual CAATs adoption (H3, H4). Collectively, these hypotheses form a concise, theory-based, and context-sensitive explanation of the intention-mediated usage process within the Malaysian SMP environment.

This study holds significant implications for theory, practice, and policy. Theoretically, it extends the UTAUT literature by repositioning Behavioral Intention (BI) as a mediating variable rather than a terminal predictor, thereby offering a more accurate and mechanistically coherent model of the adoption process. In terms of practice, the study directs small and medium-sized accounting firms (SMPs) to focus on human capital- and performance-oriented strategies as the most effective drivers for CAATs integration. At the policy level, the study provides a robust theoretical foundation for the MIA and relevant professional bodies to design competency-driven Continuing Professional Development (CPD) interventions capable of shaping intentions, while addressing the dimensions of performance expectancy and skills regarding auditors' readiness to adopt the technology.

As with all conceptual papers, this study has certain limitations. The proposed framework has not yet been empirically tested and relies entirely on theoretical arguments and a synthesis of prior empirical literature. The framework was intentionally designed to be concise, focusing on two antecedent factors; future studies could consider expanding it by incorporating additional constructs such as social influence, facilitating conditions, or organizational support to provide a more comprehensive picture of CAATs adoption in small and medium-sized accounting practices (SMPs). Future empirical research is encouraged to test the proposed hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM), specifically PLS-SEM, given its suitability for complex mediation models in the SMP context (Hair et al., 2022), involving a geographically diverse sample of SMP auditors in Malaysia, to validate and refine the framework.

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