Cybercrime in Nigeria: Social Influence Affecting the Prevention and Control

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Abstract
Over the past decade, the internet has grown dramatically with increasing everyday users. As internet users increase, so is the percentage of cybercriminals who seem to be shifting traditional crime to the internet. The predicted financial losses of N250 billion ($649 million) in 2017 and N288 billion ($800 million) in 2018 have made cybercrime in Nigeria one of the most difficult crimes to solve. Young people, especially those in higher education, are involved in cybercrime in Nigeria, but this crime is committed by both young and old adults. The involvement of young people is typically influenced by high levels of poverty, unemployment, insufficient laws against this crime, and diminished social influence. A nation with a high crime rate cannot prosper or develop. The study examines the effects of social influencers. The study utilized the structural-functional theory and the theory of technology-enabled crime to provide a grasp of the nature of the problem. Due to the nature of the investigation, secondary data and qualitative methods were used and it was found that youth involvement in cybercrime is significantly influenced by unemployment, peer pressure, and socialization factors. The study suggests that Nigeria should provide basic facilities (e.g., Electricity, Security, Good Governance and so forth), enhance its cybercrime laws and policies, and instruct its social agents (War against Indiscipline and Corruption, National Orientation Agency).
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1. Introduction

All facets of life have improved as a result of the development of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) tools like the Internet; it is a crucial element on which the world's economic and social progress

depends (Ufuoma & Ohwomeregwa, 2020). There is no doubt that the Internet has improved communication and etiquette. In many parts of life, it has evolved into a driving force. The internet has assisted man in conquering time and space; as a result of these wonderful attainments, nations around the world have become much closer to each other (Bello, 2017). Because of the internet platform that cyberspace has made available, businesses have been able to grow exponentially in terms of productivity, efficiency, and window of opportunity. They have also been able to break down economic boundaries that have previously prevented corporate organizations from operating globally.

In the digital age, cybercrime is one of the biggest, most confusing, and possibly the most complicated problems. The utilization of illicit actions carried out via electronic means such as computers, and auxiliary equipment is known as cybercrime. It includes email bombing, virus dissemination, network traffic interruption, identity theft, computer hacking, and internet scams. Similarly, cybercrime comprises all sorts of crime done through the use of the internet. They are also known as online fraud. This entails presenting false solicitation to potential victims through one or more internet-based tools, including chatting and faxes, among others, or using them to defraud people or businesses. ICT is used by cybercriminals throughout the world to perform an infinite number of crimes that have caused and continue to cause many enterprises on the continent to fail (Ufuoma, 2020).

Both young and old individuals commit cybercrime in Nigeria, however, the majority of young adults are students at the nation's many higher educational institutions as well as unemployed graduates and school dropouts (Uche, 2015). They look at the latitude provided by the internet for fraud, theft, and other mind-boggling crimes that have an impact on the socioeconomic advancement of business organizations in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria has over the years implemented economic and developmental programmes to promote wealth creation, innovation, and social development because these are some of the crucial indicators used to assess the economic progress of a nation (Ibikunle & Eweniyi, 2013).

As a result, cybercrime activities in Nigeria have been considered a driving force that caused a lot of detrimental economic repercussions on the nation. It was estimated that in 2017 and 2018, Nigeria suffered cumulative economic losses owing to cybercrime of N250 billion ($649 million) and N288 billion ($800 million) respectively (Proshare, 2020). In addition to damaging the nation's reputation, cybercrime discourages foreign businesses from investing in the economy and makes it harder for startups small and

medium-sized businesses to operate. Cybercrime operations have cost individuals money, creative works, or secret data, and the harm is grave.

One of the main factors contributing to the rise in cybercrime in Nigeria has been noted to be the skyrocketing incidence of joblessness, which is demonstrated by the fact that most cybercrime assailants are unemployed young people. According to Aborisade (2009), the Nigerian Police detained five students from the Universities of Abuja and Port Harcourt on suspicion of accessing several banks' websites via the internet and moving money from one person's account to their own. In the same vein, the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collaborated on the four-month Operation Rewired, which resulted in the arrest of 281 people. 167 of the 281 people who were arrested for various offences were young Nigerians (Olarewaju, 2020).

According to Bolaji *et al*., (2016), Nigerians are well-known both at home and internationally for being prolific cybercrime perpetrators. When compared to other citizens of other nations, the number of Nigerians apprehended for dishonest actions carried out by television channels is significantly higher. The internet's contribution to Nigeria's development has been beneficial to many different areas of the nation. But these industries, like banking, e-commerce, and education, struggle with the impact of cybercrime. Each new cybercrime is more sophisticated than the one before it, and the number of these crimes is rising alarmingly. In a 2011 World Bank survey, Olubukola (2017) noted that four of the top ten nations in the world with a high frequency of cybercrime are located in Africa (Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and South Africa).

High rates of poverty, the desire for riches, and inadequate security or electronic gadgets, among other factors, are thought to have combined in Nigeria to raise the rate of cybercrime among adolescents, providing a serious challenge for the nation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), which was released, Nigeria's poverty rate increased to 40.1% in 2019. This indicates that poverty rates have been rising. Additionally, it is believed that the majority of Nigerians are still living in extreme poverty and that the country's rising poverty level is a significant contributing factor to the rise in cybercrimes. This is based on the fact that the nation's poverty index is still at the highest level of any country in the world. Those who participate in these illegal operations are frequently said to be struggling to make ends meet and turn to cybercrime as their only option. More than eighty per cent (80%) of Nigeria's e-businesses are vulnerable to cyber attacks as a result of the alarming increase in cybercrime

occurrences and the financial consequences that follow, endangering their livelihood (Bolaji *et al*., 2016).

After passing through the Senate's legislative process, the Cybercrime Act was finally signed into law in 2015. Yet, the Act was still widely seen as a "work in progress" by many. For instance, the Senate Committee on ICT and Cybercrime, demanded a review of the law to bring it into line with the standards of modern nations in 2017 (Premium Times, 2017). Regarding cybercrime, Kamini (2011) makes the case that a country with a high crime rate cannot progress or expand, and as a result, cybercrime has detrimental effects on society and the economy. such effects are visible throughout Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape, and because of the country's reputation for corruption, foreign investors are moving away from Nigeria.

However, many scholars have worked on cybercrime in Nigeria. For example, Omodunbi *et al*., (2016) focus on Cybercrimes in Nigeria: Analysis, Detection and Prevention while Chidozie (2018) examined cybercrime in Nigeria. Also, Augustine (2017) focuses on the challenges of cybercrime in Nigeria, while this study explores the relationship between cybercrime and social influence in Nigeria. The paper conceptualizes some of the fundamental ideas, such as cybercrime, poverty, cyberspace and social influence to help readers catch the discussion.

2.   Literature Review
2.1   Conceptual Clarification
2.1.1   Concept of Cybercrime

The lack of a consistent and legislative framework for the practices that may qualify as cybercrime is a significant problem in creating a correct definition of this crime (Yar, 2005). Determining what constitutes cybercrime involves conceptual challenges, Smith and Kipesha (2004). There are numerous definitions of cybercrime. Along with being difficult to define, it is also known by several other names, including computer hacking, computer-related crime, digital crime, information technology crime, Internet crime, virtual crime, e-crime, and net crime (Odumesi, 2014). Cybercrime might reasonably comprise a wide array of criminal acts and activities. Odumesi opined that cybercrime is classified into two categories and characterized as follows:

i.   Cybercrime, in its narrowest meaning, refers to any unlawful activity aiming at compromising the security of computer systems and the data they process through the use of electronic methods.

ii.   In a wider context, cybercrime includes any unlawful activity related to or carried out through, a computer system or network, including

offences like unauthorized possession and providing or disseminating information via a computer system or network.

The convention covers cybercrime in four main categories:

i.   Violations of the privacy, availability, and integrity of computer data and systems, including unauthorized access, eavesdropping, tampering with data or systems, and the use of illicit tools

ii.   Computer-related offences such as computer-related fraud and forgery.

iii.   Offences involving content (e.g., child pornography).

iv.   Crimes involving violations of copyright and related rights.

In addition, any criminal conduct that threatens or makes use of an electronic, network node, or networked device is considered a cybercrime, according to Kaspersky (2021). Profit-driven hackers or cybercriminals commit the majority of cybercrime, but not all of it. Cybercrime is committed by people or groups, some cyber criminals are well-organized, employ cutting-edge techniques, and are technically proficient. It is uncommon for cybercrime to be undertaken with the purpose of damaging computers other than for financial gain (John, 2017).

Thomas and Loader (2000) provided a working definition of cybercrime as "computer-mediated acts deemed unlawful or regarded illegitimate by some parties and that can be undertaken across worldwide electronic networks," albeit this definition is not definitive. Odumesi (2014) opined that cybercrime should include both known illegal acts or crimes that are actively conducted using or with the use of a computer system, information network, or data. Any illegal behaviour that utilizes a computer, networked device, or network is considered a cybercrime.

2.1.2   Concept of Poverty

In the instance of Nigeria, there is no doubt about the connection between cybercrime and destitution. Nigeria had a 40.1% poverty rate in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). According to Stella (2017), the National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report sheds light on the severity of the nation's poverty. More than half of Nigeria's people make less than $1 each day.

According to Rafiu *et al.,* (2017), poverty is considered a limitation that worsens people's purchasing power and living conditions. These characteristics include persistent structural imbalances, a slowdown in economic growth, low gross domestic product growth and high population growth rates, underdeveloped sectors and means of production, depletion of natural resources, obstacles to economic development as the engine of the economy, and limited access to the majority of the population.

Measurements of poverty aim to pinpoint the impoverished. The metric that is most frequently employed is the headcount poverty index, which is determined by the proportion of the population that resides in households with per capita consumption below the poverty line. The poverty gap index, which measures how far the average poor person's earnings deviate from the poverty threshold; the curved poverty gap, which displays the median of the squared proportion rate squared poverty gap, which measures the severity of poverty; and the poverty gap index. People are considered to be in absolute poverty when their income is below that required for basic survival, as opposed to low income, which is determined by other members of their community's standard of living (Bello, 2017)

2.1.3   Concept of Internet and Cyberspace

According to Osahenvemwen (2018), the Internet is a network made up of millions of local to international private, public, academic, business, and government networks that are connected by a wide range of electronic, wireless, and optical networking technologies. Consequently, the term "internet" refers to a vast network of electronically interconnected items, such as smartphones, automobiles, TVs, radios, smartwatches, Internet service providers (ISPs) like MTN, Glo, Etisalat, and Airtel facilitate the connection by enabling access to social media, video transmission (for human conversation), digital information, and e-commerce for any user who is connected via the Internal Service Provider (ISP).

Cyberspace is yet to have a universally accepted definition. Uche and Eman (2015) defines cyberspace as a space characterized by the people, process, and technology elements, bounded by logical territories and inhabited by zeroes (00000) and ones (11111). Cyberspace is a space where connections and transmissions offered by the internet happen. Anything that is done with the internet is done under the confined of cyberspace. Therefore, the internet is required to access cyberspace and the total of what is done with the internet is done in cyberspace.

2.2.1   Agents of Social Influence and Cybercrime in Nigeria

Oludayo (2013) argued that the unrestrained quest for wealth in Nigerian society is one of the factors driving young people to devise dubious ways of acquiring wealth rather than adhering to the rules set forth by society. For instance, it is expected that a young person will move through their educational system, do the required National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and then find meaningful employment. Regrettably, Nigeria's level of corruption further motivates young people to forgo hard work and foster an aspiration to get wealthy at any cost. Therefore, it is believed that the

following social elements have an impact on the rate of cybercrime in Nigeria.

i.   Peer Influence

Young internet users may be influenced by their peers. Philip (2020) opined that hackers frequently build social networks with their online friends, and to get their approval or recognition, they may demonstrate their ability to steal accounts. Teenagers could say that they feel at home in their peer group. Because theirs is a world of thrills, they often wish to take a flight of fancy and their peers provide an enabling environment for this to happen. Hence, some young people may engage in cybercrime while disregarding the repercussions only to stand out from their law-breaking classmates.

According to John (2017), peer pressure, not money, lures youths into cybercrime. Young people's involvement in cybercrime is attributed in large part to peer pressure and the desire for recognition. Few, if any, of those who break the law online would have done so in a traditional setting. Young offenders frequently have other goals in mind than money. Perhaps more significant factors in fostering cybercrime are the sense of accomplishment one feels after completing a task and the need to prove oneself to others to enhance online reputation. Cybercrime was committed by some young individuals because they thought it was "cool." Some offenders start by using gaming cheat websites and "modding" forums eventually moving on to criminal hacking groups.

As young adults leave their homes to pursue a tertiary education, which frequently leaves them exposed to joining gangs, Suleiman (2016) stated that socializing with delinquent peers could make a child more prone to corruption in adulthood. The majority of people who engage in cyber fraud or other crimes are gang members.

ii.   Family

In today's world, it is impossible to avoid social connections among peers. Yet, the same interaction is a known cause of deviant conduct. Parenting in Nigeria has been less effective over time as a result of the pursuit of economic objectives. While sending their children to school, parents have little choice but to grant them temporary freedom, which greatly promotes the development of youngsters who are unconstrained and who explore their surroundings without thinking about the implications for their communities (Oludayo, 2013). As a result, wards have little choice but to follow the advice of their peers and the internet.

iii.   Custom or Religion

Despite the fact that internet fraud is illegal in Nigeria. The majority of cybercriminals, sometimes referred to as Yahoo Boys or Yahoo Plus Boys, seek herbalists, clergymen, and *alfas* to create charms (fetish items) that increase success to increase the likelihood of having more victim's swindle. According to Oludayo (2013), Internet browsing is combined with charms like *Afose* (do as I say), *Oruka-ere* (charmed rings), *Ijapa* (tortoise), *Ose Awure* (success-boosting soap), and *Atona* (pathfinder) to make victims simple. It should be emphasized that the herbalist, pastor, or *alfa* who is approached is typically accompanied by followers that they preach to or influence. The government has over the years created jobs, retention programs, grants, subsidies, and other initiatives in an effort to raise the standard of living in Nigeria and advance the nation's economic development. Nigerian government institutions, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and even private sector donors have recently targeted young people in Nigeria.

In order to empower youths and diversify the economy, the government established and sponsored Entrepreneurship Development Centers (EDCs), unveiled the Microfinance Policy, Regulation and Supervisory Framework for Nigeria, and created the NYSC Sensitization, Venture Prize Competition, and NYSC Entrepreneurship Training Programmes, among other efforts. Additionally, it has taken part in initiatives like the N-Power Empowerment Programme, the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN), the Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Africa Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN), the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), and the Graduate Internship Scheme.

Moreover, NGOs and donors from the corporate sector have contributed some money. LEAP Africa, the Tony Elumelu Foundation for Enterprise in Africa, the Diamond-Crest for Youth Education Foundation, the New Era Foundation, the Youth for Technology Foundation, and the Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) are carried out to boost employment, lessen poverty, and bring in money for both the general public and the government. Notwithstanding all the policies and initiatives described above that attempt to increase youth employment and thereby promote economic diversity, growth, and prosperity, Nigeria still has a lot of difficulties in providing enough job possibilities for her unemployed youngsters.

2.3 Theoretical Review
2.3.1 Theory of Structural Functionalist

In order to adequately provide a vivid explanation, prediction, prescription and analysis of the issue of Security challenges that pervaded Nigeria's federal arrangements right from the local levels to the federal level, Structural-functionalist Theory (SFT) was adopted by this paper. This is believed by the view that this theory will help to gain depth understanding of cybercrime in Nigeria. The adoption of this theory is justified in the ability of theory in providing a proper analysis of why cybercrime activities are yet to be curbed.

Structural functionalism as wholly explained refers to the large-scale social structures and institutions of society, their inter-relationships, and their constraining influence on actors (Ritzer, 2008). Historically, some founding fathers of sociology like Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, laid the classical foundation of structural-functionalism. Talcott Parsons later redefined it to reflect his work titled "the social system" in 1951 (John & Marshall, 2005). From a theoretical perspective in sociology, functionalism holds a view of society as a social system that is made up of different parts, which are interdependent and interrelated. These important parts of society, which include the family, school, government, law enforcement agencies; economy, etc. perform various functions positively toward the maintenance, stability and survival of the social system (Ravishankanr, 2019).

From the organism analogy, the functionalists equate the human society with the human or biological organism that has a structure comprising organs, systems and capillaries, which must function for the maintenance and survival of the whole organism. To understand the structure of the organism (man), the respective parts and their interconnected functions must be examined. The foregoing forms the basis of Parsons' concept of Adaptation, Goal maintenance, Integration and Latency function (AGIL). Thus, AGIL is an elaborate model of systems and sub-systems. It implies that for any society to survive, each system must meet the aforementioned four functional prerequisites namely: Adaptation (adjustment to the physical environment); Goal attainment (a means of organizing resources to achieve societal goals and obtain gratification), Integration (forms of internal coordination and ways of dealing with differences), and Latency or pattern maintenance (means of achieving comparative stability). A problem in one component might hinder the growth and existence of the other components. Although the parts make up the whole, the existence of the whole depends on the presence of the parts. Social influence, poverty, unemployment, and crime all function as

necessary but inevitable components of the system, which together increase/decrease society's overall efficacy and efficiency.

2.3.2   Relevance of the Theory of Structural Functionalist to the Study

The theory emphasizes social order based on tacit agreements between people and state or society, views shared norms and values as the cornerstone of society and views social development as slow and orderly. The other component of the system will be impacted if one component of it is inefficient. For instance, a state's economic growth will be impacted by the political system's inefficiencies. The theory demonstrates why the ineffectiveness of the legal system and law enforcement, as well as unemployment, family, custom, religion and poverty, are the main factors promoting cybercrime activity in Nigeria. The point of emphasis here is how social equilibrium can be achieved and maintained between and among the various elements or institutions of a social system and sub-systems in such a way that all the assigned institutions in Nigeria should rise to the task of meeting their daily functions and responsibilities in order to reduce the level of social vices (Ritzer, 2008).

Meritocracy is the functionalist theory's main flaw. Meritocracy is based on the idea of praising an individual's achievements, but in doing so, it completely ignores the fact that some people face disadvantages due to circumstances beyond their control. Not everyone starts from the same place for example, an individual from a working-class background and an individual from a middle-class background will have different experiences in life just due to their background may not be able to access the same opportunity someone from a middle-class background. This is a weakness because opportunities are not within the reach of all the members of a society which therefore reduces the chances of an individual and makes it unfair and biased

2.3.3   Theory of Technology-Enabled Crime

The theory's main contribution is the way it synthesizes various theoretical models to explain why crimes co-evolved with computer and telecommunications technology to become one of the most complicated and challenging types of crime to prevent, prosecute, and manage. According to McQuade (1998), understanding and managing relatively complicated criminality might be challenging at first, and there is an ongoing struggle between law enforcement and the criminal element for technological superiority. Law enforcement must keep up with criminal activity in order to avert, regulate, dissuade, and prevent emerging types of crime. According to McQuade (2006), the technology-enabled crime theory includes:

i.   crimes conducted specifically against technological devices and systems.

ii.   This category of criminal activity is frequently referred to as high-tech crime, computer crime, or cybercrime.

iii.   Using gadgets for traditional crimes or to help others do so.

iv.   The use of technology can make it easier to commit crimes including fraud, scams, and harassment, which presents fresh problems for long-standing offences.

3.   Relevance of Technology-Enabled Crime to the Study

The theory offered a framework for comprehending all types of criminal behaviour, particularly those that are developing in response to advancements in computing and telecommunications technology. The theory is relevant for comprehending current challenges posed by international criminal networks, developing forms of cybercrime, and terrorism networks that challenge conventional techniques of criminal justice and security measures for preventing and managing crime.

The theory is important to our study because it sheds light on how cybercriminals are adopting new tools and tactics, which represents a change from basic crimes to complicated crimes using complex tools. Also, it aids in comprehending novel instances of social abuse, criminal activity, and other forms of deviance brought on by cutting-edge technological use.

The major weakness of the theory is that it opens more opportunities for crime and draws people into committing a crime, leading to an unprecedented growth in the crime rate. The growth of ICT has a significant impact on crime; it increases the number of opportunities for corruption and encourages criminal behaviour, causing crime to rise at an unprecedented rate.

4.   Conclusion

Over the years, the issue of youth unemployment has persisted and defied all attempts to address it by Nigeria's successive governments through the implementation of targeted programmes and policies that aim at creating jobs and reducing poverty. Youth unemployment has led to conditions where young people are easily recruited by other young people to join insurgencies, where young people participate in some production activities, where fewer people are absorbed into the labour market, where economic growth is slowed down, and where unsustainable economic growth is experienced. Nonetheless, the impacts of increased youth unemployment and underemployment, which have shown up as political lawlessness, armed robberies, and other illegal actions conduct, have continued to be a drain on

the government. These issues have also been reflected in the Niger Delta's turmoil and insurgency. The youth are a crucial resource needed for a nation to be wealthy. A nation's social and economic development can be influenced by qualified, spirited, and brave youth provided they are used and managed correctly. The young potential is a key resource for ending poverty, establishing lasting peace, and fostering sustainable economic growth.

In addition, socialization factors strongly influence whether cybercrime is encouraged or discouraged. Peer greatly encourages these cybercrimes. Among their peer group, youths feel at home. They frequently desire to go on "a flight of fancy" because they live in an adventurous world, and their peers give them the supportive atmosphere they need to do so. As a result, some young people may commit cybercrime despite the repercussions merely to outclass their criminal classmates. The government is making every effort within the law to stop cybercrime in the nation by creating various agencies that would aid in combating this cybercrime. For instance, the establishment of legislation like The Penal and Criminal Codes, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and its Act.

5.   Recommendations

It has been argued that the agents of socialization are major influencers of cybercrime in Nigeria either positively or negatively. Socialization-promoting agents, such as the family, can aid in the deterrence of online crime by taking on the burden of raising and educating their children themselves rather than leaving this task to the teachers in school. Together with discipline, parents should avoid spoiling their kids excessively. In order to guide their children's morality, parents must also exhibit and teach them God's ways and listen to their children when their attention is needed.

Additionally, religious organizations could support parental efforts by educating the populace, particularly young people, about the need to be patient because prosperity arrives at a certain time rather than constantly talking about it. Also, religious leaders should refrain from showing off their wealth in an effort to scare young people and encourage them to engage in cybercrime. Finally, authorities should communicate with the state's Ministry of Youth and Sports to educate these youths about the risks of cybercrime and to assist in raising awareness among other youths who might feel pressured by their peers to engage in it. To further strengthen the various institutions set up by the government to fight against cybercrime. The government can collaborate with international bodies and organizations that are capable of providing the required technical know-how on the prevention of cybercrime in the country.

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