

# Unpacking the Impact of Cybercrimes and Socio-Cultural Dimensional Developments in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the impact of cybercrime on Nigeria's socio-cultural life and development. Cybercrime has become a menace to socio-economic development in Nigeria. Apart from subjecting individuals and organizations to huge financial losses, cybercrime has also led to the gradual loss of faith by local and foreign investors in the digital economy of Nigeria. However, apart from economic effects, cybercrime also has many socio-cultural effects on the country, like moral and society value system, which hardly form the crux of our discussions. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the social and cultural impact of cybercrime in Nigeria as one of the dimensions of the repercussions of information technology revolution. The paper adopts the historical research method, which is qualitative in nature, this includes narrative, interviews, focus groups, content analysis among others, drawing from oral interviews with the "yahoo" boys, police officer, and community members in Awka, Agbor, Okpanam and Asaba, between the age of 30 to 70 years. The paper finds that poverty, and unemployment are among the many reasons people engage in cybercrime. The socio-cultural effects of cybercrime are more entrenched and spell more doom for the country than the economic effects. This paper concludes that drastic measures including lifting people out of poverty by providing job opportunities creating a conducive atmosphere for small scale business to thrive, meeting the basic needs of the people and implementing effective anti-cybercrime laws, and Nigeria data protection Act 2023 must be implemented to curtail surge of cybercrime, and to avoid the further disintegration of the country's socio-cultural life.

*Keywords: Cybercrime and Socio-cultural, Development, Nigeria*

*JEL Classification Codes: O15, O19, N01*

## Introduction

No doubt with the discovery of computer and mobile phones and the consequent emergence of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the world speedily has become a global mini community, these devices with internet and browsing capacity has revolutionized the world and made it a circle of interactive communication platform. This revolution has significantly increased traffic in the cyber space and aided the world economy. Apart from boosting the global economic system, it has created millions of jobs in the world today, most of which are digitalized, it has brought a lot of innovation in the execution of both academic and non-academic research and hosting some regional and global meetings, bringing participants all over the world. It has in addition, enabled the holding of academic lectures virtually. A good example is the national open university of Nigeria, which organizes classes for students. In societies where ICT has fully deployed, evidence shows that, it has the capacity to influence all aspects of life, including education, health, finance, recreation, government, career and personal life as well.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that information communication technology (ICT) enables a wide range of global opportunities for all and sundry to attain greater heights in human endeavor, where human power proved insufficient (Omodumbi, Doniyon, Esan 2016)

Today the cyber space has become invaluablely important because of the speedy rate at which internet transactions are now being carried out. Private organizations, government agencies, NGOs, economic and other institutions have increasingly resorted to this new mode of communication and other transactions, not only because of its speed, but also because of its reliability. The internet has simplified business transaction processes such as sorting, summarizing, coding, editing, customizing and generic report generation in a real time processing mode. However, despite the enormous gains made through its development and use, ICT has thrown up a big challenge for the world to tackle. It has led to an upsurge in cybercrime which is the major focus of this research. It particularly focuses on its emergence, the cyber security threat, and other related challenges it unleashes and possible solution to the menace.

Over the years the alarming growth of the internet and its wide range of acceptance has led to the increase in security threats in Nigeria. According to (*datareportal 2023*) a total of 5.35 billion people around the world were using internet that is over about 62.3 percent of the global population, over 602 million internet penetration in Africa and in Nigeria over 122.5 million internet users which account for over 55.4 percent of Nigerian population, this overwhelming number internet users led to the surge in cybercrime. Today, several internet platforms assist crimes known as cybercrime which are perpetrated daily in various forms, such as a fraudulent electronic mail, pornography, identity theft, hacking, cyber harassment, automated teller machine, spoofing, piracy, phishing, romantic scam among others (Ibikunle and Frank, Eweniyi 2013).

Today cybercrime is a direct threat to the global cyber space, which Nigeria as a country is part of. Worse still, Nigeria has a porous cyber security and so it's worse hit by cybercrime this is evident in the surge in cybercrime in Nigeria because due to the complexity of the organized cybercrime and weak cyber security system in Nigeria, being that Nigeria with its enormous natural and human resources, is the poverty capital of the world, with an alarming rate of over 46 percent rate of poverty rate 2023, with the youth consisting of 104 million people in Nigeria (World Bank 2023), these youth are bound to look for other means of survival at all cost. Unemployed youth seeking for survival, has found solace in various cyber security loop holes to perpetrate crimes against those companies and individuals that lack strong cyber security to protect themselves against eminent cybercrime.

There is no doubt that these crimes have a lot of economic implications for the country. It has led to the scaring of foreign direct investors. It has also subjected individuals and organizations to huge financial losses. It has equally resulted to the gradual loss of faith by foreign and local investors in the digital economy, most especially in banking sector, where hacking is in constant reoccurrence. According to (*leadership news paper 2023*), Nigerian banking customers has lost over a whopping sum of 51-billion-naira savings to cybercrime, from 2019 to 2023, and this deter local and foreign investors in banking sector, in a global economy that is gradually gaining immense grounds as a major cyber space for huge economic transactions all over the world.

However, apart from economic effects, cybercrime also has many socio-cultural effects on the country, such as moral decadence, decline in societal values, value for hard work, ritual killings' low interest in formal education among others which hardly form the crux of discussions on the effects of cybercrime. The socio-cultural life of a country is very important, once it is eroded, it will have a spill-over effect on other areas including the economy. Addressing the effects of cybercrime on Nigeria's socio-cultural life is therefore important. It is also pertinent to note that many authors have focused on mainly the socio-economic development aspect of the impact of cybercrime with little emphasis on the socio-cultural implication. This loophole is what this paper sets out to address by focusing on the impact of cybercrime on Nigeria's socio-cultural life and development.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, a brief literature review on the subject matter of this paper is embarked upon. The second section traces the historical evolution of cybercrime in Nigeria, while the third focuses on the impact of cybercrime on Nigeria's socio-cultural life and development, which include societal values, lifestyle, religion, belief system, value for education among others. In the fourth section, the paper is concluded.

(Gbanga Olowu 2023), notes that one of the global crises in the world of technology is cybercrimes. The work focuses on the general effects of cybercrime and the efforts of the government in curbing the menace. It sees cybercrime as a dangerous development for the economy.( Kelvin D Mitnick 2002). In his book he enumerated with concise explanation the process of hacking and wire fraud. AS can be seen, his concern was educating the readers on the process of indulging in cybercrime. (B.A Omodumbi, P.O Odiase, Olanyan and Osani 2016), in their work, noted that over the years the alarming growth of internet and its wide acceptance has led to an increase in security threat in Nigeria. The major focus of the work is the security implication of cybercrime. They noted that cybercrime

is a threat to various institutions and people who are connected to the internet. (Sumanjit Das and Tapaswini Nayak's 2013) work is also relevant. Their work dwells more on cyber space and its overwhelming implications on the society. On impact of cybercrime, they posited that cybercrime among teenagers has led to misplacement of value. Money is now seen as having more values than moral values. A definite look in the corruption related offences reveal that social morality is low, which influence the commission of crime to attract less social stigma than ever before. They also suggest that the surge of cybercrime is as a result of positive correlation between the growth of crime and population of a country.

(Salas Epron and B.N Nwokeoma, 2016) in its reports stated that the inflow of foreign direct investments to Nigeria has been relatively low. This is even with the introduction of cashless policy and electronic banking for business transaction in the country by the past administration. This low volume has been attributed to frequent cyber-attacks that have succeeded on either scaring away foreign investors from either continuing business in the country or moving to another safer place. They noted that the situation is more threatening than even bokoharam insurgencies. (Ibrahim Suleman 2016) in his article titled "**Causes of Socio-Economic Cybercrime**". He indicated the security operative attitude is one of the factors aiding cybercrime in Nigeria. The study shows that some law enforcement agencies act as informants to the cyber criminals and provide useful information that support their criminal activity. (Folashade and Abimbola 2013), posited that information technology revolution associated with internet, has brought two edge functions: on one hand, it has contributed positive value to the world while on the other hand, it has produced so many maladies that threatens the order of the society also produce a new wave of crime to the world. (Kamili 2005) argues that a nation with high incidence of crime cannot grow or develop; hence cybercrime leaves negative social and economic consequences, this can be seen as it affects Nigerian socio-cultural order.

### **Historical Background of Cybercrime in Nigeria**

Socio-cultural effects of cybercrime can be trace to the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT). Although Crime has been part and parcel of every society though the degree varies from society to society. Scamming later grew more complex and metamorphosed into cybercrime especially with the advent of Information Computer Technology [ICT]. Expectedly, cybercrime did not start in Nigeria as the country was a late comer to the use of ICT. It started in other parts of the world, especially developed parts of the world. It has been dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when some cases were recorded globally. (LE VPN 2018) Technically the first cybercrime that hit the world was perpetrated in France in 1834, when some attackers stole financial marketing information by accessing the French telegraph system. From that time on word cybercrime began to grow exponentially. The advent of internet and computer system has led to increase in the pace of scamming crimes snowballing into cybercrime activities in the world, most especially in Nigeria where it has had strong negative effects in our socio-cultural development, as it relate to societal moral decadence and low interest in legitimate hustle, because the criminals no longer need to appear in physical form, like in the old time when 419 approached their victim to convince them to invest in any Ponzi schemes, or fake high interest generating Investment. This to some extent lessens the cumbersome process of committing fraud. Hence, the surge in cybercrime.

The year 2000 which is the starting date of our study, marked a new phase of cybercrime. With the emergence of social media network, which gained tremendous worldwide acceptance, saw another dimension of cybercrime. Indeed, hackers started making use of this platform to steal data in order to perpetrate cybercrime. In the following year cybercrime increased tremendously and cyber criminals improved on malware infection and data theft techniques, these days, cyber-attack are deployed in its thousands and consistently increasing with no end in sight.

(Stephen Ellis 2023) has noted Cybercrime has again continued to grow by leap and bounds in Nigeria since the introduction of the use of mobile cell phones by the Obasanjo administration in the early 2000s. Those who could not afford the computer to perpetrate the act have found it easier to indulge in the nefarious act from the comfort of their homes or indeed from any where even when on transit with the use of their cell phones which are cheaper to procure than computer. However, cybercrime has not left the country without serious socio-cultural consequences. This forms the focus of the next section of this paper.

### **Impact of Cybercrime on Socio-cultural Life and Development in Nigeria**

Cybercrime has entrenched stealing culture. Cybercrimes largely involves different shades and forms of theft execution which encourages a stealing culture and erodes the culture of hard work, contentment and integrity. Cybercrime discourages and undermines the dignity of labour and encourages wealth acquisition through any means

possible. Seun Awogbenle(2020) has rightly observed that cybercrime has eroded the country's values and that moral standards are fast waning and fading away right before our eyes. According to him, dignity of labour, honest living is becoming a mock in the society. Such stealing acts include Phishing: the term Phishing was coined by hackers who initiate legitimate companies in email to entice people to share their passwords or credit card numbers. It simply means stealing of people's personal information from unsuspected users, Phishing scams are found everywhere and exponentially increasing it has become one of the fastest cybercrimes in Nigeria. The Perpetuators of Phishing have devised way to mimic an authorized organization email in order to retrieve information from Clients through the Phishing email messages. In Nigeria Phishing email are mostly carried out on bank Customers and the company that deal, in buying and selling online via their web mail.

Identity theft is another way through which cybercrime has encouraged and popularized the stealing culture. This connotes the deliberate possession of another person's identity, living or dead with the intention of deceiving or defrauding people. This is an act of impersonating another person with the aim of committing cybercrime. This is mostly common in romance scam. When a cybercrime perpetrator steals someone's picture on Facebook or Instagram to carry out cyber-crime.

Another is cyber hacking is a term used to describe cybercrime such as illegal access, delaying, high jacking, bombing, denial or service attack, eavesdropping etc. This is done to gain access to someone personal information either to someone personal information, someone mobile application and transfer money out of their victim account. Charity fraud which involves the hosting of fake social media network page, for charity purposes. Usually, they open an account into which solicited funds from well-meaning Nigerians to help the needy are asked to be paid into. Charity fraudsters use the photo of someone that is ill or handicapped or less privileged, asking people to donate for the person's well-being and treatment.

Cybercrime also increases and consolidates the culture of violence, conflict and wanton destruction of lives and extrajudicial killings. Most time conflict arises from the issues of trust among the cybercriminals. The bank account perceived to be used for cybercrime could be barred or closed by banks. However, there are times that a cybercriminal may lie to his partner, especially the 'owner of the work' that the bank account that the victim of cybercrime paid money into has been closed by the bank. The closure of this bank account is what is called Aza Die. This usually leads to a serious fight between the cyber-criminals, between the 'picker' and the 'owner.' Numerous lives have been lost, as the owner of the work sometimes, pained by the betrayal goes ahead to murder the picker. Since the advent of cybercrime, cybercriminal have been at war with themselves as the case of perceived betrayal from Aza die (banned account) is a diversion of client to another group of cybercriminals. Sometimes, the parents and the siblings of the cybercriminals are used to settles scores, by assassinating them in order to send a message (Interview, Asaba 2023). What this does, is that it increases and consolidates the culture of violence and wanton waste of lives. This culture is seriously gaining grounds in Nigeria.

The culture of killing people for money has also been promoted by cybercrime. Over the years, cybercrime has witnessed another dreaded dimension. It has graduated from normal yahoo yahoo level to another realm of ritual killing, that is referred to as yahoo-plus. At this point the cyber criminals engage in ritual killings to perform some ritual to some deity, to be able to cast spear on their victims to be absolutely loyal and follow their instruction without any form of resistance or suspicion. This ritual killing has been going on and on since the introduction of yahoo-plus. Too frequently, dead bodies are dumped along the street with some vital organ missing. These vital organs are harvested for the yohoo-plus purposes. Female panties are also sought after for this yahoo plus sacrifices. Innocent people have been killed to achieve this great evil called yohoo-plus.

(Ayobede 2023) noted that cybercrime has corroborated the fact that cybercrime has often resulted in the loss of body parts and precious lives as victims are maimed or gruesomely murdered for ritual purpose by students who use them to get spiritual or diabolic power.<sup>19</sup> Most of the target of these ritual killings are young women who are unaware of the evil plot of their boyfriends. Studies have shown that majority of the victims are street prostitutes and hookup ladies who sell sex in exchange for money. These yahoo plus cybercriminal pick them randomly to unknown locations and gruesomely murder them and harvest their body parts for money rituals.

Cybercrime has also affected the education sector. Education prepares and equips the youth of a country to be well placed to manage the affairs of the nation in the future. It therefore has serious survival implications for the country. Cybercrime has contributed in killing the passion of many young Nigerians to go to school. The ability to get quick

money without going through the long process of education has made education to be out of the options considered by some youths.

It is no longer news that there is a consistent decline in the interest to acquire formal education among Nigeria youths, the excuse is that there are no employment opportunities after graduation, so why waste your time in going to acquire academic knowledge; it believed that after your parents have sold almost all they have to see you through school, it would be unfair that at the end you would end up unemployed or under employed, because there is no job out there to assimilate the population of school leavers. (Akpan and Enebong 2013) posited that the advent of social media has helped to spread awareness of cybercrime among Nigeria student and that has led to increase quest for participation in cybercrime. Having seen the lavish life style flaunted on social media and not knowing the story behind the wealth, some students and youth go as far as withdrawing from school to join the pyramids of cybercrimes, whether yahoo-yahoo or yahoo plus. This has grievous consequences for the students themselves, the school, their parents and the society at large. Student who are blinded by sudden and unexpected affluence become moral deviant and arrogantly disrespectful of their school authority.

(JAMB 2023) noted that in 2018, a total number of 1,644,110 applied for the jamb exam and a total of 47,974 candidates were absent and also because of low performance of student which have been attributed to the distraction caused by cybercrime, students are scoring below the cut-off point, in 2013 jamb cut-off mark was 180 for university and are 150 for polytechnics but in 2019, jamb had to drastically reduce their cut-off point to gain admission into university, the cut-off mark had to be reduced to public universities 140 to as against 180 in 2013, 120 for polytechnics as against 150 in 2013, and subsequently in 2012 jamb has to reduce the cut-off point to universities 140, and polytechnics 100. One of the reasons for this decline is that the exposure and spread of cybercrime among Nigeria youths has impacted negatively on the academic life of many Nigerian youth. This portends a bad omen for the academic development of Nigeria.

Some of the few youths who combine education and engagement in cybercrime have also corrupted other innocent youths and influenced them to go into cybercrime. These influencers are often ostentatious, reckless, oppressive and undisciplined students, who have escaped the cuffs of the law and have successfully made some ill-gotten money especially from cybercrime, build a somewhat distinct identity or 'class' for themselves. These rascally students, adorned with the toga of youthful exuberance, in attempt to maintain a distinct class and authority often oppress fellow students and lure some into the crime. Cybercrimes commonly committed by students include; hacking, unauthorized and illegal access to bank accounts, identity theft, phishing, spoofing, unauthorized reading of emails, desktop counterfeiting, pornography, cyber harassment, fraudulent conversion of property, chat room conspiracy, sending computer virus, plagiarism, phreaking, and downloading unauthorized data

Closely related to the above is the fact that cybercrime has also affected scholars negatively as well as innovation and creativity. One way this happens is **Online intellectual Property Infringement and theft**. Apart from the fact that intellectual property infringement and theft has discouraged the owners of the copyrights and trademarks infringed upon from being more creative and innovative, it has also discouraged scholars from churning out more scholarly works.

Cybercrime has also eroded sound parental up-bringing and good home culture. The destructive wind of cybercrime has blown into the family units, resulting in dysfunctional homes. Today, parents have deteriorated in their responsibility of training their children with good moral standard. Cybercrime has been widely accepted by many Nigerian parents as an option for their children. There are some recorded cases where parents encourage their children to join cyber crime training system (HK), to learn how to practice cybercrime, and make money as against learning of legitimate skills. The belief is that the end justifies the means. People are more interested in the result, not the process. These kinds of parents will keep breeding and raising criminals for the nation. This spells a great doom for the country more than mere economic impact of cybercrime.

It is true, as ( Sulaiman 2016) has argued, that poor family up-bringing and value system has contributed to the surge in cybercrime. however, it must also be noted that cybercrime has also further weakened and adulterated good home cultures and child training as many more parents have overtly or tacitly endorsed cyber-criminality for their children or have been unable to resist its booties from their children. Internet fraud has become normalized and institutionalized at the family and community level. Since the family units make up the community, the decline of moral values at that level has also affected the communally shared values. Communities, friends and some family members, now provide cover for the cyber criminals, guard them and aid them in the obnoxious act. Nigerian's young people now go about it unabashed and unperturbed. Internet fraud used to attract public opprobrium and

condemnation. However, it is now completely sad to see how people now hail and cheer fraudsters who flaunt their wealth particularly on social media unrestrained, move freely and live ostentatiously, dazzling their ill-gotten wealth before our faces like badge of honour (Seun Awoibenle 2023).

Romance scam, a popular cybercrime in Nigeria has also increased the spate of immoral lifestyle among the youths. This is carried out via social media platform, Facebook tweeter, Instagram etc. Through the creation of a fake account in any of the social media platforms named above and their target are mostly lonely women, with the intention to love them or promise them marriage, albeit with the intention to defraud them. A romance scam is a confidence trick involving faking romantic intentions towards a victim, gaining the victim's affection, and then using that goodwill to get the victim to send money to the scammer under false pretenses or to commit fraud against the victim. More money is lost each year to romance scams than to similar internet scam (Seun 2023). Pornographic pictures are usually exchanged during the gestation period of romance scam, which corrupts the moral world view of the initiators as well as the victims.

Moreover, some Nigerian women believe that being in relationship with a boy, automatically means that their needs are met. This has pushed a lot of men to engage in cybercrime to be able to raise money to impress their girlfriends and to be able to attract beautiful ladies. Some go extra length like yahoo plus to make money to be able to afford sexual satisfaction. This has increased sexual perversion in the Nigerian society.

Cybercrime has also led to reputational damage for Nigeria. This is a big problem because a good name is a useful currency in the international setting. Indeed, cybercrime has become a national embarrassment, as many Nigerian youths engage in the crime without any atom of moral consciousness. (Seun Awogbenle2023) has noted that to save the country from what has become a national embarrassment; fight against internet fraud must be redoubled. Not only has this become a national embarrassment, it has greatly affected how Nigerian citizens are perceived abroad. Most Nigerians travelling outside the country is viewed with suspicion. They are often subjected to gruesome scrutiny during international transit.

This has also affected the nation in the area of visa application to other countries of the world. Stringent conditions are often stipulated, even among neighboring African countries. Asian countries are worst case scenarios where majority of Nigerian youths are languishing in jail for cyber acclaimed crime, without proper investigations. The reputational damage that cybercrime has inflicted on Nigeria's national image among the committee of nations can hardly be quantified. More so the inhuman treatment meted out to Nigerians will be on the increase as a result of the dented national image if cybercrime is not arrested.

## **Conclusion**

The advent of computer, mobile phones and internet assisted gadgets brought mixed blessings for Nigeria. Indeed, the discovery of information communication technology gave birth to cybercrime. The devastating effects of cybercrime in our society cannot be accurately and exhaustively quantified. It has brought economic consequences such as the closure of many companies across the world and crippled individual businesses, most especially in Nigeria. Cybercrime has also scared foreign and direct investment and has subjected individuals to huge financial losses.

However, the socio-cultural impact of cybercrime, have been considered in this paper as more disturbing than these economic effects. The paper has discussed some of the effects of cybercrime on socio-cultural development in Nigeria. It has also been noted that the implosive nature of these socio-cultural effects calls for quick measures to drastically reduce the spate of cybercrime in Nigeria. The first is to lift people out of poverty. Poverty is one of the major causes of cybercrime in Nigeria. Over 60 percent of Nigerian people are living below one dollar per day, and with the harsh economic reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cybercrime serves as a readily available alternative to survival. Government and stake holders should deliberately lift people out of poverty Second, job opportunity should be created for school leavers. Like the saying goes the idle mind is the devil's workshop. When the youth are meaningfully engaged, this will help to curtail the rise of cybercrime in Nigeria. Third, a holistic approach to providing an equal playing ground for all citizens should be adopted in managing and arresting the problem of cybercrime. Job opportunities should be by merit not by favoritism. Fourth, provision of adequate cyber security to safeguard the cyber space should be made. Fifth, adequately providing and kitting the law enforcement agencies with state-of-the-art technological equipment to combat the menace of cybercrime is very essential. Sixth, the

judiciary should be strengthened to be able to handle the case of cybercrime and deliver the judgment without prejudice. Seventh, law enforcement agents caught in the act of aiding cybercrime should be disciplined to serve as a deterrent to other officers that would like to toe the same line. Local communities should be educated, trained and encouraged to collaborate with police to fish cybercriminals.

Lastly, state of emergency should be declared on cybercrime like other criminal activities across the country. Cybercrime is a social cancer that should be eradicated or reduced to insignificant level. Indeed, the devastating effects of cybercrime as has been discussed in this research cannot be over-emphasized. This research concludes by identifying the various major causes of cybercrime and how the menace has affected the economic development of Nigeria and the globe. Cybercrime may look like a way out of poverty; however, it is actually creating a bigger problem of economic loss to the country and in turn forestalls economic development and scares foreign direct investors. When there is no investment in the economy, there is bound to be stagnation, and this causes more hardship than ever imagined. Government should, as a matter of urgency, declare state of emergency on cybercrime, and provide job opportunities for the youths.

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