



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CYBERCRIME IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA VALUE SYSTEM

Chinweze Uzochukwu C.¹ⁱ,

*Onyejegbu Dominic Chukwuemeka*¹,

Egbegi, Friday Raphael²

¹Social Science Unit, School of General Studies,
University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus,
Enugu, Nigeria

²Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology,
Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract:

This paper examines cybercrime in the contemporary Nigerian value system. The paper finds that the uptick of cybercrime in Nigeria is inextricably linked with contemporary Nigeria value system. Indeed, the understanding of this linkage is important to carry out a truly scientific approach to the study of cybercrime and correct some policy misconceptions. The study was anchored on institutional anomie theory (IAT) and data were secondarily sourced through newspaper publications, journal articles, textbooks, magazines and publications. The paper recommends the urgent need for a value re-orientation, a re-engendering and a re-focusing on our value system with the view to actualizing our potentials and harnessing our resources both human and materials, for a greater, purposeful and vibrant Nigeria. Also, fighting corruption and enthroning transparency through the strengthening of institutions, and increased citizen participation in the governance process is urgently needed.

Keywords: contemporary, cybercrime, exploratory, Nigeria dream, value system

1. Introduction

In recent years, the issue of cybercrime has become topical among criminal justice administrators, corporate organizations, political leaders, entrepreneurs and the general public. Expectedly, it is facilitated by internet which has become so central to several areas of social activity. In the words of Ibekwe (2015), *“Between 2000 and 2012, the internet expanded at an average rate of 566.4% on a global level, while an estimated 2.4 billion people are on the net. Six trillion web pages are accessible, 2.2 billion Google searches per month*

ⁱ Correspondence: email divinemercy_f@yahoo.com

and 12% of all global trade happens online, with about \$240 million lost from global cybercrime”.

Although, the advent of the internet has brought immeasurable transformation to every aspect of life. The internet has changed our routine of doing things by providing the bedrock for innovation, social development and economic growth. The internet has indeed no doubt become the driving revolution in all aspects of human endeavor. Ironically, this revolution introduced by the internet has now become a smart tool or instrument which criminals adopt to commit cybercrimes.

The concept of cybercrime is broadly used to describe criminal activities in which computers or computer networks are used for criminal activity (Das & Nayak, 2013). In the words of Fanawopo (2004), cybercrime refers to unlawful practices carried out using computers, electronic and ancillary devices. It involves disruption of network traffic, email bombing, distribution of viruses, identity theft, cyber stalk and cybersquatting. Accordingly, Gandhi (2012) asserted that cybercrime includes traditional crimes in which computers or networks are used to enable the illicit activity. Computer crime mainly consists of unauthorized access to computer systems data alteration, data destruction, theft of intellectual property. In a similar note, Ifukor (2006) stated that cybercrime includes all forms of crime committed through the use of the internet. They are referred to as internet fraud. This means using one or more components of the internet such as chat rooms and emails among others to present fraudulent solicitation to prospective victims or to defraud individuals or financial institutions.

Presently, there is floodgate of cyber offences in Nigeria. Cybercrime has indeed become a thing of great concern for Nigerians who falls victims to it on daily basis. And for the perpetrators of this crime, the reason for going into it; is simple and not farfetched. The nature of value system inculcated by the contemporary Nigeria dream and the quest to achieve positive valued goals such as status or respect, and monetary goals among others gave rise to it.

In 2006, both foreign and local print and electronic media in their headline news reported the arrest and trial of Emmanuel Nwude who committed the largest cyber fraud in the continent by selling a non-existent airport to a Brazilian firm for \$242 million between 1995 and 1998 (Yusuf, 2017). Consequently, statistics has shown that by 2017, about N127 billion was the estimated loss to cybercrime in Nigeria. Nigeria now ranks third in global internet crimes behind the UK and U.S. (see Premium Times 2017).

Previous studies (Matthias & Ajah, 2017; Ukwayi & Okpa, 2017; and Ajah, 2018) noted with sadness that successful perpetrators of organize crime are being celebrated in Nigeria and have become role models of the society unless when they are busted by the law enforcement agencies that their criminal exploits are chronicled for the world to see. Accordingly, the effect of cybercrime has put everyone-young and old, rich and poor, male and female, foreigners and non-foreigners-at a constant risk of either being a primary, secondary or vicarious victim (Ukwayi & Okpa, 2017; Okpa & Ukwayi, 2017; and Ajah, 2018). It is important to note that the contemporary Nigerian brand of cybercrime is unique in its own right. First, it is characterised by a certain level of societal acceptance that encourage and celebrate successful cybercriminals as role

models of the society. Secondly, going by the frustration in achieving the goals of the society (Nigerian dream), it is seen by the offenders as the easiest means to achieve positive valued goals such as monetary goals, and status or respect.

Wealth of scholarship attentions in understanding the nature, extent, and dynamics of cybercrime abound (see for example, Ndubueze, Igbo & Okoye 2013; Ibrahim 2016; Jackson & Robert 2016; Ajah, Nwokeoma, & Okpan, 2017; Ukwaiyi & Okpa, 2017; Ajah, 2018; Okpa & Ukwaiyi, 2017). What, however, is striking is that these literatures are yet to look at the contemporary Nigerian value system as a major cause of cybercrime. This gap needs not wait further, as it imposes serious limitation to not only efforts to design and carry out a truly scientific and systematic approach to the study of cybercrime but also on policy implication. Hence, this research is set to bridge this knowledge gap. The study will critically investigate the effect of cybercrime on the contemporary value system in Nigeria.

2. Some notable cyber offences in Nigeria

It became a difficult task documenting the statistics of notable cyber offences in Nigeria because traditionally, Nigeria lacks organized accessible statistical data on cyber offences. However, the authors made attempt to present comprehensive and informative diary of some prominent cyber offences in Nigeria.

S/N	Date of conviction	Nature of sentence	Name of the offender	Age of the offender	Offence charged
1.	18 th April, 2018	One month imprisonment by Enugu State High Court.	Omokaro Osamudianmen Precious	28 years	Obtained One Million Five Hundred and Forty Five Thousand Naira (N1,545,000.00) under false pretence of being a genuine business man through mail fraud
2	15 th May, 2018	51 months imprisonment State and liable to pay \$187,422.60 in restitution by US District Court	Idowu Olugbenga Temetan aka David Cole	30 years	Internet scams and passport forgery.
3	15 th Jan, 2018	46 months in imprisonment and ordered to pay \$615,555.12 by U.S. District Court	Amechi Colvis Amuegbunam	30 years	Conspiracy to commit wire fraud.
4	15 th May, 2018	45 months imprisonment and liable to pay \$187,422.60 in restitution by US District Court	deltilewa Olamigoke Afolabi Ikuejuyone aka Kuffour Duval	36 years	Wire fraud
5	3 rd April,	1 month	Prince Henry	30 year and	Internet fraud and

	2018	imprisonment each and to forfeit the sum of N3.5million recovered from them by Federal High Court, Benin	Ofeyi and Afatakpa David	27 years	identity theft
6	16 th May, 2018	1 month imprisonment by State High Court, Sapele, Delta State	Michael Ebade	21 years	Mail fraud and identity theft
7.	26 th May, 2017	95 years in prison by Mississippi court	Oladimeji Seun Ayelotan	30 years	Mail fraud, wire fraud, identity theft, credit card fraud and theft of government property.
8.	26 th May, 2017	115 years in prison by Mississippi court	Rasaq Aderoju Raheem	31 years	Mail fraud, wire fraud, identity theft, credit card fraud and theft of government property.
9.	26 th May, 2017	45 years in prison by Mississippi court	Femi Alexander Mewase	45 year	Conspiracy to commit identity theft, wire fraud, bank fraud, theft of US government funds, and conspiracy to commit money laundering.
10.	11 th May, 2017	2 years imprisonment each, with an option of N400,000 fine each by Federal High Court sitting, Warri	Chukwudi Ugwueke and Sophia Ugwueke	32 years and 30 years	Defrauded one Lisa Marie Nors, an American citizen through internet scams.
11	4 th February, 2017	27 years imprisonment was also ordered to repay \$1.7m by US district Court in East St. Louis	Olayinka Ilumsa Sunmola	33 years	Mail fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy, and interstate extortion he perpetrated from 2007 to 2014.
12	2006	Five years imprisonment and was asked to pay \$10 million fine to the federal government by the Federal High Court, Abuja	Emmanuel Nwude	51 years	Committed the largest internet fraud in the country by selling a non-existent airport to a Brazilian for \$242 million between 1995 and 1998.
13	2006	Two and half years imprisonment and was asked to pay \$25.5 million fine as restitution by the Federal High Court, Abuja	Amaka Anajemba	42 years	Internet fraud and money laundering.

3. Cybercrime in the contemporary Nigeria value system (the Nigeria dream)

The concept of value covers every aspect of human endeavors. *“Value is the means through which individuals grapple with the needs and essentials of daily lives, and it is that which people hold dear, what they cherish and what they practice as a member of a society, and that which serves as the basis for social co-existence and cohesion. It is the basis on which sound moral and wholesome judgment is based.”* (Obasola, 2015:2) Indeed, values are those intrinsic attributes and characteristics which are innate in every person for the actualization and promotion of social order, cohesion and peaceful co-existence which are fundamental indices for growth and development in the society.

Every country is identified with peculiar values which invariably forms their common perception and identity. Also, the type of value adopted by a nation greatly determines the level of its integration and development. Accordingly, a country who instills good virtues of honesty, integrity and hard work bound to succeed and develop with minimal crime cases. It is in the above light that Obasola (2015) asserted that a good moral value is an indispensable and absolute factor for social, economic and political developments. However, a country that instills wrong virtues of honesty, integrity and hard work attracts inordinate ambition to acquire wealth among its citizens. This is what is common in contemporary Nigeria society. No wonder people are no longer celebrated based on hard work rather, it is by their smartness to get rich either by hook or crook. Ojo (n.d) rightly observed that *“Those who are supposed to be behind bars in Nigeria are bestowed with chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees which have also contributed to the deterioration of our value system”*. Unfortunately, this is antithetical to Nigeria that was built on the foundation of honesty and hard work.

Sadly, the problem of decline in public morality and national discipline in Nigeria is very alarming. Every sphere of life is not spared by this cankerworm which has eaten deep into every facet of the society. This prevailing situation has been incisively portrayed by Iwe (1991:82) who asserted that *“over-concern with one’s self-importance and pre-occupation with self-aggrandizement naturally lead to total indiscipline or moral decadence from the self to the society”*. Nigeria has experienced and is still experiencing its share of value laxity especially as depicted in cybercrimes such as the advanced free fraud popularly called 419, and other social vices e.t.c. Abogunrin (1994:5) stated categorically that *“There was never a time when humanity was so degraded and spiritually blind as is evidence in the madness we see around us daily in Nigeria”*.

Regrettably, cybercrime has now become a notable means to achieve the contemporary Nigeria dream and liberates families from poverty, achieve prestige and lucrative employment. In 2015, the Cybercrimes Act was passed into law to address the challenges. The law criminalizes a variety of cyber offences. Expectedly, like almost every law in the country, there is the problem of enforcement.

4. Causes of cybercrime

There are several adduced factors responsible for the rise in various cyber offences in Nigeria. Some of these factors are as follows:

- 1) **Underemployment and Unemployment:** In Nigeria, the unemployment rate is alarming and worrisome. According to Ajah and Okoro (2017), *“starting from the first quarter of 2016, underemployment rose to 19.1% from 18.7% while unemployment rose to 12.1% from 10.4%. Unemployment and underemployment continued to rise for the second quarter of 2016. While unemployment rose to 19.3%, underemployment rose to 13.3%. For the third quarter of 2016, unemployment rose to 13.9% while underemployment rose to 19.7%. For the fourth quarter of 2016, this rise in unemployment and underemployment continued as unemployment and underemployment stood at 14.2% and 21.0% respectively”*. And based on the above observed statistics, underemployment and unemployment is paving the way for cybercrime and other social vices in the country.
- 2) **Poverty:** A United Nations report on Nigeria’s Common Country Analysis in 2016 revealed that Nigeria was one of the poorest countries in the world with over 80 million or 64 per cent of her population living below poverty line. Poverty is the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Relative poverty is defined contextually as economic inequality in the location or society in which people live. Thematically, poverty has compelled some people into committing cybercrime to meet their basic human needs.
- 3) **Bribery and corruption:** Bribery and corruption are cankerworms which have been institutionalized and have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Arrested cybercriminals are known to usually bribe their way through and escape the long arm of justice. This has led to the increase in social vices since the criminals know that the criminal justice agencies could be bought at a price.
- 4) **Success story by cybercriminals:** The tremendous rate of success story by cybercriminals and not been caught by the law enforcement agencies encourage others to participate in the act.
- 5) **Wrong value:** a country that instills wrong virtues of honesty, integrity and hard work attracts inordinate ambition to acquire wealth among its citizens which has become ticking time-bomb because it has given rise to increase in criminal activities.
- 6) **Policy inconsistency:** The uncertainties associated with the government’s policies have created panic and led to the loss of foreign direct investment (FDI) while dousing any optimism for local investment. This panic has led to the loss of confidence by the citizens which seeks alternative to alleviate their economic downturn. Hence, result to cybercrime.

5. Consequences of cybercrime

1. **Battered National Image:** the image of Nigeria has suffered and battered due to the nefarious activities of cybercriminals, who turn the internet into a cheap and easy channel for the perpetration of their criminal activities, particularly the 'Advanced Fee Fraud (419). In the words of Longe, Chiemekwe, Fashola, Longe and Omilabu (2008), "*Nigeria has therefore emerged as a source of fraudulent Spam mails characterized by bogus business proposals and fraudulent joint ventures*".
2. **Threat to Economic Development:** Cybercrimes have caused the crimophobia image of the country before the international community which has scared both foreign and local investors away and limited the interest to invest in the country. Regrettably, Nigeria has lost a lot of job opportunities as a result of fear created by cybercrime.
3. **Loss of investment and resources:** Between 2000 and 2013, banks in the country lost N159 billion to electronic frauds and cybercrime. In 2014, bank customers lost about N6 billion in Nigeria while in South Africa, the loss amounted to about N8 billion (This Day Editorial, 2016). The Central Bank of Nigeria (2016) observed that 70 per cent of attempted or successful fraud/forgery cases in the Nigerian banking system were perpetrated via the electronic channels.
4. **Spread of Immorality:** Cybercrimes have caused the moral values to be increasingly endangered and encourages the spread of immorality. The recent case of former Miss Anambra, "Chidinma Okeke", which shows the rate at which cybercrime causes the breakdown of morals and values in the society gives credence to it.

6. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the institutional anomie theory (IAT) which was developed by Steven Messner and Richard Rosenfeld (1994). According to Bjerregard and Cochran (2008), the proponents of institutional anomie theory hypothesized that an over-emphasis on economic goals, in addition with a devaluation of the non-economic institutions in society, results in higher rates of crime and re-offending behaviour. Messner and Rosenfeld (1994) agree that American society (Similar to what is obtainable in Nigeria) places an over-emphasis on material and monetary success, the American Dream. The duo authors defined the American Dream as the commitment to the goals of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open and individual competition etc.

Ironically, the playing field is not equal. Messner and Rosenfeld (2007) see the American Dream as representing four cultural values: achievement, individualism, universalism, and the fetishism of money. Achievement simply refers to a person achieving a goal they set for themselves. Individualism is something that is revered in the United States, as much of the framework of the United States is based on individual rights and autonomy. This is also tied into achievement as people are supposed to

achieve the goals they set on their own. This makes every citizen competitive and impedes an individual's pursuit of the American Dream, and these aspects of culture together can create a strain toward anomie. Universalism relates to societal goals being largely determined by American culture. Whether or not an individual achieves these goals, mostly monetary goals, dictates how likely they are to be perceived as a success or failure. One can see how this last statement alone could create a strain toward anomie in a social environment. The final cultural value that is probably the most unique in the United States is the fetishism of money. The fetishism of money occurs when money takes on a life of its own. Besides what can be purchased with money, the possession of it takes on value of its own, and possession of money alone becomes a symbol of success. Because of this, money is the ultimate symbol of success in the United States. The more money an individual has or appears to have, the more successful they are perceived to be. This can cause norms to lose their power in preventing use of criminal means in accumulating more money. All of these four cultural features combined help make up the American Dream (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2007).

Igbo (2007) in his words, underscores the above assertion when he observed that material wealth in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria, has become the major yardstick for measuring success and where people have little or no regard whatsoever for the rules of the game. Nigerians have come to glorify and even worship wealth, regardless of how it was acquired. Whether by fair means or foul. It is not surprising that the undue emphasis placed on the societal goal of achieving monetary success and material acquisition certainly produced and reproduced a multiplicity of offences. In this regard, criminal offences are reinvigorating. Hence, result to the rising rate of cybercrime in Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

The rate of stealing from people online for the sole reason of achieving the Nigerian dream is alarming. It has no doubt affected the image of Nigeria in the international community and the pace of development in the country. To curtail this abnormal incidence; there is the urgent need for a value re-orientation, a re-engendering and a re-focusing on our moral values with the view to actualizing our potentials and harnessing our resources both human and materials, for a greater, purposeful, egalitarian and vibrant Nigeria. Also, fighting corruption and enthroning transparency through the strengthening of institutions, and increased citizen participation in the governance process is urgently needed. And finally, there is need to restore the investors' confidence and preach against violence insolence and other social vices that project the country in a bad light.

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