Safeguarding Nigerian Youths from Cybercrime: Exploring the Challenges and Potential Solutions

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Abstract

It remains an undeniable fact that the rapid growth of internet and digital technology has transformed the way Nigerians live, work and interact. However, this digital revolution has also introduces new challenges, particularly among the youths. It is on this background that this paper is set to critically identify and examine ways of safeguarding Nigerian youths from the menace of cybercrime by examining the challenges of mitigating cybercrime among Nigerian youths and prospering potential solutions. To achieve this, Human Needs Theory propounded by John Burton and his associates was used. The study employed content analysis to x-ray the existing documented literatures. The findings show that a dialectical relationship exists between economic crises and youths' involvement in cybercrime. The relationship is however negative symbiosis where economic crises disempowers and incapacitates the Nigerian youths from meeting their basic needs hence they resort to criminal activities such as phishing, hacking, cracking, cyber stalking among others. The paper also found that although there are regulatory agencies on the ground to curtail the menaces of cybercrime, the performance of such agencies leaves much to be desired. The paper therefore concludes that unless governmental policies and actions are consciously geared towards the achievement of effective, transparent and accountable leadership that will in turn guarantee good governance, safeguarding Nigerian youths from cybercrime will continue to be a mirage. The paper recommends concerted efforts should be made to promote good governance thereby providing job opportunities and improved leaving standard of Nigerians in general and the youths in particular.
Keywords: Crime; Cyber-Crime; Youth

Introduction
It remains an undeniable fact that youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only they are legitimately regarded as the future leaders, but they are equally, potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development (Isa 2003). They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as nurture or sustain itself. Adeniyi (1999) sees the youths as the foundation for the growth and sustainable development of any given nation; they are one of the dynamic agents for social change.

But contrary to the above submissions, in Nigeria, youths are seen as vital violent arsenals and willing tools for anti-social and clandestine political and criminal activities. This is because over the years, the endemic social miscreants and politically motivated crises and violence that enveloped the Nigeria have youths at the heart of most violent conflicts. Buttressing this argument, Omeje (2007) cited in Moveh) observed that youths are prosecutors of 90-95% of violent conflicts in Nigeria

The above submissions present a clear picture of a pronounced neglect and marginalization of the youths from the mainstream socio-economic and political processes in Nigeria by the ruling elite. Consequently, this inability or failure of Nigerian leadership has translated into having menace in the society.

Suffice to say that, neglecting youths coupled with the ever widening social gap prompted the youth in Nigeria to be involved in various ICT related anti-social behaviour and criminal tendencies such as Cybercrime (Yahoo-Yahoo). Odo and Odo (2015) observed that the large number of cybercrime perpetuators in Nigeria falls within the age bracket of 18 to 30 years of age. In fact, the Nigerian youth in recent times have resorted to cyber-crime with a hope of meeting their basic need or living extravagant lives.

In response to these, Mohammed, Mohammed and Musa (2023) pointed out that numerous strategies were put in place by the Nigeria Government in order to tackle the menace, such strategies adopted include:
- i- The inauguration of central agency to enforce crime laws known as Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group (NCWG) in 2003
- ii- Enactment of Cyber law known as "Anti-terrorism economic and financial crimes and allied matters" law
- iii- Regulation of Cyber cafes
- iv- Government Partnership with Microsoft
- v- The enactment of Advance Fee Fraud Act of 2006,
- vi- The enactment of Money Laundering Act of 2004 section 12(1) (c) - (d),
- vii- The Economic and Financial Crime Commission Act of 2005, and
- viii- The enactment of Evidence Act of 1948

In spite of all the reactive multifaceted measures taken by the Nigerian government in a bid to address the menace of cyber-crime bedeviling the country in general, the cyber-crime activities are far from being over. This is because, as Lindsey (2019) observed that in 2018, Nigeria-based cybercrime jumped to 54 percent over the previous year, as groups of scammers expanded their operations adding new tactics and reaching a wider breadth of targets. On the similar vein Oghenevwede (2019) pointed out that "the Cyber Security Experts Association of Nigeria (CSEAN), has estimated that Nigeria loses about N127 billion to cybercrimes yearly". This is devastating and shocking to all Nigerians and the country in general. This situation as opined by Okeshola and Adeta (2013) and Mohammed, Mohammed and Musa (2023) have led to the undermining of Nigeria's image both at home and abroad.

Thus, it is against this backdrop that this paper set to critically identify and examine the ways of safeguarding Nigerian Youths from Cybercrime with particular emphasis on exploring the challenges of and potential solutions for safeguarding Nigerian Youths from Cybercrime

Conceptual Clarification
The central theme of this paper revolves around four key concepts that require a brief discussion in order to have clear focus. These concepts are:

Crime:
To Tappan (1964) "crime is an intentional act in violation of the criminal law (Statutory and case law), committed without defence or excuse, and penalized by the state as a felony or misdemeanor". Crime is a violation of the criminal law, which is subsequently followed by legal punishment. These definitions conceptualized crime from a legal point of view.
From these broader definitions of crime, crime can be conceived to mean a behaviour that violates the norms of society. It can also be seen as any activities classified by the society, state or parliament of the country or law of the land as an offence, anti-social behaviour, unlawful or wrongdoing which attracts sanctions by stipulated law of the land.

Cyber-Crime
The term cyber-crime broadly describes the crimes that take place within the cyber space and the term has come to symbolize insecurity and risk online (Gibson, 1982). To Ndubueze (2012) cyber-crime refers to various forms of computer-related, computer-assisted and computer-mediated crimes. He further added that cyber-crime is used in generic sense to describe all forms of computer-centric crime and criminalities. The Nigeria Cyber-crime Working Groups (2005) defined cyber-crime as "conducts prohibited by law with prescribed punishment carried out using computers, electronics, ancillary devices, processes and/or procedures". NCIS, (1999 in Wall, 2007) referred cyber-crime to signify the occurrence of harmful behaviour that is somehow related to the misuse of a networked computer system. The British Police defines cyber-crime as 'the use of any computer network for crime'. Cyber-crime has been variously described as computer crime, electronic crime (e-crime), virtual crime, digital crime, automated crime, high-tech crime and network crime in the literature (Ndubueze 2012)
From the definition above, it is generally understood that cyber-crime is a crime or an unlawful acts committed on the internet with the aid of a computer.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
ICT is a broader term that includes any communication devices or applications like radio, television, cellular phones, computer, and satellite systems. Asabere and Enguah (2012) defined ICT as the tools, facilitates, processes, and equipments that provide the required environment with the physical infrastructure and the services for the generation, transmission, processing, storing, disseminating of information in all forms including voice, text, data, graphics and video. Some of the examples of ICTs; IWBs, computers, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Software, Office Application (Word, PowerPoint, Drawing tools etc.), Internet-Websites & Downloadable Software, Commercial Course Book CD-ROMs, DVD players, mobile phones, electronic dictionaries, digital cameras and videos, DAT recorders, document cameras, data projectors.

ICT related Crime
The term ICT related Crime refers to the crimes that take place within the ICT space online. It is that form of type of crime that has to do various forms of computer-related, computer-assisted and computer-mediated crimes (Mohammed, Mohammed and Musa; 2023). In other words, ICT

related crime describe all forms of computer-centric crime and criminalities. Thus, ICT related crime is a crime or unlawful acts committed on the internet with the aid of an ICT gadgets.

Youth

The term 'youth' has been a subject of intense arguments in academic writing. The United Nations (1991) defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of I5 and 24 years. In Nigeria, the youth are defined as "all young persons of ages 18-35 who are citizen of the Federal republic of Nigeria" (National Youth Policy, 200). The National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria (2006) considered individuals between 15 and 24 years as youth; the UN Habitat Agenda 21 categorized youth as individuals between 15 and 32 years; while the African Youth Charter of African Union (2006) considered individuals between 15 and 35 years. On these bases, this study considered the definition of youth as offered by the National Youth Policy (200 l), Nigerians who are between the ages of l8 and 35 years.

Theoretical Framework

Human Needs Theory propounded by John Burton (1979) and his associates, is employed as the framework of analysis for the paper. Needs theorists such as John Burton (1979), Abraham Maslow (1970), Marshall Rosenberg, and Manfred Max-Neef (1991) among others have over time identified some of the basic need which they believed that deprivation, denial or frustration of which can cause conflict. Maslow in his motivation and personality (1970) identified physiological needs, safety needs, belonging or love, self-esteem and self-actualization. Edward Azar in his contribution identified; distributive justice, safety and security, belongingness, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, identity, freedom, and participation as the basic needs of human being (Azar, 1999 cited in Best, 2009:52).

The basic argument of the theory is that all human beings have basic human needs which they seek to fulfill, and that the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individuals could affect them immediately or later, thereby leading to conflict (Rosati et'al, 1990). Implied from this submission is the fact that one of the primary causes of protracted or intractable conflict and insecurity or involvement into criminal activities is people's unyielding drive to meet their needs at the individual, group and societal levels. In other words, Human Needs Theory argues that conflict and violence are caused by unmet human needs. Thus, violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs (www.turkishweekly.net).

Rosenberg (2003) maintained that: "Violence is a tragic expression of unmet needs". This implies that all action(s) undertaken by human beings are attempts to satisfy their needs. In other words, in order to live and attain well-being, peace and security, human beings needs certain essentials. These essentials according to Maslow (1970) and Burton (1990) goes beyond just food, water and shelter. They include both physical and non-physical elements for human growth and development, employment opportunities could be one such essential that make life favourable for human growth and development. Needs theory also insists that, "… only by satisfying or creating opportunities for individuals to satisfy their basic needs can there exist the possibility of a fully developed human person, a whole man, and a harmonious, progressive society". (Roy; 1990:7)

Justifying the theory therefore, one can argue that the Nigerian state's failure to put in place some effective mechanisms that would satisfy citizens' needs particularly the youths increases their involvement into criminal activities such as cybercrime. For instance, the apparent failure of public utilities in Nigeria is a clear indicator that the state is dysfunctional and cannot effectively deliver the desired service to its citizens particularly – the youth. This is because incurable level of unemployment in the country due to the failure of the country's economy. Consequently, cases of cybercrime such as phishing, hacking, cracking, cyber stalking among others become the order of the day. The theory therefore explains how the unemployed youths became frustrated and idle, left to the mercy of the social evils in general and ICT related crimes in particular.

Methodology
This study dwelt mainly on secondary data, which were obtained from reports, books, journals, and newspapers, publications by both governmental and non-governmental organizations and from the Internet in order to enhance the validity of the findings of the study. Unpublished materials were also used. Content analysis was used. All data collected were presented and analysed qualitatively.

An Overview of the Mechanisms Adopted by Successive Nigerian Governments towards Curving Cybercrime in the Country
As an integrative measure, various mechanisms, strategies, institutions and policy frameworks were adopted by different governments with sole motive of curving the menace of cybercrime in the country (Mohammed, Mohammed and Musa; 2023). But for the purpose of this paper, the following mechanisms are examined.

i. **Creation of Central Agency to Enforce Crime Laws known as Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group [NCWG]**

The Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group (NCWG) was formed based on the recommendation of presidential committee on Cybercrime. The NCWG is an inter-agency body made up of all key law enforcement security, intelligence and ICT agencies including the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria Police Force, the National Security Adviser, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), Department of State Services, National Intelligence Agency, Nigeria Computer Society, Nigeria Internet Group, Internet Service Providers Association of Nigeria, National Information Technology Development, and Citizens representing public interest. The primary goal of the NCWG is to develop and appropriate legal and institutional framework for securing computer systems and networks in Nigeria. Other duties include:
  i. Engaging in public enlightenment programs;
 ii. Building institutional consensus amongst existing agencies;
iii. Providing technical assistance to the National Assembly on Cybercrime and in the drafting of the cybercrime act;
iv. Laying the groundwork for cybercrime agency that will eventually emerge to take charge of fighting cybercrime in Nigeria; and
 v. Working with global cybercrime enforcement agencies in the USA, the UK and other countries who are at the forefront of fighting cybercrime (Ayantokun, 2006).

ii.   **Enactment of Cyber Law**

The promulgation of the "Anti-terrorism economic and financial crimes and allied matters" law by the National Assembly of Nigeria. The law provides for the establishment of a standing commission known as the "Anti-terrorism, Economic and Financial Commission" whose primary responsibility is to confront this hydra-headed condition of terrorism, financial crimes which of course include 419 scams and other cybercrimes. The law makes provisions for stringent punishment for convicted offenders. Such provisions include confiscation of properties and passport of convicted offenders as well as long jail terms (Olayemi, 2014).

iii.   **Regulation of Cyber Cafes**

In a bid to curve the menace of cybercrime in Nigeria, EFCC and ATCON instructed that:

i-   all cyber cafes must register with the Corporate Affairs Commission, NCC and EFCC; That cyber cafe will now be run on membership basis instead of pay-as-you-go; All cyber café must install acceptable hardware surveillance; The architecture of cyber cafes must be done such that all computers are exposed; Each cybercafé is expected to be a watchdog to others, as they have been detailed to have direct access to EFCC (Chawki, 2009). The decision came as result of the fact that some Nigerian fraudsters have perfected the act of using the internet via cyber cafes as their criminal platform to dupe unsuspecting citizens across the globe (Aragba-Akpore (2006b)

ii-   Overnight browsing in cyber cafes is prohibited. The prohibition came as a result of facts obtained by EFCC and ATCON that Nigerian fraudsters have restored the act of using overnight browsing just because the service allows users to use the internet at a minimal cost. Although this ban on night browsing has had an adverse negative effect on clients who use the internet for academic purpose and other positive purposes in night browsing sessions, but the ban was in adherence to the Telecommunication Act 2006 endorsed by the then President Olusegun Obasanjo on 5th June 2006.

iv.   **Government Partnership with Microsoft**

The signing of a unique memorandum of understanding by Nigerian government with Microsoft with the aim of identifying and prosecuting cyber criminals, creating a safe legal environment and restore hundreds of millions of dollars in cost investment (EFCC, 2006). The agreement defines a framework for cooperation between Microsoft and Nigeria that will give the EFCC access to Microsoft technical expertise information for successful enforcement. Under this agreement, Microsoft is expected to:

i.   Sponsors seminars, and training sessions specially designed for law enforcement officers and representatives,

ii.   Provide knowledge on so-called "botnet" technology that enables hackers to control tens of thousands of PCs and to use those PCs to spread spam or to inundate websites with so much traffic that the sites crash in denial of service attacks.

iii.   Instruct Nigerian investigators on techniques of extracting useful information from Personal Computers (PCs) compromised by botnet attacks, how to monitor the complex network to detect such attacks, and how to identify the people behind them.

iv. Provide leads on spam emanating from Nigeria, enabling the authorities to pursue investigations more quickly and successfully.

Contending Cyber Crime among Nigerian Youths: The Challenges
In spite of the measures taken by the Nigerian government in mitigate the spread of cybercrime among the Nigerian youths, the problems still remain or even increase. In other words, the measures put in place leave much to be desired and consequently seems to be barely effective due to the following factors;

i. The rising profile of Unemployment couple with poverty particularly among the teeming youths is one of serious factor that hindered effort(s) of mitigating Nigerian youths from involvement into cybercrime venture(s). The available literature shows that significant proportion of youths in Nigeria joined cybercrime due to either absence of employment, or/and abject poverty.

ii. The pervasive level of corruption and corrupt practices in Nigeria have to large extent incapacitate and halter agencies saddled with primary responsibility of curving cybercrime in the country. Buttressing the effect of corruption in Nigeria Ogundiya and Abdullahi (2012) opined that corruption in Nigeria has undermined and incapacitate governmental institutions and agencies put in place to promote and enhance development and security in the country. These institutions according to Ogundiya and Abdullahi (2012) cannot carry out their primary constitutional responsibilities of service delivery resulting from the misplacement of priority, and embezzlement of public funds, lack of due process, and transparency among others.

iii. Slowness of the judiciary proceedings in the country has also makes the process of justice for cybercrime matters tortuous and lengthy. For example, the case of *Federal Republic of Nigeria vs Peter Nosa (*Charge No. FHC/L/62C/2006, the case was said to have started in 2006, and was judged in 2013, a delay of 8 years. Another similar case was the case of *Federal Republic of Nigeria vs Olasaide Dare (*Charge No. FHC/KD/2008, the case was also said to have started in 2008 was concluded in 2012, a delay of 5 years (Oyenuga, 2007).

iv. Lack of Sophisticated and modern detective ICT gadgets/devices within the reach of the institutions saddled with duty of checkmating and fighting cybercrime in the country.

v. Lack of National Functional Database that could serve as a platform of tracking down the perpetrators of these scandalous acts by checking into past individual records and tracing their movements. In other words, the institutions saddled with duty of checkmating and fighting cybercrime lacks of National Functional Database that could serve as a platform of tracking down the perpetrators of these scandalous acts.

vi. Challenges emanating from organizational structure and due processes of the agencies saddled with the responsibility of prosecuting cybercriminals in the country. For instance available literature shows that despite the achievements recorded by EFCC in fighting against cybercrime in the country, the fact remain that EFCC is witnessing quite a number of problems militating against the prosecution of cybercrime offenders and perpetrators. This challenges as identified by Oyenuga (2007) include:
a. Improperly drafted and worded charges;

b. Lack of precise and specific laws prosecuting the offender;
c. Lack of diligent prosecution by the EFCC prosecutors;
d. Poor organizational and logistics arrangement of the EFCC;

Conclusion

In conclusion therefor, it is inferred from the forgoing analysis that a dialectical relationship exists between youths' involvement in ICT related crime (cybercrime) that enveloped the country, and youths' marginalization and discrimination on socio-political and economic setting. The relationship is however negative symbiosis where economic crises disempowers and incapacitates the youths from meeting their basic needs hence they resort to criminal activities - cyber-crime inclusive.

The paper also revealed that although there are regulatory agencies and institutional framework on ground to curtail the menaces of cyber-crime in the country, the performance of these agencies leaves much to be desired. This is evidently clear when one observe the increased cases of cybercrime such as phishing, hacking, cracking, cyber stalking among others in recent time. Finally, unless governmental policies and actions are consciously geared towards the achievement of effective, transparent and accountable leadership which will in turn guarantee good governance, economic development/buoyancy, and fight against youths' marginalization and discrimination on socio-political and economic sphere, mitigating cyber-crime among Nigerian youths will continue to be a mirage. The author therefore opines that concerted efforts should be made to promote good governance thereby providing job opportunities and improved standard of living for Nigerians in general and the youths in particular. This will eventually reduce the number of idle hands that can easily be involved in cybercrime.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby suggested to guide those in position of leadership at all levels.

i. The paper recommends that concerted efforts should be made to promote good governance thereby providing job opportunities and improved standard of living for Nigerians in general and the youths in particular. This will eventually reduce the number of idle hands that can easily be recruited or joint the cybercrime ventures.

ii. Mitigating cyber-crime among Nigerian youths should be situated within the socio-economic well-being of the country. In other words, concerted efforts should be made to revive the economy to provide jobs and uplifts the living standard of the people. This will eventually reduce the sources of idle hands that can easily joint the cybercrime ventures.

iii. Severe punishment should be served to any convicted corrupt public office holder to serve as deterrence to others. This is because, the study revealed that despite the government efforts geared toward fighting cybercrime couple with huge amount of budgetary allocation engulfed by regulatory agencies it has contributed insignificantly toward accomplishing the stipulated goals due to high level of political and bureaucratic corruption.

iv. The also recommended that for proper monitoring, checkmating and fighting cybercrime calls for sophisticated Information and Communication Technology detective gadgets/ devices.

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