AN EVALUATION OF CYBER CRIME AMONGST YOUTHS IN IGBOLAND: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Materialism has eaten deep into the fabrics of modern Igbo society. This has made youths to desire become rich overnight neglecting the value of hard work and dignity of labour. This theoretical paper assessed cybercrime amongst youths in Igboland, causative factors and practical strategies for curbing the menace in our clime. The purpose of the study is to explore the forms, effects of cybercrime on youths and the society, as well as to point out the role of the Church and government in ameliorating it. The study suggests that the church, government, media, and relevant agencies should adopt a strategic approach towards curbing it. The study also recommends that the Church should partner with the government in providing employment to the youths through adequate investment in agriculture, establishment of vocational and industrial training centers, youth empowerment programs and so on. The media should anchor programs that would sensitize youths on the dangers and implications of cybercrime. Moreover, the government should ensure that people perpetrating cybercrime when arrested should be punished in accordance with the law

Keywords*: cybercrime, youths, Igboland*

Introduction

The advancement in science and technology has made the world a global village. Whereby, people could communicate with each other from different parts of the world as if they are physically close to each other. This advancement in science and technology, has also led to improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) of which the internet is among. This 21st century seems to be the epitome of technology driven era. The internet has been of great help in this technology driven era, however, it could be observed that some unscrupulous persons are using the internet to perpetrate heinous crimes in various parts of the world. Nwaozuru (2020) enunciates that internet fraudsters in Nigeria are everyday formulating better approaches for executing cybercrime, some even use charms and diabolical means to make their cybercrime activity successful. Cybercrime or internet fraudster popularly called *Yahoo Yahoo* seems to a lucrative business of which some Igbo youths involve themselves into in order to make quick money. Cybercrime activity perpetrated by some Igbo youths has a lot of detrimental effects on the society. Hence, there is a need for the church and government to work together to ameliorate this situation and carry out programs that would benefit the youths.

The problem of the study is that Technological advancements are supposed to provide the youth opportunities for growth, learning, skills development and expansion of their knowledge base. However, in recent time, Udelue, Mathias and Ezeh (2020) observed that technology has been misused for criminal activities which mostly occur through cybercrime.

In traditional Igbo society, the value of hard work and dignity of labor permeates the lives of Igbo people; this prompts them to get various decent occupations to earn a living and to achieve success in life. However, in recent times, things have fallen apart as materialism has eaten deep into the fabrics of modern Igbo society; this as a result has led to the worship of wealth without recourse to its source. The desire to get rich overnight has led to a significant increase in the rate of cybercrime. Cybercrime activity perpetrated by some Igbo youths has led to economic loss, poor economy, piracy, unauthorized dissemination of information, hacking of bank and social media accounts of users and so on. These are detrimental to the wellbeing of people in the society. To this end, the church, government and other relevant agencies in the society are to rise to this occasion to ameliorate this social malady. This could be done by formulating appropriate policies to reduce the incidence of cyber-criminality in Igboland and by extension Nigerian society. The purpose of the study is to explore the forms, causes, effects of cybercrime on youths and the society, as well as to point out the role of the Church and government in ameliorating this social malady.

The significance of the study will be relevant to families, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Federal Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, ICT experts, other stakeholders involved in criminal related activity in Nigeria. It will furnish libraries and would be of colossal help to students and scholars in computer science, criminology, sociology, law, religion and so forth. Finally, the curbing of cybercrime among youths will help in raising future leaders who would use their potentials to make significant contributions to the development of the society. The scope of the study is limited to evaluation of cybercrime amongst Igbo youths in South-eastern Nigeria. The researcher adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection which include; oral interview, observation, mainline books, journals, book of readings, newspaper and lecture notes.

Definition of Terms

Cyber Crime
Odumesi (2014**)** states that, cybercrime may reasonably be defined as numerous criminal activities and offenses perpetrated through the internet or cyberspace such as illegal possession or distribution of information through computer networks or systems.
Evaluation
In this context, evaluation means to assess the involvement of Igbo youths in cybercrime activity.
Remedial Approach
Remedial approach in this context, means pragmatic measures that could help to curb youths from getting involved in cybercrime activity.
Youth
According to National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2012), a youth is seen as a person between 18-35 years who is a citizen of the Federal republic of Nigeria.

Concept of Cybercrime
        Cybercrime as a concept has several meanings due to its multifarious manifestations. Wall (2015) enunciates that cyber-crime involves criminal activities, in which a criminal offence is committed with the criminal intention to harm an individual using the contemporary communication systems available in internet services and mobile phones. Cybercrime according to Sarre et al. (2018) could be cyber-dependent or cyber-enabled. While cyber-enabled crimes use computers and their related activities to carry out illicit dealings, cyber-dependents rely on computers and its programs to carry out its activities (such as, hacking and malware distribution). In the same vein, Adeleke (2017) views cyber-crime as criminal ventures, involving information technology infrastructure, and includes unauthorized access to computer data from or within a computer .With the above descriptions of cybercrime, in this study, cybercrime could be defined as crimes committed with the aid of ICT enabled tools and channels.
        In Nigeria, cybercrime is popularly known as *yahoo yahoo*. Adejoh, Alabi, Adisa and Emezie (2019) opine that "yahoo yahoo" refers to the activities which entail the use of computers, phones and the internet to defraud unsuspecting victims, especially those outside the country. According to Lazarus and Okolorie (2019), the term "yahoo yahoo" originated from the fact that the use of Yahoo e-mails and Yahoo instant messenger was a dominant medium of communication between perpetrators and victims. Those who are involved in "yahoo yahoo" are popularly referred to as "yahoo boys"; with the popularity of Gmail services and use, "yahoo boys" are presently being referred to as G-boys.
        In recent times, crime associated with cyber seems to be popular for many Nigerian youths and youths in Igboland are not exempted. Tade and Aliyu (2013) pointed out that the National White Cyber Crime Centre and the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that Nigeria was ranked third in the world with the highest rate of cyber-crime. The advancement in technology, has increased the rate cybercrime especially among youths. In addition, Ojolo (2017) decry the usage (if not over use) of internet has exposed many young people to activities related to cyber-crime (for example, yahoo-yahoo), a modern form of theft.

History of Cybercrime
        Cybercrime came on board with improvement in ICT of which the internet is a major component. Stambaugh, Beaupre, Icove, Baker, Cassaday and Williams (2001) trace that the first highly publicized cybercrimes occurred in November, 1988 in the United States (U.S.) when a

23-year old student, Robert Morris, launched a virus ("Morris Worm") on the internet. Over 6,000 computers of the estimated 60,000 systems linked to the Internet at that time were infected. It cost about $100 million to repair the infected systems; while Morris got a sentence of 3 years' probation and a $10,000 fine.

 In Nigeria, it could be said that the history of cybercrime in Nigeria also known as *yahoo yahoo* seems to be much pronounced in this 21ˢᵗ century; as ICT started in Nigeria in the early 1980s. Adirinka (2013) traced the rise of ICT in Nigeria and stated that:

> "The Nigerian society has witnessed a new wave in computer usage since the time of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Until then, some computers brought into many schools sat unused for dearth of handlers and knowledge in educating the youths; an instance is the colossal failure that was the machines and equipment brought into schools for the teaching of Introductory Technology in the 1980s. (p. 201)."

 For Adirinka, ICT was not so functional in Nigeria until Obasanjo's civilian administration which gave room for ICT to be appropriated by Nigerians including students of higher institutions. Thus, Adirinka (2013) reported that the most commonly accessed in Nigeria are internet and social media with greater patronage from youths.

Forms of Cybercrime

There are many forms of cybercrime, but this study shall examine the few below. Nwaozuru (2020) observes that various sectors of the nation are vulnerable to cybercrime attack but it could be observed that the banking sector is mostly attacked by cybercrime perpetrators. Many Igbo people especially those who have bank accounts are at the risk of being victims of cybercrime. Nwaozuru (2020) further enunciates that some of the internet fraudsters try to steal people's SIM card (which a person used to open bank account or to perform other banking services such as internet banking), Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) Cards and other digital devices used by bank customers in order to hack their bank accounts and withdraw their money without their consent.

Another form is the use of various Ponzi Schemes. As a result of the desire to earn quick money, many Igbo youths fall victims to various online money-making ventures. A good example is the Ponzi Scheme called Mavrodi Mondial Moneybag scheme popularly known as MMM. Many Igbo youths got hooked up in the cyber scam as many of them invested their money into it.

Furthermore, another form of "yahoo yahoo" is contract and love scams. The love scam involves dating vulnerable and gullible women abroad that are mostly wealthy and single to get financial gains and other benefits. These criminals change their IP addresses to areas of the target location, that is someone could be in Nigeria and pose as someone in the United States of America (USA). They also possess international phone numbers that aid their disguise. All information given out to the victim are usually fake including pictures to hide identity, making them hard to trace. The contract scam involves e-mail phishing, identity theft, hacking, defamation, credit card theft and so on.

Causes of Cybercrime Amongst Igbo Youths
Unrestricted Access to Internet

With the launching of the World Wide Web (WWW), the internet is made accessible to as many that could connect to the internet. The sole purpose of the internet is to bring the world together and to make gathering of information very easy and fast. Furthermore, many social media platforms are launched into cyberspace to increase interaction and online social activity

with people from various parts of the world. This has given room to unrestricted access to the internet by users whereby people in their various comfort zones could do so many things online. Meanwhile, people, especially hackers, exploit this freedom to hack into people's online accounts and perpetrate various crimes.

Poverty

Poverty is a primary reason youths involve in cybercrime since it generates fast cash. Dike cited by Salifu (2010) views poverty as inability of an individual or population to meet the basic needs of food, education, housing, health security, liberty, individual right to property and access to employment.

It could be observed that lack of finance and the three basic necessities of life (food, shelter and clothing) are some of the root causes of crime. Nduoma quoted by Ukandu (2011) sees these basic needs of food, shelter and clothing as the propelling force that drive men to ignore the legitimate means of livelihood for unethical, immoral and of course illegitimate ways to satisfy their basic needs. The above viewpoint suggests that what pushes some poor people into committing cybercrime is the monetary gain it yields.

Youth Unemployment

The high rate of unemployment among the youths in Igboland and Nigeria at large has contributed to the high rate of crime of which cybercrime is inclusive. In Nigeria, it could be observed that there are many youths who are qualified and capable to work, yet little or no job is available. Youth unemployment is caused by corruption, ghost workers syndrome, nepotism, lack of meritocracy among others. Many youths who are unemployed see cybercrime business as alternative employment opportunity to become rich in no distant time. Therefore, some unemployed and idle Igbo youths venture into it to eke out a living. 'citation'

Weak Educational System

The quest to be educated has led to the establishment of various schools in Igboland. Many Igbo youths are undergraduates in various tertiary institutions. In recent years, the educational system of Nigeria has fallen below international standard as a result of incessant industrial actions embarked upon by various unions in higher institutions. There is no doubt that incessant strikes in Nigeria have resulted in poor academic performance of students thus, they lack employable skills. Igba, Igba, Nwambam, Nnamani, Egbe and Ogodo (2018) observe that over 5 million Nigerian university undergraduates have no hope of what to do when they graduate from the university. Nigerian undergraduates seem to have developed the spirit of the fear of the future that makes them think of a fast way of breaking through financial bounds when they have graduated.   To this effect, they negatively indulge in sharp practices of cybercrime to be able to meet up with their life expectancies before and after leaving school. Hence, they resort to cybercrime as a means of paving ways for tomorrow.

Parental /Peer Pressure

There is a need to understand that young people are initiated into this crime by their peers. It is worthy to note that some people are easily influenced by their friends. When youths see that their friends are earning large sums of money from cybercrime business, they will be in a hurry to learn from their friends on how to perform cybercrime. This supports social learning theory, which is of the opinion that criminal activities are learnt. Sometimes, parents have pushed their children into crime. Hanafi (2022) states that the Lagos Police Command arrested Afeez Olalere for allegedly killing the younger sibling for money ritual. The suspect reportedly told the police that his mother took him to a herbalist who told him if he wants to be successful in the yahoo

business he will have to sacrifice one life and that person must be a sibling to him. Then, his mother suggested that he should use his younger brother who is 21 years old. Indeed, things have really fallen apart, since parents who should shun their children to refrain from crime; are now the ones encouraging and persuading them to join crime.

Breakdown of Igbo Indigenous Value System

Igbo indigenous value system frowns at idleness, laziness and illegality, especially stealing. Igbo indigenous value system promotes the philosophy of dignity of labour and value hard work. Some Igbo proverbs also buttress the importance of hard work like: *Aka ajaaja, na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu* (he who works, eats), *Aruo n'anwu, erie na ndo* (work first then enjoy later) and many more. This is a pointer to the fact that in older times, stealing or other crime of any sort were unacceptable. But in modern times, crimes such as cybercrime are pronounced, and proceeds of such crimes are warmly received by our social institutions. Criminals are now bestowed with chieftaincy titles. The traditional values of integrity and honor have been replaced by money. With this erosion of values, crimes such as cybercrime is gaining ground in modern Igbo society.

Corruption and Weakness in the Banking and Security Sector

Although the security agencies in the nation are making efforts to combat crime yet it could be observed that corruption is not far-fetched in the security sector. Nwaozuru (2018) decries that the security agents are weakened for instance, Agbakwuru (2020) reports that the then President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari has approved the immediate suspension of Ibrahim Magu as Acting Chairman of the EFCC. This is not unconnected to fraudulent and corruption perpetrated by Magu. He was later replaced by Abdulrasheed Bawa in 2021. Nwaozuru (2020) opines that it is observed that sometimes instead of the security agents to arrest violent crime offenders, they prefer to collect bribe and release them such that it encourages intending offenders to join cybercrime gangs without fear of being prosecuted by the law.

In the banking sector, Nwaozuru (2020) observes that internet fraudsters Popularly known as *Yahoo* boys who steal from the banking sector sometimes are assisted by unscrupulous top ranking bank officials who help to exchange the hard currencies they got from their foreign victims into Naira notes.

Effects of Cybercrime

The impact of cybercrime is not only limited to the victim; it spreads its impact on society. The effects include:

Loss of Revenue

One of the main effects of cybercrime on an economy is the loss of revenue. Various state governments in the East and Nigerian government have spent millions of naira in fighting cybercrime over the years. Also, the government has lost a lot of revenue due to low foreign investment in the nation.

During the era of this Ponzi Scheme called Mavrodi Mondial Moneybag scheme popularly know as MMM. Many Igbo youths including undergraduates invested their money into it with the hope of making much profit, little did they realize that it was a scam. Many Igbo youths lost their money and this affected their business and education.

Damaged Reputation

The reputation of the Igbo nation by extension Nigeria in the comity of nations has been damaged as a result of involvement of Igbo youths into cybercrime and other violent crimes. Odey (2001) notes that everywhere in the world Nigerians are generally feared as dogs, dreaded

like criminals, cautiously approached like snakes and avoided as lepers. The impact of cybercrime already has a detrimental influence on Nigerian citizenry/economy.

Poor Academic Performance and Truancy

Undergraduates are expected to focus on their academic pursuit in order to achieve academic excellence and as well garner skills which could make them employable in the labor market after graduation from the higher institution. Recently, it could be observed that many undergraduates have deviated from pursuing academic excellence to pursuing wealth at all cost. Some of them have chosen to earn money through fast means, which cybercrime is among. It could be observed that some students have dropped out of school to concentrate more on various activities they assume could bring quick money while others have paid less attention to their studies to focus more on cybercrime activity. Many students are having poor academic performance because they concentrate more on various activities, they think that could bring quick money to them; such as cybercrime (*yahoo yahoo*), than their academic pursuit.

Imprisonment

Due to the menace of cybercrime in the society, the government in order to curb this menace has promulgated laws punishable to cybercrime. Internet fraudsters upon arrest by security personnel will be prosecuted by law and sent to prison for years as stipulated by the criminal code of Nigerian Constitution. There are many Igbo youths who have been arrested and imprisoned for cybercrime offences both home and abroad. Notable among them are Obinwanne Okeke also known as Invictus Obi, Chibuzo Kelly Vincent among others.

Measures to Combat Cybercrime Amongst Igbo Youths
Improvement in Security and Communication Sector

The previous administrations have made efforts to fight cybercrime. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a major anti-corruption agency set up by the administration of President Obasanjo's government to fight against cybercrime and other monetary related offences. Since the establishment of this commission, EFCC has made attempts to arrest and prosecute many cybercrime offenders. EFCC has been relentless in its drive to stamp out cybercrimes from Nigeria. Under the leadership of Abdulrasheed Bawa, it has upped the ante. Osaghale (2021) reports that in 2021 alone, the commission has arrested over 1500 internet fraudsters and have so far secured over 900 convictions. Victims of internet fraud have also been restituted through the efforts of the commission.

However, there is a need to equip the security sector with modern crime detection equipment like General Positioning System (GPS), closed camera television, digital communication gadgets, and sophisticated weapons to fight cybercrime perpetrators. The communication sector is to be provided with intrusion detectors, and prevention through firewalls, antivirus, anti-spam and antispyware (Ayo, 2010). This will help to curb the activities of cybercrime amongst youths in Igboland and Nigeria at larges

Church-Government Partnership in Investment in Agricultural Sector

Igbo people are enterprising in nature. They flourished in commerce and agriculture before the oil boom in 20th century. It could be observed that recent years, there has been a decline in investment of agriculture in the region as the government depends mostly on oil revenue. This has created food insecurity and youth unemployment. The present administration has encouraged youths to get deeply involved in agriculture. In order for this to be actualized, the present government has established various agricultural programs such as National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), N-Agro and so on. NALDA (2021) under the

Presidency, are saddled with the mandate of harnessing the full potentials of the vast arable lands in Nigeria, empowering smallholder and large-scale farmers and mechanize, and supporting the drive for food and fiber security. Youths will be trained on modern farming systems and later be empowered to establish their own Agro businesses.

The church is not exempted in this issue. It could be observed that when the Christian missionaries came to Igboland, they found out that the socio-economic life of the indigenous people was in a low state. Thus, they introduced mechanized agriculture. For example the missionaries made Onitsha, Owerri, Aba and so forth   centers for commerce, trade and agriculture. This brought employment and improved the standard of living of Igbo people. Since many youths have no well paid jobs, there is a need for the church to invest adequately in agriculture to provide employment for the teeming youths. It is worthy to note that some churches in various states in Igbo land, have keyed into investment into the agricultural sector to generate employment to the youths. For instance in Anambra State, Nwokolo (2018) confirms that the Anglican Communion Diocese on the Niger (DON) Women's Ministry has acquired about 51 hectares of land for rice and cassava production for commercial purposes.   This will increase youth employment in the area.

Giving Vital Information to Law Enforcement Agencies

For effective policing, there should be a cordial relationship between the law enforcement agencies and the citizenry. This is expressed in a slogan: Police is your friend. Meaning that citizens will join hands with security men to fight crime in the society. Cybercrime is a social problem that affects the entire society. To this end, Igba, Igba, Nwambam, Nnamani, Egbe and Ogodo (2018) state that the public can contribute in reducing cybercrime by reporting any person seen engaging in cybercrime to the law enforcement agent and the law enforcement agent should also help by allowing the law to take control in respect of the person's position in the society.

Enactment and Implementation of Cyber law

Furthermore, the federal government should accede to strategic law that can prevent and reduce cybercrime. Ojolo (2017) points out that the National Assembly (legislature) of Nigeria promulgated the "Anti-terrorism economic and financial crimes and allied matters" law. 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 malaise 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 passports of convicted offenders as well as long jail terms (Olayemi, 2014).   Furthermore, Udelue, Mathias and Ezeh (2020) point to the Cybercrime Act of 2015, which makes the provision that any individual or group of individuals found guilty of hacking or unlawful accessing of a computer system or network, are liable to a fine of up to ten million (N10 million) naira or a term of imprisonment of 5 years (depending on the purpose of the hack). The full implementation of these laws are necessary as they will put fears to youths and also make parents give reasonable advice to their children not to engage in any form of cybercrime.

Need to Revitalize Igbo Indigenous Value System

The African or Igbo indigenous value system is worthwhile as it promotes the development and progress of the society. Igbo values may be taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct in their daily lives. They include; hard work, dignity of labor, virtues of respect, courtesy, decency, propriety, honesty and righteousness. If these values could be revitalized and inculcated into the minds of the youths from a tender age

and they remain disciplined to hold these values through to adulthood, they would be inoculated from crime, especially cybercrime.

To this end, the media should anchor programs that portray these values such as the story about Unoka and Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart. Unoka was a lazy man and died a poor man but his son Okonkwo held on to the dignity of labor, hardworking, diligent and became successful. Such a program could help youths to learn to do the right things avoiding evil.

Conclusion

Materialism has eaten deep into the fabrics of modern Igbo society. It could be said that the present society worships wealth without recourse to its source. This has made youths desire to become rich overnight neglecting the value of hard work and dignity of labour. Hence, many youths have joined cybercrime as a shortcut to wealth. This has negative implications on the victims, perpetrators and the entire society. Therefore, the church, government, media, and relevant agencies should adopt a strategic approach towards curbing such menace in the society.

The study recommends that the Church should partner with the government in providing employment to the youths through adequate investment in agriculture, establishment of vocational and industrial training centers, youth empowerment programs and so on. The media should anchor programs that would sensitize youths on the dangers and implications of cybercrime. Moreover, the government should ensure that people perpetrating cybercrime when arrested should be punished in accordance with the law. All these will in doubt curb the trend of cybercrime in Igboland and the entire Nigerian society.

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