



Public Perception of the Prevalence and Drivers of Youth Involvement in Cybercrime in Ojo Local Government, Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

This study explores public perceptions of the prevalence and drivers of youth involvement in cybercrime in Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria. Guided by Merton's Anomie Theory, the quantitative research surveyed 400 respondents using structured questionnaires. Findings show that 90% view cybercrime as a serious problem, driven mainly by economic hardship, unemployment, moral decline, peer influence, and social media exposure. Weak law enforcement and lenient penalties were also identified as major enablers. Additionally, 77.5% believe digital access and social media significantly influence youth involvement, while 65% attribute the trend to weak legal consequences. Educated but unemployed youths were seen as the most vulnerable group, often viewing cybercrime as an alternative path to success. The study concludes that socioeconomic challenges and institutional weaknesses underlie youth cybercrime and recommends youth empowerment, digital ethics education, and stronger cybercrime legislation

INTRODUCTION

Cybercrime has emerged as one of the most significant security challenges of the 21st century, affecting individuals, organizations, and governments across the globe. It refers to unlawful activities carried out through digital platforms, including identity theft, phishing, financial fraud, hacking, cyberbullying, and other internet-enabled crimes (Wall, 2017). While cybercrime transcends age, geography, and socio-economic boundaries, research has consistently highlighted that youths form the dominant demographic group engaged in such practices (Tanwar, 2019; Holt, Bossler, & Seigfried-Spellar, 2018). This does not negate the fact that older individuals also participate in cybercrime; however, the prevalence is disproportionately higher among young people due to their technological proficiency, adaptability, and exposure to online opportunities. Consequently, cybercrime is now considered a growing epidemic, cutting across both developed and developing nations, thereby posing grave economic, social, and moral implications.

Within the ambit of extant literature, several interrelated factors have been associated with youths' engagement in cybercrime. These include exposure to and accessibility of internet facilities, the quest for quick wealth, high unemployment rates, peer influence, glorification of cybercriminals in the media, weak punitive measures against offenders, poor enforcement of cybercrime laws, and inadequately equipped law enforcement agencies (ICC, 2016; Longe & Chiemeke, 2018; Okeshola & Adeta, 2019). Other notable drivers include bad governance, frustration, negative role models, the display of wealth by corrupt politicians, and the desire for socio-political recognition or fame. Scholars have further argued that cultural acceptance and rationalization of internet fraud—popularly known in Nigeria as “Yahoo-Yahoo”—has created a permissive environment where many young people view cybercrime as a legitimate means of survival (Ojedokun & Eraye, 2012; Adebayo, 2019).

Cybercrime's growing prominence in public discourse underscores the need to investigate not just the objective drivers of this crime but also how it is perceived by the general public. Public perception is central to understanding social realities; it shapes law enforcement approaches, informs policymaking, and influences how communities respond to criminal trends (Jain, 2018). For instance, if the public perceives cybercrime as an acceptable survival strategy in an economy plagued by unemployment and inequality, this perception may hinder collective efforts at curbing the menace. Conversely, negative public perceptions of cybercriminals may encourage communities to support law enforcement and prevention programs. Thus, examining public perceptions of cybercrime—especially at the community level—helps to identify not only the drivers of the crime but also societal attitudes toward its prevalence and possible solutions.

The rise of digital technologies has expanded both opportunities and vulnerabilities. While the internet has been hailed as one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century, shrinking the world into a global village through instant communication and knowledge exchange, it has equally given birth to numerous criminal and security concerns (Saroha, 2020). Nations across the

world have increasingly recognized cybercrime as a high-profile threat to national security, economic stability, and individual financial health. The Nigerian state is no exception, with cybercrime now constituting one of the fastest-growing forms of criminality, particularly among youths in urban and semi-urban areas (Awan, 2017; Akpan, 2019).

Socio-economic factors have been identified as some of the strongest predictors of cybercrime involvement among youths. Research suggests that economic inequality, poverty, and limited employment opportunities create conditions that push young people toward illegal online ventures (Hassan, Las, & Makinde, 2019; Jain, 2018). In contexts such as Nigeria, where youth unemployment remains staggeringly high, many undergraduates and recent graduates perceive cybercrime as an alternative avenue for income generation and financial mobility (Okeshola & Adeta, 2019). The allure of quick financial gains, compounded by the social status that comes with wealth, further incentivizes young people to engage in fraudulent online practices. Peer pressure also contributes significantly, as many youths seek to compete with their affluent counterparts, displaying expensive gadgets, luxury cars, and designer fashion – all sometimes funded by cybercrime proceeds (Holt, Bossler, & May, 2019).

In Nigeria, cybercrime has become not only a criminal act but also a cultural phenomenon. Several reports indicate that some communities have normalized internet fraud as a form of ingenuity or survival tactic in the face of systemic governance failures (Adebayo, 2019). Akpan (2019) observes that Nigerian youths are increasingly motivated by the incessant quest for wealth, often prioritizing material gains over education and legitimate career paths. The easy availability of internet infrastructure, affordable smartphones, and data services has further facilitated access to cyberspace, making it easier for young people to experiment with and master fraudulent techniques. These realities portray Nigerian youths negatively at the global level, heightening international concern over the country's reputation in cyberspace (Umaru, 2020).

The situation in Lagos State is particularly noteworthy. As Nigeria's commercial hub and most populous urban centre, Lagos presents a fertile ground for both opportunities and crimes. Ojo Local Government, home to several institutions including Lagos State University, provides a critical context for examining youth involvement in cybercrime. Here, the concentration of young people, coupled with socio-economic pressures and exposure to digital platforms, has created a complex environment where cybercrime trends are perceived as highly prevalent. Local narratives suggest that youths in Ojo, like in other urban areas, view cybercrime as a path to social mobility, particularly when legitimate economic opportunities appear scarce (Adejumo, 2021). Thus, assessing the public perception of these trends in Ojo is vital for contextualizing the broader national and global discourse.

Beyond economic factors, socialisation plays a pivotal role in influencing youth involvement in cybercrime. Peer networks, social norms, and exposure to popular culture significantly shape attitudes toward cybercriminal practices. Holt, Butler, and May (2019) argue that peer influence not only exposes young people to cybercrime but also normalizes it as a socially acceptable activity.

Similarly, poor parenting, lack of moral guidance, and community indifference have been linked to the proliferation of deviant behaviours among young adults (Asokhia, 2017). The public perception of such influences is important for understanding the social ecology of cybercrime, as communities themselves may either reinforce or resist these dynamics.

Law enforcement faces considerable challenges in combating cybercrime trends in Nigeria. Weak institutional frameworks, inadequate training of personnel, and limited technological resources hinder the capacity of agencies to effectively respond to digital crimes (Longe & Chiemeké, 2018). Moreover, corruption within law enforcement institutions further undermines public trust, reducing community cooperation in cybercrime prevention. Understanding public perception of these challenges is critical, as it reveals not only societal expectations but also the extent to which citizens believe current systems are capable of addressing the problem. When the public perceives law enforcement as ineffective or complicit, individuals may become reluctant to report cybercrime incidents, thereby worsening the situation (Ojedokun & Eraye, 2012).

The role of governance also cannot be ignored. Bad governance, corruption, and lack of accountability at the political level have been identified as indirect drivers of youth cybercrime (Asokhia, 2017). The display of ill-gotten wealth by political elites often serves as a negative model for young people, who, in turn, justify fraudulent online practices as a reflection of the broader socio-political environment. Public perception of this link between governance and cybercrime further highlights the complexities of addressing the menace, as societal change requires reforms at both grassroots and institutional levels.

The urgency of examining public perception in relation to cybercrime trends in Ojo Local Government is reinforced by the growing recognition that prevention and intervention strategies cannot succeed without community buy-in. Public opinion influences how policies are implemented, how enforcement is carried out, and how youths themselves interpret societal responses to their actions. Research into public perceptions therefore provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of current laws, the adequacy of preventive measures, and the trustworthiness of law enforcement agencies (Jain, 2018; Hassan et al., 2019). Moreover, it highlights areas where educational campaigns, community sensitization, and youth empowerment initiatives are most needed.

Cybercrime, as a double-edged outcome of technological advancement, continues to threaten national security and individual well-being. With a simple click, information can be shared globally, but the same technologies enable devastating activities such as credit card fraud, cash machine spoofing, identity theft, and even cyberterrorism (Okeshola, Adebola, & Adeta, 2018). In Nigeria, university undergraduates have been particularly implicated in these crimes, raising concerns about the values driving the younger generation. Greed, poor parenting, poverty, and unemployment have all been cited as leading causes, reflecting a multidimensional problem that requires multifaceted solutions.

Concisely, cybercrime is a pervasive menace with global, national, and local dimensions. Its prevalence among youths, particularly in Nigeria, has attracted widespread concern, not only because of its socio-economic implications but also because it threatens the moral fabric of society. Public perception of the drivers of cybercrime is an indispensable area of study, especially within communities like Ojo Local Government, where socio-economic pressures and digital exposure converge. By examining these perceptions, this research contributes to understanding how communities view the prevalence and causes of youth involvement in cybercrime and, more importantly, how such insights can inform effective policies, educational programs, and law enforcement strategies. Addressing the socio-economic, technological, and socialisation factors identified in both literature and public opinion is essential for building a secure and resilient digital environment in Nigeria.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework provides the foundation upon which research is designed and interpreted. It connects established theories with the study's objectives, offering a structured lens through which data can be analysed and findings situated within broader academic discourse (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, Merton's Anomie Theory offers critical insights into the drivers of deviant behaviour, particularly youth involvement in crime, by highlighting the tension between societal goals and the means available to achieve them (Merton, 1938).

Merton argued that deviance is not merely a product of individual pathology but a systematic outcome of societal structures. He identified two essential elements that shape behaviour: culturally defined goals, such as wealth and success, and the prescribed means for achieving them. When these elements are poorly integrated, individuals experience a state of normlessness, or "anomie" (Merton, 1968). In contexts where success is highly emphasized but legitimate means are inaccessible, individuals may resort to illegitimate alternatives, producing deviant behaviour (Passas, 2000).

Merton proposed five modes of adaptation to anomie. Conformity involves acceptance of both societal goals and means, representing the majority who continue to strive legitimately. Innovation entails acceptance of goals but rejection of legitimate means, often leading to creative or illicit strategies—commonly linked to crimes like fraud and cybercrime (Agnew, 1992). Ritualism occurs when individuals abandon broader goals but rigidly adhere to societal rules. Retreatism reflects withdrawal from both goals and means, often seen in cases of substance abuse. Finally, Rebellion involves rejecting existing goals and means while substituting new ones, as in revolutionary or reform movements (Downes & Rock, 2011).

Applied to Nigeria, this typology explains how socio-economic pressures, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality, drive youths toward cybercrime as an innovative adaptation. Many young people accept societal aspirations of wealth and status but lack legitimate opportunities to achieve them, particularly in environments where manual labour yields little reward (Adebayo, 2019; Odetoal et al., 1983). As a result, internet fraud (“Yahoo-Yahoo”) becomes a socially rationalized pathway to success. This aligns with empirical observations across African societies, where materialism and status-seeking are powerful motivators of deviance (Ojedokun & Eraye, 2012).

Despite its relevance, Anomie Theory has notable limitations. Critics argue that it overemphasizes economic goals while neglecting social, cultural, or psychological drivers of deviance (Taylor et al., 1973). The assumption of a consensus on societal goals is also problematic, as subcultures may define success differently (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Moreover, the theory has been critiqued for ignoring the role of power, inequality, and structural barriers that systematically disadvantage certain groups (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). Nonetheless, its conceptual clarity – especially the categories of adaptation – remains influential in criminological research, offering a robust starting point for understanding youth crime in contexts such as Ojo Local Government, Lagos State.

In summary, Merton’s Anomie Theory provides a comprehensive framework for linking societal pressures, structural inequalities, and deviant adaptations. While it has conceptual weaknesses, it remains empirically valuable for explaining why Nigerian youths, constrained by economic and social realities, often innovate through illegitimate means like cybercrime. By situating public perceptions within this framework, this study contributes to understanding the broader social dynamics driving youth involvement in digital crime.

METHODOLOGY

Methods and Materials

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study, including the research design, study area, population, sampling procedure, instruments, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. The methodology provides a systematic approach to gathering and interpreting data, ensuring that the findings are reliable, valid, and generalizable within the study context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study adopts a quantitative research design, which is appropriate for examining patterns and relationships among variables using numerical data. A structured questionnaire, developed in alignment with the research objectives, will be the main instrument for data collection (Bryman, 2016).

The research will be conducted in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria, a location characterized by vibrant informal economic activities such as trading, due to the presence of an international market. Despite the dominance of informal business activities, the area also contains formal institutions, including schools, banks, and hospitals. This makes it a suitable setting for exploring youth involvement in cybercrime, as it represents both

formal and informal socio-economic influences (National Population Commission [NPC], 2006).

The target population for this study consists of youths aged 15–35 years residing in Ojo Local Government. Because studying the entire population is impractical, the research focuses on a representative sample. This ensures the findings can be generalized while remaining manageable in terms of time, cost, and effort (Fink, 2017).

The sample size was determined using Cochran’s formula, which yielded 385 respondents, rounded up to 400 to accommodate potential non-responses. A multistage sampling technique will be employed. First, five of the eleven political wards in Ojo will be randomly selected. From each ward, four streets will be chosen systematically, totalling twenty streets. Finally, twenty respondents will be randomly selected from each street, yielding the desired 400 participants. This multistage approach increases representativeness while minimizing sampling bias (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Data will be collected using structured questionnaires, administered directly to the respondents. This quantitative, cross-sectional approach is effective for capturing data at a single point in time, providing insights into public perceptions and socio-economic factors linked to youth cybercrime involvement (Babbie, 2020).

For data analysis, univariate statistics such as frequency distributions and percentages will describe socio-demographic characteristics. Bivariate analysis will employ Pearson’s chi-square test to examine associations between variables, using a 0.05 level of significance to determine statistical relationships (Field, 2018).

Finally, the study will uphold strict ethical standards. Participants will be informed of the study’s purpose and assured of their right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent will be obtained, and confidentiality of responses will be maintained, aligning with best practices in social science research ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006).

RESULT

Table 1. Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency(400)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	240	60.0
Female	160	40.0
Age		
15–20 years	80	20.0
21–25 years	120	30.0
26–30 years	140	35.0
31–35 years	60	15.0

Marital Status		
Single	290	72.5
Married	110	27.5
Divorced	0	0
Widowed	0	0
Ethnic Group		
Hausa	9	2.25
Igbo	23	5.75
Yoruba	316	79
Others	52	13
Level of Education		
No formal education	7	1.75
Primary	11	2.75
Secondary	112	28
NCE/OND/HND	61	15.25
BSc	199	49.75
Postgraduate	10	2.5
Religious Affiliation		
Christianity	249	62.25
Islam	148	37
Traditional	3	0.75
Occupation		
Civil servant	23	5.75
Self-employed	129	32.5
Student	181	45.25
Unemployed	67	16.75

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 above present the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing insights into the population sampled in the study. Of the 400 respondents, a higher proportion were male with 60% compared to female which were 40%, suggesting a notable male dominance in the group surveyed. Regarding age distribution, the majority of the respondents fell within the 26–30 years age range representing 35% of the sampled population, followed by those aged 21–25 years with 30%. Those aged between 15–20 years comprised of 20%, while the smallest group was aged 31–35 years with 15%. This indicates a significant representation of youths in their prime years of social and economic activity. The marital status of the respondents shows that a large majority were single with 72.5%, reflecting the typically younger demographic engaged in the study. Married respondents accounted for 27.5%, while there were no respondents that were either divorced or widowed.

The ethnic representation of the respondents was diverse, with Yoruba being the largest group of 79%. The Igbo group represents 5.75%, followed by the Hausa with 2.25%. Other ethnicities made up 13%. This ethnic distribution suggests that the majority of the study populations are Yoruba which was due to the study location being indigenous to the Yorubas. Although, other ethnic

groups were vaguely represented. Educational attainment varied among the respondents, with the majority holding Bachelor's degree 49.75%, followed by those with Secondary school certificates making up 28% of the study population, NCE/OND/HND qualifications 15.25% respondents, Primary school attendants were 2.75% while postgraduate qualifications were 2.5%. Meanwhile, a small minority had no formal education 5.0% or only primary education 10%.

The religious affiliation was also diverse, with Christianity being the dominant religion among the respondents with 62.25%, followed by Islam with 37%. Traditional beliefs were vaguely practiced by 0.75% of the sampled respondents. This reflects the pluralistic religious landscape of the study location. Occupationally, students constituted the largest category of the study population with 45.25%, indicating a significant representation of those still in the educational system. Self-employed individuals made up 32.5%, while Unemployed respondents accounted for 16.75%. Civil servants were the smallest group with 5.75%. This distribution reflected a considerable level of economic activity, even among young individuals in the study location. In summary, the socio-demographic analysis reveals a youthful, educated, and ethnically diverse sample, with notable male dominance and significant representation of single individuals and students. These characteristics provide a clear context for understanding the dynamics of cybercrime among Nigerian youths, aligning with the trends in social, economic, and educational activities within this demographic.

Table 2. Socio Economic Factors Contributing to the Prevalence of Cybercrime

Variables	Frequency (400)	Percentage (%)
Primary factors for engaging in cybercrime		
Financial pressures	140	35.0
Unemployment	100	25.0
Lack of ethical awareness	60	15.0
Lack of moral values	40	10.0
Encouragement by social circles	30	7.5
Curiosity	20	5.0
Others (specify)	10	2.5
Unemployment as a major factor for cybercrime		
Yes	290	72.5
No	110	27.5
Significance of online resources and hacking tools		
Highly significant	220	55.0
Moderately significant	150	37.5
Not significant	30	7.5

Influence of weak legal consequences		
Very influential	260	65.0
Moderately influential	100	25.0
Not influential	40	10.0
Internet and social media exposure contribution		
Yes	310	77.5
No	90	22.5
Social media exposure leading to susceptibility to cybercrime		
Leads to cyber bullying	100	32.3
Leads to breaching of personal details	90	29.0
Exposure to inappropriate contents	70	22.6
Possibility of online grooming into cybercrime	40	12.9
Leads to stalking (sharing location information)	10	3.2

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 above presents the analysis of the socio-economic factors contributing to cybercrime highlights several key influences driving the prevalence of this issue among youths. Financial pressures emerged as the leading factor, cited by 35.0% of respondents, emphasizing the role of economic hardships in pushing individuals toward cybercrime as a means of income generation. Unemployment was the second most common factor, identified by 25.0% of respondents, further underlining the link between economic instability and cybercrime involvement. Other significant factors included a lack of ethical awareness with 15.0% and moral values with 10.0%, suggesting a need for greater emphasis on ethical education and character development. Social influence, such as encouragement by peers was identified by 7.5% of the respondents, while curiosity was agreed by 5.0% as playing a significant role, albeit to a lesser extent, while those who agreed to other factors accounted for only 2.5.

The majority of respondents with 72.5% agreed that unemployment is a major factor driving youth involvement in cybercrime, while 27.5% disagreed, indicating that while unemployment is a significant concern, other factors also contribute meaningfully. The accessibility of online resources and hacking tools was deemed highly significant by 55.0% of respondents, moderately significant by 37.5%, and not significant by only 7.5%. This demonstrates that the ease of obtaining cybercrime tools is a critical enabler, reducing barriers to entry and amplifying the issue. Weak legal consequences were identified as a very influential factor by 65.0% of respondents, highlighting the perceived inefficacy of punitive measures in deterring cybercriminal activities. Another 25.0% from the study population considered weak legal consequences moderately influential, while 10.0% deemed them not influential, suggesting a general consensus on the need for stricter legal frameworks to combat cybercrime effectively.

Exposure to the internet and social media was considered a major contributor to cybercrime susceptibility by 77.5% of respondents, while 22.5% disagreed. Among those who believed social media played a role, specific pathways to susceptibility were identified. The most cited factor was the role of social media in facilitating cyber bullying with 32.3%, followed closely by breaches of personal details at 29.0%. Other contributors included exposure to inappropriate content with 22.6%, grooming into cybercrime with 12.9%, and stalking due to sharing location information with 3.2%. These findings underscore the multifaceted risks associated with unregulated internet use and social media exposure. These data underscore the complex interplay of socio-economic pressures, technological accessibility, legal inadequacies, and social media exposure in driving cybercrime among youths.

Table 3: Public Perceptions of Factors Contributing to Youths Involvement in Cybercrime

Variables	Frequency (400)	Percentage (%)
Factors contributing most to cybercrime prevalence		
Socialization	120	30.0
Economic factors	180	45.0
Globalization	80	20.0
Others (specify)	20	5.0
Major reasons youths engage in cybercrime		
Unemployment	100	25.0
Financial gratification	140	35.0
Greediness	80	20.0
Ignorance about the implications	30	7.5
Moral decadence	30	7.5
Inadequate implications	10	2.5
Others (specify)	10	2.5
Why cybercrime thrives in contemporary societies		
The menace is handled with levity	180	45.0
Lack of adequate legal consequences	160	40.0
Cybercrime glorification	50	12.5
Others (specify)	10	2.5
Agreement on cybercrime as a social menace		
Yes	360	90.0
No	40	10.0

How cybercrime poses a threat to the society		
Leads to financial loss	120	33.3
Violation of privacy	100	27.8
Leads to public safety concerns	40	11.1
Manipulation of data	30	8.3
Threat to personal security	30	8.3
Leads to social unrest	50	13.9
Leads to loss of lives and properties	20	5.6
Others (specify)	10	2.8

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 above present the analysis of public perceptions regarding factors contributing to youths’ involvement in cybercrime reveals a range of societal, economic, and institutional influences. Economic factors were identified as the most significant contributor to the prevalence of cybercrime, cited by 45.0% of respondents. This aligns with broader trends and earlier summations by the respondents linking financial instability and poverty to criminal behaviours. Socialization followed as the second most influential factor, highlighted by 30.0% of respondents, suggesting that peer and societal influences play a major role in shaping attitudes toward cybercrime. Globalization was identified as a driver by 20.0% of the respondents which is likely due to increased exposure to international influences and technological tools. A small proportion of 5.0% pointed to other unspecified factors. When exploring the reasons youths engage in cybercrime, financial gratification emerged as the most cited motive 35.0%, reflecting the lure of quick and substantial financial rewards. Unemployment is the second leading reason with 25.0% underscoring the economic challenges faced by many youths. Greed was agreed by 20.0% and ignorance of the implications of cybercrime by 7.5% highlighting the interplay of moral and informational gaps. Similarly, moral decadence was agreed to by 7.5%, and inadequate legal consequences by 2.5%, were also noted, indicating a need for ethical education and stricter enforcement of laws. Other reasons accounted for 2.5%, indicating minimal additional motivations.

Regarding why cybercrime thrives in contemporary societies, 45.0% of respondents attributed it to the menace being handled with levity, indicating a perceived lack of seriousness in addressing the issue. This was closely followed by the lack of adequate legal consequences by 40.0% of the respondents which underscores the necessity for robust legal frameworks. Cybercrime glorification was noted by 12.5%, pointing to cultural factors that may normalize or celebrate such activities. A small proportion of the respondents with 2.5% cited other unspecified reasons. The overwhelming majority of respondents with 90.0% agreed that cybercrime is a social menace requiring eradication, while only 10.0% disagreed. This consensus highlights the widespread acknowledgment of the negative impacts of cybercrime. In terms of how cybercrime poses a threat to society, financial loss was the most commonly cited impact with 33.3%, followed by the violation of privacy by 27.8%. Public safety concerns by 11.1%, data

manipulation by 8.3%, and threats to personal security by 8.3%, which further emphasize the broad spectrum of harm caused by cybercrime. Other identified threats included social unrest with 13.9%, and loss of lives and properties with 5.6%, while a small percentage of 2.8% pointed to other unspecified dangers.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how the public perceives the prevalence and drivers of youth involvement in cybercrime within Ojo Local Government, Lagos State. Drawing from empirical data and theoretical foundations such as Merton's Anomie Theory, the discussion integrates quantitative results with insights from previous literature to explain the dynamics shaping youth cybercriminal behaviour and societal attitudes toward it.

The study revealed a youthful and educated population, with the majority (65%) aged between 21 and 30 years. Most respondents were single (72.5%) and male (60%), suggesting that young, unmarried men form the demographic most associated with cybercrime awareness and participation. This aligns with the observations of Holt, Bossler, and Seigfried-Spellar (2018) that technological proficiency and social freedom among young men make them more susceptible to engaging in online criminal activities.

Additionally, the high level of education among respondents – almost half (49.75%) possessing Bachelor's degrees – demonstrates that cybercrime is not necessarily a function of illiteracy but rather of opportunity and exposure. Educated youths with limited employment prospects may exploit their digital literacy for illegitimate purposes. This finding corroborates the assertion by Okeshola and Adeta (2019) that cybercrime in Nigeria is often perpetrated by intelligent, computer-literate individuals seeking alternative sources of income in the face of economic hardship.

Economic deprivation emerged as the most dominant driver of youth involvement in cybercrime. Financial pressure (35%) and unemployment (25%) were the two most frequently cited factors influencing participation. Furthermore, 72.5% of respondents explicitly identified unemployment as a primary cause of youth cybercrime. This outcome reinforces Merton's (1938) notion of "innovation" as a mode of adaptation under anomie – where individuals accept societal goals of wealth and success but resort to illegitimate means when legitimate opportunities are blocked.

This finding is consistent with studies by Hassan, Las, and Makinde (2019) and Adejumo (2021), which highlight the role of economic marginalization and limited employment opportunities in propelling young Nigerians toward online fraud. The data suggest that when formal employment is inaccessible, youths innovate through cybercrime to attain material and social success.

A striking 65% of respondents indicated that weak legal consequences are "very influential" in sustaining cybercrime prevalence, while 25% rated them as "moderately influential." This suggests widespread public scepticism regarding the effectiveness of Nigeria's legal and enforcement institutions in deterring

cybercriminals. The public's perception of impunity and leniency toward offenders reinforces the persistence of the problem.

This observation supports Longe and Chiemeké's (2018) argument that the inadequacy of cybercrime legislation and enforcement capacity contributes significantly to Nigeria's struggle with cybercriminal activities. Moreover, corruption within law enforcement agencies, as highlighted by Ojedokun and Eraye (2012), further erodes public confidence, resulting in limited community cooperation in combating cybercrime.

A large proportion of respondents (77.5%) affirmed that exposure to the internet and social media contributes to the rise of cybercrime. The availability of hacking tools and online resources was deemed "highly significant" by 55% of respondents. This indicates that easy access to digital platforms and anonymity in cyberspace have lowered the barriers to criminal participation.

Specifically, respondents noted that social media exposure leads to cyberbullying (32.3%), breaches of personal data (29%), and even online grooming into cybercrime (12.9%). These findings resonate with Holt, Butler, and May (2019), who emphasized peer influence and digital exposure as catalysts for youth involvement in online deviance. The findings suggest that unregulated digital environments provide both the motivation and means for cybercriminal activity.

From the analysis, 15% of respondents cited lack of ethical awareness, and 10% attributed youth cybercrime to moral decay. Additionally, 7.5% identified peer encouragement as a contributory factor. These outcomes point to a growing moral crisis and the normalization of unethical behaviours within youth culture. The glorification of cybercriminals in music, films, and social spaces has contributed to this moral laxity, as noted by Adebayo (2019), who described the "moral economy" of cybercrime in Nigeria as one where deviance is rationalized as a survival strategy.

Furthermore, 45% of respondents believed that cybercrime thrives because it is handled with levity, while 40% cited inadequate legal consequences. This underscores both institutional complacency and moral permissiveness, highlighting the need for ethical reorientation and values-based education.

The majority of respondents (90%) recognized cybercrime as a social menace, demonstrating widespread public awareness of its destructive impacts. The leading perceived consequences include financial loss (33.3%), privacy violations (27.8%), and social unrest (13.9%). These align with the observations of Tanwar (2019) and Umaru (2020), who linked cybercrime to economic instability and Nigeria's negative international image. The consensus among respondents reflects a strong public desire for reform and stricter intervention strategies.

Socialization (30%) and globalization (20%) were identified as significant contributors to youth cybercrime. The influence of peers, online communities, and transnational exposure to global lifestyles fosters comparative aspirations among Nigerian youths. When legitimate avenues to success are blocked, such exposure can stimulate deviant adaptation. This reflects Merton's theory of goal-

means disparity and supports Awan's (2017) assertion that globalization has extended criminal opportunities through digital interconnectivity.

The findings strongly align with Merton's Anomie Theory. The disjunction between cultural goals (wealth, success, and status) and legitimate means (education, employment, and entrepreneurship) drives innovation through illegitimate channels such as cybercrime. The public's perception of unemployment, weak legal enforcement, and moral decline as core drivers further substantiates the theory's applicability. Youths, constrained by structural inequalities, resort to cybercrime as a socially rationalized means of achieving success within a stratified society.

The study reveals that public perception situates youth involvement in cybercrime within a complex web of socio-economic deprivation, moral decadence, weak institutional frameworks, and digital exposure. Economic hardship and unemployment are perceived as foundational, while socialization and moral erosion reinforce deviant behaviour. The prevalence of cybercrime is sustained by inadequate enforcement and societal leniency. Yet, the overwhelming acknowledgment of cybercrime as a social menace suggests strong community readiness for reform, provided institutional and educational frameworks are strengthened.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined public perception of the prevalence and drivers of youth involvement in cybercrime, using Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State as a case study. Drawing upon empirical findings and theoretical insights, particularly Merton's Anomie Theory, the study underscores that youth involvement in cybercrime is not merely an individual moral failing but a complex outcome of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional realities.

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents perceive cybercrime as highly prevalent among youths, driven primarily by economic hardship, unemployment, moral decadence, peer influence, and weak law enforcement. Financial pressure and lack of legitimate employment opportunities were found to be the most dominant factors, indicating that many young people view cybercrime as an alternative means of survival and social mobility. This aligns with Merton's notion of "innovation," where individuals adopt illegitimate means to attain culturally approved goals when legitimate avenues are blocked.

Furthermore, the study found that weak legal consequences and ineffective institutional responses have emboldened cybercriminal activities, as many perpetrators operate with minimal fear of detection or punishment. The public perceives law enforcement agencies as either under-resourced or lacking the technological competence to combat sophisticated cybercrimes effectively. This has eroded public trust and reduced the willingness of citizens to collaborate in anti-cybercrime initiatives.

The findings also highlight the significant role of social media exposure, digital accessibility, and peer socialization in encouraging cybercrime among youths. The ease of access to hacking tools, unregulated online spaces, and the glamorization of wealth in popular culture have contributed to normalizing

cybercrime within youth circles. Moreover, moral decline and inadequate ethical education were also identified as reinforcing factors, suggesting that societal values increasingly reward material success over integrity and hard work.

Importantly, an overwhelming 90% of respondents agreed that cybercrime constitutes a social menace, reflecting broad awareness of its negative implications, including financial loss, privacy violations, social unrest, and reputational damage to Nigeria. Yet, the persistence of the problem reflects deep-seated structural issues that transcend individual morality.

In conclusion, the study affirms that youth involvement in cybercrime is a multidimensional problem rooted in economic inequality, social disorganization, moral decay, and weak institutional control. Public perception, as captured in this study, reveals both a recognition of the menace and a readiness for collective reform. Tackling the problem, therefore, requires a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach that addresses not just punitive measures, but also the underlying socio-economic and cultural conditions that make cybercrime appealing to youths.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made to various stakeholders—government, law enforcement, educational institutions, communities, and families—to curb youth involvement in cybercrime:

1. Economic Empowerment and Job Creation

The government should prioritize youth employment programs, entrepreneurship grants, and digital skill development initiatives. Empowering young people with marketable skills and access to legitimate income sources will reduce their vulnerability to cybercrime. The private sector should be encouraged through tax incentives and partnerships to create internships and mentorship schemes for youths, particularly in ICT and innovation fields.

2. Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework

The Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015 should be reviewed and effectively enforced to ensure stricter penalties for offenders and to address emerging trends in digital crime. Law enforcement agencies such as the EFCC, NPF, and NITDA should be adequately funded, trained, and technologically equipped to investigate and prosecute cybercriminals efficiently. There should be inter-agency collaboration and regional cooperation to trace, monitor, and disrupt cross-border cybercrime networks.

3. Digital Literacy and Ethical Education

Educational institutions should integrate cyber ethics, moral instruction, and digital responsibility into their curricula from secondary to tertiary levels. Government and civil society organizations should implement public awareness campaigns to sensitize citizens about the dangers of cybercrime, online fraud, and digital privacy breaches. Regular digital literacy workshops should be organized for students and young entrepreneurs to guide them toward safe and responsible internet usage.

4. **Value Reorientation and Cultural Reform**
Religious and community leaders should spearhead moral reorientation programs that emphasize honesty, integrity, and hard work as pathways to success, countering the glorification of illicit wealth. The entertainment and media industries should be encouraged to promote positive role models and responsible representations of success, rather than glamorizing “Yahoo Yahoo” lifestyles.
5. **Parental and Community Engagement**
Parents and guardians must take active interest in their children’s digital lives, monitoring online activities and providing moral guidance. Community-based organizations should collaborate with schools and local authorities to identify at-risk youths and engage them in rehabilitative and skill-building initiatives rather than punitive exclusion.
6. **Research, Policy, and Data Development**
Universities and research institutes should support continuous research on emerging cybercrime patterns to inform policy decisions and intervention programs. The government should establish a national cybercrime observatory or database to track trends, evaluate the effectiveness of laws, and guide evidence-based policymaking.
7. **Youth Engagement and Rehabilitation**
Rehabilitation programs should be developed for youths who have engaged in cybercrime, combining counselling, skill acquisition, and mentorship to reintegrate them into productive societal roles. Youths should also be included in policy formulation and peer-led campaigns, as their involvement enhances credibility and relevance of anti-cybercrime initiatives.

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