Cyber-crimes and Youth Empowerment for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

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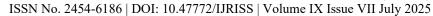**Department of Public Administration, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi**

ABSTRACT

The study which is based on content analysisis an attempt to establish anexus between cybercrimes, youth empowerment and socio-economic development in Nigeria. It explores the underlying factors that contribute to youth involvement in cybercrimes, as well as the impact of cybercrimes on youth empowerment in Nigeria. Cybercrime poses a significant threat to individuals, businesses andgovernmentsthe world overas it hinders meaningful socio-economic development of any country. Cybercrime no doubt, remains a serious challenge to the teeming youth in Nigeria and has become a source of worries to well-meaning Nigerians including the leadership of the country. In order to achieve the objective of this study, secondary data were collected, and data obtained were content-analyzed to establish a nexus between cybercrime and youth empowerment in Nigeria. The study also analyzes the nature and prevalence of cybercrimes among Nigerian youth, the challenges to youth empowerment in the country, and efforts at addressing these challenges. Findings reveal that cybercrimes undermine youth empowerment by limiting their access to education, gainful employment and other opportunities, and that the inability of Nigerian youth to navigate the digital environment safely and responsibly poses grave danger to Nigerians and the Nigerian economy. It was also found that lack of digital training, non-acquisition ofcyber security skills, poverty, unemployment and social inequality, are among the key factors that drive youth involvement in cybercrimes. Based on the finding, the paper recommends among others the need to address the root causes through the empowerment of young people with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the digital landscapethus mitigating the risks of cybercrime and unlocking new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and socio-economic development in Nigeria. The study equally recommends the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to youth empowerment that integrates initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of cybercrimes. It concludes that only a deliberate promotion of digital literacy and cyber security skills among the Nigerian youth can guarantee youth empowerment and socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Cyber-security, Empowerment, Employment, Youth

INTRODUCTION

Cybercrime has become a major concern in Nigeria, as the country is experiencing an upsurge in various forms of cybercrime such as phishing scams, identity theft and hacking electronic devices. According to Omolola (2020),although, Nigeria has different laws in place for the purpose of combating cybercrimes, however, realities on ground have shown the folly embedded in the system as the unending issue of cybercrime has questioned the effectiveness of Nigerian legislative framework on this matter (Omolola 2020).No doubt, the trend has been attributed to the increasing use of technology and the internet in the country, as well as the lack of proper security measures to protect individuals, businesses and government agencies from cyber-attacks. In Nigeria, young people constitute a sizeable proportion of the population, and they are often more tech-savvy and familiar with online platforms than their older counterparts. Moreover, youth are also vulnerable to being involved in cybercrime either as perpetrators or as victims. There are various ways to gain access to information in cyberspace. Attackers can exploit vulnerabilities in software and hardware. They can exploit security vulnerabilities by tricking people into opening infected emails or visiting corrupt websites that infect their computers with malicious software. They can as well take advantage of people who fail to follow basic cyber security practices such as changing their passwords frequently, updating their antivirus protection on a regular basis, and using only protected wireless networks.

At the turn of the 21st century, Nigerian internet penetration levels took a quantum leap. Where the number used to be less than 5% between 2002 and 2003, it stood at over 40% by the end of 2015 with the growth still accelerating. According to National Communications Commission NCC (2021), the advent of mobile telephones on the Nigerian market played a major role and continues to be a key driver in economic advancement of the country. Omolola (2020) stated that on the 23rd of August, 2019, one of the largest cybercrimes in the history of the world was experienced in the United States of America. Unfortunately, the United States authorities revealed that the cybercriminals arrested were mostly Nigerians who were illegally involved in wide-ranging fraud and money laundering operations amounting to the tune of Forty-Six million dollars ($46,000,000) from the internet. Apart from additional implications of this crime on the already battered image of Nigeria, it also brought in its wake, negative consequences on the socio-economic development of Nigeria due to the withdrawal of several companies of their intentions to establish multi-billion Naira projects in Nigeria among other negative effects. This is the extent cybercrime which has assumed a status of notoriety among the Nigerian youth has impacted negatively on the socio-economic development of the country.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, cybercrime poses a significant threat to government, individuals, businesses, youth empowerment and the socio-economic development of the country. It is an obvious fact that young people are often more involved in cybercrimes either as perpetrators or victims. This is partly due to their familiarity with online platforms and partly due to the lack of guidance, education and skills needed to navigate these spaces safely and responsibly which have impacted negatively on the socio-economic development of the country. Engaging the youth gainfully through empowerment and digital skills can create a safer and more equitable digital future for all. Therefore, to promote youth empowerment and socio-economic development in Nigeria, there is need to curb cybercrimes among young Nigerians by creating enabling environment for them to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the digital landscape thus mitigating the risks of cybercrime and unlocking new opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Theoretical framework

The Social Strain Theory (SST), originally developed by Merton (1938) in the United States, serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The core premise of SST is that when individuals face blocked opportunities to achieve socially desirable goals, they may respond in various ways to adapt to their circumstances. Merton identified five potential adaptations to social strain: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Of particular relevance to the issue of cybercrime is the concept of innovation. According to Merton, innovators are individuals who seek to achieve societal goals but resort to unconventional or illegitimate means to do so. In the context of this study, innovation is exemplified by the adoption of cybercrime as a means for Nigerian youths to seek empowerment and wealth. As traditional criminal activities like armed robbery and kidnapping have become riskier due to improved security measures, many young individuals perceive cybercrime as a less risky alternative that can yield significant financial gains within the confines of their private environment.

By applying the SST, this study aims to shed light on the prevalence of cybercrime within the Nigerian context by exploring the social strain experienced by many youths in the country. The theory suggests that the pressure to achieve societal goals, coupled with limited legitimate avenues for success, can drive individuals to engage in innovative criminal behaviour. The choice of SST as the theoretical framework is driven by its potential to explain why cybercrimes, specifically, may be more prevalent among Nigerian youth. It is important to note that the SST does not excuse or justify criminal behaviour but rather seeks to understand the underlying social factors that contribute to it. By examining the social strain experienced by Nigerian youths and their adaptation through cybercrime, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the motivations and dynamics of cybercriminal activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualization of Cybercrime

The word "cybercrime" has been conceptualized in different ways by researchers as each attempt to explain what the term cybercrime is all about. Cybercrime has become a global issue, and Nigeria is not an exception. Odunayo

(2024) opined that Cybercrime occurs not just in Nigeria. It is a global problem. However, it is rampant in Nigeria because of our economic and financial level. To her, cybercrime means the use of the computer devices, the internet to commit crimes which adversely affect individuals as all crimes do. However it is rampant in Nigeria because of our economic and financial levels. To Akanji (2020), cybercrime is all about all forms of crime being carried out with the use of the Internet. Kamini (2011) opined that any criminal activity that uses a computer either as an instrumentality, target or a means for perpetuating further crimes comes within the ambit of cybercrime"

However Idowu (2021) defined cybercrime as illegal activities committed via the Internet and other digital networks, devices, and technologies. It involves using computers, software, and online platforms to conduct illicit activities such as hacking, financial fraud, publishing of disapproved electronic information, breach of confidentiality, data interference, system interference, illegal interception, and identity theft, Hence, cybercrime encompasses a range of offences in which computers play a significant role, including unauthorized access to private or company information, violation of network integrity, infringement of privacy, industrial espionage, and computer software piracy (Idowu, 2021).According to a report by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), as at September 2021, 80 per cent of its 978 convictions were connected to cybercrime and cybercrime related offences (The guardian 2021). This trend has been attributed to various factors, including the increasing use of technology and the internet, inadequate security measures, and a lack of awareness and education among young people.

Cybercrime according to Ibrahim (2020) cited in Ibrahim Saheed, Jaji and Ekpe (2023), cybercrime is mostly associated with electronic banking given the fact that cybercrime is usually committed in the process of opening a deposit account, paying bills online, making transfers and withdrawals online, as well as any other online banking transaction, using the internet as a delivery method for these services. Likewise, Ajibola (2021) was of the view that cybercrime is all about all forms of irregularities being perpetrated in cyberspace to gain an undue advantage over other cyberspace users.

Similarly, Inês and Alexandra (2017) cited by Adeyemi (2021) posited that cybercrime has to do with any form of illegal and illicit computerized mediation aimed at gaining undue advantage over other users of electronic networks. According to Halder and Jaishankar in Okpako (2023), cybercrimes are viewed as the crimes perpetrated towards individuals and mostly a set of people to cause damage or harm. The damages caused include and is not limited to economic, financial, emotional, social crises. It is done through the use of telecommunication networks such as internet and phones. To Omojo and Ochuko (2024), cybercrime may be perpetrated by individuals or groups using technical methods to manipulate the transmission of data to, from, or within a computer network to disrupt the operation of a computer system by the input, transfer, damage, or alteration of computer data. It can significantly impact individuals, businesses, or a nation by causing financial losses, compromising personal and sensitive information, disrupting critical infrastructure, and damaging national security.

In Nigeria, young people are often more tech-savvy and familiar with online platforms than their older counterparts. However, they are also more vulnerable to being involved in cybercrime either as perpetrators or as victims. A study on "Professional Challenges to Counselling Practice in Primary Schools in Anambra state, Nigeria: The Way Forward undertaken by Anagbogu, Nwokolo, Anyamene, Anyachebelu, and Umezulike, (2013) found that a lack of guidance, education, and support to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly contributed to the involvement of young people in cybercrime in Nigeria. The study recommended the need for more comprehensive digital literacy programs and other initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide.

It needs to be emphasized that empowering young people with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly is crucial to mitigating the risks of cybercrimes and unlocking new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and social impact. This can be achieved through initiatives such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, coding boot camps and youth entrepreneurship programs. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics(STEM) education has a unique role to play because of its ability to solve real-world problems in the areas of health, energy and environment (Durik,Hulleman & Harackiewics, 2015, Martín-Páez,Aguilera, Perales-Palacios& Vílchez-

González, 2019). Across the world, a priority for educational systems is to prepare the youth for the workplace in the midst of a dynamic, vibrant and challenging environment characterized by sophisticated technologies, a globalized and competitive economy, and social diversity. Graduates are expected to possess the critical skills required to compete in competitive global labour markets, including academic, technical and soft skills (Breiner,Harkness, Johnson& Koehler, 2012; Deming & Noray, 2020).

Cybercrime in Nigeria: An Overview

The roots of cybercrime culture in Nigeria date as far back as the 1980s. In those early days, Nigerian youth mainly perpetrated cybercrimes through email scams. Cybercrime, known colloquially as the "yahoo yahoo" business, "yahoo boys" use social engineering tactics to convince their victims into sending them money. The fraudsters often use emotional pressure points or promises of high returns. In 2020, Nigeria was the ranked 16th highest in the world for international cybercrimes by the FBI. However, that Nigeria ranked 47th on the Global Cybersecurity Index, shows a vast disparity between the volume of cybercrimes, and the effectiveness of Nigeria's cybersecurity. In recent times, cybercrimes have emerged as a persistent social problem in Nigeria, raising concerns among government officials and the general public. While the internet presents abundant educational, social and economic opportunities due to technological advancements, it also poses significant threats due to the unique characteristics of cybercrime. Nigeria has gained notoriety as one of the leading sources of cybercrime globally, ranking third behind the United States and the United Kingdom (Daily Trust, 2010, cited in Maitanmi, Ogunlere, Ayinde and Adekunle, 2013).The nature of cybercrimes in Nigeria is constantly evolving, with tool cybercrimes taking center stage. Rather than specifically targeting computers, cybercriminals in Nigeria often utilize computers and the internet to defraud and harm others, capitalizing on the lack of technological expertise among Nigerians (Kamini, 2010; Saulawa and Abubakar, 2014). Various forms of cybercrimes prevail in Nigeria, including website cloning, financial fraud (commonly known as Yahoo-Yahoo), identity theft, credit card theft, cyber theft, cyber stalking, fake emails, cyber laundering, and the spread of viruses, worms and Trojans (Ribadu, 2007; Olugbodi, 2010).

Several high-profile cases highlight the impact of cybercrime in Nigeria, such as fraudulent scams targeting foreign investors, creation of fake procurement contracts, impersonation of government officials, and romance scams (Sunday Punch Newspaper, 2006). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has been actively cracking down on cybercriminals, making numerous arrests and seizing significant amounts of illicit funds (EFCC Chairman, Mr. Ibrahim Magu, Punch News, 2019).Furthermore, international cooperation has played a crucial role in apprehending Nigerian cybercriminals, as seen in the case of Ramon Olorunwa Abass, also known as 'Hushpuppi,' who was arrested in Dubai for alleged involvement in a multi-billion-dollar fraud scheme (Guardian Newspaper, 2020).

These incidents according to the then EFCC Chairman, Magu (2019) underscore the growing prevalence of cybercrimes and the need for effective measures to combat this menace. Addressing the menace of cybercrime requires not only law enforcement efforts but also a focus on educating, sensitization and empowering Nigerian youth about the consequences of engaging in cybercrime, both for their personal futures and the country's image and economy.

It is imperative for Nigeria to take a comprehensive and coordinated approach, involving government agencies, educational institutions and stakeholders, to tackle the root causes of cybercrimes and promote youth empowerment in the digital age. Such an approach will help create a safer online environment, enhance digital literacy and cybersecurity skills, and provide economic opportunities for the youth, thus contributing to the overall development and progress of the nation.

Youth and Cybercrime in Nigeria

According to Ogunjobi (2020), youth in Nigeria (within age 18– 45) have seized the opportunity of the tremendous growth in the internet and technology (the innovation in mobile gadget development, the internet of things (IoT), and information technology) to commit internet fraud for financial gain. The increased number of cyberspace users hasincreased the rate of cybercrimes, which is posing a worrisome threat to the National Economy, National Infrastructure, National Security, Governance and Technology around the globe. Overtime

Nigeria youth are part of the numerous users of the cyberspace, whose engagement in cyber fraud has become worrisome. The intentions of engaging in cybercrime are to carry out illegal activities, with the computer as the target or a tool, depending on the context of vulnerability involved. Cybercrime encompasses a wide range of illegal activities conducted using computers and networks, including hacking, identity theft, ransomware attacks and data breaches, posing significant risks to individual and organizations.
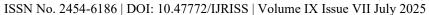
Halder and Jaishankar (2011) define cybercrime as criminal activities aimed at damaging a person's reputation or causing physical or mental harm using modern telecommunication networks like the internet and mobile phones. The term specifically refers to illegal acts conducted online, targeting individuals or groups. Similarly, Kamini (2011) characterizes cybercrime as unlawful actions committed using computers as weapons, encompassing various activities such as internet fraud, counterfeiting, extortion, scams, unsolicited bulk emails, pornography, gambling, intellectual property infringement, defamation, stalking, and more. This definition acknowledges that cybercrime victims can be either computer systems or individuals, depending on the primary focus of the crime.

The youth in every society is of great importance and concern to the society because they are looked upon as the leaders of tomorrow. Olaide and Adewole (2004), observed that a sizeable number of criminals in Nigeria fall within the youthful age. The youth at present have discovered different ways of using the internet in doing different types of criminal activities and these age brackets are usually found in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These internet crimes being committed by youth in Nigeria is currently on the increase as more youth in Nigeria are becoming aware of the various activities that can be done on the internet. Furthermore, Emeh, Abang,Isangadighi, Agba and Ogaboh (2011) noted that youth in Nigeria are faced with so many economic challenges such as poverty, corruption, unemployment e.t.c which further propel them to participate in various internet crimes. According to Sesan (2010) a 2007 internet crime report listed Nigeria third in terms of online crime activity and the prevalence of young Nigerians. Although Mc Connel (2000), argued that cybercrimes differ from most terrestrial crimes in four ways which are They are easy to learn, they require few resources relative to the potential damage caused, they can be committed in a jurisdiction without being physically present and they are often not clearly illegal. As such, internet crime has become one of the major security issues for law enforcement agencies and the world in general.

Ribadu (2007) stated that most internet crimes in Nigeria were committed by youths between the ages of twenty (20) and thirty-five (35) years in Southern part of Nigeria. He further stated that the prominent forms of internet crimes in Nigeria are cloning of website, false representations, internet purchase and other e-commerce kind of fraud. Olugbodi (2010), states that the most prevalent forms of cybercrimes are website cloning, financial fraud, identity theft, credit card theft, cyber theft, cyber harassment, fraudulent electronic mails, cyber laundering and virus/worms/Trojans.

UNESCO (2016) explained that the concept "youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. When carrying out its youth strategy, UNESCO uses different definitions of youth depending on the context. The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines "youth" as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. The Oxford online dictionary (2012) further defines "youth" as the period between childhood and adult age.Young people are particularly vulnerable to cybercrime in Nigeria, with many involved either as perpetrators or victims. Studies have shown that the majority of cybercriminals in Nigeria are under the age of 35, and a significant proportion of them are students or unemployed (Omolola 2020).

One of the reasons for this is the lack of job opportunities and economic opportunities for young people in Nigeria. Many young people turn to cybercrime as a means of making a living, particularly given the potential for significant financial gain. This is particularly true for young people who are well-educated and tech-savvy but have limited job prospects (Salkowitz, (2010).In addition to economic factors, other factors contributing to youth involvement in cybercrime include peer pressure, social status, and a lack of guidance and education on how to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly. Many young people are not aware of the consequences of cybercrime or the importance of cybersecurity.

It is worth noting, however, that not all young people in Nigeria are involved in cybercrime. Many young people are using their digital skills to create innovative solutions to local problems, such as developing mobile apps for healthcare or agriculture. These young people represent a growing cohort of tech-savvy entrepreneurs in Nigeria who are driving innovation and economic growth.

Internet fraud suspects. Photo: NAN

Factors Contributing to Youth Involvement in Cybercrime

A number of factors have been attributed to youth involvement in cybercrime in Nigeria:.

1. **Economic Pressure:** One of the most significant factors is economic pressure, particularly given the high rate of youth unemployment in the country. Cybercrime readily offers a potentially lucrative source of income for young people, particularly those with tech skills. Many young people view cybercrime as a way to make quick money, particularly given the low barriers to entry and the potential for significant financial gain.

2. **Peer pressure** is another factor that contributes to youth involvement in cybercrime. Many young people are introduced to cybercrime through their social networks, with friends or acquaintances encouraging them to get involved in cybercrime activities. In some cases, young people are compelled to engage in cybercrime to fit in with their social circle or to gain status among their peers.

3. **Quick wealth:** The quest for quick wealth is indeed a significant factor contributing to cybercrime in Nigeria. The country faces significant economic disparities, with a large gap between the rich and the average citizen. This wealth disparity creates a strong motivation for individuals to seek quick and substantial financial gains by any means necessary. In the pursuit of wealth, some individuals turn to cybercrime as it offers a potentially lucrative opportunity with relatively low investment requirements. Cybercriminal activities often promise high returns and can be conducted in a comfortable environment, such as from the privacy of one's own home. Unlike traditional businesses that require significant capital investment with attendant various risks. In this wise, cybercrimes can be seen as a way to achieve rapid financial success with minimal risk.The allure of quick wealth, combined with the perception of low risk and the potential anonymity provided by the internet, drive some individuals to engage in cybercriminal activities. However, it is important to note that this quest for wealth through illegal means ultimately undermines societal progress and the overall well-being of individuals and the nation as a whole. To this end, efforts should be made to address the root causes of economic disparity, provide legitimate avenues for wealth creation, and promote ethical and legal means of financial success.

4. **Unemployment:** Cybercrime can be associated with high rate of unemployment, harsh economic conditions, and poor educational system. Unemployment stands out as a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of cybercrime in Nigeria. It is widely acknowledged that a considerable number of graduates in the country, estimated at over 20 million, according to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, are unable to secure meaningful employment. Consequently, this dire situation has led to a sharp rise in their involvement in criminal activities as a means of survival.

5. **Lack of cyber security education and Weak/fragile laws against Cybersecurity:** This is another factor contributing to youth involvement in cybercrime. Many young people are not aware of the risks associated with cybercrime or the importance of cybersecurity measures. As a result, they may engage in risky online behaviours or become victims of cybercrime themselves. Moreover, the lack of cybersecurity education in the formal education system further compounds this issue. Weak/fragile laws regarding cyber criminals exist in Nigeria, unlike in other civilized world where criminals such as armed robbers are treated with maximum penalties. Nigeria is not well equipped with sophisticated hardware to track down the virtual forensic criminals. Laura (2012) states that "African countries have been criticized for dealing inadequately with cybercrime as their law enforcement agencies are inadequately equipped in terms of personnel, intelligence and infrastructure. Worst still, the private sector is also lagging behind in curbing cybercrime". Nigeria is not an exception to this rule. Example is the Ismaila Mustapha, a.k.a Mompha case of alleged N6 billion money laundering case brought against him by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCCwhich is still in court for over long time.

6. **Perception of Corruption in society:** Perception of corruption in society may lead young people to view cybercrime as a way to "beat the system" and gain an advantage. Several factors contribute to youth involvement in cybercrime in Nigeria, including economic pressure, peer pressure, a lack of awareness and education on cybersecurity, and social inequality and corruption. Addressing these factors is critical to reducing youth involvement in cybercrime and promoting responsible digital citizenship.

Digital Literacy and Cybersecurity in Nigeria

It needs to be understood that digital literacy and cybersecurity education are critical components of addressing youth involvement in cybercrime in Nigeria. Digital literacy involves developing the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly. This includes understanding the risks associated with cybercrime and how to protect oneself from online threats. Cybersecurity education is essential for young people in Nigeria, given the increasing prevalence of cybercrime in the country. Such education can help young people understand the risks associated with cybercrime and the importance of cybersecurity measures. In addition, cybersecurity education can help young people develop the right skills and knowledge necessary to pursue careers in the technology industry, promoting economic growth and innovation. The Nigerian government has taken steps to promote digital literacy and cybersecurity education in the country. In 2019, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) launched the Digital Literacy and Skills Programme, aimed at equipping young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the digital economy. The government has also introduced cybersecurity measures, such as the Nigeria Cybercrime Act, which criminalizes cybercrime activities and provides a legal framework for prosecuting cybercriminals.

However, a lot still need to be done to promote digital literacy and cybersecurity education in Nigeria. Many young people in the country still lack access to digital technologies and resources, thus hindering their ability to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly. Moreover, cybersecurity education is not yet integrated into the formal education system in Nigeria, highlighting the need for further government intervention in this area. Digital literacy and cybersecurity education are critical components of addressing youth involvement in cybercrime in Nigeria. The Nigerian government has taken steps to promote digital literacy and cybersecurity education in the country, but there is still much work to be done to ensure that all young people have access to the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly.

Efforts at promoting Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Several youth empowerment initiatives have been launched in Nigeria to address the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime and promote responsible digital citizenship. One such initiative is the Youth Empowerment and ICT Foundation (YEICTF), a non-governmental organization that seeks to empower young people with ICT skills and knowledge. The YEICTF offers training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities to young people, promoting economic growth and innovation.

One other effort at promoting youth empowerment in Nigeria is the Nigerian Youth ICT Foundation (NYICTF), which seeks to promote the development of the ICT industry in Nigeria and empower young people to pursue careers in this field. The NYICTF offers training programs, mentorship opportunities, and access to funding and resources to support the growth of young people in the ICT sector.

In its quest to empower Nigerian youth, the Nigerian government has also launched several initiatives to promote youth empowerment in the country, including the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program. The NYSC program aims to promote national unity and youth development by providing young people with opportunities for community service, leadership development, and personal growth. NYSC was created on 22 May 1973 as an avenue for the reconciliation, reconstruction, and rebuilding of the nation after the civil war. It was established based on decree No. 24 which stated that the scheme was created "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youth of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity".

Furthermore, the Nigerian government has launched several initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and small business development among young people, including the Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) program. The YES program provides young entrepreneurs with access to funding, mentorship, and training opportunities, promoting economic growth and innovation. Several youth empowerment initiatives have been launched in Nigeria to address the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime and promote responsible digital citizenship. These initiatives offer young people access to ICT skills and knowledge, mentorship opportunities, and support for entrepreneurship and small business development, promoting economic growth and innovation in the country.

Constraints to the promotion of Youth Empowerment in Nigeria

Despite the various youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, there are still several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of these programs in addressing youth involvement in cybercrime and promoting responsible digital citizenship.

One of the major challenges is the lack of adequate funding for these initiatives. Many of the youth empowerment programs in Nigeria are heavily dependent on government funding, which can be inconsistent and insufficient. This lack of funding hinders the ability of these programs to reach a wider audience and provide the necessary resources and support for young people.

Another constraint to youth empowerment in Nigeria is the lack of access to digital technologies and resources, particularly in rural areas. Many young people in Nigeria still lack access to digital technologies and resources, hindering their ability to acquire develop the necessary skills and knowledge required to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly. This lack of access also limits their ability to participate in online learning and training programs, which are increasingly important in the digital age.

Moreover, there is an obvious disconnect between the skills and knowledge provided by these programs and the needs of the job market. Many youth empowerment programs in Nigeria focus on providing ICT skills and knowledge without addressing the specific needs of the job market. This can result in a mismatch between the skills possessed by young people and the demands of the job market, hindering their ability to secure gainful employment.

Finally, there is a lack of coordination and collaboration among the various youth empowerment programs in Nigeria. Many of these programs operate independently of each other, leading to duplication of efforts and a

lack of coherence in addressing the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime. This lack of coordination can also lead to a lack of accountability and transparency in the implementation of these programs. There are several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria in addressing the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime and promoting responsible digital citizenship. These challenges include the lack of adequate funding, the lack of access to digital technologies and resources, an obvious disconnect between skills and the needs of the job market, and a lack of coordination and collaboration among the various programs. There is need to address these challenges if youth empowerment must be achieved to remove youth from various cybercrimes in Nigeria.

Dealing with the Nexus between Youth Empowerment and Cybercrime for socio-economic Development in Nigeria

Given the challenges to youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime and promote responsible digital citizenship. A comprehensive approach would involve addressing the various factors that contribute to youth involvement in cybercrime, including socio-economic factors, lack of digital literacy, and limited job opportunities. This approach would require collaboration among various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society organizations, and international organizations for the promotion of socio-economic development.

Moreover, a coordinated approach would involve the development of a national strategy and framework for youth empowerment in the context of cybercrime. This strategy would provide a clear vision and roadmap for addressing the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime, with specific goals, targets, and indicators. This strategy would also ensure the coordination and collaboration of various stakeholders, with clear roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, a comprehensive and coordinated approach would require the provision of adequate funding and resources for youth empowerment initiatives. This would involve the mobilization of resources from various sources, including the government, private sector, and international organizations. It would also involve the development of innovative financing mechanisms, such as impact investment and social impact bonds.
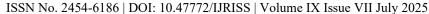
A comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed to address the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime and promote responsible digital citizenship in Nigeria for socio-economic development. This approach would involve addressing the various factors that contribute to youth involvement in cybercrime, developing a national strategy and framework for youth empowerment in the context of cybercrime, and providing adequate funding and resources for youth empowerment initiatives. Such an approach would require collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, with a shared vision and clear roles and responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective of this study, secondary data were collected, and the data content-analyzed to establish a nexus between cybercrime and youth empowerment in Nigeria. The root causes of cybercrime in Nigeria, with a focus on the role of young people in perpetrating or falling victims of cybercrimes were analyzed. A critical evaluation of the impact of cybercrime on youth empowermentas well as the resultant effects on employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy for socio-economic development in Nigeria, was carried out. The existing youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, with a focus on their effectiveness in addressing the issues of cybercrime were equally critically examined. Finally, recommendations were developed to enable policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders to know how to empower young people to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly while mitigating the risks of cybercrime for the promotion of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

FINDINGS

1. Nigeria has experienced a significant increase in cybercrime activities, with youth being the most common perpetrators due to factors such as poverty, lack of job opportunities, and a desire for quick wealth.

2. Digital literacy is a crucial factor in reducing youth involvement in cybercrime. Unfortunately, there is a significant digital skills gap in Nigeria, with a majority of young people lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the digital landscape securely.

3. Although the Nigerian government has implemented various youth empowerment programs, these initiatives have been insufficient in addressing the issue of cybercrime due to inadequate funding, limited coordination, and ineffective implementation.

4. There is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to youth empowerment, involving collaboration among various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society organizations, and international organizations. This approach would require addressing the various factors that contribute to youth involvement in cybercrime, developing a national strategy and framework for youth empowerment in the context of cybercrime, and providing adequate funding and resources for youth empowerment initiatives.

5. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as impact investment and social impact bonds, can be utilized to mobilize resources from various sources and fund youth empowerment initiatives effectively.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the need for empowerment of young people with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the digital landscapethus mitigating the risks of cybercrime and unlocking new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and socio-economic development in Nigeria.It concludes that only a deliberate promotion of digital literacy and cyber security skills among the Nigerian youth can guarantee youth empowerment and socio-economic development in Nigeria.Overall, addressing the issue of youth involvement in cybercrime requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses both preventive measures and proactive interventions. Such an approach would require a shared vision, collaboration, and coordination among various stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of youth empowerment initiatives and promote responsible digital citizenship in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need to strengthen digital literacy programs. Digital literacy programs should be designed and implemented to equip Nigerian youth with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the digital landscape safely and securely. These programs should be tailored to different age groups and should emphasize responsible digital citizenship.

2. Attention should be focused on Increase funding for youth empowerment initiatives. Adequate funding should be provided for youth empowerment initiatives to ensure their effectiveness. The Nigerian government should increase its budget allocation for youth empowerment programs, and private sector and international organizations should be encouraged to invest in initiatives that promote youth empowerment.

3. There is need to foster collaboration and coordination among stakeholders. Collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society organizations, and international organizations, is critical to the success of youth empowerment initiatives. A national strategy and framework for youth empowerment in the context of cybercrime should be developed to guide these efforts and ensure that resources are mobilized effectively.

4. Leveraging innovative financing mechanisms remains an important key in promoting youth empowerment. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as impact investment and social impact bonds, can be utilized to mobilize resources from various sources and fund youth empowerment initiatives effectively.

5. In order to address the issue of unemployment, the Nigerian government should prioritize job creation and invest in sectors that have high potential for job creation, such as the technology industry.

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