



# Information Technology and the Escalation of Cyber Crime in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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## Abstract

The crux of this study critically discussed the role of Information Technology in the escalation of cybercrime in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study adopted Social Disorganization Theory propounded by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in 1942. Data for analysis were derived from secondary sources. The study discovered that the Information Technology constitute the main source of escalation of cybercrime in Niger Delta region. Some of the identified causes of computer crime are unemployment, quest for wealth etc. It is therefore recommended amongst others that Internet laws should be enforced by the Federal government of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Information Technology, Escalation, Cybercrime, Niger Delta region.

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## INTRODUCTION

The importance of information and communication technology cannot be overemphasize in the present generation as virtually all field of human existence apply information technology in solving problems. According to Gabriel, Fagbenle and Jaja (1998), the struggle by man to survive in his environment necessitated the development of body of knowledge that is scientific

in nature. They further quoted Anya (1977) who defines science as the *cognition of necessity*. From the above definition, it can be deduced that there must be a felt need; that the need must be appreciated in its totality and well understood and that human ingenuity and hard work must be involved as well as dividend being accrued from the venture.

The natural science gave birth to the computer science that laid the foundation for information and communication technology. In the view of Kabari (2003), the computer science is relatively a new subject but its importance is being felt all over the world basically in the field of education, business, and industry. In developed countries, information and communication technology has been a fruitful venture in building the military, business, and governance etc. Considering the speed in improvement of information system, it is easy to foresee that in the nearest future, Nigeria and other less developed countries will be gradually transformed into computer-oriented societies.

Furthermore, since the early 1990s, 'globalization' has become a particular way to analyze the changes in world political economy (Akani, 2007). According to Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012), advances in technology and modern communications are said to have unleashed new contacts and intercourse among peoples, social movements, transnational corporations, and governments. The level of the impacts is yet to be fully ascertained especially on the third world economies. In defining the concept of globalization, Addo (2003) cited Nye (2003) as he defined globalization as a worldwide networks of interdependence. Interdependence here simply means a situation where actions of others having impact on another. Or we can simply put that interdependence is mutual dependence among nations, industries and organizations. In globalizing the world through the information technology, several things happen on the internet. The impacts are sometimes positive and other times negative.

Achuonye (2004) sees the internet which can also be referred to as the cyberspace as a form of configuration that enables two or more computer devices to communicate with one another. This connection through the cyberspace is carried out with the use of both hardware and software which is designed to enable information passed in between two or more autonomous computers. According to her, the information networks had contributed immensely to the development of education in sub-sahara Africa in the aspect of education and technology transfer. But Addo (2003) argues that the impact has been to the disadvantaged of the third world countries as it has been evidently noticed in the spate of cybercrime. Fagbenle et al. (1998) also notes that several social issues that are inimical to African growth are done on the internet such as sharing of pornographic materials, hate mails, bank frauds, credit card fraud amongst others.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Information Technology**

According to Wikipedia (2017), information technology is the application of computers to store, retrieve, transmit and manipulate data or information often in the context of a business or other enterprise. The term is often used for computer networks but it comprises all information gadgets such as telephone, radio, television etc. Information Technology is distinguished into four distinct phases of development: pre-mechanical (3000 BC – 1450 AD), mechanical (1450–1840), (1840–

1940), and electronic (1940–present). This article focuses on the most recent period (electronic), which began in about 1940 (Wikipedia, 2017).

## **Cybercrime**

According to Wikipedia (2017), cybercrime can be defined as offences that are committed against individuals with a criminal motive to intentionally harm the reputation of the victim or cause physical or mental harm, or loss to the victim directly or indirectly, using modern telecommunication networks such as the internet. In the view of Pereware and Digitemie-Batubo (2016), cybercrime refers to unlawful practices carried out using computers, electronic and ancillary devices. They further explain that there are several types of cybercrime perpetrated in the Niger Delta region. Some of the types are Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Fraud, Online Identity Theft, Copy Right Theft, Hacking, Terrorism and Organized Crime, Copycat Website and Scam Mails.

It must be noted here that cybercrime is a global phenomenon. While the advance economies are putting modalities on ground to check the spate of cybercrime in their cyberspace, the case with Nigeria and Niger Delta in particular is currently in a sorry state as the cyberspace is open to almost all fraudulent attempts. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the influence of information technology on the spate of cybercrime in the Niger Delta.

## **Niger Delta Region**

Niger Delta is located in the delta of Niger River with six states of south-south region (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers), one state of south-west (Ondo) and two states of south-east (Abia and Imo) geopolitical zones. Of all the states that are in the Niger Delta, only Cross-River that is not oil producing state (Wikipedia, 2017). Niger Delta is a densely populated region, sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of Palm Oil. The area was the British Protectorate from 1885 until 1893 when it was expanded and became the Delta People's Republic. The delta is an oil-rich region, and has been the center of international controversy over pollution (notably by the Abacha regime), and the region has been known for high crime rate ranging from pipeline vandalisation, kidnapping, and theft to cybercrime etc.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The theoretical framework adopted to guide discussion in this paper is the Social Disorganization Theory. Social disorganisation theory came out of study conducted by sociologists at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s. Its key proponents were Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in 1942, who used spatial method to examine the residential locations of juveniles referred to court. Shaw and McKay found that patterns of misbehaviour were much in areas characterised by poor housing, poor health, socio-economic disadvantage and migrant populations. This led them to suggest that crime was a function of neighbourhood, unstable and unacceptable conditions and not due to individual actors and their actions.

Shaw and McKay explained these patterns by reference to the problems that accompanied immigration to Chicago at that time. They claimed that areas settled by newly arrived immigrants experienced a breakdown of social norms due to ethnic diversity and competing cultural traditions. Conventional institutions of social control were therefore weakened and unable to regulate the behaviour of local youths.

From the above theoretical strand, one could deduce that the sources and causes of cybercrime in the Niger Delta is as a result of low quality of life of the indigenous Niger Delta people. Cybercrime can be associated with high rate of unemployment, harsh economic conditions, and poor educational system in the Niger Delta region (Hassan, Lass & Makinde, 2012).

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ESCALATION OF CYBERCRIME**

A lot of people in the world mostly Nigerians are limited in knowledge of the crime occurring on the internet, known as cybercrime. Cybercrime happens in the world of computer and the internet. This kind of crime is said to have severe impact on our economy, lives and the society generally because our society is fast becoming an information oriented society embedded with information system (Hassan, Lass & Makinde, 2012).

According to Maitanmi, Ogunlere, Ayinde and Adekunle (2013), cybercrime began with disgruntled employees causing physical damage to the computers they worked with, with the single aim of explaining their grievances to their superiors. This attack by the workers on the computers were carried out on super computers (Addo, 2012). As at the time, the attack was known as “computer crime” or “computer related crime”. Since the invention of the internet, the nomenclature was changed to “cybercrime” because the crime is now perpetrated with the help of the internet network and computer (Maitanmi et al., 2013).

The major source of cybercrime in the Niger Delta is traceable to the advent of Information Technology which serves as platform for the perpetration of the crime. The causes according to Hassan, Lass and Makinde (2012) are unemployment, quest for wealth, weak implementations of cyberspace laws, and negative role models amongst others. The level of unemployment bedeviling the Niger Delta region could warrant youths to venture into cybercrimes.

## **TYPES OF CYBERCRIME**

Cybercrime simply put are crimes that are committed using the computers and networks. According to Hassan et al (2012), there are various types of cybercrime ranging from cyber terrorism, fraud identity theft, drug trafficking deals, malware, cyber stalking, spam, logic bombs to password sniffing. I will go further to explain the different types in detail.

### **Cyber Terrorism**

A cyber terrorists can be seen as one who launches attack on government or organization in order to distort and or access stored information on the computer and their networks. In the view of

Wikipedia, a cyber-terrorist is someone who bully a government to steal money or to advance his or her political or social objectives by launching computer-based attack against computer network and the information stored on them. This means an act geared towards instilling fears by accessing vital information in organization or government using computer and internet is generally known as cyber terrorism.

### **Fraud-Identity Theft**

Fraud is a form of criminal activity in which someone pretends to be someone and retrieve vital information about someone. For instance, when someone make false bank webpage to access vital information on someone's bank account. They access people's personal bank account and obtain information that gives them the leverage to transfer or withdraw money from another account with the use of Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards. This crime is sometimes address as "ATM Fraud" because of its nature and the used of ATM machines. In Nigeria and Niger Delta in particular, people design fake web links with the sole aim of defrauding people on line. They build in online forms that people are requested to fill in vital information relating to bank account which they use to make withdrawals from their victims account.

### **Drug Trafficking Deals**

Another type of Cyber Crime is Drug Trafficking. It is a world trade which involves cultivation, manufacturing, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition law. Drug traffickers are taking advantage of the Internet to sell their illegal substances through encrypted e-mail and other Internet Technology. Some drug traffickers organized deals at internet cafes, use courier Web sites to track illegal packages of pills, and swap recipes for amphetamines in restricted-access chat rooms. The rise in Internet drug trades could also be attributed to the lack of face-to-face communication. These virtual exchanges allow more intimidated individuals to make comfortably purchase of illegal drugs (Hassan, Lass & Makinde, 2012).

### **Cyber Stalking**

According to Wikipedia.com, cyber stalking is essentially using the Internet to repeatedly harass another person. This harassment could be sexual in nature, or it could have other motives including anger or economic. People leave a lot of information about themselves online. Such information can make one vulnerable to cyber stalking, a term that essentially refers to using the Internet to stalk or to illegally follow and watch somebody (Justin, 2010). While the content may be provoking in a non-specific way, harassment, direct obscenities and derogatory comments at specific individuals for example on gender, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation. This often occurs in chat rooms, through newsgroups, and by sending hate e-mail to interested parties. In the view of Hassan, Lass and Makinde (2012), this situation cause the victim to commit suicide or harm oneself.

## **EFFECTS OF CYBER CRIME**

According to Hassan, Lass and Makinde (2012), some of the effects of computer crimes are: it reduces the competitiveness of organizations, constitute waste of time, slow productions, defamation of image amongst others. The explanations are as follows:

### **Reduces the Competitive Edge of Organizations**

Computer crimes over the years have cost a lot of havoc to individuals, private and public business organization within and outside Niger Delta, causing a lot of financial and physical damage. Due to computer crime, there has being loss of billions of naira annually, such crimes may threaten a nation's security and financial health, a company can suffer losses due to cybercrime when a hacker steals confidential information and future plans of the company. And he simply sells the information to a company competing with the former. This will automatically reduce the competitive strength of the company.

### **Time Wastage**

Wastage of time is another problem because many Information Technology personnel may spend a lot of time on handling, rectifying harmful incidents which may be caused by computer criminals. The time spent should have provided profit to the company. One peculiar problem is that, when a hacker enter in an organization and steals confidential information from the company the people who entrust the company loses their confidence in the company as the company may contains confidential information like credit cards of customers and as the information is stolen the customer will not trust the company again and will move to someone else who could protect their confidential information.

### **Slows Production Time and Add to Over Head Cost**

Computer crime reduces the productivity of a company, as a company will take measure to reduce cybercrime, by entering more password or other acts this will take time to do and therefore will affect productivity. Computer crime will increase cost as to stop viruses and malware, companies must buy strong security software to reduce the chances of attacks from such attackers or criminals.

### **Defamation of Image**

With high level of cybercrime in the nation, the slogan "Good People Great Nation" by Nigerians will be tarnished and the global community will view the other side of the coin. Other effects includes the consumption of computer and network resources, and the cost in human time and attention of dismissing unwanted messages.

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper aimed at finding the influence of Information Technology on the escalation of cybercrime in the Niger Delta region. So far, the study has been able to establish that Information

Technology which is the application of networks remain the primary source of cybercrime in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Some of the notable causes are urbanization, unemployment, quest for wealth amongst others. Some of the identified cybercrime are cyber terrorism, fraud identity theft, drug trafficking deals, cyber stalking etc. No doubt, these crimes been perpetrated by the use of internet has reduced competition among companies, defamation of country's image amongst others. In view of the above, it is therefore recommended as follows:

1. That laws on cybercrime should be strengthen by the Federal government of Nigeria. Apart from ensuring full implementation of the internet laws, constant review of the laws should be carried out by the National Assembly to tackle recent challenges of cyber terrorism currently bedeviling the north east part of the country.
2. The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should put adequate plans on ground to engage the young people who find cybercrime as a lucrative business. If their wealth of knowledge is properly diverted to meaningful venture that will boast the country's economy.
3. The Nigeria Police should be equipped with modern gadgets that will enable them have interface with police in other countries of the world. This will enable them ventilate the internet in search of culprits.
4. Banks in Nigeria should ensure that security details of their customers are not expose to individuals that could take advantage of it.

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