



MORAL VALUE, PEER INFLUENCE AND TENDENCIES TO CYBERCRIME INVOLVEMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE

AJAKE, UCHENNA EGODI, KALU, GOODNESS UKA AND UGWU, SAMSON CHIDUBEM

Email: ucheajake@gmail.com, kalugoodya15@gmail.com, samsonchidubemugwu@yahoo.com

(Received 11, March 2024; Revision Accepted 8, April 2024)

ABSTRACT

The study investigated moral value, peer influence and tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities, Cross River State, Nigeria. The research questions formulated to guide this study were two and two hypotheses were also formulated. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 400 level students in the two conventional public universities in Cross River State which include University of Calabar and University of Cross River State with the total of 7020 students in 2021/2022 academic session. A sample of 400 undergraduates were randomly selected for the study through stratified sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a well-structured questionnaire titled; "Moral Value, Peer Influence and Tendencies to Cybercrime Involvement Questionnaire" (MVPITCIQ). Simple Linear Regression was the statistical technique employed to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings revealed that, moral value, peer influence significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State. Based on the conclusion drawn, it was recommended that parents, teachers and significant others should inculcate positive morals to students. Also, moral values education should be taught in our Universities so as to curb the problems of cybercrimes. This means that moral value and peer influence can predict students' propensities to minimise indulgence in cybercrime.

(Word Counts:227)

Ajake, Uchenna Egodi, Institute of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Kalu, Goodness Uka, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Ugwu, Samson Chidubem, Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing involvement of Nigerian undergraduates in cybercriminal activities presents a significant challenge. Cybercrimes, including phishing, online scams, identity theft, and internet fraud, not only jeopardize the security of individuals and organizations but also undermine the ethical fabric of society. Presently, Nigeria has experienced a surge in digital connectivity and internet access, transforming various aspects of life, including education, business, and social interaction. While this digital revolution offers immense opportunities for progress and development, it has also brought about new challenges, notably the proliferation of cybercrimes. Among the most alarming trends is the increasing involvement of undergraduate students in cybercriminal activities.

Practically every area of life has been impacted by the use of information and communication technology (ICT) applications, including e-commerce, e-governance, finance, agriculture, education, medical, military, and transportation (ICT). By accelerating present procedures and introducing fresh, adaptable ways to carry out diverse tasks, technology advancement and Internet promotion have been boosted to attain higher efficiency in both the corporate and governmental sectors (Ololade, Salawu & Adekanmi 2020).). However, this development has drawn a number of vices, including cybercrime, money laundering, cyberbullying, and pornography. The nature, scope, severity, and extent of cyber fraud in Nigeria are rapidly changing due to technological improvement in general (Adesina, 2017). The desire to select a simple method to earn large sums of money quickly has led to cyber fraud among young

people, especially university students, according to the existing research (Andeme, Fosso, & Kala 2018; Tade & Aliyu, 2011).

Cybercrimes encompass a wide range of illicit activities conducted online, such as phishing, online scams, identity theft, hacking, and internet fraud. According to Onyido (2018) cybercrimes include phishing, computer originated virus (virus, worms, Trojans, etc.), malware (malicious software), hacking, spam, botnets, cyber bullying, child pornography, software piracy, ransom-ware, cloning of websites, false representations, internet purchase (including other e-commerce kinds of fraud), credit card theft, cyber theft, cyber harassment, fraudulent electronic mails and cyber laundering. Shinder (2002), define cybercrime as any criminal offenses committed using the internet or another computer network as a component of the crime. Cybercrimes are offences that are committed against individual or group of individuals with a criminal motive to internationally harm the reputation of the victim or cause physical or mental harm to the victim directly or indirectly using modern telecommunication networks such as internet and mobile phones. Such crimes may threaten nation's security and financial health (Akogwu, 2012).

These activities not only have severe legal consequences but also pose significant ethical and societal dilemmas. Students' quest for wealth and material possessions is becoming alarming. The inordinate desire for quick success and material possession inevitably results in compromise, covetousness and corruption. People want to make it at all costs and the result is the rise in crime rate such as armed robbery, ritual killings, kidnappings, advance fee fraud (popularly known as yahoo yahoo), peddling hard

drugs and even cultism which is prevalent today in the Universities and the society at large. Wealth and affluence are today the yardstick for measuring one's acceptance by the society unlike the days of old when Nigerians had respect for wisdom and hard work. Egong (2021) quoting Denga (n.d) observed that even God is interested in hard work. But the people are no longer interested in hard work and so they cut corners in order to become successful thereby indulging in cybercrime. More so, the unbridled desire for quick success has led many to untimely death and the students are warned to be contented with what they have as wealth and success are built over time (Eze, 2015).

However, cyber-crime in Nigeria presently has metamorphosed into what is called "yahoo-yahoo". This nomenclature is prominent among Nigerian youths and involves defrauding people to the tune of millions of dollars annually. For example, they execute this crime by way of using fake identities on dating websites such as elite' singles, match.com, claiming they are United States Army and intelligent officers on peacemaking mission to Afghanistan and other countries where war seems to be prevalent. They also disguise themselves by pretending to have goods to sell or an on-going project to be executed (Okeshola and Adeta, 2013); hence they request for financial aid from foreigners and get them cheated of their hard-earned money. Since it is a bit difficult to convince the foreigners this day, some even went as far as indulging in what is now call yahoo plus which involves rituals like killing, harvesting human organs for sacrifice in order to gain more spiritual influence on the victims.

The consequence of cybercrime activities on Nigeria's educational system is undergraduates

dropping out of schools, getting arrested, leading to poor academic performance and defamation of its national image and prestige. If not controlled, cybercrime is completely impotent and will bring poor integrity to the educational sector. Other nations now consider Nigeria as a country where cybercrime thrive and its residents are treated with contempt. Furthermore, the continued prevalence of cybercrime would intensify the level of criminality and corruption in the country and there's a possibility of the present generation projecting a bleak future for the coming generation, making cybercrime to be a norm and excusable, so long as the perpetrator are searching for a means of survival.

Federal Government in an attempt to curb this menace took significant steps to combat cybercrimes by enacting the Cybercrimes (Prohibition and Prevention) Act, 2015. This legislation serves as a comprehensive legal, regulatory, and institutional framework in Nigeria to prohibit, prevent, detect, prosecute, and punish cybercrime. It also emphasizes cybersecurity, the protection of computer systems and networks, electronic communications, data, computer programs, intellectual property, privacy rights, and critical national information infrastructure. Despite the attempts to address this issue, cybercrime especially yahoo-yahoo has eroded fortunes and tarnished Nigeria's image internationally.

Here, the researcher seek to find out if moral values and peer influence can be the reason for this persistence increase in cybercrime among undergraduate students. Moral value plays a significant role in shaping ethical orientation. Students with strong moral values, such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others, may be less likely to engage in cybercrimes due to their

commitment to ethical behaviour. In some cases, individuals may employ moral justifications or rationalizations to justify their cybercriminal actions. They may perceive themselves as victims of economic inequality or view their actions as a form of social justice. Peer influence may also exert significant pressure on undergraduates to conform to certain behaviors, including cybercrime. Students may feel compelled to engage in cybercrimes to gain acceptance or approval from their peers, especially if cybercrimes are normalized within their social circles. The internet provides a platform for like-minded individuals to form online communities centered around cybercrimes. Peer influence within these communities can be particularly strong, as members may share techniques, experiences, and even financial gains from cybercrimes.

The emergence of Nigerian undergraduates as active participants in cybercrimes raises pressing questions about the factors that contribute to their engagement in such activities. The nexus between moral values, peer influence, and cybercrime involvement remains insufficiently explored, leaving critical knowledge gaps that hinder effective prevention and intervention efforts, hence the rationale of this study.

Amini-Philips (2018) discovered that students are involved in cybercrime in a variety of areas, including online drug trafficking, cyber stalking, email hacking, hacking of organizational accounts, identity theft, encrypting files with public-key, sending online spam, floating illegal business proposals, cybercrime with direct contact via phone, the use of remote administrative tools, and online child sexual abuse material. According to Ngozi (2016), the quest for quick success has led

to Nigerian teenagers becoming extensively involved in cybercrime. The author also discovered that the majority of these children, like their classmates, are deeply involved in cybercrime. Even though Denga (2011), in his own study, strongly disagreed with Ngozi's findings, stating that undergraduates are completely occupied with academic and vocational activities that can lead to cyber theft. Ben (2017) claimed in his study that up to 90% of undergraduate students are heavily involved in cybercrime and its activities. Adanma (2017) strongly disagreed with Ben, concluding that the level of undergraduate student involvement in cybercrime is still unknown. Odo and Odo (2015) evaluated the extent to which students in higher institutions in Nigeria's Enugu state were involved in cybercrime activities. Their findings revealed that students in Enugu state's higher education institutions are involved in cybercrime.

Rapid improvements in digital technology, combined with an increase in societal complications, underscore the significance of values and beliefs, particularly as they pertain to youths behaviour in modern times. Value and belief are based on an educative function in which individuals or groups create shared feelings about their personal daily lives and activities. While some young people associate with values such as finding purpose and meaning in life, making a lot of money, co-habiting, citizenship and civic participation, material wealth, health and education, others associate with crime and criminal behaviour (Campanelle, Mehlich, Leitner, Rossi, and Bringman, 2011).

Moral judgment entails the value we passed on a person, a thing or an act. Every society has moral values they live by which basically influenced their

moral judgment (Osawaru, 2020). The values and quality of our lives in the society is a product of the decisions we have made so far in our daily lives. Today, the society is facing different crime and this situation contributes to the moral degradation daily. Moral values and virtues have been relegated to the background and as a result it has affected the stability and development of any society in diverse ways. Our moral judgment has immense bearing and the quality of life we have has moral beings in the society. Our values, from which we make moral judgment, are the universal concept or one of the components to guide people's behavior are used to develop norms that are socially enforced. No society makes significant progress without first developing the human mind. Until we are morally grounded the individual and society will continue to crumble and degenerate. The individual and the socio economic dimension will continue to decline (Osawaru, 2020).

Guseinov (2014) maintained that there is a connection between moral principles and success. He further asserted that moral development focuses on the emergence, change and understanding of morality from infancy through adulthood. Morality develops across a lifetime and is influenced by an individual's experiences and their behaviour when faced with moral issues through different periods. In short, morality concerns an individual's growing sense of what is right and wrong; it is for this reason that young children have different moral judgment and character than that of a grown adult. Morality in itself is often a synonym for "rightness" or "goodness".

Abraham (2018) examined moral value education and quick financial success among students in Kano State of Nigeria. The study sample

consisted of 800 students. Three research questions were formulated which were converted to three hypotheses. Correlation research design was used. The questionnaire was used to elicit information from the subject for the study. The reliability estimate was done through Cronbach coefficient alpha which gave the reliability indices ranges from 0.70 to 0.76. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the three hypotheses generated in the study. Among other findings moral values education significantly relates to quick financial success of students.

Young internet users may be influenced by their peers. Hackers are said to often form social communities with online friends and in quest for acceptance/recognition with these individuals may demonstrate their ability to hack accounts (Marcum, 2014). Arguably, adolescents feel at home within their circle of friends. Because theirs is a world of adventures, they often want to take 'a flight of fancy' and their peers provide an enabling environment for this to happen. Thus, some young people may commit cybercrime damning the consequences just to impress their delinquent peers.

The phrases "my friend has this; I want to get it as well", "My friend is doing this; I want to do it as well", "My friend has achieved this, I want to do it as well" represent a desire "to want to belong" often expressed among youths; this resonates with Tade and Aliyu (2011) research who stress that commanding respects from their peers, attracting the opposite sex and extravagant lifestyle seem to be the major goals for many Yahoo boys. Looking at the age bracket, this behavior is perhaps not surprising when other aspects of their lives and the society around them

are considering (Doppelmayer, 2013). The author further posited that even if a young person is not already in a group of yahoo-yahoo boys, the youths' culture around him could be of influence. The objectives of this study were to investigate moral value, peer influence and tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in public Universities in Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine whether moral value predicts tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduate students in public Universities in cross River State.
2. Ascertain whether peer influence predicts tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduates in cross River State.

Research questions

- How does moral value predict tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduate students in public Universities in cross River State?
- How does peer influence predict tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduate students in public Universities in cross River State?

Statement of hypotheses

- Moral value does not significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State.
- Peer influence does not significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State.

Significance of the study

This study holds great significance to Cybersecurity Professionals and Law Enforcement Agencies, Students, University

Administrators and Educators, parents and society at large. Cybersecurity Professionals and Law Enforcement Agencies will understand the risk factors and behavioral patterns related to cybercrime. Also, in policy making, this knowledge will enhance cybersecurity policies and enforcement strategies.

Awareness of moral values and their impact on moral value tendencies empowers students to make informed choices. Understanding peer influence helps them navigate social pressures and avoid engaging in cybercriminal activities.

The society can use the knowledge of the study to provide a safer digital environment for everyone and foster responsible online behavior.

The knowledge of this study will create awareness of the factors that influence cybercrime tendencies among young adults. And also help them in engaging in open conversations with their children and online behavior and ethical choices. It will also help in parental control and supervision, early intervention and provide possible alternatives.

University Administrators can use the findings to develop targeted educational programs and workshop. Insight into peer influence can guide the creation of preventive measures within the university environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study investigated moral value, peer influence and tendencies to cybercrime involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities, Cross River State, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 400 level undergraduates in the two conventional public universities in Cross River State which include University of Calabar and University of Cross River State with the total of

7020 students in 2021/2022 academic session. A sample of 400 undergraduates were randomly selected for the study through stratified sampling technique. An instrument used for data collection was a well structured questionnaire titled; “Moral Value, Peer Influence and Tendencies to Cybercrime Involvement Questionnaire” (MVPITCIQ) was the instrument used for data collection. Simple Linear Regression was the statistical technique employed to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. This was subjected to validity by experts in educational Psychology and measurement and evaluation in Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies, University of Calabar. A trial tested on fifty 50 undergraduates from Faculty of Biological Science, University of Calabar who were not part of the study sample establish the reliability of the

instrument. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability estimate of the instrument $\alpha = .70$ -.74. The instrument was administered to the respondents and retrieved with Zero attrition rate. This process was facilitated by the researcher and two trained research assistants. The data collected was analyzed through simple regression analysis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis one

Moral value does not significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State. The independent variable in this hypothesis is moral value; while the dependent variable is tendencies to cybercrime involvement. Simple regression analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table .

TABLE 1: Simple regression result of the prediction of moral value and tendencies to cybercrime involvement

Model	R	R. square	Adjusted R. square	Std error of the estimate	
1	.826(a)	.683	.682	1.76315	
Model	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	2662.211	1	2662.211	856.372*	.000(a)
Residual	1237.266	398	3.109		
Total	3899.478	399			

*Significant at .05 level.

The simple regression analysis of the prediction of moral value on tendencies to cybercrime involvement yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of .826 and a multiple regression R-square (R²) of .683 and an adjusted R² of .682. The adjusted R² of .682 indicated that the moral value account for 68.2% of the determinant

tendencies to cybercrime involvement in the study area. This finding is a critical indication that moral value is relatively high in the area of the study. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was F = 856.372 at the sig.value of .000 since p(.000) is less than p(.05), the null hypothesis is rejected.

The implication of this result is that moral value is a significant predictor of tendencies to cybercrime involvement.

Hypothesis two

Peer influence does not significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among

undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State. The independent variable in this hypothesis is peer influence; while the dependent variable is tendencies to cybercrime involvement. Simple regression analysis was employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Simple regression result of the prediction of peer influence and tendencies to cybercrime Involvement

Model	R	R. square	Adjusted R. square	Std error of the estimate	
1	.867(a)	.752	.751	1.55940	
Model	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	2931.648	1	2931.648	1205.580	.000(a)
Residual	967.829	398	2.432		
Total	3899.478	399			

* Significant at .05 level.

The simple regression analysis of the prediction of peer influence on tendencies to cybercrime Involvement yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of .867 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of .752 and an adjusted R^2 of .751. The adjusted R^2 of .751 indicated that the peer influence accounted for 75.1 % of the determinant tendencies to cybercrime Involvement in the study area. This finding is a critical indication that peer influence is relatively high in the area of the study. The F-value of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) obtained from the regression table was $F = 1205.580$ at the sig. value of .000. Since $p(.000)$ is less than $p(.05)$, the null hypothesis is rejected. The implication of this result is that peer influence is a significant predictor of tendencies to cybercrime involvement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the hypothesis one reveals that moral value significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State. The findings is in line with the study of Campanelle, Mehlich, Leitner, Rossi, and Bringman, (2011) who stressed that while some young people associate with values such as finding purpose and meaning in life, making a lot of money, co-habiting, citizenship and civic participation, material wealth, health and education, others associate with crime and criminal behaviour.

Guseinov (2014) maintained that there is a connection between moral principles and success.

He further asserted that moral development focuses on the emergence, change and understanding of morality from infancy through adulthood. Abraham (2018) who examined moral value education and quick financial success among students in Kano State of Nigeria and discovered that moral values education significantly relates to quick financial success of students. Thereby, exposing them to cybercrime activities.

The results of the hypothesis two reveals that peer influence significantly predict tendencies to cybercrime Involvement among undergraduates in Public Universities in Cross River State. The finding is in agreement with Marcum (2014) who observed that young internet users may be influenced by their peers. Hackers are said to often form social communities with online friends and in quest for acceptance/recognition with these individuals may demonstrate their ability to hack accounts. Tade and Aliyu (2011) research who stress that commanding respects from their peers, attracting the opposite sex and extravagant lifestyle seem to be the major goals for many Yahoo boys. Doppelmayr (2013) who also stress that looking at the age bracket, this behavior is perhaps not surprising when other aspects of their lives and the society around them are considering (Doppelmayr, 2013). The author further posited that even if a young person is not already in a group of yahoo-yahoo boys, the youths' culture around him could be of influence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that moral value, peer influence significantly predict cybercrime involvement among undergraduate students in Public Universities in Cross River State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parents, teachers and significant others should inculcate positive morals to students. Also, educational institutions, community organizations, and government agencies should prioritize ethical education and awareness programs that emphasize the importance of moral values, digital ethics, and responsible online behavior. These programs should target young individuals, particularly in schools and colleges, to instill a strong ethical foundation from an early age.
 - Develop initiatives and support systems that encourage positive peer relationships and provide alternatives to negative peer influences. This can include mentoring programs, peer counseling, and extracurricular activities that promote teamwork, leadership, and positive social connections.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, cybersecurity experts, and law enforcement agencies to enhance cybersecurity education and establish clear reporting mechanisms for cybercrimes. Encourage students and young individuals to report suspicious online activities without fear of retribution.

REFERENCES

- Abraham, S., 2018. Moral value education and quick financial success among student in Kano State. An unpublished thesis submitted to Bayero University Kano.
- Adanma, J., 2017. Awareness level of undergraduate students and cybercrime among undergraduate students in South-East zone of Nigeria. *Journal of Social Media Review*, 5(3), 20-29
- Adesina, S. O., 2017. Cybercrime and Poverty in Nigeria. *Canadian social science*, 13(4), 19-29.
- Amini-Phili Social ps, C., 2018. Awareness and Involvement in Cybercrime among Undergraduate Students in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, 7(3), 39-43
- Andeme Bikoro, D. M., Fosso Wamba, S., and Kala Kamdjoug, J. R., 2018. Determinants of cyber security use and behavioral intention: Case of the Cameroonian public administration. *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, 1087-1096. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-77712-2_104
- Ben, F., 2017. Cybercrime awareness level of students: The media role. *Journal of Social Development*, 4(2), 92-101.
- Campbell, E., 2003. *The ethical teacher*. Maidenhead United Kingdom: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.
- Denga, A., 2011. *Youths and cyber theft*. Lagos: Ademola Publishers
- Egong, A. I., 2021. Even God is interested in hard work. Oral remarks in external defence of department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Calabar.
- Eze, P., 2015. The influence of moral values on students quick-money making syndrome in Ogun State. An unpublished project submitted to OlabisiOnabanjo University.
- Guseinov, B., 2014. *Societal principles*. Menosota: Jutex.
- Marcum, C.D., 2014. *Cyber Crime*. New York: Wolters Kluwer: Law and Business.
- Ngozi, S., 2016. Students' perception of cybercrime and its implications. *Journal of Social Development*, 4(2), 50-57.
- Odo, C. R. and Odo, A. I., 2015. The Extent of Involvement in Cybercrime Activities among Students' in Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State of Nigeria. *Global Journal of Computer Science and Technology: Information & Technology*, 15(3), 1-6
- Okeshola, F.B. and Adeta, A.K., 2013. The nature, causes and consequences of cyber-crime in tertiary institutions in Zaria-Kaduna state, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3(9).98-114.

-
- Ololade, B. M., Salawu, M. K., and Adekanmi, A. D., 2020. E-Fraud in Nigerian Banks: Why and How?. *Journal of Financial Risk Management*, 9(3), 211-228.
- Onyido, J. A., 2018. Cyber-crime and its implications for educational development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 5(12), 74-79
- Osawaru, O. C., 2020. Cybercrime and its Moral Implications in the Light of Kantian Ethics. *Sapientia Journal of Philosophy*. 13, 22—33.
- Tade O. and Aliyu I., 2011. Social organization of Internet fraud among university undergraduates in Nigeria. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 5(2).