

## **SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY AND CYBERCRIME: A STUDY OF CALABAR METROPOLIS, CROSS RIVER, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This research “Social Media Literacy and Cybercrime in Calabar Metropolis Cross River State, Nigeria,” is aimed at assessing the relationship between social media illiteracy and vulnerability of people towards to cyber-related crimes in Calabar metropolis. It is also aimed at finding if residents of the metropolis and the law enforcement agents deploy social media platforms in combating cyber-induced crimes, and to determine whether exposure to social media platforms also leads to cybercrime. The study made use of survey design method, while the researcher adopted the situational crime prevention theory as a theoretical framework. Questionnaire was employed as an instrument for data collection. One hundred thirty respondents were picked through random sampling method, with simple percentage statistics used for data analysis. Findings revealed that social media illiteracy has tremendous impact on cyber-induced crimes particularly in Calabar metropolis and can also be used as a veritable tool to be deployed by the law enforcement agents to monitor and, possibly track down those involved in cybercrime in Calabar metropolis.

### **1.1 Introduction**

The advent of technology has made it possible for nations of the world to integrate with one another and to create a bond with other nations to the extent that the entire world has become like a “global village.” This paved the way for the electronic market to be opened to everybody, and this has also created room for all manner of individuals to seek for people who they can do business with notwithstanding the continent where the business

partner resides. This has created room for fraudulent individuals to find a fertile ground in order to dupe innocent people who fall prey to scammers on the internet.

The primary function of the social media is to provide people with the platform to socialise. Unfortunately, social media have exceeded the primary design, serving a multitude of other roles since its inception. From contest and advertisements to breaking news and awareness creation, the social media platform is the most efficient/effective means to communicate in this digital age (Hughes, 2014). Among the many changes of the modern world, it is the social media that plays a pivotal role.

Gabriel (2015), says that whether you brand internet theft as obtaining by tricks (OBT) or yahoo-yahoo, it is the same stuff - people are using the social media to perpetrate crimes that deprive many of their hard-earned money, destroy businesses and lives, and make nonsense of people's lives. Crime remains a threat to socio-economic and political security of any nation, and a major factor that can lead a nation to underdevelopment given the fact that it discourages local and foreign investments, destroys both human and social capital, damages relationships, undermines democracy and rule of law, and indeed, brings economic activities of the nation to their knees. Durkheim (2013) sees crime as an integral part of a society and a normal society phenomenon in the sense that it existed in all societies throughout history.

To Durkheim, stealing via the use of social media network, is a crime which violates social norms, and works against the functions of society as a means of defining the limits of behaviours that are acceptable, serving as an instrument for social change by extending and putting to test those boundaries (Abayomi, 2013).

However, information technology revolution associated with the use of social media has brought about two-edged functions: On one hand, it has contributed positive values to the world, while on the other hand, it has produced so many maladies that threaten societal order and also a new wave of crime to the world. The social media, which ordinarily should be a blessing as they expose one to a lot of opportunities in various fields of life are fast becoming a source of discomfort and worry due to the atrocity being perpetrated through them.

Shinder (2002) defines cybercrime as an offense committed by using the internet or another computer network as a component of the crime. Cybercrimes are offences that are committed against individuals or group of individuals with a motive to intentionally, harm the reputation of the

other or cause physical harm to the victim directly or indirectly using modern telecommunication networks like the internet or smart phones. Such crimes may threaten a nation's security and financial health.

The causes of cybercrimes are not far-fetched. One only has to take a quick glance around the society to observe illicit wealth acquisition and its display. This is coupled with the fact that the perpetrators are highly exalted. The problem is made worse by the high youth unemployment, negative role models, the absence of enforceable prohibitive laws, and the general laissez-faire attitude of individuals and businesses regarding cyber security (Hassan, Lass & Makinde. 2012).

As risky as it can be to do business via the social media platforms, many corporate organisations, including banks, still depend on ICT and computer networks to perform basic as well as complex tasks without being afraid of failing into the booby trap of internet fraudsters. The electronic market is, however, open to everybody, including criminals.

There are many effects of cybercrime; Hassan et al. (2012) identify them as reduction in competitive edge of organisations, time wastage and slow financial growth, slow production time and increase in overhead cost, as well as defamation of the image of a nation. Other major effects include monetary losses and loss of privacy. An organisation can lose its competitive advantage and suffer losses when a hacker steals its confidential information and plans, and sells it to a competitor. The time spent by IT personnel on rectifying harmful incidents caused by cyber criminals could have been used to earn profit for the organisation.

The financial costs to economies and businesses from cyber-attacks include the loss of intellectual property, financial fraud, and damage to reputation, lower productivity, and third party liability. Opportunity cost (lost sales, lower productivity, etc) make up a proportion of the reported cost of cyber-attacks and viruses. However, opportunity costs do not translate directly into costs to the national economy. Businesses face greater damage from financial fraud and intellectual property theft over the Internet.

One key negative effect of cybercrime is that it tarnishes a country's image. Once a country is labeled as a harbor for cybercrime activities, potential investors are cautious in investing in such countries. This has some dire implications for the nation's macroeconomic stability, it retards financial growth, and proliferation of cybercrime in a particular country can discourage financial inclusion due to the fear of being a victim of cyber-attack.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The advent of social media has, to a large extent, marred the development of Nigeria as a nation due to the wave of fraud associated with social media, particularly *Facebook* and other platforms. Social media have in recent times become an environment where most lucrative and safest crime thrives. Crimes committed through the cyber space via the social media have, for now, become a global threat from Africa to Asia, America and Europe. We have heard of stories where most Nigerians have lost their fortunes to cyber criminals surfing the cyber space pretending to be friends to social media users or business partners offering high percentage of commission to people on businesses that hardly exist. Besides this, the cyber criminals also take undue advantage of their presumed business partners and disappear into thin air after duping them.

The use of social media platform such as *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, and *Twitter* by young Nigerians to defraud innocent people home and abroad has reached an alarming rate. Tales of people being duped on the social media are often heard on daily basis causing the security agents and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to swing into action to seal homes and arrest the perpetrators, particularly in Calabar metropolis and its environs. Social media have encouraged cyber-crime through identity hijacking, and false image that have made unsuspecting users fall victims.

In spite of the gains and ills of social media in Nigeria, does social media illiteracy make users vulnerable to cyber related crimes? This is a question which has remained unanswered.

However, social media illiteracy has to do with individuals who make use of social media often, but do not understand all of the important subtleties that can make the difference between appearing either clever or thoughtless and idiotic. Social media, to an extent, have overcome illiteracy. Like Watt-pad, it enables users to get access to books, and literature of all genres. People can get to improve their writing skills from the media. A person who is ignorant in a particular field or area of knowledge can become literate online by making good use of the *You Tube*.

As days gone by, “more and more” cases are heard of one or two Nigerians being defrauded via the social media platform, probably because they are not literate on the use of social media networking. The victims fall

prey because of the limited knowledge they have on the use of social media networking.

On daily basis, stories are heard of many Nigerians losing their fortunes to cyber criminals who defraud millions of unsuspecting members of the public through the internet because of the limited knowledge of the victims. Cyber criminals install particular software on their mobile devices or desktop which aid them to gain access or extract confidential information from their victims through the internet to defraud their victims of their money.

To keep the cyber rats at bay, website owners are to take the right security measures and be alert and aware when connected. These are key ways to prevent cyber intrusion and online crimes. People are to learn how to protect their computer network and personal information by understanding common crimes and risks.

Often times, people's business e-mails are compromised, thus making life difficult for the actual owners of the e-mail accounts. When once one's personal information is stolen after a cybercriminal has hacked into one's account, the victim's social security number is stolen, which in most cases, is used by the cyber criminals to commit theft or fraud on the cyber space.

On the other hand, the cyber criminals sometimes do make use of malicious or ransom ware where their victims are blocked from gaining access to their personal computer files, system or network and the cyber criminals demand their victims to pay a ransom for their return.

To make their victims fall prey to their schemes, the cyber criminals go to the extent of making use of spoofing and phishing, which is aimed at tricking their victims to provide sensitive information that enable them to be scammed by the cyber thieves. All these are causes of worry, especially if victims failed to report the criminal cases to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

This research therefore, tries to assess the relationship between social media illiteracy and the vulnerability of people towards cyber-induced crimes in Calabar metropolis, and if residents and law enforcement agents can deploy social media platforms in combating these crimes.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To find out if residents of Calabar metropolis and law enforcement agents deploy social media platforms in combating cyber-induced crimes.
2. To determine whether social media illiteracy expose residents of Calabar metropolis to cyber-related crimes.
3. To ascertain the expected role of law enforcement agents in tackling cyber induced crimes among residents of Calabar metropolis.
4. To establish if social media illiteracy among residents of Calabar metropolis is responsible for their vulnerability as victims of cybercrime.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study sought to provide answers to the following questions:

1. How do residents of Calabar metropolis and law enforcement agents deploy social media platforms in combating cyber induced crimes?
2. How does social media illiteracy expose residents of Calabar Metropolis to cyber related crimes?
3. What is the expected role of law enforcement agents in tackling cyber induced crimes among residents of Calabar Metropolis?
4. What is responsible for frequent identity hijack resulting to fraudulent activities among residents of Calabar metropolis?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study will be of great assistance to users of social media, either to do business on-line or involved in online dating and even the security agents. It will also help individuals desiring to surf on the social media platform to know that it is good to have a broad and wide knowledge in ICT in other to guard against being subject of cybercrime.

It will again assist those connected on social media platforms to be cautious of the fact that “yahoo boys” are on the prowl, surfing the internet, looking for a novice to fall into their bobby traps. Findings from this work will equip social media users with broad knowledge on how the “cyber rats” do take advantage of their victims’ ignorance. Information provided by the research work will help social media users on how to guard themselves against divulging of certain useful security information to everyone they meet on social media platforms.

The research averred that for anyone to meet up with modern trend, people should equip themselves with knowledge on ICT so as to overcome all the tricks of cyber criminals who will stop at nothing to swindle social users. With the study, security agents can properly strategise on how to get hold of the cyber criminals taking undue advantage of the illiteracy on the part of people using the social media platforms.

Apart from that, the study will provide far-reaching implications particularly to individuals who are addicted to the usage of social media, be it *WhatsApp*, *InstagramFacebook*, *Twitter* and others, and indeed policy makers to fashion out a strategy on how to clamp down on these criminals taking undue advantage of social media users who lack the knowledge of how to protect or secure their accounts from being attacked by hackers. Moreso, the study will be instrumental to prospective researchers wishing to go into similar study as the study would reveal the actual level of appreciation of social media to fight cyber-crime.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study focused on social media illiteracy and cybercrime in Calabar metropolis. It was limited to Calabar metropolis where, in the last decade, many had suffered losses of their hard earned money to the “yahoo boys”, notwithstanding the presence of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) who had worked round the clock to contain this cartel of cyber criminals.

Even though Nigerians in general may have in one or two occasions, experienced losses of their hard earned money to cyber criminals in diaspora, focus of this paper was limited to the victims residing in Calabar metropolis of Cross River States.

### **1.7 Definition of Terms**

**Crime:** Unlawful act that attracts sanctions by authority of the state.

**Cyber Crime:** Crime committed using computer networks. It is an offence committed against individual using the internet or another computer network as a component of the crime. It is an offence committed against individuals with a criminal motive to intentionally harm the reputation of the other or cause mental harm to the victim directly or indirectly using modern telecommunication networks like the internet or smart phones.

**Crime Prevention:** Attempt towards blocking loopholes and to stop every criminal activity which occurs using the computer or computer networks.

**Social Media:** Social media in this context simply means the internet-based social networking website developed for individuals to log on to the system to chat and air their views, exchanges ideas with friends who are far and near. It is used by cyber criminals to defraud their unsuspecting victims.

**Social Media Illiteracy:** The act of not having the skill to make use of, learn or work in a society where communication and access to it is increasingly through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media and mobile devices.

## 2.1 Literature Review

The section gives detailed review of related literature on social media and how to put an end to cyber theft. The presentation is done in a logical manner as follows:

## 2.2 Review of Concepts

### Concept of Social Media

New technology has enabled large number of participations in the public discussions. The changing technology usage has shaped the communication process in which we have formed a personal relation to the new media than what we had with the old media. The concept of virtual identity has become a popular idea for many researchers in order to understand the impact of new media in developing one's own identity. (Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University, India. 2021)

This gives an idea about how the audiences shape their identity in the social media platforms by communicating their opinions in computer-generated public sphere. The advent of social media in Nigeria came with a lot of problems which has seen several people losing their hard-earned money to fraudsters who had taken hold of their victims while surfing on the internet.

Tobin and Baziell (2008), asserts that social media are powerful channels for mobilisation and demobilising people. They also provide platforms for interactions that can spring up new and waning ideas, symbols and identities. He also emphasises that the public is constantly aware that the internet is transforming every aspect of human existence. The level of heightened awareness of internet explosion occasioned by social media use has aided a better and advanced way of news production, dissemination and use. This implies that interactivity and feedback loop has become a key essential of social media either for the highly literate and the illiterate alike.



Accordingly, Tobin and Baziel (2008), state that “Social media are digital technologies that allow people to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media among themselves.” As a result of trying to share experiences and perspectives, residents of Calabar metropolis who may not be too conversant with negative implications associated with excessive use of social media may become susceptible to cyber related crimes.

The social media platforms have revolutionised the way some persons and organisations engage in personal and corporate communications. As the concept implies, the emergence of social media brought both good and evil into the country. Thus, Udenze (2020, p. 115) notes that with the emergence of social media, the news ecology has metamorphosed into yet another sphere. With the help of smartphones, social media have revolutionised the diverse aspects of our daily endeavours, and some essentials of daily existence among residents of Calabar metropolis have been made convenient. In this context, social media have dismantled the monopoly of news gathering and dissemination which hitherto was the exclusive preserve of the conventional media. This new experience has brought both the literate and the non-literate residents of Calabar metropolis to converge on the digital turf. Social media are often used to describe websites which include, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter*, and all places where humans can go to interact and engage with others by surfing on the internet.

In the same vein, Palen (2008), in his view, posits that social media are a platform where many have fallen prey to cyber criminals just because they are not ICT-compliant. On the perils of social media, Nargarwal (2019, p.1) advances that “undoubtedly the social media has transformed the way of communication and revolutionized the traditional media. It has opened up a fresh hope to the people to raise their disagreement, share the facts and unmask the falsehood.”

Oso (2013), highlight that the general opinion is that a new media ecology with social media at the forefront has widened the public sphere. With digital technology occasioned by the advent of the Web 2.0 which facilitates two-way flow of communication, journalists and users can throw their net deeper and wider. This could, in most cases, become veritable platform for crime, because those who are not too savvy of negative implication of social media use can be hooked by the wither net.

Horton (2009), in his quest to look into the various definitions of social media, comes up with the criteria stated below which include:

- i. **Internet-based but not totally so:** Meet.com, for example, uses the internet to set up local face-to-face meetings. The internet is the organising agent but communication is personal.
- ii. **User-generated and published information:** Those using the internet often times republish interesting pieces of information that they come by elsewhere. This is why it is said that user's generation is loosely defined.
- iii. **Community-sharing: Post and comments.** Sharing of files community of interest: Community interest varies by individuals/group. The community of interest may vary according to the quality of materials pasted on blogs. If a blog uses quality posts, there is a tendency for such a blog to attract more comments than the blog with fake posts.
- iv. **Multimedia** – Blogs, post casts, videos, photos, forum, internet messaging and texting: The internet subsumes all audio-visual and print media because of its ability to transmit them. The social media are likely to adopt mechanical stimulation of touch due to the growing possibility of hepatic communication when once the social media are fully developed.
- v. **Immediate:** The reason it is easier to publish on the social media like *Twitter*, *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*, than the print media is that a news item or a post easily gets published on the social media with a blink of the eye against the print media, where a lot of time has to be consumed.
- vi. **Collapsed geographically:** The issue of distance does not come to bear with social media. An Individual can decide to follow anyone on the social media irrespective of his or her geographical location or the continent he or she resides.

### Concept of Crime

Crime, like other social phenomena especially as it occurs in the social media platform like *Twitter*, *Facebook* and legal framework, can be seen as a set of facts or assumptions that are part of a case in which there were committed acts punishable under criminal law. Crime is one of the deviant behaviours which attracts sanctions such as fines, imprisonment, flogging, amputation in most cultures like what is obtainable in some Islamic states where Sharia is practiced, or even death. In the light of the above, Aongu, Nwachukwu, Orim and Pyke (2019, p.8) note that the decision by an individual to adopt *Facebook* for a crime-related ambition

can be inspired by both idiosyncratic (or individual) and systemic (or social) factors as well as the potential advantages of using the social media platform to realise his/her crime-related objective.

The approach takes into cognizance, the complex realities surrounding the concept of crime, and seeks to understand how changing social, political, psychological and economic conditions may affect the definitions of what crime is all about and the form of legal, law enforcement and penal responses made by society.

Anthony (2013), posts that as cultures change and the political environment shifts, curtains behavior may be ‘criminalized’ or ‘decriminalized’. However, the conflict orientation on their part views crime in the perspective of the ruling class. To this category of individuals, crime is an act of behaviour selectively identified by the few who govern in the society. To them, society consists of competing interest groups which are in conflict with each other, due to unequal distribution of wealth which results in inequality in economic and social powers.

For Dambezau (1994), crime is seen as “an act of omission against public interest”, and which is prescribed by law enacted by the legislature in the overall interests of the society, and to which punishment is meted out to anyone who violates the law and it involves four major principles which are public wrong, moral wrong, law, and punishment for the criminals.” In the same vein, crime can also be seen as a violation of laid down rules agreed to be respected by all members of the society, and upon which the rest members of the society mete sanction upon those guilty of the violation. Nargarwal (2019, p.3) notes that disadvantageous part of social media confirms that despite many benefits, some of the menace and other concomitant ill-effects cannot be sidelined.

The news and views spread so rapidly through social media through crime that causes turbulence and social disharmony. According to one of the scholars, Matthews (1993), crime is one of the outcomes of social changes, which is brought about by social developments and exposure of Nigerians to the Western cultures and their life styles.

### **Characteristics of Crime**

As change is taking place in almost every social sphere of human life, so also is crime changing in dimension. Online trading companies are increasingly being subjected to fraudulent attacks on their websites. Such cyber-attacks use invented customer information and stolen credit cards to place advertisements to attempt to sell non-existent goods to regular users.

Other fraudulent activities include phishing (attempting to gain access to login and password information through emails purporting to come from the company) and clone sites, which are constructed around similar-looking URLs by working with such a company.

There are instances where criminals carry out their activities against computers or devices directly to damage or disable them, while others use computers or networks to spread malware, illegal information, images or other materials. Some cybercrimes do both – i.e., target computers to infect them with a computer virus, which is then spread to other machines and, sometimes, the entire networks.

A primary effect of cybercrime is financial. Cybercrime can include many different types of profit-driven criminal activity, including ransomware attacks, email and internet fraud, and identity fraud, as well as attempts to steal financial account, credit card or other payment card information. Cybercriminals may also target an individual's private information, as well as corporate data for theft and resale.

This accounts for the reason why crime has taken a new dimension with cross-border crimes becoming increasingly frequent, with some taking to drug peddling, indulging in the smuggling of foreign contraband goods, prostitution, trafficking in human persons, fake currency trade and importation of fake industrial machines - all requiring the transfer of goods, persons and cash from one continent of the world to another. The situation has led to a gradual grouping together of organised crime, gangs controlling particular areas, the adoption of common modes of operation and the possibility of exploiting differing legislations and the varying levels of effectiveness of crime prevention in different countries.

The necessity of internet connectivity has enabled an increase in the volume and pace of cybercrime activities because the criminal no longer needs to be physically present when committing a crime. The internet's speed, convenience, anonymity and lack of borders make computer-based variations of financial crimes such as ransomware, fraud and money laundering, as well as crimes such as stalking and bullying easier to carry out.

Cybercriminal activity may be carried out by individuals or small groups with relatively little technical skill. Or, by highly organised global criminal groups that may include skilled developers and others with relevant expertise. To further reduce the chances of detection and prosecution, cybercriminals often choose to operate in countries with weak or nonexistent cybercrime laws.

Cyber-crimes consist of illegal activity conducted on a computer. Traditional crimes may be committed while using a computer, but cyber-crime consists of more specific types of crimes, such as phishing schemes and viruses. Cyber-crimes consist of some special characteristics, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The most striking feature of cyber-crimes is that they are relatively easy to commit, difficult to detect and even harder to prove. The cyber criminals with basic computer knowledge and skill can easily destroy valuable database causing huge loss or damage to the affected victims of the crime. Cyber-crimes are relatively easy, low-risky and high-rewarding venture. There is plenty of money to be made.

Recent studies claim nearly fifty percent of adult Internet users have acquired a virus or had online accounts hacked at some point in time. The reason for such a high number of cyber-crime victims is simply the lack of awareness. Cyber criminals are targeting popular personal devices like mobile phones to spread their threats and infiltrate high-value sectors of the economy. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria has embarked on an aggressive programme of awareness-creation to make sure individuals understand the risks and the need to take appropriate measures for the protection of their own cyber.

In addition, the anonymity and ease of use that the internet offers energises criminality and exploitation. New cases of harassment, credit card fraud, and identity theft facilitated via computer technology increase daily. Clearly, strong computer skills are vital part of any investigator's toolkit.

More often than not, the party or the organisation victimised by the cyber-crimes prefers to refrain from reporting the case to the police for the fear of adverse publicity or possibility of the loss of public trust in them. The reluctance of the victims to come forward and file a police complaint further aggravates the magnitude of the problem of cyber-crimes detection and control. The existence of Internet Crime Complaint Centre in most advanced nations accepts online Internet crime complaints from either the actual victim or from a third party to the complainant.

### **2.3 The Role of Social Media in Crime Occurrence**

A lot of individuals who became involved in cyber-crime today through the use of social media where they dupe their victims did not just get entangled in the act just because they are criminally minded, but became involved as a result of peer group influence which had made them

turn into crooks. Apart from peer group influence, other reasons responsible for internet theft includes, genetic, environmental and other factors like get-rich-quick syndrome. We cannot certainly determine the full impact the aforementioned factors in occurrence of crime, but we can say that the social media's role is to prepare the person from potentiality to actuality (Ezenkwu, Ozuomba, & Kalu, 2013). It is obvious that in the formation of a misdemeanour and a criminal character, family and social factors are effective.

Social media, especially *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, platforms play imitation pattern role among their users and we can easily say that all people, whether delinquent or not, use social media and other media platforms which are sometimes tools for peace and sometimes, for stimulating crime. With the rate of incidences of criminal activities that have taken place via these platforms, one can easily conclude that the social media affect society's attitudes, thoughts, insights and actions. In this case, social media can be helpful and simply pave the way for a commission of a crime in the society with a malicious programme (Ali, 2016).

Eshiet (2014) gives an instance concerning reported cases of gender-based violence perpetrated by acquaintances and friends met via the social media platform. The violence includes rape, mutual assault, theft, kidnapping and murder. For instance, the incident involving one Mr. Arthus Obora, a 26-year-old unemployed graduate of Igbinedion University Okada, who pushed down his *Facebook* lover, Nkiruka Akabuogu, from a storey building for turning down his sex overtures. Obiora met 21 years old Nkiruka, a Linguistics student of the University of Lagos, while surfing on the internet on the *Facebook* platform and invited her out for a good time. They subsequently decided to move to Obiora's house, where Obiora demanded to have carnal knowledge of her. Unfortunately, Obiora's demand was turned down by her *Facebook* girlfriend. Irked by the frustration, Obiora decided to tear Nkiruka's dress and thereafter pushed her down from the third floor of the storey building, she became unconscious with a pelvic fracture and multiple injuries (Vanguard, 2012). In the same vein, Esene (2013) while trying to give an instance how ladies had been battered by their *Facebook* friends, gave an account of how one Cynthia Osokogwu, a 25-year old postgraduate student of Nasarawa State University, a daughter of a retired Nigerian Army General and a business-women mother, was killed on July 22, 2012 in a hotel by friends she had met on the social media platform (Facebook).

## **2.4 The Role of Social Media in Crime Prevention**

All the negative report about social media does not mean that social media has not played any significant role in the prevention of crime. Social media platforms are increasingly useful in the fight against crime and pursue of investigations. They can also serve as a means for police departments to share information with the public. They also enable the police to engage and involve their communities in new and potentially transformative ways.

## **2.5 Review of Empirical Studies**

Vivien (2008), after a careful study on the Media, Crime Prevention and Urban Safety, concludes that social media exposure to crime and crime-related event can be effective crime prevention strategy, and useful tool for educating and sensitising the public on the underestimated or overlooked social problems arising from the use of the social media. In the same vein, Ali (2016) declares that, informing and raising public awareness of citizens can be effective in the prevention of crime, as well as in harm and social abnormalities reduction. Ali discovers that social media illiteracy is one of the major issues affecting crime prevention.

Anthony (2013), in another study, discovers that people fall victims easily to internet fraudsters especially if they are social media illiterate. He states that fraud on the social media takes place by sending scam messages through email accounts or posting messages tagging their victims and requesting for their Bank Verification Number (BVN), in order to verify bank account of unsuspecting individual. He adds that, sometimes, the fraudsters hack into people's *Facebook* or *email* account and then send threatening messages containing false information, which they use in duping the account users. Result of the study attributes those falling as victims of cyber criminals to social media illiteracy. Ali's study concludes that unemployment is one of the factors responsible for cyber-crime.

Findings further reveal that the reasons many fall prey to the fraudster's booby trap include lack of knowledge on usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), unemployment, poverty and laziness among youths, and the get-rich-quick syndrome.

## **3.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

There are many theories that explain the role of technology in advancing interactivity in the social media. Severin and Tankard (1982) as cited in Anaeto, Osifeso and Onabanjo (2008, p. 43), assert that a theory "is

a set of ideas of systematic generalisations based on scientific observations leading to further empirical observations.” For the purpose of this study, the Situation Crime Prevention Theory was used.

### **3.1.1 Situation Crime Prevention Theory**

According to Clarke, the situation crime prevention theory and approach is maintained by the intervention to raise awareness and prevent crime.

Clarke (1997), in his submission, aver that “situational prevention comprises opportunity-reducing measures (Bennett & Weigand, 1994), that are directed at highly specific forms of crime (Brisman & South, 2015), involving the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in a systematic and permanent way as possible (Chiluwa, 2012) and making crime more difficult and risky, or less rewarding the excusable as judged by a wide range of offenders.” Situational crime prevention strategy is based on the principle that crime is repeatedly opportunistic and aims to modify contextual factors to limit the opportunities for offenders to engage in criminal behaviour.

The theoretical framework above portrays the role of social media in crime prevention, and the interconnecting links that social media can facilitate between the law enforcement agencies and youths, who are most likely to be engaging in crime. The cyclical nature of the concepts supports the flow of information and discourse between all parties and project that as youth engagement increases and the social media are used to denounce and repudiate crime and violence, the impact of social media will become more pervasive.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The research design chosen for this study was survey method. Zikmond (1984, p.26) states that survey design “is a method of data collection that is based on communication with a representative sample of individual”. Ogbuoshi (2020, p.125) aver that it is an outline or scheme that serves as a useful guide to the researcher in an effort to generate relevant data. It requires asking people who are called respondents for information, using either verbal or written questionnaire.

This study adopted survey design whereby data were systematically collected once across a given population through sampling. Copies of questionnaire were distributed to a group of people who even though have different family values but, have same characteristics via the use of written



data collection instrument dealing with participants' response on facts, opinion and attitudes. It may be used for descriptive and explanatory purposes. Survey is basically used in studies that have individual people as the unit of analysis.

Survey was adopted because it provides a quick, inexpensive, efficient and accurate means of accessing information about the variables that are being studied. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) say that "the cost of survey is reasonable considering the amount of information gathered". In addition, researchers can control expenses by selecting from the four types of surveys: mails, telephones, personal interview and group administration. Survey was also adopted because it aided the researcher in collecting of data objectively to explain a disturbing existing phenomenon and finally become survey is economical.

### **3.3 Research Area**

The study was carried out in Calabar metropolis in Cross River State. Calabar metropolis is often described as the tourism capital of Nigeria, especially due to several initiatives implemented during the administration of Governor Donald Duke (1999-2007), which made the city the cleanest and environmentally friendliest city in Nigeria. Administratively, the city is divided into Calabar Municipal and Calabar South Local Government Areas. It has an area of 406 square kilometers (157sq m) and a population of 371,022 as at 2006 census. It lies between longitudes 8°18'00"E and latitudes 4°54'00"N to 5°04'00"N and is located in the southern part of Nigeria.

The fast growing city is located at the edge of large water bodies and it interferes negatively on the wetland ecosystem of Cross River Estuary. It was originally named Akwa Akpa in Efik language. The city is adjacent to the Calabar and Great Kwa Rivers and Creeks of the Cross River (from its inland delta)

The indigenous ethnic groups are Efik, Efut and Qua. Residents of the place love fishing, dancing and a lot of merriment. They are very hospitable, with many non-natives residing in the metropolis.

### **3.4 Research Population**

Research population means the research subjects, participants, people, elements or publications, etc to be examined/studied. Every study should have a clearly defined population – the number/figure, characteristics, etc (Isangedighi, 2012). Thus, the population of study

constitutes social media users and law enforcement agents in Calabar metropolis. The population of this study includes residents of Calabar metropolis who definitely have access to social media platforms/networks, but have little or no knowledge on how to detect fraudsters who clone or hijack users' account to defraud them on the internet.

Majority of the respondents were youths who fall between the ages of 21 and 30 years. Occupation of respondents from the data gathered, showed that majority (40%) were students. On marital status/academic qualification, data gathered showed that majority (57%) were single and (36%) were people with OND/NCE.

### **3.5 Sampling Techniques**

The technique employed by the researcher to gather information for the study was random sampling. Because the population involved in the study live in different streets/settlements across the 22 political wards that make up the metropolis, the researcher decided to use 50 streets, 20 from Calabar south and 30 from Calabar municipal for the study. The streets inhabited by individuals with social media accounts like *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *Badoo* and others. One hundred thirty residents in the metropolis were sampled across the 22, political wards that constitute Calabar metropolis.

### **3.6 Instrument for Data Collection**

Instrument used for collection of data was the questionnaire. One hundred and thirty copies of questionnaire administered on 130 respondents who reside in Calabar metropolis. Subsequently, the items in the questioner were scrutinised bearing in mind the variables in the study. Questions that appear on the questionnaire were frame in two sections (A and B). Items 1 – 4 centred on gender, occupation, marital status, and educational qualification that made up Section A. Items 6 – 17 measured respondents' views on the research questions raised in the study. These were section B.

The questionnaire was administered to respondents and later retrieved for the study. Apart from the questionnaire, the researcher also got information from secondary sources which include journals, internet, and text books.

#### 4.1 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Tabulation and simple percentage (frequency distribution) were employed in the study. The technique applied was the most suitable because of its ability to reduce complication and enhance easy comprehension.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Sex**

Sex	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Male	80	61.5
Female	50	38.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 1 above shows that out of (130) respondents, 80 are males amounting to 61.5% of the population whereas 50 were females amounting to 38.5% of the population. Based on above result, there is an indication that there is an imbalance in distribution of respondents.

**Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Less than 20	26	20
21---30	44	33.8
31---40	25	19.2
41---50	19	14.6
51 and above	16	12.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 2. above indicates that 20% of the respondents were younger than 20 years, 33.8% fell within the age bracket of 21-30, 19.2% while were within the age bracket of 31- 40 years, 14.6% were within the age bracket of 41-50 years and 12.4% were 50 years and above. The result above shows that respondents were mostly youths.

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Occupation**

Occupation	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Civil servant	46	35
Business	30	23.1
Student	40	30.8
Others	14	10.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Results from Table 3 above shows that 35.4% of the respondents were civil servants, 23.1% were businessmen and women, 30.8% were students, and 10.7% engaged in other forms of occupation.

**Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency (r)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Single	77	59.2
Married	50	38.5
Divorced	3	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Analysis from Table 4 above indicates that majority (77 or 59.2%) were single, 50 (38.5%) were married while three (2.3%) of the respondents were divorced.

**Table 5: Frequency Distribution showing Educational Qualification of Respondents**

<b>Academic Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency (r)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
WASSCE/GCE	34	26
OND/NCE	46	35.4
B.Sc/HND	37	28.5
M.Sc	11	8.5
Others	2	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

On Table 5 above, respondents with OND/NCE had the largest percentage, which is 35.4%, with forty-six 46. respondents, Respondents with WASSCE/GCE were 34 representing 26.2%, those that have B.Sc/HND were 37(28.5% ). Respondents with M.Sc were 11 (8.5%) while others were two (1.4%).

**Table 6: Frequency distribution Showing Exposure to Social Media**

Variable/option	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	117	90
No	13	10
Undecided	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Field work 2022

Results from Table 6 above show that majority (90%) indicated “Yes” while 10% indicated “No”. This result shows that a good percentage of respondents were exposed to one form of social media or the other.

**Table 7: Frequency distribution showing whether social media exposure to crime and crime related events impact positively on crime prevention**

Variable/option	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	48	36.9
No	44	33.8
Don't know	38	29.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 7 above shows that 48 respondents (36.9%) said Yes, 44 respondents (33.8%) said No, while 38 (29.3%) said “I don't know”.

**Table 8: Frequency distribution showing whether residents in the study area deployed social media networks to fight cybercrime**

Response Variable	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	56	43.1
No	38	29.2
Can't say	36	27.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Respondent's response in Table 8 shows that 56 (43.1%) indicated Yes, 38 (29.2%) indicated No, while 36 (27.7%) couldn't say if they deploy social media platforms to fight cybercrime, or not.

**Table 9: Frequency distribution showing efficiency of social media usage in the fight against crime by law enforcement agencies**

Option	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Efficient	55	42.3
Very efficient	41	31.5
Inefficient	34	26.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 9 showed that 55 respondents (42.3%) indicated efficient, 41 (31.5%) indicated very efficient, while 34 (26.2%) indicated that law enforcement agencies did not efficiently deploy social media to tackle cybercrime.

**Table 10: Frequency distribution showing whether residents use social media such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* in averting crime**

Option	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	57	43.8
No	34	26.2
Undecided	39	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Sources:** Field work, 2022

Table 10 shows that 43.8% of respondents responded Yes, 26.2% responded No and 30% were undecided.

**Table 11: Frequency distribution showing whether social media promote crime rate**

Option	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	59	45.4
No	36	27.7
Undecided	35	26.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 11 above shows that majority (59 or 45.4%) indicated Yes, 36 (27.7%) indicated No, while 35 (26.9%) were undecided about social media promoting crime rate.

**Table 12: Frequency distribution showing whether social media enhance crime prevention**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Frequency (r)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	48	36.9
No	39	30
Don't know	43	33.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Results from Table 12 above show that majority 48 (36.9%) said yes, 39 (30%) said no and 43 (33.1%) were undecided.

**Table 13: Frequency distribution showing whether social media illiteracy played significant role in people falling victims to cyber crimes**

<b>Response Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (r)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	62	47.7
No	33	25.4
Can't say	35	26.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Results in Table 13 show that majority 62 (47.7%) indicated Yes, 33 (25.4%) indicated No, while 35 (26.9%) couldn't say if social media illiteracy played significant role in crime prevention and awareness or make people fall victims to cybercrime.

**Table 14: Frequency distribution showing social media platforms that promote cyber related criminal activities the most**

<b>Response Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (r)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Facebook	38	29.2
WhatsApp	38	29.2
Twitter	19	14.7
Instagram	12	9.2
Badoo	23	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 14 above shows that majority 38 (29.2%) indicated *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* in a relative manner, 19 (14.7%) indicated *Twitter*, 12 (9.2%) indicated *Instagram* and 23 (17.7%) indicated *Badoo*. The results above show that *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* promote cybercrime related activities most closely followed by *Badoo*.

**Table 15: Frequency distribution showing whether social media are an effective tool for sensitising and educating the public on underestimated or overlooked social problems**

Response Variable	Frequency (r)	Percentage (%)
Yes	108	83.1%
No	-	-
Don't know	22	16.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field work, 2022

Table 15 shows that majority 108 (83.1%) said Yes, while on the other hand, minority has a figure of 22 (16.9%), showing that they don't know whether social media are an effective tool for sensitising and educating the public on underestimated or overlooked social problems.

Based on the respondents' demography, analysis is done on five variables, namely gender, age, occupation, marital status and academic qualification. Result shows that majority 65% of the respondents were male and 35% were females signifying that most respondents were males. On the issue of age bracket, findings shows that majority of respondents fell between the ages of 21 – 30 years, constituting (39%) of the respondents. This signifies that most respondents fell within the range of youthful age, and this was of great concern for the study. On occupation of respondents, data in the study depict that majority (40%) were students. On marital status/academic qualification, data showed that majority (57%) were single and (36%) were people with OND/NCE as highest qualification.

The use of social media has become part and parcel of life, with users cutting across families and different households.



## 4.2 Answers to Research Questions

### **Research Questions one: Do residents of Calabar Metropolis and law enforcements agents deploy social media platforms in combating cybercrimes?**

Law enforcement agencies and the general public have no option than to embrace these technologies to enable them communicate with the community they serve. The day- to- day use of social media by members of the public has afforded the law enforcement agencies an open window. Posts, pictures, status updates and check locations on *Facebook*, and other social media sites assist law enforcements agencies to gather and collect information (Ali, 2016). Allis's assertion is in line with findings in Table 8 signifying that the majority (43.1%) responded "yes" to the residents deploying social media platforms to combat crime; also majority of (43.8%) of respondent's agreed in Table 10 that social media are usually deployed to fight crime. In the same vein, in Table 9, majority (42.3%) of respondents indicated that law enforcement agencies efficiently deployed social media to tackle cybercrime in Calabar metropolis. These results affirm the position of Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros and Romero, (2013) who maintain that the broad role of social media and its correlation with prevention has been affirmed by everyone. The activities of social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Whatsapp*, *Twitter*, and *Badoo* geared towards decriminalization and prevention are very important and play a basic role in decreasing misdemeanour and deviation as well as preventing the crises of penal and justice system in dealing with crimes in a wide manner.

### **Research Question Two: How does social media illiteracy expose residents of Calabar metropolis to cyber-related crimes?**

Findings in Table 7 show that social media exposure to crime and crime-related events impacts positively in crime prevention with majority (36.9%) of respondent supporting this position. The findings are in line with the assertion of Laudati (2017) that the most decisive part of the social media's role in the fight against cybercrime could and should be assisting individuals with examples of social behaviour that are not collectively considered very alarming but which provides big-business opportunities for organised crime. In another development, Ali, (2016) further supports the findings with the idea that information dealing with criminal investigations could be extremely useful to the people, and could help them avoid buying counterfeit products or becoming victims of the largescale fraud currently being perpetrated by criminals using the social media

platforms to dupe their victims. We are, therefore faced with the decisive challenge of guaranteeing freedom, security and justice in Nigeria today. This is one challenge that requires closer relationship between users of the social media platform and security agencies in the deployment of the platform to combat cybercrime.

**Research Question Three: What is the expected role of law enforcement agents in tackling cyber induced crimes among residents of Calabar metropolis?**

Table 13 shows that majority (47.7%) indicate that social media illiteracy among residents of Calabar metropolis is responsible for them falling victims to cybercrime. This result is in line with the provision Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, Romero, (2013) who states that social media play an important role within the context of public opinion, providing security and crime prevention. The scholar stresses that social media are like a double-edged sword which in addition to the positive performance of pushing the community to improve security, can in the event of carelessness cause damages and also provide crime. This confirms the findings in Table 14 where (29.2%) of respondents say that social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Whatsapp* promote gender related crime activities the most and majority (83%) in table 15 show that the use of social media platforms remain an effective tool in sensitising and educating members of the public on how to tackle social problems.

The aforesaid findings under discussion relate to the situational crime prevention theory propounded by Clarke (1997), where he postulated that crime is repeatedly opportunistic and aims to modify contextual factors to limit the opportunities for offenders to engage in criminal behaviour. The role of social media in crime prevention is imperative. Social media in the wrong hands can do a lot of damage. However, when placed on the right hand they become a powerful tool for educating, advertising of products, informing, updating and sanitising the populace on social networks crime related events. Transit law enforcement agencies leverage community involvement and reduce crime by providing customers with an anonymous means for reporting suspicious or crime related activities in their respective domains via the use of social media platforms.

### **Research Question Four: Is social media literacy among residents of Calabar metropolis responsible for them falling victims to cybercrime?**

Results in Table 11 indicate that majority (59 or 45.4%) indicated Yes, 36 (27.7%) indicated No, while 35 (26.9%) were undecided that social media promote crime rate. This is in line with the postulation of McGuire (2016) who stated that social media which, enable many to steal and make money world over via cyber, make it possible for many to fall victims of cybercrimes.

From respondents, it was observed that social media literacy among residents of Calabar Metropolis is responsible for them falling victims to cybercrimes.

### **5.1 Summary**

This study was carried out in order to investigate social media illiteracy and cybercrime in Nigeria in Calabar metropolis. The study raised four research questions: Do residents of Calabar metropolis and law enforcement agents deploy social media platforms in combating cyber induced crimes? How does social media illiteracy expose residents of Calabar metropolis to cyber related crimes? What is the expected role of law enforcement agents in tackling cyber induced crimes among residents of Calabar metropolis? Is social media illiteracy among residents of Calabar metropolis responsible for them falling victims to cybercrimes?

For conceptual clarifications, concepts such as crime, crime prevention, cybercrime, social media illiteracy and social media were all defined. The study however, adopted the situational crime prevention theory.

For the research questions to be answered, simple percentages and tables were adopted in analysing relevant data; and the study was able to prove that social media illiteracy was responsible for residents of Calabar metropolis falling victims to cybercrimes.

Findings from the research revealed that: Residents of Calabar metropolis and the law enforcement agents deploy social media platforms in combating cyber-induced crimes; social media illiteracy expose residents of Calabar metropolis to cyber-related crimes; and social media illiteracy among residents of Calabar metropolis plays a significant role for their frequent falling as victims to cyber crimes.

## 5.2 Conclusion

This study shows that social media illiteracy has tremendous impact on cyber related crimes perpetuated in Calabar metropolis. All this is as a result of the level of sophistication and capabilities of the social media platforms. Upon realizing that the social media can be a veritable tool to check cybercrimes, residents of Calabar metropolis and indeed the law enforcement agents have accepted to begin to deploy platforms like *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram* and others to monitor and report perpetrators of cybercrimes and possibly pick the perpetrators up.

According to the study, social media illiteracy enhances cybercrimes. In spite of the rising wave in cyber-related crimes and the reluctance in integrating the social media technologies, there has been significant reduction in perpetration of cyber-induced crimes. The sophistication of social media information transmission and delivery has to, a large extent, led to the reduction of cybercrimes.

## 5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations were raised based on findings from the study:

1. It is important to define modern politics, and state explicitly the boundaries social of media role in social control and cyber crimes and the fight against it.
2. Members of the public, particularly those using the social media platforms through their mobile devices, to be constantly sensitised on different avenues of cyber crimes to avoid being defrauded or falling victims to cyber crimes.
3. Those connected to social media platforms not to accept all users of the platform who seek their friendship request to avoid falling victims to cyber crimes.
4. Block unwanted calls, text messages, avoid releasing out their financial/personal information in respect to request that you didn't expect, resist the pressure to act immediately, know how scammers tell you to pay, stop and talk to someone who you trust.
5. Law enforcement agencies should fashion out modalities on how to monitor and promote a society that would be devoid of crimes through the social media.

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