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Cybercrime and Nigeria's External Image: A Critical Assessment

by

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Abstract

Information and communication technology systems and computer networks are regarded as basic essential utilities which boon people's life. Sadly, the country's image has also suffered as we tend to lose global trust and integrity which is as a result of the illicit activities by some Nigerians, who have now turned cyberspace into an arena for committing criminal activities known as cybercrime. Thus, the paper examines the nexus between cybercrime and Nigeria's external image. To achieve the central objective of the paper, cross-sectional survey was used to generate data in the study; purposive sampling was used to select the eligible respondents. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis formulated on cybercrime and Nigeria's external image. The paper discovers that cybercrime poses serious threat to the country's external image and concludes with recommendations for combating cybercrime, thereby addressing the country's sullied international image.

Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) systems are embraced in all facets of life. They are utilized virtually in all households, associations, organizations and governments. Hence, information and communication technology can be said to be an indispensable material as it appears that all human associations, organizations, institutions, governments etc., rely heavily on it to carry out their operations (Onwubiko, 2010). The deluge of the information and communication technology (ICT) system is not only for ease, efficiency and pleasure, but is also an important drive behind innovation and economic growth.

Nigeria is an exemplar of trends in telecommunications development. Nigeria witnessed a great escalation in cell phone ownership, soaring from 13,000 subscribers in 1995 to over 9 million in 2004; internet users rose from under 10,000 in 1995 to 1.7 million in 2004 (OpenNet Initiative, n.d.). The number according to NCC (2015) grew to 81, 892,840 in January 2015. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) unveils that:

Globally, in 2011, at least 2.3 billion people, the equivalent of more than one third of the world's total population, had access to the internet. Over 60 per cent of all internet users are in developing countries. By the year 2017, it is estimated that mobile broadband subscriptions will approach 70 per cent of the world's total population. By the year 2020, the number of networked devices will outnumber people by six to one, transforming current conceptions of the internet.

In the hyper-connected world of tomorrow, it will become hard to imagine a 'computer crime', and perhaps any crime, that does not involve electronic evidence linked with internet protocol (IP) connectivity. The growth of the information society is accompanied by new and serious threats. The information and telecommunication revolution is changing the face of crime in many fundamental ways. Advances in technology have provided exciting new opportunities and benefits, but they also heighten vulnerability to crime. Cybercrime, therefore, represents an extension of the conventional criminal behaviour alongside some novel illegal activities (Dennis, 2014). This phenomenon is one of the most serious social problems in our society today. It has threatened the credibility and sabotaged the external image of the country which invariably has a greater effect on the society as a whole. Most efforts to understand cybercrime have focused on the causes of cybercrime and the nature of cybercrime in the country. Yet it is equally important to understand the effect of this crime on Nigeria's external image. Thus, this lacuna is what this paper intends to fill.

Conceptualizing Cybercrime and External image

Cybercrime

There is no commonly agreed single definition of cybercrime. There has been controversy on the criteria been used to determine the definition of the term cybercrime or e-crime or computer crimes. Some IT experts, Criminologists, police, security analysts etc., argued that cybercrime is a crime aided by the computer, or a crime in which the computer network plays a central role. More importantly, some have faulted the tag or label of cybercrime or e-crime. For instance: Don Gotternbarn cited in Javaid (n.d: 1) argued that:

There is nothing special on the crimes that happen to involve computers. Is it possible for a crime being categorized in accordance to a tool, equipment, mechanism or means through which it was committed? If that is so, how many categories of crime would there be? How about the crime committed through using a television, automobiles, scalpel, scissors, and other tools, can we categorize each of them as individual crimes?"

In arguing against this assertion, Magalla (2013: 8) contends that it is true that, we may not categorize other crimes in accordance to tools, equipment, mechanism or means through which they were committed. However, the nature and features of cybercrime clearly make the crime a unique and distinct crime and this compels the concept of these crimes being categorized as e-crimes or cybercrimes. Therefore, let cybercrime be cybercrime.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (2009) cited in House of Commons (2013) defines cybercrime as “*the use of networked computers or internet technology to perpetrate crime*”. In the same vein, the Home Office and the SOCA-led Cyber Threat Reduction Board (TRB) also cited in House of Common (2013) defined e-crime by using a three-fold categorization:

- Pure online crimes, where a digital system is the target as well as the means of attack. These include attacks on computer systems to disrupt IT infrastructure, and stealing data over a network using malware (the purpose of the data theft is usually to enable further crime);
- Existing crimes that have been transformed in scale or form by use of the internet. The growth of the internet has allowed these crimes to be carried out on an industrial scale; and
- Use of the internet to facilitate drug dealing, people smuggling and many other ‘traditional’ types of crime.

These two definitions as House of Commons (2013) put it,

Recognise the transformational effect of the internet and computer systems in existing crimes. However, these definitions could be problematic for law enforcement agencies as they risk referring to all crimes whose perpetrators use the internet to organise themselves as 'e-crime' or 'cybercrime'. It is possible that this type of definition could therefore blur the distinction between crimes carried out using the internet and crimes carried out offline where the internet is used only as an accessory. Also, other aspects of cybercrime may not be covered within the definitions of cybercrime used by law enforcement agencies. The two definitions appeared to exclude the use of computers to carry out frauds which do not involve networks, the acquisition of illegal material such as child or extreme pornography and the deployment of techniques to generate forged documents.

Therefore, it is imperative for organization to review the features that constituted the definitions of e-crime or cybercrime if organisations wish to attempt to define the dynamic nature of the cybercrime menace. However, cybercrime is becoming difficult to define as distinct or unique crime from other crimes because many criminals have moved or embraced the computer networks in perpetrating many conventional crimes. The information and the telecommunication technology according to Australian Crime Commission (n.d.) now provide a platform for perpetrating crimes- fraud, forgery, money laundering- on a large scale. The internet is particularly enticing to criminals and organised crime groups.

It is imperative to note that cybercrime is mostly a crime on the information of an individual, organizations, governments etc. These crimes are not physical assaults on people, organizations and governments but are assaults on individual or corporate virtual body. Virtual body is the information that characterizes people, organizations, corporations, institutions etc. In this century, our virtual identities are central to everyday life: individuals, institutions, associations etc., are stored on computer databases through virtual identities (Dennis, 2014). Hence, an attack on the virtual body could cause hazard to the entire body- physical, virtual and mental.

Information and communication technology makes it possible for conventional crimes such as harassment, drug trafficking, theft, prostitution, forgery etc., to be perpetrated on the computer network or electronically. It has also moved some criminals from the physical environment to the virtual environment.

By and large, it is important to note that cybercrime has been defined by different people in different ways; the bottom line of all these definitions is that cybercrime generally refers to a unlawful activity where a “computer or computer network is the source, instrument, target, or place of a crime. Despite the inevitable references to computers or online activity, cybercrime nevertheless encompasses a whole raft of ‘traditional’ crimes - such as fraud, theft, blackmail, forgery and embezzlement” (Dennis, 2014). The phenomenon is extremely hard to notice and castigate because the perpetrators can skillfully protect their identities and attack at anytime and anywhere.

External Image

This is an internal psychological concept, the sum total of what penetrates our cognition and is organized into a rather complex structure of subjective knowledge (Frankel, 1969). Anton, (2011) describes external image as the entirety of all perceptions, feelings, and judgments that people make about others. It is how we perceived others. This perception springs from earlier experiences or contacts with the person or organization and the outcome of this contacts and evaluation. The way we perceive and judge people modifies our interaction towards them.

The external image of a nation is like a mirror through which a nation is viewed by other countries as they relate among themselves. It is the perception of a country by other nations of the world. The international system is a gamut of relationship among nations and how a country is perceived may determine the extent of its success at the international system.

Image is one thing no nation, organization, government, association as well as individuals can toy with. Impression cannot be ignored in anything one does. This is so because impression determines one’s image, and image determines the kind of support or reaction to be received from others. A bad impression leads to bad image, and this does not command “public support for any programme of action” (Soeze, 2014). A bad image therefore, affects an organization, government especially in the international world. This ultimately will prompt the international community to downgrade and abase such country because of the sullied and soiled image. This is why it is very important for a nation to project itself well when dealing with other nations of the world. Besides, the world, through technology, has become a ‘global village’ and therefore what happens within a nation is not entirely hidden to the outside world. A nation that lacks good governance as a result of human rights abuse and bad economic policies cannot possess a good image at the international level.

The strategic image of a state has to do with the decision-makers’ view (perception of the international environment). It summarizes the way the policy-maker organizes structures, evaluates and relates to his environment. It is the systematic understanding of others’ strategic image that lays the sound foundation of diplomacy.

A person's external image which is the entirety of perceptions, judgements and feelings others have toward the person, significantly affects the person's self-image. That is, the perceptions and judgments we have for an individual dictate his self-image- the way he views and assesses himself. A good image “strengthens an individual's self-confidence and self-esteem. In extreme cases, a negative external image can cause mental illness” (Ottoh, 2007). This explains why Ogwu (2005) argued that a nation’s reputation is a critical asset and, therefore, a vital component part of its national power.

Good image is a valuable national asset, which defines its strategic position in international politics. Essentially, every nation aspires to wield some influence in the struggle for strategic partnership. In this struggle, national reputation becomes a critical determinant of foreign policy. In other words, national image is a determinant factor in the conduct of a nation’s foreign policy (Ottoh, 2007).

Soeze (2014) asserts that a good external image has a nexus with the fortunes of an organization, government and people. A country and organization that constantly maintain good customer relations, good government relations, good ethical business practice and so on certainly would enjoy a good image that will impacts positively on all its products/services and actions, and importantly, its whole activities in the international scene. Put differently, a nation that present itself or position itself well stands the chance of being seen as a good nation at the international level. This is because international perception of a country is a reflection of its domestic activities. Soeze (2014) further points out that:

The need to establish and maintain a favourable international image is the wish of every organization and government of every country whether under military or democracy. A nation with bad image could be treated with levity at the international level. Nigeria witnessed this during the military dictatorship of the late General Sanni Abacha from 1993 to 1998. At that particular period, Nigeria’s image was seriously dented and denigrated. As a result, our great nation, the giant of Africa, was not accepted at the international community.

No nation will enjoy good relationship with other nations of the world when it suffers good reputation. Until recently, countries like Liberia, Sierra-leone, Rwanda, Somalia, Congo, etc., suffered bad international image for years as a result of civil wars fought in the countries.

Exploring the Nexus between Cybercrime and Nigeria's External Image

There exists a sharp connection between the extent to which crimes are perpetrated in a country and the kind of external image the country will enjoy. This is because the image of a nation is closely connected to its domestic activities and the kind of relationship it establishes with the outside world. There are so many ways in which a nation can project its reputation at the international system; these ways are not unconnected to how the country conducts its domestic activities. Endemic corruption, high rate of crimes, absence of good governance etc., are few areas in which a country's image can be bastardized.

Many Nigerians accuse the government as being solely responsible for the country's bad external image without paying adequate attention to the roles of individuals that may give the country positive or negative image as the case may be. Today, the world has become a global village through the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). How we use this technology to the advantage of individuals matters a lot in shaping the country's image at the global level.

Most people in Nigeria have embraced the ICT inventions, such that the Internet medium now takes larger part of their days when compared to their other daily activities. The varieties of application offered by the Net, such as, electronic mailing, 'chat' systems and Internet messaging (IM), often serve as good grounds for carrying out immoral and other deceitful activities by the criminals (Adeniran, 2008: 368). In other words, "the Internet has opened up a new window for the development of a new criminal sector of fraud. The painful aspect of this type of new fraud is that perpetrators can now use the anonymous advantage of the Internet to cause harm" (PBI Media, 2013). The situation is so bad now that young secondary school leavers, undergraduates and graduates are finding cybercrimes as shortcut to success. This has greatly affected the image of the country. Cases are abounding where Nigerians were rough handled on their arrival at some foreign countries. An average Nigeria is a suspected fraudster. Consequently, the image of the country has been badly affected.

Theoretical Issues Robert Merton's Manifest and Latent Functions and Dysfunctions

Robert K. Merton is one of the subscribers of structural functional theory. He developed another nuance of structural functional theory by revealing that social patterns, institutions and structures have both manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions (Merton, 1948). Manifest functions are intended, planned, expected, imagined and recognized consequences or outcomes. These are functions which people expect the institutions to fulfill and are not dumbfounded when such functions or outcomes or consequences come to reality. The latent functions on the other hand are unintended, unplanned, neglected, extemporaneous, spontaneous and unfamiliar consequences.

For example, the manifest function of technology is for socio-economic development. On the other hand, it also has its latent function which is that it is being used to perpetrate criminal activities. It is the responsibility of all Sociologists according to Merton to analyse and examine both the manifest and latent functions of social patterns, social structures and institutions.

The manifest function of cybercrime especially fraud is that it provides income for the cybercriminals, while the latent function is that: it is detrimental to both the victims and the perpetrators' countries.

Merton also talked about dysfunctions. He asserts that dysfunctions can also be manifest or latent. Manifest dysfunctions are anticipated problems and disruptions of a particular phenomenon or menace, while the latent dysfunctions are unintended disruptions and problems of a particular phenomenon. There is no gainsaying that cybercrime is dysfunctional to human society. It has the manifest and latent dysfunctions. The manifest dysfunctions are: cybercrime causes financial loss to the victims, it triggers other forms of social vices, it kills creativity and hinders productivity. Having said, it is imperative to observe that cybercrime has its latent dysfunction which is that it destroys the country's external image. The unpleasant, unpalatable and scaring image of the country has been a result of the questionable attitude of some Nigerians who specialize in cybercrime.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Lagos-State. Cross-sectional survey was used to generate data for the survey in which purposive random sampling was used to select eligible respondents. The study population consisted of male and female adults aged 18-67 years in the study population who had traveled and lived outside the shore of Nigeria before. Questionnaire schedule was used to elicit data from the respondents. Statistical Packages for Social Statistics (SPSS/PC) Version 22.0 was used to analyze the data. This was done after the returned questionnaires were edited and coded.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Table 1 below shows the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The sex distribution of the respondents in the table below shows that 56.5% (113) of the respondents were males, while 43.5% (87) were females. Data on age of the respondents shows that 28.5% (57) were in the age group 28-37years; 24% (48) were in the age group 38-47; 22% (44) were in the age group 18-27 years; 15.5% (31) were in the age group 48-57 years; 8% (16) were in the age group 58-67 years, while 2% (4) were above 67. Information on the respondents' education shows that 51% (102) had higher education; 41% (82) had secondary education; 5.5% (11) had primary education; 2% (4) had quranic education, while 0.5% (1) had no formal education.

Question on the respondents' occupation shows that 58% (116) engaged in white collar jobs; 33% (66) engaged in blue collar jobs; 6% (12) were students; 1.5% (3) were retirees, while 1.5% (3) were unemployed. Question on the continents the respondents have been to shows that 28.5% (57) of the respondents had been to Europe before; 28% (56) had been to Africa before; 19.5% (39) had been to North America before; 18.5% (37) had been to Asia, while 5.5% (11) had been to South America before.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by their Socio-Economic Characteristics

Socio-Economic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	113	56.5
Female	87	43.5
Total	200	100
Age		
18-27	44	22
28-37	57	28.5
38-47	48	24
48-57	31	15.5
58-67	16	8
67 and Above	4	2
Total	200	100
Education Qualification		
No formal Education	1	0.5
Quranic	4	2
Primary Education	11	5.5
Secondary	82	41
Higher	102	51
Total	200	100
Occupation		
White collar job	116	58
Blue collar job	66	33
Students	12	6
Retirees	3	1.5
Unemployed	3	1.5
Total	200	100
Which of these continents have you been to?		
Asia	37	18.5
Africa	56	28
North America	39	19.5
South America	11	5.5
Europe	57	28.5
Total	200	100

Table 2 below reveals the prevalence of cybercrime in Nigeria. From the table, 88% (176) believed cybercrime is prevalence in Nigeria, while 12% (24) believed cybercrime is not rife in Nigeria. Question on whether the prevalence of cybercrime affects the country's external image shows that the same proportion of people that believed cybercrime is rife in Nigeria 88% (176) opined that the scourge of cybercrime affects Nigeria's external image, while the same proportion of people that debunked that cybercrime is prevalence in Nigeria also asserted that the phenomenon of cybercrime does not affect the country's external image.

Table 2: Cybercrime

Cybercrime	Frequency	Percentage
Which of these continents have you been to?		
Asia	37	18.5
Africa	56	28
North America	39	19.5
South America	11	5.5
Europe	57	28.5
Total	200	100
Is cybercrime prevalence in Nigeria?		
Yes	176	88
No	24	12
Total	200	100
Does cybercrime affect the country's external image negatively?		
Yes	176	88
No	24	12
Total	200	100

Table 3 is the cross tabulation of the prevalence of cybercrime and the effect of cybercrime on Nigeria's external image. The table reveals that cybercrime sabotages the country's external image. For example, 88% of the respondents asserted that cybercrime is prevalence in the country and it has a negative effect on the country's external image. This proportion was far more than the percentage of people who debunked the prevalence of cybercrime and its negative effect on the country's external image. This relationship was statistically significant at $P < 0.05$. The chi-square value of the relationship is $(X^2) = (200.000^a)$, degree of freedom = 1, $P = 0.000$ and $P < 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis that there is significant relationship between cybercrime and the country's negative external's image was accepted. The contingency coefficient result shows that the relationship between cybercrime and Nigeria's external image was very strong (0.707). This shows that 70.7% of the occurrence of the country's negative external image could be a function of cybercrime.

Table 3: Chi-square table of the Cross-Tabulation of Cybercrime and Nigeria’s External image

Is cybercrime prevalence in Nigeria?	Does cybercrime affect the country’s external image negatively?	
	Yes	No
Yes	176 (100%)	0 (0%)
No	0 (0%)	24 (100%)
Total	176 (88%)	24 (12%)
X²= 200.000^a d.f. =1, P = 0.000, C= 0.707		

Conclusion and Recommendations

The unattractive and soiled image of Nigeria has been a result of the questionable attitude of some Nigerians who specialize in internet fraud, credit card manipulation, money laundering etc. Nigeria has picked up quite a reputation as the epicenter of international vice. Cybercrime brings down a nation and no doubt Nigeria has had its fair share. Economic activities have been crawling as foreign investors are not ready to come to Nigeria. Hence, the investors that ought to have established companies and by that will employ unemployed Nigerians cannot come. Thus, unemployment continues to rampage the country. Therefore, we can conclude that cybercrime is no doubt an image trauma for Nigeria; it is a source of concern and embarrassment for the nation.

It is imperative to note that attenuating cybercrime in Nigeria will go a long way in shaping and redeeming the soiled external image of the country. While experts agree that the causes of cybercrime are complex and enormous, it is possible to develop counter measures that will address the known risk factors. These countermeasures are: education, international cooperation, creating sustainable job, inter alia.

Education

Education is very consequential in combating cybercrime. People need to be educated on how to prevent cybercrime, how cybercrime works and the harmful effects of cybercrime in the society. People also need to be enlightened on how to secure their data and computers. This according to International Telecommunication Union is important because certain cybercrimes – especially those related to fraud, such as “phishing” and “spoofing” – do not generally depend on a lack of technical protection, but rather lack of awareness by victims (International Telecommunication Union, 2009).

If users are aware that their financial institutions will never contact them by e-mail requesting full passwords or bank account details, they cannot fall victim to phishing or identity fraud attacks. Educating ICT users reduces the number of potential targets.

International Cooperation

Cybercrime is a transnational crime which requires transnational efforts. Transnational efforts can be said to be the cooperation among agencies of countries of the world. International and transnational investigations without the consent of the competent authorities in the countries involved are difficult with regards to the principle of 'national sovereignty'. This principle does not allow one country to carry out investigations within the territory of another country without the permission of the local authorities. Therefore, investigations need to be carried out with the support of the authorities in all countries involved.

Providing Sustainable Jobs

Graduates and people with IT skills are finding it difficult to secure legitimate and sustainable jobs. A large number of cyber-attacks originate from Eastern Europe and Russia because students there are good at mathematics, physics, and computer and have difficulties finding jobs.³² In some countries, organized crime groups reportedly pay up to ten times as much as legitimate IT jobs to top graduates (Blau, 2004). This scenario is not quite dissimilar to the extant situation in our country. Hence, massive creation of sustainable jobs and creation of youth empowerment programmes in form sports competitions, IT oriented contests and jobs are necessary. All these help to enable those with immense IT skills and the unemployed ones to be more productive rather than wasting their talents on cybercrimes.

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