

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FRAMING OF CYBERCRIME ON UNDERGRADUATES IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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This study investigates the portrayal of cybercrime on social media and its influence on undergraduate students in selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study adopted Framing Theory to explain how social media shape public perception through the selective presentation of information on cybercrime. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 397 undergraduates in Olabisi Onabanjo University and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that students frequently encounter cybercrime-related content on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), often perceiving such content as both informative and sensationalised. These portrayals significantly impact their awareness of cybersecurity, influence their perceptions of cybercrime, and may contribute to its glamourisation. Key factors motivating engagement with such content include curiosity, entertainment, peer influence, and the anonymity provided by social media. To counter the glamourisation of cybercrime, the study proposed strategies such as stricter content regulation, integration of cyber ethics into academic curricula, awareness campaigns, and responsible influencer behaviour. The study concludes that while social media can serve as a tool for awareness, it also poses risks by subtly normalising cybercrime. A collaborative approach involving educational institutions, policymakers, media platforms, and youth communities is essential for fostering responsible digital citizenship and mitigating the appeal of cybercrime among undergraduates.

Keywords: Framing, Social Media, Cybercrime, Cybercrime Portrayal, Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

Cybercrime, which is defined as unlawful actions conducted online or through computers, is becoming a bigger problem in Nigeria and around the world. These offences include identity theft, cyberbullying, phishing, hacking, and online fraud (Fafinski, 2018). Increased internet usage, digital illiteracy, and socioeconomic reasons, including high unemployment rates, have all contributed to a notable surge in cybercrime in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2020). This trend has also affected Ogun State, which is home to multiple universities. Many of the state's students actively use social media, and they come from a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Ene, 2021).

The way that cybercrime is portrayed on social media has become a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides a forum for public education campaigns that inform people about the risks associated with cybercrime and how to avoid it (David et al., 2019). However, by showcasing the extravagant lifestyles of those purportedly engaged in cybercrime known as "Yahoo boys" in Nigerian slang, it glamorises criminal activity, especially among young people (Tade, 2019). Undergraduate students'

perceptions and potential interactions with cybercrime are influenced by this dual presentation. For example, viral content that normalises or glorifies cybercrime can gently erode moral and ethical limits among students who are susceptible to being influenced (Agboola, 2020).

Research has indicated that youths, especially those enrolled in undergraduate programmes, are more vulnerable to the effects of social media because of their developmental stage, peer pressure, and exposure to a wide range of information (Tomaszewski et al., 2021). Their perception of the world, particularly how they feel about cybercrime, is greatly influenced by the digital environment they live in (Tomaszewski et al., 2021). Positive or negative narratives regarding cybercrime can be shaped by the interaction of socioeconomic circumstances, cultural influences, and the ubiquitous nature of social media (Akpojivi & Bevan-Dye, 2019).

The increasing influence of social media has significantly shaped how undergraduates perceive societal issues, including cybercrime, which involves activities such as hacking, identity theft, and online fraud (Olumuji & Olaniran, 2025). Young people, especially university students, are especially vulnerable to cybercrime in Nigeria, where they are in some cases both victims and offenders.

Previous scholarship on cybercrime in Nigeria has made important contributions to understanding cybercrime in Nigeria, a significant conceptual gap remains in relation to how cybercrime is framed on social media and how such framing shapes undergraduates' perceptions. Studies such as those by Okeshola and Adeta (2013) and Olowu and Daramola (2018) largely focus on the socioeconomic implications of cybercrime and the role of digital platforms in facilitating fraudulent activities. Although these studies acknowledge the relevance of online environments, they do not examine the symbolic and narrative ways cybercrime is presented to audiences on social media.

Similarly, studies by Eke, Ekechukwu, and Emmanuel (2021) and Olumuji and Olaniran (2025) examine students' perceptions of cybercrime, but their emphasis is on the causes, prevalence, and socioeconomic drivers of cybercriminal behaviour. These studies provide useful insights into why young people may engage in cybercrime but do not interrogate how repeated exposure to cybercrime-related content on social media may shape students' attitudes, values, and behavioural orientations. Likewise, Umeh and Owoye (2019) identify peer influence as a factor in cybercrime involvement, yet they do not account for the role of social media as a mediated environment where peer norms and meanings are constructed, circulated, and reinforced.

Ogun State, being a hub of educational institutions, is home to a significant population of tech-savvy youth who are active on social media, making it a critical area for investigation. This study adds to scholarship by grounding the concept of "portrayal" in Framing Theory, conceptualising portrayal as the selective presentation and emphasis of cybercrime narratives that may glamorise, normalise, or condemn cybercriminal behaviour. In addition, "social media" is operationalised to specifically refer to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X), as these platforms are widely used by undergraduates and provide distinct spaces for the circulation of cybercrime-related narratives. By investigating how cybercrime is framed across these platforms and how undergraduates interpret such frames, this study contributes a media-centred perspective on youth cybercrime in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To determine how cybercrime is portrayed on social media platforms.
- ii. To analyse the influence of the portrayal of cybercrime on social media among undergraduates in selected universities in Ogun State
- iii. To identify the factors that motivate students to engage with social media content related to cybercrime.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cybercrime

Cybercrime, often defined as illegal activities executed through or against computer systems, has become a global menace. According to McConnell International (2017), cybercrime stands apart from traditional crimes due to its ease of execution, minimal resource requirements, jurisdictional challenges, and sometimes ambiguous legality. Its various forms include identity theft, phishing, ransomware attacks, cyberbullying, and hacking (Gupta, 2020; Abdurrahman & Jibril, 2017).

In Nigeria, cybercrime, popularly referred to as "Yahoo-Yahoo", is driven by socioeconomic

factors such as poverty and unemployment. Saulawa and Marshall (2015) highlight that Nigeria ranks among the countries with the highest rates of cybercrime, causing significant financial losses for individuals and businesses. The anonymity provided by digital platforms enables offenders to operate with minimal risk of detection, further complicating efforts to combat these crimes (Olumuji & Olaniran, 2025).

As noted by Oni et al. (2023), cybercrime has become a significant global issue, affecting individuals, businesses, and governments alike. Its various forms include identity theft, phishing, ransomware, and hacking, which exploit technological vulnerabilities to cause harm (Anudini et al., 2021). In Nigeria, cybercrime poses a significant threat, costing the nation approximately N127 billion annually, equivalent to 0.08% of its GDP (Pantami, 2016). Youths are both primary perpetrators and victims, with financial systems and governmental websites frequently targeted (Akano, 2013). Globally, the rise in internet penetration and digital literacy has also expanded the opportunities for cybercriminals. The prevalence of cybercrime correlates with limited awareness of cybersecurity and socioeconomic factors such as unemployment and poverty (Abdurrahman & Jibril, 2017).

Victims often suffer not only financial losses but also emotional trauma and reputational damage. For instance, women and children are particularly vulnerable to crimes like identity theft and cyberstalking (Gupta, 2020). Ogunjobi (2020) also penned that the economic and psychological impacts of cybercrime are profound, with victims often facing financial losses, emotional distress, and reputational damage. Studies also highlight that in higher education settings, cyberbullying and data breaches undermine academic integrity and mental well-being (Akrami et al., 2024).

Efforts to counter cybercrime include both technological solutions, such as multi-factor authentication and anti-malware tools, and legislative measures. However, Agara et al. (2021) stress the need for more robust cybercrime legislation, particularly in Nigeria, to address the evolving nature of these offences. A multi-pronged approach involving education, policy enforcement, and international cooperation is essential for tackling the global threat posed by cybercrime.

Social Media Portrayal of Cybercrime

Social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and others both facilitate and amplify cybercrime. Through tactics including phishing, financial fraud, and social engineering, criminals can take advantage of victims due to the ease of anonymity and global access (Gupta, 2020; Akrami et al., 2024). According to Olumuji & Olaniran (2025), narratives ingrained in popular social media culture frequently justify fraudulent activity, making efforts to combat cybercrime on these platforms even more challenging. Social media has turned into a sanctuary for criminals, who use it to target vulnerable populations, disseminate false information, and steal identities (Gupta, 2020). During the COVID-19 epidemic, social media usage grew quickly, making individuals more susceptible to cybercrime (Anudini et al., 2021).

Cybercrime is portrayed and influenced by social media in two ways. It normalises some types of cybercrime, to start. According to a study by Abdurrahman and Jibril (2017), for example, ads for hiring money mules on Instagram frequently glorify illegal activity by showcasing opulent lifestyles. Additionally, Oni et al. (2023) noted that social media is commonly used to lure people into fraudulent schemes, portraying cybercrime as a profitable endeavour. Second, it draws attention to the negative effects of cybercrime. According to research on online universities by Akrami et al. (2024), students actively use social media sites like Instagram for learning, but they also run serious dangers of being hacked and subjected to cyberbullying.

Social media's anonymity has made it possible for criminals to take advantage of weaker victims and commit a variety of illegal activities and cybercrimes. According to Lee (2019), a "darknet" is a group of websites maintained on encrypted networks that are not reachable by normal web browsers or traditional search engines. By offering areas for the creation, access, sharing, or keeping of illicit acts, other online platforms beyond these dark webs also aid in criminal activity, sustaining frauds and other types of dishonest behaviour against gullible people.

Cybercrimes, which include acts like hacking, credit card fraud, advanced fee fraud (often referred to as 419 fraud), forgery, and website defacement, account for a sizable percentage of crimes in the digital age (Saulawa, 2016). The development of information and communications technology (ICT) has made it easier for a number of crimes to be committed online. Since the Internet is the main

information technology channel, cybercrime has increased, with cybersquatting emerging as one of the most common crimes in cyberspace. Through computer equipment and communication networks, cyberspace connects people all over the world, making the process easier for users. However, cybercriminals have also found refuge in this borderless environment, using it to perpetrate crimes that have an international impact. The initial intent of cyberspace is being undermined by this trend, which makes people, governments, and organisations feel more vulnerable as a result of the rising rate of cybercrime (Olumuji & Olaniran, 2025).

Due in large part to advanced fee fraud's ubiquity and reputation in Nigeria's cybercrime environment, credit card users and those doing online transactions are frequently the main targets of these schemes. The absence of comprehensive cybercrime regulation in Nigeria contributes to the growth of these types of cybercrimes. Although fraud is covered by the Penal Code, the employment of computers in contemporary settings is not. Furthermore, credit card fraud, Point of Sale intrusions, and other related offences are not addressed under the current Advanced Fee Fraud Act of 2006, which largely concentrates on fraud charges pertaining to telecommunications (Saulawa, 2016). This calls into question whether the current laws are sufficient to deal with these offences.

As the Nigerian government works to address the difficulties of internet transactions within the international community, Saulawa & Marshall (2015) stress the importance of enacting cybercrime legislation. The nation's progress in passing pertinent legislation is demonstrated by the emphasis on cybersquatting, a particular type of cybercrime. Chang (2008) claims that cases involving advance fee fraud are now being investigated by the Nigerian government's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act, which was adopted in June 2004. Significant technological breakthroughs have been brought about by the digital age, but cybercrimes have also increased as a result. To combat these crimes and guarantee the protection and security of users of the internet, effective legislation and international collaboration are crucial.

Such practices are becoming more common in Nigeria, where some people are participating in them using what are seen to be mystically beneficial means. The contemporary nickname "Yahoo boys," which has replaced "419" because of the sophisticated use of computers and the internet in their scams, is frequently used to describe these criminals. The term "Yahoo boys" usually refers to a group of young people who specialise in different types of cybercrime and are primarily between the ages of 22 and 29 (Saulawa, 2016). Teenagers have reportedly just entered the "Yahoo" industry, where they pick up skills from more seasoned "Yahoo boys" before going on to operate independently.

Furthermore, social media accelerates the spread of victim narratives and misleading information, which exacerbates the effects of cybercrime. According to reports, social media cybercrime exacerbates societal problems such as victim stigmatisation, mistrust, and fear (Gupta, 2020; Akrami et al., 2024). Scholars support greater digital literacy and more stringent social media content controls as solutions to these problems (Gupta, 2020). To reduce these hazards, it is essential to enforce stricter rules on material sharing and increase knowledge of digital literacy (Anudini et al., 2021).

Application of Framing Theory to examine the portrayal of cybercrime in social media and its impact on undergraduate students is evident in Adeyemi and Okeke (2021), the study analysed how *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers framed cybercrime, particularly the "Yahoo-Yahoo" phenomenon, in Nigeria. The study found that the media predominantly employed a criminality frame, emphasising the illegal nature of cyber fraud while occasionally portraying perpetrators as victims of economic hardship. This framing influenced how audiences, including university students, interpreted cybercrime, either as a condemnable offence or as a necessary survival strategy. Similarly, Olatunji and Adebayo (2020) examined the influence of media narratives on cybercrime perception among Nigerian undergraduates. Their findings revealed that exposure to social media discussions on cyber fraud shaped students' views, often normalising cybercrime through humorous or justification frames. Beyond Nigeria, a study conducted by Mensah and Osei (2022) in Ghana investigated undergraduate perceptions of cybercrime at the University of Cape Coast. Their research highlighted that social media narratives significantly contributed to students' awareness and attitudes toward cyber fraud.

The way social media platforms and news outlets portray cyber fraud influences students' attitudes and behaviours, either reinforcing negative perceptions or normalising fraudulent activities as a viable means of economic survival.

Factors Motivating Young People to Engage with Cybercrime

One of the primary drivers of cybercrime among young people is financial gain. Many young individuals turn to cybercrime, such as hacking, fraud, and identity theft, as a means to make money quickly (Hutchings & Holt, 2023). Given the global economic disparities, some youths see cybercrime as an accessible and lucrative alternative to traditional employment. Cybercriminal activities, such as ransomware attacks and phishing schemes, often yield substantial financial rewards with minimal physical risk.

Economic deprivation, social influence, and curiosity about technology are also other factors driving youth involvement in cybercrime. Poverty and unemployment create a fertile ground for cybercriminal activities as individuals seek alternative means to secure financial stability (Abdurrahman & Jibril, 2017). As highlighted by Oni et al. (2023), peer influence and societal normalisation of fraudulent activities further exacerbate this trend. For instance, the study by Abdurrahman and Jibril (2017) found that 58.1% of Nigerian youth believe poverty drives cybercrime, while 33.6% attribute it to the influence of social networks.

Social media platforms play a critical role in fostering engagement with cybercrime. The anonymity offered by these platforms reduces the perceived risks of criminal activities, making them attractive to young people. Furthermore, peer groups often normalise cybercrime by sharing knowledge and promoting success stories of financial gains (Gupta, 2020; Abdurrahman & Jibril, 2017). Such normalisation leads to a perception of cybercrime as a viable and low-risk means of achieving wealth.

Curiosity and skill development also motivate participation. Some youths view cybercrime as an opportunity to test and showcase their technical skills. (Gupta, 2020). Despite these motivations, many participants underestimate the consequences of their actions, including legal penalties, societal stigma, and long-term impacts on their professional lives (Akrami et al., 2024). Additionally, cybercrime communities offer recognition and a sense of belonging, motivating individuals to participate. Gupta (2020) notes that some youth view cybercrime as an opportunity to explore and demonstrate their technical skills, often underestimating the potential consequences.

Another contributing factor is the lack of awareness regarding the legal and ethical implications of cybercrime. Many young offenders do not fully understand the severity of their actions or the potential consequences, including legal penalties and long-term reputational damage (Leukfeldt et al., 2023). Educational gaps in cybersecurity awareness and ethical digital practices contribute to the increasing number of youth engaging in cybercrime.

The inflow of young people into urban areas, where it is profitable to establish oneself, catalyses cybercrime activity. It's shocking to learn that young people leave Nigeria for other nations in search of a hiding place where they may conduct their activities covertly. Nigerian youth struggle to find white-collar work, so they look for any way to make ends meet (Ogunjobi, 2020).

Addressing the issue of youth cybercrime requires a multifaceted approach, including enhanced cybersecurity education, legal deterrence, and alternative pathways for young people to utilise their digital skills ethically. Schools, governments, and technology companies must collaborate to promote awareness and provide opportunities for ethical hacking and cybersecurity careers. By understanding the motivations behind cybercrime engagement, society can work towards preventive measures that channel young talent into productive and legal pursuits.

Theoretical Framework - Framing Theory

Framing theory is a significant concept in communication studies that explains how media and other social agents shape public perception through the selective presentation of information. The theory, which has its roots in Goffman's (1974) writings, asserts that how an issue is presented affects how audiences perceive and react to it. Framing has been used extensively in social psychology, political communication, and media studies over time. Erving Goffman first presented framing theory in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis*, where he defined frames as "schemata of interpretation" that enable people to comprehend and react to reality. Goffman contends that to make sense of complex information, people use mental structures, or frames. Framing is the term used in media studies to describe how news outlets emphasise some parts of a narrative while downplaying others, to influence viewers (Entman, 1993). Although framing is associated with the agenda-setting tradition, it broadens the scope of the study by concentrating on the main points of the current problems rather than a specific subject.

Undergraduates' perceptions of and involvement in cybercrime might be influenced by media representations that normalise or stigmatise such behaviours. Cybercrime framing on social media can have a big impact on how people feel and act about it, either supporting or contradicting accepted standards (Loja, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design to examine the current characteristics of the issue under study. The design allowed the study to extract relevant data from a large, defined sample. The target population for this study were undergraduate students in Olabisi Onabanjo University and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. This accounts for 32,239 OOU students as obtained formally from the school’s website, and 23,558 FUNAAB undergraduate students obtained officially from the school’s registrar; this totals 55,797 students.

The Taro Yamane formula was employed to derive the sample size for this study. Using this formula with an estimated total population of 55,797 students, $n \approx 397.15$, a sample size of 397 students was the least recommended number of students to receive questionnaires to participate in the survey. The sampling technique employed for this study was simple random sampling technique. Data was collected through physical administration of the questionnaire with the help of four research assistants (two per university) who were trained and administered the instrument in a month. Respondents’ participation was voluntary and consensual.

Therefore,

S/N	University	Population	Sample Size
1	Olabisi Onabanjo University	32,239	229
2	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	23,558	168
Total		55,797	397

The study used questionnaire as the primary source of data collection. A structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale was used to examine the framing of cybercrime on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X); assess its influence on undergraduates; and identify motivational engagement factors. To ensure the research instrument’s validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two mass communication scholars and collaborators to verify its accuracy and alignment with the study’s objectives, the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach’s alpha was used and the reliability coefficient was 0.72. Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means would be used to summarise the data. The results are presented in tables, frequencies and percentages.

Result and Discussion

Though the sample size was 397, only 377 respondents, representing approximately 95% of the intended sample, completed and returned the questionnaire accurately.

Table 1: Portrayal of Cybercrime on Social Media

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
I frequently come across content related to cybercrime on social media	37 (9.8%)	273 (72.4%)	24 (6.4%)	21 (5.6%)	22 (5.8%)	3.74
Social media platforms provide accurate and reliable information about cybercrime	19 (5.0%)	289 (76.7%)	24 (6.4%)	24 (6.4%)	21 (5.6%)	3.68
Cybercrime is often exaggerated on social media	31 (8.2%)	305 (80.9%)	17 (4.5%)	9 (2.4%)	15 (4.0%)	3.90

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The portrayal of cybercrime on social media influences my perception of online security	28 (7.4%)	253 (67.1%)	27 (7.2%)	40 (10.6%)	29 (7.7%)	3.56
Social media users are generally well-informed about cybercrime threats	37 (9.8%)	241 (63.9%)	34 (9.0%)	25 (6.6%)	40 (10.6%)	3.56

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents data on how respondents perceived the portrayal of cybercrime on social media. Among the listed items, the statement that cybercrime is often exaggerated on social media recorded the highest mean score of 3.90, indicating that a significant number of respondents agreed that social media tends to sensationalise cybercrime content. The second-highest mean score of 3.74 was recorded for the statement that respondents frequently come across content related to cybercrime on social media.

The findings revealed that cybercrime is a highly visible and frequently discussed issue across various social media platforms. Respondents indicated that while the topic often receives exaggerated representation, users still place a moderate level of trust in the content shared. However, this trust does not equate to a comprehensive understanding of the underlying issues surrounding cybercrime. These findings are consistent with the studies of Gupta (2020) and Akrami et al. (2023), both of whom emphasised the role of social media infrastructure in shaping perceptions of cybercrime. Gupta (2020) pointed out that the anonymity and interactive design of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide fertile ground for the proliferation of cybercrimes, including identity theft, cyberbullying, and online fraud. Akrami et al. (2023) further corroborated this, noting that while these platforms serve educational and social functions, they are simultaneously vulnerable to various cyber threats. The dual nature of social media offering both utility and risk, creates an environment where cybercrime is not only exposed but also normalised through repeated and often dramatised depictions. This supports the assumptions of Framing Theory, which posits that the way the media frames an issue shapes public interpretation. The dramatisation, sensationalism, or glamourisation of cybercrime contributes to its heightened visibility but often at the expense of deep, critical engagement. As such, the findings affirm that while users are frequently exposed to cybercrime-related content, their ability to critically process and understand the complexities of the issue remains limited, shaped more by presentation than by analytical insight.

Table 2: Influence of Cybercrime Portrayal on Social Media among Ogun State University Undergraduates

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
The portrayal of cybercrime on social media has influenced my perception of cybercrime	31 (8.2%)	245 (65.0%)	37 (9.8%)	34 (9.0%)	30 (8.0%)	3.57
Social media content about cybercrime makes me more aware of online security risks	51 (13.5%)	212 (56.2%)	40 (10.6%)	36 (9.5%)	38 (10.1%)	3.53
Exposure to cybercrime-related posts on social media affects my attitude toward cybersecurity practices	19 (5.0%)	294 (78.0%)	28 (7.4%)	21 (5.6%)	15 (4.0%)	3.74
Discussions about cybercrime on social media influence how I perceive law enforcement efforts against cybercrime	44 (11.7%)	223 (59.2%)	39 (10.3%)	41 (10.9%)	30 (8.0%)	3.55
I believe that cybercrime is normalised or glorified on social media	33 (8.8%)	299 (79.3%)	16 (4.2%)	17 (4.5%)	12 (3.2%)	3.86

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 explored the influence of cybercrime portrayal on social media in shaping undergraduate perceptions. The statement with the highest mean score (3.86) indicated that respondents believed cybercrime was normalised or glorified on social media. Following this, the statement that exposure to cybercrime-related posts affected respondents' attitudes toward cybersecurity practices had a mean score of 3.74.

This study found that repeated exposure to cybercrime narratives on social media significantly influenced students' perceptions, particularly in terms of raising awareness, altering cybersecurity practices, and shaping attitudes toward law enforcement. Some respondents also noted a normalisation of cybercrime behaviour in everyday digital discourse, whereby acts once seen as deviant are increasingly perceived as strategic or justified, especially in contexts of socioeconomic hardship. This finding aligns with earlier studies by Abdurrahman and Jibril (2017), who observed that a considerable number of Nigerian youths regard the internet as a platform for engaging in cybercrime, driven largely by poverty and systemic inequality. They recommended that awareness campaigns be instituted to counteract these beliefs. Similarly, Onyibe et al. (2023) identified prevalent cybercrimes such as phishing and cyberstalking among Nigerian youths and emphasised the need for resilience strategies, digital literacy, and institutional interventions. These studies collectively highlight that the social media portrayal of cybercrime not only informs awareness but also influences behavioural patterns and attitudes toward crime prevention. The consistent portrayal of cybercrime on social media, especially when framed as a legitimate or rewarding pursuit, functions as a behavioural model for undergraduates. Consequently, the normalisation of such portrayals can foster attitudinal shifts that reduce moral restraint or increase risk-taking behaviours. The impact on perceptions of law enforcement, particularly scepticism about institutional efficacy, also reflects the deep influence of digital narratives on how youths internalise social order and justice. Thus, the findings emphasise the powerful role of social media in shaping not only what students think about cybercrime but also how they feel and act in response to it.

Table 3: Factors Motivating Students to Engage with Cybercrime-Related Content on Social Media

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
I engage with cybercrime-related content on social media out of curiosity	20 (5.3%)	287 (76.1%)	14 (3.7%)	28 (7.4%)	28 (7.4%)	3.64
I find cybercrime-related content on social media entertaining	29 (7.7%)	248 (65.8%)	34 (9.0%)	30 (8.0%)	36 (9.5%)	3.54
I engage with cybercrime-related content to stay informed about online security threats	49 (13.0%)	198 (52.5%)	44 (11.7%)	54 (14.3%)	32 (8.5%)	3.47
Peer influence affects my interest in cybercrime-related discussions on social media	24 (6.4%)	284 (75.3%)	21 (5.6%)	27 (7.2%)	21 (5.6%)	3.69
The anonymity of social media encourages students to explore cybercrime-related content	18 (4.8%)	335 (88.9%)	9 (2.4%)	9 (2.4%)	6 (1.6%)	3.94

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 examined the factors that drive student engagement with cybercrime-related content on social media platforms. Among the listed factors, the highest mean score was recorded for the statement that the anonymity of social media encourages students to explore cybercrime-related content, with a mean of 3.94. The next most significant motivating factor, with a mean of 3.69, was peer influence, suggesting that students' engagement with cybercrime content was largely driven by social circles and the influence of friends or acquaintances.

Findings indicated that engagement was primarily driven by the anonymity provided by social media platforms, the desire for social interaction, and curiosity, rather than by a genuine interest in

acquiring formal knowledge. Informational purposes were noted but ranked lower in priority compared to social and experiential motivations. These findings are supported by the works of Agara et al. (2021) and Kaur et al. (2024). Agara et al. (2021) reported that students are frequently exposed to cybercrime-related content on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, largely because of the interactive and participatory nature of these digital spaces. Kaur et al. (2024) emphasised that the lack of robust privacy controls, combined with high user engagement, makes social media a fertile ground for the spread of cybercrime, particularly through mechanisms like phishing and social engineering. The appeal of engaging with such content lies in the entertainment, social approval, and exploratory value it offers, rather than in any educational merit. Social media platforms, through their design and interactive features, create an environment in which cybercrime-related behaviours are not only visible but often celebrated or trivialised. These environmental cues function as stimuli that reinforce learning, even when the behaviours being learned are harmful or unethical. Thus, the findings underscore the importance of platform architecture and peer influence as key drivers of student engagement with cybercrime content.

CONCLUSION

The study established that perceptions of cybercrime among university undergraduates are influenced by its portrayal on social media. This includes increased awareness of cyber threats, changes in digital behaviour, and shifts in the way students view both online risks and law enforcement. Social Learning Theory provided a critical lens for understanding how repeated exposure to cybercrime-related content, especially when modelled by influencers or peers, can inform attitudes and potentially encourage imitation. Engagement with such content was driven more by curiosity, social connectivity, and anonymity than by a desire for information, reinforcing the role of social media's structural features in fostering interaction with harmful digital narratives.

Finally, the research underscored the need for multi-pronged interventions to counter the glamourisation of cybercrime. Respondents emphasised legal enforcement, public awareness, influencer accountability, and content regulation as urgent strategies, while education was viewed as a long-term foundation. These insights affirm that both theoretical frameworks and empirical findings converge on the need for coordinated, systemic efforts to reshape how cybercrime is framed, understood, and responded to in the digital environment.

RECOMMENDATION

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

- i. Educational institutions should integrate comprehensive media literacy programs into their curricula to equip students with critical skills to analyse and interpret media content.
- ii. Social media platforms should develop and enforce stricter content moderation policies that target the promotion and glamourisation of cybercrime.
- iii. Government agencies, civil society organisations, and educational institutions should collaborate on awareness campaigns that highlight the real consequences of cybercrime.

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