

A Review on Prevalence of Cyber Sextortion Among Internet users in North East Nigeria

Goni Ibrahim Usman

M.Sc. Candidate, Federal University Dutes, Jigawa State, Nigeria

Shehu Usman Ali

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences Modibbo Adama University Yola PMB2076, Yola Adamawa State, Nigeria

Abdullahi Usman Musa

Department of Sociology (Criminology and Security Studies) Federal University Dutes, Jigawa State, Nigeria. PMB 7156 Ibrahim Aliyu Bye- Pass

Abstract: Cyber sextortion is an emerging phenomenon across the world, which is facilitated by the use of online environments where perpetrators gain the trust of vulnerable individuals in order to obtain sexually explicit material and then use it to coerce, threaten or intimidate the victims for the purposes of sexual, personal or financial gain. The paper is entitled to give an overview on the phenomenon of cyber sextortion in north eastern Nigeria with the aims providing nature and impact of sextortion as emerging cyber threat in the study area which has negative effect on psychological and emotional imbalance such as anxiety, depression poor mental wellbeing, feeling of shame, anger, fear, helplessness, and loneliness or even forced to restrict their movements, exclude themselves from social life. Cyber sextortion is committed on daily basis irrespective of ages, gender, race, youths and adolescent who are usually perpetrate so-called phenomenon. This research depends upon secondary source or desk review data that will be generated via printed materials such as textbooks, book chapters, newspapers, magazines, journal articles, and periodicals, among others. The findings of the study revealed that the advent of social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Tweeter among others have dramatically become an analogy which promote cyber sextortion in the cyber space. The study recommended that, Religious clerics should extend level of awareness in the mosques, churches in order to counsel parents and youths.

Keywords: Cyber Crime, Cyber Sextortion, Internet Users Youths.



This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license

Introduction

The modification of the of the world through the use of technology has dramatically incubate various aspect of crime in the cyber space or online. The development of cyber spaces has resulted the emergence of new forms of technology assisted crime which is known as the cyber sextortion. Cyber sextortion is the use of power to coerce, threatening, intimidating, harassing or defaming individuals by sending their nude pictures, videos to comply with certain behavior such as monetary gain or sexual engagement by the victims. Nilsson, et al. (2018) see sextortion as an emerging threat that is facilitated by the use of online environments where perpetrators gain the trust of vulnerable individuals in order to obtain sexually explicit material and then use it to coerce, threaten or intimidate the victims for the purposes of sexual, personal or financial gain In addition, sextortion can also be a form of genderbased violence because not only does sextortion occur in the context of intimate partner abuse but also intimate images have significant potency due to the potential shame and stigma attached to a person's gender and sexuality, as well as other markers of identity, such as race, age, and ability(Powell & Henry, 2017). Sextortion can occur in a variety of contexts and is perpetrated by a diverse group of offenders, both known and unknown to the victim. For example, sextortion can be perpetrated by abusive intimate partners who threaten to shareintimate images to prevent the victim from leaving the relationship, taking custody or parental responsibility of children, pursuing an intervention order, or as another form of power and coercive control (Henry et al., 2023).

Sextortion is essentially the threat to expose a sexual image to coerce the victim into doing something, even if exposure of the image never actually occurs. The intention is to instigate fear, intimidation, restlessness, and discomfort by showing or threatening to publish nude images or videos of someone viral on social media platforms (Imam & Usman, 2024). Sextortion is a presuming online threat to children and adult, Similar to many forms of sexual violence and technologyenabled offences, under-reporting is common due to embarrassment, fear of retribution from the offender, and concern about punishment for behaving sexually online (Alsoubai et al. 2022). Moreover, sextortion is perpetrated against both adults and children, children appear particularly vulnerable to this crime type (O'Malley & Holt 2022). This is thought to be in part due to their increased time spent online, coupled with their elevated risk tolerance and lower social and developmental maturity (Douglass et al. 2018). Nevertheless, sextortion may only in cyber space through the use of internet and auxiliary devices such as the computer laptop, iPad, tablet and smart phones. Moreover, sextortion may also occur with the development these auxiliary devices through the advancement of social networking site application which promote the phenomenon under investigation. The paper is entitled to give an overview on the phenomenon of cyber sextortion in north eastern Nigeria with the aims providing nature and impact of sextortion as emerging cyber threat in the study area.

Literature Review

Susceptible Application that promote cyber sextortion

Instagram

Instagram is one of the susceptible applications that promote cyber sextortion across the globe, the perpetrator may wish to post any sexual content image or nudity of individual for the purpose of threatens or to instigate social stigma on individuals or group of individuals for sexual explicit. The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by hash tags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or preapproved followers. Users can browse other users' content by tag and location, view trending content, like photos, and follow other user to add their content to a personal feed. Instagram can enhance deviance actions and practices among youth and adolescent due to viral phonographic videos post by all ages in the plat form (Imam & Usman, 2024).

Tik Tok

Tik Tok It is another application that promote cyber sextortion among youths and adolescent which host user to submitted videos or nude image of the victims if they failed to comply with their demand from the victims which can be range in duration from 3 second to 10 minutes. Tik Tok platform can be used for academic purpose such as slide video or mathematical formula for solving equations and religious preaching (positive). Imam & Usman, 2024 opines that It also promotes deviance activities among youth and adolescent due to viral pornographic videos post by all ages in the platform (negative).

Facebook

Facebook platform is a hub for aggressive, violent, sexually suggestive and other discriminatory and harmful comments, posts and exchanges directed towards other members of the platform Facebook is one of the populace social networking sites in the world which connect various people from the world (Ateeq, 2011). Face book is a platform which is use for educational purpose to serve as an avenue to connect students and other members of the society to communicate in cyber space through the use of desktop, laptop, smart phones, tablet computer etc (Imam & Usman, 2024). However, Facebook was lunch for the purpose of academic activities and later turn to used it for deviant activities such as sending of phonographic video and nude pictures. The use of facebook for negative aspect in our society play a vital role for deviant activities which take place either in physical space or unphysical space (cyber space).

You Tube

You Tube is a video sharing website which allows users to share their videos with friends, family and the world (Nwangwa, 2014.) You Tube include music videos, video clips, news, short films, feature films, documentaries, audio recordings, movie trailers, teasers, live streams which can be source of deviant behaviors among young people. YouTube now allows users to upload HD videos and recently launched a service to provide TV shows and movies under license from their copyright holders (Ateeq, 2011). Moreover, you tube play a pivotal role toward escalating the phenomenon of cyber sextortion in our society perpetrators use the application to intimidate, threaten and to bully the victims through the platform when the victims fail to comply with their demand.

Consequences of cyber sextortion

Financial Consequences

sextortion is essentially for monetary/financial gain or the victim to comply with the demand of the perpetrator. Sextortion is a relatively new form of fraud that became apparent in about 2008 (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). In this crime, criminals pretend to initiate a relationship through online dating sites then defraud their victims of large sums of money (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). Sextortion has brought disappearance of governmental and organizational privacy and has an economic impact, especially relating to cost of retrieving the perpetrator information. This is highlighting that apart from individuals, organizations and governments suffer financial losses due to cybercrime victimization. Sextortion victims incurred financial cost when there were demands for money, victims usually sent any sum of amount in order protect their integrity from blackmailing and social stigma.

Social Consequences

Social consequences of sextortion relate to social exclusion, being ignored or labelled negatively as a result of victimization. These consequences are common among victims of revenge pornography and sextortion. Henry et al. (2017) pointed out that victims of cyber sextortion may be forced to restrict their movements or exclude themselves from social life. For example, victims

of cyber sextortion could be shy to mingle with people outside. Wide spread of pornographic materials and sexting are offences against persons and social order in physical society. The context of violence that emanates from cybercrime like hate speech had influenced extremists to engage in violence that leads to disruption of peace and security (Ben-David & Fernandez, 2016). The American Association of Matrimonial Lawyers recently released information on the growing number of divorce cases that cite Facebook as a contributing factor in the dissolution of marriage (Cravens & Whiting, 2014).

Psychological and Emotional Consequences

Cyber sextortion victims experience various forms of psychological and emotional imbalance such as anxiety, depression poor mental wellbeing, feeling of shame, anger, fear, helplessness, and loneliness. Which they required care from a mental or medical health professional. The feeling of not reporting the incident may lead them to self-harm or even committing suicide. The effects are commonly found among the victims who are reluctant or afraid to report to law enforcement officials.

According to Henry et al. (2007 p.5),

Threats of cyber sextortion can also lead to traumatic experiences. This is particularly harmful for victims, not only because of the consequences that can flow if the image or video is made public, but also because of the consequences that could emerge from such threats, including unwanted sexual acts, restrictions of movement, exclusion from social life and monetary deprivation.

Physical Consequences

Spread of pornographic materials reinforces indecency and sexual lusts among people that may consequently influence physical crime like rape. Wolak et al. (2018, p. 8) narrated a story of how sextortion was perpetrated against a lady:

My ex-boyfriend wanted me back very badly after I broke up with him... He threatened suicide... He sent me horrible texts and Facebook messages and left me mean voicemails saying since I hurt him, he was going to make me hurt just as bad. He threatened to send naked pictures of me that I had sent him during our relationship to my college or to my parents over Facebook.

The story above describes how cyber victimization experiences lead victims to self-harm themselves cyber sextortion victims has to isolate them self, to change time for coming from work due to the reputational damage in some instance they have to change their environment. Cyber sextortion may also affect the family relationship that exist with the core family members. This impact also leads to modified their online presence.

Ongoing Victimization

Cyber sextortion could be prolonged with threats received for over a period of time by the victims. The threats were carried out by perpetrators to complying with the demands could lead to continuation of cyber sextortion which was often accompanied by other form of victimization. Victims of cyber sextortion suffer from or experience of physical, emotional, psychological, or financial harm as a result of crime committed. According to Wright and Wachs (2019), ongoing victimization as being subjected to harm(s) by exhibiting behaviours (for example, spreading rumors, someone's information, sending degrading messages deemed to be offensive, derogatory, and unwanted. These behaviors are experienced online and through information and communications technology (ICT), such as social networking sites, email, text messages, and other means of communication. Victimization is a growing problem that has been associated with a variety of mental health outcomes. This suggests that the cyber sextortion victimization can lead to psychological trauma such as depression and anxiety.

Nature of cyber sextortion

Cyber sextortion involves a range of demands, including inperson favors, intimate images, and monetary payments. The nature of these demands is influenced by contextual factors, relationship dynamics between individuals, and genderrelated considerations. Intimate images are often used as a tool for escalation (Ray & Henry, 2024). As more people get connected to the internet, more people get trapped into the potential cyber sextortion victimization through the use of social networking site. Morales (2016) noted that Facebook users that have high number of friends in their lists are more prone to victimization than those with low number of friends. Previous studies (for example, Aliyu et al., 2020; Azeez et al, 2021; Effiom-Edem& Effiong, 2020; Henson et al., 2011; Ndubueze, 2016) focused on online interpersonal victimization, including harassment, unwanted sexual advances, and cyberstalking. Kaakinen et al. (2020) observed that there is a strong relationship between gender and cyber sextortion. Similarly, Hamsa et al (2018) and Tarigan et al. (2018) argued that young populations are more likely to be the targets of crime on internet or social networking sites. In addition to age, other features that increase vulnerability of persons including gender, education, and financial status. Likewise, those who actively take part in online chat forums and other online communities are more likely to become victims of cyber sextortion (Oksanen & Keipi, 2013). Because of the complexity of crime on social media like Facebook, it is sometimes difficult for victims to realize being victimized. Furthermore, since cyber sextortion is committed on the cyberspace, its detection remains a considerable challenge (Matlhare, et al., 2020). Most victims do not even report cyber sextortion to the police (Weijer et al., 2019). This may be attributed to feeling of shame and upset by the victims, which deter them from reporting their victimization experience (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). It is clear that detecting Facebook-related cybercrime victimization is a considerable challenge to law enforcement (Matlhare, et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

Routine activity theory is a subfield of crime opportunity theory that focuses on the situation of crimes. It was developed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. The theory states that a crime occurs when the following three elements come together in any given space and time: an accessible target, the absence of capable guardians that could intervene, and the presence of a motivated offender.

An accessible target: An accessible target can include a person, an object, or a place. The following acronyms have been used to describe accessible targets: Value, Inertia, Visibility, Access (VIVA), Concealable, Removable, Available, Valuable, Enjoyable, and Disposable (CRAVED)

Absence of a capable guardian that could intervene: A capable guardian has a 'human element' that is usually a person who, by their mere presence, would deter potential offenders from perpetrating a crime. A capable guardian could also be on CCTV, provided that someone is monitoring it at the other end of the camera at all times. Some examples of capable guardians are police patrols, security guards, door staff, vigilant staff, co-workers, friends, and neighbors. Some of the guardians are formal and deliberate, like security guards; some are informal and inadvertent, such as neighbors. It is also possible for a guardian to be present, but ineffective. For example, a CCTV camera is not a capable guardian if it is set up incorrectly, in the wrong place, or is not monitored. Staff might be present in a shop but may not have sufficient training or awareness to be an effective deterrent.

Motivated offender: Routine activity theory looks at crime from an offender's point of view. A crime will only be committed if a likely offender thinks that a target is suitable and a capable guardian. The offender's assessment of a situation determines whether a crime will take place.

The theory attempts to show that the crime rate is not generally affected by macro-changes such as economic recession and unemployment rate. (Gaetz, 2004). In terms of crime prevention methods, the RAT offers a simple solution: in order to reduce crimes, opportunities for committing crimes must be reduced (Paternoster & Bachman 2001). Bachman (2007) found that the RATS component can be useful in explaining victimization through internet-born attachment.

The theory suggests that victimization, much like the lifestyle exposure theory, is associated with the habitual activities that individuals engage in on a daily basis. These recurrent themes that take place open doors to possible victimization. With reference to cyber sextortion, individuals are at risk of victimization when they are regularly exposed to cyber technologies such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, social networks, and anonymous chats. This is because Cyber sextortion can only be committed with the involvement of cyber-technology. When individuals engage in such activity without taking the necessary precautions, they are made vulnerable to cyber sextortion. The theoretical construction suggests that the presence of three factors that combine in time and place creates a high probability for crime and victimization. The occurrence of these components does not guarantee that a crime will be committed but rather enhances the likelihood that it may occur. In cyber sextortion, perpetrators are motivated by many diverse reasons, such as rejection, obsession, revenge, or power. These motivations compel the offender to engage in online sextortion. The offender finds value in sextorting people. Visibility relates to the risk of being observed by potential criminals. In cyber sextortion, this may not always be physically visible but may have found shape in an online encounter, such as in a chat room. Accessibility entails the ease with which an offender can approach a target without attracting suspicion or attention. Cybercriminals are highly intelligent when it comes to cyber technologies and can thus easily find and approach their victims in order to exploit them, often remaining unidentified due to the anonymity of cyberspace. Lastly, inertia refers to the ease with which a target can be acquired. Cybercriminals can access information about their victims effortlessly due to factors such as the careless disposal of personal details and the absence of protective software.

Methodology

Research Design

The study is descriptive research design in nature. The main objectives of the study are to establish the nature and impact of cyber sextortion among inter users in the study area. Data of the study is solemnly secondary data source of data which was obtained from periodic, journals, newspapers, websites, books and conferences papers base on the relevance to the subject matters.

Discussion of Findings

The study examines the prevalence of cyber sextortion among internet users in North- eastern Nigeria. Cyber sextortion involves a range of demands, including in person favors, intimate images, and monetary payments. The nature of these demands is influenced by contextual factors, relationship dynamics between individuals, and gender related considerations. Cyber sextortion in effect affects the victims through psychological and emotional imbalance such as anxiety, depression, poor mental wellbeing, feeling of shame, anger, fear, helplessness, loneliness and it may also affect the family relationship that exist with the core family members. However, the study revealed that the advent of social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook and Tweeter among others has dramatically become an analogy which promote cyber sextortion among children and adolescent in the cyber space which are committed in daily basis irrespective of ages, gender, race, youths and adolescent that are usually perpetrate so-called phenomenon. The findings of the study revealed that the advent of social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Tweeter among others have dramatically become an analogy which promote cyber sextortion in the cyber space. The study also recommends that the youths and adolescent should be counselled

vigorously against online victimization, also Religious clerics should extend level of awareness in the mosques, churches in order to counsel parents and youths.

Recommendation

1. Religious clerics should extend level of awareness in the mosques, churches in order to counsel parents and youths
2. Parents should train their children to behave well online or offline community in order to protect their integrity
3. Youths and adolescent should be counselled vigorously against online victimization
4. Nigerian communications commission (NCC) should be mere proactive in gathering primary data from users in order to be able to understand the situation and level of compliance with various regulatory agencies.

Conclusion

The rate of cyber sextortion that occurs in interpersonal relationship cannot be overemphasized as it has become normative, to the extend that people who do so do not over realize or weigh its implication on the bedrock of interpersonal relationships which include trust, integrity and love. This phenomenon of cyber sextortion can be led to reputational damage beyond imagination. The menace has become so entrenched that victims cannot participate in social activities in their environment due to the social stigma and label

References

1. Aliyu, N.I., Abdulrahman, M.D., Ajibade, F.O. & Abdurauf, T. (2021). Analysis of Cyber Bullying on Facebook Using Text Mining. *Journal of Applied Artificial Intelligence*, 1(1), 1-12.
2. Alsoubai A et al. 2022. From ‘friends with benefits’ to ‘sextortion:’ A nuanced investigation of adolescents’ online sexual risk experiences. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6(CSCW2): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3555136>
3. Ateeq Ahmad. (2011). A short description of social networking websites and its uses. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, 2(2).
4. Ben-David, A.B., & Fernandez, A.M. (2016). Hate Speech and Covert Discrimination on Social Media: Monitoring the Facebook Pages of Extreme-Right Political Parties in Spain. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 1167–1193.
5. Cravens, J. D. & Whiting, J. B. (2014). Clinical implications of internet infidelity: Where Facebook Fits in. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 1-15, DOI: 10.1080/81926187.2013.874211.
6. Douglass CH, Wright CJC, Davis AC & Lim MSC 2018. Correlates of in-person and technology facilitated sexual harassment from an online survey among young Australians. *Sexual Health* 15(4): 361–365. <https://doi.org/10.1071/SH17208>
7. Effiom-Edem, N.J. & Efiog, I.E. (2020). Students’ Facebook and Twitter usage as predictors of their Academic Achievement in Physics in Ogoja Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 60(1), 39-46.
8. Henry, N., Gavey, N., & Johnson, K. (2023). Image-based sexual abuse as a means of coercive control: Victim-survivor experiences. *Violence Against Women*, 29(6–7), 1206–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012221114918>

9. Henson, B., Reyns, B.W. & Fisher, B.S. (2011). Security in the 21st Century: Examining the Link Between Online Social Network Activity, Privacy, and Interpersonal Victimization. *Criminal Justice Review*, 36(3), 253-268.
10. Matlhare, B., Faimau, G. & Sechele, L. (2020). Risk Perception and Knowledge of Cybercrime and its Preventive Strategies among Youth at the University of Botswana. *Mosenodi Journal*, 23(1) 99-113.
11. Mohammed A.N.A., Imam, &Goni .I. Usman., (2020). Cyber Stalking Victimization among Undergraduate Students in Yobe State University, Damaturu-Nigeria Jalingo Journal of Social and Management Sciences Volume 2, Number 4 September, 2020 ISSN 2659-0131
12. Morales, K.E. (2016). Cybercrime and Facebook: An Examination of Lifestyle Routine Activity Theory. *Theses and Dissertations*. 93. <https://rio.tamui.edu/etds/93>.
13. Ndubueze, P.N. (2016). Cyber Criminology and Quest for Social Order in Nigerian Cyberspace. *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 14(1), 34-48.
14. Nilsson, M.G., Tzani-Pepelasis, C., Ioannou, M. & Lester, D. (2018). Understanding the Link between Sextortion and Suicide.
15. O'Malley, R. L., & Holt, K. M. (2022). Cyber sextortion: An exploratory analysis of different perpetrators engaging in a similar crime. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(1–2), 258–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520909186>
16. Oksanen, A. &Keipi, T. (2013). Young People as Victims of Crime on the Internet: A Population-based Study in Finland. *Vulnerable Children & Youth Studies*, 8 (4), 298–309.
17. Powell, A., & Henry, N. (2019). Technology-facilitated sexual violence victimization: Results from an online survey of Australian adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(17), 3637–3665. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516672055>
18. Tarigan, V.E., Hasibuan, L.R., Purba, P., Irawan, Sari, P.B., Rossanty, Y., Putra, M.D. &Nasution , T. (2018). Cybercrime Case on Social Media in Indonesia. *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology*, 9(7), 783–788.
19. Trend Micro & INTERPOL. (2017). *Cybercrime in West Africa: Poised for an Underground Market: A joint Study Paper*, 7-8. <http://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cybercrime-and-digital-threats>
20. Weijer, S.V., Leukfeldt, R. & Van der Zee, S. (2019). Reporting cybercrime victimization: determinants, motives, and previous experiences. *Policing: An International Journal*. DOI 10.1108/PIJPSM-07-2019-0122.
21. Whitty, M. & Buchanan, T. (2012). The Online Dating Romance Scam: A Serious Crime. *CyberPsychology, Behavior, and SocialNetworking*, 15(3), 181-183.
22. Wright, M.F &Wachs, S. (2019). Adolescents' Psychological Consequences and Cyber Victimization: The Moderation of School-Belongingness and Ethnicity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, 2493. 1-11.
23. Wright, M.F. (2015). Adolescents' cyber aggression perpetration and cyber victimization: The longitudinal associations with functioning. *Soc. Psychol. Educ.*, 18, 653–666.