Chapter 14
Financial Cybercrimes During COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Africa

Usman Sambo
Yobe State University Damaturu, Nigeria

Babayo Sule
Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria

Misbahu Ibrahim Zamfara
Gombe State University, Nigeria

Marie G. Nakitende
Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced and altered the daily routine of the masses around the globe. The pandemic has far-reaching economic, political, social, and cultural implications on the African continent. Although Africa witnessed low levels of infections and deaths as compared to other continents, African socio-economic life was affected tremendously. This scenario facilitated the increased social media usage for source information, communication, and socializing in Africa. The study examined how COVID-19 caused increased social media use in Africa and the corresponding cybersecurity threats. Documented sources were used for data sourcing while empirical data analysis was used to discuss the ideas. The study revealed that COVID-19 significantly increased the number of social media users in Africa and has a correlation with cybersecurity threats and cybercrimes. The study observed that there is a need to secure African cyberspace due to the significant increase in social media activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel Corona Virus popularly known as 'COVID-19' was declared a global pandemic in March 2019 by the World Health Organization (WHO) after the nature and the level of devastation of the disease became uncontrollable (Osler, 2019). The mysterious disease emanated from the industrial city of Wuhan in China in December 2019 and quickly spread to other parts of the world at the speed of light (Zizek, 2020). The pandemic has so far infected millions of people across the world, killed hundreds of thousands, grounded all economic activities and it has affected and influenced political decisions and policy responses by world governments, international organizations and agencies and all global key players in the affected sectors particularly the health sector (Rosberg & Knell, 2020 and Hochberg, 2020). Africa is one of the continents that are affected by COVID-19 pestilence in the early months of 2020. The nature and trend of devastation in Africa are softer than in American and European countries in terms of incidences of infection and deaths but the African economy which is vulnerable in comparison with its American and European counterparts is where the virus hit hard (Hruby, 2020 and Samaddar, 2020).

In the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, many world countries witnessed their daily livelihood activities abruptly halted. Hence, the scramble for alternative strategies commenced. One of the plausible methods of operation to keep the world going and to engage the various stakeholders actively in responding to countering the virus is the use of digital means (Kredens, 2020). The global revolution in internet service and the explosion of the digital economy linked the world to an era of globalization unprecedented in the history of mankind (Buchanan, 2016). Internet and the digital revolution compelled all for devising means of securing personal details and private data and information. This was the foundation for Cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is necessary because of increased Cybercrimes by hackers, fraudsters and other groups that target individuals and critical national infrastructure (Antonucci, 2017). Currently, there are over 4 billion internet users in the world and nearly 5 billion smartphone users all over the world (Kemp, 2020). Internet spread across Africa rapidly in the 21st century. Almost all African countries are connected today. Cybersecurity is the protection of vital and private data including financial information and big data from unauthorized intrusion. Users of computers, smartphones and the internet are vulnerable and exposed to Cybercriminals once their information is uploaded online. Thus, modern computers, phones and digital gadgets are protected against hackers through effective Cybersecurity by individuals, organizations, businesses and governments (Kshetri, 2019; Rafay, 2023).

The spread of COVID-19 in African countries led to the adoption of the option of the use of the internet for various purposes such as official government meetings, seminars, webinars, conferences, e-learning for pupils and students in tertiary institutions and for private use by individuals as a repercussion of lockdown which kept millions of people at home (KPMG, 2020). Internet usage increased and this implied that the activities of hackers and Cybercriminals will also be intensified. With the increased internet usage and Cybercrimes, Cybersecurity is necessary to avoid losses of information on private finances, attacks on critical national infrastructures by criminals and attacking of vital information on health data such as progress on the treatment and prevention of the deadly COVID-19. Unfortunately, African countries are mostly weak in terms of the strengths of Cybersecurity and the protection of the digital sector. The Global Cybersecurity Index (2018) reported an abysmal performance by most African countries in terms of Cybersecurity index. This study examined practically how the outbreak of COVID-19 led to increased internet usage in Africa and by extension, the role and impact of Cybersecurity in responding to the explosion to protect private and official users. In doing so, the chapter analyzed the following: COVID-19: a global pandemic; the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in Africa; discourses