

DIGITAL MEDIA AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN REDUCING CYBERCRIME AMONG YOUTHS IN EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

Cybercrime has emerged as a major social and economic problem growing among youths in Nigeria, especially in Ebonyi state, where the increasing use of digital media platforms have exposed many young people to fraudulent online activities. This study examined the influence of digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The main objectives were to: examine the extent to which youths in Ebonyi State use digital media for information. determine the level of knowledge on digital media and ascertain the level of influence of digital-media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State. The study anchored on Social Learning Theory, the study adopted descriptive survey research. Data were collected from 384 youths selected across 13 LGAs using structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that youth is widely use digital media for information and possess considerable awareness of digital-media based anti-cybercrime campaigns. The study further found that strategic communication through digital media positively influence cybercrime reduction among youths. However, poor Internet access, low digital literacy, and inadequate funding limited effective cybercrime communication campaigns. The study concludes that digital media remains an essential tool for cybercrime reduction and recommended intensified awareness campaigns to

strengthened and improve youths' knowledge of cybercrime and its dangers, government and stakeholders should address challenges of poor Internet access, low digital literacy and inadequate funding to improve digital media campaign on cybercrime prevention.

Keywords: Digital Media, Strategic Communication, Cybercrime, Youths, Ebonyi

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally transformed patterns of communication, economic participation, and social interaction across the globe. In Nigeria, the proliferation of smartphones, affordable data services, and social networking platforms has intensified youths' engagement with digital media. Digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and online forums now function not only as channels of entertainment, but also as primary sources of information sharing, social identity formation, and economic opportunity. However, alongside these opportunities has emerged an alarming increase in cybercrime, particularly among young people (Alanzi, 2023).

Cybercrime is formally recognized in Nigeria under the cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention Act, 2015), which identifies cyber-related offences as activities capable of undermining individual safety, economic development, and national security. The growing involvement of youths in cyber-related activities has raised concerns among policymakers, educators, and communication scholars, highlighting the need for strategic digital media interventions and responsible technology use, particularly at Ebonyi state and Nigeria in general. According to (Dunu, 2020), posited that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), reported that as of October 2022 alone, about 2,847 individuals had been convicted of cybercrime across the country, the majority of whom were young people.

However, beyond enforcement limitations, the persistence of cybercrime among youths reflects broader structural realities, including

unemployment, socio-economic inequality, and the aspirational culture reinforced through digital media. Many young people are socialized within online environments where success is frequently equated with material display and rapid financial mobility. Within such digital contexts, narratives surrounding cyber fraud may be framed as ingenuity or resilience rather than criminality (Nsude, 2023). This socio-economic framing complicates purely punitive responses and underscores the need to understand the communicative environment that shapes youth perceptions, motivations, and value systems.

Furthermore, digital media consumption patterns among youths significantly influence how information is received, interpreted, and acted upon. Youths are not passive audiences; they actively create, remix, and circulate content, thereby contributing to the construction of shared meanings within digital communities. The algorithms that govern social media visibility often amplify sensational or aspirational content, which may overshadow educational or cautionary messaging. Consequently, examining the extent to which anti-cybercrime messages penetrate youth digital spaces and how such messages are framed and perceived becomes crucial for designing effective preventive strategies (Oluwatobi & Ijeoma, 2021). The normalization and, in some cases, glamorization of cyber fraud within youth-oriented digital spaces shows that media exposure plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of legitimacy, risk, and reward. Social media content often portrays sudden wealth acquisition without equal emphasis on legal or moral consequences, thereby influencing attitudes and behavioural intentions. This highlights the need to critically examine digital media not only as a platform facilitating cybercrime but also as a strategic tool that can be harnessed for preventive communication.

Strategic communication is defined as a specialized approach to distributing and receiving information. It is purposeful communication that drives high-impact and goal-oriented outcomes. Strategic communication

also means communicating the best message, through the correct channels, to right people, at the right time and using feedback from this process to stay focused on the main objective (Nwosu, 2022). In global and digital world, strategic communication has become essential to the functioning and success of many different types of organization. These include government, corporate, consultancy, community, services, public health, and development campaigns. However, its systematic application in reducing cybercrime particularly in Nigeria remains insufficiently examined. In Ebonyi State particular, increasing youth engagement with digital media, combined with poor digital literacy structures and sporadic awareness initiatives, raises important questions about the effectiveness of existing communication strategies (Adeleke, 2022).

Therefore, this study is situated within mass communication scholarship and seeks to examine how digital media and strategic communication can function as preventive mechanisms in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State and Nigeria in general. Specifically, it investigates youths' digital media use patterns, their exposure to anti-cybercrime messages, and the influence of strategic communication campaigns on their awareness of the dangers and consequences of cybercrime.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing national concern over cybercrime in Nigeria, current measures are more corrective than preventive. The law enforcement agencies focus mainly on detection, arrest, and prosecution, reflecting an institutional orientation toward punitive control. While such measures are necessary, but they do little to address the communicative environment in which cybercrime attitudes are formed and reinforced.

The neglect of preventive communication strategies appears to stem from structural and institutional limitations. Security agencies are primarily designed as enforcement institutions and often lack integrated

communication channels capable of sustained behaviour-change campaigns. Furthermore, collaboration between communication scholars, media professionals, and law enforcement agencies remains limited. Government budgetary allocations have consistently focused on enforcement rather than on educating youths through digital media making cybercrime prevention effort weak and less effective.

In Ebonyi State, the challenge is compounded by high youth dependence on digital media for information, socialization, and economic engagement, yet there is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which they are exposed to structured anti-cybercrime messages, while such messages exist, the design, frequency, framing, and effectiveness remain unclear.

Although previous studies have examined cybercrime in Nigeria, like: (Adejoh, 2022), analyzed the internet and emergency of the Yahoo boys sub-culture in Nigeria; (Nsude, 2023), also carried out a study on enhancing national development and growth through combating cybercrimes/Internet fraud among University undergraduates in Nigeria. However, there is insufficient empirical knowledge regarding the extent to which youths in Ebonyi State use digital media for information; their level of knowledge to anti-cybercrime communication messages; the level of influence of digital media-centered strategic communication and what are the inhibitors to the use of digital media-centered for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the role of digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.

Objectives of the Study

The general objectives of the study were to examine the role of digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State. Specific objectives were to:

1. examine the extent to which youths in Ebonyi State use digital media

for information.

2. determine the level of knowledge on digital media centered strategic communication among youths in Ebonyi State
3. ascertain the level of influence of digital-media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.
4. access the inhibitors to the use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State?

Research Questions

1. To what extent do youths in Ebonyi State use digital media for information?
2. What is the level of knowledge on digital media centered strategic communication among youths in Ebonyi State?
3. To what extent does digital media-centered strategic communication influence cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State?
4. What are the inhibitors to the use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State?

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focused on the influence of digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State. The study was specifically evaluated the extent of digital media usage among youths, the level of knowledge and exposure of digital media-centered strategic communication campaigns, and the influence of such campaigns on cybercrime awareness and preventive. The study was limited to youths selected from the 13 LGAs of Ebonyi State.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Digital Media

Digital media refer to communication technologies that enable the creation, storage, distribution, and exchange of information through digital platforms such as the Internet, mobile devices, and social networking sites.

Unlike traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers, digital media facilitate interactive communication in which users can simultaneously act as both producers and consumers of information (Udenze, 2022). Digital media encompass Internet-based platforms and technologies that allow individuals and organizations to communicate, share multimedia content, and interact in real time across geographical boundaries.

The growth of digital technologies has significantly transformed communication patterns globally. Digital platforms such as social media, blogs, websites, and instant messaging applications provide opportunities for rapid information dissemination and public engagement. Scholars argue that the interactive nature of digital media has reshaped the dynamics of communication by allowing users to participate actively in the production and circulation of information (Addejo, 2023). In Nigeria, the rapid expansion of Internet access and smartphone usage has accelerated the adoption of digital media, particularly among young people. Recent reports indicate that youths constitute the largest proportion of digital media users in the country, using online platforms for education, entertainment, social networking, and economic activities (Okorie & Adibe, 2024).

In Ebonyi State, the rise of digital media has led to greater online engagement among youths who use platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to express opinions and access opportunities. However, the misuse of these platforms has also facilitated cybercrime activities such as online fraud, scams, and identity theft (Adeleke, 2022). This dual impact of digital media underscores the need for strategic communication to guide positive behavior online.

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is defined as a specialized approach in distributing and receiving information. It is the deliberate and purposeful use of communication by organizations, institutions, and governments to achieve specific objectives and influence the attitudes and behaviors of target audiences (Nwosu, 2022). Strategic communication involves the systematic

planning, design, and dissemination of messages that align communication activities with broader organizational or societal goals. (Agba,2023)also describes strategic communication as a coordinated communication process through which institutions develop. Modern strategic communication practices increasingly rely on digital media platforms to reach wider audiences. Through online campaigns, social media engagement, and targeted messaging, institutions can influence public opinion and promote awareness about social issues. According to (Bazarah, 2025), the effectiveness of strategic communication depends on careful audience analysis, message framing, and the selection of appropriate communication channels.

Strategic communication has been widely applied in addressing societal challenges such as public health awareness, political participation, and crime prevention. In the context of cybercrime prevention, communication campaigns are often designed to educate citizens about online safety, promote digital literacy, and discourage participation in fraudulent activities. Scholars argue that effective communication strategies can help reshape social norms and influence behavioral change among vulnerable groups, particularly youths (Adeleke, 2022).

In Nigeria, strategic communication initiatives have increasingly been used by government agencies, civil society organizations, and media institutions to address the growing problem of cybercrime. Awareness campaigns on digital ethics, responsible Internet use, and online fraud prevention have become common across digital platforms. For states such as Ebonyi, where youth engagement with digital technologies is steadily increasing, strategic communication can play a critical role in shaping responsible online behavior.

Cybercrime

Cybercrime refers to unlawful activities carried out through the use of digital technologies, computer systems, mobile devices, and internet-

based networks. It encompasses acts in which information and communication technologies serve as the primarily instruments, targets or environments for criminal behavior. According to (UNDP, 2021), define cybercrime as any illegal conduct committed in cyberspace with the intent to gain unauthorized access to data, disrupt digital systems, manipulate information, or cause financial, psychological or institutional harm.

(Nsude, 2023), cybercrime involves a wide range of offences including online fraud, identity theft, unauthorized access to computer systems, data breaches, cyber espionage and the misuse of digital platforms for deceptive or malicious purpose. These crimes exploit vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure and human behavior, particularly within increasing interconnected societies where dependence on digital technologies for communication, commerce, education and governance continues to expand. Cybercrime is often characterized by the transnational nature, anonymity of perpetrator, speed of execution, and the complexity of detection and prosecution.

Cybercrime are of different types, there include cyber terrorism, phishing, malware and spam. According to (Agba, 2022), cyber terrorism is the malicious act of using computer network to disrupt the normal processes of critical national infrastructures such as education, energy, transportation, government operation. The author also defined phishing as the theft of an identity. It involves stealing personal information from unsuspecting users and it is also an act of fraud against the authentic, unauthorized education system, business and financial institutions that are victimized. Phishing scams are ubiquitous and are exponentially increasing. It becomes one of the fastest growing cyber-crimes in Nigeria.

Udeze (2022) conceptualized malware as malicious software or code deliberately designed to bypass security protocols in computer systems, or mobile devices in order to gain unauthorized access to data or systems without the consent of the user. Udeze further defined spam as unsolicited

bulk electronic messages transmitted indiscriminately through electronic messaging systems to unsuspecting users who may become potential victims of cyber-related crimes. These forms of cyber threats are often disseminated through digital media platforms such as email services, social networking sites, and instant messaging applications, thereby increasing the vulnerability of users, particularly youths who are highly active in digital spaces. Therefore, strategic communication through digital media platforms plays a crucial role in promoting awareness, responsible digital behaviour, and preventive measures aimed at reducing cybercrime among youths.

However, there are causes of cybercrime among youths such like economic hardship and unemployment. Economic insecurity and high levels of unemployment among youths in Ebonyi State create financial strain that may push some individuals toward cybercrime as an alternative income source. According to Amodu & Omotoso (2024), limited access to formal employment increases youth vulnerability to online fraud and Internet-based criminal activities. When legitimate economic opportunities are scarce, non-legitimate digital avenues can become more attractive. Another causes of cybercrime among youths is low digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness. Although Internet access has expanded across Ebonyi State, many youths lack foundational knowledge about cybersecurity, legal consequences of cybercrime, and responsible online behavior. Poor digital literacy reduces youths' ability to distinguish ethical from unethical digital practices, which correlates with higher involvement in cyber offences Oginni & Adekunle, (2023). A lack of structured training in cybersecurity weakens preventive capacity and increases risky online behavior.

Also, cybercrime is caused by peer influence and social normalization. Social influence from peers can significantly shape attitudes toward cybercrime. According to Okeke & Nwafor, (2024), youths observe their peers gaining material benefits from Internet fraud without visible negative consequences, such behaviors can become normalized and socially

reinforced. This peer effect has been identified in studies of youth cybercrime behavior in sub-Saharan contexts. Weak institutional enforcement and judicial response equally contributed youths' involvement in cybercrime. The capacity of law enforcement to investigate, arrest, and prosecute cybercrime offenders remains limited in many Nigerian states, including Ebonyi. Insufficient digital forensic skills, inadequate technology, and slow judicial processes reduce the perceived deterrent effect of cybercrime laws. Insufficient cybercrime awareness campaigns also cause cybercrime among youths. Sporadic or non-targeted awareness campaigns fail to reach youths effectively. Without sustained and context-specific messaging on the harms and legal implications of cybercrime, many youths remain unaware of the consequences or ethical implications of online misconduct (UNDP, 2023). This gap undermines prevention efforts and allows cybercrime-friendly environments to persist.

Digital Media and Cybercrime Prevention

In contemporary society, digital media such as social networking sites, online forums, blogs, websites, and mobile communication applications have become central to information sharing and social interaction, particularly among youths. In Nigeria, digital media platforms have expanded rapidly due to increased smartphone penetration and internet access, positioning them as influential tools for shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. This widespread usage makes digital media a critical space for both the perpetration and prevention of cybercrime Ezech (2024).

Cybercrime prevention involves deliberate efforts aimed at discouraging, controlling, and reducing cyber-related offences in society through awareness creation, legal enforcement, behavioural change, and technological safeguards. While cybercrime often exploits the anonymity and reach of digital platforms, these same platforms can be strategically utilized to promote cybercrime prevention. Nigerian scholars argue that

preventive approaches are more sustainable when they emphasize education, ethical reorientation, and digital responsibility rather than relying solely on punitive measures Tade & Aliyu, (2022). Digital media therefore provides a viable channel for delivering preventive messages that can reach large youth populations in real time.

One major significant of digital media to cybercrime prevention is awareness creation. Digital media enables government agencies, security institutions, civil society organizations, and ICT professionals and educational bodies to disseminate information on the dangers, consequences, and legal implications of cybercrime. Through targeted online campaigns, short videos, infographics, and interactive content, youths can be educated about common cybercrime tactics, victimization risks, and digital safety practices. Research indicates that continuous exposure to preventive digital content significantly improves youths' understanding of cybercrime risks and reduces their likelihood of involvement in cyber-related offences (Asemah & Edegoh, 2021).

In the context of Ebonyi State, digital media offers a strategic avenue for cybercrime prevention among youths when aligned with local realities. By leveraging popular platforms such as social networking sites and mobile messaging applications, stakeholders can design localized digital campaigns that reflect the socio-economic conditions, cultural values, and language preferences of Ebonyi youths. When digital media is integrated with strategic communication, digital literacy programmes, and youth empowerment initiatives, it becomes an effective tool for reducing cybercrime and promoting responsible digital citizenship in the state (Nsude, 2023).

Empirical Review

Nwosu (2022) conducted a study titled “*Cyber Hygiene among University Students and Staff at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka*”. The study examined cyber hygiene practices and the level of cybersecurity awareness among Internet users in an academic environment. The

researchers adopted a survey research design to collect quantitative data from respondents.

The study was anchored on Protection Motivation Theory, which explains that individuals adopt protective behaviours when they perceive threats and believe that preventive actions can reduce such risks. The population of the study consisted of students and staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, while a sample size of 316 respondents participated in the study. Findings from the study revealed that cyber hygiene practices among Internet users vary significantly depending on demographic factors such as gender, employment status, and academic discipline. The study also found that increased cybersecurity awareness improves responsible digital behaviour and reduces vulnerability to cyber threats. The study recommended strengthening cybersecurity education, promoting cyber hygiene practices among students and staff, and improving awareness of digital security risks within academic institutions. The review above shows that the study focused solely on students and staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which represents a restricted academic population, but the present research focuses on youths in Ebonyi State, thereby covering a wider and more diverse population beyond a single university setting therefore, there is a population gap evident which the present research seeks to address by examining digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.

In the same vein, Alademusi (2024), conducted a study titled *Internet Fraud: The Menace of Yahoo Boys and the Deceitfulness of Riches*. The study examined the growing involvement of Nigerian youths in Internet fraud popularly referred to as Yahoo-Yahoo and the socio-moral implications of such activities. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, utilizing document analysis and interviews to obtain data on youth involvement in cyber fraud. The study was anchored on Structural Strain Theory, which posits that individuals may engage in deviant behaviour when

societal pressure to achieve economic success exceeds legitimate opportunities available to them. The population of the study comprised Nigerian youths and members of communities where cyber fraud activities are prevalent, while a purposive sample of participants was selected for interviews. Findings from the study revealed that the desire for quick wealth, unemployment, peer influence, and societal glorification of material success significantly contribute to the rise of Internet fraud among youths. The study further noted that the normalization of fraudulent lifestyles among some youth groups has intensified the spread of cybercrime.

The study recommended stronger cybercrime enforcement policies, moral re-orientation programmes, and greater involvement of families, religious institutions, and educational institutions in promoting ethical values among youths. The study is related to the present research because it addresses youth involvement in Internet fraud, which represents a major dimension of cybercrime. However, despite its insightful contributions, the study limited by a methodological gap (in terms of research design) and an empirical gap in the area of digital media and strategic communication in reduction among youths in Ebonyi State. The present research therefore, seeks to address by examining digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.

In another study conducted by Soyinka and Bello (2025), titled *Enhancing National Development and Growth through Combating Cybercrime and Internet Fraud*. The objective of the study was to examine the implications of cybercrime on Nigeria's national development and economic growth. The researchers adopted a survey research design, using structured questionnaires to collect data from respondents. The study was anchored on Routine Activity Theory, which explains that crime occurs when motivated offenders interact with suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. The population of the study consisted of ICT professionals, university students, and law enforcement personnel in Nigeria, while a

sample size of 350 respondents was selected through stratified sampling techniques. Findings from the study indicated that cybercrime negatively affects Nigeria's economic growth, global reputation, and digital economy, while weak enforcement mechanisms and inadequate public awareness contribute to the persistence of cybercrime activities. The study also found that Internet fraud discourages foreign investment and undermines trust in Nigeria's digital environment. The authors recommended improving cybersecurity infrastructure, strengthening cybercrime legislation, and intensifying public awareness campaigns on cybercrime prevention. The study relates to the present research because it recognizes cybercrime as a major national problem requiring communication-based interventions, but focused mainly on national economic consequences and institutional responses to cybercrime. There is an empirical gap in the area of youth-focused strategic communication through digital media platforms for reducing cybercrime among youths, particularly within Ebonyi State which the present study seeks to address by examining digital media and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.

Also, Okeke and Nwafor (2024), conducted a study titled “*Cyber Awareness Programmes in Southeast Nigeria*”. The study investigated the effectiveness of cyber awareness initiatives in educating Internet users about cybercrime risks and preventive strategies. The researchers adopted a mixed-method research design, combining surveys with in-depth interviews. The study was guided by Communication Theory of Awareness Creation, which emphasizes that the dissemination of information can influence public attitudes and behavioural change. The population of the study comprised Internet users and youths across the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, while a sample size of 300 respondents participated in the survey and 15 participants were interviewed. Findings from the study indicated that cyber awareness programmes significantly increase knowledge of cybercrime risks among youths, but awareness alone does not necessarily prevent

individuals from engaging in cybercrime due to factors such as financial motivation and peer pressure. The study recommended intensifying cybercrime awareness campaigns, strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and security agencies, and introducing youth empowerment programmes to address the socio-economic drivers of cybercrime. The study is related to the present research because it focuses on cyber awareness initiatives within Southeast Nigeria, which includes Ebonyi State. However, the study did not specifically examine how digital media platforms can be strategically used as communication tools to reduce cybercrime behaviour among youths. Therefore, there is empirical gap in the area of digital and strategic communication in reducing cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State which this study seeks to fill.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory according to (Albert Bandura, 1977), the theory posits that people learn behaviors by observing, imitating, and modeling others especially those they perceive as successful or admirable within their environment. Bandura emphasizes that learning occurs not only through direct experience but also through vicarious reinforcement, seeing others rewarded or punished for certain actions. The theory identifies four interrelated processes necessary for observational learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. These stages provide a structured lens for explaining how digital media environments facilitate youth cybercrime socialization in Ebonyi State and how strategic communication can disrupt this process. Albert Bandura (1977). The theory held it that individuals pay more attention to a behaviour, especially when it is performed by attractive, credible, or influential models; next, they retain what they have observed in their memory through mental images or verbal coding; thereafter, they reproduce the behaviour depending on their skills

and ability; and finally, motivation which determines whether the behaviour will actually be performed, as individuals are influenced by expected rewards or punishments. In the context of this study, digital media provides a platform where youths are exposed to various behaviours, and through repeated exposure to strategic communication messages, they can learn, internalize, and either adopt or reject cyber-related behaviours based on perceived outcomes. In the study of Udeze (2024), Social Learning Theory provides the foundation for designing communication messages that replace negative role models with positive ones. By influencing what youths observe and admire, strategic communication can change behavior indirectly. In Ebonyi State, for example, media content that celebrates integrity, digital entrepreneurship, and creativity can help youths unlearn the glorification of cybercrime. The theory has the same stand with the study's objectives of using communication to reshape learning experience and reduce cybercrime participation among youths especially in Ebonyi State and Nigeria in general.

Methodology

The research method applied in this study was descriptive survey research. The method is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from respondents and describe their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors as they naturally occur without manipulation.

Population of the Study

For the purpose of this study, youth is defined as a person within the age bracket of 18 to 35 years, in Ebonyi State. Based on the projected population of Ebonyi State in 2025, Ebonyi State has an estimated population of about 3.2 to 3.7 million, and considering the significant proportion of Nigeria population falls within the youths' category. Therefore, the estimated youths' population for the study was approximately 1.2 million persons within the age range of 18-35 years in Ebonyi State (NPC, 2025) and City population Ebonyi State population projection (2025). This forms the target population from which the study sample will be drawn

Sample Size

The sample size of 384 respondents was determined using the Cochran's (1977) table, a widely accepted method for social science research, using 0.5 population proportion to ensure maximum variability, a 95% confidence level to guarantee reliability, and a 5% margin of error to maintain accuracy.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

where:

n_0 = required sample size

z = Standard normal deviation (1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = estimated proportion of the population (0.5)

$q = 1 - p = 0.5$

$e = 1 - p = 0.5$

e = margin of error (0.05)

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{3.8416 \cdot 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n_0 = 384.16$$

The sample size = 384 respondents.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique in selecting respondents for the study. In the first stage, the 13 Local Government Areas constituted the cluster. In the second stage, selected communities were randomly chosen from each of the LGAs. While in the third stage, three eligible youths aged 18-35 within the selected communities were randomly

selected and administered copies of the questionnaire. These process was continued till the sample size of 384 was attained. This give opportunity to all qualified respondents' equal opportunity of being selected for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher adopted a quantitative method of data collection which involves the use of structured instruments to gather numerical data from respondents. Specifically, data was collected through a structured questionnaire designed in line with the research objectives. The Questionnaire were administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure a high rate of return and proper completion of the research instrument.

Instrument of Data Collection

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher based on the study's objectives and relevant literature reviewed. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions and was divided into sections, section A contained item on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while section B contained item that showing extent to which youths in Ebonyi State use digital media for information, determine the level of knowledge on digital media, ascertain the level of influence of digital-media-and access the inhibitors to the use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State. The questionnaire items were structured using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distribution tables and simple percentages with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher used simple percentage in the analysis with the aid of statistical package for Social Science (SPSS).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 4.1. Instrument Result from the Filed

Respondents	Copied Distributed	Copies returned	Copies lost
All the youths in Ebonyi between age bracket of 18-35 years	384	384	=

The outcome of the instrument from field indicate that 384 copies of questionnaire distributed were properly filled correctly and returned representing a 100% response rate. The high response rate enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

Table 4.2 Demographics characteristic of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency(n=384)	Percentage(%)
1 Gender	Male	220	57.30
	Female	164	42.7
		384	100
2 Age	18-23yrs	180	46.9
	24-28yrs	155	40.4
	29-33yrs	30	7.8
	34- 35yrs	19	4.9
		384	100
3 Educational Level	SSCE	89	23.2
	ND/NCE	140	36.5
	B.Sc/B.A	110	28.6
	Postgraduate	45	11.7
		384	100
4 Occupation	Students	111	28.9
	Unemployed	220	57.3
	Civil Servant	23	6.0
	Business/Artisan	30	7.1
	Total	384	100

Source: Oboke filed survey, 2026.

The data generated from the table above shows that the majority of 220 respondents representing 57.30% were male, while females consisted 164 or 42.7%. Also, most of the respondents 180 or 46.9% were within the age range of 18–23 years, 155 of them were age range of 24-28 showing that the participants were mostly young adults. Furthermore, 89 of them or 23.2.5% possess SSCE and 140 representing 36.6% of respondents possessed ND/NCE while, 110 or 28.6% possess B.Sc., 45 of them or 11.7% were postgraduate. This further indicates that great number of the respondent wererelatively literate capable of understanding online content and media messages, and the high number of students suggests that the study captures perspectives from the group most exposed to digital technologies.

Table 4.3 Analysis from the Respondents

Frequency showing extent youths in Ebonyi State use digital media platforms?			
S/N	Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
5	I use social media regularly for Information	150	39.1
6	Digital media is the main source of Information	115	29.9
7	I normal access information through online platforms daily.	85	22.1
8	I use Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok for news update.	34	8.9
	Total	384	100

Source: Oboke filed survey, 2026.

Based on the data generated from the table 3 above which state that, 150 of the respondents, representing 39.1% said yes to research question 3 that there are use digital media regularly. Also, 115 of them or 29.9% respondents agreed that digital media is the main source of their information, and 85 of the respondents' representing 22.1% said yes to the research question, while items 8, 34 or 8.9% of the respondents use

Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok for news update. None of the respondent said no. This further indicates that youths are active users of digital platforms, making digital media a strategic channel for delivering anti-cybercrime communication.

Table 4.4 Analysis from the Respondents

Frequency distribution showing the level of knowledge of digital media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage
9	I am aware of anti-cybercrime campaigns on digital media.	144	37.5
10	I have seen several messages warning youths against involvement on cybercrime online.	121	31.5
11	Digital media increased my knowledge of the consequence of cybercrime.	99	25.8
12	Strategic communication messages online actual educate youths on lawful Internet use.	20	5.2
	Total	384	100

Source: Oboke filed survey, 2026.

The data generated from table above indicate that 144 or 37.5% of the respondents agreed that there are aware of anti-cybercrime campaigns. 121 of them or 31.5% said yes they have seen warning messages against cybercrime. Also, total of 99 or 25.8% said yes to research question that digital media increased their knowledge of the danger cybercrime. While, 20 of the respondents, representing 5.2% agreed that online strategic communication messages actual educate them on lawful Internet use. This further indicates that great number of the respondents agreed with the research question four.

Table 4.5 Analysis from the Respondents
Frequency distribution showing the level of influence of digital media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime among youths' massage

S/N	Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
13	Anti-cybercrime messages discourage youths from involving Internet fraud.	98	25.5
14	Exposure to online awareness messages reduces interest in cybercrime.	154	40.1
15	Strategic communication helps youths understand the dangers of cybercrime	132	34.4
	Total	384	100

Source: Oboke filed survey, 2026.

Based on the data generated from the table 4 above which stated that 98 of the respondents, representing 25.5% of them said yes with the research question 4, that strategic communication disseminated through digital media have a positive influence on youths. 154 of them, representing 40.1% said yes while 132 of the respondents or 34.3% equal said yes. This further indicates that the greater number of the respondents agreed that digital media-centered strategic communication messages has a positive and significant influence on cybercrime awareness among youths.

Table 4.5 Analysis from the Respondents
Frequency distribution showing the inhibitors to the use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
13	Poor network limits exposure to anti-cybercrime campaigns.	154	40.1
14	Many youths ignore cybercrime online messages awareness.	98	25.5
15	Lack of digital literacy affects understanding of online campaigns.	132	34.4
	Total	384	100

Source: Oboke filed survey, 2026.

Data generated from table 5 above stated that 154 of the respondents representing 40.1% agreed that poor Internet connectivity is one of the major barriers that hinders access to online awareness messages, while 98 of them representing 25.5% said yes the tendency of some youths to ignore awareness messages weakens the impact of strategic communication efforts. Also, 132 of the respondents representing 34.4% equal said yes that inadequate digital literacy reduces the ability of some youths to understand and engage with campaign message. This indicates that the greater number of the respondents agreed with the research question five.

Discussion of Findings

Objective One: Examine the extent to which youths in Ebonyi State use digital media for information.

The findings of the study revealed that youths in Ebonyi State make extensive use of digital media for information dissemination and consumption. The majority of respondents indicated that regularly access information through platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. The findings further showed that digital media serve as the main source of information for many youths in the state. This supports the assumptions of the Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977), which posits that individuals learn behaviours, attitudes, and values through observation and interaction within their social environment. Since youths spend considerable time on digital media platforms, these platforms provide opportunities for exposure to both positive and negative behavioural influences.

Objective Two: Determine the level of knowledge on digital-media-centered strategic communication among youths in Ebonyi State

The study found that youths in Ebonyi State possess a high level of knowledge regarding digital-media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime. The majority of the respondents displayed great awareness of cybercrime and indicated that digital media campaigns message have

enhanced their understanding of the dangers and consequences associated with cybercrime activities. The result corroborates the findings of Adeleke (2022), who observed that digital media play an essential role in shaping public understanding and promoting responsible online conduct among youths. The finding therefore suggests that digital media-based awareness programmes contribute significantly to cybercrime education among youths.

Objective Three: Ascertain the level of influence of digital-media-centered strategic communication on cybercrime among youths in Ebonyi State

The study findings revealed that digital-media-centered strategic communication significantly influences attitudes of young people and their perceptions toward cybercrime. Majority of the respondents agreed that exposure to anti-cybercrime messages discourages involvement in internet fraud and other cyber-related crimes. The findings further showed that online awareness campaigns help youths understand the legal, moral, and social consequences of cybercrime, thereby reducing their interest in engaging in such activities. This finding aligns with the position of Soyinka and Bello (2025), who argued that strategic communication messages increase awareness of the consequences of cybercrime and encourage lawful digital engagement among youths. The finding therefore demonstrates that strategic communication through digital media can serve as an effective tool for cybercrime prevention and behavioural change among young people.

Objective Four: Assess the inhibitors to the use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State

The study identified several factors inhibiting the effective use of digital media for strategic communication on cybercrime in Ebonyi State. These factors include inadequate digital literacy, poor Internet connectivity, irregular power supply, inadequate funding of awareness campaigns, and lack of attention given to cybercrime messages by some youths. These challenges reduce the effectiveness and reach of anti-cybercrime

communication efforts, particularly in rural communities where access to digital technologies remains limited. In line with the Social Learning Theory, effective learning and behavioural change depend on access to communication channels and relevant information. Therefore, the identified barriers limit the exposure of youths to cybercrime awareness messages and reduce the overall effectiveness of digital-media-based interventions.

Based on the table above, 150 of the respondents, representing 39.1% said yes to research question 3 that there are use digital media regularly. While, 115 of them or 29.9% respondents agreed that digital media is the main source of their information, and 85 of the respondents' representing 22.1% said yes to the research question, while items 8, 34 or 8.9% of the respondents use Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Tik-Tok for news update. None of the respondent said no. This further indicates that youths are active users of digital platforms, making digital media a strategic channel for delivering anti-cybercrime communication. This supports the Social Learning Theory, showing that consistent exposure to moral and developmental messages influences behavior.

Conclusion

The persistence of youth cybercrime cannot be addressed solely through enforcement mechanism. Since digital media function as the dominant informational ecosystem for youth in Ebonyi State, preventive efforts must operate within the same communicative architecture that shapes youth perception and attitudes.

Strategic communication must therefore move beyond sporadic awareness campaign towards sustained, theory-driven, digital optimized engagement. Effective prevention requires not just increasing message, quantity but enhancing message framing frequency, competitiveness, and relevance within youth centered digital space.

Recommendations

1. Government agencies, communication and other relevant agencies should increase the use digital media platform for information dissemination among youths in Ebonyi State.
2. The awareness campaigns be strengthened to improve youths' knowledge of cybercrime and its dangers.
3. Strategic communication messages should be made more frequently and engaging to positively influence youths against cybercrime.
4. Government and stakeholders should address challenges such as poor Internet access, low digital literacy and inadequate funding to improve digital media campaign on cybercrime prevention.

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