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**Internet Fraud and Human Trafficking in Contemporary
Nigeria**

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Abstract

The study investigated the internet fraud and human trafficking nexus in contemporary Nigeria. Specifically, the paper highlights the growing role of digital platforms and cryptocurrency in enabling these social vices. The study also investigates the socio-economic and security implications of these interconnected crimes, stressing how they undermine Nigeria's development, fuel organised crime, and damage its international reputation. A total of fifty (50) copies of questionnaires were distributed to residents in the Abraka metropolis of Delta State, Nigeria. The study confirmed that both vices are triggered by social deprivation, gender inequality, and a high poverty level. Internet fraud and human trafficking are fuelled by socio-economic vulnerabilities such as unemployment, poverty, and weak governance frameworks and technological advancements. The study confirmed that the majority of the respondents are aware of the existence of internet fraud and human trafficking. Hence, the study concludes that the rise in internet fraud is associated with the rise in human trafficking. Consequently, there is a need to strengthen the institutional and legal frameworks. There is also a need for public enlightenment on the dangers inherent in cybercrimes. Finally, soft loans should be provided to young graduates.

Keywords: *Internet Fraud, Human Trafficking, Contemporary Nigeria*

Introduction

The current increase in the number of youths and young graduates from higher institutions of learning coupled with the reduction in societal values remains a major source of concern for major scholars (Sarkar & Shukla, 2024; Ulo & Jike, 2022; Arunaye, 2022). Nigeria is one of Africa's most populous countries, divinely endowed with human and natural resources, yet the nation grapples with the high cost of living and poverty level. Even government attempts aimed at addressing societal concerns associated with internet fraud and human trafficking remain highly transactional (Nagle, 2024; Palumbo, 2024). Human trafficking is considered a transnational crime deeply rooted in socio-economic vulnerabilities. Associated crimes with human trafficking include forced labour, sexual enslavements and organ harvesting (Nwabachili & Iloka, 2024). Verma (2024) and Chopra and Guharoy (2024) affirm that human trafficking is a modern form of human slavery, and if attempts are not directed towards addressing this menace, it may result in their entrenchment as social norms. Internet fraud is a deceptive scheme targeted at obtaining financial or personal information via online from victims (Ali & Mohd Zaharon, 2024). It therefore cut across a wide spectrum of deviant behaviours which rely on the anonymity, reach, and frequency of the internet to defraud others. Most often, these perpetrators/internet fraudsters manipulate digital platforms such as emails, fake websites, social media, and malware (Tuleun, 2025). They achieve these nefarious activities by cloning the digital platforms. These further increase the success rate of their attacks on their victims (Balogun et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Associated crimes with internet fraud include hacking, identity theft, phishing, cyberstalking, money laundering, carding, investment fraud, ransomware attacks, and online impersonation. These illicit activities are progressively interconnected, as perpetrators adopt multi-vector strategies which combine technical exploits with social engineering. The rise of online shopping, mobile banking, digital banking, and digital financial services has further heightened cases of internet fraud, particularly in emerging countries like Nigeria, which face low digital literacy and weak cybersecurity infrastructure. Consequently, the issue of how internet fraud occurs and how it can be mitigated requires a multidisciplinary approach which blends insights from various disciplines such as sociology, criminology, financial forensics, information systems

and cybersecurity (Fidelis et al., 2025; Moharrak & Mogaji, 2025; Ukam et al., 2024).

Though human trafficking is distinct from internet fraud, its crimes share significant overlap, as it leverages global networks and thrives in contexts of weak governance, economic desperation, and deprivation. Movsisyan (2018) added that while both internet fraud and human tracking are highly distinct in nature and execution, associated social issues are high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, and weak governance structures. Sarkar and Shukla (2024) stressed that both social vices are deeply interwoven in that internet fraudsters use funds generated from human trafficking operations while human traffickers use internet platforms to both advertise and recruit their victims. As such, the rapid technological advances and weak regulatory/governance frameworks have made the Nigerian economy into a hub for cybercrimes.

Ali and Mohd Zaharon (2024) stressed that internet (online) fraud is difficult to detect due to its invisibility and the anonymity of online fraudsters. Most victims' descriptions of the process also make it difficult for researchers to address the issues. Hence, major attention in extant research has focused on the victims of internet fraud (Bhardwaj, 2021; Lacey et al., 2020; Paat & Markham, 2021), while some other studies have examined the impact of fraud on victims (Coluccia et al., 2021), with limited attention given to providing timely information on how to address this social menace. Most of this research underestimates the incidence of internet fraud. Even attempts made by scholars to address the issue by identifying individuals more vulnerable to being defrauded have not reduced fraud cases; instead, they appear to have further aggravated the problem. This research therefore takes a step forward by advocating increased employment opportunities and the provision of soft loans to young graduates as social tools for reducing the menace. The study further confirms that if internet fraud is reduced, human trafficking will also decrease significantly. This identified research gap contributes to the existing body of studies on the internet fraud–human trafficking nexus. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the relationship between internet fraud and human trafficking in present-day Nigeria. Through both contextual and empirical analysis, it aims to provide valuable insights for criminologists, policymakers, sociologists, researchers, and other stakeholders on how these social issues can be addressed within Nigerian society.

Literature Review

Internet Fraud in Nigeria

The issue of internet fraud remains one of the most sophisticated crimes in Nigeria. Internet fraudsters commonly use fake emails, social media handles, and other online platforms to scam their victims. The writer sees internet fraud as the illegal and criminal action performed through the utilisation of an aided internet-accessed device with the sole purpose of exploiting or extorting the targeted victim of financial gains or other values of interest. Popular schemes include romance scams, phishing, and fake investment opportunities. Evidently, these fraudsters generate huge sums of money annually through the use of foreign accounts or cryptocurrency. Given that internet fraud is multifaceted, its drivers are myriads. Various drivers of internet fraud include economic deprivation, inadequate government supports, high unemployment rates, rich-quick syndrome, and low societal values, among other issues. Omoniyi (2023) further argued that inadequate cybersecurity infrastructure and weak regulatory oversight can also further motivate these perpetrators. The various impacts of internet fraud include financial loss, psychological and emotional distress, loss of international reputation, global restrictions and loss of trust at the global business level (Norris et al., 2022; Eboibi & Ogorugba, 2023).

Human Trafficking in Nigeria

One of the major social vices facing Nigeria in contemporary times is human trafficking. Oladayo, Benjamin, Ulo, and Olaniyi (2024) maintained that human trafficking is the dubious act of luring or preying on humans for personal gains, interests or values. The act is not restricted to a particular group, person or nationality, as all ages, groups and nationalities are vulnerable victims of this crime. The demands by cronies determine when, where and how victims should be targeted in terms of age, sex and nationality. Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery, and victims are trafficked to the Middle East, Europe, and other parts of Africa under the guise of giving victims the promise of a better living condition. This therefore serves as a medium through which they commit such deviant behaviour. Usually, victims are deceived with promises of a better life, employment, and education, only to discover they have been deceived. The transnational nature of this deviant

behaviour makes it especially difficult to trace, regulate, and prosecute (Ijiga et al., 2024).

Within the Nigerian context, the mechanisms the traffickers use to carry out this deviant behaviour are both complex and deeply embedded in institutional and socio-economic structures. One of the most common mechanisms used by traffickers includes the provision of fake documents (fake passports, visas, and work permits). This gives the victims the illusion of legality of such documents that are presented before them. Most often, the traffickers collude with corrupt immigration officials at embassies, immigration checkpoints, and border posts (Babatunde, 2025; Okorie & Okeja, 2024). These corrupt immigration officials may either receive bribes or also be involved in the trafficking directly. Additionally, traffickers often use clandestine routes; particularly, northern Nigeria serves as an avenue through which this crime thrives due to the fact that the porous borders allow discreet movement of humans across Chad, Niger, and other neighbouring countries (Eze et al., 2025; Eselebor, 2019). It is striking to note that human trafficking also occurs within Nigeria's borders in that victims from rural communities are relocated to cities such as Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt on a daily basis. These victims are subjected to various exploitative labour conditions either through force or deceptive arrangements (Osimen & Daudu, 2025; Idris et al., 2024). Many of such victims are girls, boys, women, and underaged children, who are especially vulnerable due to unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, broken homes, and other societal pressures (Adeyemo, 2025; Chinedu, 2019; & Anurioha, 2024).

Norris et al. (2019) argued that the consequences of trafficking are devastating, ranging from physical abuse to long-term psychological trauma. Survivors often face stigma and difficulty reintegrating into society. On a macro scale, human trafficking undermines Nigeria's socio-economic development by perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Major factors that have heightened human trafficking in Nigeria are technological advancement, loss of societal values, high poverty rate, poor institutional qualities, gender inequality, among other issues. Omoniyi (2023) stressed that most human traffickers use digital tools to monitor their victims, which suggests that if internet fraud is addressed, human trafficking will be reduced.

Strain Theory

This study is anchored on the strain theory. Developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938, it stresses that individuals can only engage in deviant behaviour, such as internet fraud and human trafficking, when there are disconnect between societal goals and the legal means to achieve success. Merton further stressed that societal pressure such as economic hardship, social inequality, and inadequate access to legal ventures may motivate the individual to engage in deviant behaviour. Merton called this being innovative through unlawful means, and individuals feel coerced to be engaged in deviant behaviour as a means of either survival or financial advancement.

Empirical Literature and Gap

Using various methodological approaches, scholars have demonstrated over time that human trafficking and internet fraud are two prominent social vices and that internet fraud is often used by perpetrators as a means to facilitate human trafficking. These two vices, in turn, contribute to the emergence of other social problems (Nwabachili & Iloka, 2024; Verma, 2024; Chopra & Guharoy, 2024; Ali & Mohd Zaharon, 2024; Efrat, 2016). This current study, however, takes a step further by focusing on male and female respondents residing in the Abraka metropolis of Delta State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This section focuses on the methodology employed. The research purposively selected males and females in the Abraka metropolis of Delta State of Nigeria. The choice of Abraka is based on the fact that, apart from being a university environment, the majority of the youth in the study area are unemployed and actively seeking opportunities. A total of fifty (50) copies of questionnaires were shared with residents in Campus 3 Area (Ivie Road), Police Station Road, Ekerejeta, Okpogoro Street, Umono Street, Etaghene Street, and Lucas Street. The selected areas were known to be densely populated. Another major feature of these streets is that most students and graduates stay in these areas due to their perceived safety and low violent crime rate.

The respondents' awareness of internet fraud and human trafficking was measured based on respondents' knowledge and perceptions of

reported cases of internet fraud and human trafficking, rather than their personal experiences. The questionnaire captures the respondents' general awareness through media exposure (news and social media), community discussions, and education, rather than direct involvement/victimisation. The essence of using this approach is to assess how informed the respondents are about the connection between internet fraud and human trafficking. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the questionnaire was presented to two (2) professors of sociology at Delta State University, Abraka, to vet the questionnaire. It is on the basis of their comments that the questionnaire was corrected and then sent to the respondents.

Frequencies and simple percentages were used in analysing the questionnaire, and a multivariate analysis was used to test the research hypothesis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The statistical package was chosen due to user-friendliness and global acceptability for running primary data regression analysis.

4. Result and Discussion

Although, a total of fifty (50) copies of questionnaire were shared, forty five (45) questionnaires were returned (Table 1):

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution Analysis

Questionnaire	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Questionnaire Distributed	50	100
Questionnaire Returned	45	90

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Consequent upon the above, the respondents’ demography is presented thus:

Table 2: Respondents’ Information

		Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Females	21	46.67
	Males	24	53.33
Age Bracket (Years)	21- 30	15	33.33
	31-40	14	31.11
	41-50	11	24.44
	51 and Above	15	33.33
Marital Status	Single	26	57.78
	Married	11	24.44
	Widowed	8	17.78
	Divorced	7	15.56
Educational Background	OND/NCE	16	35.56
	BSc/HND	11	24.44
	MSc/MBA/Med/	7	15.56
	PhD	3	6.67
	Others	1	2.22

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 2 reveals that 46.67% of the participants are female, while 53.33% are male. Regarding age distribution, 33.33% fall within the 21–30 age bracket, 31.11% are aged 31–40, 24.44% are between 41 and 41–50, and 33.33% are aged 51 and above. This distribution suggests that awareness of, or vulnerability to, human trafficking spans across age groups. In terms of marital status, 26 respondents are single, 11 are married, and 8 are divorced.

Lastly, the majority of participants hold OND or NCE qualifications, while only a few possess PhDs. This may suggest that individuals with lower educational attainment are more prevalent in the area, which could correlate with greater socio-economic vulnerability to human trafficking.

Hypothesis Testing

Response to Research Question 1:

The first research question centres on determining if the respondents are aware of internet fraud and human tracking. The outcome is presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Internet Fraud and Human Trafficking

Response	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Yes	38	84.44%
No	6	13.33%
Neutral (N)	1	2.22%
Total	45	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

From Table 3, 38 respondents confirmed that they are aware of internet fraud and human trafficking; only 6 respondents were not. However, a respondent was neutral on the issue. This shows that the majority of the respondents are aware of the existence of internet fraud and human trafficking. However, this does not suggest a direct understanding of any causal relationship between internet fraud and human trafficking.

Regression Analysis

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.992 ^a	.984	.978	218.17408

a. Predictors: (Constant); Internet Fraud

Source: SPSS Output (2024)

Table 4 confirmed that internet fraud accounted for 98.4% of the variation in human trafficking, while the remaining 1.6% is attributed to the error term. This further confirmed that 98.4% of the variance in the human trafficking variable can be statistically associated with the variation in internet fraud. This indicates a strong linear association between human trafficking and internet fraud.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.413	.968		2.493	.013
Internet Fraud	1.137	.482	.469	2.36	.025

a. Dependent Variable: Human Trafficking

Source: SPSS Output (2024)

As presented in Table 5, internet fraud has a positive coefficient value of 1.137 units and a p-value of 0.025. This confirmed that, if internet fraud rises by 1 unit, human trafficking will increase by 1.137 units. This further contends that as internet fraud increases, human trafficking also increases alongside it. The rationalisation is that it provides financial incentives to the perpetrators. It may also enable the perpetrators of the platform to exploit their victims without being caught. As such, if internet fraud is combated, human trafficking will reduce to a large extent. This further highlights the need to strengthen cybersecurity measures and invest more in infrastructure with the intention to trace and also detect suspicious transactions without delay. The study further reaffirmed the need for public awareness of the danger inherent in the rise of internet fraud among youths of the Abraka metropolis.

Discussion

Implications for Nigeria’s Socio-Economic and Security Landscape

The study clearly confirmed that both constructs pose huge threats to Nigeria’s economic system. From an economic sense, both crimes increase crime rates and, at the same time, stifle legitimate development opportunities. From the social viewpoint, crimes erode trust within communities and increase exploitation.

From a security perspective, the activities of organised crime networks undermine the rule of law and stretch the capacities of law enforcement agencies. Cross-border trafficking, facilitated by internet fraud, also damages Nigeria’s international relations, particularly with countries affected by trafficking inflows. The majority of the perpetrators of these crimes, especially in Abraka metropolis, are able-bodied men with great aspirations, but the society does not provide them with the

opportunity to develop their God-given potential. Akinyemi (2023) highlighted a trafficking network that relied primarily on proceeds from internet phishing scams to finance human trafficking activities. Hence, it is expected that as internet fraud increases, the likelihood of illegal migration overseas also rises. Additionally, another area of concern lies in the misuse of technology by the perpetrators, as these result in fake jobs, which has also led to the death of many (Obi & Yusuf, 2022). Furthermore, internet fraudsters serve as the financiers/capital providers for human trafficking operations. In some cases, those involved in human trafficking are also involved in internet frauds. Overall, the study stressed that internet fraud is not just a cybersecurity issue but also a major factor which contributes to the rise in human trafficking cases in Delta State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study focused on the internet fraud and human trafficking nexus in the Nigerian context. Specifically, the paper highlights the growing role of digital platforms and cryptocurrency in enabling these social vices. The study also investigates the socio-economic and security implications of these interconnected crimes, stressing how they undermine Nigeria's development, fuel organised crime, and damage its international reputation. A total of fifty (50) questionnaires were distributed to residents in the Abraka metropolis of Delta State, Nigeria. The study confirmed that the majority of the respondents are aware of the existence of internet fraud and human trafficking. The study also confirmed that both internet fraud and human trafficking are complex and that both issues are driven by technological misuse, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and the operations of organised crime networks. Hence, the study concludes that the rise in internet fraud is associated with the rise in human trafficking. Consequently, the following submissions were made:

1. There is a need to strengthen the institutional and legal framework; this will reduce internet fraud and trafficking operations in Delta State.
2. There is also a need for public enlightenment on the dangers inherent in internet fraud.
3. Soft loans should be given to young graduates with a view to curtailing fraudulent tendencies among the young.

Although the findings highlight a potential link (internet fraud and human trafficking) worth further studies, no conclusion was drawn that internet fraud causes or explains human trafficking based solely on the current model. Hence, future research should employ more rigorous methods, such as longitudinal data, triangulated sources, or qualitative interviews, to uncover any potential causal pathways. Future studies should expand their sample size to cover a wider scope than the current study, which was confined to only 50 respondents.

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