

Technologies in criminal justice



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The past decade has brought about drastic changes in the availability and use of electronic materials, particularly the pagers, cell phones, computers and recently the internet. Advancements in technology and emerging technologies in law enforcement, majorly in the investigation and prosecution of crime, have brought about positive results in the societies. An example of an advantageous advancement in technology in crime is the ability to conduct DNA testing to establish identity of sexual criminals. This is helpful in a case where identification is the root issue. In 1996, there were roughly 16, 000 or more cases that involved forensic DNA testing in the U. S. However, the same technological advancements viewed as positive have been used by criminals to evade crime. A need to research on these, therefore, exists to help to establish a solution to the above mentioned problem. This paper aims at highlighting in summary the advantages, the disadvantages, research cases and providing viable solutions to the problems brought forward.

Growth in the forensic science departments is on the rise. From the old practices of identification by fingerprints to the new era of DNA identification, now computer forensics exists. The new age of computer forensics is quite popular and many governments have adopted the system in their bid to eradicate crime and pursuit of evidence to prosecute assailants. With the new technology in computer forensics, investigation of internet related crimes such as website hacking is now possible. The same technology is also helpful in investigating crimes as mentioned earlier in sexual assault, child trafficking, and homicide etc. These advancements have brought about many advantages. The amount of time taken to solve crimes has reduced

significantly due to the use of modern technology. Cases that used to take weeks now can be solved within a shorter period of time. This, in turn, reduces the expenses incurred in the process of solving the case. With the new use of GPS systems, locating a suspect is now easy via internet or mobile phones. Another advantage enjoyed by the law enforcement agencies is the ability of interconnection of databases globally. This allows the law enforcement agencies to be able to follow up on crime suspects globally. Migration from one state to another is now computerized. This largely reduces the movement of criminals thereby confining them to one area for easier arrests. The use of digital surveillance cameras with high resolution powers allows experts to clean up images so as to provide a clear face for purposes of identification in investigation work. Finally, it is now easier to store evidence for longer periods of time unlike in the past where storage required bulky materials to maintain the process.

However, good and advantageous the new technology has brought to law enforcements, a few disadvantages within the same have been experienced. With the drastic changes and advent of the computerized age, law enforcement officers have to undergo intensive computer training to help in evidence collection and maintenance. This process is quite expensive to the government and institutions hoping to use the new advancements in technology. The same process of training and perfecting the art also consumes a lot of time. The internet has brought about numerous advantages to people worldwide. However, the same click of a button advantage may translate to the commission of a crime to a person far away in a different time zone. The cyber criminals often commit these crimes

anonymously making it hard to track them down. The same advancement in technology embraced by the law enforcement agencies has also provided a platform for advanced crime. Dealing with that crime is expensive and requires a lot of resources (Jones, 2007). The major disadvantage, however, remains to be the fact that law enforcers cannot match the level of expertise cybercriminals possess.

In the case of *People vs. Harrison*, a cyber criminal, Harrison is charged and convicted of possession of fake or counterfeit bank bills and several counts of using the computer to commit crimes. This was in violation of Michigan laws (Michigan Court of Appeals, 2009). He uses the computer to make the fake bills. Another case involving the use of computers to commit a crime as documented in the Central District of California. 2 of the 3 defendants plead guilty to identity theft and bank fraud. This case shows just how the advanced crimes can get as the criminals have the expertise to cause harm to others directly or indirectly. It adds to the long list of disadvantages.

To review a case where the computer was used to prosecute a criminal successfully, a man from Sussex was convicted of murder in 2005 after forensic evidence obtained from his computer available in the trial session showed scenes of violence. The use of present technology allowed experts to retrieve web mails and images that were successful in his prosecution and eventually conviction. Another example of a case is that of a London man who was charged with the possession of indecent images of children after printouts had been found by his landlord in his room. Computer experts later retrieved more images to help in collecting evidence against him.

The above summaries and research study of advantages, disadvantages, negative and positive cases in relation to the computer advancement in technology create a mixed reaction. However, as much as criminals are getting smarter by the hour, so the law enforcement agencies have. This is welcome news to the public. This study is of the opinion that technological advancement no matter the disadvantages has brought about more positive changes than the negative. The government and the public should, therefore, learn to embrace these changes.