
Francisca Afua Opoku-Boateng

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School Faculty of
Beacom College of Computer and Cyber Sciences
of Dakota State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cyber Defense

by
Francisca Afua Opoku-Boateng
May 2022

Dissertation Committee: Dr. Cody Welu, DSU (Chair), Dr. Kyle Cronin, DSU, Dr. David Bishop, DSU, Cynthia Hetherington, MLS, MSM, CFE, CII
DISSERTATION APPROVAL FORM

This dissertation is approved as a credible and independent investigation by a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and is acceptable for meeting the dissertation requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this dissertation does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department or university.

Student Name: Francisca Opoku-Boateng


Dissertation Chair/Co-Chair: Cody Welu
Name: Cody Welu
Date: April 19, 2022

Dissertation Chair/Co-Chair:
Name:
Date: 

Committee member: Kyle Cronin
Name: Kyle Cronin
Date: April 19, 2022

Committee member: Dave Bishop
Name: Dave Bishop
Date: April 19, 2022

Committee member: Cynthia Hetherington
Name: Cynthia Hetherington
Date: April 19, 2022
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to God for my dissertation experience and the lessons learned during this journey. I have received excellent support and assistance through this dissertation's writing.

Firstly, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Cody Welu, for his dedication and time investment. You helped me choose the right direction and effortlessly navigate my doctoral research journey. To my committee members, Dr. David Bishop, Cynthia Hetherington, MLS, MSM, CFE, CII, and Dr. Kyle Croionin, the expertise you all brought on board was invaluable while working on completing my work. Your insightful, genuine, and constructive feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and finish the research work.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my support systems. One way or the other, you all provided me with wise counsel, a sympathetic ear, love, prayers, advice, and the encouragement I needed, especially on days I needed my mind outside of my research.

❖ Parents – Dr. Ps. Daniel Opoku-Boateng and Dr. Mrs. Sarah Opoku-Boateng.
❖ Sisters – Dr. Mrs. Florence Opoku-Boatema Ayarkwah and Dr. Mrs. Gloria Opoku-Boateng Osardu.
❖ Mentors - Brigadier General Terrence Adams, Dr. Siobahn Grady, Dr. Kofi Bonnie, Noureen Njoroge, Ethelyn Balisteri, and Dr. Mark Hawkes.
❖ Friends – Posie Aagaard, Dr. Martinson Ofori, Dr. & Dr. Mrs. Agyeman, Akua Bema, Ohemaa, Dami, Alor, Ajay and KBJ.
❖ Mentee – Meosha Wilkus

Lastly, I would like to single out my HUSBAND! Danny (Dr. Daniel Korankye-Boadu), my Ph.D. journey took a significant toll on our family; however, thank you for being incredibly patient and supportive. I am glad I didn't give up, and I pray my achievement motivates you to keep pushing through life. I dedicate this to my future kids and every young black girl aspiring to be great.
ABSTRACT

Globally, as the COVID-19 pandemic persists, it has not just imposed a significant impact on the general well-being of individuals, exposing them to unprecedented financial hardships and online information deception. However, it has also forced consumers, buyers, and suppliers to look toward a darkened economic world – the Dark Web world – a sinister complement to the internet, driven by financial gains, where illegal goods and services are advertised sold. As the Dark Web gains an increase in recognition by normal web users during this pandemic, how to perform cybercrime investigations on the Dark Web becomes challenging for manufacturers, investigators, and law enforcement officers.

This research aims to (1) understand the Dark Web, in general, the impact Dark Web markets have on the pharmaceutical industry during the time of this pandemic, (2) comprehend the procurement of various COVID-19 vaccine products that are procured on the Dark Web, and (3) ultimately create a Dark Web pharmaceutical open-sources investigative framework, which the pharmaceutical industry, manufacturers, investigative analysts, and law enforcement can utilize. This framework will aid them in understanding better and navigating the Dark Web space as they investigate illicit activities or cyber-crimes involving COVID-19 vaccine products procured from the Dark Web markets.

The proposed framework is a methodology with four steps and was built upon the known Justine Nordine OSINT framework template, a web-based tool developed primarily in JavaScript programming language. A qualitative grounded theory analysis was applied to evaluate the tool. Research findings serve as a reference paper and contribute significantly to the pharmaceutical investigators’ community and the OSINT and Dark Web investigative communities.

Keywords: Dark Web, COVID-19 Vaccines, OSINT, Cybercrime Investigations