

Ranking Cyber Attacker Motives

Abdias Noel

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Reading these articles provided good insight into the motivation of some cyber attackers. One thing that came to mind while going through them was the hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow which I will use as rationale to rank them.

Because the lower levels represent the most fundamental human needs, I used Maslow's hierarchy to rank the motivations from the most understandable (*as human motivation*) to the least understandable.

Rank	Article	Primary Motive
1	HP: <i>Sex, Drugs, and Toilet Rolls</i>	Financial gain
2	Hactivism Wave	Political/ideological activism
3	Revenge Porn	Revenge / control
4	Bradley Niblock Election DDoS	Political protest / personal grievance
5	LinkedIn Scraping ("for fun")	Curiosity, challenge, reputation, ego
6	What Drives Hackers to a Life of...?	Psychological compulsion / thrill
7	Cyberbullying & Child Grooming	Sadism, exploitation, predatory behavior

1. Financial gain

Cybercriminals spending stolen money on luxury items, drugs, gambling, everyday expenses, and investments understandable, since financial gain, either to feed oneself, or take care of pressing needs, is not a novel criminal motive, thus making it rank first. It is immoral, but psychologically straightforward.

2. Political/ideological activism (Group)

I understand attackers motivated by political or social causes as individuals whose safety needs are either not met or disappearing. In an effort to protect what they gain through their labor or heritage, some individuals may resort to cyberattacks when they perceive traditional political avenues as ineffective.

3. Revenge / control

While some element of this motive belongs to the fourth level of need (status/recognition) for the attacker, I believe most of the underlying causes are tied to the third level notably in the pursuit of intimacy and sense of connection. These attacks usually occur after the end of a relationship where one of the parties involved has a hard time accepting rejection.

4. Political protest / grievance (Personal)

This one is similar to (revenge) in the sense that it has some elements from two levels (3 and 4). The DDoS attack against election-related systems appears to be rooted in political frustration or grievance, unlike hacktivism, whose stated objective is societal change, personal attacks against election systems often appear directed toward expressing / demonstrating personal capability.

5. Curiosity, challenge

Tom Liner's claim of scraping about 700 million profiles "for fun," is puzzling considering that he later intended to sell the data. The combination suggests curiosity and technical challenge (self-actualization) mixed with reputation (Status/recognition) and financial incentive, rather than pure amusement.

6. Psychological compulsion / thrill

This motivation may develop from an increasing curiosity/challenge phase. While it is not victimless behavior, the ultimate goal is nothing other than the attacker's intellectual satisfaction. In search of that satisfaction, the attacker engages in high-risk compulsive behaviors where the "reward" is internal rather than practical.

7. Sadism, exploitation, predatory behavior

Of the seven motivations, this one makes the least sense to me, as it does not correlate with any of the levels of needs in the hierarchy. It does not satisfy any physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, or self-actualization need. While the previous might be psychologically understandable in some cases, this one is not.

Overall, Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a useful framework for understanding the motivations behind many forms of cybercrime. While it cannot explain every behavior, particularly those rooted in sadism or exploitation, it helps distinguish between crimes motivated by survival, ideology, recognition, and personal gratification. Understanding these motives may assist cybersecurity professionals in developing more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

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