Case Study Report

on

BreachForums Shutdown & Migration to Telegram Cybercrime Ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the rise and falls of BreachForums—one of the world's largest dark web cybercrime marketplaces—and analyzes how its shutdown led to a mass migration of cybercriminals to Telegram. The report highlights the complete timeline, from the creation of BreachForums, its criminal ecosystem, FBI's infiltration, the administrator's arrest, the forum's seizure, and the eventual decentralization of cybercrime activities onto encrypted social platforms. The study explores why Telegram became the preferred choice for threat actors, the emerging cybercrime patterns on Telegram, the challenges faced by law enforcement, and the long-term impact on global cybersecurity.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of cybercrime over the past decade has been driven by the increasing availability of hidden platforms, anonymous communication methods, and global access to hacking tools. Among these underground ecosystems, **BreachForums** emerged as one of the most active and influential dark web marketplaces. Operating on TOR hidden services, it became a major hub for selling stolen databases, breached credentials, malware kits, ransomware leaks, and illicit digital goods.

BreachForums was known for hosting thousands of cybercriminals, from small-scale hackers to large ransomware groups. Its structure, anonymity, and reputation-based trading system made it a preferred destination for illegal digital transactions. However, in 2023–2024, the forum became the target of a major international investigation led by the FBI. This operation resulted in the arrest of its administrator, seizure of its servers, and a complete shutdown of the platform.

The takedown of BreachForums was expected to reduce cybercrime activities, but instead, it triggered a major shift in the global cybercrime landscape. With the sudden loss of their primary marketplace, threat actors rapidly migrated to **Telegram**, an encrypted, mainstream messaging platform. Telegram's features—such as anonymity, private channels, encryption support, no strict identity verification, and automated bot systems—made it an ideal replacement for dark web forums.

This case study provides a detailed, step-by-step analysis of how BreachForums operated, how it was dismantled, how cybercriminals adapted, and how Telegram became the new decentralized center of cybercrime networks. It highlights the technological, operational, and investigative aspects of this transition while examining the impact on cybersecurity and law enforcement.

BACKGROUND OF BREACHFORUMS

BreachForums was one of the most prominent and influential cybercrime platforms operating on the dark web. It emerged in 2022 as the successor to RaidForums, which had been taken down by international law enforcement. With thousands of active members, BreachForums quickly grew into a global marketplace for stolen digital assets, cyberattack tools, and sensitive data obtained from major breaches.

The forum operated primarily on the **TOR (The Onion Router)** network, which concealed the identities of both buyers and sellers. This anonymity made BreachForums a preferred hub for individuals involved in:

- Selling and purchasing leaked databases
- Trading stolen login credentials
- Sharing government or corporate documents
- Distributing malware, botnets, and exploit kits
- Providing hacking services
- Hosting ransomware leak sections

The platform maintained a structured hierarchy where experienced cybercriminals served as trusted vendors. A reputation system was used to verify sellers, ensuring a steady flow of illegal goods without the fear of fraud or exposure. The forum's interface was deliberately designed to resemble legitimate online communities, creating an environment where illegal transactions felt routine and organized.

BreachForums also served as a communication bridge for various threat actors, including ransomware gangs. These groups used forum threads to leak victim data, advertise new attacks, and negotiate with organizations. The combination of anonymity, accessibility, and user-friendly design allowed BreachForums to become a central pillar of the dark web cybercrime economy.

By early 2023, BreachForums had grown so influential that it attracted the attention of multiple law enforcement agencies around the world. The scale of transactions, the sensitivity of leaked data, and the platform's connection with high-profile breaches made it one of the FBI's top cybercrime targets. This set the stage for a major investigation that would eventually dismantle the forum permanently.

FBI SEIZURE OPERATION

The rise of BreachForums and its rapid expansion caught the attention of multiple international law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, Europol, and intelligence units from several countries. Due to the platform's involvement in large-scale data breaches, illegal data trading, and cyber extortion, it became one of the highest-priority targets for dismantling.

The FBI initiated a **long-term undercover operation** to infiltrate and monitor the forum's internal activities. This mission combined cyber forensics, digital footprint tracking, behavioral analysis, and covert agent interactions with key forum members.

5.1 Identification of the Administrator — "Pompompurin"

The primary goal for the FBI was to identify the real individual behind the alias **"Pompompurin"**, the administrator of BreachForums.
Despite using:

- TOR Browser
- VPNs
- Multiple aliases
- Disposable emails
- Cryptocurrency transactions

The FBI gradually pieced together clues through small but critical mistakes made by the admin.

Some key techniques used:

- **Login time correlation** with real-world ISP records
- Monitoring cryptocurrency wallets linked to earlier transactions
- Metadata leaks from previous forum versions
- Behavioral writing analysis (stylometry)
- Footprints left during maintenance windows
- Recovery email traces

These combined efforts eventually revealed the true identity of the forum's operator.

5.2 The Arrest Operation

Once the administrator was identified, the FBI coordinated with local law enforcement to physically track and arrest him.

The arrest included:

- Seizing all electronic devices
- Cloning hard drives for forensic analysis
- Obtaining access tokens, session cookies, and stored credentials
- Extracting server keys and encrypted data storage

This moment marked the beginning of BreachForums' collapse.

5.3 Seizing the Infrastructure

After gaining access to backend credentials, the FBI:

- Took full control of the **TOR hidden service** hosting the forum
- Shut down the clearnet mirrors and backup servers
- Captured internal communication logs
- Secured databases containing user accounts and transaction history
- Replaced the forum homepage with an official FBI seizure banner

This banner publicly confirmed the takedown and warned users that the platform was now under federal control.

5.4 Result of the Seizure

The operation effectively halted BreachForums' activities:

- Thousands of pending illegal transactions were interrupted
- Multiple ransomware groups lost their leak distribution channels
- High-profile data sellers went offline
- Buyers panicked, fearing that their identities might be exposed

However, instead of ending cybercrime, this event triggered the next phase — a massive migration to Telegram.

MIGRATION TO TELEGRAM

The shutdown of BreachForums created a sudden vacuum within the global underground cybercrime ecosystem. Thousands of sellers, buyers, and ransomware affiliates who relied on the platform for trading illegal data were left without a marketplace. As panic spread among cybercriminals, they urgently searched for a new platform that could provide anonymity, accessibility, and a wide user base. This demand led to a rapid and widespread migration from the dark web to **Telegram**.

Telegram, originally designed as a secure messaging platform, unintentionally evolved into an alternative hub for underground activities. Within days of BreachForums being seized by the FBI, cybercriminals began forming Telegram channels, private groups, and automated bot services to replicate the same operations they previously conducted on the dark web.

6.1 Surge of New Telegram Channels

Just one week after the BreachForums shutdown:

- Dozens of “BreachForums Reloaded” style channels appeared
- Known data sellers started announcing their new Telegram handles
- Cybercriminals created backup channels to avoid takedowns
- Groups with 10,000+ members emerged within days
- Ransomware gangs opened “official Telegram broadcast channels”

These channels acted as:

- Black market trading groups
- Data breach announcement boards
- Malware distribution platforms
- Credential selling hubs

Telegram’s instant joining system allowed thousands of users to reassemble faster compared to recreating a hidden TOR forum.

6.2 Why Cybercriminals Chose Telegram

Telegram provided several advantages that made it an ideal replacement for the dark web:

1. No Real Identity Needed

Users can create accounts without personal verification, often using:

- VPN
- Virtual numbers
- Burner SIM cards

2. Private and Public Channels

These channels support **up to 200,000 members**, perfect for large-scale operations.

3. Automation Through Bots

Cybercriminals started using Telegram bots for:

- Auto-delivery of leaked databases
- Crypto payment verification
- File distribution
- Automated customer support

4. Fast Distribution

Leaks posted on Telegram spread **10× faster** due to forwarding features.

5. Cross-platform Availability

Works on:

- Windows
- Android
- iOS
- Linux
- Web version

which made it accessible globally.

6. No TOR Required

Unlike dark web forums, Telegram is accessible to anyone, reducing barriers for new criminals.

6.3 Creation of Mirror Communities

After the shutdown, many cybercriminals replicated BreachForums' structure:

- **General cybercrime discussion groups**
- **Data leak channels**
- **Malware trading groups**
- **Ransomware victim update channels**
- **Zero-day discussion hubs**

These groups often linked to **TOR mirrors** for full data dumps but used Telegram to advertise and coordinate.

6.4 Ransomware Groups Move to Telegram

Major ransomware groups—such as LockBit, Conti remnants, and BlackCat affiliates—moved to Telegram to:

- Post victim announcements
- Leak stolen files
- Recruit new hackers
- Alert followers when their TOR site went offline

They commonly used Telegram as:

- Backup negotiation platforms
- Status update boards
- Media release centers

6.5 Formation of a New Underground Economy

Telegram became the core of the new decentralized digital black market:

- Database leaks selling for $5–$50
- Credit card dumps and bank logs
- ATO (Account Takeover) kits
- Phishing pages
- RDP/SSH server credentials
- Malware bundles and stealer logs
- Fake identity/KYC documents

All of this operated with almost **zero oversight**.

Summary of the Migration Phase

Migration Factor	Telegram Advantage
Loss of dark web forum	Instant group creation
Need for anonymity	No real identity required
Need for fast distribution	Forwarding + public channels
Need for automation	Telegram bots
Global access	Works without TOR
Panic after FBI takedown	Safe, encrypted platform

CYBERCRIMINAL ACTIVITY PATTERNS ON TELEGRAM

After the shutdown of BreachForums, Telegram quickly transformed into a decentralized cybercrime hub. Unlike dark web forums—which require TOR, registrations, and complex navigation—Telegram offered instant access, anonymity, automation, and high-speed content distribution. This resulted in new behavioral patterns among cybercriminals, making Telegram one of the most active platforms for underground activities.

Telegram groups began functioning like digital black markets, and almost every service that existed on BreachForums became available in an even more accessible format.

7.1 Data Leak Distribution & Sales

One of the most common activities observed on Telegram is the **sale and distribution of stolen data**.

Criminals sell:

- Full database dumps
- Email/password combinations (combo lists)
- Corporate login credentials
- Phone number databases
- KYC/Aadhaar/PAN scans
- Government document leaks

How it works:

1. Criminal posts **preview screenshots** of the data.
2. Interested buyers message privately or join a bot.
3. Payments via **crypto wallets**.
4. Bot automatically sends the full dump.

Telegram forwarding feature se ek leak **seconds me thousands of members tak pahuch jaata hai**.

7.2 Malware & Hack Tools Distribution

Cybercriminals use Telegram to distribute:

- RATs (Remote Access Trojans)
- Info-stealers (RedLine, Raccoon, Vidar)
- Keyloggers

- Botnets
- Android/Windows malware APKs
- Phishing page kits
- Exploit tools

Often they package malware as “educational tools” to avoid takedown.

Many channels provide **lifetime access**, **cracked versions**, or **malware-as-a-service subscriptions**.

7.3 Automated Bot Shops

Bots are the backbone of Telegram’s cybercrime ecosystem.

These bots can:

- Auto-deliver databases
- Validate stolen accounts
- Check credit card validity
- Sell subscription-based access
- Verify crypto payments
- Provide RDP/SSH server login dumps
- Offer cracked streaming accounts

This eliminates human involvement and makes cybercrime **24/7 automated**.

7.4 Ransomware Group Operations

After BreachForums died, ransomware groups used Telegram for:

✓ Announcements

Posting details of hacked companies.

✓ Data Leak Previews

Sharing small files or screenshots.

✓ Backup Communication

If their TOR site is seized, Telegram remains active.

✓ Recruitment

Hiring new affiliates, developers, or access brokers.

Example posts include:

- “We have breached XYZ company.”
- “Looking for initial access brokers.”
- “New ransomware version released.”

7.5 Selling Compromised Accounts

Telegram markets are full of stolen accounts for:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Netflix / Prime / Hotstar
- PayPal
- Bank logins
- Crypto exchange accounts
- CPanel / hosting logins

Prices vary from **₹50 to ₹5000** depending on account value.

7.6 Access as a Service (AaaS)

Telegram par attackers compromised systems ka access sell karte hain:

- RDP servers
- SSH access
- cPanel access
- Cloud panel access
- Corporate VPN access
- Email server admin access

Companies ke hacked systems **₹1,000–₹50,000** me easily mil jaate hain.

7.7 Fraud Kits & Social Engineering Tools

Fraudsters openly share:

- Fake payment proof generators
- Fake screenshot apps

- OTP bypassing guides
- SIM cloning tricks
- Fake Aadhaar/PAN generators
- Phishing page templates
- Bank call scripts

These tools help newbies enter cybercrime without technical skill.

7.8 Community Organization & Coordination

Telegram par cybercriminal communities ka structure kuch aisa hota hai:

Public Channels

For announcement & data previews.

- **Private Groups**
  For advanced discussions & paid leaks.
- **Premium/VIP Rooms**
  High-value data & corporate breaches.
- **Bot-Operated Shops**
  Completely automated data selling.

Cross-Platform Links

TOR sites + Telegram channels working together.

Telegram essentially became a **dark web 2.0**, faster, easier, and distributed.

7.9 Key Characteristics of Cybercriminal Behavior on Telegram

- Anonymous identities
- Disposable accounts
- High-speed file sharing
- Global criminal collaboration
- Automated illegal commerce
- Low skill requirement
- Decentralized structure
- Fast migration if channel banned

Cybercriminals have adapted to Telegram's infrastructure so effectively that even after repeated bans, their operations never fully stop—only shift.

CASE SNAPSHOT: POST-SEIZURE SURGE

The shutdown of BreachForums triggered one of the fastest reorganizations ever seen in the cybercrime ecosystem. Instead of decreasing criminal activity, the takedown resulted in a massive surge of new groups, channels, and marketplaces on Telegram. This phase highlights how quickly cybercriminals adapt when their primary platforms disappear.

8.1 Rapid Growth of Telegram Channels

Within the first **72 hours** of the seizure:

- Over **40 new cybercrime channels** appeared on Telegram.
- Previously well-known BreachForums vendors shared their new Telegram handles.
- Multiple unofficial “replacement” channels were created, mimicking the original forum.
- Some channels crossed **5,000 to 20,000 members** in just a few days.

By the end of the first month, more than **150 active groups** associated with former BreachForums users were identified.

8.2 Formation of a New Black Market Structure

Telegram quickly evolved into a fully functional underground marketplace. The following categories of groups became common:

- Data-leak trading channels
- Malware distribution groups
- Ransomware update channels
- Bot-operated shops
- Tools and exploit-sharing communities
- Credential and account-selling groups
- Access brokers networks

Every key function of BreachForums was recreated on Telegram—often in a faster and more efficient way.

8.3 Emergence of Clone & Mirror Communities

Dozens of groups began branding themselves as:

- “BreachForums Reloaded”
- “BF Market v2”

- “Official BreachForums Backup”

Most of these were not legitimate but served to attract followers, redirect traffic, and build new cybercrime marketplaces.

8.4 Increased Activity Among Ransomware Groups

Major ransomware gangs responded quickly and began using Telegram channels to:

- Announce newly hacked victims
- Share sample files or screenshots
- Redirect users to their TOR leak sites
- Recruit new affiliates or partners
- Post updates when their main websites were attacked or shut down

Telegram became a reliable backup communication channel for these groups.

8.5 Expansion of Bot-Based Cybercrime Operations

Telegram bots became one of the biggest drivers of the new ecosystem. These bots automated:

- Delivery of stolen databases
- Crypto payment verification
- Credit card or credential checks
- Sale of RDP/SSH access
- Automated customer support for illegal services

This automation allowed cybercriminal operations to run **24/7 without human involvement**.

8.6 Ultra-Fast Spread of Leaks

Because Telegram supports instant forwarding, data leaks spread far more rapidly than they did on the dark web.

A single leak could:

- Hit hundreds of groups
- Reach thousands of users
- Be forwarded tens of thousands of times

This dramatically increased the scale and speed of exposure for breached data.

8.7 Entry of Low-Skill Cybercriminals

Telegram does not require:

- TOR
- VPN configuration
- Special browsers
- Forum accounts
- Technical expertise

This made cybercrime accessible even to low-skilled individuals, contributing to a noticeable rise in small-scale cybercriminal activity.

8.8 Complete Decentralization of the Criminal Network

Unlike BreachForums, which was a centralized platform, Telegram enabled a **fully decentralized structure**, including:

- Multiple administrators
- Multiple channels for each purpose
- Backup groups ready to activate
- Instant migration if a channel gets banned

This decentralization made cybercrime more flexible and much harder for law enforcement to track or suppress.

Summary of the Post-Seizure Surge

Event	Result
BreachForums shutdown	Panic and rapid regrouping
Migration to Telegram	Fastest transition in cybercrime history
New channels	5,000–20,000 members within days
Bots deployed	Fully automated cybercrime
Ransomware migration	Telegram used for updates & leaks
Decentralization	Hardest structure to monitor

IMPACT ANALYSIS

The shutdown of BreachForums was expected to significantly reduce cybercrime activity across the dark web. However, the actual outcome was the opposite. Instead of decreasing, cybercrime became more widespread, faster, and harder to detect. The migration to Telegram fundamentally reshaped the global cybercriminal landscape in several critical ways. This impact analysis highlights the major consequences of this transition.

9.1 Expansion of Cybercrime Activities

New channels, groups, and automated bots on Telegram enabled cybercriminals to:

- Operate without the technical barriers of the dark web
- Sell stolen databases more efficiently
- Communicate instantly with thousands of buyers
- Create decentralized criminal communities

This expansion transformed Telegram into a large-scale underground marketplace far more active than BreachForums.

9.2 Increased Speed of Data Leak Distribution

On BreachForums, data leaks took **hours or days** to gain visibility.
On Telegram:

- A single leak can reach thousands in **seconds**
- Forwarding features accelerate spread exponentially
- Multiple channels mirror and re-share leaks instantly
- Criminals no longer depend on one platform for visibility

This speed drastically increases the impact of data breaches on victims and organizations.

9.3 Lower Entry Barrier for New Cybercriminals

The dark web required:

- TOR browser
- VPN usage
- Forum registrations
- Reputation systems
- Technical understanding

Telegram removes all of these requirements.

A completely inexperienced user can now:

- Join cybercrime groups
- Buy stolen data
- Use malware
- Access phishing kits
- Participate in fraud schemes

This democratization of cybercrime significantly increases the total number of actors in the ecosystem.

9.4 Decentralization of Criminal Networks

BreachForums was a centralized platform with a single point of failure—its admin and servers.

Telegram introduced a **decentralized structure**, with:

- Multiple channels
- Multiple admins
- Redundant backups
- Shared resources
- Distributed operations worldwide

This decentralization makes cybercrime networks far more resilient and almost impossible to dismantle completely.

9.5 Rise of Automated Cybercrime Operations

Telegram bots allowed criminals to:

- Automate data sales
- Verify crypto payments
- Deliver stolen files
- Provide real-time customer service
- Run credential-checking tools
- Perform account brute-force operations

Automation has turned cybercrime into a scalable, always-online digital business.

9.6 Ransomware Groups Strengthen Their Outreach

After the shutdown, major ransomware gangs began using Telegram to:

- Release victim data previews
- Announce new breaches
- Recruit affiliates
- Maintain communication even if their TOR site goes down

This improved their resilience and enhanced their global visibility.

9.7 Increased Difficulty for Law Enforcement

The transition to Telegram created new challenges for investigators:

- Anonymous accounts created via VPNs
- Disposable phone numbers
- Lack of metadata retention
- End-to-end encrypted chats
- Rapid channel migrations
- Bots leaving minimal forensic evidence

Law enforcement agencies now require advanced OSINT, AI-driven monitoring, and international collaboration to track such activities.

9.8 Broader Exposure of Sensitive Data

Due to rapid sharing and decentralization, leaked data now affects:

- Individuals
- Corporations
- Governments
- Financial institutions
- Healthcare systems

The widespread availability of stolen information increases risks such as:

- Identity theft
- Financial fraud
- Phishing attacks

- Ransomware extortion
- Corporate espionage

The public impact is significantly higher than before.

Summary of Impact

Impact Area	Result
Cybercrime Volume	Increased significantly
Leak Distribution Speed	10× faster on Telegram
Entry Barrier	Much lower
Network Structure	Fully decentralized
Automation	Cybercrime now runs 24/7
Ransomware Ecosystem	Strengthened
Law Enforcement	Harder investigations
Public Exposure	Higher damage & risk

LAW ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES

The migration of cybercriminals from BreachForums to Telegram introduced significant complications for law enforcement agencies worldwide. Unlike centralized dark web platforms that rely on fixed servers and identifiable infrastructure, Telegram provides a highly flexible, encrypted, and globally distributed environment. This makes cybercrime investigation more difficult, time-consuming, and resource-intensive.
Below are the major challenges faced by agencies after the shift.

10.1 Encrypted and Anonymous Communication

Telegram's features allow criminals to hide their identities effectively.

Key issues:

- Accounts created using **VPNs, proxies, or public Wi-Fi**
- Registration through **virtual or anonymous phone numbers**
- Private chats with **end-to-end encryption**
- No obligation for Telegram to reveal encrypted chat content

This anonymity makes direct attribution extremely difficult.

10.2 Disposable and Rapidly Changing Accounts

Cybercriminals often use temporary identities.

They frequently:

- Create new accounts within seconds
- Discard accounts after individual transactions
- Rotate between multiple identities
- Use "burner phones" and VoIP numbers

This makes continuous tracking almost impossible.

10.3 Large-Scale Decentralization

Unlike BreachForums (which had a single administrator), Telegram groups:

- Have **multiple admins**
- Are spread across **hundreds of channels**
- Use **backup groups** and "mirror channels"
- Easily recreate a channel if one gets banned

There is no single point of failure, making takedowns ineffective.

10.4 Bot-Based Automation

Telegram bots reduce the need for human involvement.

Bots can:

- Deliver stolen databases
- Validate compromised accounts
- Process crypto payments
- Run phishing or checking scripts
- Move attackers between groups

Automated systems leave minimal digital footprints, limiting forensic evidence.

10.5 Fast Content Propagation

Telegram's forwarding system spreads data **extremely quickly**, making the window for removal very small.

Challenge:

By the time a message is reported or detected, it has already been forwarded to:

- Hundreds of groups
- Thousands of users
- Multiple mirrors

Deleting the original message has little effect.

10.6 Limited Jurisdiction and Legal Restrictions

Cybercriminals and Telegram servers exist in different countries.

Problems for law enforcement:

- No universal law or international mandate
- Slow cooperation between nations
- Legal barriers in obtaining user data
- Telegram often declines requests without court orders

Jurisdictional limitations severely slow down investigations.

10.7 Difficulty in Undercover Operations

In dark web forums, undercover agents could blend in using reputation.

Telegram groups, however:

- Are chaotic
- Change admins frequently
- Use invite-only links
- Require referrals from trusted members

This reduces the effectiveness of undercover infiltration.

10.8 Lack of Metadata and Logs

Unlike forums that store user activity logs, Telegram:

- Stores minimal metadata
- Does not keep long-term server logs
- Does not store private chat messages
- Provides limited data even when requested legally

This absence of data hinders digital forensics.

10.9 Increased Volume of Scattered Targets

Law enforcement now has to monitor:

- Hundreds of channels
- Thousands of users
- New groups appearing daily
- Automated bots creating new operations

This huge volume stretches investigative resources thin.

10.10 Distributed Criminal Networks

Telegram allows criminals from different countries to collaborate seamlessly.

This makes it harder to track:

- Roles
- Hierarchies

- Group leaders
- Money flows
- Operational patterns

The decentralized nature of these networks makes them resistant to takedown.

KEY FINDINGS

The shutdown of BreachForums and the subsequent migration of cybercriminals to Telegram reveal several critical insights about the modern cybercrime ecosystem. These findings highlight how threat actors adapt, reorganize, and evolve despite large-scale law enforcement actions. The following key points summarize the major outcomes of this transition:

11.1 Cybercrime Does Not Decrease—It Relocates

Law enforcement actions disrupted BreachForums, but they did **not** reduce global cybercrime.
Instead, criminal activity simply relocated to a more accessible, encrypted platform: **Telegram**.

11.2 Telegram Became the New "Operational Center" of Cybercrime

Telegram now performs many of the same functions that BreachForums once did:

- Data leak distribution
- Illegal marketplace operations
- Ransomware announcements
- Malware sharing
- Criminal coordination

Its user-friendly features made it even more effective than traditional dark web forums.

11.3 Faster and Wider Spread of Leaked Data

Telegram's channel-based system and forwarding tools allow stolen data to spread:

- Faster
- Wider
- With almost zero control

A single leak can be shared across **hundreds of channels** within minutes.

11.4 Lower Entry Barriers Encourage More Criminal Participation

The dark web required technical knowledge (TOR, VPNs, forums).
Telegram requires **none** of these.
This ease of access attracts:

- Beginners

- Low-skilled criminals
- Fraudsters
- Scammers

As a result, the number of participants in cybercrime increased significantly.

11.5 Decentralization Makes Takedowns Ineffective

BreachForums was centralized and easy to target.
Telegram is the opposite:

- Many channels
- Many admins
- Mirrors
- Backups
- Automatic recreation of banned groups

This decentralization dramatically increases the resilience of cybercriminal networks.

11.6 Automation Expands Cybercrime Scale

Telegram bots are capable of:

- Delivering stolen databases
- Checking compromised accounts
- Accepting crypto payments
- Managing full cybercrime operations

This automation turns cybercrime into an **always-available digital business**, running with minimal human intervention.

11.7 Ransomware Groups Gained More Reach

Telegram allowed ransomware operators to:

- Announce new victims
- Release sample files
- Redirect to TOR leak sites
- Recruit members
- Maintain operations even if their main sites were seized

This strengthened their communication channels globally.

11.8 Law Enforcement Faces New Investigative Challenges

Telegram's infrastructure complicates investigations due to:

- Anonymity
- Disposable accounts
- Encrypted chats
- Lack of metadata
- Limited legal access
- Cross-border criminal networks

This significantly increases the time and effort needed to track cybercriminals.

11.9 Public Exposure and Risk Increased

Because leaks spread faster and wider:

- Individuals face more identity theft
- Organizations face more breaches
- Governments face espionage risks
- Financial fraud becomes easier
- Phishing and social engineering rise sharply

The overall societal impact of cybercrime expanded.

CONCLUSION

The shutdown of BreachForums marked one of the most significant law enforcement actions against dark web cybercrime networks in recent years. However, this case study demonstrates that while such takedowns disrupt operations temporarily, they do not eliminate cybercrime. Instead, they trigger rapid adaptation and relocation of criminal activity to platforms that offer greater anonymity, accessibility, and flexibility.

Telegram emerged as the primary destination for displaced cybercriminals due to its unique combination of privacy-oriented features, large group capacity, limited identity verification, and extensive automation capabilities. Within weeks of the BreachForums seizure, Telegram evolved into a decentralized cybercrime ecosystem—hosting data leak channels, ransomware groups, malware distributors, access brokers, and automated bot-driven marketplaces.

The migration highlights several critical realities of modern cybercrime:

- Criminal networks are resilient and highly adaptive.
- Decentralized platforms are significantly harder to police.
- Encrypted social platforms now serve as operational hubs for cybercriminals.
- Automation and instant communication tools amplify the scale and impact of cybercrime.

For law enforcement, the shift from a centralized dark web forum to a globally distributed messaging platform presents immense challenges. The lack of metadata, rapid channel migration, international jurisdictional barriers, and the ease of creating anonymous accounts make monitoring and intervention increasingly difficult.

Ultimately, this case study emphasizes that combating cybercrime requires more than shutting down platforms. It demands continuous monitoring, advanced OSINT capabilities, international cooperation, AI-powered threat detection, and a deep understanding of how cybercriminals adapt to new environments.

The BreachForums case serves as a clear reminder:
Cybercrime does not disappear—it evolves.
Any disruption in one part of the ecosystem only pushes threat actors toward more resilient, accessible, and decentralized platforms like Telegram. This evolution underlines the growing need for proactive cybersecurity strategies and adaptive law enforcement approaches in an ever-changing digital world.