

A Critical Examination of ‘Yahoo-Yahoo’ among Nigerian Youths as a Breach of African Culture and Values

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Abstract

The widespread prevalence of internet fraud, commonly referred to as "Yahoo," among Nigerian youths in recent years raises significant concerns. Its ubiquity has reached a point where security officials, parents, guardians, and citizens often perceive it as common place, showing little inclination to addressing it even when fully aware of the identities of those involved or their wards' participation. Some individuals, including parents and guardians, go as far as celebrating the ill-gotten wealth accumulated by their wards through fraudulent means. While this phenomenon can be attributed to underlying socio-economic and political factors in Nigeria, such as governance failures, high unemployment rates, and disadvantaged backgrounds, which push youths toward such activities as a means of survival, it nonetheless contravenes African cultural values. This paper contends that despite the contextual validity of the circumstances driving youths toward internet scams, which might render such behaviour seemingly justifiable, it ultimately represents a departure from African cultural norms. Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of "YahooYahoo" among Nigerian youths, delving into its underlying causes. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate how such activities not only conflict with African cultural values but also serve as a breach of societal expectations. This analysis will be anchored within the context of proverbial wisdom from distinct African ethnic groups, namely, the Akan people of Ghana, the Igbo of Southern Nigeria, and the Yoruba people of Southern Nigeria.

Keywords: *Yahoo-Yahoo, African Culture and Values*

Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape characterized by unprecedented connectivity facilitated by the internet, a myriad of opportunities has arisen, transcending geographical boundaries and converging disparate societies into what Marshall McLuhan termed a "global village." While the internet has undeniably catalyzed advancements in transportation, communication, business, and economics, it has concurrently provided a platform for criminal activities, enabling individuals to perpetrate scams and frauds amounting to billions of dollars annually. This phenomenon of cyber criminality, pervasive on a global scale, has found particularly deep roots in Nigeria, perpetuating

the enduring stereotype that Nigerians are synonymous with fraudulence. This has given rise to the colloquialism "Yahoo, yahoo," serving as a euphemism for internet fraudsters, commonly referred to as "Yahoo boys."

Regrettably, this illicit pursuit has become ingrained in the fabric of Nigerian youth culture, with many embracing it as a lucrative vocation, adopting the lifestyle and nomenclature associated with it. As time progresses, a growing number of young individuals are enticed into this realm, captivated by the ostentatious lifestyles exhibited by those engaged in these nefarious activities, which in turn serves as a beacon for impressionable minds. According to Aghatise (2006) cited in Adesida (2021, 80% of cyber-crime perpetrators in Nigeria are youth in various settings of the society.

Moreover, the audacious prevalence of Yahoo boys' activities has reached a point where concealment is no longer imperative. There seems to be although often denied publicly – a general acceptance of conducting Internet fraud by at least some section of the population. Individuals involved in other types of crime often claim they are Yahoo boys since it is more acceptable (Adeniran, 2008). The Yahoo Boys have become bold and unbending in their activities (Ojiego, 2021). They can easily be identified because they have a common habit such as wearing dreadlocks and sagging of their trousers and pants (Uchenna, 2022). It has become a matter bereft of shame, evidenced by instances where parents and guardians not only condone but even celebrate the success garnered by their wards through fraudulent means. Concurrently, law enforcement agencies appear to approach these matters with alarming nonchalance (Uchenna, 2022), with reports suggesting complicity in the exploitation of proceeds derived from these illicit activities. Yahoo boys are generally not worried about the police (Nhan et al., 2009; Smith, 2007; Tade & Aliyu, 2011) or other law enforcement agencies such as SARS and EFCC, and this is because as soon as they are arrested, they can easily bribe their way out of jail or prosecution of their crime.

They have become so audacious so much that they do not fear any threat of arrest by law enforcement agents, (Uchenna, 2022). Kolawole (2020) argued that decades of corruption, poverty and unemployment have created an acceptance of Yahoo-Yahoo in at least some parts of the population. When wealth is celebrated, questions of how it was amassed are seldom asked (Tade & Aliyu, 2011). While socio-economic and political factors such as economic downturns, governance deficiencies, and pervasive poverty may provide contextual explanations for the proliferation of "Yahoo Yahoo," it is essential to recognize the existence of alternative avenues for legitimate and profitable internet ventures pursued by other Nigerian youths, such as cybersecurity, data analysis, digital marketing and web development.

This paper posits that irrespective of the justifications proffered by youths for their involvement in "Yahoo Yahoo," it constitutes not only a moral transgression but also a violation of African cultural norms and values. The act of deceit and theft inherent in such activities stands in stark contrast to the ethical principles espoused by African societies. Therefore, this study endeavors to undertake a comprehensive examination of "Yahoo Yahoo," exploring its origins, causal factors, modus operandi and societal impacts. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate how this phenomenon

deviates from the foundational tenets of African culture and values, serving as a divergence from its inherent ethos.

Conceptual clarification of Yahoo-Yahoo (Yahoo boys)

An essential point of departure in comprehending the sociocultural nuances inherent in cyber fraud originating from Nigeria involves an understanding of the concepts encapsulated by the terms "Yahoo-Yahoo" and "Yahoo-Boys". The designation of individuals involved in "yahoo-yahoo" as 'Yahoo-Boys' underscores a prevailing gender association, predominantly male, as elucidated by Olaiya et al. (2020).

Yahoo-Yahoo encompasses deceptive practices aimed at illicitly acquiring monetary assets or valuables from unsuspecting individuals, primarily conducted through digital platforms facilitated by computers or smart phones such schemes often leverage emotional manipulation tactics, such as fabricating narratives surrounding civil unrest in Africa, assuming false identities of government officials in spurious contract negotiations or purporting to be kin of deceased African dignitaries seeking to transfer embezzled funds to a purportedly trustworthy recipient, all to extract substantial sums of money (Smith, 2017; Abdul-Rasheed, 2016).

Adesida (2021) observes that participants in advance fee fraud schemes, commonly referred to as "419" or "yahoo-yahoo", are colloquially known as "yahoo boys" within Nigeria. This label, "419", originates from Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code (Capp 777 of 1990), which specifically addresses advance fee fraud. The modus operandi typically involves the utilization of email platforms, notably those associated with Yahoo or Yahoo Messenger, to ensnare unwitting victims. Nigeria has consequently become synonymous with this form of cybercrime, which involves the utilization of technological tools such as computers, mobile phones and the Internet to defraud individuals, particularly those residing beyond its borders (Adesida, 2021).

For this inquiry, our conceptual framework of 'Yahoo-Yahoo' is congruent with the delineation proposed by Olaiya, Bello and Lamidi (2020). They characterize "Yahoo" as the nefarious activities orchestrated by young individuals either collaboratively or individually, to orchestrate deceptive schemes targeting unsuspecting foreign victims. These schemes typically lure victims into seemingly lucrative transactions where an initial payment is solicited in exchange for promised financial gains or valuable assets. Within Nigerian discourse, individuals engaged in such illicit practices are commonly denoted as Yahoo boys (Uchenna, 2022).

The Historical Origin of Yahoo Yahoo

The emergence of the phenomenon commonly known as "Yahoo Yahoo," now synonymous with online fraudulent activity, lacks a precise temporal delineation but is widely associated with a significant proliferation coinciding with the advent of the Internet in Nigeria during the 1990s (Iheaka et al., 2022). Nevertheless, its conceptual roots can be traced back to the era of '419' scams, deriving its nomenclature from Section 419 of the Criminal Law Codes in Nigeria (Olaiya et al., 2020). These fraudulent schemes, emblematic of the 1970s, orchestrated financial deceptions on a substantial scale, often with complicity from Western actors. Consequently, during this epoch,

individuals engaged in such deceptive practices were commonly referred to by the epithet '419' (Olaiya et al., 2020) or Obtaining by Trick (OBT) (Salifu, 2023). Notably, the designation '419' has gained ubiquity with Nigeria often depicted as the epicentre of such nefarious activities (African News, 2003, as cited by Olaiya et al., 2020).

The contemporary proliferation of illicit financial activities facilitated through online mediums has garnered widespread recognition under the moniker 'Yahoo,' initially utilized for the dissemination of fraudulent content and the reception of ill-gotten gains (Tade & Aliyu, 2011). This designation, 'Yahoo,' represents the virtual manifestation of the infamous '419' scams (Adeniran, 2011; Melvin & Ayotunde, 2010, as cited in Olaiya et al., 2020), leveraging the prevalence of Yahoo emails, applications and instant messaging platforms during the mid-2000s (Lazarus, 2018) amidst the burgeoning Internet landscape in Nigeria.

The onset of the 21st century witnessed a surge in cybercrime perpetrated by African youth, particularly from the West African sub-region, facilitated by the widespread accessibility of internet services via mobile telecommunication networks. This enabled fraudsters to exploit vulnerabilities in global North targets through mass email campaigns and internet postings. Notably, the proliferation of mobile internet access has contributed to an escalation in criminal activities, as mobile platforms typically offer diminished security measures compared to traditional computer-based channels, thereby affording perpetrators greater operational latitude albeit exposing them to heightened risks (Lazarus, 2018).

Mishra (2009) delineates the inception of Internet services in Nigeria, attributing its introduction to the UNESCO-sponsored Regional Informatics Network for Africa (RINAF) project initiated in 1995. Adomi (2005) supplements this historical narrative, positing that electronic mail (e-mail) services were facilitated by RINAF while stationed at the Department of Computer Science, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, from July 1995 onward, in collaboration with the Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST) and Rose Clayton Nigeria Limited. During this nascent phase, available services encompassed e-mail, telnet, and gopher, predominantly operating on UNIX-based servers. The subsequent advent of the World Wide Web in Nigeria occurred in 1996, with comprehensive internet access achieved by 1998. By 2001, the proliferation of internet service providers (ISPs) reached a count of over 150 duly licensed by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). This technological advancement facilitated the establishment of cybercafés, extending internet accessibility to a broad spectrum of users, ranging from academics and businesses to individuals engaged in fraudulent activities.

Oloworekende (2019) underscores this transformative period, noting that seasoned practitioners of postal fraud recognized an expanded market opportunity for their illicit schemes. Concurrently, a cohort of younger individuals enticed by the allure of rapid wealth from email scams contributed to the evolution and refinement of fraudulent tactics, exemplified by the adaptation and enhancement of traditional fraudulent schemes like the Spanish Prisoner trick. The escalating prevalence of Internet fraud within Nigeria engendered the coining of terms such as "Yahoo" and "Yahoo Yahoo" to denote various forms of online fraudulent activities. Practitioners of these illicit practices came to be colloquially referred to as "Yahoo boys" (Doppelmayr, 2013).

However, recent times have witnessed some individuals involved in these illicit activities resorting to alternative methods, notably adopting spiritual practices to augment their operations, a phenomenon known as "Yahoo Plus". This advanced form of cyber fraud involves the utilization of traditional spiritual techniques, such as voodoo or juju, by "Yahoo boys" to exert psychological influence over their victims, compelling them to comply with financial demands (Kolawole, 2020). Ritualistic practices, often involving consultations with spiritualists or diviners are integral to the implementation of these schemes, with options including residing in a coffin for a prescribed duration, spending time in cemeteries, or procuring specific body parts through violent means, such as kidnapping and murder (Regner et al., 2016). Additionally, victims may be subjected to further atrocities, such as sexual assault or exploitation, with young girls being particularly vulnerable to abduction and abuse by individuals driven by ambition (Adekunle, 2019). Kolawole (2020) further notes that alternative rituals may involve engaging in sexual acts with pregnant or mentally impaired women and in extreme cases, abstaining from bathing for extended periods, purportedly to avert adverse consequences.

Given this contextual backdrop, there arises a compelling imperative to understand the operational patterns of Yahoo Yahoo comprehensively, to gain deep insights into its underlying causes.

Yahoo Yahoo Operation Patterns and Common Formats

Yahoo boys employ a variety of patterns and methodologies characterized by varying degrees of complexity. As articulated by Evans-Obi (2023), one such strategy is termed "bombing," which entails the initial outreach to potential victims with the objective of cultivating trust. After establishing trust, Yahoo boys proceeded to devise effective means of soliciting payments from their victims, a stage referred to as "billing." Ultimately, upon successful acquisition of fraudulent payments, they conclude this sequence by executing the "cash out" process (Evans-Ibe, 2023). The specific formats utilized by Yahoo Boys exhibit considerable diversity, often contingent upon individual experiences and areas of expertise. Evans-Ibe (2023) provides a detailed exploration of these distinct "formats" employed by Yahoo Boys.

Romance Scams: Experienced Yahoo boys commonly counsel novices to start "bombing" through romance scams. This is a foundational step in acquiring proficiency and mastering the art of communication with foreign targets. This fundamental approach entails attracting emotions, establishing rapport, and manipulating the sentiments of victims. Typically, the perpetrators target divorced individuals and elderly American women who seek genuine affection and may be beneficiaries of retirement benefits. Facebook serves as a pivotal platform for forging these connections. A cursory search using keywords such as 'lonely granny', 'divorcee', or 'sad grandma' yields a list of profiles likely owned by middle-aged women, widows, or divorcees. Upon establishing initial contact, the fraudsters often delve into the victim's social network to connect with additional targets (potential victims). Homosexual individuals have also become increasingly susceptible to victimization, as perpetrators exploit their desire for affection from a purported same-sex partner. The modus operandi typically involves deceiving victims into believing in a romantic relationship, promising marriage, and subsequently soliciting funds for various purposes,

including travel expenses and flight tickets purportedly for the wedding ceremony, which, in reality, never materializes (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Military: Within the realm of fraudulent activities, Yahoo boys commonly adopt the guise of an American soldier on a foreign mission, employing what is known as the 'Military Format'. This format entails two primary strategies for defrauding victims. The first method involves a scenario referred to as the 'Box'. In this scheme, the fraudster persuades the victim to take delivery and safeguard a box purportedly containing valuable items such as gold and diamonds, purportedly bestowed upon the soldier as a token of appreciation for their service. The value attributed to the contents of the fictitious box is typically inflated, often exceeding a million dollars. Fraudsters often establish dedicated websites to facilitate this deception. Once the victim agrees to receive the box and assumes custody, the fraudsters direct them to the websites and inform their collaborators, responsible for operating the scam websites, to await the transaction. Upon initiating contact and making an initial payment, typically less than \$2,000, through the website, the purported box is dispatched to the victim. However, the box purportedly traverses multiple intermediary points, where fictitious customs officials, in collaboration with the fraudster, demand fabricated customs fees before the box can reach its intended destination. The number of intermediary points and the associated customs fees typically escalate progressively, while the fraudster feigns frustration with the delivery company, expresses sympathy for the victim and encourages continued payment of fees. This cycle persists until the victim either exhausts their financial resources or becomes weary of the process.

The second approach within the 'Military Format' is termed 'leave' and is effective only when the victim has already developed an emotional attachment. Similarly, fraudulent websites are employed to facilitate this scheme. Victims are persuaded to apply for leave through these deceptive websites and are required to remit specified fees purportedly to secure the release of their soldier-lovers from the battlefield, ostensibly for an impending wedding ceremony (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Crypto Fraud: This format encompasses various stratagems, ranging from coercing victims into divulging their wallet secret phrases to persuading them to invest their cryptocurrency into fraudulent Ponzi schemes. For instance, on November 8, 2021, agents of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) apprehended an individual named Precious Ofure Omonkhoa on suspicion of involvement in a Bitcoin investment scam. Allegedly assuming the identity of MoshemCnich, a Swedish national, Omonkhoa purportedly deceived unsuspecting victims by falsely claiming to operate a Bitcoin investment scheme promising substantial returns on investments (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Investment Scams: Investment scams predominantly operate through fraudulent websites constructed and managed by perpetrators. These individuals entice victims to these platforms, encouraging them to invest funds in fictitious enterprises under the guise of promising substantial returns on investment (ROI) within exceptionally brief time frames. The purported ROIs can reach extraordinary levels, with promises of up to 100% returns within a single week (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Inheritance Fraud: Inheritance scams involve fraudsters contacting prospective victims with purported evidence of substantial inheritances, often amounting to millions of dollars, left by deceased individuals. Victims are then solicited to remit advance fees, typically a percentage of the total inheritance, to facilitate the release of these fictitious funds. Perpetrators of this scheme are often seasoned, sophisticated operators with international connections, possessing fabricated official bank documents, seals, and digital signatures to authenticate the legitimacy of the purported inheritance schemes presented to victims. For instance, Onwuzuruike Ikenna Kingsley was arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on June 30, 2020, for allegedly impersonating Jeff Sikora, President/CEO of Prime Trust Credit Union Bank in the United States of America, defrauding victims, including an Egyptian, of \$6,500,000.00 under the pretext of being beneficiaries of inheritance funds held in a fixed deposit account at Prime Trust Financial Bank (EFCC, 2020, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Loading: Another sophisticated fraud scheme involves fraudulent transfers orchestrated by perpetrators directly into victims' bank accounts. Subsequently, victims are instructed to withdraw legitimate funds from these accounts and transfer them to the fraudster's accounts. However, these falsified transfers are often flagged by the victim's bank after several days, resulting in the wrongful arrest of unsuspecting individuals for crimes of which they possess limited awareness (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Business Email Compromise (BEC) Scams: Arguably one of the most intricate schemes executed by Nigerian Yahoo Boys, BEC scams involve infiltrating organizations' official email accounts through sophisticated software, commandeering business communications, and initiating financial transactions in the guise of victim organizations (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Impacts of Yahoo Yahoo on Victims and Society

Yahoo Yahoo engenders profound impacts both on its victims and society at large. These effects encompass:

1. Mental Health Consequences: Victims of Yahoo Yahoo often experience significant health repercussions including a heightened risk of heart attacks due to the financial losses incurred. Additionally, victims may suffer varying degrees of psychosis, either stemming from financial devastation or as a result of manipulation through charm tactics employed by perpetrators (Osuntoye et al., 2021). Ritual killings committed by some Yahoo boys also contribute to a spill-over effect, further exacerbating mental health challenges (Umukoro, 2019). Financial fraud victims, particularly those defrauded of substantial sums, are highly susceptible to depression and even mortality. Research by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Education Foundation indicates that approximately 35% of financial fraud victims experience depression (Evans-Ibe, 2023). Depression is recognized by the World Health Organization as a leading cause of disability worldwide, significantly contributing to the global burden of disease (Evans-Ibe, 2023). For instance, Yahoo boys defrauded Renee Holland from Florida of her life savings,

resulting in her husband's inability to cope with the loss and his subsequent act of homicide (Kleinman, 2020, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2023).

2. Financial and Property Loss: Yahoo Yahoo's adverse impact extends to victims facing impoverishment and liquidation due to substantial financial and property losses. Victims may resort to borrowing or mortgaging their assets to meet the fraudulent demands of perpetrators, often resulting in bankruptcy. For example, Nigerian fraudsters and their Asian collaborators led to the bankruptcy and liquidation of Banko Noroeste company, ultimately resulting in the arrest of Nelson Sakaguchi, the implicated official (Ojedokun& Ilori, 2021, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2023).

3. Economic Consequences: The extravagant lifestyle exhibited by Yahoo boys exerts upward pressure on market goods prices, thereby contributing to a higher cost of living for the populace. This lavish spending behaviour, characterized by spraying money in public spaces and clubs, as well as overpricing of goods, induces retailers to increase their prices, thus impacting the broader economy (Salifu, 2023; Evans-Ibe, 2023).

4. Damage to National Image: Yahoo's Yahoo activities significantly tarnish the country's collective image, fostering negative stereotypes of Nigerians as inherently corrupt and deceitful. This detrimental perception not only affects Nigerians travelling abroad, who may face disdain and suspicion but also deters foreign investors from engaging with the country due to concerns over fraud and deception (Evans-Ibe, 2023).

Given these multifaceted impacts, it is imperative to delve into the underlying causes driving Nigerian youth's involvement in Yahoo Yahoo.

Major Causes of Nigerian Youth's Involvement in Yahoo

Family Background.

The involvement of youths in Yahoo Yahoo often stems from the socioeconomic conditions of their family backgrounds. Individuals from low-income or impoverished households, burdened with dependents, may perceive Yahoo Yahoo as a means of financial escape. Adesida (2021) highlights the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, with over 100 million Nigerians living in impoverished conditions, attributing the engagement of many young people in Yahoo Yahoo to the economic hardship prevalent in their families. Some parents even actively introduce their children to established Yahoo boys, akin to traditional apprenticeships in trade occupations, to secure financial stability (Adejoh et al., 2019). Tade and Aliyu's (2011) study underscores the complicity of parents in supporting their children's involvement in cybercrime, reflecting a departure from their expected role as agents of socialization who transmit societal norms and values. The financial constraints faced by parents often lead them to overlook or turn a blind eye to the illicit activities of their children, indirectly facilitating their involvement in cybercrimes.

Furthermore, inadequate parenting or upbringing contributes to youth engagement in Yahoo Yahoo. Notably, the phenomenon is not exclusive to children from impoverished backgrounds, as even youths born into affluent families are drawn into the illicit activity (Adesida, 2021). Many

parents or guardians have neglected their duties in guiding and shaping the moral development of their children, contributing to the erosion of values in Nigerian society today. Children raised in environments marked by poor parenting are more susceptible to engaging in criminal behaviours (Okoroafor & Njoku, 2012; Uwe, Asuquo & Ekuri, 2008, as cited in Iheaka et al., 2022). Failure to provide proper guidance during formative years increases the likelihood of such individuals becoming societal miscreants in adulthood.

Pressures from Parents

Another influential factor driving youths into Yahoo Yahoo is the significant pressure exerted by parents, particularly upon graduates or those who have reached adulthood. Parents often transfer the responsibility of providing for the family onto their children, compelling them to seek rapid wealth accumulation. These pressures stem from parents' desires for their children to quickly attain financial security, support the family, facilitate their marriages and emulate the achievements of their peers. Consequently, many youths succumb to the allure of Yahoo Yahoo as a quick pathway to wealth, driven by the imperative to meet familial and cultural expectations (Adesida, 2021).

While some parents may not explicitly encourage their children to engage in Yahoo Yahoo, their subtle pressures may stem from well-intentioned desires for their children's success. However, their failure to report their children's illicit activities to law enforcement agencies suggests tacit approval of their ill-gotten gains. Their acceptance of the material benefits derived from Yahoo Yahoo, despite not explicitly condoning the activity, implies a degree of endorsement, albeit indirect, of their children's involvement in such criminal endeavours (Adejoh et al., 2019).

Negative Peer Group Influence/Pressure.

The innate human inclination to belong and seek acceptance within peer groups significantly influences youths' involvement in Yahoo Yahoo. There exists a compelling desire among youths to maintain parity with their friends and peers in terms of social and economic status, often leading them to pursue any means necessary to achieve this parity. Egan (2020) highlights peer pressure as a dominant force driving young people towards Yahoo Yahoo, emphasizing the strong influence of peer relationships on individual behaviour. The interpersonal dynamics within peer groups play a pivotal role in shaping youths' decisions and actions, with individuals often conforming to behaviours exhibited by their peers or significant others (Adesida, 2021). Thus, the impact of peers emerges as a key determinant of youth engagement in Yahoo Yahoo in Nigeria.

Observing peers achieve success through Yahoo Yahoo while one struggles to attain similar success through legitimate means can exert a powerful pull towards involvement in illicit activities. Esiri (2016) asserts that peer pressure can lead individuals to Yahoo Yahoo, particularly when they witness their peers evading detection and punishment for their crimes. The allure of emulating friends who lead flashy and opulent lifestyles further intensifies this desire to engage in Yahoo Yahoo (Adekunle, 2019). Motivated by the aspiration to mirror the extravagant lifestyles of their peers, including owning expensive cars, attracting attention from desirable partners and indulging in luxury items, youths find themselves susceptible to the persuasion of joining the Yahoo Yahoo community (Adesida, 2021).

Bad Governance

Bad leadership and governance have been a major canker to the growth and progress of the nation. The emergence of the “Yahoo boys” subculture in Nigeria could be linked to the failure of political leadership and corruption (Adeniran, 2008; Tade & Aliyu, 2011). With the way elected leaders embezzle public funds with no one holding them accountable, a bad precedent is already set. This breeds unprecedented levels of poverty, which propel youths into Yahoo Yahoo (Iheaka et al., 2022). The poor economic situation in the country has impoverished a larger percentage of its citizenry and has made crime an avenue to get out of poverty (Suleiman, 2019). In other words, the present economic situation in Nigeria has brought about an unwholesome increase in fraudulent online activities, resulting in more frequent and malicious forms of this type of crime. The World Bank (2019) cited in Iheaka et al., (2022) declared Nigeria’s economic growth as being too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. Therefore, bad leadership and governance have maintained their proper places as the source of many other evils in the country. When the government of the day is not making life easy for the governed, there are bound to be different uprisings and many taking matters into their own hands. One such is the Yahoo Yahoo boys. No doubt, bad leadership and governance have left the country wide open for many people to do what they like with the knowledge that anything goes in the country and with the thought that everyone is a thief,(Iheaka et al.,2022).

Unemployment

Higher education institutions in the country are continuously producing graduates without commensurate employment opportunities. Recent statistics reveal a staggering figure of over 20 million unemployed individuals in Nigeria, underscoring the pervasive nature of unemployment, particularly among the youth demographic (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020; Kazeem, 2020). This dire situation leaves many young people idle and disillusioned, devoid of viable means of sustenance.

The adage "an idle mind is the devil’s workshop" becomes increasingly pertinent in this context, as unemployed youths, compelled by circumstances, turn to criminal activities such as Yahoo Yahoo as a means of survival. Unemployment not only engenders economic hardship but also fosters social ills such as poverty, thuggery, touting, violence and even ritual killings, ultimately culminating in the scourge of armed robbery. Udeh, Okoroafor, and Ihezue (2013) affirm the correlation between unemployment and rising criminal activities, highlighting the detrimental impact of joblessness on societal stability and security.

There is a large population of unemployed youths. Nevertheless, it saddens the heart to find out that many of these unemployed youths have decided to take matters into their own hands by engaging in unwholesome acts such as increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability. (p. 224).

The prevailing circumstance has exacerbated the proliferation of Yahoo Yahoo activities among youths. The burgeoning army of unemployed young people is increasingly driven to explore various avenues for financial sustenance. Consequently, individuals proficient in computer usage

and internet navigation have capitalized on the expansive online domain to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours, irrespective of their legality. Some have resorted to organizing themselves into criminal syndicates with the intent of defrauding unsuspecting online entrepreneurs of their legitimate earnings. The allure of quick financial gain presented by Yahoo Yahoo becomes particularly enticing in light of the dire economic circumstances faced by these unemployed youths (Uchenna, 2022).

Colonialism, imperialism, and globalization

The historical backdrop, extending into contemporary times, has continually been cited as a motivating factor behind involvement in 'Yahoo's money schemes. A prevailing notion posits that the West has historically marginalized Africa, perpetuating institutional mechanisms that exploit Africa's vulnerabilities (Olaiya et al., 2020). This perception has spurred many youths to engage in Yahoo Yahoo activities, driven by the belief that they are reclaiming what has been unjustly taken from their country by Western powers. They perceive their actions as an attempt to recoup the wealth that their ancestors worked for but were never adequately compensated for by the global community during their lifetimes. Suleiman (2019) supports this perspective, highlighting the Yahoo boys' conviction that their ancestors were subjected to brutal enslavement by colonial masters and they seek to reclaim what they perceive as their rightful entitlements.

Greed

This emerges as a significant impetus propelling Nigerian youths into Yahoo Yahoo endeavors. A strong desire for wealth, possessions and power motivates individuals across various socio-economic strata, irrespective of their financial standing. Many Nigerian youths aspire to own extravagant cars and other luxuries without exerting the requisite effort. This mindset is driven by an aversion to starting from scratch and a pervasive inclination toward instant gratification. The excessive pursuit of wealth is underscored as a contentious issue, wherein individuals succumb to the allure of the "get rich quick" syndrome, eschewing the necessary labour required for genuine success. This inclination manifests as a desire to reap rewards without investing the effort, reflecting a broader societal trend towards shortcutting the path to prosperity (Salifu, 2023; Ezechukwu, 2016, cited in Uchenna, 2022).

An Overview of African Culture and Values

Culture is commonly understood as the collective way of life of a particular group of people, transmitted intergenerationally and characterized by its dynamic nature, shared among members of the society, thereby distinguishing them from others (Madukwe, 2010). It encompasses the customs and traditions that form the foundation of societal practices and behaviours. As delineated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (1988, p. 6), as cited in Enebe (2007, pp. 74-75) and further referenced by Madukwe (2010), culture comprises:

Material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. The material aspect has to do with artefacts in their broadest form (namely, tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, housing, etc.); the institutional deals with the political, social, legal and

economic structures erected to help achieve material and spiritual objectives; while the philosophical is concerned with ideas, belief and values; the creative concerns of a people's literature (oral or written) as well as their visual and performing arts which are normally melded by, as well as help to mould, other aspects of the culture(p.265)

Within every cultural context, there exist established norms and practices that guide the behaviour of its members, grounded in certain principles regarded with utmost significance, commonly referred to as values. Ngangah (2020) provides a nuanced definition of values as the beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment either for or against something. These values serve as the driving force behind cultural dynamics, shaping the lifestyle and daily activities of individuals within a social group, encompassing various aspects such as food, clothing, shelter, social organization, and broader personal, social, and environmental needs (Ngangah, 2020).

In the African context, values constitute a composite framework of principles, knowledge and beliefs deeply ingrained in societies across the continent, serving as guiding principles for interpersonal, group and inter-group interactions and communications (Blake, 1993, as cited in Ngangah, 2020). These values are integral to ensuring social cohesion and facilitating the smooth functioning of communities, acting as deterrents against behaviours that may jeopardize societal well-being (Awoniyi, 2015). They span religious, political, moral and social domains, collectively shaping the conduct of community members and contributing to the broader fabric of cultural values (Awoniyi, 2015).

Despite the diversity of ethnicities, cultures and values within African societies, certain core values resonate across various cultural groups, including hospitality, chastity before marriage, truthfulness, respect for elders, commitment to agreements, diligence and integrity (Awoniyi, 2015). These values are instilled through processes of socialization, deeply ingraining them in the collective consciousness of African communities (Blake, 1993, as cited in Ngangah, 2020).

African norms, traditions and taboos constitute unwritten codes of behaviour, reflecting the acceptable standards of conduct across different spheres of life (Ngangah, 2020). These norms delineate the boundaries of permissible behaviour, shaping individuals' perceptions of what is acceptable and unacceptable within their cultural milieu.

In this context, this study aims to scrutinize select African cultural values, namely, good character, truthfulness and honesty, hard work and contentment, respect for human life and juxtapose them with the phenomenon of Yahoo cybercrime, highlighting the stark disparities between the values upheld by African societies and the practices associated with cybercriminal activities.

A Critical Examination of 'Yahoo Yahoo' among Nigerian youths as a breach of African Culture and Values.

Upon comprehensively examining the essence of Yahoo Yahoo, encompassing its operational framework, causal factors and societal ramifications, it becomes evident that this cybercrime

practice starkly contradicts core African cultural values such as good character, honesty, diligence, contentment, respect for others' property and reverence for human life. This analysis will be anchored within the context of proverbial wisdom from distinct African ethnic groups, namely, the Akan people of Ghana, the Igbo of Southern Nigeria, and the Yoruba people of Southern Nigeria.

One of the cornerstone values within African societies is the significance accorded to good character. From early childhood, individuals are imbued with the ethos of upholding moral integrity and fortifying their character. They are instilled with the principles of discerning between right and wrong, fostering self-respect, reverence for elders and conscientious regard for the possessions of others, thereby dissuading them from engaging in acts of theft or dishonesty. This cultivation of character moulds individuals into paragons of integrity and honour within their communities.

This profound emphasis on good character is encapsulated in the Akan proverb "Good character is a person's guard" (Awoniyi, 2015), which underscores the protective function of one's character. Similarly, the Igbo proverb "omume onye n'edu ya-(one's good character leads him) elucidates that one's character serves as a guiding force in life. Furthermore, the Igbo proverb "ezigbo aha ka ego" (a good name is greater than wealth) and "ezigbo agwa bu mma nwanyi" (a good character is the beauty of a woman) underscore the paramount importance of character over material wealth or physical appearance. These proverbs underscore the irreplaceable value placed on good character within African societies.

Conversely, individuals involved in Yahoo Yahoo demonstrate a blatant disregard for these cherished cultural values. By engaging in deceitful practices aimed at defrauding others, they betray the fundamental principles of good character. Their actions not only compromise their integrity but also tarnish the reputation of their communities. Hence, Yahoo Yahoo represents a fundamental breach of African cultural values, as it inherently rejects the ethos of good character and moral uprightness upheld by African societies.

Yahoo Yahoo, being inherently fraudulent, stands opposed to the foundational principles of truthfulness ingrained in African cultural values. Truth and honesty hold paramount importance in African societies, instilled in individuals from infancy as essential virtues for societal cohesion and personal integrity. This reverence for truth is exemplified in the Yoruba proverb: Otito ki isinaironii fi origbogbe, (An unpleasant truth is better than a pleasant falsehood) signifying that truth is unwavering while falsehood leads astray (Awoniyi, 2015). Similarly, the Akan proverb: An unpleasant truth is better than a pleasant falsehood- underscores the superiority of truth over deception (Awoniyi, 2015). Furthermore, the Igbo axiom: Eziokwu bu ndu-(truth is life) emphasizes that truth is synonymous with life itself. However, Yahoo Yahoo contradicts this cultural value as its essence lies in deceit and falsehood, which are antithetical to the principles of truthfulness upheld in African societies.

Moreover, the African cultural ethos places a high premium on the virtue of hard work and diligence, viewing it as the cornerstone of prosperity and societal advancement. This value is encapsulated in the Yoruba proverb: Ise niogunise-(hard work is the cure for poverty) asserting

that hard work is the antidote to poverty (Awoniyi, 2015). Similarly, the Akan proverbs emphasizing the consequences of laziness and the dignity of labour underscore the importance of industriousness in the words: Treat your guest as a guest for two days, on the third day give him a hoe; and, There are no other things you get out of laziness than poverty. (Awoniyi, 2015). For the Igbo, proverbs such as: Onye ruo orie (if one works he eats) and, aka ajaaja n'ebute onu mmanu mmanu (a dusty hand begets an oily mouth) extol the virtue of hard work and the rewards it brings. However, Yahoo Yahoo subverts this cultural value by promoting quick wealth accumulation through fraudulent means, devoid of legitimate labour and industry. This flagrant disregard for hard work and contentment undermines the cultural ethos that celebrates the dignity of labour and self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, African cultural values emphasize the sanctity of human life, viewing it as sacrosanct and invaluable. Proverbs such as "Ndu ka ego," "Ndu ka uba," and "Ndubuisi" among the Igbo highlight the primacy of life over material wealth (Awoniyi, 2015). Taking one's life or causing harm to others is considered a grave transgression against the sanctity of human existence. However, Yahoo Yahoo's activities often lead to devastating consequences for victims, including loss of life in extreme cases. The emergence of Yahoo+ exacerbates this violation of human life, as it involves not only deceit but also direct harm to individuals, including the desecration of their bodies for ritualistic purposes. This egregious disregard for human life starkly contradicts African cultural values that uphold the sanctity and reverence for life.

In conclusion, Yahoo Yahoo's practices stand in sharp contradiction to African cultural values of truthfulness, diligence, contentment and respect for human life. Its fraudulent nature, promotion of quick wealth acquisition through deceit and disregard for the sanctity of human life undermine the foundational principles upon which African societies are built. As such, the perpetuation of Yahoo Yahoo represents a departure from the moral and ethical standards upheld within African cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The analysis presented underscores the fundamental contradiction between Yahoo Yahoo activities and core African cultural values. Despite attempts to rationalize the involvement of Nigerian youths in online fraudulent activities, such actions remain in direct opposition to the principles upheld by African societies. Regardless of the socio-economic challenges faced by Nigerian youths or the perceived failings of government institutions, engaging in cybercrime cannot be morally justified. The internet offers abundant opportunities for individuals to harness its resources legitimately, without resorting to fraudulent practices.

While acknowledging the shortcomings of Nigerian governance in addressing youth empowerment and employment issues, it is essential to recognize that cybercrime is inherently unethical and detrimental to society. The time, effort and resources invested in mastering the skills of Yahoo Yahoo could be redirected towards acquiring legitimate online skills that contribute positively to personal and societal development. Thus, this analysis concludes that Yahoo Yahoo activities constitute an unjustifiable breach of African cultural values and moral principles.

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