

PROLIFERATION OF CYBERCRIME ‘YAHOO-YAHOO’: THE RESULT OF A FAILED SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, which is the most populous black nation in the world, has been bedeviled with a detestable reputation due to the nefarious activities of some youth in recent times. Without any shred of uncertainty, there is the necessity for proactive steps to be taken by the government and its agencies to strictly tackle the menace of cybercrime prevalent among its youth population which has recently taken an alarming dimension. Society is not helping matters. People place unexplained wealth over reputation and a good name. The truism that a good name is better than silver and gold, no longer hold sway. Every sector of society has been blamed for this menace. The religious bodies, families/parents, schools, and the government all have their chunk of the blame. This paper, therefore, examines the factors responsible for the proliferation of cybercrime ‘yahoo-yahoo’ and why society has failed in this regard. It takes a critical look at the negative outcome of cybercrime on the image of Nigeria as a country internationally. This paper being a desk table research, employed descriptive and explanatory analysis. The paper concludes that the epidemic of cybercrime in Nigeria is on the increase due to the acceptance in the society which further encourages the youth to continue the menace to mention a few. The paper suggests that the government should look critically into the existing law against the menace and put in place an efficient structure to

monitor internet activities and partner with corporate or private bodies to re-orientate the youth and citizenry on the need to avoid illicit activities that are already blackmailing the image of the nation.

INTRODUCTION

The progression in global telecommunication systems which comprises the Internet, mobile phones, and computers, has given a new dimension and brought about visible positive alteration in world communication. In the Nigerian narrative, the young and the old presently have unlimited access to the global village from the comfort of their homes, offices, cyber cafes (though going into extinction due to the popularity of mobile devices), and so on. Peter (2011). This has made business transactions easier, faster, and more accurate. The progression witnessed with the proliferation of global telecommunications is enormous but they also come with their threats especially in the Nigerian context.

One of the challenges of this unlimited access to the Internet is the issue of cybercrime. Consequently, cybercrime, popularly known as “Yahoo Yahoo”, G-boys, or “Yahoo Plus”, is an issue of major concern to the country - Nigeria. In recent times, Nigeria’s rising cybercrime profile has become alarming globally, even though it has spread into neighboring countries like the Benin Republic and Ghana where they are popularly known as ‘Sakawa boys’. This is not surprising when one takes into consideration the high level of poverty and a high unemployment rate that has bedeviled the nation despite the huge human and material resources stock up in the country. Adegoke (2018)

The continuous expansion of the scary trend which has now gone diabolic leaves one to imagine what the future holds for the nation. However, it is often believed that the best way to tackle a problem is to consider the root of the problem. This poses these questions to every Nigerian: Where did we get it wrong? Who is to be blamed, parents,

the society, the government, or the criminals involved? How can this menace be controlled or even eradicated?

The interesting part of this is that ‘cyber-criminals’ have a way of justifying their trade in stock. Most times, when they are interviewed, they defend themselves with the notion that they are ‘taking back what the whites stole from their black grandparents in the form of the slave trade’. Jacobson (2014). This lame excuse to cyber-crime has really tarnished the image of an average Nigerian in the international marketplace driven by the Internet. An average Nigerian has to convince a foreign prospect exhaustively to prove he/she is not one of the thousands of cyber-criminals prowling the Internet looking for scammers who are usually referred to as ‘clients’.

Though there have been efforts by the Nigerian government to clamp down on Yahoo-yahoo boys using the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established during the President Olusegun Obasanjo regime but the moves seem not to deter them. This is probably due to the light sentences passed to culprits during court rulings which, most times, do not go beyond six months or an option of payment of a fraction of the cash scammed.

These observations and more necessitated this paper which takes an overview on the Proliferation of Cyber Crime ‘Yahoo-Yahoo’: The Result of a Failed Society. The paper aims at taking a cursory look at the Yahoo-yahoo trend, the roles of the society, parents, religious organizations, and the government in its increase, and measures necessary to tackle this ugly trend.

Cybercrime: An Overview

The major issue when researching cybercrime is the deficiency of a consensual standard definition, even law enforcement agencies charged with tackling it find it difficult to define it. However, according to the Council of Europe (COE) Convention on

Cybercrime, cyber-crime concerns “action which is against the privacy, integrity, and availability of computer systems, networks, and computer data as well as the abuse of such computer-based systems, networks, and data especially with the intent of committing a crime”. Council of Europe (2001). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), cybercrimes cuts across various scenarios which include; crimes against children (such as child pornography), intellectual properties theft and/or publications, cyber bullying, deliberate dispersion of malware to national and international internet fraud. Casey posits internet crimes and frauds to imply any crime that has to do with the application of computers and networks, including crimes that do not rely heavily on computers. Casey (2004). Thomas & Loader (2000) consider cybercrime as “computer-mediated activities which are either illegal or believed to be illicit by certain parties and which can be carried out using internet networks”.

In summation, cybercrime can be referred to as crimes committed on the Internet whereby the computer is either a tool or a targeted victim. It involves all the illegal activities carried out by one or a group of persons referred to as scammers, hackers, internet fraudsters, cyber citizens, or 419ners, using the internet through the medium of networked computers, and other information and communications technologies (ICTs) equipment. Cybercrimes target laptops, Point-of-Sale (POS) machines, mobile phones, tablets, and entire networks including that of banks. Mobile merchants are reported to be incurring the greatest fraud losses as a percentage of revenue amongst all merchant segments. Lexis Nexis (2013).

Cybercrime in Nigeria: Yahoo Yahoo and Yahoo Plus

Cybercrime is a widespread crime in Nigeria. Cybercriminals in Nigeria are infamous for baiting people across the globe into fraudulent scams through cash-laundering e-mails, love scam mails, spam mails, and smartly planned but pretentious organizations partnership offers. Scammers that are into advance fee fraud schemes (419) also known as “yahoo yahoo” are popularly called “yahoo

boys” in Nigeria. Cybercrime is now commonplace in Nigeria. It simply has to do with the use of electronic mail, particularly through a Yahoo or Gmail address to deceive unsuspecting victims (usually referred to as clients). The country is famed as the source of what is now globally known as “419” mails culled from Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code (Capp 777 of 1990) that criminalizes advance fee fraud. George (2020)

“Yahoo boys” adopt different techniques in defrauding their victims. Before the advancement of mobile devices, fraudsters frequent cyber cafes, browsing the Internet all through the night, sending scam bulk emails to unsuspecting ‘clients’. Foreigners, especially mature females, who are looking for life partners through the Internet have fallen victim to “yahoo boys”. They fake their identities using pictures downloaded from the Internet, pretending to be ready for long-lasting relationships with these desperate women, and afterward start to exploit them. Some of them deceive victims to assist in landing travel documents to where they (victims) live or even to help in getting residential permits. Once they achieve their goals, they abort all communication channels with the victim and move on to another target. Adesina (2012).

In other cases, the scammers use tales of severe life misfortunes, calamities, family deaths, personal life-threatening injuries, or other difficulties they have encountered to engage their victims’ interest and put up their schemes.

Most victims just accept their fate and move on with life, but some of the vindictive victims lay complaints to the appropriate authorities who often apply hi-tech facilities to track down and prosecute the suspects. The ugly situation is complicated by the fact that some non-Nigerians caught for cybercrimes most times insist they are Nigerians before they are thoroughly probed and their true identity established.

However, in recent times, due to the stiff measures adopted by many financial institutions and different companies that conduct online transactions, the cybercriminals in Nigeria have obviously suffered a setback in their stock in trade. Based on this, the desperate ones amongst them have resorted to spiritual measures to intensify their businesses. This is what is now widely called “Yahoo Plus”. Yahoo plus is a sophisticated approach to yahoo in which the “yahoo boys” apply traditional spiritual means like voodoo or juju to mesmerize their victims into following their bidding and dishing with whatever amount of cash they demand. These boys take part in occultic ritual practices which include human sacrifices to deepen their potency to scam people. Akanimo (2017)

Once this is accomplished with success, the victim (now a confirmed ‘client’) is bound to keep paying them money from any location in the world. There are different methods adopted in making this happen. First, the scammer visits a spiritualist or diviner who consults, the “oracle” or the “gods”. He is then presented with different options of rituals to choose from. The options usually include sleeping in a coffin for a number of days, sleeping or bathing in a cemetery, or bringing body parts. With this, a scammer abducts a victim who is mostly a young girl, murders her, and gets the body part required. Some are even required to have sex with virgins as part of the ritual processes. Other types of rituals carried out involve sleeping with pregnant women or mentally deranged women and sometimes, the scammer may be directed not to shower for days or months as doing so may bring about terrible consequences. Andrew (2017)

Causative Factors behind the Proliferation of Cybercrime in the Society

Cybercrime, also known as Yahoo Yahoo in the Nigerian local parlance, is presently a thorn in the flesh of most Nigerians, especially those interested in carrying out business transactions with the international marketplace as most

Nigerians are now considered scammers in the comity of nations. Denis (2017). It has pushed back the belief in hard work to the background and projected massive wealth as the only means of getting respected in society regardless of how the money was made. What was once considered taboo and spoken about in hush tones is now trendy whereby popular scammers are celebrated publicly.

According to Johnson (2020), many social commentators are of the view that poverty and the dwindling standard of parenting should be blamed for the trend. The get-rich-quick syndrome prevalent amongst youths involved in Yahoo Yahoo has also taken a new dimension into widespread human ritual killings. Adekoya (2012). Ritual killing was a rarity until recent times. Today, it is a daily occurrence in local news. The fact is saddening that kid as young as 13, 14, and 15 years have started to get involved in this sacrilege.

Here are seven major reasons why young people go into cybercrime/ritual killing as observed and stated by Ayobami (2018):

1. Unemployment: When caught, many cybercriminals/ritual killers usually testify that they went into the act because of unemployment. Information emanating from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2021 posits that the unemployment rate in Nigeria stood at about 32.5%. This is a very sad record when one takes into consideration the natural and human resources the nation is blessed with. Though, not a good reason for one to go into cybercrime, unemployment definitely has a role to play in the proliferation of cybercrime.

2. Social Media: Social media advantages are numerous. From the provision of job opportunities to the advancement of good governance to technical advancement of the banking and financial industry, etc, it has added value to humanity. In spite of these many benefits, cybercrime has ridden to popularity

through the help of social media. Individuals with shady characters use it to show off false and or stolen wealth, which negatively influences unsuspecting individuals, especially the youth. Ritualism now employs social media to trap victims, especially young ladies. For example, in the past two months, social media have erupted with stories of how teenagers behead or gouge out the eyes of young girls for money rituals which are usually driven by the urge to make money through Internet fraud.

3. Materialistic Nature of Some Women: Many young men have died prematurely while trying to satisfy the insatiable love of money of their lovers. They have been forced into cybercrime just to satisfy the materialistic cravings of their girlfriends. In recent times, many ladies do not take out time to probe into the kind of jobs their husbands, fiancés, or boyfriends are involved in. All they are interested in is the money they get. The challenge is that some of them, directly and indirectly, force some young men into different kinds of criminal activities to meet their endless financial demands.

4. Poor Parenting: This is the major challenge that needs to be contended with. The level of parenting in recent times according to many public/social commentators has gotten to an awfully low level. Disciplining a child/ward who misbehaves is now considered child abuse. There have been cases where parents get physical with teachers who reprimand their children in school. When children grow up lacking morals and discipline, they often cannot tell the difference between wrong and right. They might go the extra mile just to make money because of the lack of morals or wrong moral compass.

5. Laxity of Religious Leaders: In recent times, many religious leaders do not preach the fear of God to their congregation. Churches and mosques are now about the biggest donors, givers, and tithers. Wealthy church members are recognized specially and awarded without background checks to ascertain the source of their

money. There are cases of scammers being ordained as pastors, imams, elders, etc because they are rich and can pay for such designations.

6. Government Incapacity: The government seems to be overwhelmed with a lot of youth already in the business of scamming. In the last five years, there is no week there has not been an arrest by the EFCC across the nation. Most of these cases do not see the light of the day and suspects are set free due to lack of evidence(s) by authorities. In cases where the suspects are convicted, they get a very light sentence which rarely goes beyond six months with the option of meager fines. This shows the unwillingness of the government in combating cybercrime head-on.

7. The Society: The poverty level in the country has gone so deep that people are just about their bellies. Society has accepted illegalities as a norm. The massive public display of wealth that cannot be explained keeps thriving on a daily. As long as one has money to throw around, the source of such wealth is inconsequential. According to Jude (2015), people no longer ask questions as long as they can get a little chunk of the large piece. The reason corrupt politicians keep getting honoured with chieftaincy titles. It is now all about the money while the moral compass of society has tilted negatively. This acceptance keeps fueling vices such as cybercrime.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the practice of cybercrime is getting popular by the day. This is due to the fact that the practice has now been intensified by the application of rituals and the volume of money they control within a short time is mind-blowing. The families of youth that have taken to cybercrime practice do not see anything wrong in this illicit act despite having knowledge of the implications or consequences that characterizes the practice. A developing country like Nigeria no

longer appreciates social values due to the level of poverty that has eaten deep into the life of many households where feeding is a big problem, the desire for social value and societal acceptance is exchanged for illegal and unreasonable forms of making blood money. Cybercriminals both male and female are now more celebrated and recognized than those youth that has refused to take the bull by the horn to do money rituals. In most cases, there have been cases where parents, especially mothers, lead their children that are into cybercrime to herbalists or money ritual specialists for success and protection from any consequence.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations emanated from the findings in this study. They are:

- i. Generally, parents/guardians, religious bodies, and members of society should endeavour to teach and uphold worthy morals, values, and ethics. Also, there should be strict adherence to the faith believed in (either Christianity or Islam) and practiced in order to put the fear of God in the youth.
- ii. Opportunities should be created for the vigour and passion of the citizenry, especially the youth, to be put into visionary and profitable enterprises such as skills acquisition, youth empowerment and agricultural scheme, etc
- iii. Parents should intentionally engage their children by making youth see the need for hard work, diligence, honesty, and modesty.
- iv. The government at all levels should create opportunities for the citizenry in order to assuage poverty in the country.
- v. Furthermore, government agencies, law enforcement agencies like the EFCC, intelligence agencies, and security agencies should take out time to understand both the hi-tech employed and the individuals who engaged in this criminal act.

vi. Cybercrime laws should be more stringent. Cybercriminals' assets should be taken over by the government if spotted. There should be the imposition of at least 25 year-jail terms for cybercriminals. This will serve as a discouragement to those youth who might want to go into such a crime.

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