

A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION TO CYBERCRIME IN NIGERIA: THE ‘YAHOO PLUS’ PHENOMENON

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Abstract: Cybercrime in Nigeria is largely perpetrated by young people and students in tertiary institutions, and are socially tagged *yahoo yahoo* or *yahoo boys*. *Yahoo boys* rely on their computer dexterity to victimise unsuspecting persons in cyberspace. A new phenomenon in cybercrime is mixing spiritual elements with internet surfing to boost cybercrime success rates. This paper examines the factors underlying this spiritual dimension (cyber spiritualism) to cybercrime, and discusses some of the strategies employed in perpetuating cyber crime. Using Space Transition Theory of cybercrime, data were generated on *yahoo boys* and those involved in *yahoo plus*. The clampdown on Internet fraudsters by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in-group conflict among *yahoo boys* over social recognition, reduced victimisation and delayed success, and mass media enlightenment were reported factors influencing the fusion of spiritual elements in cyber crime. The methods used include *ase or mayehun* (incontrovertible order), charmed or magical rings (*oruka-ere*) and incisions made around the wrist, which are used to surf the net, while *ijapa* (tortoise) is used to navigate profitable sites. Unsuspecting victims fall under the spell of the *ase* via phone conversation where spiritual orders are made to the victims without their objecting.

Key words: *yahoo plus*; fraud; rituals; Nigeria; youths; EFCC.

Introduction

The Internet has opened a window for both legitimate and illegitimate transactions. Dalal (2006) observes that information technology is a double-edged sword, capable of destructive as well as constructive purposes. Although Dana (2001) opines that a sizeable number of users in cyberspace are well behaved, engage the web for productive purposes, and are law-abiding, Danquah and Longe (2011) aver that a fraction of Internet consumers act inappropriately, break the law and use illicit means to take advantage of others in cyberspace. Those who explore the Internet and pervert it for criminal opportunities are cybercriminals. According to McCusker (2006) cybercrime has become an integral part of the transnational threat landscape and conjures up pressing images of nefarious and increasingly complex online activity. A study by Norton (2012) puts the cost of cybercrime globally at \$110 billion annually. In essence, the innovations in technology have opened a vista of possibilities for pursuit of a criminal and deviant career (Durkin, Forsyth, and Quinn 2006; Nuth 2008). Ratliff (2005) opines that with computers, traditionally difficult crimes can now be accomplished with ease.

In Africa, cybercrime has been indigenously christened. For instance, in Nigeria, it is called *Yahoo yahoo* while the perpetrators are called *yahoo boys* (Adeniran 2008; Longe and Chimeke 2008; Tade and Aliyu 2011). In Ghana, it is called 'Sakawa' or 'Yahoo yahoo' (Coonsom 2009) and 'Faymania' in Cameroon (Oumarou 2007). In Nigeria, the majority of cybercriminals are young people and are found in universities (Adeniran 2008; Tade and Aliyu 2011). *Yahoo boys* are youths involved in cybercrime using electronic e-mails. This social tag originated via the mode employed by *yahoo boys* in defrauding, which involves sending sinister and deceptive e-mails using 'Yahoo mail'. Alubo (2011) informs us that the web has created a platform for fraudsters to engage in advance-fee-fraud via the sending of spam e-mails. This act, he notes, is called 419, and the perpetrators called *yahoo boys*. They typically utilize free e-mail accounts (e.g., Yahoo or Hotmail) to communicate with their targets (Dyrud 2005; Smith 2007; Tanfa 2006). This is made possible owing to the availability of e-mail extractors (Adomi and Igun 2008).

Studies have been conducted on the emergence of the *yahoo boys* subculture (Adeniran 2008), the social organisation of Internet fraud in Nigeria (Tade and Aliyu 2011), ICT and perpetration of cybercrime (Oyenuga et al. 2012), and the cost and attractiveness of cybercrime (Kshetri 2006). In a somewhat similar study conducted in Ghana, Warner (2011, 744) reports the use of a klepto-theological paradigm, created to abet the perpetration of Internet crime. He calls this *Sakawa*. According to him, *Sakawa* serves two main functions: it protects the cybercriminal and ensures their financial success. Melvin and Ayotunde (2011) treat *yahoo boys* as a unit and analyse it as such from purely philosophical and psychosocial perspectives. However, this attack by humans through machines (Jaishankar 2010) has now incorporated spiritual elements in Nigeria.

This paper explores *yahoo plus*, a cybercrime strategy which blends spiritual elements with internet surfing to enhance victimisation rates on the web. This is what I call 'Cyber spiritualism'. Cyber spiritualism involves the procurement and use of mystical, spiritual and supernatural powers by *yahoo boys* to cast a spell on their victims. Through this method, victims become hypnotised and, without objection, offer their treasures (products and money) to the fraudsters. Although empirically unverifiable, *yahoo boys* derive some psychological impetus which enhances their adoption of the strategy. The 'plus' in *yahoo plus* implies the addition of spiritual ingredients to *yahoo yahoo*. Within the *yahoo yahoo* family, a line is drawn between those who surf the net and defraud plainly (*yahoo boys*) and those who surf the net and employ spiritual assistance for increased defrauding (*yahoo plus*). The different approaches employed are esoteric to those involved in cybercrime while the larger society refers to both groups as *yahoo boys*. The objective of this paper is two-fold: to investigate factors leading to the adoption of spiritual elements in cybercrime and, to explore the techniques/strategies employed in cyber spiritualism.

Review of related literature

Harnischfeger (2006) avers that recourse to spiritualism in Nigeria may be a feature of the decline of the state in the performance of its functions. He said:

The decline of the state might be contributing to the return of the occult in yet another way. Since power is hardly regulated institutionally anymore, it has become unpredictable and

seems to be connected to hidden forces, and everyone in society has an interest in manipulating these forces. In all spheres of life, it now seems advisable to take occult influences into consideration. In the universities, for example, students seek the help of miracle doctors or (Christian) spirit mediums in order to pass their examinations. Government employees seeking promotion or businessmen looking for customers arm themselves with amulets against the evil magic of their opponents, and in politics, too, the rise and fall of powerful figures seems to depend on invisible forces (2006, 74).

One may argue, therefore, that unrestrained celebration of materialism in Nigeria without an equal platform for all to reach their desired goal may have a profound effect on youth deviation into seeking fast wealth via cybercrime (cyber spiritualism). The socio-economic climate encourages excessive individualism and diminishes we-feelings. Corruption plays an important role in cybercrime. Nigerian youths are socialised into corruption by the penchant for looting public funds by the political class. Unbridled corruption and the broadcast of wealth in public glare may have produced the wrong psyche in the youths, making them jettison hard work and embrace short cuts to making money. As chances of getting employment become slimmer in Nigeria, a less risky but high profit act (cybercrime) may germinate and be nurtured. Adeniran (2008) and Tade and Aliyu (2011) claim the emergence of the *yahoo boys* subculture in Nigeria could be linked to failure of political leadership and pervasive corruption.

To an African, things within the spiritual constitute an important aspect of social reality which must be engaged for a holistic understanding of social phenomena. Although it can be said to be unscientific, the fact that people hold on to it as a basis for the interpretation of social events makes it a necessary component of African societies. This is because western theorisation fails to aptly explain social realities in African societies (Akiwowo 1983). Thus for Akiwowo (1983), the Yoruba world view is similar to other African peoples and includes the perception of both physical and spiritual phenomena. Payne (1992) submits that physical phenomena can be seen as the vehicles of activity, while spiritual phenomena can be seen as the essential, activating forces. Nwolise (2012, 2) also contends that “although science has become a religion in the world, the fact that the microscope of science cannot as of today capture the spiritual force or element in witchcraft, juju, curses, familial spirits, ghosts and others, does not mean that these things do not exist”. He asserts that science and technology are concerned with physical things and thus present a partial truth of social reality. To him, “science is cowardish (sic), pompous, or too arrogant to insist that what it cannot capture, measure or control does not exist” (*ibid.*, 3). Science must be humble enough to understand the spiritual.

Nwolise (2012) further argues that life has two aspects—spiritual and physical. Even though man in his materialism has relegated the spiritual to the mundane, in all things, the spiritual supersedes the material, just as the spirit of the law is *nonpareil* to the letters of the law. He adds that:

The fear of juju and witchcraft in Nigeria and Africa is real and this has kept many young and old people away from their villages and this has serious negative implications for national development, especially rural areas...for now, materialism seems to have overtaken spiritualism and we are all paying the price given the decadence in moral values, the rate of blood spilled today all over the world and the rate and depth at which leaders loot the public treasury and the

callousness underlying individual pursuit and worship of money...there is need to develop the science of the spirit as a balance to the science of matter (2012, 10-11).

There are different sources of spiritual powers. Nwolise (2012,18-26) identifies “local deities, juju, witchcraft, curses, oath-taking mercantile native doctors, possessed plants, animals and stones, oath-taking and breaking, ghosts and ancestral spirits, bewitched or charmed objects, spiritual covenants, and hypnotism” as sources of spiritual powers. There is no limit to which a charm can be used. According to Simpson (1980), there are charms to offset evil forces, nullify both old and new types of hazards and facilitate the gaining of desired ends. He notes that there are charms to be used in curing illnesses, seeking a job, attaining prosperity, increasing one’s popularity, improving one’s luck, succeeding in love, getting back to a wife, restoring peace among quarrelling wives, attracting customers to a shop and passing examinations and for “prosperity” in business. Simpson (1980) lists protective charms among the Yoruba to include *gbere*, charmed rings, magical rings and waist band (*Ibante*) and native medicine other than the one used in *gbere*. Atolagbe (2011) views *afose* (incontrovertible order) as one of the indigenous Yoruba anti-burglary devices. The beliefs, values and world view of Africans are guided by their perception of the spiritual beings around them and their reaction to them (Akiwowo 1983).

Evidence of spiritualism abounds in the social, economic and political life of Nigerians. McCall (2004), in his article on the activities of Bakkasi boys in Nigeria, opined that the charms employed may be defensive, such as those that prevent harm from bullets or machetes, and revelatory charms that are used to extract confessions. Charms that protect the owner from injury are well documented in the colonial literature, and belief in the efficacy of such charms remains widespread (Basden 1921, 203; Talbot 1923). Further Harnischfeger (2006, 57) observes that “Militias in Nigeria typically make use of magic or spiritual powers. The militia operated in a social and political environment in which traditional forms of policing were indeed better suited to maintaining order than bureaucratic institutions borrowed from the West.” Politicians consult for spiritual fortification against perceived enemies; while market women and some pastors consult herbalists for *juju* to have more customers and large congregations, respectively (*The Punch*, August, 2012)¹. Thieves are also arrested with assorted charms dangling around them (*The Compass* 3, August, 2012)². Political thugs usually rely on spiritual materials before launching any attack on perceived enemies (*People’s Daily*, April 28, 2011; *Daily Post*, 2012; *PM News*, 2011). A pastor in Eastern Nigeria explained that:

The society is actually corrupt and it is supposed to be the duty of men of God to assist in bringing sanity to the society. But unfortunately, you will find out that most of us pastors are after wealth, and when a pastor is after money, you can never be after God. And today you see

¹ A pastor was paraded by the police. He was arrested with a human skull in Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria. <http://www.punchng.com/news/police-parade-ogun-pastor-over-human-skull/>

² The paper writes on the exploits of a dare-devil robber that terrorised Nigeria. Titled “Lawrence Anini: Nigerian Robin Hood”, the paper narrated how Anini’s charms made him invincible and impregnable to police bullets. <http://www.compassnewspaper.org/index.php/features/crime/6231-lawrence-anini-nigerian-robin-hood>.

a lot of pastors going to see native doctors, herbalists to prepare charms for them so that they will become miracle workers.³

Wolff (2000) opines that the making of medicine figures in the African context involves the use of plants, animals and other natural objects in order to benefit from the natural unique powers of each of the components. The parts of plants and animals used tend to be “signature elements” (Rubin 1989). These include the leaves and roots of plants, and in the case of animals:

the distinctive survival equipment which characterizes each: for birds, their beaks, talons or feathers; for the various types of antelopes, their horns; for snails or tortoises their shells, and so on. Imitations in carved wood or other materials may, it seems, also serve (Rubin 1989, 20).

The crafted human figures used in medicines are, of course, more than imitations; they are transformers that embody and channel the powers of the natural materials from which they are fashioned. In other words, the creation of the medicine figure is an act of embodiment with the intention of concentrating powers of nature for social goals (Wolff 2000, 207).

In Nigerian home videos, fetishism is also celebrated in money-making rituals, inflicting pains on perceived enemies and may even be used for spiritual fortification. In the business climate, some people hold the belief that making spiritual soaps (*Ose-Awure*) can promote and boost sales in a very competitive location (*Punch*, May 25, 2012)⁴. Cohen (1966) reported that the ups and downs of business are attributed to mystical forces in Nigeria, hence necessitating spiritual consultation. Therefore, it can be said that youths in the country have been exposed to spiritualism in almost every sphere of living, and they consequently employ it in cybercrime.

Space transition theory of cybercrime

Chris (2007, 689) argues that “criminal behavior is a complex affair that requires specialized, lower-level theories to adequately deal with the specific types of human conduct and social situations that are said to be characteristic of criminality or deviance”. Space Transition Theory (SPT) was developed as a theory of cyber crimes because the general theoretical explanations of crime were found to be inadequate as an overall explanation for the phenomenon of cyber crimes (Jaishankar 2008). Traditional theories of crime have been variously employed by scholars with limited explanatory value for cybercrimes. Yar (2005), after adopting the routine activities theory, admits that a gulf separates the ‘virtual’ and the “terrestrial” types of crime which limited the theory’s usefulness. Social learning theory (Skinner and Fream 1997; Rogers 2001), routine activities theory (Adamski 1998 McKenzie

³ Incredibly: some pastors sleep with people’s wives-Obaseki. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/06/i-n-c-r-e-d-a-b-l-e-some-pastors-sleep-with-peoples-wives-pastor-obaseki/>

⁴ A pastor had approached the customary court in Badagry to divorce his wife of 6 years on the accusation that she was using charms on him. The wife denied using charms on her husband but said that the soap her husband saw her using was to “promote” her business. <http://www.punchng.com/metro/my-wife-uses-charms-on-me-pastor/>

2000), and multiple theories (Brock and Stuart 2006) had been employed with limited explanatory value to the phenomenon of cybercrimes.

SPT is hinged on seven propositions. These include:

- i. Persons, with repressed criminal behavior (in physical space) have a propensity to commit crime in cyberspace, which they would not otherwise commit in physical space due to their status and position.
- ii. Identity Flexibility, dissociative anonymity and the lack of deterrence factors in cyberspace provides the offenders with the choice to commit cybercrime
- iii. Criminal behavior of offenders in cyberspace is likely to be imported to Physical space which, may be exported to cyberspace as well.
- iv. Intermittent ventures of offenders into cyberspace and the dynamic spatio-temporal nature of cyberspace provide the chance to escape.
- v. (a) Strangers are likely to unite together in cyberspace to commit crime in the physical space.
(b) Associates in physical space are likely to unite to commit crime in cyberspace.
- vi. Persons from a close society are more likely to commit crimes in cyberspace than persons from an open society.
- vii. Conflict between the norms and values of physical space and the norms and values of cyberspace may lead to cyber crimes.

The migration of youths from committing physical traditional crimes to cybercrime in Nigeria is best captured as explained by a renowned sociologist, Akinsola Akiwowo. Akiwowo (1983, 13-14) explains that social life in Africa is inspired by five categories of inalienable social values which includes: (1) ire aiku (the value of good health to old age), (2) ire owo (financial security), (3) ire oko-aya (the value of intimate companionship and love), (4) ire omo (the value of parenthood and (5) ire abori ota (the value of assured self-actualization). The five values outlined, for Akiwowo, represent the values that a government must continuously seek for its citizens if the society which that government represents is to be considered a good society (*ibid.*, 26-27). Of these five values, financial security is uppermost in the minds of youth. The socio-economic situation in Nigeria hardens social reality and limits the ability to fully realise social values. Nigerians, and youths in particular, are daily driven farther away from realising the social values of financial security. There is growing youth unemployment, corruption and financial embezzlement and physical display of wealth and worship of material possessions. Yet, young people are socialised to uphold the moral values and are constantly monitored and warned against engaging in deviant or criminal acts which may puncture their dreams and dent the family image.

The 'physical space' constitutes a 'moral community' governed by the regulated conduct of people by formal and informal mechanisms. This, in itself, serves to check the bogus manifestation of a deviant or criminal act. However, a repressed youth within the physical space may elect to migrate to the 'virtual space' for uninhibited and unregulated conduct of behavior, which allows dissociative anonymity. In Nigeria, a child going to school or leaving the 'sphere of control' of his/her parent is told to remember the child of whom he/she is. In other words, because the child carries the name of the family, it must be jealously protected. Also, the status of the parents may inhibit manifestation of criminal behaviour in the physical space. However, as *yahoo boys* migrate from the physical space to cyberspace, the family name, status of parents and their identity become dis-inhibited. Personal (known) names

are usually substituted with 'coded' online names which may be difficult to link to a known person, family or status in the physical space.

According to Jaishankar (2008, 295), "traditional crime gangs are starting to use the Internet not only for communication but also as a tool to commit crimes such as extortion, fraud, money laundering, intimidation or theft, more efficiently and with less risk, and to move into new fields of crime. Due to the Internet's global reach, the temptation is highly attractive and the scale of the problem is massive." And as Woolgar (2002) opines, cyber-crimes have little adherence to the spacio-temporal restrictions which characterize traditional crimes. And according to Giddens (1990), an action in one spacio-temporal boundary may have its effect outside that restriction. Hence, Jaishankar (2008) argues that cyberspace is a transit place which grants free entry and exit, and allows the offender to escape uncaught.

Cybercrime is a highly networked crime (Tade and Aliyu 2011). Tade and Aliyu (2011) show that undergraduate fraudsters network with allies on and offline to ensure the success of their crime. This involves leaking official information and 'geographic coding' to dupe unsuspecting Internet users. Youth involved in cybercrime may also view their actions as a protest against social arrangements in the society. This may serve to neutralize their actions by citing government failure to provide jobs for university graduates and corruption as grounds for engaging in cybercrime. Thus, cyberspace provides an avenue for cybercriminals because it allows for unrepressed expression of norms and values which favour crime as against the regulated norms and values of the physical space.

Methods

The study was carried out at the University of Ibadan. It is located in south west Nigeria. As a federal university, it admits students from all six geo-political zones of the country. However, owing to distance, most of the students are of south-west extraction with a mix of students from other parts of the country. The study was conducted between November 2012 and February 2013. It involved interview with students involved in cybercrime. The sensitive nature and security implication of engaging in cybercrime in Nigeria made initial direct contact with cybercriminals impossible. The research design was exploratory while a snowball sampling technique was employed to reach respondents. Five key informants were used in the study. The key informants are tagged "area brothers" by the cyber criminals. They are, however, not involved in the act. They have established a consistent level of relationship with some of the respondents spanning 10 years. It is this 'social connection' that endeared others students involved in cybercrime to them. They are considered 'trustworthy' and related with as 'insiders'.

After explaining the focus and purpose of the research to them, the informants agreed to speak with those involved inasmuch as "their identity would be protected". The process of wooing participants took three weeks before their consent to participate in the research was obtained. The participants were allowed to choose the time suitable for the interview. The key informants were present at each interview. The venue of the interviews was their rented (boys quarters) apartment within the university. Each interview lasted about forty minutes. The interview guide was structured to obtain information on the meaning of *yahoo plus*, the reasons for its emergence, and strategies employed in fusing spiritual elements with Internet

surfing. In all, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with *yahoo boys* (5) and *yahoo plus* fraudsters (5). The respondents are involved in cyber deception through online dating. The views of the respondents were aggregated to form major themes (factors influencing adoption of *yahoo plus* and strategies involved in *yahoo plus*) around the interest of the research. The data were transcribed manually and subjected to inductive content analysis.

Results and discussion of findings

Factors influencing the adoption of yahoo plus (cyber spiritualism)

Online dating is one of the most lucrative cyber crimes in which students involved in *yahoo yahoo* are engaged in Nigeria. This is not surprising because their age group gives them the opportunity to possess the requisite language of persuasion and deceit to victimise. Online dating involves visiting chat rooms and dedicated singles sites to interact. Some of the respondent may also send fraudulent mails but they specialize in online dating fraud. Unlike *yahoo yahoo*, the mixing of spiritual elements with surfing the Internet was employed as a result of some factors.

One of the factors is the dwindling fortunes of *yahoo boys* in getting victims. This threatens their hedonistic lifestyle which has become unsustainable. From the interviews, three reasons may be postulated for these diminished rates of victimisation. First, there is increase in awareness of some of the techniques and strategies being used by *yahoo boys* in defrauding their victims. The media coverage was reported by respondents as beaming the searchlight on the activities of the *yahoo boys*. As a result, people's responses to online interactions were reportedly withdrawn. Second is the slow response rate and delayed success from fraud transaction. This may not be divorced from the first factor which has now delayed e-payment and interaction as people now tend to spend more time on verification than they ever did before. Third is the activity of the Nigeria anti corruption agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The agency has intensified cybercafé raids through Operation 'Cyberstorm 1', which has recorded much success with many convictions (Tade and Aliyu 2011). As at April 2012, EFCC had convicted 288 Internet fraudsters, while 234 cases were under prosecution (*The Punch*, April 17, 2012). A key informant stated that:

Yahoo yahoo is about using laptop to make conversation with people you have not seen before in order to get them involved in business with the aim of defrauding. Here the use of computer is compulsory. Yahoo plus could be viewed as a higher level of yahoo. Nowadays, yahoo does not hit (low success) again because people they do converse with are now being more careful than before. That is why guys have to elevate to the level of yahoo plus. Yahoo plus implies the use of traditional charms or juju to get their needs from the foreigners. Yahoo yahoo, on the other hand, involves the use of common sense to get what you want from the person you are making conversation with through the Internet. (Key Informant /Male/UI)

Following these difficulties, a new set of cyber criminals emerged with *yahoo plus*. Their focus is to fast track victimisation rates through spiritual help. The new phenomenon synthesises spirituality (use of charms or *juju*) with surfing the Internet. It may not be unconnected with the Yoruba proverb: *ojuboro o se fi gbomo lowo ekuro* (a casual strategy cannot be successfully used to extract the nut out of a kernel). Hence, Internet fraudsters, the

majority of whom are youths, are drifting into fusing spirituality with cyber-crime to become 'successful'. The spiritual element is the 'plus' indicated in *yahoo plus* because of its radical departure from the popular *yahoo boys* group. *Yahoo plus* is what has been described as 'cyber spiritualism' in this paper.

The unbridled quest for materialism in Nigerian society has been argued as one of the factors influencing youth to innovate sinister ways of achieving success, without following the laid-down societal approved means. For instance, a young person is expected to pass through the educational systems, undergo the mandatory youth service and then be gainfully employed. It is after being employed that the society sees a rich young man as having laboured and passed through the 'approved means'. The endemic corruption in Nigeria further makes youths jettison hard work and desire to become rich at all costs. Peer influence remains an important factor, especially when students leave home with little or nothing to meet their socio-economic needs in school. This factor affects children of both the rich and the poor. Gaviria and Raphael (2001) claim that social interaction among peers is important at the outset of deviant behaviour. The temporary freedom of control from their respective parents has contributed to the growth of unbounded children who explore their environment without considering the implication for their families. Owing to economic activities, parenting in Nigeria has become less effective. Children have been left to be guided by the Internet and their peers, while the parents' attention is glued to economic pursuit. The result is too much freedom to explore, as articulated by one of the respondents.

One of the reasons is peer influence. When a child gets out of a carefree family and such a child mixes with other boys, there is tendency that such a child will be behaving like others in a wrong manner. (Key Informant/Male/UI)

A *yahoo plus* male said:

My experience in this act has been great, while, sometimes, I experience problem because I have been hiding this from my parents. They must not know because they are disciplinarians. If they find out, they will hand me over to the police without bail. So, if I go home, I don't drive my cars home. I have three exotic cars and I do park them with my friends. (IDI/ yahoo plus/ Male)

Apart from the negligence of the parents in supervising their wards as narrated by our respondents above, in-group fighting among fellow *yahoo boys* was reported as influencing the emergence of *yahoo plus* phenomenon. Different success rates among *yahoo boys* lead to rivalry. Early callers in the 'business' usually initiate others into the act. They become role models while the converts thread their laid path. As time goes on, the new convert becomes an expert, and may make more money in Internet fraud than the person who introduced him into the business.

This brings up the seasons in Internet fraud: the wet and dry season. The 'wet' season is when the fraudster consistently becomes successful in his rate of victimisation. He makes money via online fraud and spends it on friends and 'babes' (girls). He commands respect as a 'big boy'. This 'wet' season may not last. As the 'dry' (low success rate) season sets in, the new *yahoo boy* begins to make waves in the business. Attention is shifted from the former kingpin to the trainee who now becomes the cynosure of all eyes.

The trainee then begins to draw attention and command respect. The kingpin loses followership, while more people pay homage to the trainee who now has more money, cars, and attends night clubs of 'big boys' in the city. Threatened by this new development, the kingpin and some of his followers may try to find a new way of achieving faster wealth or making more money than the trainee. The strategy is to add spirituality to Internet surfing to increase their success rate and increase victimisation. This may, however, happen in either way. The trainee may have the hunch of standing independent and having more money. He may also adopt spiritual dimension. When spirituality is added to cybercrime, the respondents claimed that the 'underdogs' become the pacesetters, relegating their kingpin to the back stage. It is in the quest to return to prominence and command respect within their clique that those relegated explore other means of making more money. This is supported by this excerpt:

You know in this business there is no permanent boss. I may introduce somebody into the business and suddenly he hits more than me and commands more respect and intimidate me in clubs, carrying my babes! I need to find better means to get more money. Yahoo plus will make that happen faster. I need to win back my respect in the league. (Yahoo plus/Male/IDI)

The next is greed. Greed has its origin in the insatiable quest to achieve what is beyond one's capabilities. Luxuries, such as exotic cars, smart phones, club membership and possessing a bevy of ladies, among others, have become measures of class among youth in Nigeria. They show who is a 'big boy' and who is 'claiming or acting' as one. To others, cyber-fraud is a vengeance mission against foreigners. Those involved reported that the 'white' have exploited their fathers to build their countries while impoverishing them. They employ techniques of self-justification by condemning the condemners and describing those being defrauded as equally greedy. Therefore, cyber spiritualism is one of the means they use 'to fight for justice'. One of them asserted:

This reason is greed. Once a guy could see that his friend is driving expensive cars, he or she could be easily influenced negatively. Again, corruption is the root of all evil acts. The issue of embezzlement is also germane. Monies given out to officials to create infrastructural facilities and even jobs to people are diverted into personal purse. This serves as negative influence on people particularly the youths. However, some believe that it is their forefathers' money that they are collecting back from the white. They believe that their forefathers have been exploited so they must inherit their forefather's wealth. (Yahoo plus/Male/24)

These factors can be summarised as in-group conflict over control of 'influence', unbridled quest for material wealth, perceived vengeance against 'colonial' exploitation, and greed.

The techniques

The world view of the Yoruba encourages people to work hard in order to become rich and enjoy their wealth. This is contained in the saying, that the solution to poverty and wretchedness is work *ise loogun ise* (work is the medicine for poverty). However, not all people follow this line of thought; a non-conformist, such as a cybercriminal may employ crooked means to achieve success. This is seen in their embracing of charms in boosting

success in whatever they do. The Yoruba believe that charms work during times of trouble, but stress the need not to engage in acts that run contrary to predestination (*Oogun lo ni ojo kan iponju, ori eni lo ni ojo gbogbo*). Therefore, charms are used in times of emergency or desperation, and as a last resort. Awolalu (1979) notes that the possession of mysterious powers among the Yoruba, although mystifying, cannot escape notice when they are manipulated by those who have access to them.

Fadipe (1987) avers that belief in charm among African peoples is still pervasive despite the significant changes ushered in by education and Christianity. There are charms for achieving life desires and those for harming or hurting people and their interests. Indeed charm exists to serve the quest of the procurer. There is charm for good luck (*Awure*), for money making (*oogun owo*), for retaining young posture (*ajidewe*), to disappear or be invisible (*Ofe* or *afeeri*), for preventing machete penetration (*Okigbe*) or gunshot (*ayeta*), to make someone fall in love with the procurer (*Ogun Ife*), to attract more customers (*aworo*) and for cursing people (*epe*).

Socialised in the environment described above, a typical *yahoo boy* approaches an herbalist to make success-enhancing charms to boost his chances of having more victims to defraud. He is given fetish materials whose application in the process of surfing the Internet amplifies the success rate. This is, however, dependent on strict adherence to the instruction of the *juju man*. They may also approach a *yahoo plus* pastor⁵ who will prepare anointing water which they have to drink and bathe with for enhanced “luck”. The herbalist with “knowledge of mystical powers” (Mbiti 1978, 171) is used in making *yahoo plus* charms. The charm becomes the mystical medium through which the desire of the *yahoo plus* boy is actualised on the victim. However, such charms must be prepared according to specification in order to meet the expectations of the procurer. Some respondents opined that:

These guys make occasional visit to their herbalist, pastors, alfas to get more power so as to continue to make more money via the Internet (Informant/Male/UI).

In Yahoo plus you don't rely on your brain alone. You need more than that. You need charm and other spiritual powers before conversing with your victims referred to as 'maga'. (Yahoo plus/Male/27/Kuti Hall)

Another respondent said:

Yahoo plus is gaining much ground among Internet fraudsters owing to the failure of ordinary yahoo yahoo. In the sense that their 'claims' are not coming to pass or fulfilment or reality. In this case, they use what the Yoruba call 'Ohun ti owo eniyan koto, on fi gongo faa'. That is, getting what one wants by using any means. Their notion is that they are obtaining payback for what their forefathers did (slave trade era) for the white. (Key Informant/Male/34/UI)

The above narrative supports Warner (2011) who found that cyber criminals in Ghana do not see Internet fraud as crime but a redemptive project of social justice against the Western world's colonisation of their forefathers. It is rational for them to use charms or spiritual elements since it aids faster fraud returns unlike pure Internet surfing which rely on

⁵ A *yahoo plus* pastor is conceived in this work as any person who claims to be the spiritually ordained man of God but mixes fetishism to deliver miracles.

employment of deception strategies which may not work with all potential victims. Another respondent attested to the effectiveness of *yahoo plus*:

It is a faster means of acquiring wealth from 'Maga' foreigners. Yahoo plus acquires money in only a short period of time while yahoo yahoo takes a longer period of time for the desired aim to be achieved. Success, in yahoo yahoo terms, is achieved probably once in a year. Yahoo plus uses spiritual means to enhance defrauding on the Internet. This works to hypnotise victims and make them give anything to the yahoo plus boys without question. (Yahoo boy/Male/Mellanby Hall)

Oogun (charms) takes many forms, both intangible and material. *Oogun* refers to the knowledge needed to capture and concentrate powers drawn from nature's products, the verbal incantations and formulas necessary to activate and command the powers, and the final products that result. The skilled practitioner has a large repertoire of formulas for making medicines which take the form of ingestible liquids, powders, soaps, charms, and incantations. Whatever forms it takes, *oogun* is imbued with the energy or power present in the natural features of the landscape such as hills and rivers, animals, plants, human beings, and the deities (Abiodun 1994, 72). By putting this vital force in all he created, the Yoruba supreme deity '*Olorun*', provided "a power to be used as '*ase*' or '*afose*' the power-to-make-things-happen, morally neutral power, power to give, and to take away, to kill and to give life" (Thompson 1983, 5-6). *Oogun*, including incantations, employs *ase* to concentrate the powers of nature to perform specific tasks; i.e., to cure, harm, protect, and attain a life goal. When *ase* is invoked, the victims go into a trance and only regain their senses after fully complying with the order of the *yahoo plus* boy. The *yahoo plus* boy works on the information at his disposal concerning the victims' economic buoyancy to determine what to demand. Speaking further on the meaning of *yahoo-plus*, another respondent said:

When we say yahoo plus, people believe that it involves people using charms which are popularly known as juju to exploit the white people on the Internet. It also means using spiritual power such as 'Afose' or 'incantation' such that whatever they say to their victim, he/she will comply. But it is not only the white ones that are victims of yahoo plus, any rich person, whether white or black could be defrauded. (Yahoo plus/IDI/Male/27/Kuti hall)

Ase (incontrovertible order) may work alone or with another incision made in the mouth region or drawn around the mouth region of the fraudster. The true name of the victim is needed so that the inconvertible order charm may be made using this name. The order is usually invoked on the name by following the chanting of incantations. This mystical power is said to work with air and makes it possible to travel far into any location where people breathe in air. Another method is for the victim to pick the call of the fraudster. This provides a direct access to the victim and the order is made. It was reported by respondents that, when the charm is correctly prepared and the procedures for its use have been adhered to, the victim cannot resist the order, the charm hypnotizes the victim. Also, incisions are made around the wrist region. This is rational since the *yahoo plus* boys use their hands on the keyboard to browse. A *yahoo* boy said:

Yahoo plus is an advancement of yahoo yahoo which is related to Internet fraud. Those engaged in the practise go to the extent of meeting herbalists to collect charms or some

Celestial⁶ pastors that will give charms, anointing oil and holy water. Some can go to the extent of placing their legs on tortoise while on their laptop and chatting with the foreigner. Some make use of the chain made of charms in order to authoritatively demand for money but ordinary yahoo yahoo could not set up online dating access with a foreign partner who can be female or male. The yahoo boys could disguise to be either sex to deceive the unsuspecting foreign partner. (Yahoo boy/Male/Zik Hall/23years)

Yahoo plus is sometimes executed with a female companion or girlfriend. Usually, a girlfriend may agree to be part of the fraud with a sworn agreement that they share the proceeds. The agreement is traditionally executed at the shrine. This is because the lady plays a significant role in the final success of any cyber-fraud. In this partnership, the female loses weight when the Internet negotiation begins. She acts as a catalyst in the bewitchment process of the victims. As the deal near success, she loses more weight almost resembling somebody that has contracted AIDS. Ironically, the success is also dependent on her reduced size and the pain she endures. This is the normal cycle until the final payment is made and she regains her normal weight. A respondent revealed that:

Some girls agree to be used by their boyfriends for Internet fraud. This is based on the agreement that they (the girls) will not die in the process. They also sign agreement that they will partake of the loot....Whenever the transaction is ongoing, the girlfriend becomes slimmer and always in pains, as if she has contracted HIV/AIDS. Negotiation will begin to make headway once she begins to feel this way. Once the money or the consignments are received, the girlfriend will begin to recover and they enjoy the money together. (Yahoo-boy/IDI/Male)

Conclusion

The spiritual dimension to cybercrime is a paradigmatic shift from the popular *yahoo yahoo* which relies solely on Internet dexterity to victimise. However, the blending of the spiritual to victimise in cyberspace reveals the innovative capabilities of cybercriminals in this study area. Anticipated social strain may influence the participation of university students in cybercrime. This is because the university environment is not totally isolated from the socio-economic milieu of Nigerian society. Since materialism seems to be cherished within Nigerian society, young people appear to have imbibed this social value by designing strategies of accomplishing the set task. Repressed in the physical space, *yahoo boys* migrate to the cyberspace to perpetrate criminality.

The delayed success rates in *yahoo yahoo*, the untiring clampdown of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on cybercriminals, group rivalry and the activities of the media in enlightening the public accounted for the search for a more speedy way of increasing cybercrime victimisation. The frustrated *yahoo boys* innovated and imported the spiritual elements into cyber crime leading to the emergence of *yahoo plus*. This group relies on the spiritual capital (Bourdieu 1986) of herbalists, fetish pastors and Alfas. *Yahoo plus* fraudsters approach fetish pastors, *alfas*, and herbalists for success-promoting charms.

⁶ One of the white garment churches in Nigeria is Celestial Church of Christ. This respondent referred to pastors in this denomination who are approached for spiritual help.

Charms such as *afose* (do as I say), *oruka-ere* (charmed rings), *ijapa* (tortoise), *ose-awure* (success-boosting soap), *atona* (pathfinder) are used along with Internet surfing to defraud victims.

The consequences of indulging in *yahoo plus* are inimical to the growth of Nigerian society. The youths involved are more susceptible to different forms of crime when the voodoo fails. A maxim among the Yoruba recognises the fact that charms may guarantee success temporarily, but eternal success can only be sustained by destiny. This also means that the charms can boomerang. Some of the unintended consequences of forcing wealth via invocation of spiritual elements are untimely death, madness and deformation. The belief is expressed by a respondent:

The effect could be individualistic and it could be general. Most mad women and men roaming about the street could be as a result of their (evil) work. Their lavish way of spending ruins their lives quickly. It affects the image of Nigeria negatively. They also incur the curse of elders owing to their disrespectfulness because of their money which could also continue even till their future generation. (Key Informant/Male/UI)

Assured future employment will encourage commitment to learning and reduce association with deviant peers. Cyber spiritualism portends danger for a developing country like Nigeria. It leads to image battering which impedes development. A way out of this social ill is a genuine restructuring of the social values of Nigerian society. This should encompass adequate reward for service, encouragement of meritocracy, delivery of justice in corruption, abhorrence of ritualism in the socio-political sphere and social welfarism to meet the yearnings of the vulnerable populace. There is need for a large scale study to investigate the consequences of this approach on the lives of the perpetrators.⁷

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