

Cheques or dating scams? Online fraud themes in hip-hop songs across popular music apps



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ABSTRACT

How do hip-hop songs produced from 2017 to 2023 depict and rationalize online fraud? This study examines the depiction of online fraudsters in thirty-three Nigerian hip-hop songs on nine popular streaming platforms such as Spotify, Deezer, iTunes, SoundCloud, Apple Music, and YouTube. Using a directed approach to qualitative content analysis, we coded lyrics based on the moral disengagement mechanism and core themes derived from existing literature. Our findings shed light on how songs (a) justify the fraudulent actions of online fraudsters, (b) blame and dehumanize victims of online romance fraud, (c) glamorize online fraud, and (d) provide insights into prevailing attitudes, indigenous linguistics, and worldviews regarding cybercrime victimization. Specifically, our analysis shows the presence of moral disengagement mechanisms, including "dehumanization," "minimizing own agency," and "displacement of responsibility." Moreover, we identify core contextual themes pertinent to online fraud in the Nigerian context: (a) "cyber spiritualism" and (b) "the North-South divide." This research underscores the global influence of musicians whose songs are easily accessible on diverse music platforms in trivializing the plight of online fraud victims. We argue that these artists' persuasive messages not only downplay but also satirize the victims' predicaments, thus contributing to the cultural worldviews and dimensions of online fraud. We conclude by underscoring these songs' capacity to actualize, reshape, and actively engage with the narratives of glamorization, justification, spiritualism, colonial legacies, gender dynamics, and societal implications. We recommend that future research endeavors explore non-conventional data sources adept at capturing the intricate fabric of cultural attitudes and dynamics.

1. Introduction

1.1. The confluence of lyrical messages, and unintended endorsements

While the influence of celebrity statecraft is undeniable, this article explores how musicians portray criminal activity and the people involved in their lyrics. Music not only appeals to a wide range of people, but musicians also significantly impact many individuals' lives (Adeduntan, 2022; Inyabri, 2016; Lazarus, 2018; Price III, 2006). While the persuasive

messages of hip-hop artists attract more followers than critics in society, there is a reciprocal influence between online fraudsters and musicians (Lazarus, 2018; Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019). Thus, this research casts a brighter light on the interconnectedness between cyber fraudsters and some musicians, suggesting a reciprocal influence on each other's trajectories. The study undertakes an innovative exploration to examine the representation of cyber fraud in popular music produced by Nigerian artists, covering the period from 2017 to 2023. Additionally, several important reasons justify the need to conduct this study.

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Fig. 1. The 65th US Secretary of State danced and sang to "Yahoozee." Image adapted from [BBC \(2008, p.1\)](#)

A notable incident involving Colin Powell, the 65th US Secretary of State, occurred when he appeared on stage with a hip-hop group in London to celebrate African culture ([BBC, 2008](#)). Mr. Powell, a highly regarded military leader, served as the Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005 in the George W. Bush administration. During the 2008 Africa Rising Festival in London, he shared the stage with Nigerian artist Olu Maintain, who performed his popular song "Yahoozee," as shown in [Fig. 1](#) ([BBC, 2008](#)). However, it is plausible that Mr. Powell was not aware that the song glorified internet fraud and online criminals prevalent in Nigeria and elsewhere.

This incident highlights the significance of paying closer attention to the implicit and explicit messages conveyed by the songs we endorse on platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, SoundCloud, Deezer, YouTube, and others. Understanding cyber fraudsters' behaviors and worldviews would greatly benefit from thoroughly examining the meanings embedded in popular songs. The need for greater awareness and scrutiny regarding the content we endorse is emphasized by Mr. Powell's unawareness of the song's lyrics and implications. We argue that the crux of the matter lies in the influential potency of the oratory messages conveyed by hip-hop artists. As [Bourdieu \(1977\)](#) noted, influential speakers use language to communicate, establish credibility, admiration, and perpetuate their influence. The act of reiterating fraud-laced lyrics on music apps like Spotify, Apple Music, and SoundCloud repeatedly normalizes these claims, making them widespread. The act also facilitates the misleading of many music fans to believe in the deviant messages conveyed in these songs about "Yahoo Boys" and "Yahoo Plus."

- **Yahoo Boys:** refers to Nigerian online fraudsters operating within and outside Nigeria. Engaging in various deceptive practices such as pretense, impersonation, manipulation, counterfeiting, fabrication, and more, Yahoo Boys diverge from adhering to a hierarchical mafia-style organizational model.
- **Yahoo Plus:** represents a sub-group of Yahoo Boys who employ supernatural or mystical strategies to enhance their chances of success in committing a range of computer and/or Internet-mediated fraudulent activities (cf. [Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010](#)). These strategies are used to maximize gain financial advantage through false pretenses, impersonation, manipulation, counterfeiting, fabrication, or any other form of deceptive representation of the truth.

The origin of the term "Yahoo" in both "Yahoo Boys" and "Yahoo Plus" is the widespread use of Yahoo emails, applications, and instant messaging platforms for communication between perpetrators and victims in the mid-2000s ([Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019](#)). These two concepts are fundamental to this article's discussions and the meaning of cybercrime in a Nigerian context.

1.2. Socioeconomic theory of cybercriminals (Yahoo Boys)

Cybercrime refers to a range of illegal activities carried out on the internet ([Button et al., 2023](#); [Ibrahim, 2016](#); [McGuire, 2017](#)). The "Tripartite Cybercrime Framework (TCF)" provides a structured categorization of illegal online activities, dividing them into geopolitical, psychosocial, and socioeconomic domains ([Lazarus, 2020, p.19-20](#); [Lazarus, Button and Kappend, 2022, p.385-386](#)). Ibrahim's (2016) initial framework, TCF, emphasizes that socioeconomically motivated cybercrimes are predominantly associated with Nigeria, significantly contributing to the country's negative image. Nigerian society is no stranger to "419 fraud" ([Okosun and Ilo, 2022](#); [Igwe, 2007](#); [Oriola, 2005](#); [Ndubueze, 2020](#)). The term "419" derives from Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, which addresses fraudulent activities and has been extensively used in social discourse since the 1980s. The digitalized forms of "419 fraud" are known as "Yahoo-Yahoo" ([Akanle and Shadare, 2019](#); [Suleiman, 2019](#)).

This contemporary manifestation of the Nigerian 419 fraud is multifaceted and comprises two significant strands: (a) online romance fraud, and (b) business email compromise. According to a systematic review of twenty-six studies by [Lazarus et al. \(2023\)](#), online romance fraud occurs when fraudsters use romantic relationships as a toolbox to defraud victims. On the other hand, business email compromise, as researched by [Okpa et al. \(2022\)](#), centers around fraudulent activities involving email communications within business settings. The actions of present-day actors in the theatre of "419 fraud" must be studied in the context of their historical roots. The rise of criminal groups in Nigeria who specialize in Advance Fee Fraud, a.k.a. "419," can be attributed to three central forces: (1) The architecture of the global economy and the practices of "the International Monetary Fund." (2) The rise in "graduate unemployment" in Nigeria during the 1980s. (3) The elevated corruption and "political impunity" prevailed during that same decade (for a full discussion, see [Ibrahim, 2016, p.52-54](#)). We examine online fraud themes in Nigerian hip-hop lyrics and seek to understand the socio-cultural forces underpinning their endorsements.

1.3. Internet fraudsters and musicians connections

Some Nigerian hip-hop musicians, according to media discourse ([BBC, 2022](#); [Premium Times, 2023](#); [Punch, 2019](#)) and academic research papers ([Lazarus, 2018](#); [Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019](#)), participate in online fraud and get assistance from fraudsters and their sympathizers. "Mbolowowon" by D'banj was one of the first hip-hop songs with an online fraud theme when released in 2004 ([Lazarus, 2018](#)). While D'banj was on the British police's sought list for credit card fraud in London and described his evasion methods in his song, he stated in a 2018 interview that "most of the new generation record labels are founded by Yahoo Boys" ([Daily Post, 2018, p.1](#)). D'banj was also arrested over allegations of millions of dollars in fraud charges ([BBC, 2022](#)). In his 2016 song "Living Things," the artist "9ice" not only glorified popular internet fraudsters, including "Hushpuppi" ([Lazarus, 2018](#)), but also conveyed the implicit message that 'stealing is not a crime' ([Ajayi and Bamgbose, 2018](#)). Interviews with law enforcement officers showed: (a) several musicians partake in and profit from online fraud, suggesting a reciprocal influence between fraudsters and musicians; (b) Yahoo Boys have established music labels, and some of them are even performers ([Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019](#)). "The core aspects of their relationship are based on reciprocal economic benefits and determined by them" ([Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019, p.22](#)).

Furthermore, [Lazarus's \(2018\)](#) foundational work¹ further strengthened the ties between offenders and musicians as follows: (a) While the song "Oshozondi" by DJ Sidez and Slimecase featuring Masta

¹ This is the first empirical work highlighting the reciprocal relationship between Yahoo Boys and musicians.

T references Yahoo Boys in their song, a singer, X-Busta, glamorized and interrogated the police for harassing Yahoo Boys on the street. (b) Two Nigerian rappers, "Sauce Kid" and "Special Ed," were apprehended for committing online fraud in the United States. (c) A musician, "Rapper N6," revealed that many famous musicians have received significant monetary backing from supporters who acquired their wealth illegally - Yahoo Boys. (d) Before boarding a private aircraft, Dammy Krane, a hip-hop singer, was detained in Miami for cyber fraud, further strengthening the ties between Yahoo Boys and musicians. In addition to the above observations by Lazarus (2018), in 2019, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) detained a musician, "Naira Marley," on online fraud allegations (Adeduntan, 2022). In 2023, the EFCC arrested a musician, "Shallipopi," and thirty-one other suspects over alleged internet fraud (Premium Times, 2023).

According to the available evidence, it becomes evident that cybercriminals and musicians may not necessarily fall into distinct categories. However, the relationship between online offenders and vocalists is still evolving. There is a lack of evidence beyond social media rumors, with only a few studies available. For example, while Lazarus (2018) chronologically analyzed a wide range of songs from 2007 to 2017, Tade (2019) focused on analyzing three songs by different artists that glamorized cybercrimes. Our focus is primarily on expanding upon Lazarus's (2018) study, aiming to systematically and chronologically examine songs from 2017 to 2023. We also operationalize the concept of "the ethics of Yahoo Boys" as a sequence of cognitive adaptations that function as "psychological shields" for online fraudsters (Lazarus, 2018, p.65). These adaptations enable both online fraudsters and their sympathizers to rationalize their actions and alleviate feelings of guilt or remorse (cf. Bandura et al., 2001; Bandura, 1999 about crimes in general).

1.4. Research questions and objectives

In our investigation, we emphasize addressing three crucial questions:

- **Portrayal of Online Fraudsters and Victims:** How do artists portray online fraudsters and their victims in their songs?
- **Justification and Rationalization:** How do songs justify and rationalize online fraud activities?
- **Linguistic Strategies:** What linguistic strategies do vocalists employ to depict online fraudsters and victims in their songs?

Furthermore, while we are cautious about perpetuating moral panic often associated with hip-hop music, we equally recognize that Hip-hop artists serve as cultural commentators, and their lyrics can influence perceptions, attitudes, and cultural worldviews regarding cybercrime victimization. By exploring the above questions, we aspire to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

2. Literature review

2.1. Positionality in challenging structuralist tradition

We recognize songs as a means to grasp, interpret, and critically scrutinize social reality about cybercrime. In particular, we do not only distance ourselves from the structuralist analytical tradition, but we also critique it. In our critique of the structuralist analytical tradition, which gained momentum in the 1960s, we confront one of its most glaring shortcomings: the foundational assumption of semantic certainty. De Saussure (1916), a prominent advocate of semiology or semiotics, constructed his framework on the fundamental assertion of relative certainty regarding the ultimate interpretation (signified) of a message (signifier). Although initially formulated in the realm of linguistics, this analytical tradition found resonance in adjacent disciplines such as anthropology (Levi-Strauss, 1974), philosophy, sociology

(Foucault, 1969), literary criticism (Propp, 1968), and even economics (Prebisch, 1950). An exploration of structuralist poetics from a semiotic perspective challenges the assertion that meaning is unequivocal.

Barthes (1977), in his renowned essay "The Death of the Author," contends that the predominant meaning arises from the act of tethering a text to an authorial origin, for "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (p.147). A re-evaluative examination of a literary work, and by extension any cultural artifact, should instead concentrate on the diversity of readership or audience because, as Barthes (1977, p. 148) argues:

...a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as hitherto said, the author.

Similar insights analogous to Barthes' perspective can be found in other interpretive traditions within fields such as Anthropology (Turner, 1991), Performance Studies (Schechner, 1988), and Literary Studies (Gates and Henry, 1988).

However, the poststructuralist discourse described above often emphasizes the reader or audience as the ultimate realm of semantic plurality, with little or no consideration of the author or artist as an intentional source of that plurality. Rose's (1994) pioneering work on hip-hop, adopting the framework proposed by James Scott, highlights the inclination of cultural performance to produce texts that subtly challenge authority. While not explicitly discussing polysemy, Rose (1994) acknowledges that hip-hop can obscure meanings from those in positions of authority. Our subsequent analysis extends this discourse by examining how hip-hop, employing polysemy and other strategies, artfully conceals objectionable content within its lyrics to evade scrutiny and potential censure.

2.2. Roots of Hip-Hop: Influence of West Africa

Scholars noted that hip-hop music first emerged in the Black neighborhoods of South Bronx, New York, in the 1970s (Keyes, 2002; Kubrin, 2005). It significantly impacted Nigerian traces of hip-hop in the 1990s (Muhammad, 2015; Shonekan, 2013). Various cultural forces influence the evolution of hip-hop culture. While it is essential to note the significant emphasis on West African cultures, as highlighted by Persaud (2011). Price III (2006) and Washington (2015) have traced a significant portion of hip-hop culture back to Black communities in the Caribbean. Historically, people of African heritage in the Caribbean also have their roots in Africa south of the Sahara (Agwanda and Özoral, 2020). This reinforces the idea that West African culture plays a crucial role in the global hip-hop scene. Therefore, throughout history, hip-hop artists have assumed roles comparable to "griots" within their respective social communities, drawing parallels to esteemed "West African oral historians and praise singers" (Lazarus, 2018, p.65; cf. Persaud, 2011).

For example, American hip-hop and rap songs often mirror the artists' lived experiences and the realities of their social communities, encompassing themes related to crime, such as gang violence, street hustling, and thug life (Dunbar, 2020; Kubrin, 2005). Hip-hop music embodies the essence of street culture and plays a pivotal role in shaping identities. According to Kubrin's (2005), hip-hop does not cause crime directly. Instead, they provide listeners with a rich vocabulary that justifies criminal behavior, allowing them to understand and empathize with those experiences. While this article acknowledges the extensive literature on hip-hop in the United States and its global influences (e.g., Dunbar et al., 2016; Dunbar, 2020; Kubrin, 2005; Washington, 2015), it specifically directs its focus towards Nigerian hip-hop and its association with online fraud, all within the context of the indigenous languages, ideologies, worldviews, for several reasons.

The cultural and contextual nuances specific to Nigerian hip-hop may not fully represent attitudes toward online fraud in other regions or music styles. Therefore, our investigation seeks to comprehend online fraud activities and their representation as social products and perpetrators as social

actors by examining the music lyrics within their cultural dynamics. As scholars noted, we strive to avoid imposing external meanings on another culture and aim to understand each situation within the cultural context (Agemang, 2020; Liu, 2021; Swidler, 1986). Our approach aims to mobilize the works of Nigerian scholars to fill the gap in mainstream narratives about online fraud, which lack insights from Nigerian scholars, as noted by Cross (2018). By connecting the indigenous linguistic artifacts and the activities of Yahoo Boys, we seek empirical evidence of "culture in action" (drawing from Swidler, 1986). Attention to the Nigerian context is pivotal to the cultural dimensions of online fraud within its specific cultural milieu.

2.3. The Nigerian Hip-hop Music

Nigeria's popular music scene offers diverse genres, including Highlife, Afrobeat, hip-hop, rap, and regional styles such as *jùjú*, *fújí*, and *egwu ekpili* (Adeduntan, 2022; Eze, 2020). In this context, hip-hop music's personality is influenced by different music genres, which greatly shape its defining characteristics. From the 1980s to the 1990s, American hip-hop and rap music became popular (Eze, 2020; Shonekan, 2011; Shonekan, 2013). However, due to its association with criminality, unlike other genres, rap music generated strong legal and social reactions in the United States (Dunbar et al., 2016; Kubrin and Nielson, 2014). Nigerian hip-hop has incorporated the culture of resistance commonly found in American hip-hop into its lyrics (Babalola, 2023; Eze, 2020; Shonekan, 2013). However, it has also attracted negative social reactions associated with gangster rappers in the United States, as pointed out by Lazarus (2018). The predominant musical motifs in Nigerian hip-hop songs pertain to opulence, destitution, socio-political opposition, and cybercrime (Lazarus, 2018). Like its American counterpart, Nigerian Hip-hop music has a global reach through various music apps like Spotify, Apple Music, SoundCloud, Deezer, and more.

2.4. The global impact of Nigerian music

The influence of Nigerian hip-hop music extends beyond local boundaries and is not confined solely to Nigeria. Supporting evidence for this can be found in the statistics regarding the user base of these platforms worldwide. As of April 2023, YouTube boasts a staggering 2.527 billion users worldwide. Additionally, Spotify has over 515 million users, with over 60 million subscribers globally and 28 million in the United States (Curry, 2023; Statistica, 2023). On the other hand, SoundCloud reports having more than 76 million active monthly users and an impressive collection of over 200 million audio tracks as of November 2021. Furthermore, Deezer, available in 180 countries, attracts over 16 million monthly active users (Curry, 2023; Statistica, 2023). Even though not every subscriber would endorse Nigerian hip-hop music, the following instances collectively emphasize the far-reaching impact and global recognition of Nigerian hip-hop artists in the contemporary music scene.

- (A) To begin, recent events unequivocally highlight the global appeal and widespread prevalence of Nigerian hip-hop music. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup held in Qatar, both music enthusiasts and football aficionados were treated to a captivating performance by one of Nigeria's most celebrated musicians, Davido. FIFA, the worldwide governing body of football, invited Davido to perform at the tournament's closing ceremony, and he did (FIFA, 2022; Legit, 2022). FIFA has a significant impact on football enthusiasts. Therefore, it is improbable that this music genre is predominantly consumed within Nigeria and its diaspora.
- (B) Furthermore, some Nigerian hip-hop artists, such as Davido, have achieved historic success on the Billboard charts, accompanied by substantial global fan bases. These achievements underscore the far-reaching influence of Nigerian music on a global scale (Billboard, 2023). In 2017, Davido made history with the longest-

charting Nigerian pop song on Billboard. In 2023, his song 'Timeless' debuted at No. 37 on the chart (Billboard, 2023). Billboard charts have a far-reaching impact on music lovers. Therefore, it is unlikely that this music genre is primarily consumed within Nigeria and its diaspora.

- (C) In an article dated August 25, 2023, Rolling Stone recognized the global impact of Nigerian musicians and specifically highlighted Burna Boy as an authentic global icon. According to the article, Burna Boy became the first Nigerian artist to sell out a show at the legendary Madison Square Garden in New York, and the first African artist to achieve a stadium show sellout in the United States. This underscores how Afrobeat, the musical genre championed by Burna Boy, has transcended geographical boundaries (Rolling Stone, 2023). Therefore, it is improbable that Nigerian society alone is the primary consumer of music.
- (D) Asake, another notable Nigerian musician, made waves with his sophomore album, "Work of Art." Within just two months of its release on June 16, 2023, the album amassed an impressive 1.2 billion streams across major digital streaming platforms (The Nation, 2023). Therefore, it is unlikely that this music genre is primarily consumed within Nigerian society.
- (E) In addition, WizKid, a prominent figure in Nigerian music, sold out three consecutive days at the renowned London O2 Arena, as reported by Leadership in 2023 (Leadership, 2023). Furthermore, in 2023, Tems, a Nigerian vocalist, clinched a Grammy award in the Best Melodic Rap Performance category for her contribution to the hit song "Wait for U," alongside American musicians Future and Drake (BBC, 2023). It is impossible for everyone who attends these events to be Nigerian. Thus, it is improbable that this music genre is mainly consumed only in Nigeria and its diaspora.

These examples collectively highlight the profound influence and global acclaim that Nigerian hip-hop artists have garnered in the contemporary music landscape. It reinforces the significance of examining how criminal elements are portrayed within this cultural context. Therefore, while this study contributes to a broader understanding of the socio-cultural implications and the influence of Nigerian music on a global scale, it highlights the worldwide consequences of online fraud originating from Nigeria.

2.5. The demographic of online fraudsters (Yahoo Boys)

Several insightful qualitative studies (Aransiola and Asindemadede, 2011; Lazarus, Button and Adogame, 2022; Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019; Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010; Ogunleye et al., 2019; Ojedokun and Eraye, 2012) have explored the demographics of cybercriminals, shedding light on various aspects of cybercrime perpetrators. The above empirical literature has consistently suggested that cybercrime offenses are predominantly perpetrated by men and boys, who play pivotal roles in orchestrating fraudulent activities online. Additionally, testimonies of female undergraduate students who participate in online fraud perpetration revealed that, unlike men, these fraudsters largely engage in subordinate rather than ordained positions (Ogunleye et al., 2019). Furthermore, research results have revealed the existence of structured networks within the cybercriminal ecosystem. Specific civil servants, such as politicians, have been implicated in corrupt practices that facilitate cybercriminals in executing their unlawful activities, as evidenced by empirical studies (Aransiola and Asindemadede, 2011; Lazarus, Button and Adogame, 2022; Ibrahim, 2017). The convergence of findings from these qualitative studies significantly enriches our understanding of cybercriminal demographics and the intricacies of their operations. The convergence of these qualitative studies highlights the presence of structured networks within the cybercriminal ecosystem. It is noteworthy to emphasize that the above research findings explicitly related to the Nigerian context and 'Yahoo Boys,' highlighting that males predominantly orchestrate these cybercriminal activities.

2.6. Consistency in research findings

A prominent recurring theme in these existing investigations is the connections between cybercrime and male perpetrators, often enabled by corruption in specific segments of society, such as bankers, police officers, and politicians. Numerous studies have yielded convergent conclusions through diverse data sources, including interviews with spiritualists (Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010), frontline law enforcement officers (Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019), Nigerian parents (Aborisade, 2023; Ibrahim, 2017), online fraudsters (Aransiola and Asindemade, 2011; Ojedokun and Eraye, 2012; Ogunleye et al., 2019) and analyses of music lyrics (Lazarus, 2018; Tade, 2019), fraudsters' emails (Rich, 2018), and tweets and public responses (Lazarus et al., 2022; Lazarus and Button, 2022). The consistency and agreement among these studies significantly bolster the validity of collective empirical research, reinforcing key insights into the prevalent traits of online offenders. Additionally, non-empirical papers (Hall et al., 2021; Hall and Ziemer, 2023; Ndubueze, 2020; Okosun and Ilo, 2022), and blog articles (Conversation, 2019, 2022; Lazarus, 2023) agree with the empirical literature. Thus, the convergence of evidence across various research methodologies affirms the significance of these characteristics in understanding the dynamics of "Yahoo-Yahoo" and the profiles of those involved in such fraudulent activities.

2.7. The north-south divide

Moreover, Ellis (2016) and Lazarus and Button (2022) shed light on how the distinct experiences of Christianization and colonization have impacted regional educational attainment differences in Nigeria. These historical factors interact with regional disparities in traditional crime prevalence and production, creating intricate relationships between various social factors. Specifically, Lazarus and Button (2022) conducted a study utilizing post-colonial perspectives and analyzing a vast corpus of over 100,000 tweets to investigate "the North-South divide in Nigerian society" and the enduring effects of colonialism. Their research findings revealed significant disparities in cybercriminals' arrest, conviction, and sentencing between Nigeria's northern and southern regions. Notably, the study uncovered significant variations in the criminalization rates of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) towards individuals from the South compared to those from the North (Lazarus and Button, 2022). Apart from the North-South divide in cybercrime production (Lazarus and Button, 2022), there is also a divide in how Yahoo Boys employ supernatural strategies to deceive their targets (Akanle and Shadare, 2019; Lazarus, 2019; Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010; Tade, 2013). The intricate interplay of sociocultural, historical, and supernatural elements in cybercriminal activities underscores the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon.

2.8. Cyber spiritualism, a.k.a, Yahoo Plus

One intriguing thematic strand in the Nigerian cybercrime discourse revolves around the convergence of spirituality and cybercrime. Melvin and Ayotunde (2010, p. 364) noted that "spirituality has been a crucial factor in the activities of offenders involved in both organized and non-organized crimes" in the virtual world. Online fraudsters are called "Yahoo Boys Plus" when they cheat their victims utilizing supernatural abilities (Akanle and Shadare, 2019; Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010, p.364; Tade, 2013, p.690). Cyber spiritualism refers to cybercrime practices that involve deploying supernatural powers to enhance success rates of cyber fraud victimization (Lazarus, 2019; Tade, 2013). It is noteworthy that different genres of indigenous faith, Christianity, Islam, and postcolonial modernity converge in a complex endorsement of cyber spiritualism in online fraud perpetration, according to qualitative research (Aransiola and Asindemade, 2011; Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019), warranting further inquiry into the phenomenon.

Gaining a deeper understanding of online fraud requires researchers to go beyond conventional scientific evidence and acknowledge the

"traces of spiritual manipulations of victims that are often overlooked in traditional social science approaches" (Lazarus, 2019, p.20). In this regard, exploring imaginative texts, including music lyrics, is imperative to refine our sociological perspective. Among various creative forms, hip-hop music emerged as a dominant and expressive medium in Nigeria's cybercrime landscape (Lazarus, 2018; Adeduntan, 2022). Emergent hip-hop lyrics use techniques like inorganic narrative plotting and polysemy to prevent definite interpretations of their themes. Examining how hip-hop music frames the practice of cyber spiritualism becomes essential to not only understand the dissemination of cyber spiritualism beliefs and practices but also to recognize the transformative power of musical imagination in shaping these phenomena. A more critical issue, however, is that limited scholarly attention (e.g., Lazarus, 2018) has been devoted to exploring the portrayal of cyber fraud in Nigerian hip-hop music from a criminological standpoint.

2.9. How this study differs from previous contributions

This study stands out in several distinctive aspects: (a) It addresses a unique time frame, focusing on songs produced between 2017 and 2023 and distinguishing it from previous research examining songs before 2017 (Ajayi and Bamgbose, 2018; Lazarus, 2018; Tade, 2019). Moreover, while some studies explore Nigerian hip-hop music, they do not specifically examine themes related to online fraud or Yahoo Boys (Babalola, 2023; Olusegun-Joseph, 2020; Onanuga, 2020; Shonekan, 2011; Shonekan, 2013). Therefore, this research fills a critical gap in the literature by investigating songs released between 2017 and 2023 that specifically explore online fraud themes.

(b) In addition to the temporal uniqueness, this study adopts the moral disengagement mechanism as a theoretical lens, further differentiating it from all previous inquiries, except for Lazarus (2018). By utilizing this theoretical framework, the research adds valuable insights into how online fraud themes are rationalized within the context of Nigerian hip-hop music from 2017 to 2023.

(c) None of the prior studies on the depiction of online fraud in Nigerian hip-hop music, such as Lazarus (2018) and Tade (2019), have explored the supernatural dimension of cyber fraud. This study aims to contribute to the field by examining how elements of the supernatural and spiritual realm are intertwined with cybercriminal activities within the context of hip-hop lyrics. Essentially, the distinct temporal focus, adoption of the moral disengagement mechanism, and investigation of the supernatural dimension of online fraud make this research an innovative and novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Moral disengagement mechanisms

The present study is based on the theoretical foundation of classifying specific behaviors as criminal within a moral context, in contrast to alternative actions (Becker, 1967; Bandura, 1999; Reiner, 2016). Similarly, how Nigerian hip-hop artists portray online fraud and justify the actions of Yahoo Boys in their songs can also be seen as a "moral enterprise." Consequently, a definitive perspective on the cognitive mechanisms employed by individuals to establish psychological distance from the moral consequences of their offensive actions remains elusive (Bandura et al., 2001).

Specifically, Bandura (1999) and Bandura et al. (2001) have provided a comprehensive understanding of how individuals justify deviant behaviors while simultaneously preserving a positive self-perception, as explained by the theory of moral disengagement. Both individuals who engage in criminal behavior and those who do not exhibit similar moral beliefs. However, individuals often utilize cognitive strategies to distance themselves from the ethical consequences of their objectionable actions (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 2001). The "mechanisms of moral disengagement" enable individuals to partake in immoral or destructive actions

without experiencing substantial moral anguish, as they can rationalize their behavior and detach themselves from feelings of shame or culpability.

According to the theoretical framework, it is commonly observed that individuals tend to refrain from engaging in offensive behavior until they have justified the ethical aspects of their actions. This framework has the potential to provide valuable insights into the cultural foundations of online fraud originating from Nigeria and the psychological perspectives of individuals involved in such activities, commonly referred to as Yahoo Boys. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the primary constituents comprising the moral disengagement mechanisms. This study aims to gain insight into the cultural perspectives and justifications that underlie the glorification or normalization of cybercriminal activities in Nigerian society by analyzing the lyrics and themes depicted in songs.

4. Materials and method

4.1. Lyrics data collection

The present research employs an emic perspective to shed light on the musical depictions of online fraudsters and their victims. The following systematic steps ensured a comprehensive and rigorous selection process for the lyrics included in the analysis, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent examination of online fraud themes in Nigerian hip-hop music. The selection of lyrics listed in Table 2 followed a systematic approach encompassing the following steps:

- a) **Initial Artist Compilation:** We used a Google search with phrases like "list of Nigerian musicians" to compile a comprehensive list of Nigerian hip-hop singers. Two professional Nigerian music journalists validated this list to ensure no artists were missed. This step accounted for artists who may be renowned in public spaces like dance halls but might still need to release their official first albums. To illustrate, Innocent U. Idibia, known as "2face," gained national fame while singing at parties in university settings before releasing his first album.
- b) **Identification of Relevant Artists:** Two research team members, who are professional music journalists, compiled a list of Nigerian hip-hop artists associated with depicting online fraud in their lyrics. Their songs produced from June 2017 to July 2023 were thoroughly searched to identify relevant songs.
- c) **Identification of Relevant Songs:** For a song to qualify for inclusion, it needs to be accessible on one popular music streaming platform such as Spotify, Apple Music, or YouTube.
- d) **Removal of Duplicates:** Duplicate songs were eliminated from the list; for example, we selected remix versions instead of the original version to encompass a wider variety of artists and vocabularies of motive (see "k" further down).
- e) **Language Selection:** We have chosen to only include songs that are produced in English, pidgin English, and the three major indigenous

languages of Nigeria: Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. This decision was made for practical reasons, as Nigeria has an overwhelming number of over 500 indigenous languages.

- f) **Time Frame Selection:** Songs produced between June 2017 and July 2023 were chosen for analysis, considering that previous studies (e.g., Lazarus, 2018) had covered the period up to May 2017. The reason for this is the increased digitalization, commercialization, and availability of music during this period of time.
- g) **Lyrics Review:** We searched online to find the lyrics for the remaining songs and specifically looked for themes related to online fraud.
- h) **Theme Selection:** A list of songs that explicitly depicted (a) names of high-profile Yahoo Boys, such as "Hushpuppi," (b) fraudulent actions, and (c) incorporated a range of Yahoo Boys' slang, such as "Yahoo Boys," "Gameboy," etc., was compiled.
- i) **Validation by popular music applications:** We conducted a comprehensive check for the availability of each identified song in nine popular music apps with a global reach. The apps that have been chosen are Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, Pandora, and iHeartRadio. We found songs in all nine apps. By assessing the presence of these songs in at least five music apps, we aimed to determine their popularity in leisure spaces beyond national boundaries. Consequently, we eliminated three songs, including "E fi awon omo yahoo le" and "Idan Anthem," even though they are accessible on Nigerian-founded apps, e.g., the "Boompplay" app. This approach provides valuable insights into the songs' widespread appeal and accessibility to a global audience. The availability of the songs in these widely used music apps indicates their popularity and impact on a broader scale.
- j) **Final Song Selection:** A total of thirty-three songs that explicitly represented 'Yahoo Boys' over the six years from June 2017 to July 2023 were selected, as outlined in Table 2.
- k) **Remix Version Preference:** To capture diverse lyrical "vocabularies of motive" following Mills's (1940) terminology, the remix versions involving multiple artists were chosen over the original versions with only one artist.
- l) **Ethical approval:** As the music lyrics utilized in our research were in the public domain, there was no need to obtain ethical clearance for the study.
- m) **Selected songs:** By following the above steps, we gathered thirty-three songs. We listed them in Table 2, including their particularities, such as the names and sex of the artists.

4.2. Steps of the data analysis

4.2.1. Steps of the data analysis following a directed approach to qualitative content analysis

- a) The data analysis process employed a systematic and expert-driven approach, utilizing the Directed Approach to Qualitative Content Analysis (DAQCA). Following a DAQCA, researchers initiate the process by employing a pre-established coding framework derived from existing theoretical frameworks and prior research studies. This framework guides the analysis, aiming to validate prior theories and assumptions in the literature.
- b) The existing theory (Moral Disengagement Mechanism) and prior assumptions (Yahoo Plus) were reviewed to identify high-level codes, as depicted in Table 3. These high-level codes were the overarching themes or concepts that organized the data.
- c) Sub-codes were also identified under each high-level code, as illustrated in Table 3. These sub-codes offered a more nuanced understanding of the data and facilitated a comprehensive analysis.
- d) Following the principles of DAQCA, coding commenced by reading through the lyrics to identify features of the primary predetermined codes within the theory (e.g., "Cognitive Restructuration") and prior literature (e.g., "Yahoo Plus"), which are the high-level codes shown in Table 3.

Table 1
Moral Disengagement Mechanisms.

Cognitive Mechanism	Moral Disengagement
Cognitive Restructuration	1. Moral Justification 2. Euphemistic Labelling 3. Advantageous Comparison
Minimising Own Agency	1. Displacement of Responsibility 2. Diffusion of Responsibility
Disregarding/Distorting Negative Impact	1. Disregarding Consequences 2. Distorting Consequences
Blaming/Dehumanising Victim	1. Attribution of Blame 2. Dehumanization

Table adapted from Lazarus, Button and Adogame (2022, p.4)

Table 2
List of hip-hop songs from June 2017 to July 2023.

Artist (s)	Song	Year	Music Apps	Sex
Naira Marley	1. Am I a Yaboo Boy?	2019	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud,	Man
Seyi Vibez	2. Déjà vu	2023	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud, Tidal	Man
Steven Adeoye featuring Portable and T.I. Blaze	3. Ali (Remix)	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud,	All men
SuccessMuch	4. Yahoo sweet	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer,	Woman
Qdot	5. Koshi Danu	2019	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, Pandora, iHeartRadio.	Man
Eyan latest and Seyi vibes	6. Facebook	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud	Man
Seyi Vibez and Bella Shmurda	7. C Major	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	All men
Seyi Vibez	8. No Caution (Gbemidebe)	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	Man
T.I. Blaze	9. + 234	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	Man
Seyi Vibez	10. Good Life	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	Man
Seyi Vibez	11. Better Days Freestyle	2020	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	Man
Seyi Vibez	12. Billion Dollar	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal,	Man
Olamide and Bella Shmurda	13. Triumphant	2020	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio.	Man
Cazulee	14. The Way	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, iHeartRadio	All Men
T Dollar and Oladips	15. Our Father	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime, Deezer, SoundCloud,	Man
Shallinoppi	16. Elon Musk	2023	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	Man
Seyi vibez and Zlatan	17. Professor peller	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime, Deezer, Pandora	All men
Shagzy	18. Omo iya mi	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Deezer, iHeartRadio	Man
Bella Shmurda and Olamide	19. Vision 2020 remix	2020	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men
Zlatan	20. Ale Yi	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	Man
Idowest and Seyi Vibez	21. Jah (remix)	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Prime, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud	All men
DJ Sidez featuring Slimcase and Masta T	22. Oshozondi	2018	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men
T.I Blaze, Olamide	23. Sometimes	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men
Bella Shmurda, Zlatan	24. Cash App	2020	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud	All men
Eleniyen	25. Yahoo Lawon Oremi	2019	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Deezer, SoundCloud	Man
Chinko Ekun ft. Zlatan and Lil Kesh	26. Able God	2018	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud	All men
Otega and CDQ	27. Stay woke	2018	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud	All men
Jmani	28. Yahoo Boy	2022	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	Man
Lil Kesh	29. Logo Benz	2018	Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Deezer, SoundCloud	Man
Ido West featuring Davido	30. Ji Masun	2018	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men
Olamide featuring Bad Boy Timz	31. Loading	2020	Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men
Qdot	32. Idan	2023	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	Man
Poco Lee and Portable featuring Olamide	33. Zazoo Zehh	2021	Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube, Deezer, Tidal, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio	All men

Table 3
Predetermined codes, adhering to the principles of DAQCA.

Prior assumptions	High-level codes	Sub-codes
Codes within the theory (Moral Disengagement Mechanism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimising Own Agency • Cognitive Restructuration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displacement/diffusion of Responsibility • Moral Justification • Euphemistic Labelling • Advantageous Comparison • Disregarding/distorting Consequences • Attribution of Blame
Codes within the prior literature (Yahoo Boys)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarding or Distorting Negative Impact • Blaming/Dehumanising Victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dehumanization • Cyber spiritualism • Online fraud glamorization
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yahoo Plus • Yahoo-Yahoo 	

- e) Highlighted passages were then coded using the predetermined sub-codes listed in Table 3 to identify predominant themes in the data. This process extended the classifications into more refined sub-categories to distinguish lines of lyrics that exemplified multiple aspects of cognitive mechanisms, such as “minimizing own agency,” which comprises three sub-elements: "euphemistic labeling," "advantageous comparison," and "moral justification."
- f) In cases where data segments could not be classified using the initial and subsequent coding scheme outlined in Table 3, additional categories were created. However, it is worth noting that only a small percentage of songs fell into categories such as "gender roles."
- g) To ensure inter-coder reliability, given the potential for individual coders to interpret data differently (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), three research members coded 100% of the data, while the other two independently reviewed 20% of the data, utilizing the identical code: "components of moral disengagement mechanism." The degree of similarity between the coders was 92%. The researchers' diverse proficiency in Nigeria's four main languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Pidgin English) influenced data interpretation, as each song incorporated portions of at least two of these languages.
- h) Finally, it is important to note that the codes derived from (A) the theory and (B) prior literature may not be exhaustive, as the complexity of hip-hop lyrics allows for multiple interpretations. The presented results are based solely on these codes.

5. Results

Following the processes indicated in the preceding section, we produced five key themes. Three of them support the theoretical framework, while the other two correspond to themes from the literature on Yahoo Boys, as shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 above facilitates a quick understanding of the main and supporting themes we explored in our research. It illustrates the main thematic findings that resulted from the study's application of a directed strategy to qualitative content analysis. It provides a visual summary of the overarching themes derived from the collected and analyzed data on music lyrics. Specifically, the figure consists of five main sections on the left-hand side, followed by seven sub-thematic categories (1. Dehumanization, 2. Advantageous Comparison, 3. Euphemistic Language, 4. Moral Justification, 5. Displacement of Responsibility, 6. Cyber Spiritualism, 7. The Glamorization of Online Fraud) and lyrics excerpts that illustrate the sub-themes. The themes represent the primary concepts identified in the lyric data, and they provide a structured framework for organizing and comprehending the qualitative data gathered for this study. Following the principles of a Directed Approach to Qualitative Content Analysis, the strategy provides a concise and visually accessible overview of the key findings, as shown in Fig. 2.

6. Discussions

As outlined in the results section, our analysis revealed five key themes that are essential to this discussion. While three of these themes align with

the theoretical framework, they support and validate our theoretical perspective: (a) Dehumanization of Victims, (b) Cognitive Restructuration, (c) Minimising Own Agency. The remaining two themes correspond to those identified in prior literature on Yahoo Boys, e.g., cyber spiritualism (Yahoo Plus). Furthermore, we also address two numerical themes derived from the sample pattern: (a) North-South Divide and (b) Gender Differences. Therefore, the following seven themes are the cornerstone of our subsequent discussion, shedding light on the complex dynamics of online fraud depiction in Nigerian hip-hop music.

6.1. Dehumanization of fraud victims

Blaming and dehumanization are one of the significant themes we produced in our study, where the victims depicted in Yahoo Boys' lyrics are consistently held responsible for their own suffering and dehumanization, being referred to as "Maga" - a term meaning stupid animals - as noted in prior research (e.g., Lazarus, 2018). Among male singers listed in Table 2, such as *Naira Marley*, *Seyi Vibe*, *Bella Shmurda*, *Zlatan*, and *Lincoln*, derogatory terms like "maga" (stupid animals), "Cash App," or "CC" (cash cow) are used when referring to victims of online fraud. Dehumanization, thus, plays a crucial role in inciting immoral behavior, as it shields fraudsters from remorse and perpetuates the belief that victims are intellectually deficient and comparable to inanimate objects.

In Seyi Vibe's 2022 song "C Major," the dehumanization of victims of online fraud, particularly romance fraud, is exemplified through the lines:

"Maga" [a stupid animal or client] "da'wo, K'ajo lafia" [let's enjoy together]."

Although the phrase "let's enjoy together" might initially suggest intimacy in the offender-victim relationship, analyzing the above lyric through the lens of relevant figures of speech provides additional layers of depth and insight.

First, the lines of the lyrics align with the concept of double entendre, a phrase or statement with two interpretations or meanings, often risqué or ironic. In this context, the fraudster's suggestion to "enjoy together" with a victim of romance fraud may carry a hidden, sinister meaning unbeknownst to the tormented romance fraud victim.

Second, the lines of the lyrics align with foreshadowing, a literary device where the author hints at future events or outcomes. The song's lines, "stupid animal or client, let us enjoy together," could foreshadow further torment or manipulation of the romance fraud victim from the fraudsters' perspective.

Third, the lines of the lyrics align with situational irony, occurring when there is a contrast between what is expected to happen and what actually occurs. As fraudsters typically emotionally and financially torment victims of romance fraud, the suggestion to "enjoy together" creates a situation of irony as it appears contradictory to the torment. This could also be interpreted as a form of dark humor. Regardless, these literary devices add depth, complexity, and intrigue to the lyrics, revealing character interactions between victims and offenders and

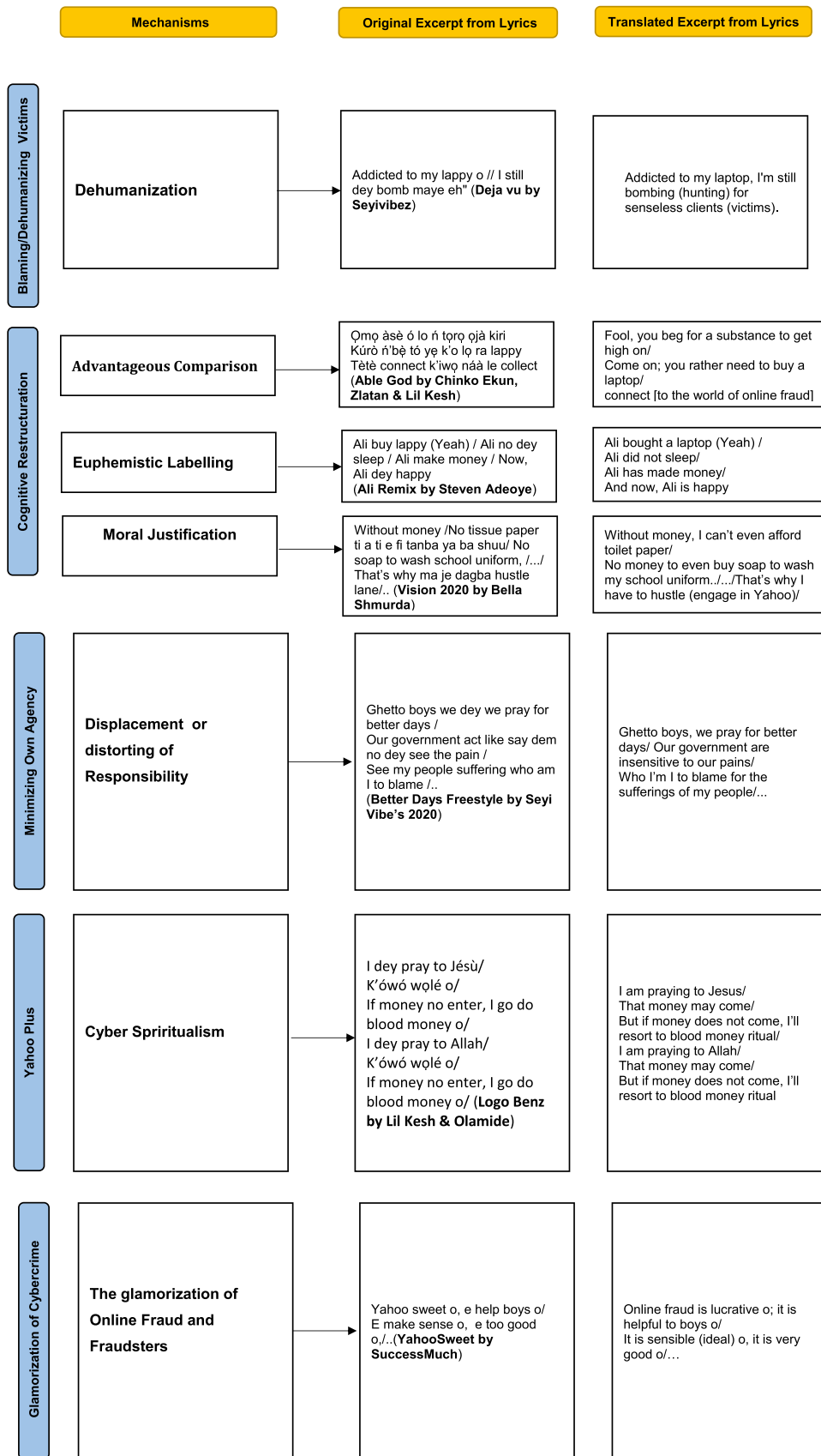


Fig. 2. Five Themes Following a Directed Approach to Qualitative Content Analysis.

conveying subtle messages that evoke various emotions in listeners.

Beyond the realm of literary lenses, the dehumanization of victims in Nigerian hip-hop music reflects cultural folklore that compares hunters to animals, specifically impala. Yahoo Boys perceive themselves as digital domain "hunters" compared to cognitively deficient "mgbada" (antelope in the Igbo language) victims, much like hunters, see themselves as wiser and superior to the antelopes they pursue (drawing from Lazarus, 2018). The indigenous language employed by prominent and educated fraudsters, such as "Fred Chijindu Ajudua," a Nigerian lawyer, has contributed to the incorporation of "mgbada" into the "419 fraud" vocabulary, effectively transforming it into the neologism "Maga" (Lazarus, 2018, p. 71). This metaphor, "Maga," dehumanizes the victims by stripping them of their human characteristics and emotions. By likening cybercrime to hunting, it is transformed into a "game," thus absolving perpetrators of the gravity of their actions. As analyzed by Lazarus (2018), the use of the word "Maga," derived from "mgbada" (antelope), further exemplifies this dehumanization process. Additionally, it implies that internet fraudsters perceive victims not as humans but rather as merely fulfilling their role as game animals in the food chain. The linguistic transformation of "maga" reinforces the perception of victims as mindless beings, reinforcing the Yahoo Boys' adopted hunters-mentality.

In comparison, "Maga" and "Maye" differ. For example, see an excerpt from another song, *Deja vu* by *Seyi Vibe*, in Table 2:

Addicted to my lappy o (x1) // I still dey bomb maye eh (x3)

Translated to standard English means:

Addicted to my laptop, I'm still bombing (hunting) for stupid clients (victims).

Linguistically, the term "Maye" in the excerpt of the song "Deja Vu" represents an intriguing duality as it serves as a less derogatory alternative to "Maga" (stupid animals) while also connoting a benefactor. By displaying their elusive and innovative nature, online fraudsters adroitly employ the term "Maye" interchangeably to refer to both the benefactors of their fraudulent activities and their unsuspecting victims. However, within the context of online fraud perpetration, the term "bombing" is linguistically similar to the act of "hunting," suggesting dehumanization. Conducting 'bombing,' a deceptive technique akin to 'hunting,' involves methodically scouring websites to identify and entrap potential victims like game animals. Therefore, we argue that "Maye" merged with "bombing" in the song is no less derogatory than "Maga." This parallel between "bombing" and "hunting" underscores the strategic and calculated approach that online fraudsters adopt in their criminal pursuits. We now highlight the connections between dehumanization and romance fraud, contributing to a more nuanced perspective.

6.2. Online romance fraud and dehumanization

The theme of online romance fraud and its connection to dehumanization is evident in the terminologies employed in the songs under study. One notable example is found in the 2018 song titled "Stay Woke," by Otega and CDQ, suggesting Yahoo Boys differentiate between two prevalent strands of online fraud, as elucidated in the following line: "To ye ko sun mo awon ton shey checks abi na dating you go do".

This line presents listeners with two distinct options: either get closer to those who do "cheques" or consider pursuing "dating" endeavors (i.e., dating scams). The terminology "cheques" or "checks" likely refers to broad strands of online fraud schemes, e.g., business email compromise (BEC) and Advance Fee Fraud, a.k.a, 419 fraud². On

² This sentence presents both spellings of "cheque" and "check," which can aid readers from regions that use British or American English to understand the intended meaning without confusion. This strategy is considerate of the global audience, ensuring clarity for international readers.

the other hand, "dating" in the song alludes to online romance fraud. The presence of "dating" in the song implies a connection between the song's themes and real-life practices relevant to Yahoo Boys, and indicates that the artists are drawing inspiration from real-life experiences or common contextual practices³. Using such terms in this song allows the artists to shed light on the dichotomy within the world of online fraud practiced by Yahoo Boys. By exploring these linguistic elements, the song exposes strategic choices, and approaches fraudsters take in their deceptive endeavors, providing the audience with insights into the complexities of this criminal activity.

Moreover, in the online romance fraud theme, dehumanization is further substantiated through the terminologies employed in other songs under examination. For instance, in Naira Marley's song, "Am I a Yahoo Boy?", the lyrics portray victims as "maga" - gullible individuals financially exploited by fraudsters. The phrase "maga to fun mi lowo" reinforces the notion that these victims willingly provide money to the fraudsters, emphasizing the cunning nature of the crime. Furthermore, the line "karin wa ko ma daru" conveys the desire for the relationship between the fraudster and the victim to remain intact, implying a level of dependence on the victim's continued financial support. The portrayal of victim blaming and dehumanization in Nigerian hip-hop songs offers a multifaceted representation of cybercrime, intertwining culture, language, and imagination. Cognitive restructuring, another route for moral disengagement, is closely connected to blaming and dehumanizing victims.

6.3. Cognitive restructuring

Cognitive restructuring emerges as a significant theme in the study of song lyrics, revealing how Yahoo Boys employ moral disengagement strategies to rationalize their online crimes (Lazarus, 2018). Bandura (1999) asserts that "cognitive restructuring, together with sanitizing language and exonerating comparisons, forms a powerful set of psychological mechanisms for disengaging moral control" (p.196). The lyrics depict fraudsters using favorable comparisons to portray their characteristics and deeds as less harmful and more virtuous than conventional crimes. For example, the term "Yahoo Boy" in Naira Marley's song serves as a euphemism to describe individuals engaged in online fraud, presenting a less direct and potentially milder characterization of their harmful activities. Naira Marley adeptly leveraged this literary device, which is an aspect of cognitive restructuring. The recurring question, "Am I a Yahoo boy?" in his song suggests an act of defiance, possibly targeted at law enforcement bodies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The EFCC has been actively pursuing those involved in online fraud (Yahoo Boys). The repetition of the above rhetorical question within the song conveys a message of resistance and fearlessness in the face of legal scrutiny.

Furthermore, in the second stanza of "YahooSweet," the advantageous comparison element of cognitive restructuring is evident as it highlights the distinction between traditional crimes and online fraud, as follows:

Yahoo good o, e baff boys o/

E reduce thief o, e reduce gun o/

E calm cult o, I no go lie, cus/

E change life o, say yahoo dope o/

Yahoo bam o, yahoo follow/...

³ Besides the use of "dating" in the song, information obtained from a seasoned frontline law enforcement officer in Nigeria suggests some romance fraudsters use scripts evocative of hip-hop musicians to lure their victims. The stories in these scripts are made up, such as "I'm an aspiring artist," "I'm closely connected to renowned artists X and Y," and "I'll have the chance to meet you in person at artist X's upcoming concert in your country next winter or summer".

Translated to English, these lines mean:*Yahoo is good o, it prospers boys o/**It reduces criminality, it reduces violence o/**It curbs cultism (in universities), I won't deceive you because/**It changes lives, Yahoo is wholesome o/**Yahoo is cool o, yahoo is recommended/...*

This stanza implies that Nigerian cybercriminals perceive themselves as law-abiding, productive citizens, emphasizing that they are not involved in "criminality or cultism." The glorification of online fraud in these lines suggests that these individuals consider it a legitimate and beneficial activity that contributes positively to society. The comparison between online fraud and other criminal behaviors reflects the subtle cultural differences in how certain crimes are perceived in Nigerian society.

It is worth noting that in Nigerian society, certain deceptive crimes are commonplace. Such criminal actions, e.g., embezzling state funds, are more socially accepted than actions like pickpocketing in public places and often face harsh vigilante retribution (Lazarus, 2018; Ibrahim, 2017). This cultural framework shapes moral enterprise, influencing the classification of activities as crimes compared to others. The normalization of Yahoo Boys' claims results from these cultural presumptions and value judgments. Cognitive restructuring, by advantageous comparison device, contributes to the moral disengagement utilized by Yahoo Boys, enabling them to justify their cybercriminal conduct while influencing how society perceives their behavior. This process involves minimizing their agency, another route for moral disengagement closely linked to cognitive restructuring.

Understanding the role of cognitive restructuring in glamorizing online fraud sheds light on the intricate dynamics of Yahoo Boys' moral justifications and their impact on societal perceptions. The language and comparisons in publicly available texts reflect the cultural legitimacy of cybercrime, embezzlement, and corruption in Nigerian society, as Lazarus (2023) noted. Recognizing the influence of cognitive restructuring in shaping attitudes towards illegal activities, such as online fraud, is crucial for developing effective interventions and promoting ethical conduct among Nigerian youths. "Minimizing own agency," another route for moral disengagement, is closely connected to cognitive restructuring.

6.4. Minimizing Own Agency

The analysis of song lyrics in this research reveals a prevalent theme among Yahoo Boys, where they minimize their own agency and shift blame to external factors, particularly poverty and unemployment. Several musicians in the study, such as Seyi Vibe's 2020 song "Better Days Freestyle" and Bella Shmurda's 2020 song "Vision 2020," utilize displacement and distortion of responsibility as psychological devices to justify their engagement in online fraud. Table 4 displays snippets from these songs that illustrate the mechanism of moral disengagement, known as minimizing one's own agency.

The line "*Ghetto boy we hustle, vision 2020*" alludes to the Nigerian government's optimistic policy projection of a prosperous nation by 2020. However, from 2020 to the present day (i.e., 2023), "Nigeria Vision 2020" (Nigeria Vision, 2020) remains underdeveloped, leading to frustration and disillusionment.⁴ The song rationalizes online fraud as an acceptable career path due to the lack of progress in achieving steady electricity, functional infrastructure, education, healthcare, and more. The context sheds light on the socio-economic basis of the

⁴ Nigeria Vision 2020 failed due to political impunity and corruption. So, while we condemn Yahoo Boys, we should also consider the social environment from which they have emerged.

glamorization of cybercrime as a means of survival amid widespread disillusionment with the unfulfilled development promises.

So, the lines from these songs in Table 4 exemplify how Yahoo Boys employ the moral disengagement strategy of displacement and dispersion of guilt, externalizing control, and denying responsibility for their actions. Phrases like "*See my people suffering, who am I to blame*" and "*No soap to wash school uniform*" indicate that the tough socio-economic realities in Nigeria are portrayed as the driving force and foundation for the sympathetic depiction of Yahoo Boys and their online criminal activities in the hip-hop songs under examination.

Distortion and displacement of responsibility serve as mechanisms that fraudsters use to exempt themselves from the consequences of online fraud. While it is important to note that not all Nigerian youths resort to online fraud in response to financial uncertainty, these songs rationalize and absolve Yahoo Boys from accountability by attributing blame to the government. This suggestion may be valid, given the prevalence of fraudulent actions among representatives of authority, including politicians. The lyrics reflect a common attitude among young people in Nigeria who face severe unemployment and insufficient wages, implying that "yahoo-yahoo" (internet fraud) has become a means of survival for them.

The portrayal of socio-economic challenges in these songs justifies cyber criminality, reinforcing the belief among Yahoo Boys that they are driven by circumstance and have limited choices for financial sustenance. While acknowledging the impact of poverty and unemployment on certain individuals, it is essential to address the moral disengagement employed by Yahoo Boys and encourage alternative, legal avenues for livelihoods. Understanding the role of minimizing own agency in the justification of online fraud is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies to combat cybercrime effectively. Closely linked to this is the "minimizing own agency" theme is the "cyber spiritualism (a.k.a, Yahoo Plus)" theme.

6.5. Cyber spiritualism: Yahoo Plus

Consistent with prior empirical research on Yahoo Boys' narratives, as evidenced in studies (Akanle and Shadare, 2019; Melvin and Ayotunde, 2010), our analysis of hip-hop lyrics indicates an explicit endorsement of supernatural tactics in their pursuit of online fraud. Emergent hip-hop texts have embraced a clandestine tone, employing compositional techniques like inorganic narrative plotting and polysemy to obstruct definite interpretations of their themes. Hip hop first aligns itself with the practice of Yahoo Plus by similarly articulating its affirmation in sometimes near-impenetrable, occult language that dissuades easy decoding. In "Zazoo Zeh," the sensational 2021 debut by Portable (Habib Olalomi Oyegbile) and Pocollee (Pascal Odinaka), Olamide's (Olamide Adedeji) opening features lyrics that challenge narrative expectations and establish a framework of Hobbesian amorality, described by Adeduntan (2022): "Èjè lójú bí t'Àbáchà [Blood in the eye like Abacha{l ate Nigerian military dictator}]/ Rúnjú pa [Wear an unfriendly look]/ Má rẹ̀rín [Do not smile/... Dájú [Show no mercy]/ Wù'wà ikà [Be wicked]."

Portable's subsequent narrative is also devoid of linearity, wandering enroute to a place called the country of the Òsú, "Níbi t'ón tí ní bo káàdi [Where coatings are peeled off scratch cards]," where one might encounter Kolu, characterized as an "Òsú tó ma ní gbòrán [an Òsú that heeds instructions]." The new hip-hop semiotics offers multiple semantic possibilities, preventing textual closure and facilitating the emergence of parallel texts, ensuring that the music remains elusive as the definitive voice of Yahoo Plus.

Nigerian hip-hop's ambiance around the Yahoo enterprise is established through a nocturnal temporal setting. In Nigerian hip-hop's portrayal of cybercrime as "work," the labor put into the enterprise is often measured by how long the actors stay awake while others sleep. The song "Zazoo Zeh" compares America (referred to as Yankee) to the country of the Òsú, emphasizing the significant disparity in time zones

Table 4
Displacement and distortion of responsibility.

Singers and songs	Original lines of song	Translated lines of song
Seyi Vibe's song "Better Days Freestyle"	Ghetto boys we dey we pray for better days / Our government act like say dem no dey see the pain / See my people suffering who am I to blame / Dem popo burst the place everybody run away-ay/...	Ghetto boys, we pray for better days/ Our government are insensitive to our pains/ Who am I to blame for the sufferings of my people/ They messed up the place, everyone runs away/...
Bella Shmurda's song "Vision 2020"	Ghetto boy we hustle, vision 2020/ Our government dem promise/ You know say boys go chop everyday we scamming hmmm/ All night, no sleeping/...	Ghetto boy we hustle, vision 2020 / Our government promised us/ (where we try to achieve our individual vision 2020 that our government promised us, but failed to fulfil) You know that boys gotta eat or must feed/ every day, we are scamming/ All night, no sleeping/ ...

between Nigeria and America, while also accentuating its distinctiveness, similar to the spirit world. Staying awake to communicate with supernatural forces becomes imperative for the prospective explorer in that realm. This hip-hop imaginary appropriates magic's capacity to empower humans, elevating the character of "idán" to a seemingly omnipotent figure who magically conjures wealth without conventional labor.

Moreover, the hip-hop single "Logo Benz" by Lil Kesh in 2018 brought attention to a myth about turning women's underwear into money through supernatural methods. This symbolic association relies on ritual symbolism, drawing parallels between G-strings or thongs and the emblem of the Mercedes Benz, which Yahoo Boys favor. While this association may seem innocuous, it carries harmful consequences for the women who are the victims of such practices. Lil Kesh justifies this magic by portraying women as catalysts for these actions, viewing them as collateral damage to sharpen tools for online fraud perpetration. Unfortunately, these women victims are seldom acknowledged in the broader discussions of online romance fraud or hybrids of other forms of fraud.

The song "Logo Benz" rationalizes blood money rituals, objectifying women and reducing them to sacrificial items, perpetuating a problematic portrayal that has been criticized within the global hip-hop community. We argue that the lyrics of hip-hop songs present a world where traditional values, moral disengagement, and illicit means converge, leading to complex themes depicted through inorganic narrative plotting and polysemy. As the music evolves continually, it unveils new semantic possibilities and layers, evading definitive conclusions and perpetually reshaping the portrayal of Yahoo Plus. The intermingling of culture, language, and imagination within the hip-hop genre allows it to mirror the intricacies of contemporary Nigerian society, offering a multifaceted representation of cybercrime in music.

In the context of hip-hop, these elements merge to create a surreal world where magic and cybercrime intertwine, blurring lines between reality and fiction while projecting a dark allure around the Yahoo enterprise. Nigerian hip-hop narratives adopt a surreptitious approach that obstructs clear interpretation, giving rise to multiple meanings and interpretations and defying fixed associations with Yahoo Plus. These musical expressions challenge conventional narrative structures by introducing amorality and themes of magical manipulation while skilfully weaving intricate linguistic strategies into their lyrics. The rich interplay of Nigerian indigenous languages adds further layers of meaning, veiling the music's intent and creating an enigmatic mosaic of semiotics. Through non-linear narratives and linguistic polysemy, hip-hop artists achieve a subtle ambiguity that captivates audiences and resists easy categorization. In doing so, they elude definite associations with cybercrime, reflecting the multifaceted complexities present in contemporary Nigerian society. They are also romanticizing fraudsters.

6.6.1. Glamorization of online fraud

The theme of "glamorization" offers valuable insights into the portrayal of online fraud in Nigerian music. Through the analysis of various

songs in this study, it becomes evident that these songs unequivocally glamorize various aspects of "Yahoo-Yahoo" and Yahoo Boys, without any de-glamorization. This observation aligns with prior research, such as, Lazarus, (2018).

In our analysis, we found that certain songs, such as "Oshozondi," "Ali-Remix," and "Am I a Yahoo Boys?," heavily glamorized Yahoo Boys throughout most of their stanzas, while others did not emphasize this theme to the same extent. However, the song "YahooSweet" surpasses them all in glamorizing online fraud, as it does so with unwavering intensity in every verse and line of the song. What sets "YahooSweet" apart is its explicit and straightforward lyrics, avoiding any concealment through idioms or proverbs. An intriguing aspect of this song is that it is authored by the only female artist, Success Much, in our study. In her persuasive endorsement of "Yahoo-Yahoo," the very title "YahooSweet" captures the allure and appeal of engaging in online fraud. The song leaves no room for ambiguity, openly glamorizing the activities of Yahoo Boys.

Furthermore, "YahooSweet" utilizes a plethora of positive adjectives, including "sweet," "good," "wise," "rise," "help," and "fresh," repeatedly asserting the benefits of online fraud and enticing youths to partake in this illegal enterprise. The lyrics not only depict the profitability of Yahoo Boys' actions but also glamorize their relentless pursuit of wealth through online scams.

The opening stanza of the song forcefully encapsulates its themes of endorsement and glamorization of online fraud, leaving little doubt about the artist's stance:

*No be ojoro, na pay back o/
You fit make it o/
Yahoo sweet o, e make boys o/
E make sense o, e too good o/
Steady bombing, just to cash out/
Dem no dey thief o, say yahoo sweet o/...*

Translated to English, these lines mean:

*It's not a prank, it's payback time o/
You can truly make it o/
Yahoo is sweet (lucrative) o, it changes the fortunes of boys o/
It's a sensible venture, it's very good/
Relentless attack (on victims), just to cash out/
They're not stealing, yahoo is lucrative o/...*

The fourth stanza of "YahooSweet" below takes a provocative and historically linked approach, portraying Yahoo Boys as seeking restitution for past injustices. The song suggests that they view themselves as descendants of victims of the slave trade, economic exploitation, and colonialism, while Westerners are seen as descendants of perpetrators

or colonialists. This portrayal implies that online fraud is partly a response to historical injustices inflicted on Africans south of the Sahara by Western nations. The lyrics are as follows:

Aahaaaaa, we thank God oooooo!

We made it o, back in those days!

Oyibo play us, dem turn us to slave!

Dem useless us, but now we don wise!

We don dey rise, we no wan hide again/...

Translated to English, the above lines mean:

Aahaaaaa, we thank God oooooo!

We made it (at last) o, back in those days!

White people (colonialists) abused us, they enslaved us!

They maltreated us, but we are now smarter!

We have transcended, We don't want to hide again/...

Moreover, beyond mere glamorization, the song incorporates biblical allusions, "thanking" God for their 'victory,' attributing the 'success' of their criminality to the concept of the Gospel of Prosperity. According to religious scholars, the Gospel of Prosperity suggests that material wealth has a spiritual origin (e.g., Heuser, 2016). This blurs the line between internet fraudsters and law-abiding Nigerians, as both share a similar social-religious ethos, associating earthly riches with spiritual roots. The song implies that Yahoo Boys are no longer willing to hide their trade or success, making online fraud an attractive option for impressionable youths.

Of course, poverty and unemployment do not directly lead to crime (Newburn, 2011), but the extensive poverty in Nigeria can drive certain individuals to resort to fraudulent activities to provide for their families (Lazarus, 2023; Smith, 2017). While some artists, like gospel singer Frank Edward, use social media to distance themselves from Yahoo Boys and encourage youths to pursue legitimate means of livelihood (Daily Post, 2023), the pervasive poverty in Nigeria may lead some individuals to view fraud as a means to support their families. This aspect aligns with Merton's (1938) strain theory, which suggests that individuals may turn to illegal activities when faced with limited opportunities for success through conventional means. There is a high tendency for people to engage in fraudulent activities because the distinction between Yahoo Boys (online fraudsters) and Nigerian politicians (Yahoo Men) is not clear in terms of these activities (Lazarus, Button and Adogame, 2022; Lazarus, 2023).

The crucial observation is that, in contrast to the de-glamorization narratives, the artistic messages by singers that glorify Yahoo Boys accurately reflect the economic and social conditions of Nigerian society. According to Duncan (2017, p.33), the "authenticity of an artistic creation" includes both a representational component (aligning with its claim) and a cultural component (adhering to a contextual or cultural tradition). Therefore, it is probable that the "glamorization" theme, in both representational and cultural dimensions, would continue to be tightly related to Nigerian society's socio-economic and contextual circumstances. The glamorization of online fraud in Nigerian music, in conclusion, illuminates the intricate interaction of cultural, social, and economic elements impacting ideologies, mindsets, and attitudes toward cybercrime. Understanding the "glamorization of fraud" theme is an important insight into how some young people perceive and romanticize internet fraud. This theme also has a history in the Nigerian music industry.

6.6.2. Glamorization predates online fraud

Thus, we argue that glorifying wealthy and prominent individuals who acquired their riches through illicit means in Nigerian music predated the digitalization of fraud and music and the subsequent

glamorization of online fraudsters. This is evident in jùjú and high-life genres, songs predating the digitalization of fraud, and music also glamorize criminal actors. The extent of similarity or dissimilarity between hip-hop songs that glorify online fraud and other cultural expressions within the wider Nigerian music genre, such as jùjú and high-life. Before the commercialization of Nigerian hip-hop, a range of music genres, such as high life, frequently glorified wealthy individuals and the origins of their wealth, irrespective of whether it was acquired through legal or illegal means. Numerous instances can be found in media outlets wherein highlife musicians embody affluent individuals who have amassed wealth through dubious methods.

We posit that the glorification of wealthy individuals who acquired their riches through illicit means within traditional music genres predates the contemporary glamorization of digital fraud observed in hip-hop. Therefore, the portrayal of Yahoo Boys in hip-hop music can be interpreted as a continuation of this well-established practice, mirroring the societal groups from which they originated. It is imperative to acknowledge that before the digitalization of fraudulent practices, many Nigerians involved in diverse illicit activities, such as corruption and fraud, were lauded through musical expressions, despite the condemnation of fraudulent actions. Hence, the differentiation between these individuals and Yahoo Boys is unclear.

Nigerian music has a recurring historical trend wherein individuals engaged in unlawful activities are elevated and celebrated. It can be enlightening to take a step back to support this assertion. Illustrative examples from scholarly research showcase the following. In the 1990s, Ebenezer Obey, a renowned jùjú musician, exalted a wealthy and deceitful industrialist who, years later, faced the consequences of his actions and was hanged for murder (Adeduntan, 2016). Similarly, Ogbogu Okonji, a high-life musician, depicted Fred Ajedua, a lawyer involved in various "419 fraud" activities, as the embodiment of wealth in his song "Alusi Ego," meaning the deity of money (Conversation, 2019; Lazarus, 2019). This manifests the enduring practice within Nigerian music of glorifying individuals whose acquisition of wealth may raise ethical concerns.

In a comparable vein, Sir Shina Peters, a prominent figure in the jùjú music genre, in his album, "Mr. President," glamorized Maurice Ibekwe, renowned for amassing wealth through fraud. Additionally, Wasiu Ayinde, a prominent figure in the fuji music genre, has openly expressed his deep admiration for a notorious international fraudster in the 1990s, "Ade Bendel," through various channels, including live performances and his album "Consolidation." This serves as additional evidence supporting the idea that glorifying individuals involved in illegal activities predates the advent of digital technology and is consistent with the prevailing trend of glamorization observed in hip-hop music. However, there is a significant disparity between Nigeria's regions with regard to cybercrime production, according to Lazarus and Button (2022).

6.7. North-south divide

While comprehensive law enforcement statistical data on cybercrime production in Nigeria remains limited, an analysis of the "North-South Divide" observed that "musicians from southern Nigeria often glamorize cybercrime in their songs, unlike their northern counterparts" (Lazarus and Button, 2022, p.508). Our study further supports this observation, as we found that all thirty-three songs examined were created by artists originating from the southern region, particularly the southwestern and south-eastern regions, during the period spanning from June 2017 to July 2023.

Based on the public opinion expressed on Twitter, it appears that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) may have a tendency to arrest and prosecute more young individuals from the southern region compared to their northern counterparts (Conversation, 2022; Lazarus and Button, 2022). This raises questions about how these disparities could influence the portrayal and glorification of cybercrime in music. Similarly, cybercriminals' identities

captured in foreign nations revealed that many of them bore names commonly associated with the southern region of Nigeria⁵ (Lazarus and Button, 2022). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that prior research on interactions with cyber fraudsters has been predominantly conducted in universities located in southern Nigeria, such as the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and Obafemi Awolowo University. This geographical limitation has likely influenced the composition of research samples, which may impact the generalizability of our findings. Our study adds to the growing body of research highlighting regional disparities in portraying and glorifying cybercrime in music. It underscores the importance of considering the geographical context when interpreting research findings in and about Nigeria. Closely related to the “North-South divide” theme is the gender divide.

6.8. Male versus female musicians

Patriarchy and cultural expectations reinforce male dominance in Nigerian society (Ibrahim, 2015; Lazarus et al., 2017). Gender is situationally accomplished, socially constructed, and culturally performative, as numerous scholars have convincingly demonstrated (Chesney-Lind, 2020; Lazarus, Button and Kapend, 2022; Lazarus, 2020; Nemat et al., 2022; Linonge-Fontebo and Rabe, 2015; Oakley, 2016; Rush and Ibrahim, 2018). Our study reveals an intriguing gender disparity within the hip-hop music genre when it comes to celebrating cyber fraud. Out of the thirty-three songs examined, all were authored by male artists, with only one exception, “YahooSweet,” performed by a female artist (*SuccessMuch*), as shown in Table 2. This observation aligns with prior research in this area. Previous studies analyzing lyrics from the period between 2007 and 2017 also found that all songs portraying online fraud in a positive light were composed by male artists (Lazarus, 2018). Moreover, research on Yahoo Boys, the online fraudsters, further strengthens this gender pattern. Studies (Aransiola and Asindemade, 2011; Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019; Ojedokun and Eraye, 2012) consistently indicate that men and boys are predominantly associated with Nigerian-originated online fraudulent activities on a global scale. Even data from foreign agencies such as the FBI support the idea that the names of arrested Yahoo Boys are predominantly male. This alignment between the representation of cyber fraud in hip-hop songs and the actual demographic of online fraudsters underscores a significant gender dynamic within this domain.

The men-women imbalance also interacts with women's barriers in the Nigerian music industry. The Nigerian music industry and Nigeria as a whole suffer from pervasive sexism. Certain scholars (e.g., Eze, 2020) and news media (Daily Trust, 2023; Tribune, 2017) have drawn attention to sexism and the underrepresentation of female voices in music research. Several reports have consistently underscored women's formidable challenges in pursuing success within the Nigerian music industry (Eze, 2020; Stears, 2017; Tribune, 2017; Zikoko, 2021). Lazarus and Okolorie (2019) noted that gender disparity extends further to the financial pressures that often act as a driving force behind cybercrime, disproportionately burdening males. Consequently, these factors collectively contribute to the underrepresentation of women in both the country's cybercrime demographic and in the music that addresses this subject matter. Thus, the prominence of male artists in crafting songs that glorify cybercrime is reflective of broader societal norms and expectations concerning masculinity and success within Nigerian culture. As hip-hop artists continually contribute to shaping popular narratives, these findings offer valuable insights into the intersections between music, gender, and the portrayal of illicit activities in contemporary Nigerian society.

⁵ For a comprehensive discussion about the colonial, historical, educational, political, and economic factors influencing “the North-South Divide” in Nigeria regarding cybercrime production and prosecution, see Lazarus and Button (2022).

6.9.1. Broader implications of findings

The presence of online fraud in music lyrics on popular platforms like Spotify, Deezer, iTunes, SoundCloud, Apple Music, and YouTube can have several potential implications:

- a) **Misinformation and deception:** Lyrics that promote or glorify online fraud can mislead many listeners, not by propagating false information, but by blurring the line dividing illegal and legal activities. This can contribute to a culture that normalizes fraudulent behavior and may influence vulnerable individuals to engage in illegal activities.
- b) **Moral implications:** Including fraudulent themes in music lyrics raises moral questions regarding the responsibility of artists and platforms regarding the plights of victims. It can be seen as endorsing or glamorizing illegal activities, ignoring the suffering of victims, e.g., romance fraud.
- c) **Negative social influence:** Music taps deeply into emotions and has a powerful influence on individuals, including young people. Exposure to lyrics that endorse online fraud may normalize and romanticize these activities, increasing listeners' acceptance and participation in such criminal behavior.
- d) **Reputation and credibility:** Artists who vocalize and energize music distribution and promotion with fraudulent themes may face reputational damage. On the other hand, street hustle credibility, such as the glamorization of Yahoo Boys, may positively impact artists' credibility. Hence, whether artists supporting or condoning illicit actions may lose or gain credibility among music lovers is uncertain. Either way, our findings provide valuable insights into the depiction of online fraud and fraudsters in Nigerian hip-hop. Concomitantly, our study sheds light on the cultural and linguistic intricacies that shape music's representations of illegal actions and actors on the internet.

6.9.2. Limitations and implications

However, we admit that our study has limitations: First, it relies solely on analyzing lyrics from thirty-three Nigerian hip-hop songs on popular streaming platforms. This limitation may not comprehensively understand the broader cultural attitudes and dynamics surrounding online fraud, as it overlooks other potential data sources like interviews, surveys, or field observations. Second, the study's focus on Nigerian hip-hop songs may limit the generalizability of its findings to other contexts or genres of music. The cultural and contextual nuances specific to Nigerian hip-hop may not fully represent attitudes toward online fraud in other regions or music styles. Third, methodologically, the directed approach to the qualitative content analysis used for coding the lyrics may introduce subjectivity in interpretation, leading to potential biases in the analysis and conclusions drawn from the data. Fourth, the study solely considers songs available on popular streaming platforms, potentially overlooking other channels, e.g., social media, that may also shape attitudes toward online fraud. To strengthen the research's comprehensiveness and robustness, future studies could consider addressing these limitations and utilizing a more diverse set of data sources to capture a broader range of perspectives.

6.9.3. Unique contributions of our study

Notwithstanding the aforementioned limitations, our study is unique in several ways, providing unique insights into the subject matter and illuminating previously uncharted facets.

1. **Original Data Source:** Our study pioneers the use of music lyrics as a rich and innovative data source to investigate the theme of colonial legacies, providing a fresh perspective on this topic.
2. **Exploring Cyber Spiritualism:** Within the context of music lyrics, our study breaks new ground by delving into the concept of cyber spiritualism, an aspect hitherto unexplored in academic discourse.
3. **Historical Glamorization:** We argue that the glorification of wealthy individuals who have acquired their fortunes through illicit

means in Nigerian music predates the digital era of fraud and the subsequent glamorization of online fraudsters. This historical perspective offers valuable context.

4. **Addressing the North-South Divide:** Our study is among the first to examine the North-South Divide within the context of music lyrics, revealing the intricate ways this divide is portrayed and perpetuated.
5. **Classification of Fraud Activities:** Another groundbreaking aspect of our research is using music lyrics to classify the activities of Yahoo Boys, distinguishing between online romance scams and other forms of online fraud. This nuanced categorization enhances our understanding of their operations.
6. **Multidisciplinary Exploration of Unique Data:** Also, our study represents a unique amalgamation of many disciplines, including religious studies, cultural sociology, cyber criminology, social psychology, literary studies, and musicology. Furthermore, our study's distinctive contributions lie in its innovative use of music lyrics, which is non-traditional data from a historically underrepresented region in academic research, making it a unique contribution to the field.

These above unique qualities of our study collectively shed new light on the complex nexus between music, unintended endorsements, celebrity statecraft, technology, culture, and cybercrime victimization.

7. Conclusion

We systematically and qualitatively analyzed thirty-three Nigerian hip-hop songs from June 2017 to July 2023, accessible across nine prominent streaming platforms, including Spotify, Deezer, iTunes, SoundCloud, Apple Music, and YouTube. We explored how linguistic, cultural, spiritual, geographical, and gender factors shape the portrayal of online fraud and fraudsters in hip-hop music. We highlighted the implications of these narratives on the perception of internet fraud and cybercrime victims. The lyrical content of the identified songs revealed a multifaceted justification for the activities of internet fraudsters, creating a complex web of motives. Even though the music lyrics do not cause crime, the influence of celebrity statecraft is undeniable. This, in turn, could influence how music listeners perceive and react to victims of online fraud and cybercrime victimization detrimentally. Specifically, the songs (discussed in 6.1. and 6.2. sections) depicted victims in a dehumanizing light, exacerbating and mocking their already challenging circumstances.

This portrayal can be characterized as passive dehumanization, marked by a conspicuous absence of empathy, further perpetuating dehumanization, particularly within the context of "dating scams" (as discussed in 6.1. section). It is crucial to acknowledge that passive dehumanization carries a comparable level of influence as its active counterpart, as perpetrated by online fraudsters themselves. The evident disregard for the humanity of victims, as depicted in these lyrics, could have unsettling repercussions for society's understanding and empathy toward those victimized by internet fraudsters. Glorifying fraudulent actions may unwittingly attract unintended endorsements, and encourage similar illicit activity among susceptible audiences, contributing to sociocultural dimensions of cybercrime. We also argue that while the glorification of online fraud in hip-hop is recent, it has been a common theme in Nigerian music genres such as highlife and jùjú before the digitalization of both music and fraud. To comprehensively elucidate the factors behind the glamorization of online fraud and its perception as a viable career choice, future research should delve into unconventional data sources adept at capturing nuanced cultural attitudes, epistemologies, and dynamics at play.

Furthermore, understanding the cultural influences behind online fraud is crucial, and one concept that stands out is "cyber spiritualism." We discovered that even hip-hop music promotes blood money rituals, a topic the global hip-hop community has yet to explore. Hip-hop music

often depicts a world where traditional values, moral disengagement, and illegal activities intersect, resulting in complex themes told through intricate storytelling and multiple meanings. As hip-hop music evolves, it creates new possibilities for interpretation and constantly changes the portrayal of cyber spiritualism or Yahoo Plus. Blending culture, language, and imagination in hip-hop allows it to reflect the complexities of Nigerian society and provide a diverse representation of cybercrime and mysticism in music. Moreover, we posit that Nigerian hip-hop music has evolved into a dynamic platform for cultivating fresh imaginaries previously unexplored in cultural and cyber practices associated with Yahoo-Yahoo (online fraud) and Yahoo Plus. Indeed, it has become an active site for generating new imaginaries and terminologies, portraying Yahoo Plus's practices in a positive light instead of condemning them.

Additionally, understanding online fraud requires a multifaceted perspective that includes both victim and perpetrator viewpoints. While understanding online fraudsters through the lens of their victims offers valuable insights, 'a sole focus on victims limits our grasp of scammers, including their terminologies, worldviews, ideologies, and mindsets,' as Lazarus et al. (2023, p.15) noted. Therefore, we encourage researchers studying fraud victims to integrate insights from unconventional data sources about online fraudsters, such as music lyrics. Filling these knowledge gaps will also enhance our understanding of the vulnerabilities experienced by fraud victims and provide deeper insights into the motivations behind perceiving online fraud as a potential career path. This approach will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex and ever-evolving landscape of online fraud and cybercrime in general. Given the confluence of lyrical messages, cultural Influences, and unintended endorsements, a more robust empirical exploration of this subject would also be advantageous, acknowledging its dual nature as a regional and global phenomenon.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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