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Social media users compare internet fraudsters to Nigerian politicians

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Public opinion on social media has been defending the actions of internet fraudsters by comparing them to those of Nigerian politicians, drawing attention to efforts to root out the fraudsters while ignoring the behaviour of those in power, Suleman Lazarus writes.

Nigeria has become a global cybercrime superpower. One of the country's most prominent groups is the Yahoo Boys. Millions of people with email accounts have encountered **Yahoo Boys'scam emails**. The media coverage of high-profile **victims in the West** has been extensive,

and according to **the US Federal Bureau of Investigation**, Yahoo Boys ranked as the third worst group globally.

The Yahoo Boys defraud victims using two broad techniques. One is the use of Romance Scams in which scammers victimise individuals **by developing fake love affairs** on dating websites or apps. The other is Business Email Compromise, where scammers hack into or duplicate the business **emails of organisations and businesses** to trick unsuspecting company representatives into transferring large amounts of funds or sensitive information to them. Specific statistics about the value of Yahoo Boys' scams do not exist. But the broader cost of fraud in the UK alone has been estimated at **£9 billion a year**.

The moniker "Yahoo Boy" is based on the scammer's dominance of **Yahoo emails, apps, and instant messaging** in the mid-2000s. Yahoo Boys are **primarily men**. Some of them are graduates, students, and dropouts from **tertiary institutions**. Those who live in Nigeria mostly live in **urban areas** with the efficient banking and technology facilities required to run their scamming industries. They are not a centralised and instead **operate independently or in small groups** depending on the nature of the scam operation. Some high-profile Yahoo Boys have associations with **Nigerian musicians and the music industry**, which enables their ill-gotten gains to be laundered internationally.

Men and Boys

Yahoo Boys are not the only group tarnishing Nigeria's image. Politicians of all stripes have been implicated in embezzling public funds. Ex-presidents such as **Sani Abacha** and **Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida** have embezzled billions of US dollars. Former governors such as **James Ibori** of Delta State and **Bola Tinubu** of Lagos State have been implicated in fraudulent practices. Many **local government** councillors have also been involved in corrupt practices. In 2016, a

government minister said **US\$ 6.8 billion was stolen between 2006 and 2013 alone.**

All the same

Similarities between these politicians and Yahoo Boys are being highlighted across social media, particularly Twitter, where many users draw attention to the differences in power between the two groups in order to show support to the internet fraudsters.

Many Nigerians on social media compare **Ibrahim Magu** to **Ramon Olorunwa Abbas, a.k.a. Hushpuppi**. Magu is a former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, despite accusations of fraudulent practices. Hushpuppi is a high-profile internet fraudster who was recently sentenced to over 11 years in prison in the United States. Public expressions on social media merge the names of Mr. Ibrahim Magu and Hushpuppi as “Hush Ibrahim,” “Hush Magu,” and “Puppi Magu.”



Hushpuppi began his career as a second-hand clothes seller in Nigeria, but by 2017 he lived in a **penthouse apartment at the Palazzo Versace in Dubai**. He gained **millions of followers on Instagram and Snapchat**, where he frequently posted about his opulent lifestyle. When he was arrested in 2020, he was **in possession of \$40 million in cash**, 13 luxury cars, and about two million addresses of alleged victims.

In contrast, Mr Magu earned a BSc in Accounting and joined the Nigerian Police Force as an **Assistant Superintendent of Police in 1990**.

Before his appointment at the EFCC, he was a member of **the Special Fraud Unit** of the Nigeria Police Criminal Investigations Department, where he served as a team leader in charge of Financial Crimes, **Money Laundering**, and Advance Fee Fraud investigation.

It's what I say, not what I do

The comparison of **Hushpuppi and Ibrahim Magu** on social media using a technique of "**advantageous comparison**" highlights the general public's trivialisation of online fraudsters' economic actions in a country where political bribery is commonplace.

In Nigeria, there is a linguistic and moral distinction between a bribe and a "dash." A "dash" is a local term for a gift. But a **dash can easily merge into a bribe**, depending on the givers' intentions and circumstances.

Both politicians and the Yahoo Boys bribe/dash **to advance their careers**. Many Yahoo Boys **bribe bankers** and "dash" money to people in their communities to be loved. Similarly, politicians use "**stomach infrastructure**" to win elections. Stomach infrastructure is a phenomenon whereby politicians bribe voters with food items. **Gift-giving wins elections** in Nigeria. During elections, politicians systematically "dash" edible items, such as bags of rice, dried fish, and powdered milk, to voters to receive their votes. The stomach infrastructure strategy is highly effective: most Nigerians cannot afford three square meals daily. **Unemployment** is commonplace.

Yahoo Boys and politicians have been involved in **similar bribery and fraud practices**. Social media is just calling out the similarities. One person's bribe is another's dash.

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About the author



Dr. Suleman Lazarus is a Visiting Fellow at the Mannheim Centre for Criminology, London School of Economics and Political Science. Previously, he was a Visiting Researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. He obtained a multidisciplinary Ph.D. from the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, the University of Portsmouth, UK. His main research interests include cybercriminals and society, and behaviour and technology. His multidisciplinary research has been published in high-quality journals such as "Telematics and Informatics" and "Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking." He tweets at @DrSLazarus.

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