



Strategic business movements? The migration of online romance fraudsters from Nigeria to Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study used an emic approach to examine the dynamics of online romance fraud, focusing on the migration of offenders from Nigeria to Ghana. We collected data through qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Ghanaian police officers and Nigerian law enforcement officers were consulted for their perspectives. Thematic analysis revealed key findings, including the migration patterns of Nigerian offenders to Ghana and the institutionalisation of scamming enterprises. These findings shed light on the transnational and structural factors driving online romance fraud in West Africa, highlighting both its global reach and the local mechanisms sustaining these criminal networks. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of regional and international cybercrime dynamics, offering valuable insights to inform policy and law enforcement strategies.

1. Introduction

Fraudster: “Honey, your sparkle always lights up my heart.” Victim: “Oh, hmmm, I love you, darling.” Fraudster: “Me too. I can’t wait to hold you in my arms. But there’s a little problem.” Victim: “What is it, honey?” Fraudster: “I urgently need a small amount of money to hasten the process of my travelling documents and visa.” Victim: “How much do you need, darling?” (Lazarus, 2018, p.64). While such exchanges are the hallmark of online romance fraud, these tactics are emblematic of fraud networks operating across West Africa.

A qualitative study commissioned by the UK Home Office identified West African nations, including Ghana and Nigeria, as high-risk jurisdictions for fraud, particularly in schemes targeting Western countries (Button et al., 2024). The search for love in the digital era often draws individuals to

online connections, sometimes with serious repercussions (Button et al., 2024; Soares and Lazarus, 2024). For instance, Laura Francis from North Carolina believed she was in a relationship with a wealthy European surgeon, only to be duped by a West African fraudster, losing \$200,000 (WRAL News, 2022). Similarly, scammers posing as Hollywood actor Brad Pitt befriended and swindled a French woman out of over \$850,000 before being traced to Nigeria, West Africa (France24, 2025). Cases like these highlight the deceptive nature and significant risks of online romance fraud. Romance fraud affects victims beyond financial loss, profoundly impacting their lives. In January 2024, the BBC News report highlighted the tragic case where Spanish police arrested a suspect involved in the killing of three siblings, driven by debts from online romance scams (BBC News, 2024). This case illustrates how romance fraud can escalate from financial exploitation to threats against personal safety, with devastating consequences.

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While romantic deception for financial gain is not new, online dating platforms have significantly expanded the scope and efficiency of these crimes (Wang, 2022, 2023; Wang and Topalli, 2024; Soares and Lazarus, 2024). Technology's impact on social interaction is clear in dating, where online connections often replace traditional romance forms (Wang, 2022, 2023; Wang and Topalli, 2024; Soares and Lazarus, 2024; Bilz et al., 2023; Lazarus et al., 2023a; Kwok and Wescott, 2020). This shift has reshaped romantic dynamics and opened new avenues for exploitation (Soares and Lazarus, 2024; Kwok and Wescott, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020). Unlike other financial scams, online romance fraud involves building emotional connections to exploit victims for financial gain (Bilz et al., 2023; Lazarus et al., 2023a; Cross, 2018, 2015; Meikle and Cross, 2024a; Snyder and Golladay, 2024).

The migration of offenders plays a key role in the dynamics of romance scams in Anglophone West Africa. Our study is the first to identify Nigerians operating in Ghana as romance scammers, exploring this migration's spatial and sociocultural aspects from both scammers' and police officers' perspectives. As a transnational, network-based crime, cybercrime has drawn the attention of geographers who highlight its spatial and contextual nature (Hudson, 2014; Hall and Ziemer, 2024; Hall and Yarwood, 2024). Geographical analysis underlines the global relevance of cybercrime actors, long overlooked in discourse (Hall and Ziemer, 2024; Hall and Yarwood, 2024; Chen et al., 2023). Like many geographers, we reject traditional-Euclidian notions of space, embracing a relational, multi-scalar approach that examines cybercrime's spatial and social dimensions (Hall and Yarwood, 2024; Ferreira and Vale, 2021; Malecki, 2017; Lazarus and Button, 2022).

Cyberspace, often seen as a disembodied, hyperconnected realm, is better understood as a 'sociotechnical network' where online activities are tied to offline realities, grounding cybercrime in specific geographical and socio-political contexts (Hall and Ziemer, 2024; Hall and Yarwood, 2024; Ferreira and Vale, 2021; Lazarus and Button, 2022). The migration of internet scammers from Nigeria to Ghana illustrates these dynamics. Cybercrime is unevenly distributed and disproportionately linked to certain regions (Lazarus and Button, 2022; Kigerl, 2012, 2016; Kshetri, 2013). Political legacies, educational systems, and economic history in Nigeria shape localised processes that drive global cybercrime (Lazarus and Button, 2022). The shift to Ghana continues these regional patterns and reflects broader transnational movements within the cybercriminal community, making it a key area for geographical scrutiny.

Understanding how individuals construct and interpret their social realities is essential. The idea that an individual is like an insect entangled in cultural webs, requiring analysis of significance and subjective experience is relevant (Geertz, 1973). Early social psychologists (Thomas, 1923; Tannenbaum, 1938) and cultural sociologists (Thomas, 1923; Tannenbaum, 1938) explored this intersection. Even in cyberspace, cybercriminals' actions are socially and situationally constructed (Lazarus, Button and Adogame, 2022). Classifying scammers as a distinct "sub-culture" is problematic because individuals are like insects entangled in sociocultural webs, requiring analysis of subjective experiences (Geertz, 1973; Thomas, 1923; Tannenbaum, 1938; Lazarus et al., 2022; Becker, 1967; Abubakari and Blaszczyk, 2023; Alhassan and Ridwan, 2023). We leverage these insights to address the following question:

- How do the migration patterns of Nigerian offenders and the institutionalisation of cybercrime shape the online romance fraud phenomenon in Ghana?

This article¹ uses "scam" and "fraud" interchangeably, reflecting common public and institutional usage versus the academic preference

for "fraud" to emphasise legal and criminological weight, Soares and Lazarus (2024). To maintain accessibility while acknowledging the gravity of these crimes, both terms are incorporated. Empirical studies (Wang and Topalli, 2024; Soares and Lazarus, 2024; Wang and Zhou, 2022), non-empirical papers (Bilz et al., 2023; Lazarus et al., 2023a; Cross, 2023; Whittaker et al., 2024), and doctoral dissertations (e.g., Wang, 2023) examined romance scams. We focus on online offenders but outline empirical studies on both victims and offenders, as outlined in Table 1.

2. Method and materials

2.1. Data collection

We chose a qualitative design to capture the complex dynamics of online fraud migration and law enforcement experiences. This study utilised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to examine the experiences of Ghanaian and Nigerian law enforcement officers regarding the migration of Nigerian online fraudsters to Ghana. All participants were men, as outlined in Table 2. All Ghanaian police officers were recruited and consulted in person. Additionally, seven Nigerian operatives were consulted via online communications. Online consultations were selected for their convenience and to eliminate the logistical challenges associated with travel.

All consultations were conducted in English and served as the primary data collection method, enabling an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. A focus group discussion with three Ghanaian officers complemented the individual interviews. Although focus group discussions typically involve four to ten participants, the study's unique context resulted in a smaller group. Initially, only one officer had agreed to an interview. However, upon the interviewer's arrival, two additional officers who had observed a prior interview with their colleague joined informally after a brief private exchange. Seeing the potential of this interaction, the interviewer extended a formal invitation for them to participate, turning the planned one-on-one interview into a spontaneous focus group discussion. Despite its smaller size, the three-person focus group discussion provided valuable data. The spontaneous group dynamic encouraged shared viewpoints and enriched the research findings. All consultations, including online and offline communications and focus group discussions, were conducted in English to ensure consistency. The primary questions centred on key themes, particularly the migration of Nigerian online offenders to Ghana, as detailed in Table 3. The study received ethical approval from the author's university, and all participants provided informed consent before taking part, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards.

2.2. Data analysis

All conversations were transcribed and anonymised before undergoing a systematic three-phase coding process. First, open coding was applied, generating descriptive labels based on initial observations in the data. Next, focused coding was used to identify patterns and relationships among these initial codes. In the final phase, thematic refinement was conducted by grouping related codes into sub-themes and broader overarching themes. Both explicit (semantic) and implicit (latent) relationships between the codes were analysed to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of participants' narratives, following Braun & Clarke's framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The coding process was carried out manually, enabling systematic organisation, retrieval, and comparison of the data through an iterative and hands-on approach. Three members of the research team collaborated to review and refine the preliminary themes, enhancing the reliability and rigour of the analysis. Any discrepancies in coding interpretations were resolved through discussions, fostering consensus and a shared comprehension of the data. Reflexivity played a pivotal role

¹ Our research report is classified as a *Short Communication* rather than a *Full Research Article*. Given this classification, we prioritised conciseness over extensive elaboration, which may have limited the level of detail provided in certain sections.

Table 1
Empirical studies on romance fraud.

Studies in Year Order	Approach	Data Source Perspectives	Sample Size (n =)	Core Findings
(Snyder and Golladay, 2024)	Qualitative	Victims	1511	It finds that 44 % of social media and dating app users experienced catfishing in the past five years, with risk factors shaped by both online and offline behaviours.
(Abubakari, 2024)	Qualitative	Offenders	27	The study identifies seven stages fraudsters use to target Western victims: creating fake profiles, reconnaissance, building trust, scamming, reinventing the truth, recruiting victims as partners, and abandonment.
(Kopp et al., 2015).	Qualitative	Offenders	37	Deceptive dating profiles tailored for specific scams; adaptable during grooming.
(Soares and Lazarus, 2024)	Qualitative	Offenders	50	The findings show that 56 % of victims are from the U.S., 58 % of offenders use Apple iPhones, and 46 % pose as Caucasian American males. Female victims make up 70 % of cases.
(Cole, 2024)	Qualitative	Victims	19	The findings reveal short- and long-term impacts on victims' health, legal, and financial well-being. Victims face obstacles to legal justice, with disenfranchised victimization occurring when their experiences are invalidated, leading to marginalisation.
(Whitty, 2015)	Qualitative	Victims	20	Psychological effects similar in monetary and non-monetary victims; financial losses compound impact.
(Modic and Anderson, 2015)	Quantitative	Victims	6609	Romance scams elicit profound emotional responses; trust cultivation critical in scams.
(Luu et al., 2017).	Quantitative	Public	399	Coping appraisal and attitude influence adoption of protective measures in online dating.
(Drew and Webster, 2024)	Qualitative	Victims	17	Psychological experiences of victims, highlighting their vulnerabilities, victim journeys, and the devastating impacts of this crime, while offering victim-centric strategies to educate potential victims.
(Saad et al., 2018).	Quantitative	Victims	280	Malaysians aged 25–45, educated, lacking computer skills, are more vulnerable to romance scams.
(Cross et al., 2018).	Qualitative	Victims	21	Identifies eight categories of psychological abuse in romance scam victims, linking to domestic violence.
(Lazarus et al., 2023b).	Qualitative	Offenders	33	It reveals that hip-hop songs from 2017 to 2023 glamorise and justify online fraud while dehumanising victims, influencing societal attitudes toward cybercrime victimisation.
(Aborisade et al., 2024).	Qualitative	Victims	10	Nigerian offenders primarily target middle-aged women with troubled marriages or widows with inherited wealth, using prolonged friendships and emotional blackmail, leading to financial losses and emotional consequences.
(Shaari et al., 2019).	Qualitative	Victims	60	Romance scams in Malaysia use politeness strategies, adapt local elements for credibility.
(Meikle and Cross, 2024b)	Qualitative	Victims	39	It challenges assumptions about fraud victims' aversion to seeking help, revealing that despite victim-blaming and stigmatisation, many romance fraud victims actively pursue explicit and implicit help-seeking behaviours.
(Cassiman, 2019)	Qualitative	Offenders	N/A	Deception leads to "creative cultural moments"; subtle distinction between acceptable and unacceptable deception.
(Anesa, 2020)	Qualitative	Offenders	49	Romance scam messages follow structural patterns to establish trust and emotional dependence.
(Carter, 2020)	Qualitative	Victims	1	Manipulative tactics, not just romantic ideals, drive victims to fall prey; financial requests should be concealed.
(Suarez-Tangil et al., 2020).	Quantitative	Offenders	20122	System identifies deceptive profiles via text analysis; scammers can evade detection by replicating genuine profiles.
(Offei et al., 2020).	Quantitative	Offenders	320	Offenders use denial of victim effect; recognise difficulty in disclaiming responsibility for psychological and monetary losses.
(Cross and Holt, 2021)	Mixed Methods	Victims	2478	Early advice on romance scams can significantly reduce scam likelihood on dating platforms.
(Cross and Layt, 2021)	Qualitative	Victims	2671	Gender does not determine vulnerability; lower income associated with higher likelihood of falling victim to military scam tactics.
(Lazarus et al., 2025).	Qualitative	Offenders and police officers	13 offenders and 5 officers	Offenders and police officers use neutralisation techniques to justify their actions, including denial of responsibility, condemnation of the condemners, and appeals to higher loyalties. Notably, fraudsters frame their scams as reparative justice, claiming they are reclaiming wealth lost to colonial exploitation.

Table 2
Groups of participants: Ghana and Nigeria

Participant Group	Number	Gender	Description
Law Enforcement Officers (Ghana)	N = 5	Men	(a) Interviews with two law enforcement officers on Nigerian fraudsters operating in Ghana. (b) Focus group discussion with three officers on Nigerian fraudsters operating in Ghana.
Law Enforcement Officers (Nigeria)	N = 7	Men	Online consultations with officers from the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Nigerian fraudsters operating in Ghana.

throughout this process, with the research team, composed of members from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, engaging in continuous self-reflection. This critical examination helped identify and address potential influences of their individual assumptions and lived experiences on the interpretation of the data. The identified themes are in Table 3.

3. Findings and discussion

Our analysis identified two key themes: 1. Migration of Offenders, and 2. Institutionalisation of Scamming. The thematic analysis below offers insights into the phenomenon of online romance fraud in Ghana.

3.1. Migration of online offenders

Participants provided insights into the presence of Nigerian romance scammers operating in Ghana. This study is the first to explicitly identify Nigerians in Ghana as both romance fraudsters and cybercriminals more broadly. Despite differences in ethnic populations, Nigeria and Ghana share many similarities, including membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which allows free movement among its fifteen member states (Orji, 2019). These shared traits, such as British colonialism, English as the official language, and similar independence timelines (Orji, 2019; Kirk-Greene, 2022) help explain why offenders migrate from Nigeria to Ghana.

Ghana is the closest Anglophone country to Nigeria despite not sharing a border. Another reason for this migration could be that Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is the leading law enforcement agency in West Africa for combating cybercrime (Lazarus and Okolorie, 2019; Orji, 2019), while Ghana's cybercrime force is still developing (Abubakari and Blaszczyk, 2023; Torsu, 2024). The intensified cybercrime policing in Nigeria has prompted many Yahoo Boys to relocate to Ghana, where enforcement efforts remain comparatively less stringent. This shift highlights the adaptive and strategic nature of cybercriminals, who exploit jurisdictional differences to sustain their operations and evade law enforcement. However, the escalation of enforcement in Nigeria has also exposed the underestimated potential for violence among Yahoo Boys. According to the EFCC, (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission EFCC, 2025) turning point in this regard occurred on January 17, 2025, with the tragic killing of Assistant Superintendent of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Aminu Sahabi Harisu, allegedly by internet fraudster Joshua Chukwubueze Ikechukwu. Previously, Yahoo Boys were primarily viewed as non-violent hustlers with little evidence of violent tendencies. This incident underlines the evolving risks in cybercrime enforcement and the intensity of the EFCC in cybercrime enforcement, unlike their Ghanaian counterparts. Concerning the migration of cybercriminals from Nigeria to Ghana, two officers from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have provided insights:

"Based on my personal experience in 2022, extraditing an offender from Ghana to Nigeria is difficult after a botched arrest... The pressure from Nigerian law enforcement, especially the EFCC, is why they migrate. The anti-corruption group in Ghana needs to join forces with its Nigerian counterparts to fight scammers in both countries. The immigration authorities of the two countries also need to collaborate for effective interception of scammers across the border." (Officer-one)

Another EFCC agent outlined the reasons:

"Several factors contribute to the migration of Internet fraudsters from Nigeria to Ghana. One is the fear of prosecution and forfeiture of criminal proceeds to the Nigerian government. Two, the fear of local anti-corruption agencies publishing their pictures on social media. Three, using Bank Verification Numbers in Nigeria, which links accounts to cybercriminals, makes local banks unattractive. They prefer to conduct transactions elsewhere. I believe too that the lack of a government database in Ghana is a factor, giving them almost a ghost-like status." (Officer-two)

Nigerian internet offenders may view Ghana as a safer place for scams, as they do not need a visa to travel within West Africa. Integrating Nigerian criminals in Ghana challenges the idea that cyberspace is detached from physical geography. Digital geographers emphasise that cyberspace is closely tied to offline realities (Hall and Ziemer, 2024; Hall and Yarwood, 2024). Understanding societal dynamics is key to explaining the worldviews and migration patterns of romance scam perpetrators in West Africa. Given the importance of online offenders in this region (Soares and Lazarus, 2024; Hall and Yarwood, 2024; Lazarus and Button, 2022; Abubakari and Blaszczyk, 2023; Alhassan and Ridwan, 2023; Abubakari, 2024), researchers should broaden their focus beyond the North Atlantic to explore global contexts, as scholars have generally noted about crime (Carrington et al., 2019; Hall and Yarwood, 2024; Moosavi, 2019). The migration of scammers from Nigeria to Ghana has important implications for researchers, policymakers, and law enforcement, highlighting the need for collaboration to exchange knowledge and adapt to evolving cybercrime dynamics in West Africa. This migration phenomenon, previously unexamined by prior research in Ghana (Abubakari and Blaszczyk, 2023; Alhassan and Ridwan, 2023; Abubakari, 2024; Abubakari, 2023) and Nigeria, (Soares and Lazarus, 2024; Aransiola and Asindemade, 2011; Garba et al., 2024) is closely linked to the institutionalisation of scamming enterprises.

3.2. Institutionalisation of scamming

Law enforcement officials shed light on the institutionalisation and proliferation of romance scams involving both Nigerian and Ghanaian nationals in Ghana. One officer commented: *"Some of the scammers, you see, are not even Ghanaians, they're Nigerians..."* Another officer emphasised that a significant portion of their caseload is attributed to romance fraud, a prevalent issue. He remarked: *Our cases are romance fraud... accounting for 70% of the total cases handled in our office.* Furthermore, another officer described how romance scams have evolved into organised entities, citing instances where law enforcement raids uncovered large groups of romance scammers cohabiting. He noted, *"Yes, it has now become what I would describe as an institution because we have conducted raids on certain properties and discovered 26 to 30 individuals in a single house engaged in cyber-related offences under a single leadership."* Similarly, an EFCC officer referred to these 'institutions' or 'academies' as *"hustle kingdoms,"* which translates into academies dedicated to teaching the fundamentals of online scams. While the cohabitation and collaboration of numerous criminal actors may suggest an organised group, the insights above necessitate further examination.

The statements of the police officers indicate that romance scamming in Ghana is similar to large groups of romance scammers in China. However, unlike the Chinese offenders in China, (Wang and Topalli, 2024) these "26 to 30" individuals were not coerced into engaging in

Table 3
Thematic summary of online romance fraud.

Theme	Definition	Labels	Characteristics	Subthemes/Sub-codes
Theme 1: Migration of Romance Fraudsters	The migration of Nigerian offenders to Ghana for online romance fraud activities.	Migration of Romance Fraudsters	- Factors driving migration include differences in law enforcement practices between Ghana and Nigeria. - Ghana is seen as a "safer" destination for cybercrime due to weaker law enforcement and the absence of a government database. - Nigerian scammers migrate to avoid the EFCC's crackdown, prosecution, and local social media exposure. - Instances of multiple offenders living together to execute scams, revealing a semi-organised nature of the crime. - Concept of "cybercrime academies" where offenders are trained, mentored, and housed together. - These institutions facilitate romance fraud, providing housing and mentorship akin to apprenticeships for new scammers.	Differential Law Enforcement Practices, Responses by Nigerian and Ghanaian Authorities, Cybercrime Opportunities in Ghana
Theme 2: Institutionalisation of Scamming	The establishment of cohabiting networks of scammers, forming semi-organised cybercrime institutions.	Institutionalisation, Growth		Systemic Nature, "Organised" Cybercrime, Scam "Academies," Global Expansion of Romance Fraud

criminal activities, nor were they victims of organised crime syndicates because "...it is a game for them [offenders] in Ghana", according to a police officer. Furthermore, while the officers' testimonies imply that romance scam activities in Ghana can be classified as organised crime, broader research on cybercriminal networks (Leukfeldt et al., 2017a, 2017b, 2017c; Lusthaus et al., 2023) indicates that cybercrime actors are typically network-oriented.

Specifically, researchers (Lazarus, 2024; Eski and Sergi, 2023) elaborate that most online offenders operate within network-based structures rather than conforming to a mafia-style hierarchy. The notion of "mafia-cation" may be conceptualised as an augmentation to network-based criminality, extending beyond mere cohabitation and collaboration among scammers (cf. Lazarus, 2024). We argued that the cohabitation of offenders in Accra city might be attributed to either the high cost of rent for novice online scammers or the provision of accommodation and training by seasoned scammers, akin to a mentorship program, facilitating support and guidance for newcomers. Nonetheless, the institutionalisation of these cybercrimes has global implications. West African digital fraudsters are an increasingly significant concern. "Hustle kingdoms" are gaining traction in parts of Ghana and Nigeria (Lazarus and Button, 2024; Lazarus and Soares, 2025). Graduates of these institutions, hustle academies, along with their associates, have expanded their operations globally, leading to a rise in online romance scams and sextortion cases in the United States, Oceania, Asia and Europe (Lazarus and Button, 2024; Lazarus and Soares, 2025).

4. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of online romance fraud, it is not without limitations. The reliance on qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, may introduce subjective biases, both from participants and researchers. The small sample size, particularly the limited number of law enforcement officers consulted, restricts the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the researchers, though reflexively considered, could have influenced the interpretation of the data, highlighting the need for further studies with broader and more diverse perspectives.

5. Empirical contributions

This study is the first to identify traces of Nigerian cybercriminals operating in the Ghanaian context. Unlike studies that rely on victims' perspectives (Cole, 2024; Saad et al., 2018; Carter, 2020; Cross and Holt, 2021; Cross and Layt, 2021) offenders' profiles (Soares and Lazarus, 2024) and perspectives (Abubakari, 2024) and online data sources, e.g., dating profiles, (Kopp et al., 2015) dating messages, (Anesa, 2020) and Facebook comments (Abubakari and Blaszczyk, 2023), this study provides insights from direct testimonies of officers from both Ghana and Nigeria on Nigerian fraudsters operating in Ghana.

6. Recommendations for addressing identified issues

Based on the findings of the migration of romance fraudsters and the institutionalisation of scamming, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and researchers to effectively address these challenges.

1. Strengthening Cross-Border Law Enforcement Collaboration

- Establish a bilateral task force between Nigeria's EFCC and Ghanaian law enforcement to improve intelligence-sharing, extradition processes, and joint cybercrime investigations.
- Facilitate real-time information exchange through an integrated West African Cybercrime Database, enhancing the tracking of known offenders.

- Strengthen the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) security framework to monitor the movement of cybercriminals across borders.
2. Enhancing Cybercrime Enforcement and Prosecution in Ghana
 - Invest in capacity building for Ghanaian cybercrime units, equipping officers with forensic tools and investigative training similar to Nigeria's EFCC.
 - Introduce legislative reforms in Ghana to align cybercrime penalties with Nigeria's enforcement framework, reducing legal loopholes that offenders exploit.
 - Implement Bank Verification Number (BVN) systems in Ghana to improve financial tracking and disrupt cybercriminal networks' ability to launder money.
 3. Disrupting the Institutionalisation of Scamming (Hustle Kingdoms)
 - Target organised scam networks through specialised cyber task forces capable of identifying and dismantling scam academies operating in urban areas.
 - Strengthen landlord and rental property regulations to prevent large-scale cohabitation of cybercriminals under a single leadership.
 - Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate at-risk youths about the risks of recruitment into cybercrime and the legal consequences.
 4. Improving Extradition and Regional Cooperation Mechanisms
 - Address challenges in extraditing offenders from Ghana to Nigeria by negotiating streamlined procedures under ECOWAS judicial cooperation agreements.
 - Establish a regional legal framework that enables fast-tracking of cybercrime cases across jurisdictions.
 - Enhance immigration and border security screening to identify known cybercriminals relocating from Nigeria to Ghana.
 5. Encouraging Further Research on Cybercrime Networks in West Africa
 - Expand empirical research on cybercriminal migration trends and their economic and social impacts in Ghana.
 - Promote collaboration between academics, law enforcement, and policymakers to develop evidence-based interventions.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the dynamics of romance scams in Ghana, focusing on the movement of Nigerian offenders into the country. Our findings reveal that this migration has significant implications for regional law enforcement and policy. Ghana's proximity to Nigeria, as the nearest Anglophone country, makes it an appealing destination for Nigerian scammers. This is further driven by the effectiveness of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in combating cybercrime, prompting offenders to relocate to evade prosecution. This trend underscores the need for stronger collaboration between Ghanaian and Nigerian law enforcement agencies. Additionally, coordinated efforts across West Africa and beyond are essential to addressing the evolving nature of cybercrime in the region.

The institutionalisation of scamming in Ghana is equally significant. The emergence of large groups of scammers operating under a single leadership suggests that romance scams have evolved into sophisticated enterprises. However, unlike organised crime syndicates in other contexts, these groups function more as network-based entities rather than hierarchical organisations. This network-oriented structure may be

influenced by factors such as high rent costs in Accra and other major cities, leading to cohabitation among novice fraudsters, or by seasoned fraudsters offering mentorship to newcomers. We encourage scholars to expand their research beyond the North Atlantic and explore global contexts, e.g., in West Africa.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Soares Adebayo Benedict: Investigation, Data curation. **Garba Kaina Habila:** Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Validation. **Button Mark:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis, Supervision, Validation. **Hughes Mariata:** Investigation, Data curation. **Lazarus Suleman:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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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