

THE TERROR OF THE 'AFRICAN PRINCE' AND THE ANTIDOTE OF MARTIN BUBER'S "I-THOU" RELATIONSHIP

Dr. Ratzinger E. E. Nwobodo (Ph.D)

Philosophy Department

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

Email: ratzingerjunor2020@gmail.com

Abstract:

One of the prevalent crises in contemporary African society is the unbridled exploits of the "African Prince", more commonly referred to as Yahoo Yahoo, Nigerian Scam Prince, E-Fraud, or internet fraud. It is the act of scamming or defrauding people of their hard-earned money through the internet. This notorious act has gained so much inroad in Africa, particularly Nigeria, such that Nigerians, over the years, have picked up the negative stereotype, the den of fraudsters. While one might argue that the poor economic trajectory of the country is pushing the youths into this nefarious act, this leaves one wondering about the fate of their victims, who often harm themselves or even die untimely, after being defrauded of their hard-earned money. Despite the adverse impact of the acts on victims, the African princes continue to thrive in their exploitation. It is in light of this that this paper argues that the reason behind the unabating nefarious act is that the African prince does not see the other as a human being, but as an object to be exploited. Therefore, adopting an expository and critical analytical methodology, the paper argues that Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relationship can serve as a possible amelioration to the onslaught of the African prince. The paper relies on secondary sources such as online journal articles, the Library, and the internet.

Keywords: African Prince, Yahoo Yahoo, E-Fraud, Nigerian Scam Prince, I-Thou Relationship.

Introduction:

Chukwuemeka Daniel (2012) in his doctoral thesis, "That 'African Prince' who keeps sending you Emails: E-fraud Economy in postcolonial Nigerian Literary and cultural texts," used the concept of 'African Prince' to refer to cybercrime, more commonly known as Yahoo Yahoo. Yahoo is generally known as an internet fraud. It is the act of defrauding unsuspecting victims through the internet. In Africa, Yahoo Yahoo has become a hobby horse. It has become a full-time job for some youths. At its mention, one already knows that it is internet fraud that is being referred to. The spate of internet fraud has brewed a negative stereotype about Africa, such that at the mention of Africa, it is quickly associated with fraud.

The negative stereotype associated with Nigerians is particularly pronounced in global discourse, where the average Nigerian is often pre-judged as a scammer or fraudster, even before being allowed to demonstrate otherwise. This perception is compounded by the widespread prevalence of internet fraud, commonly referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo", especially among Nigerian youth. The increasing allure of extravagant and ostentatious lifestyles has driven many young people to engage in cybercrime as a means of achieving material success. The operations of so-called Yahoo boys have become so conspicuous and normalised that the need for discretion has significantly diminished. Despite public denunciations, there appears to be a tacit societal tolerance, or at least a level of resignation, towards internet fraud within certain segments of the population. It is not uncommon for individuals engaged in other forms of criminal activity to self-identify as Yahoo boys, given the relatively higher level of social acceptability associated with cyber fraud (Adeniran, 2008). Notably, Yahoo boys have grown increasingly defiant and visible in their conduct (Ojiego, 2011), often marked by distinctive features such as dreadlocked hairstyles and sagging trousers, which have become symbolic of their subcultural identity (Uchenna, 2012).

The normalisation of internet fraud in certain quarters of Nigerian society is further reflected in a troubling erosion of moral standards. In some cases, parents and guardians not only condone but openly celebrate the material success achieved by their wards through fraudulent means. Simultaneously, law enforcement agencies have been criticised for their apparent indifference toward these crimes (Uchenna, 2012), with some accounts indicating direct complicity in the enjoyment of proceeds from such illicit activities. Yahoo boys generally exhibit little fear of the police or other enforcement bodies, including the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). This lack of apprehension stems from the widespread perception and reported reality that arrests can be swiftly resolved through bribery, effectively circumventing prosecution and accountability (Nhan et al., 2009; Smith, 2007; Tade & Aliyu, 2011).

Several arguments have been advanced in an attempt to justify the prevalence of internet fraud in Nigeria, with poor governance and widespread poverty frequently cited as underlying causes. Kolawole (2010) contends that prolonged exposure to corruption, economic hardship, and high rates of unemployment has contributed to the societal normalisation of "Yahoo-Yahoo" practices within certain segments of the population. While it may be reasonable to argue that Nigeria's challenging economic conditions have driven some youths toward such illicit activities, this rationale raises a critical ethical concern regarding the victims of fraud. These individuals, often defrauded of their life savings, are left to bear profound psychological and financial trauma. In some cases, victims have reportedly suffered severe emotional distress or died prematurely as a result of their losses. It is important to recognise that these victims are also human beings with legitimate needs and vulnerabilities, underscoring the moral cost of rationalising cyber fraud.

Sadly, despite the adverse impact of the acts on victims, African Princes continue to thrive in their exploits. It is in light of this that this paper argues that the reason behind the unabating nefarious act is that the African prince does not see the other as a human being, but as an object to be exploited. The African prince engages his victims as a thing to be exploited rather than a human being. This is why, no matter the sad stories of victims who were defrauded, African princes do not relent. Therefore, adopting an expository and critical analytical methodology, the paper argues that the concept of Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, which advocates for a relationship where the other is viewed as fully human and not a mere object, can serve as a possible amelioration to the onslaught of the African prince. It is on this background that this paper is divided into three sections: The first part is focused on the detailed exploration of the African Prince or Yahoo Yahoo; the second section explores the concept of "I-Thou" relationship in Martin Buber; and the final section explores how Martin Buber's "I -thou" relationship can mitigate the onslaught of the African Prince.

A panoramic understanding of African Prince, Yahoo-Yahoo or Nigerian Scam Prince.

A critical starting point for understanding the sociocultural dynamics underpinning cyber fraud in Nigeria lies in examining the meanings associated with terms such as "African Prince," "Nigerian Scam Prince," "Yahoo-Yahoo," and "Yahoo Boys." These labels reflect the distinctive narratives and stereotypes often linked to cybercriminal activities originating from the region. Notably, the term "Yahoo Boys" emphasises a gendered dimension of the phenomenon, with participants predominantly identified as male, a pattern highlighted by Olaiya et al. (2010). At the core of these constructs is a unifying theme: fraudulent activity.

"Yahoo-Yahoo" refers to a range of deceptive practices aimed at unlawfully acquiring financial assets or valuables from unsuspecting individuals, primarily through the use of digital technologies such as computers and smartphones. These fraudulent schemes often rely on emotional manipulation, including fabricated narratives about political instability in Africa, impersonation of government officials in fictitious contract dealings, or posing as relatives of deceased African dignitaries attempting to transfer misappropriated funds to a supposedly trustworthy intermediary. Such tactics are designed to elicit substantial financial contributions from victims (Smith, 2007; Abdul-Rasheed, 2006).

Adesida (2011) notes that individuals engaged in advance fee fraud, widely known as "419" or "Yahoo-Yahoo," are commonly referred to in Nigeria as "Yahoo boys." The term "419" is derived from Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code (Cap 777 of 1990), which specifically criminalises advance fee fraud. A characteristic feature of these operations is the use of digital communication platforms, particularly Yahoo email services and Yahoo Messenger, to ensnare unsuspecting victims. As a result, Nigeria has gained notoriety as a hub for this form of cybercrime, which exploits modern communication technologies to perpetrate fraud, often targeting individuals outside the country (Adesida, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, our conceptual framework regarding the notion of the "African Prince" or "Yahoo-Yahoo" aligns with the definition advanced by Olaiya, Bello, and Lamidi (2010). They describe "Yahoo" as a category of fraudulent activities typically perpetrated by young individuals, either independently or in coordinated groups, who devise elaborate schemes aimed at deceiving unsuspecting foreign victims. These schemes often involve enticing targets with the promise of substantial financial returns or valuable assets, contingent upon an initial payment (Uchenna, 2012). In this study, perpetrators of such activities are commonly referred to as "African Princes" or "Yahoo Boys."

The Historical Origin of Cyber Crime (Yahoo Yahoo).

The phenomenon popularly referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo," now synonymous with internet-based fraud, does not have a clearly defined point of origin. However, its widespread emergence is generally linked to the advent and growing accessibility of the Internet in Nigeria during the 1990s (Iheaka et al., 2012). The conceptual foundation of this form of cyber fraud, however, can be traced to earlier manifestations of financial deception, particularly the so-called '419' scams—named after Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code (Olaiya et al., 2010). These schemes, which became prominent in the 1970s, involved elaborate financial cons that, in many cases, implicated Western collaborators. During this period, individuals involved in such fraudulent activities were typically labeled as '419' or described as engaging in "Obtaining by Trick" (OBT) (Salifu, 2013). Over time, the term '419' has become emblematic of Nigerian-origin financial fraud, with the country frequently portrayed as a global hub for such illicit operations (African News, 2003, as cited in Olaiya et al., 2010).

The widespread rise of illicit financial activities conducted through online platforms has come to be recognized by the term "Yahoo," which was initially associated with the dissemination of fraudulent content and the receipt of illicit funds (Tade & Aliyu, 2011). This term "Yahoo" serves as a virtual extension of the notorious '419' scams (Adeniran, 2011; Melvin & Ayotunde, 2010, as cited in Olaiya et al., 2010), capitalising on the widespread use of Yahoo email services, applications, and instant messaging platforms during the mid-2000s. This period coincided with the rapid expansion of internet access and usage in Nigeria, further fueling the growth of cyber fraud (Lazarus, 2014).

The early 21st century marked a notable increase in cybercrime perpetrated by African youth, particularly those from the West African sub-region. This rise was significantly facilitated by the widespread availability of internet access through mobile telecommunication networks. Such connectivity enabled cybercriminals to exploit security vulnerabilities in the global North, often through mass email schemes and deceptive online postings. The expansion of mobile internet usage, in particular, has played a critical role in amplifying these criminal activities. Unlike traditional computer-based systems, mobile platforms generally feature weaker security protocols, thereby offering greater flexibility for fraudulent operations, though this also increases the risk of detection for the perpetrators (Lazarus, 2014).

Mishra (2009) traces the emergence of internet services in Nigeria to the UNESCO-sponsored Regional Informatics Network for Africa (RINAF) project, which commenced in 1995. Complementing this account, Adomi (2005) notes that RINAF, operating from the Department of Computer Science at Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, began offering electronic mail (e-mail) services in July 1995, in collaboration with the Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST) and Rose Clayton Nigeria Limited. In this initial phase, internet-related services such as e-mail, telnet, and gopher, were primarily run on UNIX-based

servers. The World Wide Web was introduced to Nigeria in 1996, and by 1998, full internet access had become available. By 2001, the number of licensed internet service providers (ISPs) had grown to over 150, as sanctioned by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). This rapid technological development spurred the proliferation of cybercafés, thereby democratizing internet access across various sectors, including academia, commerce, and illicit cyber activities.

Oloworekende (2014) highlights this period of transformation, observing that experienced perpetrators of postal fraud recognised the internet as a fertile ground for expanding their illicit operations. Simultaneously, a new generation of younger individuals, drawn by the prospect of quick financial gain through email scams, contributed to the development and sophistication of fraudulent techniques. These included the adaptation and refinement of older scams, such as the Spanish Prisoner scheme, to suit digital platforms. The growing incidence of internet fraud in Nigeria led to the emergence of popular terminology, such as "Yahoo" and "Yahoo Yahoo", to describe various forms of cyber-enabled scams. Individuals engaged in these activities became widely known in local parlance as "Yahoo boys" (Doppelmayr, 2013).

In recent years, a more sinister dimension of cyber fraud has emerged in Nigeria, commonly referred to as "Yahoo Plus." This phenomenon involves the incorporation of spiritual or ritualistic practices intended to enhance the effectiveness of internet fraud. According to Kolawole (2010), individuals engaged in "Yahoo Plus" often employ traditional spiritual methods, such as voodoo or juju—to exert psychological control over their victims, coercing them into fulfilling financial demands. These practices typically involve consultations with spiritualists or diviners and may include ritual acts such as prolonged stays in coffins, nocturnal visits to cemeteries, or the procurement of human body parts through violent acts like kidnapping and murder (Regner et al., 2015). In some cases, victims are subjected to additional forms of abuse, including sexual violence, with young girls particularly vulnerable to exploitation by fraudsters motivated by a desire for wealth (Adekunle, 2015). Kolawole (2010) also highlights that certain rituals may involve engaging in sexual acts with pregnant women or individuals with mental impairments, and, in extreme instances, refraining from bathing for prolonged periods, under the belief that such abstention wards off spiritual repercussions.

On this buildup, it becomes pertinent to understand the operational patterns of the African prince comprehensively, to gain deep insights into its underlying causes.

Towards an understanding of Yahoo Operation Patterns and Common Formats

The "African Prince" scam encompasses a range of strategies that vary in complexity and execution. As Evans-Obi (2013) explains, one commonly employed tactic is known as "bombing," which involves initiating contact with potential victims to build rapport and establish trust. Once this trust is secured, the African prince advances to the next phase, termed "billing," wherein they devise persuasive methods to solicit financial transfers. This is followed by the final stage, the "cash out," which entails collecting the fraudulently obtained funds (Evans-Ibe, 2013). The specific techniques or "formats" employed by Yahoo boys are notably diverse, shaped by individual experiences, skill sets, and preferred modes of deception. Evans-Ibe (2013) offers a comprehensive analysis of these various operational formats within the broader landscape of cyber fraud.

Romance Scams: The more experienced Yahoo boys often advise those newly inducted into their system to begin with romance scams as an introductory tactic to develop proficiency in manipulating foreign victims. This initial stage is essential for honing communication skills and learning how to exploit emotional vulnerability. The strategy typically involves establishing emotional connections, cultivating trust, and manipulating the sentiments of the target. Perpetrators often focus on vulnerable demographics,

such as divorced individuals and elderly American women, particularly those receiving retirement benefits and seeking companionship. Social media platforms, most notably Facebook, serve as primary channels for initiating contact. Through targeted keyword searches such as “lonely granny,” “divorcee,” or “sad grandma,” scammers identify and reach out to profiles belonging to middle-aged women, widows, or divorcees. Once a connection is established, fraudsters frequently extend their scheme by accessing the victim’s social network to locate additional potential targets (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

In recent years, LGBTQ+ individuals have also been increasingly targeted, as perpetrators exploit the desire for romantic connection with a purported same-sex partner. The typical modus operandi involves fabricating an intimate relationship, pledging commitment or marriage, and subsequently requesting financial assistance under false pretences, often for travel arrangements or flight tickets for a wedding that never occurs (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Inheritance Fraud: Inheritance scams typically involve fraudsters contacting potential victims with fabricated documentation claiming that they are entitled to substantial inheritances, often amounting to millions of dollars, supposedly left behind by deceased individuals. Victims are then persuaded to pay advance fees, usually presented as a small percentage of the total inheritance amount, to facilitate the release of the alleged funds. Perpetrators of such schemes are often highly skilled and operate within transnational networks, equipped with forged official bank documents, seals, and digital signatures intended to lend credibility to the scam. A notable example is the case of Onwuzuruike Ikenna Kingsley, who was arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on June 30, 2014, for allegedly impersonating Jeff Sikora, President and CEO of Prime Trust Credit Union Bank in the United States. Kingsley reportedly defrauded multiple victims, including an Egyptian national, of approximately \$6.5 million under the pretext that they were beneficiaries of inheritance funds held in a fixed deposit account at Prime Trust Financial Bank (EFCC, 2014, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Military: Within the broader landscape of cyber fraud, Yahoo boys frequently employ a tactic known as the “Military Format,” in which they impersonate American soldiers stationed on foreign missions. This format comprises two principal strategies designed to defraud unsuspecting victims. The first is commonly referred to as the “Box” scheme. In this scenario, the fraudster convinces the victim to receive and safeguard a box allegedly containing high-value items such as gold and diamonds, purportedly gifted to the soldier in gratitude for their service. The supposed contents of the box are significantly exaggerated in value, often claimed to exceed one million dollars. To enhance the credibility of the deception, perpetrators frequently establish counterfeit websites to manage the logistics of the scam.

Once the victim agrees to accept the box, they are directed to these fraudulent platforms and introduced to co-conspirators posing as logistics agents. The victim is typically required to make an initial payment, often under \$2,000, to facilitate the delivery. However, the box is said to pass through several intermediary locations, where fictional customs officials, working in concert with the fraudsters, demand a series of escalating fees under the guise of customs clearance. Throughout the process, the fraudster expresses frustration with the delivery company and sympathy for the victim, thereby encouraging continued compliance. This cycle persists until the victim either depletes their financial resources or becomes disillusioned and withdraws. The second strategy within the Military Format is known as the “Leave” scheme, which becomes effective only after the victim has developed an emotional attachment to the supposed soldier. In this variation, victims are persuaded to apply for their partner’s military leave via similarly fraudulent websites. They are then required to pay various fees allegedly necessary to secure the soldier’s release from active duty, often in anticipation of a fabricated wedding (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Crypto Fraud: This particular fraud format comprises a range of deceptive strategies, including coercing victims into revealing sensitive information such as cryptocurrency wallet seed phrases, as well as persuading them to invest in fraudulent Ponzi schemes under the guise of legitimate cryptocurrency ventures. A notable example occurred on November 8, 2021, when operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested an individual identified as Precious Ofure Omonkhoa for

alleged involvement in a Bitcoin investment scam. Posing as a Swedish national named Moshem Cnich, Omonkhoa is reported to have misled victims by claiming to manage a Bitcoin investment platform that guaranteed high returns on investment (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Business Email Compromise (BEC) Scams: Arguably one of the most complex schemes employed by Nigerian Yahoo boys, Business Email Compromise (BEC) scams involve the infiltration of official organisational email accounts using advanced software tools. Once access is gained, perpetrators hijack business communications and initiate fraudulent financial transactions while impersonating the legitimate organisation (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Loading: Another sophisticated form of cyber fraud involves the orchestration of fraudulent bank transfers into the accounts of unsuspecting victims. Perpetrators direct these individuals to withdraw the seemingly legitimate funds and subsequently transfer them to accounts under the fraudsters' control. However, these transactions are often later identified by financial institutions as fraudulent, typically after a delay of several days. As a result, the victims, who may have acted without full awareness of the scam, are frequently subjected to wrongful arrest and legal consequences for crimes in which their complicity is minimal or unintentional (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Investment Scams: Investment scams are primarily facilitated through fraudulent websites that are deliberately created and managed by cybercriminals. These platforms are designed to lure victims by presenting deceptive investment opportunities, often portrayed as legitimate enterprises. Victims are encouraged to invest funds with the promise of exceptionally high returns on investment (ROI) within implausibly short periods. In some instances, these promised ROIs reach exaggerated levels, with claims of up to 100% returns within a single week (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Impacts of the African Prince or Yahoo Yahoo on Victims and Society

The African Prince exerts far-reaching consequences on both its direct victims and the broader society. One of the most significant impacts is the adverse effect on victims' physical and mental health. Individuals defrauded of large sums often experience severe psychological distress, including heightened risks of heart attacks and various forms of psychosis, conditions that may arise either from financial devastation or from psychological manipulation, such as the use of charm-based tactics by perpetrators (Osuntoye et al., 2011). In more extreme cases, ritual killings associated with certain Yahoo boys create spill-over effects that further aggravate public anxiety and mental health crises (Umukoro, 2015). Victims of substantial financial fraud are particularly vulnerable to depression and, in some cases, premature death. Research conducted by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Education Foundation reveals that approximately 35% of financial fraud victims report experiencing depression (Evans-Ibe, 2013). The World Health Organisation also identifies depression as a leading cause of disability worldwide and a major contributor to the global burden of disease (Evans-Ibe, 2013). A tragic example is the case of Renee Holland from Florida, who was defrauded of her life savings by Yahoo boys. The psychological toll on her husband, unable to cope with the loss, culminated in an act of homicide (Kleinman, 2010, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2013).

The negative consequences of the so-called "African Prince" scam extend far beyond individual psychological trauma, encompassing severe financial repercussions for victims. Many suffer impoverishment and asset liquidation after incurring substantial monetary losses. Victims often resort to borrowing or mortgaging their properties to meet the fraudulent demands of perpetrators, which in many cases leads to bankruptcy. A notable example involves Nigerian fraudsters in collaboration with Asian counterparts, whose fraudulent activities led to the collapse and liquidation of the Banco Noroeste, culminating in the arrest of Nelson Sakaguchi, a bank official implicated in the scheme (Ojedokun & Ilori, 2011, as cited in Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Moreover, the extravagant lifestyle frequently displayed by Yahoo boys has broader economic implications. Their conspicuous consumption, including the ostentatious spraying of cash in public venues and nightclubs exerts inflationary pressure on market prices. This behavior often prompts retailers to raise the cost of goods and services, thereby contributing to a general increase in the cost of living (Salifu, 2013; Evans-Ibe, 2013). In addition to these economic and financial ramifications, Yahoo Yahoo activities have significantly tarnished Nigeria's international reputation. The global proliferation of cyber fraud linked to Nigerian actors has reinforced harmful stereotypes that portray Nigerians as inherently corrupt and deceitful. This stigma not only subjects Nigerians abroad to heightened scrutiny and discrimination but also undermines foreign investor confidence, deterring international engagement with the country due to fears of fraud and reputational risk (Evans-Ibe, 2013).

Given these extensive and multidimensional impacts, it becomes essential to investigate the underlying factors driving Nigerian youth toward participation in Yahoo Yahoo activities.

Underlying Causes of Nigerian Youth's Involvement in Yahoo

Bad Governance: Bad leadership and governance have long constituted a fundamental impediment to Nigeria's national development. The emergence and proliferation of the Yahoo boys subculture can be directly linked to persistent failures in political leadership and systemic corruption (Adeniran, 2008; Tade & Aliyu, 2011). The widespread embezzlement of public funds by elected officials, often without consequence, sets a troubling precedent and contributes to the normalisation of corrupt practices. This pattern of impunity has exacerbated socioeconomic inequality and fostered conditions of extreme poverty, particularly among the youth, who increasingly turn to cybercrime as a means of survival (Iheaka et al., 2012). As Suleiman (2015) observes, the deteriorating economic landscape has pushed a significant portion of the population toward illicit activities as an escape from poverty.

In effect, the country's economic stagnation has not only deepened hardship but has also facilitated the evolution of more sophisticated and aggressive forms of online fraud. The World Bank (2014), as cited in Iheaka et al. (2012), reported that Nigeria's economic growth remains insufficient to lift the poorest half of the population out of poverty. Consequently, poor governance has become a breeding ground for various social vices, including the rise of Yahoo Yahoo. When a government fails to ensure economic stability, provide employment opportunities, or enforce the rule of law, citizens are more likely to resort to self-help mechanisms, including criminal activity. The widespread perception that "anything goes" in Nigeria—coupled with a belief that everyone is complicit in corruption—has only further entrenched this culture of impunity and lawlessness (Iheaka et al., 2012).

Unemployment: Tertiary institutions in Nigeria continue to produce graduates at a rate that far exceeds the availability of corresponding employment opportunities. Recent data indicate that over 20 million individuals are currently unemployed in the country, with youth constituting a significant portion of this figure (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010; Kazeem, 2010). This alarming trend reflects the structural deficiencies in the nation's labour market and has left many young people idle, frustrated, and devoid of sustainable livelihood options.

In such a context, the adage "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" becomes particularly salient. Faced with limited prospects for gainful employment, numerous unemployed youths are drawn into criminal activities such as Yahoo Yahoo as a means of economic survival. Beyond its economic implications, unemployment also serves as a catalyst for broader social problems, including poverty, political thuggery, street touting, violence, ritual killings, and armed robbery. Udeh, Okoroafor, and Ihezue (2013) affirm the strong correlation between unemployment and the escalation of criminal behaviour, underscoring the extent to which widespread joblessness undermines social cohesion and national security.

There is a large population of unemployed youths. Nevertheless, it saddens the heart to find out that many of these unemployed youths

have decided to take matters into their own hands by engaging in unwholesome acts such as increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness, and political instability. (p 224).

The prevailing economic conditions have significantly contributed to the rising incidence of Yahoo Yahoo among Nigerian youths. Faced with limited employment opportunities, a growing population of unemployed young people increasingly seeks alternative means of financial survival. As a result, individuals with proficiency in computer operations and internet navigation have turned to the digital space to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, regardless of their legality. Some have gone further by forming organised criminal networks aimed at defrauding unsuspecting online entrepreneurs of their legitimate income. In this context, the promise of quick financial reward offered by Yahoo becomes especially attractive, serving as a perceived escape from the harsh realities of unemployment and economic instability (Uchenna, 2012).

Family Background: Youth involvement in cyberfraud is often rooted in the socioeconomic realities of their family backgrounds. Individuals from low-income or impoverished households, particularly those burdened with numerous dependents, may perceive cyber fraud as a viable avenue for financial emancipation. Adesida (2011) underscores the widespread prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, noting that over 100 million citizens live under impoverished conditions. This economic hardship has driven many young people to engage in internet fraud as a means of survival. In some instances, parents themselves facilitate this transition by introducing their children to established Yahoo boys, resembling the structure of traditional trade apprenticeships in an effort to secure financial stability (Adejoh et al., 2014). Tade and Aliyu (2011) further highlight this parental complicity, observing that many parents have abdicated their traditional role as moral educators and agents of socialisation, opting instead to support or ignore their children's involvement in cybercrime. Financial constraints often compel parents to overlook the illicit activities of their children, thereby indirectly legitimising their participation in cyber fraud.

Beyond economic deprivation, inadequate parenting and moral upbringing also contribute significantly to youth engagement in Yahoo Yahoo. Importantly, the phenomenon is not limited to individuals from impoverished backgrounds; even youths from affluent families have been drawn into these illicit activities (Adesida, 2011). Many parents and guardians have failed to fulfill their responsibility in guiding the moral development of their children, a lapse that reflects a broader erosion of societal values. Research suggests that children raised in environments characterised by neglect, permissiveness, or inconsistent discipline are more vulnerable to delinquent behaviours (Okoroafor & Njoku, 2012; Uwe, Asuquo & Ekuri, 2008, as cited in Iheaka et al., 2012). The absence of effective parental guidance during formative years significantly increases the likelihood of youth engaging in criminal activities and ultimately becoming deviant adults.

Peer Group Influence/Pressure: The inborn human desire for social belonging and acceptance within peer groups plays a significant role in influencing youth involvement in Yahoo. Many young individuals are driven by the need to maintain social and economic parity with their peers, often resorting to illicit means to achieve comparable status. Egan (2010) identifies peer pressure as a dominant force behind youth participation in cyber fraud, underscoring the powerful influence of peer relationships on individual behaviour. The dynamics within peer groups serve as a critical determinant in shaping the decisions and actions of young people, who frequently conform to the norms and behaviours modeled by their close associates or significant others (Adesida, 2011). Consequently, peer influence emerges as a central factor in the growing prevalence of Yahoo among Nigerian youth.

The tendency to imitate peers who have achieved financial success through fraudulent means becomes particularly compelling when legitimate avenues of advancement appear inaccessible or unfruitful. Esiri (2015) argues that the perception of impunity—observing peers succeed in Yahoo Yahoo without facing legal consequences—further emboldens others to engage in similar activities. Moreover, the ostentatious lifestyle often associated with Yahoo boys—including the acquisition of luxury vehicles, romantic

attention, and extravagant spending—adds to the allure. The aspiration to replicate such visible signs of success renders many youths especially vulnerable to peer-driven involvement in Yahoo Yahoo (Adekunle, 2015; Adesida, 2011).

Colonialism, imperialism, and globalisation: Historical narratives, both past and present, are frequently invoked as underlying motivations for youth involvement in Yahoo Yahoo. A prevailing belief among some Nigerian youths is that the West has historically marginalised Africa through exploitative institutional mechanisms designed to maintain global inequities (Olaiya et al., 2010). This perception has fueled a sense of economic and historical injustice, prompting some individuals to rationalise cyber fraud as a form of restitution. They interpret their actions as an attempt to recover wealth they believe was unjustly extracted from their ancestors during periods of slavery, colonisation, and systemic underdevelopment. Suleiman (2015) echoes this sentiment, noting that many Yahoo boys view their fraudulent activities as a means of reclaiming what is perceived as their rightful inheritance, compensation for the suffering and exploitation endured by previous generations under colonial rule.

Pressures from Parents: The intense pressure exerted by parents, particularly on graduates and young adults, is a significant factor contributing to youth involvement in cyberfraud. In many cases, parents shift the burden of financial responsibility onto their children, urging them to achieve rapid economic success. This pressure often arises from parents' expectations that their children will secure financial stability, support the family, fund marital obligations, and match or surpass the perceived accomplishments of their peers. As a result, many young individuals are drawn to Yahoo Yahoo as an expedient means of attaining wealth, motivated by the need to fulfill both familial and cultural expectations (Adesida, 2011).

Although some parents may not explicitly encourage participation in cybercrime, the subtle pressures they exert often stem from genuine, albeit misguided, desires for their children's success. Nevertheless, their unwillingness to report such criminal activities, or to question the sudden acquisition of wealth, reveals a form of tacit approval. The continued acceptance and enjoyment of material gains obtained through fraudulent means, even in the absence of direct endorsement, signals a level of complicity in their children's involvement in Yahoo Yahoo (Adejoh et al., 2014).

Greed: This constitutes a significant motivational force driving Nigerian youths toward involvement in Yahoo Yahoo activities. The intense desire for wealth, material possessions, and social power cuts across socio-economic boundaries, influencing both affluent and disadvantaged individuals alike. Many young Nigerians harbour aspirations of acquiring luxury items, such as expensive cars and high-end gadgets, without demonstrating a corresponding willingness to engage in sustained effort or legitimate work. This mentality is rooted in a widespread aversion to gradual progression and a pronounced inclination toward instant gratification. The phenomenon, often characterised as the "get rich quick" syndrome, reflects a broader societal trend in which the pursuit of immediate wealth is prioritised over diligence and long-term planning. As Salifu (2013) and Ezechukwu (2015, cited in Uchenna, 2012) observe, this fixation on rapid success fosters a disregard for the ethical implications of one's actions, leading many to favour shortcuts to prosperity over legitimate means of achievement.

An Exploration of Martin Buber's "I-thou" relationship

The concept of Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship is rooted in his dialogical philosophy, which underscores the significance of genuine dialogue and inter-subjectivity, placing emphasis on intentional, reciprocal relations between individuals. This philosophy advocates a subject-to-subject mode of engagement in which mutuality is central. Buber characterises this relationship as a conscious "turning towards the other" (Buber, 1975, p. 22). At the core of his framework lies a dual orientation towards the world, encapsulated in the dichotomy of *I-It* (*Ich-Es*) and *I-Thou* (*Ich-Du*). The *I-Thou* relationship affirms the holistic and mutual presence of two beings, where each party acknowledges the other as a full and equal subject (Buber, 1972). Genuine dialogue, in this sense, involves engaging with another in full presence, without reservation, instrumentalisation, or pretence. It is not a monologue but an authentic

interaction that opens the self to transformation through encounter. According to Buber, such dialogue demands full presence and openness, wherein one enters the relational space wholly, allowing the interaction to shape and redefine one's own being (SparkNotes).

This form of mutual engagement must be fully reciprocal, reflecting the inherent duality of dialogue. It is not passive observation but an active, co-constitutive process. Buber (1972) warns that "the self-willed man does not believe and does not meet. He does not know the solidarity of connection, but only the feverish world outside and his feverish desire to use it" (p. 60), thereby distinguishing the *I-Thou* mode of being from the utilitarian posture of *I-It*. In an *I-Thou* encounter, reciprocal openness is fundamental; the "I" and the "Thou" are experienced as unified, not divided by objectification or power asymmetries. Okafor (2011) notes that distinctions within this relationship are inferential rather than essential. As Buber poignantly states, "Through the Thou, a man becomes I" (Buber, 1958, p. 28), underscoring the idea that true selfhood emerges only in authentic relation. Thus, the *I-Thou* relationship is a profound moment of mutual affirmation and self-realisation, grounded in the recognition of the other as a co-equal subject in the shared space of being.

In the *I-Thou* encounter, there is no space for objectification; all preconceived notions and assumptions about the other are suspended to permit a sincere and authentic relational meeting. This absence of artificiality highlights the depth of recognition extended toward the other, a recognition that enables a more profound understanding rooted in presence rather than conceptual abstraction. As Okafor (2011) explains, the engagement in an *I-Thou* relationship is one of active presence, where reality is experienced and actualised, contrasting with the detached knowledge associated with the *I-It* mode of relating.

This form of encounter may be interpreted as an ontological co-affirmation—one that requires deep mutual respect and openness. Daniely (2015) articulates this dynamic clearly: "In the essential relation in which the 'I-Thou' encounter takes place, one complete presence stands before the other complete presence, the barriers fall, and a human companionship of the beings is formed" (p. 75). Within this relational space, the 'I' comes to recognise itself through the presence of the 'Thou', affirming a shared humanity. The *I-Thou* relation is marked not by passive spectatorship but by active, engaged participation from both parties. This dynamic fosters a transformative interaction, wherein each being is called forth by the presence of the other and is invited into a responsive and reciprocal exchange. Such an encounter is necessarily unmediated—it arises not from prior expectations, desires, or conceptual filters, but from direct and unconditioned presence. As Okafor (2011) notes, it is this unmediated quality that eliminates psychological or conceptual distance between participants, allowing the relational space to become one of genuine co-being.

The concept of Martin Buber's *I-Thou* relationship is rooted in his dialogical philosophy, which underscores the significance of genuine dialogue and inter-subjectivity, placing emphasis on intentional, reciprocal relations between individuals. This philosophy advocates a subject-to-subject mode of engagement in which mutuality is central. Buber characterises this relationship as a conscious "turning towards the other" (Buber, 1975, p. 22). At the core of his framework lies a dual orientation towards the world, encapsulated in the dichotomy of *I-It* (*Ich-Es*) and *I-Thou* (*Ich-Du*). The *I-Thou* relationship affirms the holistic and mutual presence of two beings, where each party acknowledges the other as a full and equal subject (Buber, 1972). Genuine dialogue, in this sense, involves engaging with another in full presence—without reservation, instrumentalisation, or pretence. It is not a monologue but an authentic interaction that opens the self to transformation through encounter. According to Buber, such dialogue demands full presence and openness, wherein one enters the relational space wholly, allowing the interaction to shape and redefine one's own being (SparkNotes).

This form of mutual engagement must be fully reciprocal, reflecting the inherent duality of dialogue. It is not passive observation but an active, co-constitutive process. Buber (1972) warns that "the self-willed man does not believe and does not meet. He does not know the solidarity of connection, but only the feverish world outside and his feverish desire to use it" (p. 60), thereby distinguishing the *I-Thou* mode of

being from the utilitarian posture of *I-It*. In an *I-Thou* encounter, reciprocal openness is fundamental; the "I" and the "Thou" are experienced as unified, not divided by objectification or power asymmetries. Okafor (2011) notes that distinctions within this relationship are inferential rather than essential. As Buber states, "Through the Thou, a man becomes I" (Buber, 1958, p. 28), underscoring the idea that true selfhood emerges only in authentic relation. Thus, the *I-Thou* relationship is a profound moment of mutual affirmation and self-realisation, grounded in the recognition of the other as a co-equal subject in the shared space of being. In his words:

The primary relation of man to the world of It is comprised of experiencing, which continually reconstitutes the world, and using, which leads the world to its manifold aim, the sustaining, relieving and equipping of human life. In proportion to the growing extent of the world of it, the ability to experience and use it must also grow. The individual can, to be sure, more and more replace direct with indirect experience, he can "acquire items of knowledge", and he can more and more reduce his use of the world to specialised "utilization"; nevertheless, continual development of this ability, from generation to generation cannot be avoided (p.38).

The *I-It* mode of relationship enables individuals to acquire knowledge about the universe and its constituent objects. However, when applied to human interactions, this relational framework often results in the objectification of persons, reducing them to instruments of use. Buber (1958) observes that "the development of the function of experiencing and using comes about mostly through a decrease of man's power to enter into relation" (p. 43), highlighting how the increasing reliance on *I-It* interactions diminishes one's capacity for authentic relational engagement. Within this paradigm, both human and non-human entities are approached as objects of experience—entities to be analysed, categorised, and utilised for the satisfaction of the subject's needs and desires. This inherently monological form of engagement lacks the reciprocity and depth characteristic of the *I-Thou* relationship, which is founded on mutual presence and recognition. Buber's dialogical philosophy maintains that human existence is constituted by these two primary relational modes: *I-Thou* and *I-It*. He warns, however, that in the absence of true dialogue, even the *Thou* can be diminished into an *It*, a transformation that negates the possibility of genuine connection. As Okafor (2011) explains, Buber contends that one cannot fully realise their humanity without participating in the *I-Thou* mode of being, which resists domination and instrumentalisation and instead affirms the other as a co-equal presence in the relational field.

Martin Buber's "I-Thou" Relationship as a Solution to the Terror of the African Prince

Martin Buber delineates two fundamental modes of human relationship: the *I-Thou* and the *I-It*. A close analysis of the actions of the so-called "African prince" a figure emblematic of digital fraud, particularly in romance scams reveals that the initial stage of engagement, commonly referred to as "bombing," aligns with the *I-It* relational paradigm. In this framework, there is an absence of authentic turning toward the other; rather than being approached as a person, the other is perceived as an object to be manipulated, controlled, and exploited for the benefit of the self. The encounter is not dialogical but monological, reflecting a relational dynamic in which the other is instrumentalised and reduced to a utilitarian function.

Within this *I-It* structure, all entities, including human beings are encountered as mere instruments or specimens to be used in the fulfilment of the subject's aims and desires. The African prince, in this context, perceives the victim not as a co-equal participant in dialogue, but as a project to be executed. Meanwhile, the victim particularly in romance scams often enters the interaction with the expectation of genuine relational engagement, thereby reinforcing an asymmetrical dynamic. This disjunction underscores Buber's assertion that, in the absence of mutual presence and recognition, the *Thou* can be reduced to an *It*. The prince's indifference to the emotional or psychological consequences suffered by the victim sometimes including self-harm—is rooted in this reductionist relational framework. Without the presence of dialogue or moral reciprocity, the victim is denied subjectivity and instead becomes an object

of manipulation. It is within this objectifying mindset that the African prince operates, a mindset that not only precludes genuine connection but is oriented fundamentally toward domination and control of the other (Buber, 1958).

The continued success of the so-called African prince in perpetrating digital fraud is rooted in a reductionist relational mindset that objectifies the other as a mere project—devoid of subjectivity or emotional depth. This instrumentalisation of the other enables the perpetrator to act without moral restraint. However, the pervasive harm inflicted by such fraudulent schemes can only be mitigated through a radical shift in relational orientation: the adoption of Martin Buber's *I-Thou* framework. Within the *I-Thou* mode of engagement, there is no room for deceit or exploitation. Instead, there is a genuine turning toward the other, a recognition of the other as a complete human being, not as a tool to be known, manipulated, or utilised (SparkNotes). As Daniely (2015) explains, "In the essential relation in which the 'I-Thou' encounter takes place, one complete presence stands before the other complete presence, the barriers fall, and a human companionship of the beings is formed" (p. 75).

In this relational dynamic, the 'I' comes to perceive itself through the lens of the 'Thou', affirming mutual subjectivity. Should the African prince come to internalise this perspective, seeing himself reflected in the other, then no degree of economic hardship, psychological pressure, or personal desire could justify manipulating another human being. The moral weight of recognising the other's humanity would foreclose the very act of "bombing" or initiating a fraudulent scheme. Buber's distinction between *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships reveals that the former is characterised by reciprocity and authentic engagement, while the latter is marked by unilateral use and objectification. A fundamental shift from the *I-It* to the *I-Thou* relational mode is therefore essential to curbing the exploitative actions of the African prince.

Only in the presence of reciprocal recognition, where one encounters the other without pretense or instrumental motives can the cycle of digital fraud be broken. The African prince, if guided by the ethics of *I-Thou*, would seek not to deceive, bill, or "cash out" but to establish a genuine connection grounded in mutual presence. Such a dialogical encounter would be inherently reciprocal, rejecting one-sided manipulation and affirming the dual nature of human dialogue, wherein both entities are acknowledged as full participants in the shared relational space.

Conclusion

In this study, we have shown that the exploit of the African prince is anchored on the I-it relational mindset. It is this mindset that makes him seek out potential victims to destroy, not minding the repercussions of his actions on them. While one might argue that the activity of the prince is a fruit of his existential predicaments, such as poverty, poor governance, etc., this paper argues that it is a product of his mindset. If the African prince adopts the I-thou relational mindset of Buber, wherein he recognises the other as a full human being, and not a means to an end or merely something to be objectified, manipulated, subdued and controlled, then are a great chance that he might stop in his tracks. It is only in the reciprocity of the I-thou, where one recognises oneself in the other, genuinely without pretence, that one can refrain from hurting the other. Hence, Martin Buber's "I-thou" relationship can serve as a possible means of ameliorating the terror of the African prince.

References

- Adejoh, O. A., Alabi, A. A., Adisa, W. B., & Emezio, N. M. (2014). "Yahoo boys" phenomenon in Lagos Metropolis: A qualitative investigation. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 13(1), 1–20.
- Adesida, J. S. (2011). *Social factors influencing youth involvement in Yahoo-Yahoo: A study of Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lagos).

- Adekunle, I. O. (2015). *Social factors influencing youth's involvement in cybercrime: A study of Oworonshoki Area, Kosofe LGA, Lagos State*.
- Adeniran, A. (2008). The internet and the emergence of Yahoo Boys sub-culture in Nigeria. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 2(2), 368–381.
- Adomi, E. E. (2005). Internet development and connectivity in Nigeria. *Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems*, 39(3), 257–268.
- Chukwuemeka, D. (2012). *African prince, who keeps sending you emails: E-fraud economy in postcolonial Nigerian literary and cultural texts* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol and Macquarie).
- Doppelmayer, A. (2013). *It's all about love: Organisation, knowledge sharing and innovation among the Nigerian Yahoo Boys* (Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture).
- Egan, H. (2010). Heartbreaking reasons why young Nigerians become Yahoo boys just to buy big, expensive cars. *Naijauto*. <https://naijauto.com/market-news/whyyoung-nigerians-become-yahoo-boys-7121> accessed on June 20, 2025
- Esiri, O. (2015). *Cybercrime in Nigeria and the way out*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Eusebeia – Godliness. (n.d.). *Grace Notes*. <http://gracenotes.info/documents/types-doc/godliness.pdf> accessed on June 20, 2015
- Iheaka, E., Nwankwor, J., & Kalu, N. (2012). Exegetical examination of 1 Timothy 6:6–10 in relation to the Yahoo Yahoo business (Internet fraud) in contemporary Nigerian society. *Unizik Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 14(1), 150–166.
- Kazeem. (2010). *National article on National Bureau of Statistics*.
- Kolawole, T. O. (2010). Yahoo-Yahoo practice: A sociological commentary on the acceptability and celebrity of the actors in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Business & Social Sciences (CJBSS)*, 11(2), 1–16.
- Lazarus, S. (2014). Birds of a feather flock together: The Nigerian cyber fraudsters (Yahoo boys) and hip hop artists. *Criminal Justice Law Society*, 19, 63–80.
- Mishra, M. K. (2009). Use and importance of the Internet at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. *First Monday*, 14(3).
- Nhan, J., Kinkade, P., & Burns, R. (2009). Finding a pot of gold at the end of an internet rainbow: Further examination of fraudulent email solicitation. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 3(1), 452–475.
- Ojiego, N. (2011). The audacity of the 'Yahoo boys'. *Vanguard Newspaper*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/10/filthy-riches-the-audacity-of-yahoo-boys/> accessed on June 20, 2015
- Olaiya, T. A., Lamidi, K. O., & Bello, M. A. (2010). Narrative of illicit money: 'Yahoo' boy (format) of cyber scams and governance challenges in Africa. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*.
- Oloworekende, A. (2014). No more insufficient funds: Yahoo, Yahoo, and cybercrime's international ecosystem. *The Republic*. <https://republic.com.ng/august-september-2019/yahoo-yahoonaaja/> accessed on June 20, 2015.

- Salifu, G. (2013). Youths and Yahoo Yahoo phenomenon in Nigeria: A moral response. *Journal of Political Discourse*, 1(3), 220–230.
- Smith, D. J. (2017). *To be a man is not a one-day job: Masculinity, money, and intimacy in Nigeria*. University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, D. J. (2007). *A culture of corruption: Everyday deception and popular discontent in Nigeria*. Princeton University Press.
- Suleiman, B. (2015). *The evil of cybercrime in Nigerian youths*. Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Tade, O., & Aliyu, I. (2011). Social organisation of internet fraud among university undergraduates in Nigeria. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 5, 860–875.
- Uchenna, C. (2012). Internet fraud: The menace of ‘Yahoo boys’ and the deceitfulness of riches. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS)*, 5(2), 87–97.
- Udeh, S. C., Okoroafor, E. C., & Ihezue, U. R. (2013). Insecurity and national economic development: Implications for Nigeria’s Vision 20:20. *International Journal of Development and Management Review (INJODEMAR)*, 8(1), 93–109.
- Umukoro, E. (2009). Ritual does not give us money: Yahoo boys confess. *The Guardian Newspaper*. <https://guardian.ng/features/ritual-does-not-give-money-yahoo-plus-boysconfess> accessed on June 20, 2025.