

NIGERIAN HIP-HOP SONGS AND THE GLORIFICATION OF CYBERCRIME

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Abstract

This study examines the depiction of cybercrime in Nigerian hip-hop music and its effects on youth behaviour, guided by cultivation theory and employing a discursive method for analysis. The research analysed three purposively selected Nigerian hip-hop songs and found that their lyrics romanticise and glamorise cybercriminal activities. This portrayal contributes to the normalisation of cybercrime within popular culture, suggesting a troubling link between musical content and the acceptance of cybercrime as a desirable lifestyle. The findings highlight that these songs explicitly promote cybercriminal behaviour, posing significant challenges as they influence young Nigerians to perceive such activities as viable. The study emphasises the necessity for collaborative efforts among government agencies, regulatory bodies, and artists to mitigate these negative impacts. It is recommended that awareness among artists regarding their influence be enhanced and that regulatory measures be implemented to monitor and sanction content that promotes cybercrime.

Key Words: Instagram, Hip-hop, Glamorisation, Lyrics, Cybercrime, Glamorise

Introduction

The issue of cybercrime has long been a significant concern in Nigeria. Adewusi (2020) posits that cybercrime has constituted a substantial part of Nigeria's global image over the past decade, contributing to perceptions of Nigerians as untrustworthy and manipulative. This negative stereotype has been reinforced by international reports, such as Channels TV's (2021) citation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which ranked Nigeria as the 16th most affected country by internet crime. In 2019, the FBI arrested 80 individuals for online fraud, 77 of whom were Nigerians. Notably, Obinwanne Okeke, a prominent Nigerian entrepreneur and philanthropist, who had previously been recognised by Forbes Africa in 2016 for his business achievements, was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison for cyber fraud in the same year (Forbes Africa, 2016).

Despite efforts by the Nigerian government and law enforcement agencies, including the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), to combat cybercrime, these initiatives have been hampered by systemic corruption and bribery.

Additionally, the glorification of cybercrime in popular Nigerian music has exacerbated the issue. Songs such as Olu Maintain's "Yahooze" and Naira Marley's "Am I a Yahoo Boy?" have contributed to the normalisation and celebration of internet fraud. These artists not only glorify cybercrime but also promote other social vices like drug abuse, violence, and indecent behaviour. Nigerian rapper Falz has openly criticised this trend, condemning it as a destructive influence on the youth (The Guardian, 2017). As Wooden, cited in Adebambo, asserts, role models hold powerful sway in shaping behaviour, particularly when their actions are emulated by impressionable followers. Tade (2019) similarly highlights the entertainment industry's critical role in shaping societal values, as audiences are influenced by the messages they hear and see.

While existing studies have primarily attributed cybercrime in Nigeria to factors such as poverty, unemployment, and economic instability, there has been insufficient focus on the role of song lyrics in promoting and glorifying cybercrime. The content of many Nigerian songs plays a significant role in encouraging fraudulent activities. This study aims to address this gap by examining how three selected Nigerian songs—"Living Things" by 9ice, "CashApp" by Bella Shmurda, and "Ali" by Adeoye—promote cybercrime. The study will also propose strategies for curbing this issue.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of cybercrime in Nigeria has garnered significant international attention, contributing to negative perceptions of Nigerians as untrustworthy and manipulative. While factors such as poverty, unemployment, and economic instability have traditionally been identified as key drivers of cybercrime, limited research has examined the influence of popular culture, particularly song lyrics, in promoting this criminal behaviour. Nigerian music, with notable examples such as "Yahooze" by Olu Maintain and "CashApp" by Bella Shmurda, often glorifies cybercrime, normalising it as a socially acceptable pursuit. Given the influential role of music in shaping societal values, especially among the youth, it is crucial to investigate the extent to which these songs contribute to the perpetuation of cybercrime. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing the lyrics of selected Nigerian songs that glorify cybercrime and exploring potential strategies to curb this growing issue.

The Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the lyrical content of selected Nigerian songs—"Living Things" by 9ice, "CashApp" by Bella Shmurda, and "Ali" by Adeoye—in order to determine how they glorify and promote cybercrime.
2. To propose strategies and recommendations for mitigating the influence of Nigerian music on the normalisation and perpetuation of cybercrime among the youth.

Conceptual Review

Hip-Hop

The emergence of hip-hop in Nigeria parallels its origins in the African American communities of the South Bronx, New York, where it evolved as a voice for marginalised groups and a reflection of social realities (Shonekan, 2013). Initially characterised by rhythmic speech, rhyming, and beat-driven music, hip-hop transcended its status as a mere musical genre to become a vital cultural force. It represents the struggles, passions, and lived experiences of its creators and consumers, offering a platform for identity formation and social commentary (Gonzalez, 2020). In Nigeria, hip-hop has undergone a similar transformation, shaped cultural identity and offering a space for artistic expression that resonates deeply with the youth.

More than a genre, hip-hop in Nigeria has evolved into a movement that reflects the aspirations and frustrations of the youth. It is a language of resistance, self-expression, and empowerment, especially for those facing socio-economic challenges (Kubrin, 2005, cited in Lazarus, 2018). Nigerian hip-hop artists often channel their personal experiences and societal issues into their music, touching on themes of poverty, corruption, and resilience. This genre has also become a conduit for economic opportunity, with many Nigerian youths turning to music as

a way out of unemployment and financial hardship (Oladipo, 2017). Through its widespread popularity and commercial success, hip-hop has opened doors to fame and financial stability for artists, positioning it as a significant cultural and economic phenomenon within Nigeria.

Cybercrime

Cybercrime refers to a wide array of illicit activities conducted via digital technologies, typically using computers, internet networks, or other electronic devices (Maitanmi, 2013, cited in Omodunbi et al., 2016; Okeshola, 2013, cited in Omodunbi et al., 2016). These activities encompass a range of offences such as illegal file sharing, spamming, piracy, fraud, identity theft, blackmail, forgery, and embezzlement (Omodunbi et al., 2016). As internet usage expands globally, cybercrime has become an increasingly pervasive issue, posing significant challenges to governments, businesses, and individuals alike.

In Nigeria, several socio-economic and institutional factors contribute to the rise of cybercrime. These include high levels of unemployment, the desire for quick wealth, weak legal frameworks, and insufficient cybersecurity infrastructure (Hassan, 2012, cited in Omodunbi et al., 2016). However, in addition to these well-known drivers, the role of hip-hop culture in normalising and glamorising cybercrime has garnered attention. Hip-hop music, particularly certain sub-genres and songs that reference online fraud, has been critiqued for perpetuating a "get-rich-quick" mindset and valorising illicit activities such as internet scams. The portrayal of cybercrime as a means of achieving wealth and success, particularly in popular songs, contributes to its normalisation among impressionable audiences.

Interplay Between Hip-Hop and Cybercrime in Nigeria

The relationship between hip-hop and cybercrime in Nigeria is complex, with cultural, economic, and technological factors intertwined. On the one hand, hip-hop reflects the socio-economic struggles of Nigerian youth, providing them with a voice and an outlet for creativity. On the other hand, the glorification of wealth and success in some hip-hop lyrics, combined with weak institutional checks, can inadvertently contribute to the normalisation of cybercrime. The increasing prominence of cybercrime-related references in music points to a broader cultural shift, where the lines between legitimate entrepreneurial success and illicit activities have become blurred.

By examining the influence of hip-hop culture on the acceptance of cybercrime, this review seeks to unpack the intricate dynamics that shape the digital criminal landscape in Nigeria. Hip-hop's role in both reflecting and shaping societal values provides valuable insight into the ways in which cultural forces can drive behaviours, especially among the youth, in an era dominated by technological advancement and economic disparity. Understanding these interactions is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat the growing cybercrime problem in Nigeria and mitigate the cultural factors that perpetuate it.

Empirical Review

Lazarus (2018), in the study titled *"Birds of a Feather Flock Together: The Nigerian Cyber Fraudsters and Hip-Hop Artistes,"* explored the connection between hip-hop music and the cybercrime landscape in Nigeria. The findings revealed a strong relationship between the portrayal of cyber fraudsters in Nigerian hip-hop songs and the actual rise of cybercrime in the country. This study identified a normalization of cyber fraud within the music industry, where musicians not only reference cybercrime in their lyrics but also associate with individuals engaged in such activities. Lazarus (2018) calls for a shift in research methodology to incorporate cultural influences in shaping public perceptions of cybercrime, stressing that the glamorisation of crime in music reinforces its societal acceptance.

Also, Tade (2019), in *"Cybercrime Glamorization in Nigerian Songs,"* focused on examining the lyrical content of hip-hop songs by popular Nigerian artists such as Olu Maintain, Kelly Handsome, and 9ice. The study highlighted how these songs glorify cybercrime,

particularly online fraud (commonly referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo"). The study's findings suggest that the glamorisation of cybercrime through music significantly undermines government efforts to curtail such activities. Tade advocates for collaboration between musicians and law enforcement agencies to counter the growing influence of music in promoting criminal activities, urging the entertainment industry to play a more responsible role in shaping societal values.

Sims (2011), in the study "*Using Hip-Hop as an Employment Tool for Young Adults: An Exploratory Study*," provided a contrasting perspective by examining the potential of hip-hop music as an empowerment tool for young people. The study focused on how hip-hop could be used as a medium for economic opportunity and career development, especially for disadvantaged youths. While this study highlighted the positive potential of hip-hop, its findings contrast sharply with research on the negative influence of hip-hop in promoting cybercrime. Sims (2011) emphasised that hip-hop, when harnessed positively, can contribute to employment generation and youth empowerment, but cautioned against the influence of content that promotes illicit activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **cultivation theory**, a framework developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976, which explores the subtle yet powerful influence of media on societal perceptions. Cultivation theory posits that long-term, repeated exposure to specific media content can gradually shape individuals' views of reality. This theory is particularly relevant when examining the cumulative effects of media, such as music, on shaping social beliefs and attitudes (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986). While it was initially applied to television content, the principles of cultivation theory have since been extended to other media forms, including music (Baran, 2009).

In the context of Nigerian hip-hop, cultivation theory provides a lens through which we can understand the influence of songs that glorify cybercrime. Nigerian hip-hop, like media in other contexts, serves as a powerful tool for socialization. It subtly reinforces the normalization of cybercrime by portraying it as not only acceptable but also a glamorous path to wealth and success. The repeated exposure to music that romanticizes fraudulent activities (such as internet fraud, popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo") can lead to the gradual acceptance of such behaviors by listeners, particularly among youth, who are often more susceptible to media influence.

Through the lens of cultivation theory, this study examines how the glorification of cybercrime in Nigerian hip-hop creates a distorted perception of reality, where illicit activities are seen as desirable or even necessary for upward social mobility. Over time, listeners may begin to perceive these activities as part of their social norm, thus blurring the lines between legality and success. The theory highlights the critical role that music plays in shaping collective consciousness and influencing youth behavior, which may have far-reaching implications for societal values and crime rates in Nigeria.

By applying cultivation theory, this study aims to deepen the understanding of how repeated exposure to cybercrime-themed songs can contribute to a broader cultural acceptance of fraudulent activities. It seeks to underscore the significant role that media consumption plays in reinforcing societal beliefs and behaviors, particularly in environments where economic hardship and unemployment make vulnerable individuals more susceptible to media-driven narratives. This theoretical framework offers valuable insights into the intricate relationship between music, culture, and crime, and supports the investigation of how media exposure contributes to the growing cybercrime phenomenon in Nigeria.

Methods

This study employs a **discursive method** to analyse the lyrical content of Nigerian hip-hop music, focusing on how these lyrics contribute to the normalisation of cybercrime. The method is well-suited for examining language's role in constructing social realities and ideologies, particularly in songs that reference cybercrime or "Yahoo Yahoo."

A **purposive sampling** approach is used to select songs based on their popularity and explicit references to cybercrime, including tracks like "Yahooze" by Olu Maintain, "Am I a Yahoo Boy?" by Naira Marley, and "Living Things" by 9ice. Through **lyrical discourse analysis**, the study explores linguistic choices, narrative structures, and cultural symbols that glamorise cybercrime, portraying it as a means of success and resistance. A **thematic analysis** identifies recurring themes, such as wealth acquisition, defiance of authority, and social mobility through fraud.

Data Analysis

The discursive method is employed to analyse the lyrics of selected Nigerian hip-hop songs—**"Living Things" by 9ice**, **"CashApp" by Bella Shmurda**, and **"Ali" by Steven Adeoye**—to understand how they contribute to the normalisation and glorification of cybercrime.

1. "Living Things" by 9ice

The lyrics of "Living Things" are examined for their portrayal of wealth acquisition through dubious means. The refrain, "Ki n sa ti lowo, wire wire" (I just want to be rich, even if it is through internet fraud), explicitly suggests that the artist is indifferent to the legitimacy of the means used to acquire wealth. The song's reference to "sase" (slang for fraudulent activity) and working "lori moju" (overnight) aligns with the nocturnal nature of cybercrime. The discursive analysis highlights how these lyrics contribute to the normalization of cybercrime by portraying it as an acceptable, even desirable, path to financial success. Criticism from figures like Falz and Daddy Freeze underscores the impact of such glorification on the public perception of cybercrime.

Lyrics: "Ki n sa ti lowo, wire wire" (I just want to be rich, even if it is through internet fraud), "Ki n sa ti lowo, money order" (I just want to be rich, money order), "Ki n sa ti lowo, Ole je come and marry" (I just want to have money, even if it is come and marry)

Thematic Context: The recurring theme in these lyrics is the pursuit of wealth regardless of the means. The phrase "wire wire" refers to the use of internet fraud (often called "Yahoo Yahoo") as a method for acquiring money, explicitly normalizing cybercrime. The reference to "money order" further underscores a transactional approach to wealth that can include fraudulent activities. Additionally, the line "Ole je come and marry" alludes to a common scam where fraudsters deceive victims into romantic relationships for financial gain. The song's insistence on wealth acquisition through any means, including illegitimate ones, contributes to the normalization of cybercrime by portraying it as a viable path to success.

2. "CashApp" by Bella Shmurda

The analysis of "CashApp" reveals a direct endorsement of cybercrime through its chorus. The lines, "Sho ni CC" (Do you have CashApp?), "Oni maga bill am" (You have a fraud victim, bill him/her), and "Efcc n'bo japa" (EFCC is coming, run away), provide explicit instructions for engaging in internet fraud and evading law enforcement. The use of "CashApp," a real financial application, in this context suggests the normalization of cybercrime as part of everyday financial transactions. Additionally, the inclusion of Zlatan, who has faced legal issues related to cybercrime, further reinforces the song's problematic message.

Lyrics: "Sho ni CC" (Do you have CashApp?), "Load am cash app" (open it), "Oni maga bill am" (You have a fraud victim, bill him/her), "Efcc n'bo japa" (EFCC is coming, run away)

Thematic Context: These lyrics explicitly endorse cybercrime by instructing listeners on how to use the CashApp for fraudulent purposes. The term "maga" refers to a victim of fraud, and the directive to "bill am" (to deceive) highlights the song's glorification of scam operations. The mention of "Efcc n'bo japa" (EFCC is coming, run away) further encourages evasion of law enforcement, normalizing the act of running from legal consequences. The song's celebratory tone towards these activities reinforces the acceptance of cybercrime as part of the financial landscape.

3. "Ali" by Steven Adeoye

"Ali" portrays a narrative where academic failure leads to a successful engagement in cybercrime. The lyrics, "Ali buy lappy, Ali se yahoo" (Ali bought a laptop, Ali engaged in internet fraud), glorify the protagonist's transition from educational failure to financial success through fraud. The chorus, which celebrates Ali's wealth obtained through cybercrime, reinforces the perception that illegal activities can lead to desirable outcomes. The song's unapologetic endorsement of crime, alongside the absence of significant critique, reflects the troubling acceptance of cybercrime in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop.

- **Lyrics:** "Ali buy lappy" (Ali bought a laptop), "Ali se yahoo" (Ali engaged in internet fraud), "I want to be like Ali" (I want to be like Ali)

Thematic Context: The lyrics of "Ali" depict a narrative where academic failure is followed by success through cybercrime. The line "Ali buy lappy" suggests that the acquisition of technology is a precursor to engaging in fraud. The explicit mention of "Ali se yahoo" (Ali engaged in internet fraud) celebrates the character's choice of illegal means to achieve financial success. The chorus, "I want to be like Ali," reinforces the notion that engaging in cybercrime is an aspirational path. By portraying Ali's success story in a positive light, the song contributes to the glorification of cybercrime, suggesting it as an acceptable route to wealth and success.

Discussion of Finding

The thematic analysis of the selected Nigerian hip-hop lyrics reveals a clear pattern of glorification and normalisation of cybercrime. This finding aligns with cultivation theory, which posits that sustained exposure to media content profoundly influences individuals' perceptions and beliefs about reality. As outlined by Gerbner and Gross (1976), media portrayals not only reflect but also shape societal values, subtly moulding public attitudes over time.

In the examined hip-hop songs, the lyrical content celebrates fraudulent activities, presenting them as legitimate or desirable paths to wealth. This portrayal is consistent with cultivation theory, wherein repeated exposure to such media content gradually alters listeners' perceptions. By depicting cybercrime as glamorous and aspirational, these songs contribute to its broader acceptance, particularly among youth. This phenomenon reflects Gerbner's assertion that media content can cultivate a distorted view of social reality, normalising and even glorifying criminal behaviour.

Lazarus (2018) supports this view, highlighting how hip-hop's portrayal of illicit activities contributes to their normalisation. Lazarus's research shows that hip-hop lyrics not only mirror but also amplify the allure of cybercrime, thus influencing listeners' attitudes. Tade (2019) further corroborates this, suggesting that the persistent focus on fraudulent activities in Nigerian hip-hop normalises and glamorises these behaviours. Tade's findings reinforce cultivation theory by demonstrating how repeated exposure to such content can lead young people to view cybercrime as an acceptable or even aspirational lifestyle.

Thus, from a cultivation theory perspective, the ongoing glorification of cybercrime in hip-hop music is not merely a reflection of existing societal attitudes but an active contributor to shaping these attitudes. Long-term exposure to such portrayals can significantly alter how listeners perceive and engage with cybercrime, reinforcing its acceptance and perpetuating its prevalence. Sims (2011) provides additional empirical support by examining how hip-hop serves as an empowerment tool for young adults, underscoring the genre's potent influence on shaping attitudes and behaviours. This aligns with cultivation theory, highlighting the power of media to cultivate attitudes towards criminal activities.

Conclusion

The thematic analysis of "Living Things" by 9ice, "CashApp" by Bella Shmurda, and "Ali" by Steven Adeoye reveals a concerning trend in Nigerian hip-hop: the normalization and

glorification of cybercrime. In "Living Things," 9ice's lyrics endorse wealth acquisition through internet fraud, framing it as a viable means to achieve financial success. Bella Shmurda's "CashApp" provides explicit guidance on committing fraud, promoting it as a profitable and evasion-friendly activity. Steven Adeoye's "Ali" depicts academic failure resolved through cybercrime, presenting this illegal route as an aspirational model. Therefore, it is concluded that these songs collectively contribute to the cultural acceptance of cybercrime by portraying it in a glamorous and desirable light, thereby influencing listeners, especially youth, to view criminal behavior as an acceptable and achievable goal.

Recommendations

To curb the glorification of cybercrime in Nigerian hip-hop songs, several measures can be implemented. While these measures may not completely eliminate the issue, they represent a proactive approach to addressing it.

1. Collaboration between the Nigerian Government and artists is crucial. Tade (2019) emphasises that the Federal Government and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) should work with musicians to discourage the glamorization of cybercrime.
2. Additionally, increasing awareness among artists about their significant influence on Nigerian youth is essential. Izuwilliam (2017) suggests that educating musicians on the impact of their lyrics could motivate them to promote positive behavior instead.
3. Regulatory oversight is also necessary. Izuwilliam (2017) proposes that the EFCC or the Inspector General of Police establish a division to monitor and sanction artists who glorify cybercrime.

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