



## Relative Deprivation and Youth Involvement in Cybercrime among Young Cybercrime Offenders in Lagos Metropolis

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### ABSTRACT

Youth involvement in cybercrime has emerged as a major social, economic, and security concern in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos State, which serves as a hub of commerce and digital activity. This study investigates the factors that encourage young people to engage in cybercrime, focusing on socio-economic disparities, peer influence, parental approval, and the quest for quick wealth. Using Relative Deprivation Theory as a guiding framework, the study explores how perceived inequality between youths and their reference groups motivates engagement in illicit activities as a strategy to bridge the socio-economic gap. A mixed-methods research design was employed, involving quantitative data collection from 277 convicted cybercrime offenders and qualitative insights from 20 key informant interviews with law enforcement officers experienced in handling cybercrime cases. The findings indicate that poverty, unemployment, parental support or approval, peer reinforcement, and cultural glamorization of cybercrime significantly encourage youth engagement in online fraud, whereas moral values, parental disapproval, and fear of arrest serve as restraining factors. The study underscores that perceived deprivation, rather than absolute poverty, is a central driver of cybercrime behavior among youths, highlighting the role of social comparisons and unmet aspirations. Based on these insights, the study recommends interventions that focus on parental guidance, moral reorientation, youth empowerment, stricter enforcement of cybercrime laws, and public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing the appeal of cybercrime. This research contributes to a better understanding of the socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms underlying youth cybercrime in Lagos State and offers practical strategies for mitigating its prevalence

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cybercrime has become one of the most pressing social, economic, and security challenges facing Nigeria, particularly among youths. Young people, often considered drivers of innovation, creativity, and technological progress, are increasingly implicated in online fraudulent schemes popularly referred to as "Yahoo-Yahoo." These schemes often involve deception, identity manipulation, phishing, online scams, and financial fraud, taking advantage of the anonymity and widespread accessibility of the internet and mobile technologies (Tade & Aliyu, 2011; Ibrahim, 2016). While economic hardship is frequently cited as a driving factor, recent scholarship emphasizes that youth involvement in cybercrime is multi-dimensional, influenced by socio-cultural, familial, psychological, and peer-related factors (Ulo, 2023; Elgbadon & Adejuwon, 2015).

Lagos State, Nigeria's commercial and technological hub, presents a unique context in which cybercrime thrives. The state's dense population, high youth concentration, and widespread access to internet-enabled devices create an enabling environment for cybercrime. Moreover, the visibility of wealth among elites, celebrities, and successful peers exacerbates perceptions of socio-economic inequality, which according to Relative Deprivation Theory, can motivate deviant behavior (Thisse & Zenou, 2000). In such an environment, young people may perceive themselves as disadvantaged relative to others, fostering frustration and incentivizing engagement in cybercrime as a means of bridging the gap between perceived deprivation and desired status.

Relative Deprivation Theory, first articulated by Stouffer et al. (1949), posits that individuals or groups are more likely to experience discontent and engage in deviant behavior when they perceive themselves as unfairly disadvantaged compared to others. In the Lagos context, youths often compare themselves to their peers, celebrities, or wealthier members of society, and these social comparisons can heighten feelings of frustration and marginalization. This sense of relative deprivation, when reinforced by peer networks, parental attitudes, and cultural validation of fraudulent behavior, can normalize engagement in cybercrime. The pursuit of rapid wealth, social recognition, and material success becomes a rationalized response to perceived social inequities.

Empirical research in Nigeria has highlighted multiple socio-economic and cultural factors underlying youth cybercrime. Poverty and unemployment remain significant drivers, limiting legitimate opportunities for income generation and pushing some youths toward illicit alternatives (Tade & Aliyu, 2011; Ibrahim, 2016). Peer influence is a crucial factor, as young people are often socialized into deviant subcultures where cybercrime is modeled and encouraged (Adejoh et al., 2019). Parental influence also emerges as critical; weak supervision, tacit approval, or direct complicity in cybercrime fosters a sense of entitlement, normalizing illegal behavior (Ibrahim, 2016; Ulo, 2023). Cultural reinforcement, particularly the glamorization of cybercrime in popular music and media, further validates these activities and diminishes perceived moral and legal constraints (Lazarus, 2018).

Despite the increasing research on youth cybercrime, there remains a need for studies that integrate socio-economic, familial, and cultural factors within a

theoretically grounded framework. Applying Relative Deprivation Theory allows researchers to understand how perceived inequality and frustration with social status motivate deviant behavior among youths in Lagos State. By combining offender perspectives and law enforcement insights, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that encourage youth engagement in cybercrime, highlighting both the social and psychological mechanisms that underpin these behaviors.

This study aims to identify the major factors that encourage youths to engage in cybercrime in Lagos State, with particular attention to how socio-economic disparities and perceptions of inequality shape their involvement. The findings are interpreted through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how perceived disadvantage motivates deviant behavior. The research is limited to Lagos State, focusing primarily on convicted cybercrime offenders within correctional facilities, while also incorporating insights from law enforcement personnel directly involved in cybercrime investigations. Although restraining factors such as morality and fear of arrest are briefly acknowledged, the primary emphasis is on uncovering the factors that encourage youth participation in online criminal activities.

By situating these factors within the Relative Deprivation framework, the study offers a theoretically grounded explanation for the persistence of youth cybercrime in an urban Nigerian context. It integrates socio-economic, familial, and cultural determinants with empirical and theoretical insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader discourse on cybercrime in Nigeria, offering practical implications for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, parents, and educators. By examining how perceived inequality and social comparison drive deviant behavior, the study informs targeted interventions aimed at reducing cybercrime while promoting lawful avenues for youth development and empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Theoretical Orientation*

The theoretical orientation for this study is grounded in Relative Deprivation Theory. Originally developed by Samuel Stouffer and colleagues in *The American Soldier* (1949), the theory was used to explain why some members of the U.S. Army Air Corps reported greater frustration over promotions than others, even though they were promoted at a faster rate. Relative Deprivation Theory posits that feelings of deprivation and dissatisfaction arise through comparison with a reference group and do not exist in isolation.

Davis (1959) formalized the theory by arguing that an individual experiences deprivation when they lack a desired good or opportunity that others possess, feel entitled to it, and desire it. Runciman (1966) extended this perspective by adding feasibility as a necessary condition, distinguishing between unrealistic desires, which do not generate deprivation, and attainable aspirations, which do. Runciman also differentiated between egoistic

deprivation, experienced individually, and fraternal or collective deprivation, which arises from comparing one's group with others.

Ted Gurr (1970) further developed the theory by focusing on the discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities. Value expectations refer to what an individual believes they are entitled to, while value capabilities represent what they perceive themselves able to achieve. Gurr highlighted three patterns of deprivation: aspirational deprivation, which occurs when value expectations rise while capabilities remain constant; decremental deprivation, when capabilities decline while expectations remain stable; and progressive deprivation, when expectations rise while capabilities decline. He emphasized the consequences of deprivation, noting that individuals and groups respond to perceived gaps in ways that may include deviant or criminal behavior.

Relative Deprivation Theory provides a framework for understanding youth involvement in cybercrime in Nigeria. Youths and parents may perceive themselves as disadvantaged relative to peers, neighbors, or social elites. These perceptions of inequality, combined with the belief that illicit means can achieve desired outcomes, can motivate engagement in cybercrime. For example, parents who see neighbors' children acquiring material wealth may encourage their own children to engage in cybercrime to bridge the gap. Similarly, youths compare themselves with peers displaying wealth obtained through fraudulent activities, generating frustration and a desire to attain comparable success. The theory thus explains how perceived socio-economic inequality, unmet expectations, and social comparison contribute to decisions to engage in cybercrime.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that encourage youth involvement in cybercrime in Lagos State. The mixed-methods approach allowed for the triangulation of findings, bringing together statistical evidence and qualitative insights to provide a nuanced understanding of this complex social phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component was used to measure the prevalence and distribution of socio-economic, familial, and cultural factors among convicted youth cybercrime offenders, while the qualitative component, based on key informant interviews with law enforcement officials, provided context, depth, and insight into institutional perspectives on cybercrime. This combination strengthened the validity of the study by enabling patterns and trends to be interpreted alongside first-hand experiences and expert observations.

The study population consisted of convicted youth cybercrime offenders within Lagos State correctional facilities and law enforcement officers with direct experience in cybercrime investigations. Lagos State was selected as the research context due to its status as Nigeria's commercial capital, its dense population, and its technological infrastructure, which collectively create a fertile environment for youth cybercrime (Tade & Aliyu, 2011; Ibrahim, 2016). A total of 150 convicted offenders were selected from three correctional facilities: Ikoyi

Medium Security, Kirikiri Medium Security, and Badagry Medium Security Custodial Centers. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants were within the age range of 18–35 years and had been convicted of cybercrime-related offenses, reflecting the demographic most actively involved in online fraud (Aransiola & Asindemade, 2011). The age range was chosen to capture the period during which youths are most socially and economically active, and most likely to engage in deviant online behavior.

In addition, 20 key informant interviews were conducted with law enforcement officers from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Cybercrime Units of the Nigeria Police Force. Officers were selected based on their direct experience investigating, supervising, or prosecuting cases involving youth cybercrime, ensuring that their perspectives offered reliable insight into offender behavior, organizational dynamics, and environmental factors that facilitate cybercrime.

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, which included sections on socio-demographic background, economic conditions, family environment, peer influence, and perceptions of inequality. Participants were asked to rate the influence of various motivating factors, such as poverty, unemployment, parental approval, peer pressure, and cultural reinforcement, on their involvement in cybercrime using a Likert-type scale. This approach allowed for systematic measurement of the factors that drive youth engagement in cybercrime, enabling the identification of the most prominent enablers. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officers, focusing on their observations regarding offender profiles, family backgrounds, peer involvement, and the influence of societal and cultural factors. Officers were also asked to reflect on institutional practices, legal frameworks, and the challenges associated with preventing and prosecuting youth cybercrime.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the relevant correctional and law enforcement authorities in Lagos State. All participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of responses. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and anonymity was ensured through the use of coding rather than names. Data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access, in adherence with recognized ethical standards in social science research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Data analysis combined descriptive statistical techniques for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. Quantitative responses were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to determine the distribution and prevalence of factors influencing youth cybercrime. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts involved coding responses, identifying recurring patterns, and interpreting themes related to parental complicity, peer group dynamics, and cultural reinforcement. Triangulating these findings allowed the study to corroborate trends identified in the quantitative data with the rich, contextual insights provided by law enforcement professionals.

While the mixed-methods design enhanced the robustness of the study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The research was confined to Lagos State, limiting the generalizability of findings to other Nigerian states with different socio-economic and cultural contexts. In addition, the focus on convicted offenders may not fully capture the perspectives of active, non-convicted cybercriminals. Despite these limitations, the study provides a detailed, empirically grounded, and contextually rich understanding of the factors that encourage youth cybercrime in Lagos State, shedding light on the interplay of socio-economic, familial, and cultural influences within the framework of Relative Deprivation Theory.

## RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Factors that Encourage Youth Perpetration of Cybercrime

Variable		Frequency (277)	Percentage (100%)
Lack of higher education	Yes	59	22.6
	No	202	77.4
	Total	261	
Poverty	Yes	175	63.9
	No	99	36.1
	Total	277	
Corruption	Yes	113	43.5
	No	147	56.5
	Total	260	
Lack of empathy	Yes	161	58.8
	No	113	41.2
	Total	274	
Lack of parental control	Yes	152	55.5
	No	122	44.5
	Total	277	
Parental approval	Yes	158	57
	No	119	43
	Total	277	
Quest for quick wealth	Yes	169	61
	No	108	39
	Total	277	
Peer pressure	Yes	147	53.1
	No	130	46.9
	Total	277	
Unemployment	Yes	168	60.6
	No	109	39.4
	Total	277	

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The table above shows that majority (63.9%) of the cybercrime offenders convicted in Lagos State attributed their perpetration of cybercrime to poverty. A close majority (61%) attributed theirs to the quest for quick wealth, while unemployment and parental approval were 60.6% and 57% respectively. Just over half of the study population (53.1%) attributed the reason for their perpetration of cybercrime to peer pressure. This is consistent with some of the findings from the qualitative research. One of the law enforcement agents opined that poverty was not a determinant for whether an individual will commit cybercrime or not he stated that "...you will see both the children of the rich and the poor doing yahoo sometimes..." (KII/RES4/2023). Another stated emphatically that

"whether the parents are rich or not does not determine whether a boy will do yahoo or not. It is more about his decision and individual differences. Greed is also a major reason o. We have investigated cases where children from good homes were doing yahoo and also those that are from bad homes." (KII/RES12/2023)

The table below shows the frequency and percentage distributions that actions which the parents of the respondents took to show their support for their perpetration of cybercrime (respondents were permitted to pick more than one response).

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Method used by the Parents of Respondents to show their Support for the Respondents

Variable		Frequency (277)	Percentage (100%)
<b>Financial Support</b>	Yes	137	50.9
	No	132	49.1
	Total	269	
<b>Words of Encouragement</b>	Yes	169	62.6
	No	101	37.4
	Total	270	

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The Table above shows that majority of the parents of the respondents (62.6%) that support their actions show this by giving them words of encouragement. It further shows that others (50.9%) show their support by giving them financial support.

Another factor that was consistent with the qualitative research is get rich quick syndrome (61%). Many of the respondents were of the opinion that greed was a major reason youths were involved in cybercrime. One of the respondents stated that "*bad parenting, society ill, greed, bad peer group, moral decadence, quick rich syndrome, and pressure also from parents*" (KII/RES17/2023). Another buttressed his point by saying that

many of these young guys these days do not want to do normal salary work again because it cannot give them plenty money that they will use to buy Benz. In fact eh, you will see a young guy of 16/17 years that will be thinking

of using the latest I-Phone, and the only way he can get such a huge amount of money is through yahoo. (KII/RES18/2023)

Peer pressure (53.1%) is another factor that was consistent with the qualitative research. One of the respondent opined that the environment in which a youth finds himself and his friends is a reason they commit cybercrime. To this effect, he opined that

The area the child is being brought up also matters because if he is in the area where there are plenty yahoo boys, he is mostly to do it. Peer pressure is another reason. (KII/RES8/2023)

Another opined that they are usually pressured to commit cybercrime because they see their friends with big cars and lots of women around them, they will usually want to feel among. He argued that *"...a lot of them join yahoo because of the friends that they keep; they are usually plenty where there are universities..."* (KII/RES11/2023).

Lack of proper parenting and parental approval were also consistent with the qualitative data. One of the reasons stated by the respondents is the lack of parental supervision and parental approval. This is because some of their parents are rich but do not have the time to properly supervise them or teach them proper morals. This then left them with a lot of unsupervised time, most of which is spent either with friends or on the internet. One of the law enforcement agent opined that:

...Lack of good parenting dey there o ...there is this guy we arrested that lured some policemen ..., I charged him to court. He did a fake transfer of 4 million and now told them that he has won lotto of 1.5 Billion naira and that the money is to be received in cash and some of them in cheque in eko hotel... When I arrested him, he said that he does not know his father. Shey [do] you see parenting? You just born and keep. What of your mother? He said that he has not seen his mother since he was in primary school. He had just been hearing that she is in Osun state. There are plenty plenty of such guys that parents will just give birth and allow them to go. You cannot tell me that a child of 6/7 years will just tell you that I do not want to live with my parents... (KII/RES2/2023)

Another respondent reiterated the above statement by saying that:

I think that has to do with parental because primarily for someone to develop that kind of knowledge is from home, before you talk of schooling. Parental care is the major reason why majority of the youths deviate from normal life to abnormal life. When the parents are too careless, when parents don't care, or you will see a child coming home with a Lexus jeep and you do not question and giving them a kind of encouragement. So, in a nutshell, parents have a vital role to play in bringing up children to a normal life rather than involving in cybercrime. (KII/RES19/2023)

Many of the respondents were of the opinion that a child may commit cybercrime if he or she has the support of their parents. One of the law enforcement agents opined that:

...some parents take their children to these people to learn yahoo. They would be given lots of equipment such as laptops, I-Phone, and plenty or things.

These parents that take their children there eh usually pay a lot of money for these teachers to train their children... (KII/RES6/2023)

Another respondent replied that

Parents pay with their money to get their children skilled in yahoo-yahoo. The ebute-metta that we were talking about sheybi three guys that we intercepted them, their parents sent them to come and do yahoo in order to meet up. (KII/RES7/2023)

Therefore, the approval of parents and lack of proper parenting may play a major role in why some youths commit cybercrime. The glamourization of cybercrime by popular culture was a factor that was identified by the qualitative research. One of the respondents opined that:

all these social media show them living big. Everybody likes to live big. Nobody is ready to learn hand work again. They are now into yahoo because they see how those that are doing yahoo are spending a lot of money and driving big cars. Social media shows young people that yahoo is the fastest way to make money and everybody will like to go into it.

Another argued that the *glamourization of cybercrime in the entertainment industry is also a factor that leads to cybercrime... 30% positive and 70% negative effects...*(KII/RES11/2023). Cybercrime becomes glamorous in the Nigerian society because of the approval of these "role models". To buttress this point, a respondent opined that "...this means that they are indirectly promoting yahoo in Nigeria. The inquisitive nature of the Gen Z is one of the reasons that they participate in cybercrime..." (KII/RES5/2023), another opined that:

...it started when Olu Maintain sang the song "YAHOOZE". I think it was the national anthem back then that made all the young boys to know of yahoo. Now because of how many other artists are singing about it, it seems that if one is not doing it, the person is not updated... (KII/RES14/2023)

The data gotten from the qualitative data shows that there might be significant association among popular musicians, cybercrime, money laundering and substance abuse. One of the respondents to this effect argued that:

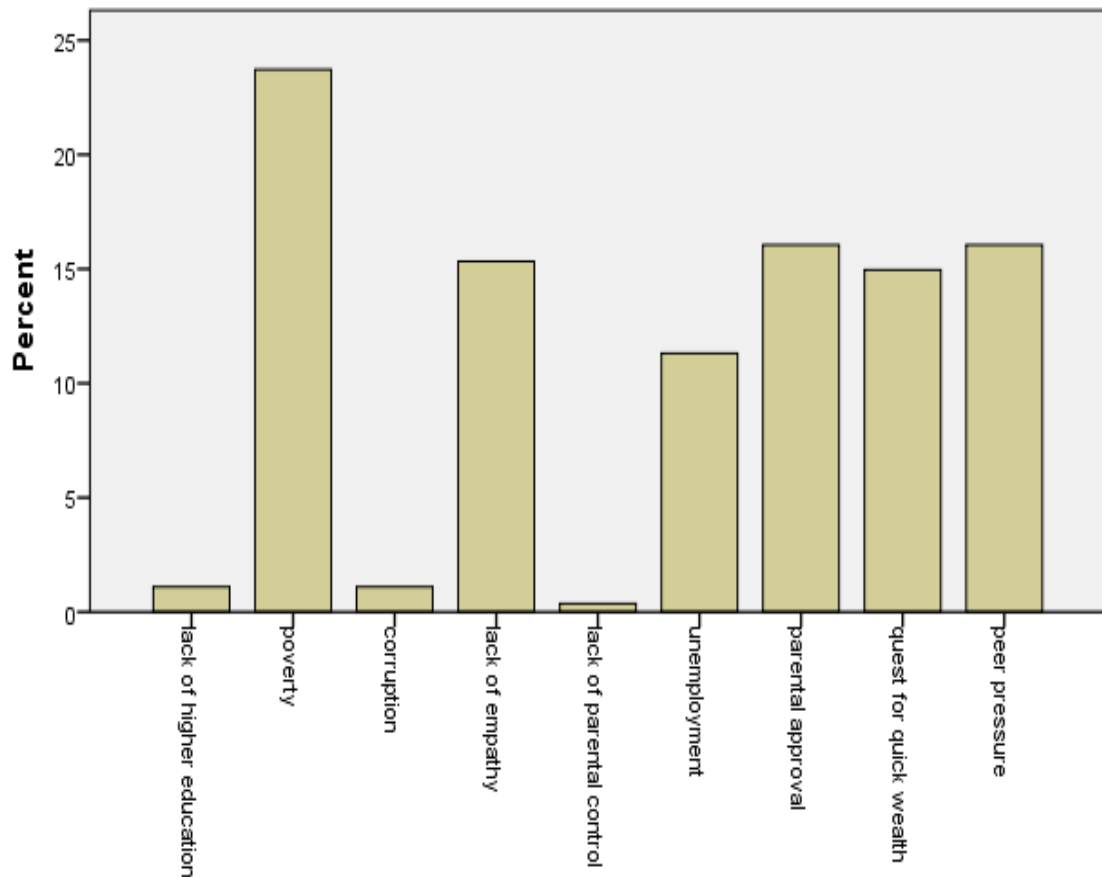
...50% of musicians are yahoo-boys and drug pushers. There is a connection between drugs, money laundering, yahoo. Musicians use drugs for several reasons (injections). Many of them act under the influence of drugs. Money made from yahoo helps them to afford drugs. They use money laundering to buy the drugs. Musicians launder money with their business and this leads to drug pushing... (KII/RES12/2023)

Another agreed with the above statement by stating that:

...They use money laundering to buy the drugs. Musicians launder money with their business and this leads to drug pushing... (KII/RES16/2023)

The graph below shows the major factor that led convicted cybercrime offenders in Lagos state to perpetrate cybercrime.

which of the above reasons was the major push you needed to engage in yahoo business



which of the above reasons was the major push you needed to engage in yahoo business

Pic 1. Which of the Above Reasons was the Major Push You Needed to Engage in Yahoo Business

The graph shows that 23.7% of the respondents agreed that poverty was the main reason they decided to perpetrate cybercrime while other factors such as peer pressure (15.3%), parental approval (16.1%), quest for quick wealth (15.0%), lack of empathy (15.3%) and unemployment (11.3%) were also posited as to why they might have been lured into cybercrime. The graph also shows that factors such as lack of higher education (1.1%), corruption (1.1%), and lack of parental control (0.4%) were secondary reasons they chose to commit cybercrime.

## DISCUSSION

Cybercrime offenders often attempt to justify their actions by attributing them to socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment. Many perceive their engagement in cybercrime as a response to the challenging economic environment of the country. However, not all youths in similar circumstances resort to such activities, which raises the question of why some individuals engage in cybercrime while others do not. Insights from law enforcement officers suggest that the difference is closely linked to individual

morality. Respondents indicated that youths with a high level of morality are less likely to commit cybercrime because they are unable to dissociate themselves from the harm caused to their victims. From a Relative Deprivation perspective, these individuals may still recognize socio-economic inequalities, but their moral compass moderates the frustration arising from perceived deprivation, reducing the likelihood that they will turn to illegal means to improve their circumstances.

This observation aligns with the view that poverty alone is not sufficient to predict criminal behavior. Zembroski (2011) argued that although individuals from impoverished environments may achieve quick success through illegal acts, poverty functions primarily as a risk indicator rather than a direct cause of crime. Deprivation creates conditions under which cybercrime becomes an attractive option, but whether a youth engages in it depends on personal values, socialization, and the capacity to resist the temptation presented by observed inequality and the allure of rapid material gain. Relative deprivation thus helps explain why individuals facing similar socio-economic disadvantages may respond differently, with some choosing deviant pathways while others seek legitimate avenues to improve their circumstances.

The study found that factors such as parental approval, the quest for quick wealth, fear of arrest, and level of morality strongly influence youth perpetration of cybercrime. The majority of convicted cybercrime offenders in Lagos State attributed their actions to poverty, consistent with previous studies (Tade and Aliyu, 2011; Tade, 2013; Ibrahim, 2016), which identified poverty as a major driver of youth cybercrime. A significant portion also cited the quest for quick wealth, consistent with the findings of Thisse and Zenou (2000), who observed that socio-economic disparities in Nigeria create frustration that motivates youths to seek rapid financial gains. This aligns with the principles of Relative Deprivation Theory, which posits that individuals who perceive themselves as disadvantaged in comparison to others are more likely to experience frustration and discontent, increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior. Egoistic relative deprivation, a strand of the theory, suggests that individuals feel inferior when they compare themselves to others, and such feelings of inadequacy can drive engagement in cybercrime as a perceived shortcut to success (Isiaka, 2020).

Parental influence was another key determinant of youth cybercrime. Both parental approval and disapproval significantly affected youth behavior. Ibrahim (2016) found that a positive family environment, parental supervision, and moral guidance reduce the likelihood of children engaging in cybercrime. Conversely, parents who are absent, preoccupied, or morally compromised may inadvertently encourage delinquent behavior. In some cases, parents explicitly or implicitly support their children's involvement in cybercrime, providing financial resources or encouragement. Law enforcement interviews revealed that some parents actively sponsor their children's cybercrime training, a trend increasingly observed in Nigerian society (Ulo, 2023). Elgbadon and Adejuwon (2015) also highlighted that families that place excessive value on material success often promote values that normalize fraudulent behavior, further exacerbating youth involvement in cybercrime. From the perspective of Relative Deprivation Theory, parents experiencing economic frustration may view

cybercrime as a legitimate means for their children to bridge the gap between their socio-economic status and that of wealthier peers, thereby transferring the perception of deprivation and the drive to overcome it onto their children.

Peer influence similarly emerged as a significant factor shaping youth engagement in cybercrime. Ibrahim (2016) emphasized that external social factors, including peer groups and institutional environments, encourage youth participation in online fraud. Adejoh et al. (2019) further noted that criminal behavior is often replicated within groups, as individuals exchange and imitate social and deviant ideas. Relative Deprivation Theory helps explain this phenomenon by highlighting the role of social comparison. Youths observing peers enjoying conspicuous lifestyles, marked by flashy cars, designer clothing, expensive gadgets, and other material symbols of success, may perceive themselves as deprived, particularly if they lack comparable opportunities due to poverty, unemployment, or limited social networks. These perceptions generate frustration and motivate youths to adopt behaviors, including cybercrime, aimed at closing the perceived gap. The group dynamics of cybercrime amplify these effects, as seeing peers achieve success through illicit means reinforces the perception that such activities are acceptable or necessary for upward mobility.

The glamorization of cybercrime in Nigerian popular culture also contributes to relative deprivation among youths. Lazarus (2018) noted that several songs portray cybercrime as exciting and rewarding. D'banj's "Mobolowowon" described the singer evading the British police after engaging in credit card fraud, while 9ice's "Living Things" framed cybercrime as legitimate work, referencing notorious cybercriminal associates. These cultural representations reinforce the perception that material success can be attained through fraudulent means, intensifying feelings of deprivation among youths who lack similar resources. Not all cultural messages are pro-cybercrime, however. Government-supported campaigns featuring artists such as Banky W, Bez, Cobhams, MI, Modele, Omawumi, Rooftop MCs, and Wordsmith produced songs like "Maga no need pay" to counter narratives that glamorize fraud (Lazarus, 2018). Yet youths are influenced by whichever media they consume, meaning that the glamorization or deglamorization of cybercrime can shape their perception of inequality and their behavioral responses.

The online nature of cybercrime facilitates these dynamics. Offenders in Lagos State often rely on stolen identities, encrypted emails, forged business profiles, and public social media accounts to scam individuals on online banking, auction, and e-commerce platforms (Izuakor, 2021). From a Relative Deprivation perspective, these techniques represent responses to perceived inequality rather than mere opportunism. Online crime offers low-risk avenues for achieving material gains, allows dissociation from victims, and reduces moral conflict, making participation more psychologically manageable for those experiencing deprivation.

Finally, self-control and parental influence mediate the extent to which youths act on perceptions of inequality. Afachung et al. (2023) argued that higher self-control reduces the likelihood of youth engagement in cybercrime despite

perceived deprivation. Parental supervision, moral guidance, and the instillation of values that prioritize hard work and integrity further limit participation in cybercrime (Idowu et al., 2021; Ulo, 2023). Youths with strong moral foundations and close parental guidance are less influenced by peer pressure and cultural glamorization, illustrating why some individuals in disadvantaged circumstances avoid cybercrime while others succumb to it (Coombs, Paulson, and Richardson, 1991).

In sum, youth involvement in cybercrime in Lagos State can be understood through Relative Deprivation Theory. Perceptions of socio-economic inequality, exposure to glamorized portrayals of fraudulent success, peer influence, and parental guidance interact to shape the decision-making process of young offenders. Those who perceive themselves as deprived and lack sufficient moral or social restraints are more likely to adopt cybercrime as a strategy to bridge the gap between their current socio-economic standing and the affluent lifestyles they observe in their social environment.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Youth involvement in cybercrime in Lagos State is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a combination of socio-economic, familial, cultural, and individual factors. This study demonstrates that poverty and unemployment alone do not fully account for the engagement of youths in cybercrime. Instead, the interplay between perceived socio-economic inequality, parental influence, peer dynamics, and exposure to glamorized portrayals of illicit wealth creates a fertile environment for deviant behavior. Relative Deprivation Theory provides a robust framework for understanding these patterns, highlighting that it is not absolute deprivation, but the perception of being disadvantaged relative to others, that generates frustration and motivates youths to pursue illicit avenues for social and economic advancement.

The study shows that youths who perceive themselves as relatively deprived often experience a heightened sense of urgency to bridge the gap between their current status and that of peers, celebrities, or affluent members of society. Peer influence reinforces this perception, as group dynamics validate cybercrime as a socially acceptable strategy to achieve rapid wealth. Cultural messages embedded in popular music and media further amplify the allure of cybercrime, making it appear glamorous and desirable. Parental guidance, moral upbringing, and individual self-control emerge as critical protective factors. Youths with strong moral foundations, close parental supervision, and internalized values of hard work and integrity are less likely to succumb to the temptations presented by inequality and peer pressure. Conversely, parental approval or passive complicity can normalize cybercrime, transmitting the perception that illicit behavior is a legitimate response to economic frustration.

Overall, the findings underscore that cybercrime among youths is not merely a consequence of opportunity or material need but is deeply rooted in perceptions of injustice, social comparison, and frustration arising from relative deprivation. Youths navigate a complex web of influences, making their engagement in cybercrime a rationalized response to the inequalities they

observe. Interventions aimed at addressing cybercrime must therefore be multidimensional, targeting both the structural conditions that generate deprivation and the social, familial, and cultural mechanisms that shape youths' responses to inequality.

### **FURTHER STUDY**

*Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:*

1. **Family-Centered Interventions:** Programs should emphasize the role of parents in shaping youths' values and behaviors. Parents should be educated on the negative consequences of supporting or condoning cybercrime. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns can equip parents with skills to supervise, mentor, and instill ethical standards in their children. Positive parental involvement is essential to mitigate the perception that cybercrime is a legitimate means to achieve socio-economic goals.
2. **Youth Empowerment and Economic Inclusion:** Economic deprivation is a key trigger for feelings of relative deprivation. Policies aimed at increasing youth employment, providing vocational training, and promoting entrepreneurship can reduce the appeal of cybercrime. Targeted microfinance initiatives, internships, and start-up support programs would allow youths to experience legitimate avenues for wealth creation, bridging the perceived gap between themselves and wealthier peers.
3. **Moral and Ethical Reorientation:** Schools, religious institutions, and community organizations should strengthen programs that foster moral reasoning, integrity, and social responsibility. Curricula and mentorship programs can emphasize the long-term benefits of lawful conduct, the value of hard work, and the consequences of deviant behavior, thereby reinforcing moral resilience in the face of socio-economic frustration.
4. **Cultural Engagement and Media Literacy:** Musicians, influencers, and media producers should be engaged to promote narratives that discourage cybercrime and highlight ethical paths to success. Youths should also be equipped with media literacy skills to critically evaluate the messages portrayed in popular culture, helping them resist glamorized depictions of illicit wealth.
5. **Enhanced Law Enforcement Strategies:** Visible, consistent, and fair prosecution of cybercrime is essential to deter potential offenders. Law enforcement agencies should adopt proactive measures to detect, investigate, and punish cybercrime, while also collaborating with community organizations to educate youths about legal risks. Community policing and cybercrime awareness campaigns can further reduce opportunities for engagement in illegal activities.
6. **Peer-Led Interventions:** Since peer influence significantly affects youth behavior, peer mentorship programs can be established to encourage positive socialization and provide alternative role models. Youths who have successfully resisted engagement in cybercrime can serve as mentors, sharing experiences and strategies for navigating social and economic pressures without resorting to illegal acts.

7. Monitoring and Support Systems: Government and non-governmental agencies should implement support systems for at-risk youths. Counseling, psychological support, and community engagement programs can address feelings of frustration, disillusionment, and perceived social injustice, thereby reducing the motivation to engage in cybercrime.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, educators, parents, and community leaders can collectively address the structural and social drivers of youth cybercrime. The study highlights that interventions must not only mitigate immediate economic hardship but also reshape perceptions of inequality, social norms, and ethical conduct to produce sustainable reductions in cybercrime among youths in Lagos State.

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