How Can the Nigerian Government Prevent Online Romance Scams?

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This paper seeks to answer the following question using Repko and Szostak's (2017c) 10-step interdisciplinary research process (IRP): "What actions can the Nigerian government take to ease the socioeconomic motivators driving Nigerians to commit online romance scams?" When performing Step 1 of the IRP, frequently referring to the textbook was immensely helpful in choosing a topic. Repko and Szostak (2017a, pp. 87-88) emphasize considering the scope of the question with the time given for and the length of the assignment. Since the category of online scams is broad and varied, the focus of this paper is narrowed down to the perpetrators of online romance scams originating in Nigeria when considering the authors' comments on a project's scope. This way, research relating to only one type of online scam and a single country's culture, economy, politics, and government are needed.

Furthermore, the focus is on perpetrators of online romance scams because much of the existing research focuses on the victims' perspective. It is pertinent to focus on the perpetrators of online romance scams because doing so would seek a solution to the root of the problem. While the suggestions from current research on how potential victims can protect themselves from being the target of online romance scams are valuable, the information must be disseminated to a large audience to be effective. If it is not, scammers could target others who are not educated on how to protect themselves proactively. By finding a solution that will stop perpetrators from engaging in scams, a broader range of people globally could be sheltered from falling victim to online romance scams.

Additionally, the growing losses from online romance scams over the past decade indicate that it is a significant societal issue that has yet to be resolved. In 2017, the FTC received reports of losses from online romance scams totaling $87 million in 2017 (Fletcher,

2022), which has risen to $1.14 billion in 2023 (Fair, 2024). Additionally, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria was ranked 145 on a scale of 1 to 180 in 2023, with 1 being the least corrupt nation and 180 being the most corrupt (Transparency International, 2024). As will be discussed, several disciplinary scholars have explored the issue of online romance scam perpetrators from Nigeria and their potential motivators in journals about sociology, economics, criminology, and political science (Akinyetun, 2021; Galadima & Umar, 2023; Ibrahim, 2016; Olojede & Osah, 2020). This indicates that online romance scams are a complex issue requiring insights from many disciplinary perspectives to resolve satisfactorily.

Reviewing the existing literature reveals that online romance scams originating in Nigeria are a complex issue involving many disciplines, including sociology, criminology, political science, and economics. For instance, Galadima and Umar (2023) interviewed a sample of citizens from different sections of a Nigerian city about their thoughts on cybercrime and performed a statistical analysis of the results. This analysis shows that 95 percent of participants "...believed that Cyber Crime will always occur if poverty exists" (Galadima & Umar, 2023, p. 46). Akinyetun (2021) corroborates poverty's link to cybercrime by pointing out that the Nigerian government's corruption has caused it to fail to protect Nigerian citizens' economic well-being, leading them to cybercrime. However, unlike Galadima and Umar, Akinyetun also emphasizes sociological factors that drive people in poor economic conditions to turn to cybercrime. He points out that despite Nigeria being commonly viewed as having one of the strongest developing economies in Africa, just over 40% of citizens still live in poverty. As a result, this creates a deficit for many, particularly youth, between "... their reality and the Nigeria of their dreams" (Akinyetun, 2021, p. 104), causing them to feel the need to turn to cybercrime to correct this deficit.

Furthermore, Ibrahim (2016) provides insights that can help bridge the gap between the above insights, arguing that the drivers of cybercrime in Nigeria are different because they are primarily socioeconomic in nature, as opposed to other nations. He sees socioeconomic factors as particularly important when pertaining to adult men because Nigerian culture ties financial success to his social privilege and position in the social hierarchy. As a result, many Nigerian men see financial success as more important than almost anything else because it can give them the power to do almost anything they want. Olojede and Osah (2020) agree that poverty is a fundamental issue in Nigerian society, but they focus on and provide details about the government's role in poverty. For example, they discuss that corrupt actions have severely hampered the Nigerian economy, leading to a greater prevalence of poverty and a hampered ability to govern properly. Additionally, they argue that the extent to which corruption has proliferated in the Nigerian government is so high that continued poverty is unavoidable in its current state. Given that the sociological motivators presented by Akinytun (2021) appear to require poverty and corruption as prerequisites to drive cybercrime, this paper considers political science, economics, and criminology the most relevant disciplines for the chosen research questions.

Olojede and Osah (2020) base their primary insights on modernization theory, which asserts that societies must go through stages of development ranging from primitive to modern. The authors argue that Nigeria is currently in one of the early stages where political corruption and poverty are prominent and that intentional action is needed to progress into more advanced stages. One aspect of Nigerian society that makes the need for intentional action particularly relevant is that it values "...smartness and intelligence…" (Olojede & Osha, 2020, p. 18), and many Nigerians view the corrupt actions politicians take to be successful as such. Additionally,

Olojede and Osah note that many Nigerian citizens in chronic poverty have become disillusioned with their poverty and that corruption has become so commonplace in Nigerian society that many citizens accept it as their way of life. Because of these feelings of defeat and potential admiration for qualities that can create corrupt politicians, the authors argue that intentional action must be taken to reduce political corruption and raise the standard of living for average Nigerian citizens. When considering this recommendation, using modernization theory and modeling the Nigerian government and economy after the West could be effective because it provides a starting point and a clear roadmap for intentional actions Nigeria can take to pull itself out of the corruption and poverty cycle.

To analyze Galadima and Umar's (2023) insights, it is important to know that they use Marxian theory as their theoretical framework. Their theoretical framework section discusses how Marxian theory asserts that people are naturally "altruistic and not competitive" (Galadima & Umar, 2023, p. 44). In contrast, according to Marxian theory, capitalism is a system that focuses on individual success rather than the group, leading to a ruling class based on wealth gained through the exploitation of the majority class. This focus on the individual also leads to greed and corruption in the ruling class. Using this framework, Galadima and Umar argue that many in Nigeria turn to cybercrime as an escape from poverty and oppression. The authors' primary insight into how to combat cybercrime in Nigeria is that the government must provide its citizens with employment opportunities and the ability to pull themselves out of poverty by creating their own livelihoods through personal businesses. Given that Galadima and Umar use Marxian theory as a framework, this paper assumes the term "personal business" to mean a business owned by those who run it, allowing for fair wages proportional to profit and efforts.

Galadima and Umar (2023) provide valuable insight into the relevance of economics in actions that the Nigerian government can take to curb online romance scams. Additionally, Olojede and Osah (2020) provide insights on how political corruption can negatively impact Nigeria's economy. As mentioned throughout this paper, poverty is a prominent motivator for Nigerians to commit cybercrimes for several reasons, including status and survival (Ibrahim, 2016; Olojede & Osah, 2020). Consider how the prominent corruption of government officials in pocketing public funds for personal gain helps drive poverty (Olojede & Osah, 2020). Not only does this directly negatively impact the financial well-being of Nigerians by preventing the funds from being used for public good, but this corruption also indirectly impacts poverty because it discourages other countries, including wealthy ones, from trading with and investing in Nigeria. This can create a vicious loop that continually hurts Nigeria's economy and thus further perpetuates the poverty rates of its citizens, leading to a greater incidence of cybercrime. These factors demonstrate that the Nigerian government can take actions that prevent the misuse of public funds for personal gain by the ruling class, be it financially or politically, to exploit and disadvantage the lower class.

Another aspect of understanding cybercrime in Nigeria is how it is classified. Ibrahim (2016) argues that the two current cybercrime classification systems are insufficient for understanding cybercrime in Nigeria because they do not sufficiently account for the perpetrator's motivation. One of the current systems classifies cybercrime as either cyber-enabled, meaning that the crime committed may be targeted at non-technical goals, or cyber-dependent, meaning the target of a cyberattack is specifically another piece of technology. Somewhat similarly, the second model classifies cybercrime as either people-centric or techo-centric. These are essentially analogous to the two previous terms in that the target of people-

centric attacks is people, and the target of techno-centric attacks is computer systems. An example of how these models are insufficient is that they would categorize cyber fraud and cyberbullying as cyber-enabled or people-centric. However, these two crimes often have two different underlying primary motivators. For cyber fraud, the perpetrator often has a financial motivation to steal money from the victim. In contrast, the primary motivation for a perpetrator of cyberbullying is often inflicting psychological damage upon the victim. Given that these two cybercrimes have very different motivations, Ibrahim argues that it is insufficient to stop at classifying them at a single high level, such as the methods and targets of attacks. As a result, he proposes a new categorization system incorporating socioeconomic, psychosocial, and geopolitical motivators.

One critique of current cybercrime classification systems Ibrahim (2016) discusses that is pertinent for the Nigerian government is how their lack of nuance can affect how policymakers create solutions and regulations to address the problem based on the data and insights from more Western-focused organizations. Ibrahim's new framework could inform government action by guiding how to classify cybercrimes more effectively in a Nigerian context. This could help the Nigerian government identify motives and consider these when creating legislation and potential solutions to curb cybercrime incidence. For example, because the motivations for cybercrime in Nigeria are frequently very different from those in the West, Nigerian government officials should scrutinize any policy or legislation targeted at cybercrime coming from the West. While doing so, they should consider why it was effective in the West and how Nigeria may differ. This could encourage Nigerian government officials to tailor regulations to the specific needs of their nation and create more effective solutions.

Despite agreement about many factors leading Nigerians to cybercrime, the disciplinary insights into reducing cybercrime incidence provided by the authors cited throughout this paper conflict significantly. The most prominent of these conflicts is between political science and economics. For political science, Olojede and Osah (2020) argue that government corruption leads to poverty, which in turn leads to more frequent crime. Olojede and Osah analyze this phenomenon using modernization theory, which is based on capitalism and provides guidance on how a nation can evolve from primitive to prosperous and modern. The authors propose that Nigeria model its government and economy after those of Western countries to reduce corruption and poverty since they have the most advanced political institutions and economies.

In stark contrast, using Marxian theory, Galadima and Umar (2023) approach the relationship between corruption, poverty, and cybercrime from an economic standpoint. Marxian theory asserts that "...crime is a natural outgrowth of capitalism…" (Galadima & Umar, 2023, p. 44). This assertion poses a significant theoretical conflict between Olojede and Osah's (2020) insights and Galadima and Umar's insights. While Olojede and Osah argue that modeling the Nigerian government after those of Western, capitalistic countries can effectively solve corruption, poverty, and crime, Galadima and Umar disagree with this because their theoretical foundation posits that creating a capitalist society would drive these three problems.

Another insight that conflicts with Olojede and Osah (2020) is from Ibrahim (2016), who argues that the current taxonomies of cybercrime are insufficient for correctly categorizing cybercrime in a Nigerian context. In particular, Ibrahim points out that socioeconomic cybercrimes are more prevalent in Nigeria and that current taxonomies based on cybercrime committed in Western nations can lead policymakers to create ineffective solutions for Nigeria. As a result, Ibrahim's ideas conflict with Olojede and Osah's proposal to restructure Nigeria's

government in a way that is based on Western countries. According to Ibrahim's insight, this solution would likely fail if it did not consider the unique socio-cultural aspects of Nigeria when modernizing its government.

This paper will use the interdisciplinary concept of transformation to create common ground between the conflicting disciplinary insights outlined above. Repko and Szostak (2017b, p. 283) explain that transformation is particularly well-suited to create common ground between insights, concepts, or assumptions that are fundamentally opposed to each other, which is the case for the insights provided by the political science and economics sources explored throughout this paper. Instead of thinking of issues as a binary where either one solution or another is correct, transformation allows for creating a spectrum of possible solutions. An interdisciplinary researcher can create this spectrum by putting one disciplinary insight on one end of the spectrum and its diametric counterpart on the other (Repko & Szostak, 2017b, pp. 283-284). This allows the researcher to consider aspects of each insight and integrate them to come to a more comprehensive understanding.

In the case of reducing cybercrime in Nigeria, both Galadima and Umar (2023), who take an economic approach, and Olojede and Osah (2020), who have a political science perspective, want government reform that will lead to less crime and corruption despite their fundamental theoretical conflicts. This desire can be seen in Olojede and Osah's writing when they emphasize the chain reaction of government corruption leading to poverty and crime and how this cycle can be mitigated by modeling the Nigerian government after advanced Western nations that are not fraught with corruption. Further, Galadima and Umar echo this sentiment in their recommendations for government reform, arguing that Nigeria should move away from a capitalistic economy because it is a system that inherently breeds greed, crime, and corruption.

These examples indicate that the authors of these two sources want a less corrupt government that does not impede Nigerian citizens and allows them to flourish.

To reconcile the differences between Olojede and Osah's (2020) Western ideals and Galadima and Umar's (2023) Marxian basis, this paper proposes that capitalistic and Marxian should not be considered descriptors of entire forms of government or economic systems. Instead, these terms should be considered adjectives to describe certain aspects of a government or economy. This recommendation can be further developed by creating a spectrum with capitalistic measures and ideas on one end and Marxian ones on the other. This does away with the dichotomy between capitalism and Marxian theories by allowing more freedom to consider ideas with an open mind. Furthermore, this solution fits nicely with Ibrahim's (2016) insights on the limitations of applying solutions that worked for one society to another because they do not necessarily account for the unique socio-cultural differences between the two. By thinking of Marxian and capitalistic as adjectives of only certain aspects of a government and economy and placing them on opposite ends of a spectrum, Nigerian citizens and government officials can consider their own unique qualities and select a range of measures from across the spectrum to create reform that will work best in their specific context. This proposal also goes well with Ibrahim's suggestion to take intentional steps to hold politicians accountable to ethical standards and reduce corruption. Because the measures in the proposed spectrum come from a variety of nations, including those that are, according to Olojede and Osah, politically advanced, they could allow a range of choices to implement intentional action that could effectively create a more functional and ethical government in Nigeria.

However, it is important to consider potential limitations and tests of this proposal's effectiveness. As previously stated, sociology is classified as less relevant to the research

question and not explored comprehensively due to this course's scope limitations. Even so, sociology contributes to the prevalence of Nigerian cybercrime and could pose an obstacle in the real-world implementation of this paper's recommendations. For instance, when exploring the impacts of sociological factors on cybercrime, Aborisade (2022) discusses how neutralization theory can be applied when studying both young perpetrators of online romance scams and their parents. Specifically, neutralization theory contends that people will use various techniques in an attempt to minimize the perceived impact of their crimes to evade the expectations or control that society has over them. Not only are these strategies used by perpetrators, but Aborisade found through a series of interviews that the parents of youth committing online romance scams will use similar strategies to justify their children's actions. This could indicate deeper societal issues that could persist and cause many Nigerian youth to continue committing online romance scams even if significant government reform could reduce corruption and raise the quality of life for Nigerian citizens.

Another consideration in testing this paper's insight involves confirming the potential effectiveness of solutions on the capitalistic-Marxist spectrum when applied in the Nigerian context. In his analysis, Ibrahim (2016) also points out another issue with the current two cybercrime classification systems: it can lead policymakers to invest effort and resources into ineffective strategies because the classification schemes do not account for Nigeria's specific societal aspects. Because the two ideologies residing at the ends of the spectrum proposed by this paper also largely originate from and have been applied in nations outside of Africa, special care should be taken to test whether measures on this spectrum can be effectively applied in Nigeria. Considering the difference between Nigerian and Western societies, some solutions on this continuum may not be worthwhile investments for Nigerian politicians.

In reviewing the existing literature on cybercrime in Nigeria, it is clear that the underlying drivers of online romance scams are diverse and originate from many disciplines. While authors from these disciplines provide valuable insights into the issue, these individual disciplines have been unable to create a satisfactory solution independently. The need for interdisciplinarity in solving this issue is evident from the sources used in this paper's discussion of the impacts of political corruption, insufficient classification systems, social norms, and poverty on Nigerian cybercrime. As a result, this paper adopted the IRP as its framework to carefully analyze insights, identify and reconcile conflicts, and integrate them to create a more comprehensive solution in the form of a spectrum of measures ranging between capitalistic and Marxian that allows the Nigerian government a broad assortment of restructuring possibilities to choose from while considering Nigeria's unique socioeconomic qualities. While this idea has a strong foundation in political science, criminology, and economics, the possible complicating factors mentioned previously indicate that this new understanding must be tested before it is implemented to determine whether it will be an effective solution in the long term. Despite these issues not appearing to be the root cause of prominent cybercrime in Nigeria, they could still motivate some individuals.

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