

Truncating the Drive of Yahoo-Yahoo in Nigeria: The Relevance of Surah At-Takhathur

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ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the increasing nature of cybercrime activities, particularly yahoo-yahoo in Nigeria. The paper adopted descriptive and evaluative methods of research to gather and analyze relevant data. The paper identifies some cases of this crime in society to validate its position. The findings show that the influence of peer groups, parental and societal support, unemployment, and many others account for the growing nature of crime in society. While the paper posits that the criminal gain from Yahoo activities is temporal, it draws attention to the concept of life after death and accountability as enumerated in Qur'an chapter 102 as a deterrence to the people's inordinate quest for wealth at all costs. The paper recommends a more robust orientation of people by both religious leaders and appropriate government agencies on the need to have the human mind and no devilish nature. The government and the well-to-do people in society are also encouraged to join hands to address the problem of unemployment.

Keywords: Yahoo-Yahoo, Nigeria, Surah At-Takhathur

INTRODUCTION

One of the most notorious crimes in our society is cybercrime perpetrated by the "Yahoo- Yahoo" boys. For the purpose of clarification, in Nigeria, "yahoo yahoo" refers to the use of computers, phones, and the internet to defraud unsuspecting victims, especially those outside the country. Perpetrators of this crime adopt Yahoo e-mails and Yahoo instant messenger as a medium of communication between them and their victims. It is as a result of this that they became popularly known as "yahoo yahoo" (Lazarus & Okolorie, 2019).¹

As time went on, some perpetrators of this heinous act resorted to utilising magic and evil spirit as tools to defraud their victims (Melvin & Ayotunde, 2010). This development is referred to as *yahoo plus*, and perpetrators are referred to as "yahoo boys" plus. Section 419 of Nigeria's Criminal Code clearly tags all forms of internet scam as a fraudulent act.²

It is important to note that the advent of computers and the introduction of the internet have provided great job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth. In addition, these two inventions have had a tremendous positive influence on all aspects of human life (socio-political, economic, and

religious life). Notwithstanding their advantages, their use by some Nigerian youth in the perpetration of various forms of fraudulent acts calls for urgent attention. The negative impacts of cybercrime lie in the fact that it leads to the moral degeneration of society, and perpetrators are deprived of peace of mind in this world and hardly attain a pleasurable end. This research looks into the activities of the “Yahoo-Yahoo” boys with the intent of addressing the menace in the light of Islam.

Research Method

The research adopted both the descriptive and applied research methods. The descriptive research method attempts to objectively describe and interpret issues, phenomena, or problems for better understanding and appreciation. By implication, the paper examines a number of relevant materials on the activities of the Yahoo-Yahoo boys. All the materials gathered were clearly explained. This approach is meant to provide the true nature of the situation for further clarification and necessary action.³

The research applied a scientific method that seeks to provide the solution to the deduced problem affecting an individual group or society at large. This method is categorized into three parts: the evaluation approach, research and development approach, and action research approach. This research specifically opts for the evaluation category of the applied research method. The evaluation research approach analyses the available data in order to provide a solution to the issue at stake. The materials gathered through the descriptive method serve as convincing grounds for affirming the trend of Yahoo-Yahoo in Nigeria. This avails the researcher an opportunity to identify the implications and find a solution to the deduced problem.⁴

Findings and Discussion

Evidence of Yahoo-Yahoo activities in Nigeria.

Hardly would a day pass without a report in some of the Nigerian dailies about an arrest or conviction of a Yahoo-Yahoo boy. For example, in April 2012, an undergraduate student of Olabisi Onabanjo University in Ago-Iwoye was sentenced to five years imprisonment for attempting to obtain money under false pretences in a cyber cafe. Similarly, on June 5, 2012, a student of the University of Ilorin was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Federal High Court in Kaduna State for defrauding an Australian of US\$1,000.⁵

On August 8 and 9, 2022, Justice Bayo Taiwo of Oyo State High Court, sitting in Ibadan, was reported to have convicted and sentenced seven internet fraudsters to various jail terms.⁶ On Thursday, August 31, 2023, Justice O. I. Adelaja of the Federal Capital Territory High Court, sitting in Kubwa, Abuja, was convicted six people on one count of separate charges bordering on internet fraud. After cross-examination, the accused pleaded guilty to all the charges against them.⁷

Similarly, ten people were, on September 14, 2023, convicted by Justice O. A. Egwuatu of the Federal High Court sitting in Maitama, Abuja, for their alleged involvement in cybercrime.⁸ On August 23, 2023, security agencies in Port Harcourt arrested about 12 Internet fraudsters (Yahoo Boys) for allegedly burying a newborn baby alive at Andoni waterfront in Eagle Island, Port Harcourt. Although they had left the spot before the arrival of the security forces, nemesis caught up with them, and they were caught, arrested, and taken to Azikiwe Police Division, Illabiuchi, Mile 2 Diobu.⁹

In October 2022, some Yahoo boys in Ibadan went on a smear campaign against EFCC, calling for a review and reform of the activities of the agency. It was gathered that the agency's drastic measures against their activities prompted their protest.¹⁰ In 2022, the Ogun state Governor, Dapo Abiodun, acknowledged the claim of the then EFCC Chairman Abdurasheed Bawa, affirming the state to be top

on the list of states with incidents of Yahoo-Yahoo cases. The Governor, however, attributed it to the high rate of tertiary institutions in the state.¹¹

In Delta state, the Yahoo boys were said to have gone to the extent of using the pants of women for rituals in order to facilitate their dubious ambitions. Attention is mostly focused on girls between the ages of 16-32. The report further affirmed that a pair of pants sold for as high as two hundred and fifty thousand naira. The implication is that after its usage, the owner loses her womb. The following is a declaration by a female resident of the Ubeji area of Warri Delta state: *As a rule now in my house, we pour anointing oil and sprinkle holy water on our pants before wearing them because of "Yahoo Boys".*¹²

Factors Promoting the Trend of Yahoo in Nigeria

Peer influence

No human being lives in isolation, as there are always irresistible reasons that make one interact with others in society. In most cases, people of the same age range, same school, same class, or same social association do relate among themselves. This interaction could have favourable or detrimental effects on the life of an individual. It is on record that many yahoo boys are introduced to this job by their friends whom they had met at school or social gatherings. Having seen their friends riding flashy cars and spraying money anyhow at night clubs, they are desperate to be like their friends and are ready to do anything necessary to make them as rich as their friends overnight.¹³

Parental / Societal support for unquestionable wealth: In research carried out in 2020, it was gathered that some parents and family of Yahoo boys support their children with their nefarious criminality. The finding further revealed that some parents see nothing wrong with yahoo practice. To ensure sustenance of the ill-gotten wealth, some parents, especially mothers, go to the extent of escorting their children to diabolic herbalists for evil power to aid their children's criminal activities.¹⁴

In January 2022, 32-year-old Afeez Olalere, who is a Yahoo boy, was arrested by the operative of Lagos State Police Command. After interrogation, he confessed that in connivance with their mother, he killed his junior brother for an evil ritual so as to resuscitate his deteriorating Yahoo business.¹⁵

The ostentatious display of wealth is a common tradition, especially among Nigerian politicians. The same applies to the Yahoo boys. These people are received by some people and social institutions when they make their illegitimate money; hence, the increasing justification of illegality. Society admires the flamboyant lifestyle. Nobody, however, knows the source of another's wealth. Some youth are fascinated by flamboyant lifestyles and yearn to acquire wealth by all means so as to be admired by society. They, therefore, take to cybercrime in their mistaken belief that the end justifies the means.¹⁶

Lack of job opportunities

After rigorous academic study and completion of the one-year service to the nation, many graduates wander about the street looking for any meaningful job without success. This class of graduates is an easy and gullible target for initiation into the scamming business.¹⁷ The fear of unemployment or unknown (future destiny) also serves as a push factor. The following is a confession by one of the Yahoo boys.

*Most of us do this to be established before graduation rather than waiting for after-school unemployment. By the way, I don't see anything wrong with it, it's just a hustle.*¹⁸ Instead of making the best use of the teeming unemployed graduates, society allows them to roam around the street. The gullible and venerable ones are easily initiated into the job of yahoo-yahoo as they are misled by the mentality of get-rich-quick no matter the way.¹⁹

Nigerian police: Instead of enforcing law and order in society, some Nigerian policemen are out to take advantage of criminals in order to enrich themselves. Knowing very well that “yahoo boys”, when caught, are ready to give out money in order to go scot-free, these policemen are always on the search for these boys.²⁰ This factor no doubt promotes the perpetration of yahoo-yahoo in the society.

Consequences of the practices of yahoo-yahoo

The adverse effects of the criminality known as yahoo are obvious and enormous. Wealth realized through yahoo is deprived of blessings and, as such, does not last long. The noticeable effect is that some of the perpetrators of cybercrime often run mad, their families become objects of ridicule and shame in society, and they often end up being wretched. All these are a result of mortgaging their human destinies for transitory animalistic treasuries. This clearly shows that Yahoo has no meaningful gain in the act.²¹

The profligate lifestyle of the *Yahoo boys* tells on the nation with its large number of poor people.²² An interview conducted at Offa in Kwara State, Ibadan, and Ogbomosho in Oyo State revealed that the Yahoo boys have contributed to the skyrocketing rate of house rent as they were always ready to give multiples of the normal rent to landlords. With their freely illegally obtained money, they are able to entice the landlord and agents with much money in order to have the house given to them. This scenario has made many landlords become greedy and inflate their house rent without minding the current economic situation by which a majority of the poor citizens cannot afford such a rate.²³

In addition, Yahoo boys are associated with Drug Abuse, various forms of occult sacrifices, a rough lifestyle, and atrocious habits. Many were said to have met their Waterloo through any of the above-mentioned attitudes. There are also cases of mob actions against suspected Yahoo boys in the society, which resulted in their demoralization or, at times, death. In the course of seeking diabolical power for the easy accomplishment of their cybercrime, sometimes they often meet their Waterloo. For example, in April 2023, a 20-year-old suspected internet fraudster, Peter Albert, was said to have died after taking some concoction and bathing overnight with the hope that a ghost would approach him with a huge amount of money running to N5 million every day.²⁴

The prevalence of cybercrimes in a society results in moral degeneration²⁵ and affects socio-economic life, which, no doubt, impedes the revenue generation of the country and reduces job opportunities for citizens. More so, foreign investors are skeptical of investing their resources in a country where there is no certainty that there would not be a spillover effect for the Yahoo boys.²⁶

Yahoo-Yahoo in Nigeria: The Relevance of Surah At-Takathur

The Glorious Qur’an is a cure for all forms of human problems. This has been mentioned in many verses, including the following;

We send down [stage by stage] in the Qur’an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe: to the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss. Qur’an (17:82)

O mankind! there hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the [diseases] in your hearts-and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy. Qur’an (10: 57)

The Glorious Qur’an consists of 114 chapters, of which Surah At-Takathur is chapter 102. The chapter is titled “The Chapter of Abundance or Piling Up”. It was revealed in Makkah and consists of eight verses. Below is the presentation of the chapter, its interpretation, and its relevance to curbing the menace of yahoo-yahoo syndrome in Nigeria.

Surah 102. Takathur, or Piling Up

1. The mutual rivalry for piling up [the good things of this world] diverts you [from the more serious things],
2. Until ye visit the graves.
3. But nay, ye soon shall know [the reality].
4. Again, ye soon shall know!
5. Nay, were ye to know with certainty of mind, [ye would beware!]
6. Ye shall certainly see Hell-Fire!
7. Again, ye shall see it with certainty of sight!
8. Then, shall ye be questioned that day about the joy [ye indulged in!].

The reason behind the revelation of the above chapter, according to some interpreters of the Qur'an, is to caution the tribes who indulge in contests to boast about their wealth, position, and adherents. It was mentioned that they went to the cemetery to count their tribal graves. There are several opinions on this. Some believe it was revealed with respect to the two tribes of Quraish, while others uphold that it refers to two tribes in Madinah.

The whole issue discussed in the paper centres around the greedy nature of human beings with regard to the acquisition of wealth at all costs. This is discernible in the inordinate quest by the Yahoo boys to acquire wealth by all means in order to live a flamboyant lifestyle. The support received by these criminals from their parents also denotes the extent of people's degeneration to worldly lusts and illusion at the expense of the hereafter. The societal admiration of ostentatious display of wealth at the expense of morality is evidence of moral decadence in modern society. The same reason is alluded to for the aiding and abetting of the crimes of the Yahoo boys by law enforcement agencies in our society.

Qur'an chapter 102, Surah at Takathur, is seen as an antidote to all the above-identified spiritual maladjustments. It is pertinent to note that the word *At-Takhathur* is an Arabic word and, specifically, the title of chapter 102 of the Glorious Qur'an. The word connotes piling up. The whole verses of the Surah cautions man about the distractive nature of the world, which makes him greedy and forgetful of the eminence of death. In his interpretation of the chapter, Ibn Kathir²⁸ mentioned a prophetic tradition that often softens the hearts of the companions whenever it is narrated. So instructive and inspiring was its nature that the companions earlier thought it was one of the revealed verses. The hadith is quoted below:

If the son of Adam were given a valley of gold, he would love to have a second one; and if he were given the second one, he would love to have a third, for nothing fills the belly of Adam's son except dust. And Allah forgives him who (repents to Him and) begs for His pardon."²⁹

After the revelation of "the chapter of piling up", their mind became clear that the above is a prophetic tradition that speaks to the human's mind, while the chapter of Takathur was revealed to corroborate this moral rearmament. In this chapter, Allah says:

أَلْهَكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ

"The mutual rivalry for piling up [the good things of this world] diverts you [from the more serious things], Until ye visit the graves"

In continuation of his exegesis of this chapter, Ibn Kathir mentioned the following relevant hadith:

Narrated from Muttarrif that his father said: "I came to the Prophet when he was reciting: "The mutual rivalry (for piling of worldly things) diverts you", [if and he said: "The son of Adam says: 'My wealth, my wealth.' He said: 'O son of Adam, do you have anything of your wealth but that which you consume and use up, or you wear and it wears out, or you give it in charity and send it forward?'"³⁰

The lesson from the above implies that it is man's greedy nature that urges him to want more and more. Man is, therefore, reminded to be conscious regarding what to acquire and how to acquire it before death overcomes him. In the hadith, man is told that even from the lawfully acquired wealth, what benefits man is what he takes, wares, or gives out as charity. All other luxuries which no doubt shall be left behind are of no benefit to man. This teaches that amassing wealth and seeking affluence at all costs, which eventually shall be of no benefit after death, should be avoided. Another relevant prophetic tradition mentioned in his book is the hadith, which says:

Narrated Anas bin Mālik Allah's Messenger said, "When carried to his grave, a dead person is followed by three, two of which return (after his burial) and one remains with him; his relatives, his property, and his deeds follow him; relatives and his property return back while his deeds remain with him."³¹

The above implies that death is imminent, life in the grave is obvious, but neither wealth nor property would be anyone's companion in the grave, except the deeds exhibited by man. Man is, therefore, cautioned to remember this stage of life so as to curtail the excessive desire to become rich at all costs.

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ - ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ

"But nay, ye soon shall know [the reality]. Again, ye soon shall know!" This refers to the time when man is placed in the grave and the things which he is being cautioned about becomes a reality to him.

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ

Nay, were ye to know with certainty of mind, [ye would beware!]

لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ - ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

Ye shall certainly see Hell-Fire!, Again, ye shall see it with certainty of sight!

ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ

Then, shall ye be questioned that Day about the joy [ye indulged in!].

All the remaining verses from verses 5-8 remind man that the fleet of cars, the faces of beautiful ladies, the gorgeous dresses, the alcoholic drinks of numerous categories, and all sorts of merriments and enjoyment of the world are nothing but temporal. The verses remind man that death is real, hell-fire is certain, and the day of accountability awaits man. Man is, therefore, cautioned to avoid a quest for wealth, which is only temporal at the expense of the reward in the next world, which is certain and eternal.

The concept of accountability is stressed in the verse, and this implies that the reward or consequences of man's actions await him in eternal life. The chapter is invariably cautioning that killing or defrauding a person in order to become rich is neither a delightful thing nor is it a gain. The following prophetic traditions shed more light on the above.

There is no man among you except that his Lord shall converse with him on the Day of Judgment, there being no interpreter between him and Him (Allah). Then he looks to the south (his right) and does not see anything except the things he put forward (of good), then he looks to the north (his left) and he does not see anything except the things he put forward (of evil), then he turns to look before him to find he is facing the Fire". The Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever among you is able to protect his face from [the heat of] the Fire – even with a piece of a date - then let him do so".³²

The feet of the son of Adam shall not move from before his Lord on the Day of Judgment, until he is asked about five things: About his life and what he did with it, about his youth and what he wore it out in, about his wealth and how he earned it, and spent it upon, and what he did with what he knew.³³

Do you know who the bankrupt is?" They said: "O Messenger of Allah! The bankrupt among us is the one who has no Dirham nor property". the Messenger of Allah said: "The bankrupt in my *Ummah* is the one who comes with *Salāt* and fasting and *Zakat* on the Day of Judgment, but he comes having abused this one, falsely accusing that one, wrongfully consuming the wealth of this one, spilling the blood of that one, and beating this one. So he is seated, and this one is requited from his rewards, and that one from his rewards. If his rewards are exhausted before the sins that he committed are requited, then some of their sins will be taken and cast upon him, then he will be cast into the Fire.³⁴

All the above prophetic traditions corroborate the teachings of the Qur'an chapter 102 on accountability. The deeds of man shall either be for him or against him. The youthful state of life is a precious stage that man is expected to utilize judiciously. In addition, whatever man acquires in life by lawful means must also be utilized in the right manner. On the day of accountability, retribution shall take place, and those who are wrongfully killed or defrauded shall have every course to rejoice. The oppressors, on the other hand, shall be the losers who shall end up in the blazing fire of hell.

Conclusion

The finding affirmed that the inability of ordinary yahoo boys to actualize their aims had resulted in the increasing rate of human insecurity in the country. Their desperation had culminated in their adoption of a devilish approach, which involved the use of vital human organs, sanitary pads, women's undies, and others for rituals meant to aid their success. The research suggests the need to arrest most of the affluent youths in any community whose wealth is questionable. In addition, it suggests the proper orientation of the community on the consequences of this nefarious act.³⁵

In recent times, the activities of the Yahoo boys have developed into what they call yahoo plus. To this end, the more desperate among them have resorted to spiritual means to enhance their businesses. This is referred to as "Yahoo Plus". Yahoo Plus is an advanced form of yahoo yahoo whereby the "yahoo boys" employ traditional spiritual means like voodoo or juju to hypnotize their victims into doing their bidding and parting with whatever amount of money they request. In other words, the yahoo boys indulge in occultic ritual practices to enhance their potential to defraud people.³⁶

There are multi-dimensional approaches to researching the trend of Yahoo-Yahoo in Nigeria. For example, the activity of Yahoo-Yahoo is viewed as a crime most popularly practised by the youthful population. In spite of the various governmental efforts to curb their activities, Yahoo-Yahoo is able to evade and outsmart the government through different methods, thereby robbing innocent people of

their legally acquired wealth. The need to explore ethical and religious issues is a way forward.³⁷

The paper is able to buttress the prevalence of the yahoo-yahoo in the society. The copious examples highlighted in the paper affirmed the worrisome expansion of this crime in Nigeria. Addressing the problem from the perspective of the lessons in Qur'an chapter 102 is apt as it provides the relevant solution to the problem at stake.

Recommendations

There should be a robust orientation from the side of both religious leaders and the appropriate government agencies on the need for the youth, parents, and society to develop a human attitude in the pursuit of material assets and the need to say no devilish nature.

The government and the well-to-do should join hands to address the problem of unemployment in society.

The government must ensure proper checkmating of the activities of the Yahoo-Yahoo in the country by providing adequate opportunities for the development of the potential of the teeming youth population.

Parents must ensure proper surveillance of their children to prevent them from being carried away by desperate youth who are out to make money at all costs.

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