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**Yahoo-Yahoo to Tech Bros: Cybercrime, Hustle Culture, and Moral Disengagement Among Cross River State Under-30s in the Digital Economy**

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**Abstract**

This study examined cybercrime-related factors and youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria, with a focus on the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture within the digital economy. The study sought to determine the influence of economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship. Existing literature were reviewed based on the subject under study. The study was anchored on strain theory, which posits that individuals may resort to unconventional means of achieving socially approved goals when legitimate opportunities are limited. A survey research design was adopted. The study targeted youths aged 18–30 years across the three senatorial districts of Cross River State. Using a multistage sampling procedure, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected, while 392 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement significantly influenced youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship. It was concluded that cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship are competing responses to socio-economic pressures and opportunities within the digital economy. Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended amongst others that: Government agencies should strengthen youth employment and digital entrepreneurship programmes to reduce economic pressures that encourage cybercrime.

*Keywords: Cybercrime, Yahoo-Yahoo, Tech Bro Culture, Digital Entrepreneurship, Hustle Culture, Moral Disengagement, Youths*

**Introduction**

The emergence of the digital economy has fundamentally transformed social, economic, and cultural life across the world. Advances in information and communication technologies have created unprecedented opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation, employment generation, and

wealth creation. The integration of digital technologies into everyday life has altered traditional pathways to economic participation, particularly among young people who are often the earliest adopters of technological innovations. Across developing societies, the digital economy has become an important mechanism for promoting economic inclusion, facilitating access to global markets, and supporting new forms of employment. In Nigeria, the expansion of internet connectivity, mobile technology, social media platforms, and digital financial services has contributed significantly to the growth of digital entrepreneurship and online economic activities (World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2025). At the same time, however, the rapid growth of digital technologies has also generated new forms of criminal behavior, particularly cybercrime, which has become a major social and security concern in the country. The coexistence of legitimate digital entrepreneurship and cyber-enabled fraud represents one of the most important sociological contradictions of Nigeria's contemporary digital transformation.

Globally, young people occupy a central position within the digital economy because of their relatively high levels of technological literacy, adaptability, and engagement with online platforms. Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for innovation in areas such as software development, e-commerce, content creation, digital marketing, fintech services, and remote work. International development organizations increasingly recognize the digital economy as a critical pathway for youth empowerment and sustainable development. According to the United Nations (2024), digital inclusion can improve employment prospects, stimulate innovation, and enhance economic participation among young people.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2024) emphasizes that digital skills development remains essential for preparing youths to participate effectively in emerging knowledge economies. Consequently, governments, educational institutions, and development agencies have intensified efforts to equip youths with digital competencies necessary for contemporary labor markets. Nevertheless, the same digital infrastructure that enables innovation can also facilitate cyber-enabled criminal activities when ethical safeguards, employment opportunities, and regulatory capacities are inadequate.

## *Yahoo-Yahoo to Tech Bros: Cybercrime, Hustle Culture, and Moral Disengagement.....*

In Africa, the expansion of internet access and digital technologies has produced both developmental opportunities and cybersecurity challenges. As digital connectivity continues to increase across the continent, cybercrime has emerged as one of the fastest-growing forms of transnational crime. Recent assessments by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL, 2025) indicate that online scams, phishing attacks, business email compromise, identity theft, and other cyber-enabled offences constitute significant threats to individuals, organizations, and governments across African countries. The increasing sophistication of cybercriminal networks demonstrates that digital technologies are being utilized not only for innovation and economic development but also for criminal exploitation. The continent's rapidly growing youth population, combined with rising internet penetration and persistent economic challenges, has created conditions that make the study of cybercrime particularly important for understanding contemporary social change in Africa.

Nigeria occupies a unique position within Africa's digital landscape because of its large population, vibrant technology ecosystem, expanding fintech sector, and growing digital economy. The country has produced globally recognized technology startups and attracted significant investment in digital innovation (World Bank, 2025). Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Calabar, and other urban centers have witnessed the emergence of technology hubs, innovation clusters, software development communities, and entrepreneurial networks that provide opportunities for young people to engage in legitimate digital ventures. Simultaneously, Nigeria has long struggled with reputational challenges associated with internet fraud popularly referred to as "Yahoo-Yahoo." While public discourse often presents cybercrime and technology entrepreneurship as separate phenomena, both activities frequently emerge from the same digital environment and involve young people seeking economic advancement through technology-mediated opportunities. This duality raises important sociological questions regarding the factors that influence the pathways youths choose within the digital economy (World Bank, 2025; UNDP, 2024).

One of the most significant developments in contemporary Nigeria is the rise of what has become popularly known as "hustle culture." Hustle culture refers to a social orientation that

emphasizes relentless effort, entrepreneurship, multiple income streams, personal branding, and the pursuit of financial success. Within the context of economic uncertainty, high living costs, and limited employment opportunities, many young people increasingly view hustling as a necessary strategy for survival and upward mobility. Social media platforms frequently celebrate narratives of rapid success, wealth accumulation, and entrepreneurial achievement, thereby reinforcing aspirations for economic advancement (Abidin, 2023). While hustle culture can encourage innovation, resilience, and productivity, it may also contribute to the normalization of excessive materialism and the prioritization of outcomes over ethical considerations. Consequently, understanding the influence of hustle culture is essential for explaining contemporary youth attitudes toward wealth acquisition and economic success.

The growing influence of social media has further intensified the visibility of wealth and success in contemporary society. Digital platforms expose young people to continuous displays of luxury lifestyles, entrepreneurial accomplishments, celebrity culture, and influencer-driven narratives of prosperity. These online representations often shape perceptions of success and influence aspirations regarding social status and financial achievement. For many youths, social media serves as an important source of information about economic opportunities and lifestyle expectations. However, constant exposure to highly curated representations of wealth may also increase social comparison, status anxiety, and pressure to achieve visible indicators of success. Such dynamics can influence decision-making processes regarding acceptable means of achieving desired economic outcomes and may contribute to the rationalization of risky or unethical behaviors (Boyd, 2023; Abidin, 2023). A critical concept for understanding the relationship between youth aspirations and cybercrime is moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement refers to the cognitive processes through which individuals justify unethical actions and reduce feelings of guilt associated with harmful behavior. According to Bandura (2016), individuals may employ mechanisms such as moral justification, victim blaming, displacement of responsibility, and minimization of consequences to disengage moral self-regulation. Within digital environments, offenders often operate at considerable social and

geographical distances from their victims, reducing opportunities for empathy and facilitating rationalizations for harmful conduct. Such mechanisms are particularly relevant in contexts where economic hardship, social inequality, and perceptions of corruption are widespread.

Within Cross River State, these issues are increasingly relevant due to growing internet penetration, widespread smartphone use, expanding social media engagement, and increasing participation in digital economic activities among young people. The state hosts several tertiary institutions, entrepreneurial initiatives, digital training programmes, and innovation-oriented youth development projects. At the same time, concerns regarding youth unemployment, underemployment, economic vulnerability, and exposure to cyber-enabled activities remain significant.

Young people in Cross River State are therefore situated within a social environment characterized by both opportunities for legitimate digital entrepreneurship and exposure to cybercrime-related influences. Despite the growing importance of these issues, empirical sociological research examining the relationships among cybercrime, hustle culture, moral disengagement, and digital entrepreneurship within Cross River State remains limited. This study therefore seeks to examine the sociological dynamics underlying the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture among youths in Cross River State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The rapid expansion of the digital economy has generated both opportunities and challenges for young people across developing societies. While digital technologies have created new pathways for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic participation, they have also facilitated the emergence of cyber-enabled crimes that increasingly involve technologically skilled youths. In Nigeria, cybercrime has evolved from isolated internet fraud activities into a complex social phenomenon that attracts considerable public attention due to its economic, social, and reputational implications. Reports by the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL, 2025) indicate that cybercrime remains one of the fastest-growing criminal threats across Africa, with online fraud, phishing schemes, identity theft, and business email compromise representing

major areas of concern. Despite numerous governmental and institutional interventions aimed at strengthening cybersecurity and promoting digital innovation, cybercrime continues to attract some young people who perceive it as a viable means of achieving financial success in an increasingly competitive socio-economic environment.

The major concerns surrounding youth involvement in cybercrime is the persistence of economic conditions that limit access to legitimate opportunities for upward mobility. Although Nigeria's digital economy has expanded considerably over the past decade, unemployment, underemployment, income insecurity, and economic inequality continue to affect many young people. Youth employment challenges remain significant despite ongoing efforts to stimulate economic growth and digital transformation. Consequently, many youths face pressure to achieve socially valued goals such as financial independence, social status, and material success without having adequate access to conventional means of attaining them. This situation creates conditions under which some individuals may become vulnerable to alternative and potentially illegitimate pathways for wealth acquisition. However, existing public discussions frequently focus on the criminal outcomes of cybercrime without sufficiently examining the broader socio-economic pressures that shape youth decision-making within the digital economy.

The emergence of hustle culture has further complicated contemporary understandings of youth aspirations and economic behavior. Across social media platforms and popular culture, young people are increasingly exposed to messages emphasizing financial success, personal branding, entrepreneurship, and continuous economic productivity. While such narratives can inspire creativity, resilience, and innovation, they may also intensify social pressure to achieve visible markers of success irrespective of the means employed. Digital cultures frequently celebrate outcomes and lifestyles while paying limited attention to the ethical processes through which success is attained. As a result, some youths may internalize social expectations that prioritize wealth accumulation above ethical considerations. Yet, despite growing public debates regarding hustle culture in Nigeria, there remains limited empirical evidence concerning how such

cultural orientations influence attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship among young people, particularly within sub-national contexts such as Cross River State.

Another important concern relates to the role of social media in shaping perceptions of success and influencing behavioral choices. Social media platforms expose users to highly curated representations of prosperity, luxury lifestyles, entrepreneurial achievements, and celebrity influence. Research suggests that persistent exposure to such content may increase social comparison, status anxiety, and aspirations for rapid economic advancement (Boyd, 2023). Within the Nigerian context, social media has become a major arena through which narratives of both entrepreneurial success and cybercrime-related wealth are circulated and normalized. Consequently, young people may encounter conflicting messages that simultaneously promote legitimate innovation and glamorize illicit financial gains. Despite the significance of this phenomenon, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how social media exposure interacts with economic strain and hustle culture to shape youth attitudes toward cybercrime in Cross River State.

Furthermore, the concept of moral disengagement remains insufficiently explored within studies of cybercrime among Nigerian youths. According to Bandura (2016), individuals often employ cognitive mechanisms such as moral justification, victim blaming, and minimization of consequences to rationalize unethical conduct. Within digital environments, offenders frequently operate without direct contact with victims, making it easier to neutralize feelings of guilt and responsibility. Existing studies on cybercrime in Nigeria have largely focused on economic motivations, law enforcement challenges, and technological dimensions, while giving comparatively less attention to the cognitive and moral processes that influence participation in cyber-enabled crimes. This represents a significant theoretical gap because understanding how young people justify or reject cybercrime is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at promoting ethical behavior within the digital economy.

In Cross River State specifically, the increasing availability of internet services, smartphones, social media platforms, and digital training opportunities has expanded youth

engagement with the digital economy. Simultaneously, concerns regarding youth unemployment, economic vulnerability, and exposure to cyber-related activities continue to persist. While government agencies, educational institutions, and development organizations have introduced programmes designed to promote entrepreneurship and digital innovation, little empirical research has examined whether these opportunities are effectively influencing youths to choose legitimate digital pathways over cybercrime. More importantly, there is a scarcity of quantitative sociological studies investigating the relationships among economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, moral disengagement, and attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship within Cross River State. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the sociological factors underlying the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture among youths in Cross River State.

### **Objective of the study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

To what extent do cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) influence youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>: Cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) have no significant influence on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria.

H<sub>1</sub>: Cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) have a significant influence on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

The digital economy has emerged as one of the most transformative developments of the twenty-first century, reshaping the ways individuals interact, work, communicate, and generate income. Digital technologies have significantly expanded opportunities for entrepreneurship, innovation, and participation in global markets, particularly among young people who are often the most active users of information and communication technologies. According to World Bank (2019), digital technologies can stimulate economic growth, enhance productivity, and create new employment opportunities when supported by appropriate infrastructure and human capital development. Similarly, International Telecommunication Union (2024) reported continued growth in internet penetration across developing countries, creating unprecedented opportunities for youth participation in digital economic activities. However, scholars have noted that digital transformation has simultaneously produced new forms of criminality, including cybercrime, identity theft, online fraud, and financial scams, thereby creating a dual reality in which technology functions as both a tool for development and a mechanism for deviance (Holt et al., 2018).

Cybercrime has become one of the most widely studied manifestations of deviance within contemporary digital societies. Scholars generally define cybercrime as criminal activities conducted through computers, digital devices, or internet-enabled networks for purposes such as fraud, theft, deception, extortion, or unauthorized access to information systems (Yar & Steinmetz, 2019). Within Nigeria, internet fraud popularly known as Yahoo-Yahoo has attracted significant academic and policy attention due to its prevalence among young people and its implications for national development. According to Tade and Aliyu (2011), Yahoo-Yahoo emerged as a socially organized form of internet-mediated fraud involving the manipulation of victims through deception, impersonation, and emotional exploitation. Although initially associated with advance-fee fraud schemes, contemporary cybercrime has evolved into more sophisticated forms involving phishing attacks, cryptocurrency scams, business email compromise, and social engineering techniques (Lazarus & Button, 2022). Consequently, cybercrime has become an important subject for sociological inquiry because it reflects broader issues relating to youth aspirations, economic opportunity structures, and social adaptation.

A recurring argument within the literature is that youth involvement in cybercrime is closely linked to structural conditions characterized by unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic inequality. Drawing upon sociological perspectives, scholars have argued that deviant behavior often emerges when individuals encounter barriers to achieving culturally valued goals through legitimate means. Nigeria's persistent youth unemployment crisis has therefore been identified as an important contextual factor in understanding cybercrime participation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), youth unemployment and underemployment continue to affect substantial proportions of the country's working-age population despite various intervention programmes. Research conducted by Ojedokun and Eraye (2012) found that many cybercrime offenders perceived internet fraud as a rational response to economic hardship and limited employment opportunities. Similarly, studies by Lazarus (2018) and Olayemi (2020) suggest that economic frustration often contributes to the attractiveness of cybercrime as an alternative means of achieving financial success.

The relationship between economic strain and deviant behavior has received considerable empirical support within criminological and sociological literature. Strain-oriented studies emphasize that individuals who experience blocked opportunities, financial insecurity, and relative deprivation may become more likely to engage in unconventional strategies for achieving desired outcomes. Agnew (1992) argues that strain generates negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and resentment, which may increase the likelihood of deviant adaptations. Within the Nigerian context, widespread youth unemployment, inflationary pressures, and declining purchasing power have intensified economic challenges facing young adults. Studies conducted among cybercrime offenders indicate that many participants viewed cybercrime as a means of overcoming economic constraints and attaining social mobility (Lazarus & Button, 2022). Such findings suggest that cybercrime cannot be understood solely as a technological problem but must also be examined as a response to broader socio-economic realities.

Beyond economic considerations, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes the importance of cultural influences in shaping youth attitudes toward success and wealth acquisition.

## *Yahoo-Yahoo to Tech Bros: Cybercrime, Hustle Culture, and Moral Disengagement.....*

One of the most significant cultural developments in recent years is the rise of hustle culture, a social orientation that celebrates relentless work, entrepreneurial ambition, productivity, and financial achievement. Hustle culture has become particularly prominent among young people through social media platforms, influencer marketing, and motivational content that promotes narratives of self-made success. According to Abidin (2023), digital culture has amplified the visibility of entrepreneurial lifestyles and transformed wealth into an important marker of social identity and status.

While hustle culture can encourage resilience, innovation, and self-reliance, critics argue that it may also contribute to unrealistic expectations regarding success and normalize excessive pressure to achieve financial outcomes irrespective of ethical considerations (Chayka, 2024). The growing popularity of hustle culture in Nigeria reflects broader socio-economic transformations affecting youth aspirations and identity formation. In contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited, young people increasingly embrace entrepreneurship and multiple income streams as survival strategies.

Research indicates that many Nigerian youths perceive hustling as a necessary response to economic uncertainty rather than merely a lifestyle choice (Akanle & Adesina, 2017). However, scholars have cautioned that excessive emphasis on material success may encourage individuals to prioritize outcomes over processes, thereby creating conditions under which ethically questionable behaviors become more acceptable. This observation is particularly relevant in discussions of cybercrime because internet fraud often promises rapid financial rewards that align with prevailing cultural expectations regarding success and social mobility.

Social media has become a central institution in contemporary youth culture and plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of success, status, and opportunity. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, and YouTube provide continuous exposure to narratives of wealth, luxury consumption, entrepreneurial achievement, and celebrity influence. Boyd (2014) argues that social media environments significantly influence identity formation and social interaction among young people by providing spaces where social comparisons occur frequently

and publicly. Research has demonstrated that exposure to idealized portrayals of success can contribute to increased aspirations, perceived social pressure, and dissatisfaction with personal circumstances (Vogel et al., 2014). Within societies characterized by economic inequality, these dynamics may intensify desires for upward mobility and increase receptivity to alternative pathways for wealth acquisition.

The influence of social media on youth behavior extends beyond social comparison processes to include the diffusion of norms, values, and behavioral models. Social learning scholars argue that individuals acquire attitudes and behaviors through observation and interaction with influential others. In digital environments, influencers, celebrities, entrepreneurs, and peers often function as models whose actions shape audience perceptions regarding acceptable behavior. Research by Marwick (2015) suggests that online visibility and perceived success frequently influence the aspirations and decision-making processes of social media users. Within Nigeria, scholars have observed that social media platforms sometimes serve as spaces where displays of unexplained wealth receive admiration and social validation, potentially weakening traditional moral constraints against unethical conduct (Ojedokun, 2021). Consequently, understanding social media influence is critical for explaining contemporary youth attitudes toward both cybercrime and legitimate entrepreneurship.

An equally important concept within the literature is digital entrepreneurship, which has emerged as a major avenue for youth empowerment and economic participation. Digital entrepreneurship refers to the creation and operation of business ventures that utilize digital technologies to produce, market, or deliver goods and services (Nambisan, 2017). The expansion of fintech services, software development, e-commerce, digital marketing, content creation, and remote work opportunities has significantly increased entrepreneurial possibilities for young people. Scholars argue that digital entrepreneurship contributes to innovation, job creation, and economic diversification while providing alternatives to traditional employment structures (Kraus et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, the growth of technology startups and innovation hubs has demonstrated the capacity of digital entrepreneurship to generate legitimate pathways for wealth creation and professional development. The rise of technology-driven entrepreneurship has contributed to the emergence of what is popularly referred to as Tech Bro culture. The term generally describes young individuals who utilize technological expertise, innovation, and entrepreneurship to build careers and businesses within the digital economy.

Unlike Yahoo-Yahoo culture, which relies on deception and fraud, Tech Bro culture emphasizes creativity, technical competence, problem-solving, and legitimate wealth creation. Scholars examining technology ecosystems in Africa note that the increasing visibility of successful software developers, startup founders, and digital innovators provides alternative role models for young people seeking economic advancement (Friederici, Wahome, & Graham, 2020). Consequently, digital entrepreneurship has increasingly been promoted as a sustainable strategy for reducing youth involvement in cybercrime while strengthening participation in the formal economy.

Moral disengagement represents another important theoretical construct for understanding cybercrime participation. According to Bandura (2016), individuals do not typically engage in unethical conduct without first neutralizing internal moral controls that regulate behavior. Moral disengagement refers to cognitive mechanisms that enable individuals to justify harmful actions, minimize perceived consequences, and avoid feelings of guilt. These mechanisms include moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, victim blaming, diffusion of responsibility, and distortion of consequences. Bandura argues that moral disengagement allows individuals to participate in unethical activities while maintaining positive self-perceptions. The concept has become increasingly relevant within cybercrime research because digital environments often facilitate psychological distancing between offenders and victims.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated significant relationships between moral disengagement and cyber-offending behavior. Paciello et al. (2020) found that individuals exhibiting high levels of moral disengagement were more likely to justify unethical online

behaviors and engage in cyber-related misconduct. Similarly, Detert, Treviño, and Sweitzer (2008) reported that moral disengagement significantly predicted unethical decision-making across diverse contexts. Within Nigeria, studies examining internet fraud offenders have shown that many participants rationalize their actions by portraying victims as greedy, wealthy, or deserving of deception (Lazarus, 2018). Such findings highlight the importance of understanding cognitive processes that facilitate participation in cybercrime despite widespread societal condemnation of fraudulent activities. Ojedokun and Eraye (2012) reported that unemployment, peer influence, material aspirations, and perceptions of economic injustice were significant predictors of cybercrime participation among youths.

Similarly, Tade and Aliyu (2011) observed that many internet fraud practitioners viewed cybercrime as a means of achieving social recognition and economic success in contexts characterized by limited opportunities. More recent studies by Lazarus and Button (2022) indicate that cybercrime participation often reflects a complex interaction between structural constraints, cultural influences, and individual rationalizations rather than any single explanatory factor.

Holt et al. (2018) in their research on the relationship between social influence and cybercrime has further emphasized the importance of peer networks and social learning processes. They argue that cybercrime frequently occurs within social environments where technical skills, behavioral norms, and justifications for deviance are shared among participants. Individuals exposed to peers who endorse cybercrime may become more likely to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors. Social learning perspectives therefore suggest that cybercrime participation is often learned through interaction rather than arising solely from individual motivations. Such findings underscore the importance of examining broader social contexts when seeking to understand youth engagement in cyber-enabled crimes. Despite the growing body of literature on cybercrime, significant gaps remain.

Existing studies have largely focused on cybercrime as a criminal justice issue, technological challenge, or economic phenomenon. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the integrated relationships among economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, moral

disengagement, and attitudes toward digital entrepreneurship. Furthermore, much of the existing Nigerian literature has concentrated on major urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, leaving states such as Cross River State relatively underrepresented in empirical research. Consequently, there remains limited sociological evidence concerning how these interconnected factors shape youth attitudes toward cybercrime and legitimate digital economic participation within the state.

The literature reviewed demonstrates that cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship represent competing responses to the opportunities and pressures generated by the digital economy. Economic strain may create motivation for alternative means of wealth acquisition, hustle culture may shape aspirations regarding success, social media may influence perceptions and behavioral norms, while moral disengagement may facilitate the rationalization of unethical conduct. At the same time, digital entrepreneurship provides legitimate opportunities for innovation, employment, and economic advancement. Nevertheless, existing scholarship has rarely integrated these variables within a single analytical framework capable of explaining the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture among youths. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how these factors collectively influence attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship among youths in Cross River State, Nigeria

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Strain Theory, originally developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938 and later elaborated in his influential work *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Merton, 1968). Strain Theory remains one of the most widely applied sociological explanations of deviant behavior because it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how social structures and unequal access to opportunities influence individual behavior. The theory emerged from Merton's attempt to explain why deviance persists even within societies that strongly emphasize social order, achievement, and conformity. According to Merton, every society promotes certain culturally approved goals while simultaneously prescribing legitimate means through which individuals are expected to attain those goals. Problems arise when significant segments of the

population are unable to access the legitimate opportunities required to achieve socially valued objectives. Under such circumstances, individuals experience strain, frustration, and pressure that may encourage adaptation through alternative means, including deviant or criminal behavior.

The central assumption of Strain Theory is that deviance is not necessarily the result of abnormal personalities or moral deficiencies but often reflects structural inequalities embedded within society. Merton argued that modern societies place enormous emphasis on economic success, wealth accumulation, prestige, and social mobility. However, access to education, employment opportunities, financial resources, and social networks is not distributed equally among all members of society. Consequently, individuals who lack access to legitimate means may experience tension between societal expectations and their actual opportunities. This tension creates strain, which may motivate individuals to seek alternative pathways for achieving socially valued goals. Merton (1968) identified several modes of adaptation to strain, including conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Of particular relevance to this study is innovation, whereby individuals accept societal goals such as wealth and success but reject or bypass legitimate means of achieving them, opting instead for unconventional or illegal alternatives.

The rise of Yahoo-Yahoo culture in Nigeria can be interpreted through the lens of strain-induced innovation. Many internet fraud practitioners aspire to achieve the same societal goals celebrated within mainstream culture, including wealth, status, luxury consumption, and social recognition. However, when legitimate avenues for achieving these goals appear inaccessible or inadequate, some individuals may resort to cybercrime as an alternative mechanism for economic advancement. Studies by Tade and Aliyu (2011), Ojedokun and Eraye (2012), and Lazarus and Button (2022) indicate that economic hardship, unemployment, and aspirations for rapid financial success are among the most commonly reported motivations for participation in cybercrime. Such findings align closely with the assumptions of Strain Theory by demonstrating how structural constraints may influence individuals to adopt innovative, but illegitimate means of achieving culturally valued objectives. The theory is equally relevant for understanding the emergence of

hustle culture among contemporary youths. Hustle culture reflects a social environment in which economic achievement, productivity, and entrepreneurial success are strongly emphasized.

The concept of moral disengagement, which forms an important component of the present study, can also be linked to strain-based explanations of deviant behavior. Individuals experiencing prolonged economic frustration may develop rationalizations that justify unconventional methods of achieving success. When societal expectations remain high but opportunities remain limited, some individuals may reinterpret unethical actions as necessary, understandable, or even legitimate responses to structural disadvantages. Such rationalizations reduce psychological discomfort associated with deviant behavior and facilitate continued participation in activities such as cybercrime.

Consequently, strain may not only motivate deviant adaptations but may also contribute indirectly to cognitive processes that support moral disengagement. Despite its strengths, Strain Theory has been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on structural factors while paying comparatively less attention to individual agency, cultural influences, and social learning processes. Critics argue that many individuals experience economic strain without engaging in criminal behavior, suggesting that additional factors influence behavioral outcomes. Nevertheless, the theory remains highly relevant because it highlights the role of socio-economic conditions in shaping opportunities, aspirations, and behavioral choices. Moreover, its focus on the relationship between societal goals and access to legitimate means aligns closely with the objectives of the present study.

Therefore, strain theory provides the most appropriate theoretical foundation for this research because it explains how economic pressures, social expectations, and unequal opportunities may influence youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship. The theory is particularly suitable for examining the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture in Cross River State because it recognizes that both phenomena emerge within the same socio-economic environment but represent different adaptations to similar structural conditions.

Consequently, the theory offers a robust sociological framework for understanding the influence of cybercrime-related factors on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. The survey design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time and examine relationships among economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, moral disengagement, and attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship among youths. The choice of the survey design is informed by its suitability for quantitative studies involving attitude measurement, hypothesis testing, and statistical generalization. The design also allows for the use of standardized instruments and objective analysis of data

The study focused exclusively on Cross River State due to the increasing penetration of digital technologies, growing youth participation in online economic activities, and concerns regarding cybercrime among young people within the state. The target population comprised youths aged 18–30 years residing in Cross River State. This age category was selected because it represents the most active demographic group involved in digital activities, including social media engagement, online entrepreneurship, and internet-based interactions. The study covered the three senatorial districts of Cross River State, namely Cross River South, Cross River Central, and Cross River North, to ensure adequate representation of youths across the state. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, local government areas were selected from each senatorial district. In the second stage, communities were selected from the chosen local government areas. In the final stage, eligible respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

Using Cochran's sample size determination formula for large populations, a sample size of 400 respondents was considered adequate for the study. This sample size was sufficient to ensure representativeness and enhance the reliability of findings. Data for the study were collected through a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on insights from existing literature on cybercrime, digital entrepreneurship, youth behaviour, social media influence, hustle

culture, economic strain, and moral disengagement. All measurement items were structured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in sociology, criminology, and research statistics. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. Reliability was established through a pilot study involving 40 youths outside the study area. Data obtained from the pilot test were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above was considered acceptable for the study. Data collection was conducted through direct administration of questionnaires with the assistance of trained research assistants. Respondents were adequately informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was sought before administering the instrument. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness before coding and analysis.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and responses. Inferential statistics were employed to test the study hypothesis. Specifically, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used to determine the influence of economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement on youths' attitudes towards cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State. The study hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Model Specification:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1ES + \beta_2HC + \beta_3SMI + \beta_4MD + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Youths' attitudes towards cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship

$\beta_0$  = Constant term

ES = Economic Strain

HC = Hustle Culture

SMI = Social Media Influence

MD = Moral Disengagement

$\beta_1-\beta_4$  = Regression coefficients

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Respondents were assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the use of information solely for academic purposes. No respondent was compelled to participate, and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Out of the 400 questionnaires administered, 392 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 98.0%, while 8 questionnaires were either improperly completed or not returned.

**Result and discussions**

**Table 1:** Economic Strain and Youth Attitudes toward Cybercrime and Digital Entrepreneurship

s/n	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Lack of employment opportunities increases interest in alternative online income sources	4.12	0.88
2	Financial hardship influences youth economic decisions	4.26	0.74
3	Many youths engage in risky online activities because of economic pressure	4.18	0.81
4	Limited economic opportunities encourage unconventional survival strategies	4.21	0.79
	Grand Mean	4.19	

Source: Field survey, 2026.

The grand mean of 4.19 indicates strong agreement among respondents that economic strain contributes significantly to youth attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship.

**Table 2:** Hustle Culture and Youth Attitudes toward Cybercrime and Digital Entrepreneurship

s/n	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Society places excessive pressure on youths to become financially successful	4.31	0.71
2	Wealth is increasingly viewed as a measure of personal worth	4.28	0.77
3	Many youths desire rapid financial success	4.34	0.69
4	Social recognition often depends on economic achievements	4.20	0.83
	Grand Mean	4.28	

Source: Field survey, 2026.

The result demonstrates that hustle culture exerts substantial influence on youth attitudes regarding wealth acquisition and economic participation.

**Table 3:** Social Media Influence and Youth Attitudes toward Cybercrime and Digital Entrepreneurship

s/n	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Social media influences perceptions of success	4.42	0.66
2	Exposure to luxury lifestyles affects youth aspirations	4.37	0.71
3	Social media encourages comparison with others	4.25	0.78
4	Online influencers shape attitudes toward wealth creation	4.18	0.80
	Grand Mean	4.31	

Source: Field survey, 2026.

The findings indicate that social media is a major factor shaping youth perceptions of success, achievement, and economic behaviour.

**Table 4:** Moral Disengagement and Youth Attitudes toward Cybercrime and Digital Entrepreneurship

s/n	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Some youths justify cybercrime because of economic hardship	4.09	0.85
2	Online fraud is often rationalized as a victimless crime	3.98	0.91
3	Individuals sometimes excuse unethical online behaviour	4.11	0.82
4	Moral justifications influence acceptance of cybercrime	4.15	0.77
	Grand Mean	4.08	

Source: Field survey, 2026.

The result suggests a high level of agreement that moral disengagement contributes to the rationalization and normalization of cybercrime among some youths.

### Multiple Regression Analysis

Test of Hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: Cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) have no significant influence on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State.

H<sub>i</sub>: Cybercrime-related factors (economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement) have a significant influence on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State.

**Table 4.5: Multiple Regression Analysis**

Dependent Variable: Youths' Attitudes toward Cybercrime and Digital Entrepreneurship

Predictor Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig.
Economic Strain	0.291	5.412	0.000
Hustle Culture	0.337	6.128	0.000
Social Media Influence	0.301	5.744	0.000
Moral Disengagement	0.246	4.883	0.000

Source: Field survey, 2026.

**Model Summary:**

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Sig.
0.792	0.627	0.621	162.481	0.000

Since the significance value of the regression model ( $p = 0.000$ ) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates that cybercrime-related factors significantly influence youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.627$ ) implies that approximately 62.7% of the variation in youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship is explained jointly by economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement. Among the predictors, hustle culture emerged as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 0.337$ ), followed by social media influence ( $\beta = 0.301$ ), economic strain ( $\beta = 0.291$ ), and moral disengagement ( $\beta = 0.246$ ).

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings revealed that economic strain significantly influences youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State. Respondents generally agreed that unemployment, financial hardship, and limited economic opportunities increase the likelihood of considering alternative online income-generating activities. This finding supports the propositions of Merton's (1968) Strain Theory, which argues that individuals may adopt unconventional means of attaining socially approved goals when legitimate opportunities are constrained. The finding also corroborates empirical studies by Ojedokun and Eraye (2012) and Lazarus and Button (2022),

who reported that economic frustrations and blocked opportunities are important drivers of cybercrime involvement among youths.

The study further revealed that hustle culture significantly influences youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship. Respondents acknowledged that societal pressure to succeed financially, admiration for wealth, and the pursuit of rapid economic success have become dominant features of contemporary youth culture. This finding aligns with the observations of Abidin (2023), who argues that digital cultures increasingly celebrate visible success, entrepreneurship, and wealth accumulation. The result also supports Akanle and Adesina (2017), who noted that economic uncertainty has encouraged many Nigerian youths to embrace intense entrepreneurial and income-seeking behaviours as survival strategies.

Findings from the study also demonstrated that social media exerts a strong influence on youth perceptions of success and wealth creation. Respondents agreed that exposure to luxury lifestyles, influencer content, and online displays of affluence shapes aspirations and economic expectations. This finding supports Boyd (2014), who emphasized the role of digital platforms in identity formation and social comparison. It is also consistent with Marwick (2015), who found that online visibility and representations of success significantly influence the aspirations and behaviour of young social media users.

## **Conclusion**

The study examined the influence of cybercrime-related factors on youths' attitudes toward cybercrime and digital entrepreneurship in Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that economic strain, hustle culture, social media influence, and moral disengagement significantly shape youth perceptions and behavioural orientations within the digital economy. While digital technologies provide opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and legitimate wealth creation, they also create environments in which cybercrime can emerge as an alternative pathway to economic success.

However, it was concluded that the transition from Yahoo-Yahoo culture to Tech Bro culture requires more than law enforcement interventions. Addressing youth unemployment,

promoting ethical digital entrepreneurship, strengthening digital literacy, and challenging social norms that glorify illicit wealth are essential for fostering sustainable participation in the digital economy. The findings further indicate that creating enabling environments for legitimate digital innovation can reduce the attractiveness of cybercrime and encourage productive engagement among youths in Cross River State.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government agencies should strengthen youth employment and digital entrepreneurship programmes to reduce economic pressures that encourage cybercrime.
2. Educational institutions should integrate digital ethics and cybersecurity awareness into their curricula to discourage the normalization of cybercrime.
3. Social media campaigns should promote legitimate digital entrepreneurship and showcase successful technology innovators as role models.
4. Community organizations should implement mentorship programmes that encourage ethical wealth creation and innovation among youths.
5. Policymakers should support technology hubs, startup incubation centres, and digital skills acquisition programmes across Cross River State to facilitate the transition from cybercrime-oriented activities to productive digital entrepreneurship.

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