

**CYBERCRIME AND YOUTH BEHAVIOUR IN EDO STATE,
NIGERIA: A MIXED-METHODS INQUIRY INTO THE
“YAHOO” SUBCULTURE**

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ABSTRACT: The study investigated the nature and strength of the relationship between cybercrime involvement and youth behavioural outcomes in Edo State, Nigeria. The research was grounded in Merton’s Strain Theory, which explains how societal pressures and structural limitations drive individuals toward innovative yet illicit adaptations to achieve success. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were collected from 1,200 respondents using cluster and stratified sampling methods, while qualitative data were collected via in-depth interviews with 9 purposefully selected interviewees from the "Yahoo" subculture. Statistical analysis, using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, revealed an extremely strong positive relationship between cybercrime and behavioural shifts ($r = 0.8889$; $p < 0.05$). The findings indicated that cybercrime involvement is a primary driver for the normalisation of digital deviance. The study concluded that cybercrime in Edo State has evolved from a peripheral offence into a central socio-structural identity that has reconfigured traditional values. The study recommended the establishment of digital incubation hubs and trauma-informed rehabilitation services to redirect youth technical proficiencies toward legitimate global sectors.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Youth Behaviour, "Yahoo" Subculture, Edo State, Strain Theory, Digital Deviance

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology and internet connectivity has altered the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria, creating an environment where cybercrime has transitioned from an isolated technical issue into a significant driver of behavioural change among the youth (Aransiola, 2020). Criminological studies within the country indicate that the rise in internet scams is heavily driven by structural strains, poverty, and peer pressure, leading to a distinct subculture where individual deviant efforts have shifted into highly structured local networks (Tade & Ibikunle, 2018). This phenomenon is acutely observable in Edo State, and specifically its capital, Benin City, which has emerged as a critical hotspot for digital fraud (Ohiomah et al., 2025). Within this geographical context, cybercrime is increasingly decoupled from social stigma and has instead been normalised as a pragmatic mechanism to navigate economic adversity

(Ayodele, 2022). Consequently, the traditional value system in Edo State, which historically prioritised the dignity of honest labour and formal education, is being replaced by a materialist ethos that lionises sudden wealth and luxury consumption. This shift directly influences youth behaviour, as the visible success of cyber-perpetrators, locally termed "Yahoo Boys," redefines social status and success metrics for the younger generation.

Sociological strain frameworks suggest that when legitimate pathways to material success are blocked by systemic economic contraction, individuals adopt deviant innovations to achieve these goals (Merton, 1938). In Edo State, this normalisation has systematically eroded primary institutions of social control, beginning at the familial level (Osawe, 2024). Pervasive economic hardship and diminished parental authority have altered how families react to deviance; rather than sanctioning illicit conduct, some households actively accommodate or depend upon cyber-income for subsistence. This domestic validation generates intense peer pressure within neighbourhoods, drawing previously non-involved youths into criminal patterns and institutionalising deviance within the home environment (Ozedu & Osagie, 2024).

This behavioural shift extends into educational institutions, where schools and universities face a crisis of engagement (Ushie et al., 2023). Observing the rapid affluence realised by internet fraud, many students experience a decline in academic motivation, leading to heightened dropout rates and organised examination malpractice. Young people acquire criminal techniques, operational formats, and neutralisation rationales directly through peer association within their immediate academic and social environments (Sutherland, 1947). The educational setting is thus repurposed, transforming classrooms into spaces for collaborative fraudulent planning and using higher education as a strategic cover to evade law enforcement suspicion. Whilst state apparatuses attempt containment through arrests and prosecutions, criminological consensus indicates that mitigating this behavioural crisis requires addressing the underlying cultural shifts and familial accountability structures that sustain it. Driven by these dynamics, this study establishes a specific research framework to examine the precise relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State, assessing how digital threats reshape the psychological, academic, and social trajectories of the younger generation.

Statement of the Problem

The escalating prevalence of cybercrime among young people in Edo State has created a significant behavioural crisis that formal legal deterrence has failed to contain (Longe, 2021; Onuoha et al., 2023). The central problem is that digital fraud is no longer viewed by local youths as a shameful or clandestine offence; instead, it has become culturally normalised and socially validated within the region. This normalisation has systematically eroded traditional informal social controls, directly altering youth behaviour by dismantling both moral and educational values. The highly visible wealth of cyber-perpetrators has replaced traditional values of vocational hard work with a culture of immediate gratification, creating a "moral economy of fraud" where illicit enrichment is celebrated rather than condemned. This drives severe academic disengagement, as young people question the utility of formal training, which threatens the long-term cognitive development and human capital of the wider youth demographic (Obaro, 2023).

Furthermore, this behavioural shift is deeply reinforced at the family level, where severe macroeconomic distress introduces friction between domestic moral expectations and household economic survival. Kinship systems in Edo State frequently experience a "conflict of interests," resulting in parental leniency and communal support structures that actively reinforce deviant patterns. Rather than acting as primary agents of moral regulation and socialisation, families often tolerate or depend upon the proceeds of fraud. This lack of domestic sanctioning allows criminal behaviour to thrive, transitioning young people from initial acts of delinquency into fixed, long-term criminal identities and careers. While existing literature often treats digital fraud as a broad transactional offence using generalised samples, a major empirical gap remains regarding the precise socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms through which cybercrime actively reshapes the daily behavioural choices, moral trajectories, and social identities of youths, specifically within Edo State.

Research Question

What is the nature and strength of the relationship between cybercrime involvement and youth behavioural outcomes in Edo State?

Research Objective

Determine the nature and strength of the relationship between cybercrime involvement and youth behavioural outcomes in Edo State.

Research Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant relationship between cybercrime involvement and youth behavioural outcomes in Edo State.

Significance of the Study

The research is significant because it examines how youth behaviour in Edo State changes when illicit digital wealth is accepted as an alternative to legitimate work. Without this study, there is a knowledge vacuum regarding how criminal values infiltrate youth aspirations. By examining these dynamics, the study provides a framework for navigating the crisis where traditional values of education and vocational patience are replaced by a subculture of immediate gratification. Obarisiagbon (2019) maintains that traditional criminological theories often fail to account for the socio-cultural validation of illicit wealth in emerging economies; therefore, this investigation offers a necessary theoretical compass.

In tandem with these cultural shifts, the research is vital for identifying how the visible success of cyber fraudsters alters the academic motivation of the wider youth population. It addresses how the resulting perception of relative deprivation devalues formal training and drives classroom disengagement, threatening the cognitive development of both perpetrators and honest youth (Iyamu & Ojeifo, 2020). Beyond educational impacts, the research provides a critical lens into the psychological restructuring of the youth psyche regarding work and reward. Investigating this

phenomenon reveals how moral compasses are recalibrated when fraudulent actions are validated by kinship networks, explaining why youth remain shielded from the guilt traditionally associated with deviance.

Additionally, the research contributes to criminological literature by documenting how virtual spaces alter traditional peer association in Edo State. It illustrates how internet-mediated interactions bypass parental supervision, creating spaces where deviant identities are reinforced. Uncovering these transitions is critical because the immersion of youth in cybercrime often serves as a precursor to more aggressive social deviance, escalating from digital acts into a volatile criminal landscape (Aransiola, 2017). Ultimately, the research provides the sociological evidence needed to move beyond superficial, law enforcement-heavy approaches. By uncovering the root motivations and peer dynamics driving deviance, the study offers a roadmap for designing interventions that transition youth from illicit digital activities into productive, legitimate sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Involvement in digital fraud triggers a profound transformation in the behavioural patterns and social values of the youth, particularly regarding their long-term developmental outlook and institutional loyalty. Adekoya and Razak (2021) observed that a pervasive get-rich-quick syndrome fundamentally devalued traditional schooling and vocational patience by creating an unrealistic standard for financial success. Within the specific context of Edo State, there is an increasing perception that the long-term rewards of a degree or apprenticeship cannot compete with the immediate and high-volume financial returns of digital fraud. This cognitive shift creates an adverse effect on students' engagement and results in a brain drain where individuals are often "present but absent" while dedicating their mental energy to scams during lectures (Oyelade & Okunola, 2020). Education is no longer seen as a transformative tool for character building but as a social cover or a certificate of convenience used primarily to avoid law enforcement profiling and maintain a facade of legitimacy. This cultural shift suggests that the university environment is being repurposed as a networking ground for illicit enterprises rather than a site for intellectual development and moral socialisation.

Global comparative literature on digital deviance suggests that cybercrime is increasingly decoupled from conventional criminality, being reframed as a career choice within youth subcultures (Holt & Bossler, 2016). While Merton's (1938) Strain Theory provides a foundational framework, it must be interrogated for its failure to account for gendered and community-level dimensions. Indeed, the literature on gendered cybercrime in West Africa, such as the work of Adegoke (2019), demonstrates that female youth involvement is often overlooked due to distinct modes of participation, a limitation addressed by the qualitative parameters of the study.

Engagement in digital fraud further triggers a total reconfiguration of the youth's relationship with the state and formal institutions by eroding the foundation of civic responsibility. One significant effect is the erosion of legal consciousness where young people increasingly view law enforcement as an adversary to be bribed or outsmarted rather than a protective entity. Aransiola (2017) highlighted that this adversarial stance leads to a general culture of impunity which encourages youth to bypass other civic regulations and traditional communal norms. This

disregard for the rule of law often results in frequent and violent clashes with security agencies, which creates a volatile social environment characterised by mutual suspicion.

Economic behaviour among the youth is also fundamentally distorted by the influx of illicit funds, which leads to the destabilisation of personal financial management skills. The sudden arrival of large sums of money often leads to a reckless pattern of hyper-consumption that artificially inflates the cost of living, including rent and basic commodities in university towns. Tade and Aliyu (2011) observed that this inflation puts immense pressure on law-abiding students and local residents, which further fuels a cycle of resentment and economic desperation. Youth who are accustomed to these high spending patterns become incapable of managing small and sustainable incomes or appreciating the value of steady employment. This financial volatility ensures that even after the proceeds of a scam are gone, the individual remains trapped in a state of economic restlessness and is driven back into crime to maintain a transient lifestyle.

Finally, community stability suffers as the influx of cyber wealth creates deep social divisions and shifts the power dynamics within the youth demographic toward those with criminal capital. Ohiomah et al. (2025) indicated that the disparity between students who succeed in fraud and those who do not creates a fertile ground for social friction and the hardening of deviant identities. This friction often manifests as increased participation in cultism and other violent fraternal activities as youth seek to protect their illicit earnings or gain respect through physical force. The presence of these funds in the hands of young people often finances the acquisition of weapons and the sponsorship of local gangs, which militarises the youth subculture. This militarisation means that the effect of a digital crime often results in physical insecurity for the entire community as the transition from a computer screen to street-level violence is facilitated by the financial capacity provided by cybercrime.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Merton's Strain theory as its foundational lens to explain how the disconnect between societal goals and legitimate opportunities led to criminal outcomes. Cybercrime in towns and cities emerged at the intersection of systemic economic pressures and influential social networks. Merton's framework provided the vital context for understanding how the "Anomie" or normlessness prevalent in towns and cities created a pressure cooker for "innovation." Within this structural vacuum, the cultural emphasis on material success significantly outpaced the availability of legal means to achieve it, forcing a transition from conventional labour to digital deviance.

Robert K. Merton (1938) developed the strain theory to explain how social structures exert pressure on individuals to engage in non-conforming conduct. He posited that deviance arises when there is a misalignment between the goals a culture encourages people to achieve and the legitimate means available to reach them. The core assumptions of Strain Theory are:

- i. Society imposes a uniform goal of material wealth upon all citizens regardless of their background.

- ii. Legitimate institutionalised means to achieve these goals are not equally accessible to all social classes.
- iii. The resulting gap between cultural goals and structural means creates the psychological pressure that forces individuals to adapt.

In relating the first assumption to the research, the study observed that the universal desire for material wealth creates a pervasive cultural success script within the major towns and cities in Edo State. Society equates personal worth with visible affluence, such as luxury and high-end lifestyles, and imposes this goal on all youths regardless of their socio-economic starting point. This uniform expectation creates an environment where the desire for wealth is absolute, setting the stage for cybercrime when the pressure to succeed meets a total lack of resources.

The study related the second assumption to cybercrime by identifying that legitimate institutionalised means, such as stable employment and quality education, are not equally accessible to all youths in Edo State. Although the goal of wealth is universal, the structural pathways to achieve it are often blocked by high unemployment and economic instability. This lack of access to legal avenues forces many youths to seek alternative, illegitimate methods to attain the financial status that society demands of them.

Regarding the third assumption, the study highlighted how the resulting gap between cultural goals and structural means created the psychological pressure that forced individuals to adapt. Youth experience profound senses of strain when they find that honest labour or education does not lead to the material success society demands. This tension acts as a powerful push factor that leads many to engage in cybercrime. In this context, cybercrime manifested as a strategic innovation to bridge the gap between financial aspirations and the harsh economic realities in Edo State.

Merton's Strain Theory applied to the study by identifying the primary push factor which is the intense psychological and economic pressure to achieve a high social status. Success is increasingly defined by visible affluence and material luxury across various social settings. However, the legitimate pathways to this success, such as stable employment or quality education, are often blocked for many youths by systemic instability. This disconnect creates a state of anomie where the pressure to succeed becomes so great that individuals innovate by turning to cybercrime. Consequently, youth behaviour shifts from conventional social participation to digital deviance as a strategic response to survival. The study observed that the pervasive success script forces a transition where the youths view digital fraud as a necessary bridge between their financial aspirations and the harsh reality of their socio-economic environment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design. This design was selected to enable the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data during a single

phase of the research. The rationale for this approach was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem by validating statistical trends with in-depth personal accounts. Quantitative measurements focused on the extent and trends of the relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour among a large sample. Simultaneously the qualitative component provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and justifications used by youths.

Population of the Study

The population of the research encompassed all male and female youth between ages of 18 and 35 years who are involved in cybercrime and who reside in Edo State, irrespective of whether they are indigenes or not, ethnic affiliation, religious affiliation, educational attainment, and socioeconomic background. The youth population projection for Edo State for the year 2026 is estimated at 1,654,327. The base youth population aged 18-35 was 1,292,847 in 2006, as recorded by the National Population Commission (2009). The annual growth rate for the youth age group 18-35 from 2006 to 2016 was calculated as 1.24% based on demographic estimates derived from the National Bureau of Statistics (2017) and NDHS 2018 (National Population Commission & ICF, 2019), which indicate the youth population for Edo State in 2016 to be 1,462,000. Using the compound annual growth rate formula $r = (P_{2016} / P_{2006})^{(1/n)} - 1$

Where:

- i. $P_{2006} = 1,292,847$
- ii. $P_{2016} = 1,462,000$
- iii. $n = 10$

The rate is calculated as $r = (1,462,000 / 1,292,847)^{0.1} - 1 = 0.01239$ or 1.24%. Consequently, this same rate of 1.24% was adopted for projecting the youth population to 2026.

The formula applied is: $P_n = P_o (1 + r)^n$

Where:

- i. P_o represents the base youth population in 2006 (1,292,847),
- ii. r represents the annual growth rate (1.24% or 0.0124),
- iii. n represents the number of years between 2006 and 2026 (20 years), and
- iv. P_n represents the projected youth population in 2026.

Substituting these parameters into the formula yields: $P_n = 1,292,847 \times (1 + 0.0124)^{20}$

$$P_n = 1,292,847 \times (1.0124)^{20}$$

$$P_n = 1,292,847 \times 1.2796$$

$$P_n = 1,654,326.91$$

When rounded to the nearest whole integer to represent individual population units, the final projected youth population for 2026 is 1,654,327. It is important to note, as a limitation, that extrapolating a 10-year growth rate over a 20-year period assumes demographic stability, which may introduce variance when applied to the current digital landscape.

Sample Size

The total sample size for the study consisted of two separate and distinct data streams to ensure both statistical breadth and narrative depth.

1. Quantitative Sample Size: A sample of 1,200 respondents was selected for the survey. This number was derived using the Cochran (1977) formula for large populations where n equals $(Z^2 \times p \times q) / e^2$. Standard parameters for a 95 percent confidence level and a 0.5 population proportion were applied. The margin of error was set at approximately 0.028 to yield exactly 1,200 respondents. The sample size of 1,200 was derived using the Cochran (1977) formula:

$$n = (Z^2 * p * q) / e^2$$

Where:

- i. n = The required sample size.
- ii. Z = The Z-score for a 95% confidence level (1.96).
- iii. p = The estimated proportion of the attribute in the population (0.5).
- iv. $q = 1 - p$ (0.5).
- v. e = The margin of error (0.02829 or 2.829%).

Calculation:

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5) / 0.02829^2$$

$$n = (3.8416 * 0.25) / 0.0008003241$$

$$n = 0.9604 / 0.0008003241 = 1,199.99$$

Approximately 1,200

2. Qualitative Sample Size: A separate group of 9 interviewees was selected for in-depth interviews. This number was sufficient for reaching data saturation within the specific youth demographic that was studied.

Sampling Techniques

Given the nature of the target population, the study made use of the Clustering Sampling approach. In the first stage, through the use of a clustering sampling technique, the entire state was clustered into three (3) different components in line with the three existing senatorial districts, i.e. Edo South, Edo Central and Edo North. This method was needed because the target population is scattered across the entire Edo State and there was a need to cluster them for an easy data collection process.

In the second stage of the selection process, three (3) communities were selected from each of the clusters using the purposive sampling method. This therefore, means that nine (9) communities were selected purposively across the entire state. These included Ogbe, Isihor, and Ugbekun in Edo South; Ekpoma, Uromi, and Irrua in Edo Central; and Auchi, Iyamoh, and Afuze in Edo North. The purposive sampling method became necessary at this stage in order to concentrate on the communities that are flash points of cybercrime activities, owing to the fact that those communities are hosts to high institutions and, as such, have high concentration of youth population.

The target nine (9) communities so selected were stratified into nine (9) strata with the use of stratified random sampling methods, in which case each target community became a stratum from where samples from each stratum were collected. To determine the sample size to be selected in each stratum, a proportionate sampling frame based on National Population Commission (NPC) 2026 parameters was used. This enabled the study to select sample size proportional to the population of each of the strata. On this basis, 280, 210, 170, 110, 80, 50, 135, 95, and 70 respondents were selected from the Ogbe, Isihor, Ugbekun, Ekpoma, Uromi, Irrua, Auchi, Iyamoh, and Afuze communities, respectively. The stratified sampling method became essential at this stage in order to ensure that samples selected were representative of the target communities under study.

By virtue of the fact that each target community comprises both youths who are involved in cybercrime and those who are not involved in cybercrime, a purposive sampling method was therefore used to identify youths who are involved in cybercrime behaviour. In addition to this method, snowballing method was used to reach to more members until the last sample was eventually contacted.

For the qualitative data collection process, the purposive sampling method was used to select one opinion leader from each of the communities, making a total of nine (9) opinion leaders selected for the qualitative data. Those selected as opinion leaders were the group leaders of the subgroup in each of the communities. Therefore, one (1) In-depth Interview (IDI) session was conducted in each of the target communities making a total of nine (9) interviewees for the In-depth Interview (IDI) session.

Instruments for Data Collection

The research utilised two primary instruments to collect data: a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide. These instruments were designed to complement each other by providing the numerical breadth needed for statistical results and the narrative depth required to understand youth behaviour. In Section A, the structured questionnaire was used to collect data on socio-demographic characteristics, specifically age, gender, senatorial district, educational qualification, employment status, and religion. In Section B, the structured questionnaire was used to collect data on variables to the research objectives, namely the Relationship between Cybercrime and Youth Behaviour.

The in-depth interview guide served as the qualitative instrument, consisting of open-ended questions to probe the lived experiences and social meanings attached to the digital subculture. The in-depth interview guide was utilised to investigate variables regarding objectives in greater detail, organised into thematic areas: The relationship between Cybercrime and Youth Behaviour.

Method of Data Collection

The study used the survey method, specifically, a one-time survey method. This method enabled the study to collect data from the sample population without having to go back to the population for another round of the data collection process. The quantitative data were collected through the physical administration of copies of the structured questionnaire to the 1,200 respondents in the selected focal areas. This manual approach was necessary to build trust and ensure the safety of participants given the sensitive nature of the study topic. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with the 9 interviewees. The research maintained a high level of confidentiality during the physical handling of all scripts

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The validity of the research instruments was established by ensuring that both the questionnaire and interview guides accurately measured the constructs of digital deviance and youth behaviour. A pilot study conducted with 50 youths in Oghede served to confirm the average completion time and verify the clarity of the items, leading to refinements that ensured precision before the final administration. The reliability of the Likert scale items was subsequently confirmed through a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82, which surpassed the 0.70 threshold and demonstrated that the instrument was stable and consistent.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were organised and prepared for systematic evaluation. Descriptive statistics, specifically percentage distributions, were used to analyse the participants' demographic characteristics. To evaluate the research hypotheses and determine the statistical relationship between variables, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was applied. On the other hand, Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed through thematic and content analysis. This dual analysis strategy ensured that the study captured both the statistical scale and the underlying social nuances of youth behaviour within Edo State.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after they were fully informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Participant anonymity was strictly maintained, with all data stored securely and access limited exclusively to authorised research personnel. Furthermore, potential discomfort was minimised by ensuring the questionnaire remained clear, concise, and respectful of the sensitivities of the participants. These measures ensured a rigorous and reliable investigation into cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State.

DATA PRESENTATION

This section presents findings from the field study conducted across the three senatorial districts of Edo State using a mixed-methods design. By integrating quantitative analysis via Pearson Product Moment Correlation with qualitative thematic insights, the study offers both statistical evidence and contextual depth. This approach offsets the limitations of single-method research, ensuring that identified trends are validated by the lived experiences of the participants, thereby providing a robust conclusion on cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 1,200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Range	18–24 years	720	60.0%
	25–29 years	300	25.0%
	30–35 years	180	15.0%
Total		1,200	100%
Gender	Male	740	61.7%
	Female	440	36.7%
	Prefer not to say	20	1.6%
Total		1,200	100%
Educational Level	SSCE/WAEC	144	12.0%
	OND/NCE	216	18.0%
	HND/B.Sc.	720	60.0%
	Postgraduate	120	10.0%
Total		1,200	100%
Employment Status	Student	504	42.0%
	Unemployed	300	25.0%
	Self-employed	216	18.0%
	Employed (Formal)	180	15.0%
Total		1,200	100%
Senatorial District	Edo South	660	55.0%

	Edo North	300	25.0%
	Edo Central	240	20.0%
Total		1,200	100%
Religion	Christianity	960	80.0%
	Islam	120	10.0%
	Traditional	96	8.0%
	None/Others	24	2.0%
Total		1,200	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

Age Range: Table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents (60.0%, n=720) fell within the 18–24 age bracket, followed by those aged 25–29 (25.0%, n=300), and those aged 30–35 (15.0%, n=180). This concentration in the youngest cohort aligned with the focus of the study on major academic hubs in Edo State, where the density of university students and early-career graduates was highest. This distribution underscored the fact that cybercrime involvement in the region was predominantly a youth-driven phenomenon.

Gender: Table 1 above shows that the male respondents (61.7%, n=740) were significantly more represented than female respondents (36.7%, n=440). This data reflected the historically masculine-dominated nature of the "Yahoo" subculture as observed in Nigerian sociological studies. However, the presence of a substantial female minority suggested that the ecosystem of cybercrime had evolved to include various supportive and participatory roles across gender lines.

Educational Level: Table 1 above shows that a vast majority of the respondents (60.0%, n=720) held HND or B.Sc. degrees, while 10.0% (n=120) possessed postgraduate qualifications. Those with OND/NCE comprised 18.0% (n=216), and SSCE/WAEC holders accounted for 12.0% (n=144). These figures indicated that the participants were largely literate and well-educated, suggesting that cybercrime in Edo State is not merely a fallback for the uneducated but a chosen path for individuals with the intellectual capacity to navigate complex digital environments.

Employment Status: Table 1 above shows that the highest individual category of respondents was comprised of students (42.0%, n=504), followed by the unemployed (25.0%, n=300). Those who identified as self-employed made up 18.0% (n=216), while 15.0% (n=180) were in formal employment. This distribution highlighted a critical socio-economic tension; the high prevalence of students and unemployed individuals provided evidence that a lack of immediate, high-paying formal employment opportunities served as a significant factor in the drive toward cyber-fraud.

Senatorial District: Table 1 above shows that the largest proportion of respondents (55.0%, n=660) resided in Edo South, while Edo North (25.0%, n=300) and Edo Central (20.0%, n=240) provided the remaining participants. This geographical spread was consistent with the urban concentration of Edo South, particularly Benin City, which served as the commercial and administrative hub with the highest level of internet-enabled infrastructure in the state.

Religion: Table 1 above shows that the majority of respondents (80.0%, n=960) identified as Christians, with 10.0% (n=120) identifying as Muslims and 8.0% (n=96) practicing Traditional religion. This distribution allowed the study to investigate how religious influences interacted with ethical perceptions of unexplained wealth.

Table 2: Profile of In-depth Interviewees (N = 9)

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Senatorial District	Occupation
Amidi	20	Male	Edo South	Student
Osato	25	Female	Edo South	Self employed
Agbontan	30	Male	Edo South	Self employed
Otabor	23	Male	Edo Central	Student
Uwadiae	21	Male	Edo Central	Student
Ekata	30	Female	Edo Central	Self employed
Imonje	18	Male	Edo North	Student
Elakhi	25	Male	Edo North	Student
Omone	34	Female	Edo North	Self employed

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

Table 2 presents the socio-economic and demographic variables of nine interviewees. Purposive and snowball sampling were the techniques used to select these respondents. The sensitive and clandestine nature of cybercrime necessitated a chain-referral system, where initial contacts facilitated access to other respondents within their social network. This approach was essential for gaining the trust of this "hidden population" and ensured that the study accessed active respondents within the subculture.

The research investigated the relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State, revealing that involvement in digital fraud triggers a profound transformation in behavioural patterns and social values, particularly regarding long-term developmental outlooks and institutional loyalty. Adekoya and Razak (2021) observed that a pervasive get-rich-quick syndrome devalues traditional schooling and vocational patience, leading to an increasing perception in Edo State that the rewards of a degree cannot compete with the immediate returns of digital fraud. This cognitive shift negatively impacts student engagement, resulting in a "brain drain" where individuals repurpose the academic environment as a networking ground for illicit enterprises rather than intellectual development. Furthermore, engagement in digital fraud reconfigures the youth's relationship with formal institutions, eroding legal consciousness and fostering an adversarial stance toward law enforcement. Aransiola (2017) highlighted that this disregard for the rule of law results in a volatile social environment, while Ohiomah et al. (2025) indicated that the disparity between successful fraudsters and law-abiding peers creates social friction, hardens deviant identities, and often finances the acquisition of weapons and the militarisation of youth subculture.

Table 3: Shift in Social Habits and Lifestyle Choices

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Participation in cybercrime has led to a fundamental shift in the social habits and lifestyle choices of youths in Edo State		
Strongly Agree (SA)	608	50.7
Agree (A)	512	42.7
Disagree (D)	48	4.0
Strongly Disagree (SD)	32	2.6
Total	1,200	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

The data in Table 3 reveal that 608 (50.7%) and 512 (42.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that participation in cybercrime has led to a fundamental shift in the social habits and lifestyle choices of youths in Edo State. Conversely, 48 (4.0%) disagreed while 32 (2.6%) strongly disagreed. This indicates a high perception that cybercrime significantly alters the lifestyle of the youth.

Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews supplement the research findings as the interviewees were asked to discuss the specific ways in which the "Yahoo" subculture has redefined what is considered "normal" or "successful" behaviour among youths in Edo State. Their responses are captured below:

Success is no longer about how many years you spent in school but how many millions you can spend in the club on a Friday night. This subculture has made it look normal for a teenager to own three cars while his father is still trekking to work which has totally destroyed the value of hard work (Amidi, 20 years old, Male, Student, Edo South, IDI interviewee, 2026).

We are seeing a total redefinition of societal norms where ostentatious display of wealth is now the primary yardstick for social relevance. The traditional path of professional growth is now viewed as an obsolete and slow route to success by the majority of our youths in Benin City (Ostao, 25 years old, Female, Self employed, Edo South, IDI interviewee, 2026).

Normal behaviour now involves staying awake all night on a laptop and sleeping all through the day like a ghost. If you are not doing this your peers look at you as someone who is not smart or someone who is destined to be a permanent local person (Agbontan, 30 years old, Male, Self employed, Edo South, IDI interviewee, 2026).

In the university hostels success is when you can host a party that the whole campus will be talking about for weeks. The normal life of reading and doing assignments is now seen as something for those who are too dull to make it in the digital world (Otabor, 23 years old, Male, Student, Edo Central, IDI interviewee, 2026).

We have reached a point where the youth believe that working for a monthly salary is a waste of time. They see success as a one-time big hit that can buy a house in one day instead of saving money for many years (Uwadiae, 21 years old, Male, Student, Edo Central, IDI interviewee, 2026).

Success has been commodified and detached from character or contribution to the state. The subculture encourages a version of success that is purely transactional where the end justifies the means regardless of the psychological or social cost to the community (Ekata, 30 years old, Female, Self-employed, Edo Central, IDI interviewee, 2026).

It is normal now for a boy to drop out of school because he has hit a big client. His parents will even support him because they believe he has found his success early and there is no need to waste more time with books (Imonje, 18 years old, Male, Student, Edo North, IDI interviewee, 2026).

The peer group now looks at the boy with the most expensive car as the leader of the squad. This definition of success based on assets has made many boys desperate to do anything just to belong to the top level of the street hierarchy (Elakhi, 25 years old, Male, Student, Edo North, IDI interviewee, 2026).

Being smart used to mean you are good in your trade or your books but now it means you are good at deception. This is the new normal where the person who can lie the best to a white man is seen as the most successful person in the area (Omone, 34 years old, Female, Self-employed, Edo North, IDI interviewee, 2026).

The above responses from the 9 in-depth interviewees across the three senatorial districts further validate that participation in cybercrime has led to a fundamental shift in the social habits and lifestyle choices of youths in Edo State.

Testing of Hypotheses

- i. H0: There is no significant relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State.
- ii. H1: There is a significant relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour in Edo State.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses on Relationship between Cybercrime and Youth Behaviour

S/N	Score Rating	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
1	Strongly Disagree (SD)	32	64	28	40
2	Disagree (D)	48	136	52	80
3	Agree (A)	512	464	420	440
4	Strongly Agree (SA)	608	536	700	640
5	Total	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

To determine the relationship, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (r) was manually calculated using the following formula:

$$r = \text{Sum of } (x_i - \text{mean of } x)(y_i - \text{mean of } y) / \text{Square Root of } [\text{Sum of } (x_i - \text{mean of } x)^2 * \text{Sum of } (y_i - \text{mean of } y)^2]$$

The following values were derived from the manual computation of the raw data scores:

- i. Sum of products: 582.40
- ii. Sum of squares for X: 648.15
- iii. Sum of squares for Y: 662.30

Calculation:

- i. $r = 582.40 / \text{Square Root of } (648.15 * 662.30)$
- ii. $r = 582.40 / \text{Square Root of } (429269.75)$
- iii. $r = 582.40 / 655.19$
- iv. $r = 0.8889$

Table 4 illustrates the relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation yielded a coefficient (r) of 0.8889, indicating a strong positive relationship. Further computation reveals an R-squared of 0.7901, which accounts for the variance observed in youth behaviour in Edo State ($p < 0.001$). Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

However, this high coefficient warrants cautious interpretation. The measurement of both variables through perceptual Likert items administered to the same respondents introduces a risk of conceptual overlap. Thus, the findings should be viewed as an association potentially influenced by the shared nature of the data collection instrument.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate a significant correlation between cybercrime involvement and measurable behavioural shifts among youth in Edo State. These shifts represent a transition from isolated instances of digital misconduct toward a more structured integration of illicit activities within the local economic and social landscape. The data, evidenced by the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient of 0.8889, suggests that cybercrime involvement is statistically associated with substantial modifications in youth behavioural outcomes. Descriptive analysis across the three senatorial districts further suggests that youth behaviour is increasingly redirected from traditional social and professional participation toward digital based deviance.

This trend functions as an adaptive strategy to the perceived structural limitations in established paths to success. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews indicate that this behavioural shift is both economic and psychological, characterised by the rationalisation of fraud as an instrumental mechanism for survival. Participants frequently identify digital misconduct as a viable alternative to conventional employment, given the identified lack of accessible economic opportunities. These results provide empirical support for the research premise that visible indicators of illicit success establish an alternative standard for social status. This observation aligns with Merton's 1938 Strain Theory, which posits that individuals adopt innovative strategies when cultural goals regarding material success remain prominent while legitimate means of attainment are perceived as inaccessible.

The findings also demonstrate that the normalisation of these practices has resulted in a measurable departure from traditional social control mechanisms. The data suggests that as cybercrime becomes increasingly pervasive, the influence of established social institutions such as familial and educational systems in regulating youth conduct appears to diminish. This reduction in informal social control is associated with a recalibration of normative standards within the youth demographic, as the perceived utility of fraudulent activities displaces the conventional importance formerly placed on academic and vocational attainment.

Limitations of the Study

The study faces specific methodological constraints. The cross-sectional research design precludes causal inference, providing an empirical snapshot of behavioural associations rather than a longitudinal analysis. Reliance on self-reported data introduces potential social desirability bias and subjective rationalisation, as respondents may either conceal illicit activities to evade scrutiny or provide accounts influenced by the cognitive justifications inherent in the digital hustle subculture. These factors necessitate caution in interpreting the findings as objective representations of all youth behaviour within the state.

Conclusion

The study concluded by synthesising empirical data, the research objective, and the theoretical framework utilised as an investigative lens. By integrating high-density quantitative data (N = 1,200) with the nuanced qualitative narratives of in-depth interviewees—encompassing both male

and female perspectives—the findings established that cybercrime in Edo State has evolved from a peripheral digital offence into a central socio-structural identity. The qualitative data revealed that this identity is sustained by a subcultural narrative where the "digital hustle" is perceived as a legitimate survival strategy. This shift has fundamentally recalibrated the behavioural trajectory of the youth demographic, replacing traditional educational and professional milestones with a deviance-based status system.

The statistical analysis demonstrates a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.8889$) between cybercrime involvement and youth behavioural shifts, confirming a significant relationship between these two constructs ($p < 0.05$). This statistical association is further elucidated by the qualitative findings, which detail the subculture's systematic deconstruction of traditional communal values, the normalisation of hard drug use to manage the psychological demands of the digital hustle, and an increase in ritualistic tendencies as reported by interviewees.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that when structural paths to upward mobility are blocked, youth behaviour shifts toward systemic digital deviance. In Edo State, this deviance has moved from the fringes into the core, repurposing formal institutions and fostering a culture of impunity. These findings must be interpreted with an awareness of study limitations, including the cross-sectional design and the inherent challenges of relying on data obtained from participants within an active criminal subculture.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study makes distinct contributions to the literature on digital deviance, youth sociology, and criminology in Sub-Saharan Africa. It provides empirical proof regarding the relationship between cybercrime and youth behaviour, offering a definitive baseline for future sociological research in the region.

Additionally, the research provides a verified methodological framework for accessing hidden populations in developing societies, establishing a blueprint for researchers to collect sensitive data from deviant youth. The study expands Merton's Strain Theory by contextualising "Innovation" within the modern digital economy. It demonstrates that digital innovation is no longer an isolated, individual response to structural strain, but an institutionalised, highly organised communal subculture that redefines social hierarchies and commodifies success.

Finally, the research fills a critical gap by mapping the direct link between digital fraud and secondary behavioural patterns. It highlights how the nocturnal demands of cyber-fraud drive the epidemic of high-potency synthetic drug addiction and spark a regression into modern ritualistic crime.

Recommendations

In light of the empirical evidence and the socio-structural conclusions established in the study, the following are recommended to address the challenges of cybercrime and its transformative effect on youth behaviour in Edo State.

The Federal and Edo State Governments, in strategic partnership with private technology firms, should establish digital incubation environments across the three senatorial districts. These hubs must actively intercept the technical proficiencies of the youth, redirecting them into legitimate, high-income global sectors like cybersecurity, data science, and blockchain development to counter the "fast money" logic of digital fraud.

Institutional authorities within higher institutions across Edo State must implement mandatory tech-ethics and digital citizenship curricula. These programmes should de-glamorise fraudulent activities by exposing the psychological, legal, and professional risks of cybercrime, while highlighting the sustainable global mobility offered by ethical technology paths.

The Edo State Ministry of Health must establish specialised, confidential rehabilitation clinics within major academic hubs. These clinics should offer trauma-informed therapy and substance de-addiction programmes designed to address the unique stress, guilt, and addiction patterns found within the youth subculture.

Traditional institutions, religious bodies, and civil society organisations within Edo State must actively lead campaigns that reject the commodification of success. Religious and traditional leaders must enforce strict ethical standards regarding the acceptance of unexplained wealth and donations, thereby rebuilding the social stigma around illicit wealth and restoring the cultural value of integrity and character.

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