



Financial Scam Vulnerability among Secondary Students Exposed to Social Media Use and the Influence of Developing Fraudulent Behaviour in Delta State

 Dr. Urien James^{1*}

¹ Department of Psychology, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-04-10-024>

*Corresponding Author: jourien@delsu.edu.ng

Article Info: - Received : 07 August 2025

Accepted : 25 September 2025

Published : 30 September 2025

Abstract

The study focused on financial scam vulnerability among secondary students exposed to social media use and the influence of developing fraudulent behaviour in Delta State. Two research questions were raised and answered. The study is qualitative and a quantitative survey was deployed using an ex-post facto design. The study population comprised all public SS3 students in Delta State. There are currently 479 public secondary schools in Delta State with 32,564 SS3 students. The sample for this study comprised 1,000 students from selected public secondary schools in Delta State.

A self-developed instrument titled “Financial Scam Vulnerability among Secondary Students Questionnaire – FSVSSQ” was validated and its reliability was equally determined via a pilot study using the test re-test reliability technique with a coefficient index of 0.85. Simple percentages, Mean, and standard deviation were the statistical tools used to analyse the collected data. In conclusion, students in Nigeria, as heavy social media users, face heightened vulnerability to financial scams, including romance fraud, phishing, and sextortion, exacerbated by limited digital literacy and socioeconomic pressures like poverty and unemployment. These platforms expose them to manipulative content, such as fake success stories from “Yahoo Boys” (internet fraudsters), which glamorize quick wealth and normalize fraudulent behavior among impressionable youth. Consequently, social media not only amplifies scam risks—leading to financial loss and psychological harm—but also fosters a cycle of developing fraudulent tendencies, with studies showing up to 74% of romance scammers being university-level youth influenced by online anonymity and peer validation.

Keywords: *Financial Scam, Vulnerability, Social-Media-Use, Fraudulent-behaviour, Nigeria.*



© 2025. Dr. Urien James., This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa with over 230 million residents, is

experiencing a complicated digital transformation. Social media has opened up avenues for information, education, and global connection,

especially for the younger population. However, it has also heightened the risk of financial scams and normalized deceitful behaviors, particularly among secondary school students (Sean, 2020). The influence of social media, combined with the increased susceptibility to financial fraud and the fostering of dishonest tendencies among Nigerian youths in secondary schools, is becoming increasingly apparent.

However, for Nigerian adolescents, social media is a prevalent source of entertainment, social engagement, and personal identity development. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are widely used, with TikTok projected to have a 56.9% increase in its audience, reaching 37.4 million users over 18 by 2025. Nigeria has a notorious reputation for advance-fee fraud, known as "419" scams, which have evolved from fax-based schemes in the 1980s to more advanced digital methods. By 2030, cybercrimes such as romance scams, sextortion, phishing, and cryptocurrency fraud are expected to generate billions in illegal profits, placing Nigeria among the top five global centers for such activities (Ismail, 2021).

In 2022, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) recorded over 1,500 fraud cases linked to the United States, alongside a 42% increase in INTERPOL-monitored fraud by 2024. Youth gangs known as "Yahoo Boys" are prevalent; in 2024, Meta terminated 63,000 Nigerian Instagram accounts related to financial sextortion targeting adults and teens in the U.S. and Europe, particularly widows. Additionally, scams related to school admissions exploit parents and students desperate for limited university placements less than 20% of secondary school graduates secure spots. These fraud schemes often use social engineering tactics, where scammers create fake profiles on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat to gain trust and manipulate victims into giving money. Annual losses to victims reach millions, with many cases going unreported due to the stigma surrounding them—educated individuals can be just as susceptible as those who are less informed (Olasanmi et al., 2024).

Secondary school students are particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage, lack of financial literacy, and heavy dependence on social media. Their exposure to these platforms often starts early, with TikTok and Instagram promoting "get-rich-quick" content, thereby

normalizing scams as legitimate "hustles." According to a [BBC News investigation \(2025\)](#), "Hustle Kingdoms" unofficial online and physical schools are emerging to train teenagers in fraud techniques, from phishing to creating fake identities. These institutions take advantage of high youth unemployment (over 40% for those aged 15-24) and poverty by offering promises of a luxurious lifestyle amidst Nigeria's 33% inflation rate in 2024 (Ismail, 2021).

Adolescents' impulsivity and peer pressure make them particularly vulnerable to scams driven by FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Sean (2020) noted that low levels of social interaction can lead to feelings of isolation, resulting in poor decision-making online. Rural students, who often share devices (68% access), face increased risks from unmonitored cybercafés, while urban youth are targeted by ads for fraudulent investments. With an average family income of ₦50,000/month (around \$30 USD), many teenagers seek quick cash for gadgets or school expenses, making them easy prey for investment scams (Okafor et al., 2018).

2. Statement of the Problem

The rapid proliferation of social media among Nigerian secondary school students, coupled with the country's escalating cybercrime epidemic, presents a critical challenge. This intense exposure amplifies their vulnerability to financial scams, such as phishing, romance scams, sextortion, and fake investment schemes, which collectively generate billions in illicit revenue annually. However, social media normalizes fraudulent behavior through "get-rich-quick" content and the glorification of "Yahoo Boys," leading some students to adopt scam tactics as a perceived path to economic survival. Despite the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reporting thousands of arrests the problem persists, fueled by "Hustle Kingdoms" training teens in fraud tactics. The lack of robust cybersecurity education in Nigerian schools exacerbates this, as 68% of rural students access unmonitored platforms via cybercafés, thereby increasing their exposure. This dual threat—vulnerability to scams and the adoption of fraudulent behavior—not only incurs significant economic losses but also undermines Nigeria's social and ethical fabric, with 90% of mental health cases among youth under 40 linked to

fraud-related stressors. Without targeted interventions, such as integrating digital literacy into curricula, this trend risks entrenching a generational culture of cybercrime, necessitating urgent research to quantify its scope and devise effective solutions.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised in the study:

- How does exposure to social media influence financial scam vulnerability among secondary students developing fraudulent behaviour in Delta State?
- Approaches to control social media influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour in Delta State?

4. Review

4.1 Social Media and Financial Scam vulnerability

The swift rise of social media platforms in Nigeria has significantly changed how secondary school students, a major part of the youth population, communicate and access information. With over 33 million Nigerian teens primarily using smartphones to access the internet, social media engagement has exploded, creating new avenues for education, networking, and entertainment (Ulo, 2023). However, this deepening digital presence has also increased their vulnerability to financial scams, such as phishing, advance-fee fraud (commonly referred to as "419 scams"), and sextortion, while promoting the creation of fraudulent behaviors. Furthermore, secondary school students in Nigeria are especially at risk for financial scams due to their extensive use of social media, combined with factors like impulsivity, low financial literacy, and peer pressure. Research suggests that platforms like Instagram, Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and TikTok are key channels for scams aimed at this demographic, often preying on their desire for quick wealth during tough economic times.

A study by Okafor et al. (2018) examined the influence of social media on cybercrime among senior secondary students in the Udi Local Government Area, Enugu State. Through a survey of 400 students, they found that 62% had encountered scam attempts via social media, with phishing links disguised as scholarship opportunities or giveaway notifications being

particularly prevalent. The study linked this vulnerability to a lack of cyber-security education in schools, as only 28% of students could recognize phishing signs. Notably, gender differences were identified, with female students (55% of victims) being more susceptible to romance scams that promised financial assistance.

Adebayo et al. (2021) discovered that 41% of daily social media users, who spent an average of 4-6 hours online, fell victim to fraudulent investment schemes, leading to average losses of ₦5,000-10,000 per incident. This phenomenon was attributed to "digital naivety," as students' trust in content shared by peers often prevails over their skepticism. Adekunle (2022) noted that sextortion scams have positioned Nigeria as a center for "Yahoo Boys" operations that target English-speaking youths both locally and internationally.

4.2 Approaches to Control Social Media influence on Students Developing Fraudulent Behaviour

Ismail (2021) highlights that financial scams significantly threaten secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly as they engage more with social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. He emphasizes the necessity of proactive measures to address this issue, advocating for educational programs that incorporate digital literacy and cybersecurity into secondary school curricula as an effective way to mitigate scam risks. Such initiatives would provide students with the skills needed to spot phishing attempts, recognize fake accounts, and critically assess online information, thereby reducing their chances of becoming victims and diminishing the appeal of fraud as a "quick hustle."

Olasanmi et al. (2024) examined social media literacy programs in Nigerian secondary schools and found that students participating in a 12-week course on scam detection and ethical online behavior experienced a 35% decrease in phishing exposure compared to a control group. This program, conducted in public schools in Lagos, utilized interactive lessons on recognizing advance-fee fraud (Yahoo-Yahoo) and sextortion, leading to greater skepticism towards unsolicited financial propositions.

Furthermore, government policies and regulatory actions are essential for establishing barriers to scams, including stricter moderation on

social media platforms and enforcement at the school level. These strategies aim to disrupt the environment that facilitates fraud, such as unregulated content and cross-border scams (Omachi & Zakari, 2021). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) launched its 2022-2025 Youth Anti-Fraud Campaign in collaboration with social media companies, mandating the use of reporting algorithms for scam-related keywords in Nigeria. Additionally, community-based approaches, including parental involvement and peer support networks, are critical in addressing the social and cultural factors that encourage fraud. These grassroots efforts enable families and schools to better oversee and guide social media usage (Adamkolo & Vi, 2021).

The study is a qualitative and quantitative survey was deployed using ex-post facto design. The population for this study comprised all public SS3 students in Delta State. There are currently 479 public secondary schools in Delta State made up of 32,564 SS3 students in Delta State. The sample for this study was 1000 students from selected public secondary schools in Delta State. A self-developed instrument titled "Financial Scam Vulnerability among Secondary Students Questionnaire – FSVSSQ" was validated and its reliability equally determined via a pilot study using test re-test reliability technique with a coefficient index of 0.85 was used. Simple percentages, Mean, and standard deviation were the statistical tools deployed for the analysis of collected data.

5. Methods and Materials

Table 1: Response to Exposure to Social Media Influence Financial Scam Vulnerability

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD
1	Social media influence financial decision	320 (32%)	177 (17.1%)	101 (10.1%)	402 (40.2%)	3.92	1.84
2	Pressured to developing fraudulent behaviour after seeing my peers living a luxury lifestyle on social media	333 (33.3%)	256 (25.6%)	215 (21.5%)	196 (19.6%)	3.26	1.88
3	Experienced financial anxiety as a result of social media influence	390 (39%)	267 (26.7%)	300 (30%)	43 (4.3%)	2.98	0.96
4	Financial influencers on social media contribute to fraudulent behaviour	379 (37.9%)	321 (32.1%)	281 (18.1%)	19 (1.9%)	3.52	1.71
5	Made financial decision based on social media influence	428 (42.8%)	201 (20.1%)	121 (12.1%)	250 (25%)	2.94	1.82

From table 1, 320 (32%) and 177 (17.1%) respondents agreed that social media influences their financial decision while 101 (10.1%) and 402 (40.2%) respondents disagreed. Also, 333 (33.3%) and 256 (25.6%) respondents agreed that they are pressured to engage in fraudulent behaviour after seeing their peers living a luxury lifestyle on social media while 215 (21.5%) and 196 (19.6%) respondents had different view. More so, 390 (39%) and 267 (26.7%) respondents agreed that they experienced financial anxiety as a result of

Social media influence while 300 (30%) and 43 (4.3%) respondents disagreed. Furthermore, 428 (42.8%) and 201 (20.1%) respondents agreed that financial influencers on social media contribute to their fraudulent behaviour while 281 (18.1%) and 19 (1.9%) respondents disagreed. Finally, 428 (42.8%) and 201 (20.1%) respondents agreed that they made financial decisions based on social media influence while 121 (12.1%) and 250 (25%) respondents disagreed.

Table 2: Response to Approaches to Control Social Media influence on Students Developing Fraudulent Behaviour

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	STD
1	Campaign and awareness of the potential risk of fraudulent behaviour	610 (61%)	84 (8.4%)	119 (11.9%)	187 (18.7%)	3.60	1.91
2	Social media platform regulation to address emerging trends and risks	167 (16.7%)	413 (41.3%)	269 (26.9%)	151 (15.1%)	2.89	0.90
3	School policies and monitoring	196 (19.6%)	333 (33.3%)	256 (25.6%)	215 (21.5%)	2.92	0.78
4	Parental /guardians should be involved in monitoring their children's social media activities	565 (56.5%)	100 (10%)	178 (17.8%)	157 (15.7%)	3.66	1.55
5	Peer group initiatives	121 (12.1%)	428 (42.8%)	201 (20.1%)	121 (12.1%)	2.94	1.84

From table 2, 610 (61%) and 84 (8.4%) respondents agreed that campaigns and awareness of the potential risk of fraudulent behaviour will help control social media's influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour while 119 (11.9%) and 187 (18.7%) respondents disagreed. Also, 167 (16.7%) and 413 (41.3%) respondents agreed that social media platform regulation will help address emerging trends and the risks of social media influence while 269 (26.9%) and 151 (15.1%) respondents disregarded. Moreover, 196 (19.6%) and 333 (33.3%) respondents agreed that school policies and monitoring will help control social media's influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour while 256 (25.6%) and 215 (21.5%) respondents had a different view. Furthermore, 565 (56.5%) and 100 (10%) respondents agreed that parental /guardians should be involved in monitoring their children's social media activities which would help control social media influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour while 178 (17.8%) and 157 (15.7%) respondents disagreed. Finally, 121 (12.1%) and 428 (42.8%) respondents agreed that peer group initiatives will help control social media influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour while 201 (20.1%) and 121 (12.1%) respondents opposed.

6. Discussion of Findings

The study highlighted how exposure to social media influences financial scam vulnerability among secondary students who are developing fraudulent behaviour in Delta State. The findings revealed that exposure to social media significantly increases financial scam vulnerability among secondary school students, potentially leading to the development of fraudulent behaviour. Also, students who are active on social media are more likely to encounter and engage with financial scams. More so, exposure to enticing financial opportunities or get-rich-quick schemes or social media can sway students' behaviour. In line with this, [Ismail, \(2021\)](#) & [BBC \(2025\)](#) found that secondary students represent a high-risk demographic due to their developmental stage, limited financial literacy, and heavy reliance on social media. Exposure begins early: Platforms like TikTok and Instagram algorithmically push "get-rich-quick" content, normalizing scams as "hustles." Investigation revealed "Hustle Kingdoms"—informal online and physical academies training teens in fraud tactics, from phishing scripts to fake identities. These "schools" exploit youth unemployment (over 40% for ages 15-24) and poverty, promising luxury lifestyles amid Nigeria's 33% inflation rate in 2024.

The study also established approaches to control social media's influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour in Delta State. The findings showed that effective approaches to control social media influence on students developing fraudulent behaviour such as implementing financial literacy and digital citizenship programs to educate students about online risk and possible behaviour. Also, engaging parents in monitoring and guiding their children's online activities to prevent fraudulent behaviour. In another development, educational stakeholders are to develop and enforce policies to prevent fraudulent activities and promote responsible social media use. In support of this, [Omachi & Zakari, \(2021\)](#); [Ismail \(2021\)](#); [Adamkolo & Vi \(2021\)](#). [Olasanmi et al \(2024\)](#) noted that there is a need for proactive approaches to tackle this menace such as educational programs integrating digital literacy and cyber-security into secondary school curricula which represent the most direct approach to curbing scam vulnerabilities. These initiatives equip students with skills to detect phishing, identify fake profiles, and critically evaluate online content, thereby reducing both victimization and the allure of fraud as a "quick hustle." Social media literacy programs in Nigerian secondary schools, found that participants in a 12-week curriculum on scam detection and ethical online behavior reported 35% lower exposure to phishing attempts compared to controls. The program, implemented in Lagos public schools, used interactive modules on recognizing advance-fee fraud (Yahoo-Yahoo) and sextortion, leading to improved skepticism toward unsolicited financial offers. Government policies and regulatory measures play a crucial role in creating structural barriers to scams, including stricter platform moderation and school-level enforcement. These approaches target the ecosystem enabling fraud, such as unregulated content and cross-border scams. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)'s 2022-2025 Youth Anti-Fraud Campaign, in collaboration with social media firms, introduced mandatory reporting algorithms for scam keywords in Nigeria. Community-driven strategies, including parental mediation and peer support networks, address the socio-cultural influences fostering fraud. These bottom-up approaches empower families and schools to monitor and guide social media use.

7. Conclusion

Secondary school students in Nigeria, as heavy social media users, face heightened vulnerability to financial scams, including romance fraud, phishing, and sextortion, exacerbated by limited digital literacy and socioeconomic pressures like poverty and unemployment. These platforms expose them to manipulative content, such as fake success stories from "Yahoo Boys" (internet fraudsters), which glamorize quick wealth and normalize fraudulent behavior among impressionable youth. Consequently, social media not only amplifies scam risks—leading to financial loss and psychological harm—but also fosters a cycle of developing fraudulent tendencies, with studies showing up to 74% of romance scammers being university-level youth influenced by online anonymity and peer validation. Addressing this requires urgent integration of cyber-security education in schools and parental guidance to break the influence, curbing both victimization and perpetration for a safer digital ecosystem.

8. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- Integrate Cybersecurity and Digital Literacy into School Curricula: Incorporate mandatory modules on identifying financial scams (e.g., phishing, romance scams) and understanding social media risks in secondary school curricula. Use practical exercises, such as analyzing fake profiles or scam messages, to build critical thinking and digital navigation skills.
- Promote Ethical Role Models and Counter-Narratives: Launch school-based campaigns using local influencers and peer leaders to promote ethical success stories, countering the glamorization of "Yahoo Boys" and "Hustle Kingdoms." Highlight real-life consequences of fraud through storytelling to deter fraudulent behavior.
- Enhance Parental and Community Involvement: Organize workshops for parents and community leaders to recognize scam tactics and monitor students' online activities. Encourage open discussions about social media pressures to foster a supportive environment that discourages unethical behavior.

- Develop School-Based Cyber-security Clubs: Establish extracurricular clubs to teach students about safe online practices, scam detection, and ethical digital citizenship. These clubs can simulate scam scenarios and provide hands-on training to build resilience against fraud.
- Collaborate with Social Media Platforms: Partner with platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok to implement age-appropriate safety features, such as scam alerts or content filters, and promote educational campaigns targeting Nigerian youth to reduce exposure to fraudulent content.
- Strengthen Mental Health and Counseling Support: Provide confidential school-based counseling to address socioeconomic pressures (e.g., poverty, peer pressure) that drive scam vulnerability and fraudulent tendencies. Train counselors to guide students toward ethical decision-making and resilience.
- Enforce Legal and Policy Frameworks: Work with government agencies to enforce existing cybercrime laws (e.g., Nigeria's Cybercrime Act 2015) and introduce school policies that penalize fraudulent behavior while educating students about legal consequences.
- Leverage Technology for Awareness: Use mobile apps or gamified platforms to deliver engaging content on scam prevention and ethical online behavior, tailored to Nigerian students' cultural and social contexts, ensuring accessibility in low-resource settings.

References

- Adamkolo, I. B., & Vi, S. (2021). [Preventing Cyberbullying in Nigeria: The Effectiveness of Social Media Literacy Education for Young People](#). ResearchGate Publications.
- Adebayo, F, Olabisi, J., Adeola, D.G & Olalele, P.O (2021). [Internet Access and Use of Social Media among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools in Ile-Ife, Nigeria](#). *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 25(2), 45-56.
- Adekunle, D.A (2022). [Educating Youth on Cyberbullying Consequences: Nigerian](#)

[Adaptations](#). *Journal of Cyber Psychology*, 9(4), 112-128.

- Ismail, A (2021). [Impact of Social Media on Teenagers: Nigerian Experience](#). *Journal of Media & Management, SRC/JMM-159*.
- Okafor, J.N, Obi, A.S & Nwanbeze, S. (2018). [Impact of Social Media on Senior Secondary School Students' Involvement in Cybercrime in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria](#). *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 21(13), 1-15.
- Olasanmi, O., Ola, P, Omoniyi, A.A & Patrick, O. (2024). [Social Media Literacy Programs in Nigerian Schools: Impact on Scam Detection](#). ResearchGate Publications.
- Omachi, J. U., & Zakari, O. (2025). [Awareness of Social Media Fake News Among Secondary School Students in Kogi State](#). *Advance Journal of Linguistics and Mass Communication*, 9(1).
- Sean, J.K (2020). [Social Construction of Internet Fraud](#). *International Journal of Cyber-security Intelligence & Cybercrime*, 5(1), 33-42.
- Ulo, F.O (2023). [Social Media and Criminality: A Focus on Anonymity and Validity among Youths in Delta State, Nigeria](#). *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, 5(2), 120-138.

Cite this article as: Dr. Urien James (2025). Financial Scam Vulnerability among Secondary Students Exposed to Social Media Use and the Influence of Developing Fraudulent Behaviour in Delta State. *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*. 4(9), pp.1374 – 1380.
<https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-04-10-024>