Tweets and Reactions: Revealing the Geographies of Cybercrime Perpetrators and the North-South Divide

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Abstract

How do tweets reflect the long-standing disparities between the northern and southern regions of Nigeria? This study presents a qualitative analysis of Twitter users' responses (n = 101,518) to the tweets of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) regarding the production and prosecution of cybercrime. The article uses postcolonial perspectives to shed light on the legacies of British colonial efforts in Nigeria, such as the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914. The results revealed significant discrepancies between Nigeria's northern and southern regions regarding cybercriminal arrest, conviction, and sentencing. Specifically, the results showed that the EFCC's criminalization of Southerners differs substantially from that of Northerners. The contemporary manifestation of inequalities concerning the production and prosecution of cybercrime on Twitter reflects long-standing contestations (e.g., economic, political, cultural, geological) between the northern and southern parts of Nigerian society. Therefore, since the North-South divide in present-day Nigeria originated from British colonization, colonialism is the base that shaped the superstructure comprising political, religious, historical, geological (e.g., crude oil), and economic factors. In turn, the article spotlights that regional differences in educational attainment, originating from differing experiences of Christianization and colonization, interact with regional disparities in the production of cybercrime. More research is required to better understand how these contextual disparities in society interact with the production and prosecution of cybercrime, given that Nigerian cybercriminals defraud victims all over the world.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Public Opinion on Twitter*

This article uses an emic approach to shed light on how public opinion on Twitter displays the disproportionality between northern and southern Nigeria regarding the prosecution of cybercriminals. Public opinion on social media offers an avenue to examine contestations between different perspectives.[1] Studies on multiple contexts—such as Norway,[2] Russia,[3] South Africa,[4] Colombia,[5] Finland,[6] India,[7] the United States,[8] Syria,[9] Spain,[10] the United Kingdom,[11] Ukraine,[12] Japan,[13] and Australia[14]—have shown that public opinion on Twitter serves as a lens through which seemingly disconnected social and contextual factors are organized as related parts of a whole. In the Nigerian context, while some researchers have investigated perceptions of corruption and cybercrime,[15,16,17,18,19] none used Twitter as a data source. Additionally, academic research on the contemporary manifestation of discrepancies between northern and southern Nigeria concerning cybercrime enforcement does not exist. This gap highlights the value of this article's contributions. Moreover, it is crucial to conduct this study for three additional reasons:

- Through colonization, the British government created the North-South divide when it merged Nigeria's two parts to benefit the empire at the expense of the colonized.[20,21] This article highlights the legacies of colonization rarely discussed in cybercrime scholarship.
- Owing to colonization and the paucity of studies on the North-South divide, many scholars, policymakers, politicians, and international cybercrime agencies tend to view Nigeria through a Western lens and see it as a monolithic culture.
- Nigeria has been identified as a country where many online frauds originate.[22,23,24,25] Therefore, more research is needed to better understand these crimes' contextual underpinnings.

Against these tendencies, this article sets out to (a) mobilize literature on Nigeria to shed light on how tweet comments reflect the colonial North-South amalgamation and (b) to southernize its contributions from postcolonial perspectives. To achieve this, we present the remaining parts of our study in six further sections: (2) the literature, (3) theoretical guidance, (4) method, (5) results, (6) discussion, and (7) conclusion.

2. LITERATURE

2.1. *Introducing Local Terminologies*

Cybercrime is used as a general term for all forms of crimes on the Internet.[26–30] However, it has

geopolitical (e.g., cyber-espionage), psychosocial (e.g., cyber-bullying), and socio-economic (e.g., cyber-fraud) categories, according to the Tripartite Cybercrime Framework.[22,31,32] Cybercrime, which emanates from Nigerian society, is online fraud, rooted in and determined by socioeconomics[22,33–38] and popularly referred to as "419 fraud."[22,33–35] This term was coined in the 1980s, referring to section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code dealing with fraudulent offenses. The digital form of 419 fraud is called "Yahoo-Yahoo,"[36,37] derived from the dominance of Yahoo e-mails, apps, and instant messaging in offender–victim communications in the mid-2000s.[37] The perpetrators of "Yahoo-Yahoo" are called "Yahoo Boys,"[24,34,36,37] implying that Nigerian cybercriminals are predominantly male.[25,34,38]

2.2.   *Nigerian Cybercriminals (Yahoo Boys)*

Nigerian cybercriminals have had numerous victims worldwide.[22,24,34,37] Interviews with law enforcement agents,[37] spiritualists/youths,[39] parents,[17] and male[34] and female[40] university students arrived at two core conclusions: (a) cybercriminals are predominantly men and university students/graduates; and (b) corrupt practices in society enable cybercriminals' activities online. Meticulous examinations of fraudulent emails[35,41] and music lyrics[38,42] as well as comprehensive literature reviews[24,25,43,44] concur with these conclusions.[34,37,40] None of these[17,34,35,37,40] explored the North-South divide or relied on Twitter data. Since the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is the principal enforcer working against cybercriminals in Nigeria,[37] it is reasonable to suggest that both parties reciprocally construct their destiny for one another.

2.3.   *Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)*

The Nigerian government established the EFCC in 2002 to address multiple variations of economic crimes in order to repair Nigeria's reputation.[37,45,46,47] Cybercriminals are not the only group responsible for tarnishing the country's global image;[22,33,34,48] they share this responsibility with many public officials.[22,33,34,48] The EFCC's primary aim is to address fraudulent and corrupt practices.[19,37] However, it is not a perfect organization. First, some high-profile politicians have used the EFCC to arrest and intimidate their political opponents.[46] Second, some EFCC officers have collected bribes from prominent cybercriminals.[34] Third, Mr. Ibrahim Magu, chairman of the EFCC from 2015 to 2020, was implicated in corrupt and fraudulent practices and suspended in July 2020.[48] No EFCC chair thus far has come from southern Nigeria. The contemporary manifestation of the North-South divide regarding the tweets of the EFCC demands a closer look, keeping history in mind, in order to understand the past that created it.

2.4.   Colonizers Created the North-South Divide

Communities indigenous to present-day Nigeria speak over five hundred languages, living diverse lives.[38] In order to understand the colonized territories, a grasp of colonial history is required.[26] The British government colonized present-day Nigeria from 1914 to 1960,[20,49] resulting in many changes: (a) the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates into a Nigerian colony in 1914;[20,21,49] (b) the Christianization of the indigenous population;[20,49] and (c) the introduction of Western education and the English language.[20,21] Consequently, colonial actions have had many contemporary implications.

For example, the British colonial amalgamation resulted in many regional conflicts: a civil war (i.e., the Nigerian-Biafran war from July 1967 to January 1970), the annulment of a presidential election (i.e., in June 1993, the preceding military president, General Ibrahim B. Babangida, a northerner, annulled the election supposedly because a southerner, Mr. M.K.O. Abiola, won the election), and many riots, political assassinations, and military coups.[20] In- disputably, regional differences between the northern and southern parts are significant.[20,21,50–52]

First, the British Christianization of indigenous people was successful in the South, unlike in the North, where Islam dominated and resisted Christianity.[20] Thus, in present-day Nigeria, Islam dominates among the Hausa, Fulani, and other ethnic groups in the North.[50,51,52.] In contrast, a variation of Christianity dominates among the Yoruba in the Southwest and Igbo in the Southeast.[49,50,51,52] Still, some north-central parts are Christian, while some people in the South are Muslim.[49,52] Second, the Islamic religion generally has the strongest hold in northern regions, making Western education more unpopular with the northern population than with its southern counterpart, especially between the 1920s and the 1980s, when many Muslims equated Western education with Christianity.[20,52] Even though there has been a noticeable reduction in regional differences in educational attainment, educated populations still originate more often from the South than from the North.[20,51,52]

Nigeria has been the largest oil producer in Africa since the 1950s, earning approximately $55 billion annually.[53] Nigeria's crude oil and natural gas are primarily located in the southern region. In contrast, since 1960,[20,51] northern politicians more often succeeded in ruling the nation than

their southern counterparts, partly due to the North's and South's differing experiences with imperial rule and partly due to British covert interference in Nigerian affairs, even when official colonization ended.[20] Nonetheless, politicians of all stripes have been implicated in nepotism resulting from the North-South divide.[20,22] Nepotism aggravates corruption. Corruption and nepotism shape both licit and illicit distributions of the "national cake" (national wealth) by holders of political power.[20,22,54,55] Hence, a web of multiple contextual forces, outlined above, intersects with the production of cybercriminals/cybercrime[22,33] and originates from the British subjugation and unification of the northern and southern parts.[20,50]

3. THEORETICAL GUIDANCE

3.1. *Postcolonial Theory*

Postcolonial theory[56,57,58,59] rests on the premise that (1) a grasp of the history of colonial rule is necessary for understanding colonized territories; (2) colonization was for the benefit of the colonizers and not for the benefit of the colonized; and (3) the impact of colonization extends beyond the end of official colonization. This article uses insights from postcolonial theory[56,57,58,59] to shed light on the contemporary North-South divide that the British colonizers created in 1914. Arguably, insights from postcolonial perspectives will help deepen our understanding of the North-South divide on Twitter. The study aims to examine how Twitter users react to tweets of the EFCC and whether these reactions reflect the North-South divide in Nigerian society. Therefore, we ask: (1a) How do Twitter users react to the EFCC's tweets about the prosecution of cybercriminals? (1b) How do these responses reflect the long-standing disparity between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria? (1c) How does the EFCC's prosecution of cybercriminals reflect the lines dividing northern and southern Nigeria?

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1. *Data Collection*

We began to follow the EFCC on Twitter in 2017 in order to answer our research questions. EFCC's social media handle, *@officialefcc*, has over 963,000 followers. The research team manually bookmarked all EFCC tweets concerning cybercriminals from July 31, 2019, to December 31, 2020. We used keywords such as "online fraud," "internet fraudsters," "online fraud," "Yahoo Boys," or "cybercrime" in selecting tweets about cybercriminals. Examples of such tweets include: (a) "Two Internet Fraudsters Jail in Ilorin" and (b) "EFCC Arrests Nine Yahoo Boys in Port

Harcourt." We relied solely on naturalistic online data in the public domain; consequently, ethical approval for this study was not necessary.

We manually retrieved the comments (N=101,518). We conclude that the Twitter users who responded to the EFCC's tweets are Nigerians for two reasons: (a) they have Nigerian names, and (b) they generally use Nigerian pidgin English and Nigerian urban slang.

4.2. *Data Analysis*

In analyzing the data, we followed the principles of a directed approach to qualitative content analysis (DAQCA),[60] the goal of which is to validate background information or theories, as Hsieh and Shannon's work recommended.[60] Accordingly, in subjecting the data to DAQCA, we "tested" how background information ("the North-South divide") appeared in tweet comments. We performed the steps listed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Data Analysis: The Steps Following a Directed Approach to Qualitative Content Analysis

1. Even though Twitter data is in the public domain, we aimed to remove Twitter users' personal details from this original research article. Hence, we commenced by deleting respondents' Twitter usernames from the data.
2. We began coding by reading tweeted comments and highlighting all texts that appeared to represent critical aspects of "the North-South divide."
3. We coded all highlighted passages using predetermined high-level code (i.e., the North-South divide) to identify the dominant theme.
4. We polished the classification into a more refined category by repeating steps two and three, which facilitated a "closeness" to the data and more careful considerations.
5. Because different coders may vary in their interpretation of the text's content,[60] the lead author coded 100% of the data, as described above.

6. The co-author independently reviewed 30% of the data applying the identical code: "the North-South divide." The degree of similarities between the coders was 98%.

Having followed these steps outlined in Table 1, it is noteworthy that "the North-South divide" code/theme is not the only one that can be derived from the vast dataset had we followed alternative approaches to qualitative data analysis. We hence present the results based on this code: "the North- South divide."

5. RESULTS

Respondents' tweets suggest that the EFCC disproportionately criminalizes youth from southern Nigeria. The result is reflective of the central code, "the North-South divide." We presented this code/theme by showing exemplars from the data in line with the recommendations of DAQCA.[60] All direct quotes presented in Table 2 represent the shared reactions of respondents. In view of the tweets, the EFCC over-criminalizes southern youths for cybercrime while ignoring their northern counterparts involved in terrorism (e.g., tweets 8, 9, and 10, Table 2). Thus, the representation of this group (Southerners) as criminals differs substantially from that of northern youths, according to the shared views of respondents as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Disproportionality: The North-South Divide

Examples of tweets about the disparity and disproportionality between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria
1. *Only Southerners? This is discrimination. No northern fraudster right? GOD go judge you BUHARI* [Only Southerners? This is discrimination. Are there no fraudsters from the northern part of Nigeria, right? God would judge Buhari - BUHARI here refers to Muhammadu Buhari, who has been the Nigerian president from 2015 till date; he is also from the Northern part of the country]

2.	*Na only for South, east and west una dey arrest person? what happened to northern parts of this country?* [Is it only from the Southern, Eastern, and Western regions that you, i.e., the EFCC, arrest people? What happened to the Northern parts of this country?]
3.	*I think the South South are sufferings in the hands of the northerns.*
4.	*Where are the Northern fraudsters? It seems EFCC is only active in southern Nigeria.*
5.	*Why always south South?? PLEASE WE NEED TO DIG INTO THIS...*
6.	*@officialEFCC This's humiliation, intimidation, abuse of RIGHTS of civil liberties / privacy, disregard for citizenship RIGHTS, denial of RIGHTS to free CONSCIENCE / THOUGHTS as adults. Can this nonsense be tried in the North? Southern YOUTHS are under siege by Northern EFCC.*
7.	*Ethnic agenda to destroy the lives & future of Southern youths & reduce them to wheelbarrow pushers thereby, turning the line of Southern civilization backwards instead of upwards. Why you will not applaud primitive EFCC to spite Southern YOUTHS?.*
8.	*We never see one fulani wey dem jail o. Na so so ibo n yoruba. Fulani herdsmen terrorists busy chopping off peoples hands n legs n taping woman. Non arrest. Nigger-ria is a complete evil jungle* [We have never seen one Fulani person who goes to jail; only Ibo and Yoruba people go to jail in Nigeria. Fulani herdsmen and terrorists are busy cutting off people's hands and legs and kidnapping women, but no arrest! Nigeria is a complete evil jungle. *it is noteworthy that the Hausa, and Fulani ethnic groups are from the Northern parts, while the Yoruba ethnic group are from the Southwest and the Igbo from the Southeast of Nigeria].
9.	*Southerners fold your hands & watch Northern controlled EFCC destroys the lives / future of your youths for a social crime against invisible foreigners who neither complained nor petitioned while bandits &terrorists of Northern extraction are negotiated with & released. Irony*

	10. *Rehabilitate and release BokoHaram allahists and Quranic Bandits from the North Prosecute and Imprison Fraudsters from the South.* [Rehabilitate and release Boko Haram terrorists and Quranic bandits from the North. In contrast, prosecute and imprison fraudsters from the South].
	11. *@officialEFCC If white Police / FBI goes into black communities, arrest people randomly as suspected internet fraudsters without report against them by any one as a victim, every black person on earth will scream racial profiling but in Nigeria, this's what EFCC subjected Southern YOUTHS to.*
	12. *This barbaric & crude method of operation by arresting innocent citizens no one reported against as a victim as suspected internet fraudsters won't end until Southern YOUTHS starts resisting & confronting EFCC violently. This's never done anywhere in the World.*
	13. *@officialEFCC Southern YOUTHS in foreign nations can't enjoy peace of mind, liberty & freedom doing the same thing whilst the ones in Nigeria are subjected to constant harassment, intimidation, abuse & violation by tribal security agents. Never.*
	14. *@officialefcc They now target teenagers. Excesses of criminal minded law enforcers like EFCC & SARS can't be tolerated in the North & in any African society.*
	15. *This arrest is illegal by modern standard & should be resisted violently. Arrest for internet scam is done through petition from victims after discreet investigation. EFCC is dispossessing Southern YOUTHS, destroying their future & lives through false conviction.*
	16. *All Northern EFCC zonal offices in d* [the] *South has conducted this erratic arrest in the last one week & never will Northern zonal offices do same. Nobody is arrested anywhere in the World as a suspected internet fraudster. Southern youths should start resisting this arrest is abuse.*
	17. *@officialEFCC Until Southern YOUTHS understand that they have a common enemy they should resist, this money spinning abusive arrest will continue. You don't arrest people as*

	suspected internet fraudsters without reports by victims after discreet investigation. This's the norm world over.
18.	*Internet scam is a social crime & private act. The least of CRIME any modern society gets worried about most especially when locals are not victims. EFCC is systematically destroying Southern YOUTHS economically by dispossessing them. Start resisting this abusive arrest.*
19.	*EFCC is a Northern agency against d* [the] *progress of Southern youths.*
20.	*Efcc is out to destroy d* [the] *future of Southern youths by making them Ex-convicts & rendering them impotent. Is high time Southerners start condemning this false conviction?*
21.	*As long as Southern youths & opinion leaders don't want to resist & condemn this intimidation of Southern youths by* [the] *EFCC, it will continue & get worst.*
22.	*I have never heard of arrest of yahoo boys in Kano, Sokoto, in the north generally. Are there no internet fraudsters in the north?*
23.	*@officialEFCC is…biased in their operations, there is immunity for the northerners, while witch hunting the southerners. We are all Nigerians.*
24.	*Magu brothers* [the allies of the previous chairman of the EFCC, Mr Ibrahim Magu] *that displayed their cars on Sallah Day* [Islamic festive day*], has any one arrested them as living flamboyantly to subject them to investigation? Magu* [Mr Ibrahim Magu], *is out to cripple Southern economy & destroy the lives / future of Southern youths with Arewa EFCC* ["Arewa" is a Hausa language word that means "north," and "Arewa EFCC" here suggests, the EFCC that derived its powers, methods of operations, and instructions from the Northern parts of Nigeria to persecute Southerners].
25.	*It seems* [the] *EFCC is only active in southern Nigeria.*

26	*How about those northern kids…what have you done even to one of them? Tribalism everywhere.*
27	*@officialEFCC never question the northerners looting and raping Naija* [Nigerian] *economy.*
28	*Northern youths & their elders can't take this shit. Nigeria would've been on fire.*
29	*Stop parading southern youths, are arewa [northern] boys saints.*
30	*EFCC is just looking down southwards for internet fraudsters, scratching the ground for little ants while ignoring magu magu[referring to Mr Ibrahim Magu, the EFCC boss from 2015 to 2020] the chief fraudster!*

6. DISCUSSION

This discussion focuses on a central strand of narratives ("the North-South divide"), as illustrated in Table 2. Our identification of regional disciplinary disparities is new and original. It is also unique because it highlights the legacies of colonization, which are rarely discussed in cybercrime scholarship. These contributions mirror and are made possible by our unique approach to collecting a naturalistic online dataset. Prior interviews with cybercriminals,[34] law enforcement officers,[37] parents,[17] and spiritualists[39] did not identify regional disparities in the incarceration of cybercriminals among northern and southern youths in Nigeria. Social media data, however, represent a rich and unique "qualitative" resource that can be used to conduct an emic study and understand local worldviews and epistemologies in society.[61,62] Accordingly, we argue here that, in many ways, Twitter comments represent a superior source of data on the attitudes and beliefs of subjects, with many of the constraints and biases of interview methods removed. For example, there were no leading questions, nor was there a high social desirability bias (unlike most interview datasets). It is an approach that can be, but thus far has not been, used in cyber criminology to

understand how attitudes and colonial underpinnings intersect with patterns in the production and prosecution of criminals, in this case, Nigerian cybercriminals. Our contributions facilitate new ways of seeing previously invisible disproportionalities in Nigerian society's production and prosecution of cybercriminals.

In addition, our identification of disciplinary disparities be- tween the North and South of Nigeria empirically shows, for the first time, how the long-standing "North-South divide" inter- sects with contemporary cybercrime production and prosecution patterns. The British empire colonized Nigeria, merging the northern and southern parts to benefit the empire.[20] This article employs a postcolonial perspective to underscore these colonial legacies, which are rarely discussed in cybercrime scholarship. Similarly, there is a tendency for scholars, policymakers, and politicians to view Nigeria through a Western lens and see it as a monolithic culture. This undermines the diversity of lives across regions as far as the production and prosecution of cybercriminals are concerned. Against this tendency, our contribution complements existing knowledge in the field about the social and contextual aspects of cybercrime.[34,37,39,40] Thus, our contribution illustrates the differences between Nigerians from the South and North and their involvement in cybercrime as perpetrators, based on the tweets of the EFCC.

Although statistical data concerning the actual number of cybercriminals from northern and southern Nigeria do not exist, the existing literature offers some clues. The EFCC represents a dominant political perspective and is not a perfect organization.[34,46,48] So, one might argue that southerners are significantly more criminalized, possibly because the EFCC is doing selective enforcement of rules indicating malfunctioning of the state apparatus. On the contrary, research on music lyrics has indicated that musicians from southern Nigeria often glamorize cybercrime in their songs,[38] unlike their northern counterparts.[63] Specifically, the examination of music lyrics from 2007 to 2017 demonstrated that, southwestern and southeastern musicians authored all hip-hop songs glamorizing cybercrime.[38] Similarly, almost all Nigerian cybercriminals arrested in foreign nations have southern Nigerian names.[64,65] In view of the above,[38,64,65] our study demonstrates that the EFCC's disproportionate criminalization of southern youths may suggest that these youths are responsible for the bulk of cybercrime originating from Nigeria. However, this phenomenon requires more critical examination.

Historical and educational factors influence regional dis- parities between northern and southern Nigeria. As explained in the "Colonizers Created the North-South Divide" section, the southern region embraced Western education earlier than the northern region, because of different experiences of Christianization and colonization. Consequently, educated populations more often originate from the southern part of Nigeria.[38,42] Also, Islam has a stronger hold in the northern part of Nigeria, making Western education less popular in the North.[52] Hence, regional differences in educational attainment, originating from different experiences of colonization, have implications for regional disparities in the production of cybercrime.

Historically, after the petroleum boom in the 1970s had provided university students with elevated aspirations, the Nigerian economy collapsed in the 1980s, resulting in mass graduate unemployment.[22,35] While university-educated populations originated more often from the South in the 1980s,[20,52] university graduates from the South bore the heaviest brunt of these harsh economic conditions.[55] This is because Northerners tended to more often occupy positions of political power than Southerners and because of nepotism, which shaped both licit and illicit distributions of the "national cake."[20,54] In part, although unemployment does not cause crime, graduates from the South formed the bulk of the first cohort of Nigerian fraudsters, who were university graduates.[22,38] Over time, these graduates produced many fraud templates and became role models,[22] influencing younger university students, dropouts, and graduates from their communities.[66] Mentees often followed in the footsteps of their mentors, and many university students, dropouts, and graduates emulated their predecessors and became more susceptible to cyber-fraud perpetration than their northern counterparts. Certainly, the mentor-mentee relationship of these cyber-fraudsters (Yahoo boys) is rooted in and determined by socioeconomics supporting prior research.[22,35–38] That is not all, however.

Another explanation for university students from the North, such as the Fulani ethnic group, being less susceptible to cyber criminality is that the government financially supports them, unlike university students from the South (e.g., the Yoruba and Ibo ethnic groups). This government support was originally implemented to reduce regional differences in educational attainment originating from differing experiences of Christianization and colonization. Thus, regional differences in the production of cybercrime may be an unintended consequence of government efforts to reduce regional differences in educational attainment.

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Another possible explanation is that fraudsters from northern Nigeria deploy a peculiar modus operandi that does not often come to the attention of the EFCC. One such method is the "hit-and-run method" involving nomadic scammers from northern Nigeria (Personal communication; Usman, 2017). These fraudulent syndicates usually launch a coordinated at- tack on an identified viable victim involving spiritual manipulation (for a comprehensive discussion about the spiritual manipulations of fraud victims, see Lazarus's work[24]). The team travels to the victim's country, befriends them, defrauds the victim face-to-face, and leaves the country with the money without a direct digital trace to its home nation.[37,67]

Either way, based on the evidence that came to light on Twitter ($n = 101,518$), the EFCC disproportionately criminalizes youths from the southern part of the country. We relied on naturalistic online data to illustrate the contemporary manifestation of long-standing discrepancies between northern and southern Nigeria, which run deep. Indeed, public opinion in the online context has mirrored the contestations between the two social groups. By implication, public opinion on Twitter regarding the North-South divide in Nigeria reinforces that online and offline lives are inextricably intertwined.

Historical, colonial, and political factors interact with online life. Our contribution sheds light on how the legacies of the British colonial occupation of Nigeria (e.g., the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates) and regional political and geographical factors (e.g., the disparities between northern and southern Nigeria) interact with the production of cybercrime and cybercriminals. An economic-geographical perspective[26,33,68] suggests that illegal economies in the digital age are grounded in a subtle interplay between activities at multiple scales. However, our study based on Twitter data is the first to substantiate this economic-geographical perspective in cybercrime research. We acknowledge that "the North-South divide" theme discussed in this study is not the only theme that can be derived from our large dataset if alternative codes and approaches are followed. Despite the abovementioned limitations, the findings of this study will help the EFCC better understand public perception of their activities and possibly encourage them to be more transparent about the prosecution of cybercriminals in various regions in Nigeria.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has used an emic approach to shed light on how public opinion on Twitter shows disproportionality between northern and southern Nigeria regarding the prosecution of cybercriminals. The article argued that a complex web of political, colonial, religious, historical, and economic factors alongside cultural and educational underpinnings explain southern Nigerian youths' degree of cybercrime involvement. Since the North-South divide in Nigeria originated from British colonization, colonialism is the base that shaped the superstructure comprising political, religious, historical, geological (e.g., crude oil), and economic factors. Simply put, the British empire created the North-South divide when it merged Nigeria's two parts, which in turn shaped political, religious, historical, religious, and economic factors intersecting with the geographies of cybercriminals in present-day Nigeria. Thus, this article has highlighted the legacies of colonization rarely discussed in cybercrime scholarship. By doing so, the article has demonstrated how public opinion on Twitter serves as a lens through which seemingly disconnected factors are organized as related parts of a whole.

Given the various factors (e.g., educational, historical, colonial) implicated in drawing lines between northern and southern Nigeria since 1960, we argue that public opinion about the EFCC's tweets concerning cybercriminals may be the tip of the iceberg—a crack in the unity between northern and southern Nigeria. Indeed, the article has shed new light on the contestations between northern and southern Nigerian societies concerning the production and prosecution of cybercrime by keeping history in mind to unpack the past that shaped them. Therefore, we conclude that a grasp of the history of colonial rule is necessary for understanding present-day Nigeria because the impact of colonization extends far beyond the end of official colonization. Nevertheless, more research is required to better understand the complexities of this aspect of the Nigerian cultural world- view, given that Nigerian cybercriminals defraud victims worldwide.

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