#NotAFraudster
Addressing the 'African Scammer' Stereotype in the Media

WEBINAR REPORT
NOVEMBER 2020

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BACKGROUND

In recent times, the rise of negative reporting around internet scams in Africa has contributed to shaping a negative international image, fostered a moral panic around internet use, and, in some cases, deprived young Africans from ethical internet-related opportunities. **Internet4Good** is a project funded by the **Bosch Alumni Network** that seeks to portray a positive narrative about the internet for young Africans while projecting a better image of young Africans within global media.

Although initially planned as an onsite capacity building workshop for media professionals in Ghana, the outbreak of the Coronavirus necessitated a digital-first approach for the project.

Consequently, Internet4Good implemented an advocacy campaign and an expert-led webinar between September to November 2020. To counter the single story of Africans using the internet as a tool for criminality, Internet4Good brought a panel of media professionals to discuss the role the media can play in fostering a more nuanced narrative about the continent. This report summarises the key reflections and outcomes of the webinar which took place on **12 November 2020** on Zoom and Facebook Livestream. The opinions expressed in this report do not represent the views of iac Berlin, or other partner organisations.

KEY REFLECTIONS

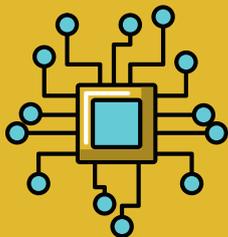# The socio-cultural drivers of cybercrime in Africa

Poverty

Unemployment

Pop culture references

Weak Digital Systems

After the opening remarks by Bosch Alumni Network Coordinator, **Lisa Richter**, the discussion was moderated by Nigerian journalist, **David Hundeyin** with a panel that included: **Aisha Dabo**, Coordinator of Africtivistes; **Mayowa Tijani**, AFP Factchecker; **Nuong Faalong**, Journalist and Bloomberg Media Fellow, and **Wunpini Mohammed (Ph.D)**, Assistant Professor of Global Media at the University of Georgia. The panelists shared key reflections and insights on: the socio-cultural drivers of cybercrime; the role of fact checking and data verification in reporting on cybercrime in Africa; the role of local media in shaping public perception about cybercrime; and the intersection of global media and the African scammer stereotype.

Panelists set the tone for the conversation by highlighting the key socio-cultural drivers of cybercrime in Africa which include: **high rates of poverty**, **youth unemployment**, **pop culture references** and **weak digital systems**. However, they emphasised that Africa's participation in cybercrime has been disproportionately represented in the media and mostly portrayed out of context. Some panelists noted that no African country was among the top 20 countries for cybercrime in the world, however there has remained this stereotype of Africans as scammers. Dr. Wunpini Mohammed warned that it is important to reflect on this singular positioning of Africa both within and outside the continent, and how that shapes the attitudes towards its people. She noted how Nigeria seems to be mostly implicated in discourses on cybercrime leading to xenophobic trends against Nigerians in countries like Ghana and South Africa.

The role of fact checking and data verification in reporting on cybercrime in Africa

The discussion revealed that there was still a dearth of local and regional institutions dedicated to fact checking in Africa. Addressing this gap is particularly important given the rise of fake news and the increasing vulnerability of the older population. African journalists tend to depend on external sources for local issues. Another layer of this vacuum reflects in the marginalisation of cybercrime or internet-related issues when it comes to fact checking. For instance, Dr Wunpini Mohammed notes that most Ghanaian media place their fact checking efforts on political issues at the detriment of other pertinent issues.

"African journalists tend to depend on external sources for local issues".

'Mayowa Tijani, AFP Factchecker
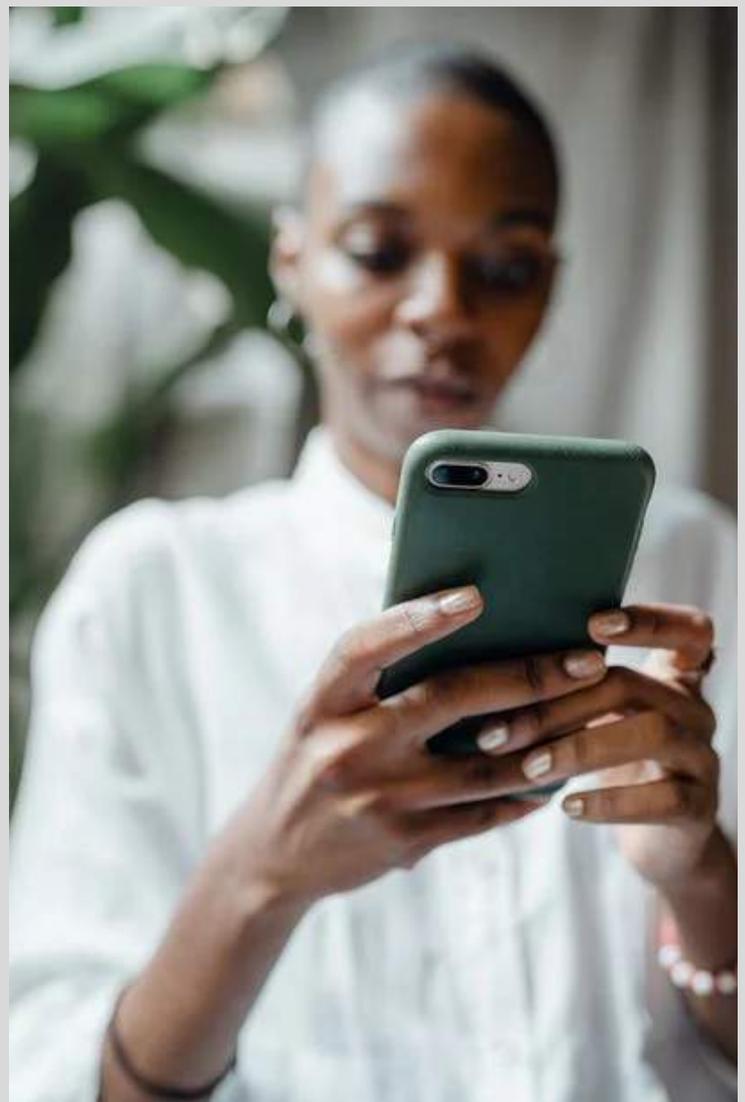
The role of local media in shaping public perception about cybercrime

In changing the narrative about cybercrime, panelists affirmed that local institutions have to intensify their efforts in providing more context and nuance to their reports. According to Nuong Faalong, African media should collaborate more and build a strong network of subject-matter experts to help enrich their stories. Other panelists echoed this perspective by calling for better engagement with local experts and on-the-ground actors who have more contextual knowledge on cybercrime.

"For African countries, context is very important because that is where the nuance is."

Aisha Dabo, Coordinator of Africtivistes

For Aisha Dabo, a centralised pan-African platform like PanaPress can help in portraying the true African story to the rest of the world. However, panelists agreed that it would take a lot of political will and commitment to achieve a full-fledged authoritative media platform in Africa that is truly independent.

While the benefits of the Internet and social media lie in its decentralisation, many African governments have attempted to curb freedom of speech by portraying it as a tool for destruction. Hence, local media also have a role to play in correcting that narrative. In fact, Mayowa Tijani noted that social media can serve as a course correction mechanism for news reports disseminated by traditional media.

"We have failed to tell the story behind the story... we seem to glorify Western news sources without interrogation"

Nuong Faalong, Journalist

The intersection of global media and the African scammer stereotype

The colonial legacy of Africa also reflects in the geopolitics of global media industries and the representation of Africa through the white gaze. Given that African media is not as heavily consumed globally as Western media, the panelists noted that the former has a role to play in correcting this imbalance. They point that freelancers writing for global news platforms and citizens using social media are already bridging this gap by putting out nuanced stories and calling out Western media platforms that reinforce faulty stereotypes.

"African countries are overrepresented in the media when it comes to cybercrime due to the white gaze."

Wunpini Mohammed, Ph.D,
Assistant Professor of Global Media

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addressing the various challenges raised during the panel discussion, the following recommendations emerged:

Building a pan-African Authoritative News Platform: To enrich the work of local journalists, it is important that they are equipped with reliable facts and data about the continent. This proposed centralised news platform should be independently funded (possibly from a continent wide taxation system) and has to remain true to its pan-Africanism by not marginalising any part of the continent.

Sharing success stories and good news campaigns: African media should consciously push the narrative of the positive things that young Africans are doing to give the world a second look about Africa. We also need greater representation within global media platforms so that African journalists can influence and tell more nuanced stories about Africa. Freelancers working with global media platforms should not be intimidated by editorial vetoing on narratives about Africa, but should push back and hold them accountable publicly if need be.

Multisectoral collaboration for capacity building: There is a need for greater collaboration between private sector particularly Telcos and media-focused civil society organisations. Through CSR initiatives, better resources and training can be made available for local journalists especially within the rural areas. Moreover, journalists need to build collaborative networks with experts from different fields and interests in order to achieve greater diversity in reporting.

Strengthening Fact checking: Africa must prioritise empowering institutions that focus on data gathering and fact checking such that it becomes - not just a consumer but - a curator of knowledge about its own issues. Existing fact checking organisations also need to expand their focus beyond political issues or a political lens. Journalists can also engage in peer-to-peer training on how to fact check stories and share best practices with one another to improve their craft.

ENGAGEMENT
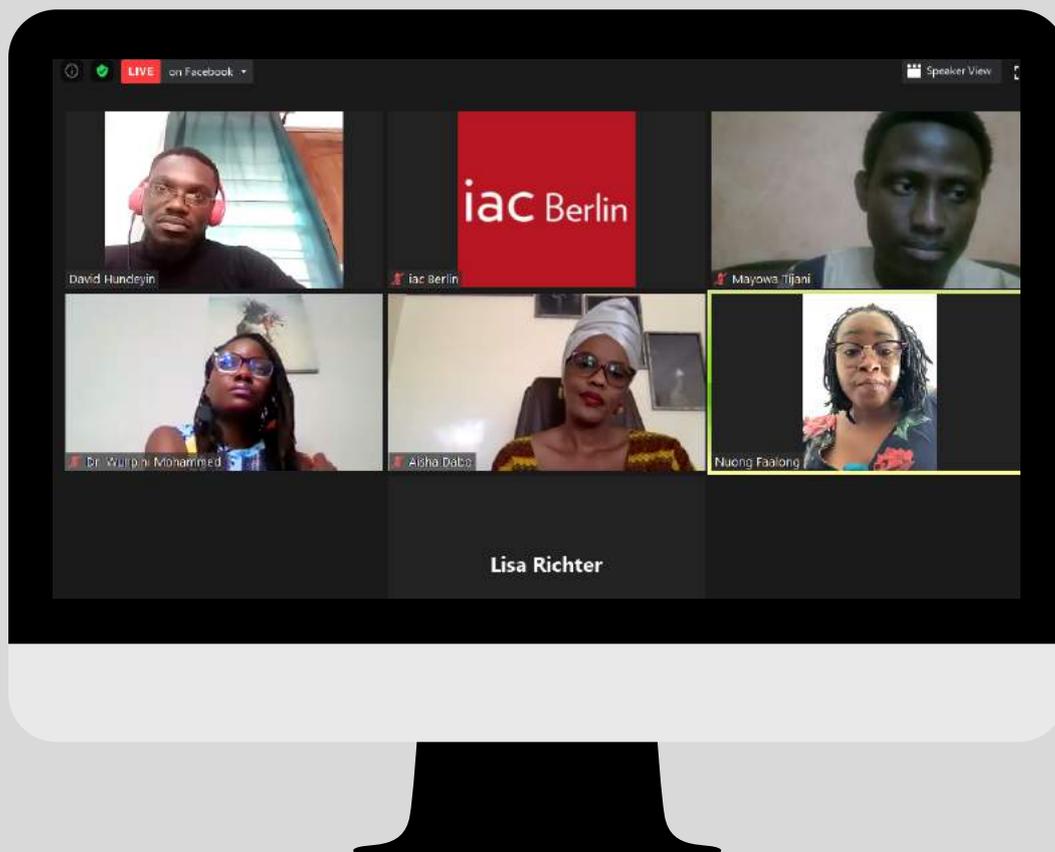
Watch live **HERE**

300+ Views

73 Attendees

13 Countries
Nigeria, Ghana, the Netherlands, Cameroon, United States, United Kingdom, Gambia, Senegal, Germany, India, Azerbaijan, Zambia, Zimbabwe

3000+ Tweets
#NotAFraudster

PROJECT TEAM

OYINDAMOLA ADEGBOYE | **Project Lead** | **Nigeria**

Oyindamola Adegboye, is a social impact strategist with 5+ years experience across communication and youth development. A 2017-2019 Erasmus Mundus Scholar, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication from the University of Lagos and a Masters in Education Policies for Global Development from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She has worked on different media projects including the Bosch-funded digital platform, Common Futures Conversations, where she served as the Country Representative for Nigeria. Oyindamola is a 2019 Ban Ki-moon Global Citizen Scholar and has spoken at global conferences including the UN General Assembly (SDG Action Zone).

MERCY MANGWANA MUBAYIWA | **Campaigns Coordinator** | **Zimbabwe**

Mercy is a Zimbabwean documentary filmmaker and digital media specialist, curating content for online platforms. She holds a B.Sc in Media and Society Studies and is currently reading for an M.Phil in Media Studies. She has experience as a Journalist, Script Writer, Social Media Manager, Communication for Development Officer, Digital Media Consultant, Public Relations officer and working on various film productions. She is an alumna of the African Filmmaking Fellowship and believes in telling Stories4Change.

DENNIS PEPRAH | **Administration Lead** | **Ghana**

Dennis is a Journalist and Chief Reporter who worked with the Ghana News Agency (GNA), a state owned media for about 18 years. He is also the Regional Secretary for the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), in charge of Bono, Bono East and Ahafo regions. He is also the General Secretary for the Ghana Journalists Network on Mining, Oil and Gas (GJNMOG). His experience cuts across online and traditional media platforms. He is an alumnus of Journalism in a Global Context programme.

REKIATU MUSA JINGI | **Community Manager** | **Cameroon**

Rekiatu is a Cameroonian investigative Journalist and human rights advocate, who works for Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). As an alumna of the Journalism in Global Context programme, her documentaries/reports on issues concerning migrants, internet crime, and ethical journalism, have contributed to the development of her country. She advocates for the use of digital reporting and promotion of fact checking in the media landscape of her country. Her objective is to change the narrative using her data communication and writing skills by promoting balanced stories amongst journalists.

BHEKIZULU TSHUMA | **Events Coordinator** | **Zimbabwe**

Bhekizulu currently works at the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe as an Online Media Professional Instructor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. He holds MSc and BSc in Journalism and Media Studies from the same university. Previously, he has worked at the state-owned weekly newspaper, the Sunday News, and the now defunct community radio initiative: Radio Dialogue. He is an alumnus of the African Filmmaking Fellowship.

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