Mobile Phone Deception in Nigeria: Deceivers' Skills, Truth Bias or Respondents' Greed?

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The use of mobile phones to deceive and defraud in Nigeria has received widespread comments and complaints but not empirical investigations. Guided by Buller and Burgoon's interpersonal deception theory, this article examined the strategies employed by deceivers, the dimension of lies told and why mobile phone deception works among Nigerians. This it did through interviews with victims and near-victims of deception, focus group discussions with users, and participant observation. Mobile phone deception falls into two broad categories: impression-related deception and deception for monetary fraud. The strategies employed by mobile phone deceivers are the same as those employed in face-to-face deception. Mobile phone deception in Nigeria succeeds widely not so much as a result of poverty, greed or truth bias. The success of mobile phone deception is largely the result of deceivers' skills, the overall mobile phone environment in Nigeria and certain socio-cultural characteristics of Nigerians. Studies of mobile telephony should be driven by perspectives that take socio-cultural milieu into consideration.

Keywords: deception strategies; developing world; GSM fraud; mobile phone; Nigeria; phone fraud

Introduction

The Global System of Mobile communication (GSM) was introduced in Nigeria in August 2001. Before then, only about half a million Nigerians had phone lines in a country of about 120 million people. The number of phone users rose to 1.6 million within the first sixteen months of GSM and to 3.8 million within three years (VOA, 2002; Ndukwe, 2006). By 2008, the number has grown to over 62 million (ITU, 2009).

Expectedly, the introduction and rise in Nigeria have attracted the attention of scholars and commentators who have attempted to contextualize its evolution (Onwumechili, 2009), investigate its adoption and use (Akande and Ajao, 2006; Olorunnisola, 2009) and articulate its impact on culture, society and the economy (VOA, 2002; Ndukwe, 2006; Soyinka, 2008; Olorunnisola, 2009).

Some have also attempted to draw attention to the abuse of the mobile phone in Nigeria, especially its use for fraud and deceit (Oyimnatumba, 2008; Adebayo, 2008; Olaleye & Okafor, 2009; See also Dempsey, 1999). But these are based on opinions and reportorial investigations rather than on guided empirical investigation. Put simply, empirical investigation into mobile phone deception and fraud in Nigeria is lacking.

This article, therefore, attempts to examine the use of mobile phones by Nigerians to deceive and defraud. Leaning on Buller & Burgoon's interpersonal deception theory for theoretical anchor (Griffin, 2003; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005), the paper attempts to examine why mobile phone deception works in Nigeria. It examines the lying strategies adopted by deceivers and the kind of lies they tell.

Smith (2007), who worked in Nigeria for about sixteen years, cautions against the popular profiling of Nigerians as the most corrupt and deceitful. This researcher wants to state quite emphatically that the choice of Nigeria for the study was for the simple reason of convenience, access or proximity. It is not because Nigerians are greater mobile phone deceivers and fraudsters than people of other nations. Mobile phone fraud is a major problem the world over. For instance, it is used to facilitate theft and robbery in Wales and England (Olorunnisola, 2009 citing Gordon, 2006), and it is a major source of marketing fraud and other forms of deceit in the US (FBI, 2009).

Mobile Telephony in Nigeria

Until 2001, telecommunication services in Nigeria were accessible to only the rich few. Starting from 1886 when the colonial administration established telephone services between London and Lagos, Nigeria, telephones had been more of a status symbol than a general infrastructure (Ogunlowo, 2008). The

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purpose of the colonial telecommunication services was to link government offices and expatriates with London. Even at independence in 1960, there were only about 18,700 lines for a population of 45 million people (Ajayi, Salawu & Raji, 1999; Ogunlowo, 2008). Needless to say, these lines were in the hands of the rich and influential. The Nigerian teledensity by 2000 was 0.38%, far below 1.98% African average and 22.7% global average (Ndukwe, 2005). Up until 2001, government was in control of much of telecommunication services in Nigeria through its agency, the Nigerian Telecommunications Company (NITEL). Though grossly ineffective, NITEL remained a monopoly in the Nigeria telecommunication sector till 2001. Under NITEL monopoly, a telephone line took months to obtain—if it was ever obtained—and billing was whimsical.

In fact, by 2000, there were about 10 million applicants waiting to be issued NITEL land lines (Ndukwe, 2005; Ogunlowo, 2008; Onwumechili, 2009).In 2001, the National Communications Commission (NCC), the agency regulating telecommunication services in Nigeria, made four GSM licenses available to investors. Three of these were auctioned; the fourth was simply given to NITEL. Two of the three auctioned licenses were bought by Econet and MTN at $285 million each. (Econet later became V-Mobile, then Vodacom, later Celtel and is now Zain). The third was obtained by Communications Investment Limited (CIL) but was withdrawn when CIL could not pay the fees. In 2003, Globacom entered the scene as another provider of GSM services and also the second national operator—second to NITEL. Today, the telecommunication sector has about fifty service providers and 61 million subscribers.

Nigerian teledensity is put at 32.79% (NCC, 2003; Okereocha, 2008).Most adults in Nigeria now own mobile phones. Given the dramatic reduction in the cost of subscriber identification module (SIM) cards and the influx of cheap handsets from especially China, many Nigerians have even more than one mobile phone line. But the use has attracted complaints from users about poor services and high cost of calls.

In response, the NCC organizes meetings with providers, and forums for both providers and users (NCC, 2003; Okereocha, 2007).A major offshoot of the widespread use of mobile phone in Nigeria is its use to deceive and defraud (Oyimnatumba, 2008; Olaleye & Okafor, 2009). This has been widely reported in the Nigerian media. The abuse ranges from announcing through SMS to subscribers that they have just won a large amount of money in a sales promotion and then asking them to send GSM recharge cards to activate their PIN code and claim their prizes (Adebayo, 2008) to luring businessmen into parting with money over non-existent contracts (Olufowobi, 2007). Cases of spouses or intended spouses deceiving one another (Adebayo, 2008) as well as cases of extracting of personal information from acquaintances' phones and selling such to fraudsters who issue death and kidnapping threats to users (Adetayo, 2009) have been reported in the media. There have also been reports of SIM takeover[1] (Olaleye & Okafor, 2009), cutting a call but claiming network was bad (Oyimnatumba, 2008) and cheating in examination using SMS (Adebayo, 2008).

As widespread as this malpractice is, all we know about it is through media reports. Empirical studies of the malpractice in Nigeria are lacking. Oluwagbemi's (2008) study concentrated on prevention of subscription fraud (which he describes as subscribers' refusal to pay their charges) and superimposition wherein fraudsters transfer bills to other subscribers. Not only is his study not located in a particular country, it does not come close to analyzing mobile phone deception and fraud in its wide gamut and explaining why these often succeed. This constitutes the focus of the current study.

Interpersonal Deception Theory

This study is anchored on selected propositions of David Buller and Judee Burgoon's interpersonal deception theory. Though the theory was meant to describe face-to-face interpersonal deception, suggestions have been made as to its relevance in mediated—such as telephone—deception as well (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005). Deception, according to the theory, involves "deliberate manipulation of information, behavior and image in order to lead another person to a false belief and conclusion" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p.152). When deceivers lie, they employ one of these three strategies: falsification, concealment or equivocation (Griffin, 2003). Falsification is telling outright untruths; concealment involves telling only a part of the truth while equivocation is being totally vague.

The theory holds that deception succeeds because of our persistent expectation that people will tell the truth. This is known as *truth bias*. Truth bias is linked with interactivity and familiarity: "people who know and like each other are particularly resistant to doubting each other's words" (Griffin, 2003:102). Even when the deceiver manifests leakage (unconscious non-verbal cues that signal an internal state), such cues are ignored by the respondent. Deception also succeeds as a result of deceivers' skills. Skilled deceivers make more strategic moves and appear more believable. Deception will more

likely fail when deceivers deceive for self gain for such deceivers often have a harder time hiding their true intention than altruistic deceivers (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005:153).

The study seeks to examine if mobile phone[2] deceivers employ just the three strategies suggested by the theory or more, what kind of lies they tell, and why their deception seems to work. Since the mobile phone is a different kind of context from face-to-face interpersonal communication, the researcher is on keen lookout for new insight the study might add to theory.

The study

The study employed the qualitative approach combining participant observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Twelve final-year students conducted participant observation hanging around and listening to conversations around different phone stands[3] as (assistant) mobile phone operators or callers or hangers-on. They also listened to conversations in commercial vehicles on and off the campus of the University of Ibadan. This method, which involves eavesdropping, raises ethical questions just as all of unobtrusive research does. After a thorough review of the ethical implications of unobtrusive research, Berg (2001) concludes that though eavesdropping is socially prohibited in many cultures, such a prohibition is untenable when conducting ethnography. This is especially so when the eavesdropping takes place in public.

The study was based in Ibadan, one of the largest cities in Nigeria. In Ibadan are to be found members of most ethnic groups in Nigeria. This factor and situating the observation and interviews around the University of Ibadan, a plural community, further enhanced the diversity of those observed and interviewed. But the choice of Ibadan was really borne out of convenience: mobile phone deception was not more prevalent in Ibadan or in Nigeria than in other places.

Thirty-three victims and near-victims of mobile phone deception were interviewed. They voluntarily submitted twenty-three fraudulent SMS messages which we also studied. We also interviewed seven operators of mobile phone stands. Four graduate students conducted six focus group discussions (FGD) spread across gender, socio-economic and occupational groups (artisans, professionals, students, civil servants and petty traders) and across residential types (low density areas such as Bodija and UI and high density areas such as Agbowo and Orogun). Sixty-three people took part in the discussion—many of these confessed to deceiving or having been deceived on mobile phones. All of them used mobile phones. The interview and discussion guides were open-ended items centered on the prevalence of mobile phone deception in Nigeria; how lies were told; what types of lies were told; and why the lies worked. Victims were asked to explain why they believed the lies; near-victims were asked to explain why they did not fall for the lie. In the discussions and interviews, we encouraged people to tell their stories and those of others. We believe, as does Frank (2002), that things which matter usually instigate stories that affirm those things in relation to how lives are lived.

As we sorted through the data, we identified emerging themes and areas of convergence and divergence. The findings were presented thematically. In our discussion, borrowing from Griffin (2003), we use the term respondent to stand for those at the receiving end of mobile phone lies because we believe deception takes two active collaborators.

Strategies and Dimensions of Mobile Phone Deception

Mobile phone deception in Nigeria falls into two broad categories: *impression-related deception* and *deception for monetary fraud*.

Impression-related deception

Mobile phone deceivers attempt to control the impression that respondents have about them. To do this, they tell lies about their actual location and about problems of mobile phone connectivity. These two categories we have called *location* and *connectivity* lies.

Location

More than any other category, lies told about the location of the speaker are the most common. This was not just because it was the kind of lies most easy to detect by our participant observers; it was the first category of lies to be mentioned by discussants and interviewees, and the category they considered to be the most prevalent.

Most discussants and interviewees confessed to telling this kind of lies regularly, and some justified it: Put yourself in my position: I haven't had a customer since Monday (this was Thursday), and I decide to come to work late, maybe in the afternoon. Then a customer calls and says, 'I am in your shop. Where are you?' I'll say, 'I'm right across the street, can't you see me?' If I tell him that I'm far away in

Iyana Church (some 18 kilometers away), he will go to another (automobile) mechanic (Male, artisan). Location lies include claiming to be held up in traffic, delayed at the airport or out of town. Occasionally, the truth is found out as the case was for Mire who said: My husband left home to return to his place of work in Ondo State (about four hours by road). Hours after, I saw him in town in front of a car driven by a lady. So I called him, 'Honey, where are you?' He said, 'Ah, I'm just arriving Ondo...' I said, 'Okay o; but give the phone to that woman driving you and let me greet her. You think I can't see you?' (Female, Professional). Most discussants claimed that most times they overlooked location lies when they found the truth out. Some however added that even when such lies are overlooked, they have a negative effect on their relationships with the deceiver. Location lies constitute an impression-related issue in that deceivers want respondents to have a positive view of them (Burgoon, Buller & Woodall , 1996).

Deceivers claim to be where they should be because they want to be taken as responsible and time-conscious people. They claim to be too far away when they do not want to interact with the respondent but still want to give the impression of being friends and a willing help.

The nature of the mobile phone provides special context for the incidence of location lies. As Gracia-Montes, Caballero-Muñoz and Perez-Alvarez (2006:69), the mobile phone is not "linked to a space... in which a person is inserted". This space independence has created a situation in which only the caller can tell their actual location. Not only this, handsets allow deceivers to hide their numbers. An operator of a mobile phone stand said she was often asked by callers to hide her number and such callers would claim they were calling from another location or even another country. Some internet-based phone services allow users to enter a phone number of their choice. Deceivers who want to claim to be calling from a foreign country simply enter a number with that country's code.

Connection 'problem'

Deceivers cite connection problems mostly to explain refusal to call, pick a call or continue with a conversation. Some interviewees and discussants confessed to switching off their phone or simply repeating 'Hello? I can't hear you, Network is terrible' when they wanted to terminate a conversation. Mimi, one of our discussants, was double-dating. She had a young man in another city whom she wanted to marry and another one on campus 'just for a fling'. She said: Each time my real guy (city guy) calls me; we end our talk with 'I love you'. But one evening, I was with this other guy (campus guy) when he (city guy) called, so I couldn't say 'I love you' because it would upset the other guy (campus guy)...So, I cut the call. He called back and asked, 'What happened?' I said 'Sorry, the network was bad... (Female, student). Lies about connection problems are common and successful in Nigeria because true network snarls are a common occurrence especially during festive seasons when users make more calls and send more texts (NBC, 2003). In this context, related to connection problems are excuses such as low battery charge and lack of credit units. Some interviewees and discussants also said that when they ignored a call, occasionally they later simply told the caller that they had inadvertently left their phones at home. Other lies included claiming to be in a 'no-phone' zone when a call came in. One of the discussants in the professionals' discussion group said, 'I simply tell them I was inside a bank or in a meeting'[4].

Connection problem lies serve the purpose of allowing the user to buy time and sort things out for themselves. One of the problems associated with mobile phone use is the great quantum of information that a user may have to handle at a time. Besieged by information coming from several other users and other non-phone tasks that have to be handled, users feign unavailability to avoid being submerged. This is especially so when these tasks and demands cannot be simultaneously met or handled—as the case was with Mimi. Lying thus helps to create a breathing space and a stop-gap while still giving the impression that the deceiver is genuinely interested in interacting with the respondent.

Deception for monetary fraud

Deception for monetary fraud is possibly the most devastating dimension of mobile phone deception in Nigeria. There are cases of people duped of large sums of money. In two of our focus group discussions, cases of such fraud ending in the victims committing suicide were mentioned. This form of deception comes in two forms: *con-text* and *impersonation*.

Con-Texts

These are text messages announcing that the respondent had won a large amount of money or some fabulous gifts in an ongoing sales promotion. These texts come from those pretending to be representatives of particular mobile phone networks. Supposed winners of promotions are told to send recharge cards in order to activate their PIN so that

they can claim their prizes. From the interviews and discussions, the impression we got was that nearly every Nigerian has experienced this one form or the other. Kemi's story is typical: During the MTN promo, I received a text from MTN that I have won a car, and to claim it I must send N5,000 ($33)[5] recharge cards to the number that sent me the message. I did not have any money on me, so I borrowed money. I bought three recharge cards of N1,500 each and one of N500 and sent it (them). I later found out that I was duped. The message did not come from MTN (Female, petty trader)

Unlike Kemi who borrowed money, Paul actually emptied his father's safe and Aishat diverted her school fees to claim these 'prizes'. Felix, a medical student was so badly hit by the fraud that he lost his mind and, at the time of this study, was still on admission in the psychiatric section of his medical school. Some deceivers actually designed a website complete with MTN colors and logo to which they directed their victims. These false URLs are not easily recognized for what they are by many respondents. Con-text lies are a carryover from snail-mail and, later, internet scams in Nigeria. The frequency has been however accelerated by near-universal availability of mobile phones in Nigeria and the speed with which text messages are sent and received. Worried by the situation, most mobile phone networks send text messages warning their subscribers against fake promotion results.

Impersonation

Lies about the status of the deceiver are the third most prevalent category of lies. Discussants and interviewees told stories of callers who pretend to be businessmen and women and invite them into businesses which often required that they part with some money, or who pretend to be relatives calling from abroad. In this category are cheating lovers who maintain the status of a committed lover or spouse. Others were deceived by those who pretend to be bearing messages and parcels from relatives in the US or the UK. These forms of deceit often end with respondents being asked to send some money in the form of recharge cards to the phone number that called them.

The deceiver bearing a message or a parcel from abroad is often somewhere he cannot find a bureau de change or bank where their foreign currencies can be converted to Nigerian naira. The respondent is therefore asked to send recharge cards to enable the deceiver to pay their transport to the location of the respondent and hand the parcel as well the cash value of the recharge cards to them.

Impersonations are made much easier now because mobile phone SIM cards are cheap and easily replaced. On the average, they cost N200 ($1.3) and come with ready credit units. Subscribers who lose their SIM cards simply go to their provider's branch office and procure a replacement which bears the old number. Fraudsters who know numbers of influential people, our discussants said, go to network provider's offices claiming to have lost their SIM cards and asking for replacement. They give the number of the influential person as theirs and that is programmed into the new SIM. With this, they contact and dupe friends and relatives of the person. One of our interviewees, Jim, a banker, received a text message from a prominent bank customer stating that he was cash-strapped in a remote location. Could Jim please transfer N70, 000 ($467) from his account to his partner's account? The text message gave the friend's bank details. Jim decided to crosscheck with the customer, using the customer's second line. That was what saved the day.

The foregoing categorization of lies is by no means exclusive. A location lie can as well be impersonation or connection, as shown by the example of the professional just cited. The aim of the categorization is not to provide a set of categories for quantitative coding of mobile phone lies but to give meaning and shape to the complex and varied array of lies told on mobile phone. We turn to the strategies employed in mobile phone deception.

Deception Strategies

Buller and Burgoon's tripartite deception strategies (Griffin, 2003) emerged in the context of face-to-face interpersonal deception. The paper sought to examine the extent to which these apply to mobile phone deception. Deceivers in mobile phone deception employ all the three strategies but the most obvious is falsification. For instance, location lies were mostly falsification. The same can be said of all *con-text* lies. Respondents were not winners. In fact, most of them did not take part in any promotion contest. Impersonation and connection lies were also falsification.

Instances of concealment and equivocation were found in users' conversations. Observers reported many instances in which users told much less than the whole truth or deliberately sounded vague. Some petty traders informed us of the difficulty they face in determining if those supplying their goods would indeed come as they promised. "Each time we ask them, 'Will you deliver our goods to us today' they simply say, 'Let's leave that in God's hands'. Though the three lying strategies were originally

meant to explain face-to-face communication, there is ample evidence that they were employed by mobile phone deceivers as well. Respondents' lack of access to much of deceivers' non-verbal cues makes these strategies easier to use in mobile phone deception.

Accounting for the Success of Mobile Phone Deception in Nigeria

Much of mobile phone deception is for self gain. From the perspective of interpersonal deception theory, these acts of deception should fail in most cases because "people who deceive for self gain...display more leakage" (Griffin, 2003:98). We do not find support for this proposition from the current study. Though mobile phone deception is meant largely for self gain, claims by our discussants and interviewees as well as our observations attest the success of mobile phone deception in Nigeria. This could be the result of truth bias, deceivers' skills or some other respondent-related characteristics or socio-cultural phenomena.

Respondents' greed and poverty

Our discussants cited two main reasons for the success of the mobile phone lies: greed and poverty. In every discussion, discussants were unsparing in their criticisms of mobile phone deception victims, especially victims of fraud. A discussant recommended:

Those who fall into the hands of these GSM fraudsters should be arrested and prosecuted. Their problem is greed. You didn't play promo. Someone says you won one million and you believe the person. No! That is greed of the highest order (Male, civil servant). Discussants lamented the hurry among young Nigerians to get rich describing that as greed and ready fodder for mobile phone fraud. Not many people agreed with the recommendation to prosecute victims, and some thought even where greed was the case, it was accentuated by poverty. The harsh economic realities in Nigeria, low wages and poor sales were all tied to poverty which, discussants claimed, predisposed people to bite every bait thrown at them by fraudsters. Our analysis of the stories told by victims made foregoing explanation an oversimplification. We found that where location lies succeeded—and it appeared that they rarely did—, it was mostly a product of truth bias. The respondent simply believed the receiver was indeed where they claimed to be. Where *con-text* and impersonation lies succeeded, it was a more complex situation. The success of these two categories of lies required a deft deployment of deceivers' skills facilitated by the nature of the mobile phone.

Deceivers' skills as a major factor

Successful deceivers in the analysed stories demonstrated their skillfulness in three main ways. First was the use of the right bait. For Ret, a computer technician, the bait that caught him was an electricity generating set which he was told that he had won in a Globacom promotion. Electricity supply in Nigeria is a major problem responsible for the failure and closure of many businesses. For Lako, known by his roommates as a lover of sandals, it was a pair of leather sandals which he was told had been sent to him by his friend in London. Successful deceivers not only get the right baits, but they also choose their time strategically. Fraudsters use *con-text* a lot when legitimate promotions are on. Even subscribers who did not take part in the promotions are told that their number has been randomly selected by the computer. An interviewee also pointed out that she began to receive SMS about ATM deals the moment the first ATM machine was installed in her neighborhood.

Second was their use of technical expertise such as designing fake websites which is a complete replica of the original websites of mobile phone networks. Using internet-based phone services in ways that display numbers from a foreign country and SIM takeover are other evidence of deceivers' technical expertise. The third demonstration of deceivers' skills was in digging for and getting insider information. Most impersonation stories clearly point to the existence of an insider link. Mobile phone fraudsters duped Bolly and her mother by imitating her uncle's voice:

The voice sounded like my uncle's exactly. He said he had sent us two iPhones, two laptops, clothing and other items from London through his friend, and that his friend would call soon us. Not long after, the person called us and introduced himself as the one sent by my uncle...he was stranded in Abuja (national capital) and would need N3,000 ($20) recharge card to sell and find his way to us in Lagos. I bought the cards on credit and sent them to his number...he called again asking for another N2,000 ($13.3) and I sent it. Bolly's uncle was truly in London and she indeed had asked him for a laptop. As it was for her so it was for several others. Like most young Nigerians, Sarat, a house-help had one ambition: to migrate to England where her friend had been. Nearly every day she called her from the mobile phone stand near her employers' house. One day, she got a call that a parcel had arrived for her from London; she needed to send some money to clear it and for some other purposes. The description of the supposed sender fitted her friend perfectly. She sent cards worth N27,000 ($180) which was more

than her earnings for three months. Sarat's employers strongly believed that those who duped her got their information by eavesdropping at the phone stand. This may not be a baseless suspicion.

Mobile phone operators whom we interviewed believed that people of doubtful integrity hang around their stands. If a legitimate caller made a call and revealed some intimate information, these fraudsters not just noted the information, they asked the operator to let them make a call but would instead transfer the number dialled by the caller to their own phone. From there, they begin to scheme. It appeared that every successful scam takes a long period of scheming and research.

This position does not negate the presence of truth bias in the success of mobile phone deception. It simply suggests that truth bias comes after respondents began to bite the bait. But it puts truth bias at a second, not first, level. It also does not negate the proposition that truth bias increases with warmth and familiarity. In the experiences that we studied, there were cases of 'stolen familiarity'—fraudsters impersonating familiar people and riding on the back of the legitimate familiarity such people have with the victims being trailed. This stolen familiarity is used to extort faith from the victim. Truth bias is thus a product of stolen familiarity and extorted faith.

Culpability of the mobile phone and the Nigerian mobile phone environment

In each discussion group, the point was stressed that deception and fraud had been before the mobile phone but that mobile phone has accentuated it greatly. It could be argued that to a great extent, the nature of the mobile phone makes deception easy. Since many people have access to the mobile phone, the population of those deceiving and being deceived has greatly swollen. The greater the population, the higher is the number of possible trials and chances of success. Transfer of money in the form of GSM recharge cards also came with the mobile phone. What is actually transferred is the PIN on the card and this is easily converted to cash by fraudsters who sell them to other subscribers and mobile phone stand operators at rates that are lower than the actual value.

The mobile phone has also created cocooned individuals who can engage in conversations and transact businesses with remotely located others without people in their immediate surroundings knowing it. In the days of the landline, transactions were slower, limited to where the phone was placed and often involved discussing and planning with immediate friends and relations. This increased the chances that someone would suspect a fraud in a spooky business deal or conversation. Yet, these cocoons are not tamper-proof. They are not immune to invasion by skilful deceivers who succeed in stealing familiarity and using it to extort faith from the individual's social network. The mobile phone also comes with speed and "a negation of procrastination" (Gracia-Montes et al, 2006:79 citing Bauman, 2000). Nothing can afford to wait. It is on this sense of urgency that mobile phone deception and fraud, especially impersonation and *con-text*, thrive. In Nigeria, the peculiar environment of mobile phone services has added to the incidence and success of mobile phone deception. Subscribers complain about high cost of calls and epileptic network connection (Adekeye, 2008).

Cost of call makes respondents a little reluctant to call that relative to confirm if indeed they sent a parcel. Not only this, during calls, subscribers are in an atmosphere of uncertainty because network may truly go off without warning. This puts a limit on the extent to which they can ask questions and probe claims. In fact, our observations showed that most callers engaged in filling in the gap for the other caller in order to hasten the conversation, cut down cost or escape the ever-impending network connection problems. Another peculiar way in which the mobile phone environment in Nigeria enhances deception and fraud is the overwhelming presence of promotions. Networks seem to want to outdo one another in sales promotions and subscribers win genuine prizes: cars, houses, generating sets, phones, cash prizes. This has created a situation in which most people are waiting to be told that they have won. Alex, one of the victims we interviewed said: You can blame me if you want but you see, our neighbor won a generator which he is still using. Glo is written on that gen. People are winning big time. Every Friday I watch *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and I see that people like me are going away with millions of naira from MTN. So if they told me say I have won, why won't I believe? Am I not a subscriber? (Male, petty trader).The advertisements mounted by the mobile phone networks tell Alex that there is no reason for him not to believe. A Globacom advertisement in Nigerian pidgin says, 'Prizes full ground, you sef fit win' (Meaning: There is an abundance of prizes; you too can win) and MTN says 'Win big and live large'. The 'everyone-a-winner' atmosphere created by the networks has become a major motivation to subscribers to bite the bait of fraudsters. Mobile phone deception thrives in Nigeria also partly because the chances that perpetrators would be detected and prosecuted are slim. The law enforcement system is incapable of dealing with these acts.

Exploiting the kin-first culture

In Nigeria, a person's kinfolk rank high on their scale of important people. As Smith (2007) rightly observes, the value of a person's wealth and influence is determined by how much his kinfolk have benefitted from him. Any rich or influential person who is not using their wealth or influence to give ascendance to their kin is considered a worthless fellow. Smith (2007) notes that the desire to be of worth by helping one's kin is responsible for most corrupt practices in Nigeria. But that desire, we argue, is also responsible for legitimately supporting otherwise helpless and hopeless relatives. It is said that Nigerians in the Diaspora remit over $5 billion each year mostly to their kin (Akuta, 2009; See also Nworah, 2005). Indeed, when a Nigerian says he has a friend or relative abroad, it is assumed that they get regular financial support from such relatives and friends. Some of the remitting is wired electronically through recognized money transfer agencies but a good chunk of it is also sent through shipping lines and friends coming home from abroad. Gift items and goods from any other country—even another developing country—are accorded greater honor by Nigerians than homemade goods.

The kin-first culture of Nigerians (and Africans) has been celebrated by many (Airhihenbuwa & Obregon, 2000; Opubor, 2000; Otite, 2000). Young relatives have been trained through school and aged ones have survived on the support sent willingly in form of dollars by relatives living and working abroad (Ogude, 2008).

Unfortunately, this culture has become a fodder for mobile phone fraudsters who impersonate relatives, steal familiarity and defraud hapless subscribers. The kin-first culture operates on trust: trust that the relative abroad will send money; the agent will deliver the money and the receiver will spend it on agreed project. Trust, according to Giddens cited by Fine and Holyfield (1996, p.26) is the 'outcome of the routinized nature of an uneventful world... [which] creates a protective "cocoon" which makes possible the enactment of the social world and the emergence of meaning'. Repeated successful transfer of resources by the Diaspora represents a routine around which a robust level of trust has developed. Mobile phone by its nature and as used by fraudsters has become a threat to that trust and the entire system. Mobile phone deception has consequences for interpersonal relationships and users' sense of security. Several of the victims that we interviewed had become untrusting and suspicious. We noticed growing traits of blind lie bias—an unreasoning assumption that every caller is a deceiver (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

One of them, a grandmother, would not pick any call whose number and caller has not been previously registered on her handset. Another said, 'if you call me, you have to quickly declare your identity and intention or else I'll cut it...Once bitten forever shy'. The net loss resulting from mobile phone deception is incomplete if valued only in terms of monies lost to fraudsters. Expended trust and drained warmth must be factored in.

Conclusion

The success of mobile phone deception in Nigeria is not so much the product of truth bias or respondent greed as it is the product of deceivers' skills exploiting the nature of the mobile phone in general, the peculiar Nigerian mobile phone environment, and certain socio-cultural factors. The socio-cultural factors are in themselves not deceptive but deceivers have exploited them for self-gain. Part of the value of this work to theory is in showing that deceivers in mobile phone contexts employ the same strategies as those in face-to-face contexts. However, deception is more likely to be successful in mobile phone situations because respondents do not have instant access to a large part of deceivers' non-verbal cues. This lack of access makes impersonation possible and enables stolen familiarity and extortion of faith which must not be confused with genuine truth bias. The study also contradicts the theoretical proposition that deception aimed at self gain does not often succeed.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Fraudsters get the number of influential people, go to network offices and claim the number is theirs and it is lost. The number is then programmed into a blank SIM card and given them. With that they send SMS to the friends and relatives of the legitimate owner impersonating the owner. Networks try to discourage this act by demanding sworn affidavits and sundry proofs of ownership.
2. Rather than use the term GSM, from this point on in the paper we use 'mobile phone' a more generic term that covers both GSM and other forms of mobile telephony.
3. There are commercial mobile phone stands in Nigeria which are run by individuals and patronised by many for their cheap calls. Individuals make calls and pay as little as N20 (a few cents) for a minute. It is usual to find people just hang around the legitimate owner of the phone stand and chat away. This made the presence of our participant observers unobtrusive.

4. For security reasons, banking halls and environs are no-phone zones in Nigeria.
5. All naira-to-dollar conversions in this paper were based on the current rate of $1 to ₦150.

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