

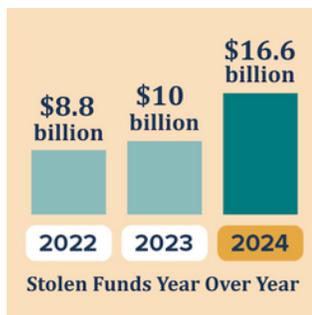
Is YouTube scambaiting the right response to scam callers?

Ring ring! It's the third call today from the "IRS" claiming you owe \$500 and need to pay immediately. Some may roll their eyes, but scam callers are undeniably clever, persistent, and ever-adapting. In 2023, one in five Americans reported losing money to phone scams. Of those, 70% didn't report it. What can be done? A group of online content creators has decided to take matters into their own hands by calling scammers and pretending to be victims, sometimes using voice changers to sound elderly. They waste scammers' time by keeping them on the phone for hours talking to someone who will never send money. The practice, known as scambaiting, has taken YouTube by storm. Channels like Scammer Payback (8.17M subscribers) and Kitboga (3.71M subscribers) post videos of themselves trying to get scammers to sing songs, pretend to be the president, or agree to get married over the phone. These videos have earned them followers and money—all, they claim, in pursuit of a noble cause. Still, others are uncomfortable with the popularity of such content.

SCAMMER STATS

In 2024, scammers stole
\$16.6 billion

2.6 million people reported scams in 2024



SCAMBAITER STATS

Scammer Payback
8.17M subscribers
1.14B total views
Estimated \$1.8M/year

Kitboga
3.71M subscribers
714M total views
Estimated \$450k/year

YES, SCAMBAITING IS MORAL

Scambaiting acts as retributive justice: punishing people who've done wrong because they deserve it. Scammers deserve punishment because they steal people's life savings and target vulnerable populations. And scambaiting is proportional to their wrongdoing since the scammers only get pranked while they're actively trying to steal. This time-wasting may save potential victims since the scammers are occupied with the scambaiter's phone call. Furthermore, the YouTube videos have educational value. They teach viewers how scams work and how to avoid them. The more people who know about these schemes, the harder it is for scammers to succeed. Plus, many scambaiters bring real change by uncovering fraudulent bank accounts or accessing scammers' computers to find information that helps victims recover stolen money.

NO, SCAMBAITING IS IMMORAL

Scambaiting is just another form of revenge and shouldn't be glorified. Some call it a scam against scammers—an eye for an eye. However, this revenge doesn't get to the root of the problem. Scambaiters typically interact with the lowest-paid, most desperate employees. The leaders of these call centers, who profit the most, are hardly affected by YouTubers being cruel. Scambaiting tries to provoke confusion, frustration, and anger in scammers, but inflicting suffering, even on wrongdoers, is immoral. While scambaiters claim to educate viewers or waste scammers' time, scambaiters aren't noble protectors of potential victims. Their purpose is entertainment and they're ultimately performers chasing views, subscribers, and ad revenue. Real change is achieved through the justice system, not through vigilantes with profit incentives.



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