

Journalists as Spin Doctors: Perspectives on Journalist Hangout

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Abstract

This study examined the role of journalist hangouts as spin doctors, focusing on how this gathering influence the framing of news stories in Nigeria, promote specific narratives, and affect public perception of media credibility. The specific objectives are to; assess the extent of influence these hangouts have on news framing, investigate their role in reinforcing narratives and agendas, and evaluate the implications of spin doctoring on public trust. Framing theory provides the theoretical framework, emphasising how media professionals shape narratives through their interactions. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative thematic analysis, to gather and interpret data from journalists. Findings reveal that journalist hangouts significantly impact news framing and agenda-setting, with a general agreement on their role in reinforcing media narratives. However, the direct effect of spin doctoring on public trust is less clear, although there is a consensus that the public is aware of manipulation. The study concludes that while the journalist hangouts is influential, ethical training, transparency in reporting, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives are essential to mitigate negative impacts and enhance media credibility. Recommendations include strengthening ethical training for journalists, promoting transparency in news reporting, and encouraging diverse viewpoints to ensure balanced media coverage.

Keywords

Journalists Hangouts; Spin Doctors; Framing; Public Perception.



I. Introduction

Journalists as spin doctors has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of journalist hangouts where media professionals gather to share ideas and shape narratives. These gatherings often serve as platforms for journalists to engage in discussions that may influence how news stories are framed and presented to the public. In this light, journalists, consciously or unconsciously, may become spin agents, shaping public opinion by selectively emphasising certain aspects of a story while downplaying others. This practice is closely related to the broader concept of media framing, where journalists play a crucial role in constructing reality through the lens they choose to present to their audience. Recent studies by Nigerian scholars such as Adeyemi (2023) and Omole (2022) highlight how these hangouts can sometimes blur the lines between objective reporting and the promotion of specific agendas, thus transforming journalists into spin doctors who contribute to the manipulation of public perception. A typical case is Journalist Hangout on Television Continental (TVC): it is an informal gathering, meeting, or social interaction among journalists, whether in person or online, where ideas, stories, and professional experiences are exchanged. For this study, journalist hangout is operationally defined as a setting where at least three journalists regularly meet to discuss news coverage and share insights, with a potential influence on how news stories are framed or reported.

Moreover, journalist hangouts have also been critiqued as spaces where the professional norms of objectivity and impartiality are often compromised. These informal settings, while fostering camaraderie among journalists, can also lead to the homogenisation of viewpoints, where dominant narratives are reinforced, and dissenting opinions are marginalised. As Ogunleye (2022) and Adewale (2023) suggest, the social dynamics within these hangouts may encourage journalists to adopt a more subjective approach to reporting, influenced by the prevailing opinions of their peers. This can result in a subtle yet significant shift in how news is reported, with journalists acting as intermediaries who not only report the news but also shape it to align with particular interests. Consequently, the role of journalists as spin doctors becomes more pronounced, as the line between reporting and opinion shaping becomes increasingly blurred in these settings.

The role of journalists as spin doctors has become increasingly problematic in the media landscape, particularly in the context of journalist hangouts where informal discussions may influence the framing of news. These gatherings, while fostering professional relationships, have raised concerns about the potential for journalists to become complicit in shaping narratives that serve specific interests rather than adhering to the principles of impartiality and objectivity (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024). The convergence of personal and professional interactions within these spaces can lead to a homogenisation of perspectives, where dominant narratives are reinforced, and alternative viewpoints are marginalised. This dynamic poses a significant challenge to the integrity of journalism, as it may result in a distortion of facts and a manipulation of public perception. Scholars such as Okon (2023) and Eze (2022) argue that the increasing prevalence of this phenomenon threatens the foundational role of the media as a watchdog, raising questions about the extent to which journalists can maintain their independence in such environments (Obasi & Aondover, 2023).

Furthermore, the subtle transformation of journalists into spin doctors in these settings highlights a broader issue within the media industry, where the pressures to conform to prevailing narratives can undermine journalistic ethics (Aondover et al., 2023). The informal nature of journalist hangouts often blurs the line between professional duty and personal bias, making it difficult to distinguish between objective reporting and the propagation of particular agendas. As Nwachukwu (2023) and Ibe (2022) suggest, this blending of roles can lead to a significant erosion of public trust in the media, as audiences become increasingly aware of the potential for bias and manipulation. The problem, therefore, lies not only in the overt acts of spin but also in the more insidious ways in which these interactions can shape the news agenda, ultimately influencing how the public perceives and understands critical issues.

1.1 Objectives of the study

1. To examine the extent to which journalist hangouts influence the framing of news stories by journalists in Nigeria.
2. To investigate the role of journalist hangouts in promoting or reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape.
3. To assess the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public perception and trust in the media.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Framing theory, a concept primarily developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, explores how individuals and groups perceive and interpret reality through specific frames or lenses. Goffman posited that people rely on these frames to make sense of their experiences and the world around them. The theory suggests that the way information is presented (framed) significantly influences how audiences understand and respond to it. Goffman's work laid the foundation for understanding how media and communication practices shape public perception by highlighting the role of frames in guiding interpretation (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). His theory has since been expanded upon by various scholars, particularly in the field of mass communication, where it is used to analyse how media frames influence public opinion and social discourse.

The assumptions of framing theory are rooted in the idea that frames are both socially constructed and strategically employed. According to Goffman, frames are mental structures that shape the way people interpret information, guiding their perceptions and judgments. These frames are not neutral; they are often influenced by cultural norms, social practices, and institutional power dynamics. In the context of media, frames are deliberately chosen by journalists, editors, and media organisations to shape the narrative of news stories. This selective framing can highlight certain aspects of a story while omitting or downplaying others, thus guiding the audience's understanding of the issue at hand. The theory assumes that the power of framing lies in its ability to simplify complex realities, making certain interpretations more salient than others.

One of the key aspects of framing theory is its focus on the selection and salience of information. Goffman argued that frames work by selecting particular aspects of reality and making them more prominent in the communication process. This selection process involves highlighting specific issues, events, or attributes, thereby making them more noticeable and memorable to the audience. The theory also posits that framing is a dynamic process, with frames constantly evolving in response to changing social and political contexts. As frames are continuously constructed and reconstructed, they shape and are shaped by public discourse, reflecting the ongoing interplay between media, culture, and society. This dynamic nature of framing underscores the theory's relevance in understanding how media practices influence public perception over time (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024b).

Framing theory also assumes that frames have a powerful impact on how audiences interpret and react to information. The way a story is framed can significantly influence public opinion, attitudes, and behaviours. For instance, framing a social issue in terms of conflict or crisis can lead to heightened public concern and demand for action, whereas framing it as a routine or inevitable occurrence may lead to apathy or acceptance. This influence is not limited to the immediate interpretation of news stories; it extends to shaping long-term perceptions and attitudes toward specific issues, groups, or policies. The theory thus highlights the role of media in constructing social reality, as frames guide the public's understanding of what is important, how it should be interpreted, and what actions, if any, should be taken.

The relevance of framing theory to the concept of journalists as spin doctors, particularly in the context of journalist hangouts, is profound. Journalist hangouts are spaces where media professionals collectively discuss and shape the frames that will guide their reporting (Yar'Adua et al., 2023). In these settings, journalists may consciously or

unconsciously adopt frames that align with specific narratives or agendas, effectively becoming spin doctors who influence public perception through strategic framing. Framing theory helps to explain how these interactions can lead to the propagation of particular frames within the media, ultimately shaping the way news stories are presented and understood by the public. By highlighting the power of framing in shaping public discourse, the theory underscores the critical role that journalist hangouts play in influencing media content and, by extension, public opinion (Usman et al., 2022). It also raises important ethical questions about the responsibilities of journalists to maintain objectivity and avoid manipulating information to serve specific interests.

2.2 Journalist Hangout

Journalist hangouts can also be understood through various definitions provided by scholars. According to Musa (2023), a journalist hangout is defined as an informal gathering of media professionals where ideas and perspectives are exchanged, often leading to the development of shared narratives. Ibrahim (2023) expands on this by defining it as a social space where journalists engage in discussions that can influence their professional output, particularly in the framing of news stories. Bello (2023) offers a slightly different perspective, defining journalist hangouts as networking events that, while fostering professional relationships, also have the potential to shape the ideological leanings of the journalists involved. Meanwhile, Okonkwo (2023) defines journalist hangouts as informal meetings where the lines between social interaction and professional collaboration blur, leading to the potential for bias in news reporting. These definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of journalist hangouts and their significance in the media industry, particularly in how they influence the content that is ultimately presented to the public (Aondover et al., 2022).

Journalist hangouts has become increasingly relevant in discussions on media practices and their impact on news framing and reporting. These hangouts, often informal in nature, serve as spaces where journalists gather to exchange ideas, discuss current events, and share professional experiences. While these interactions can foster camaraderie and collaboration, they also raise concerns about the potential for bias and the homogenisation of viewpoints. In the Nigerian context, where the media landscape is diverse yet highly competitive, journalist hangouts can significantly influence the narratives that emerge in public discourse. According to recent studies, these gatherings can lead to the reinforcement of dominant perspectives, which may, in turn, marginalise alternative voices (Aondover et al., 2021; Aondover et al., 2023). As such, the concept of journalist hangouts is crucial in understanding how media professionals interact and how these interactions shape the content that reaches the public.

One of the key aspects of journalist hangouts is their role in shaping the way news stories are framed and presented to the audience. Scholars like Adamu (2023) argue that these gatherings are not merely social events but are integral to the process of news production. During these hangouts, journalists may discuss the framing of particular stories, consciously or unconsciously aligning their reporting with the prevailing views within the group. This phenomenon is particularly significant in Nigeria, where the media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion. The informal nature of these gatherings allows for open discussions, but it also creates an environment where peer influence can lead to a convergence of viewpoints, potentially undermining the diversity and objectivity of news reporting. Thus, the concept of journalist hangouts is essential in analysing how media content is crafted and the factors that influence the narratives presented to the public.

2.3 Spin Doctors

The concept of spin doctors refers to individuals who specialise in shaping the public's perception of events, organisations, or individuals by manipulating information and crafting persuasive narratives (Aondover, 2021). According to recent Nigerian scholars, the term has been defined in various ways, reflecting its complexity in the media and political landscape. For instance, Akande (2023) defines spin doctors as public relations experts who strategically present information to favour a specific agenda while downplaying opposing views. Ojo (2023) describes them as media professionals who intentionally craft narratives that serve the interests of their clients, often at the expense of factual accuracy. Another definition by Chinedu (2023) characterises spin doctors as experts in media manipulation who use selective reporting to shape public opinion, particularly in political contexts. Lastly, Adeola (2023) defines spin doctors as key players in media strategy, whose primary role is to influence how events are perceived by the public through careful control of information and messaging (Hile et al., 2023). These definitions collectively underscore the influential role that spin doctors play in media and public relations, particularly in shaping narratives to achieve specific outcomes.

The role of spin doctors is especially significant in the context of media and political communication, where the control of information is crucial (Idri & Msughter, 2022). In Nigeria, spin doctors are often employed by political figures, organisations, and corporations to manage public perception and protect reputations. As Idowu (2023) notes, spin doctors work behind the scenes to craft messages that resonate with the target audience, often using selective information to sway public opinion. This process involves a deep understanding of media dynamics and public sentiment, allowing spin doctors to create narratives that align with the interests of their clients while marginalising dissenting perspectives. The effectiveness of spin doctors lies in their ability to manipulate both the content and timing of information, ensuring that the desired message dominates the public discourse. This manipulation often blurs the line between objective reporting and strategic communication, raising ethical concerns about the integrity of information presented to the public.

In the Nigerian media landscape, the activities of spin doctors have become increasingly prevalent, particularly in the run-up to elections and during major public relations crises. As Olatunji (2023) observes, spin doctors are adept at using media channels to control the narrative, often employing tactics such as selective disclosure, framing, and repetition to reinforce their message. Their influence extends beyond traditional media to social media platforms, where they can rapidly disseminate their narratives to a wide audience. The pervasive presence of spin doctors in Nigerian media highlights the growing importance of media literacy and critical thinking among the public (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). As the lines between fact and spin become increasingly blurred, it is essential for audiences to be aware of the techniques used by spin doctors to shape perceptions and to approach media content with a critical eye. The work of Nigerian scholars in this area emphasises the need for greater transparency and accountability in media practices to mitigate the impact of spin on public discourse.

The influence of journalist hangouts on the framing of news stories in Nigeria is a subject of considerable debate among scholars and media professionals. These informal gatherings are often seen as spaces where journalists exchange ideas and discuss the narratives that will shape their reporting. Recent studies by Nigerian scholars such as Adeola (2023) suggest that these interactions significantly impact how news stories are framed, with journalists often aligning their perspectives with the prevailing opinions within these groups. This alignment can lead to a homogenisation of news content, where certain angles or issues

are consistently highlighted while others are downplayed or ignored. The framing of news, therefore, becomes a collective endeavour influenced by the social dynamics within journalist hangouts, potentially compromising the diversity and objectivity of the reporting (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

The influence of journalist hangouts on the framing of news stories is not limited to political reporting. According to Okonkwo (2023), even in areas such as business and entertainment journalism, the narratives that emerge from these gatherings can shape public understanding and discourse. The concentration of media power within certain networks of journalists who frequently engage in hangouts means that certain stories or perspectives may dominate the media landscape, often at the expense of more diverse or critical viewpoints. This concentration can lead to a narrowing of the public discourse, where the range of opinions and information available to the public is limited by the collective framing decisions made within these journalist hangouts. The role of these gatherings, therefore, extends beyond mere social interaction to becoming a significant factor in the shaping of public knowledge and opinion.

The reinforcement of specific narratives through journalist hangouts also has implications for media pluralism in Nigeria. As Ibrahim (2023) points out, the dominance of particular viewpoints within these gatherings can lead to the marginalisation of alternative voices, both within the media profession and in the broader public sphere. This marginalisation is particularly concerning in a diverse society like Nigeria, where multiple perspectives are essential for a healthy and balanced public discourse. The influence of journalist hangouts on the framing of news stories, therefore, not only affects the content of the news but also the range of perspectives that are represented in the media. The potential for these gatherings to stifle dissenting voices raises important questions about the role of the media in promoting a vibrant and inclusive public debate.

Journalist hangouts also play a crucial role in promoting or reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape. According to Musa (2023), these gatherings often serve as echo chambers where dominant narratives are repeatedly discussed and refined before being presented to the public. The reinforcement of these narratives can be intentional or unintentional, but the result is the same: a media landscape that favours certain perspectives while marginalising others. This process is particularly evident in political reporting, where journalist hangouts can become spaces for the strategic promotion of particular political agendas (Vitalis et al., 2023). The informal nature of these gatherings allows for the free exchange of ideas, but it also creates an environment where groupthink can flourish, leading to the propagation of narrow or biased narratives.

The implications of journalists acting as spin doctors in these contexts are significant, particularly concerning public perception and trust in the media. When journalists, influenced by their peers in hangouts, begin to consciously shape stories to fit specific narratives or agendas, they blur the line between objective reporting and strategic communication (Msughter & Aondover, 2023). As Bello (2023) notes, this practice can erode public trust in the media, as audiences become increasingly aware of the potential biases in news reporting. The perception that journalists are not merely reporting the news but actively shaping it to serve particular interests can lead to scepticism and a decline in the credibility of the media as an institution. In Nigeria, where the media is a critical tool for social and political engagement, the role of journalists as spin doctors has profound implications for how the public perceives information and engages with it.

The perception of journalists as spin doctors also affects how the public engages with the media. Olatunji (2023) argues that when audiences perceive that journalists are primarily

concerned with promoting specific agendas rather than providing balanced and objective reporting, they may become more critical of the media and less likely to trust the information presented to them. This scepticism can lead to a more fragmented public discourse, where different segments of the population turn to alternative sources of information that align with their preconceived notions. The role of journalist hangouts in fostering this perception of bias and agenda-setting among journalists highlights the need for greater transparency and accountability within the media profession. Ensuring that news stories are framed based on factual accuracy and diversity of perspectives, rather than the influence of social dynamics within journalist hangouts, is essential for maintaining public trust in the media.

The influence of journalist hangouts on the framing of news stories, the promotion of specific narratives, and the perception of journalists as spin doctors has far-reaching implications for the Nigerian media landscape. These gatherings, while fostering professional camaraderie, also have the potential to shape media content in ways that may not always align with the principles of objectivity and diversity. As Nigerian scholars continue to explore these dynamics, the need for a more critical approach to understanding the role of journalist hangouts in media practices becomes increasingly apparent. Addressing the challenges posed by these gatherings requires a commitment to upholding ethical standards in journalism and ensuring that the media serves as a platform for diverse and balanced public discourse. The concept of journalists as spin doctors has been explored extensively in media studies, particularly in the context of how informal interactions among journalists may influence news framing and reporting. Abiodun (2023) argue that journalist hangouts, while often seen as harmless social gatherings, play a significant role in shaping the narratives that dominate media discourse. These hangouts can lead to the creation of echo chambers where journalists, influenced by their peers, may adopt a more subjective approach to reporting. This shift from objective reporting to narrative shaping aligns with the role of spin doctors, who manipulate information to present a particular viewpoint. The impact of these interactions on media integrity is profound, as it challenges the traditional notion of journalistic objectivity.

The role of journalist hangouts in promoting specific agendas is further examined by Kalu (2023), who suggests that these informal settings often serve as breeding grounds for bias. In these spaces, journalists may discuss and reinforce particular viewpoints, which can then influence their reporting. This dynamic creates a cycle where certain narratives are continuously promoted, while alternative perspectives are marginalised. The power of these hangouts lies in their ability to subtly shift the focus of news coverage, often without the conscious awareness of the journalists involved (Msughter et al., 2023). Kalu's study highlights the need for greater awareness among journalists about the potential for bias that can arise from these interactions.

Further exploring the influence of journalist hangouts, Chukwu (2023) notes that the social dynamics within these gatherings can lead to a homogenisation of viewpoints. This homogenisation occurs when journalists, seeking to align with the dominant narratives within their peer group, subconsciously alter their reporting to fit the prevailing perspectives. This process not only reinforces existing biases but also diminishes the diversity of viewpoints in media coverage. Chukwu's research underscores the importance of maintaining a critical perspective in these interactions to preserve the integrity of journalistic practices and ensure a diversity of voices in the media.

The manipulation of public perception through journalist hangouts is also a significant concern. As Adekunle (2023) argues, when journalists engage in these informal gatherings, they may become more susceptible to the influence of powerful individuals or groups who seek to control the media narrative. This manipulation can take various forms, from subtle

suggestions to overt pressure, leading journalists to become unwitting agents of spin. Adekunle's study reveals the complexities of maintaining journalistic independence in environments where social and professional pressures intersect.

Okafor (2023) expands on this by examining the ethical implications of journalists acting as spin doctors. He argues that the blending of social and professional roles in journalist hangouts can lead to ethical dilemmas where journalists must balance their personal relationships with their duty to the public. The challenge lies in maintaining objectivity and resisting the temptation to conform to the views of their peers. Okafor's work highlights the ethical risks associated with these informal settings and calls for stronger adherence to journalistic standards to prevent the erosion of public trust.

Nwosu (2023) provides a different perspective by exploring the role of journalist hangouts in shaping public opinion. He suggests that these gatherings can serve as powerful tools for influencing how the public perceives certain issues. Journalists, through their discussions and interactions, can shape the narratives that reach the public, effectively acting as gatekeepers of information. Nwosu's study illustrates the significant power journalists wield in these settings and the potential consequences for public discourse when this power is used to promote specific agendas.

The relationship between journalist hangouts and media credibility is critically examined by Uche (2023). He argues that the integrity of the media is compromised when journalists allow their social interactions to influence their reporting. This compromise is particularly damaging in a media landscape where trust is already fragile. Uche's research highlights the need for greater accountability and transparency in journalistic practices, particularly in the context of informal interactions that have the potential to shape news coverage.

Ezeh (2023) focuses on the long-term effects of journalist hangouts on the media industry. He suggests that these gatherings, while beneficial for networking and professional development, can also contribute to the entrenchment of biased reporting practices. Over time, this can lead to a media environment where certain narratives are consistently prioritised over others, reducing the overall diversity of news coverage. Ezeh's work calls for a more critical approach to these interactions to ensure that they do not undermine the diversity and quality of journalism.

The potential for journalist hangouts to create a culture of conformity is explored by Yusuf (2023). He argues that these settings can lead to a culture where dissenting opinions are discouraged, and journalists who deviate from the dominant narrative may be marginalised. This culture of conformity can stifle critical thinking and creativity in journalism, leading to a media landscape that is less reflective of the complexities of the issues being covered. Yusuf's study highlights the need for journalists to actively resist the pressures to conform and to embrace diverse perspectives in their reporting.

Finally, Bello (2023) examines the impact of journalist hangouts on the public's perception of media bias. He argues that as the public becomes more aware of the informal networks that influence news coverage, their trust in the media may decline. This decline in trust is particularly concerning in an era where misinformation and fake news are prevalent. Bello's work underscores the importance of maintaining transparency and objectivity in journalism, particularly in the context of informal interactions that have the potential to influence news reporting.

III. Research Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather and analyse data. The mixed-methods design allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, providing both numerical data and in-depth insights into the perspectives of journalists (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo and Okpanachi, 2022). The population for this study consists of journalists in Nigeria. A sample size of 50 journalists was selected for the quantitative survey, using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. This sampling method was chosen due to its feasibility and accessibility, given the time and resource constraints of the study. Two data collection instruments were used in this study: 1. Quantitative Survey Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from the sampled journalists. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, to gather information on journalists' perspectives on their role as spin doctors. 2. Qualitative In-Depth Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect qualitative data from online articles and opinions of experts. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, designed to gather in-depth insights into the perspectives of journalists on their role as spin doctors. The collected data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods: 1. Quantitative Data Analysis: The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean ratings and standard deviations. The data was presented in tables to facilitate easy interpretation. 2. Qualitative Data Analysis: The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, a systematic approach to identifying and coding themes and patterns in the data (Asemah et al., 2022). The themes and patterns that emerged from the data were presented in narrative form.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Presentation of Results

Research Objective One: To examine the extent to which journalist hangouts influence the framing of news stories by journalists in Nigeria.

Table 1. Mean ratings on the extent to which journalist hangouts influence the framing of news stories by journalists in Nigeria.

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std	Decision
1	Journalist hangouts significantly influence the way news stories are framed in Nigerian media.	2.9	0.71	Agreed
2	Discussions at journalist hangouts often lead to a consensus on how certain news stories should be reported.	3.1	0.11	Agreed
3	The framing of news stories is often shaped by the prevailing opinions in journalist hangouts.	2.7	0.91	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The results presented in the table indicate that journalist hangouts play a notable role in influencing the framing of news stories in Nigeria. The mean ratings for all three statements fall around the neutral to agreement range, with the highest mean of 3.1 for the statement that discussions at journalist hangouts often lead to a consensus on how news stories should be

reported. This suggests a general agreement among respondents that such gatherings contribute to a collective approach in framing news. Similarly, the mean of 2.9 for the statement regarding the significant influence of journalist hangouts on news framing and 2.7 for the influence of prevailing opinions within these hangouts further support the idea that these interactions shape how stories are presented in the media. The standard deviations, particularly the 0.91 for the third statement, indicate some variability in responses, reflecting differing opinions on the extent of this influence. The findings suggest that journalist hangouts have a considerable impact on the way news is framed, albeit with varying degrees of influence perceived by respondents.

Research Objective Two: To investigate the role of journalist hangouts in promoting or reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape.

Table 2. Mean ratings on the role of journalist hangouts in promoting or reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std	Decision
4	Journalist hangouts are platforms where specific narratives and agendas are actively promoted within the Nigerian media.	2.8	0.71	Agreed
5	Journalist hangouts contribute to the reinforcement of dominant narratives in the Nigerian media.	3.2	0.79	Agreed
6	Journalist hangouts play a crucial role in shaping the agendas that are pursued by media organisations in Nigeria.	3.0	0.69	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The table's results highlight the significant role of journalist hangouts in promoting and reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape. The mean ratings for all three statements suggest a general agreement among respondents about the influence of these gatherings. The highest mean of 3.2 indicates that respondents strongly believe journalist hangouts contribute to the reinforcement of dominant narratives in the media. Similarly, the mean ratings of 3.0 and 2.8 for the shaping of media agendas and the active promotion of specific narratives further reinforce the perception that journalist hangouts play a crucial role in shaping the media's direction in Nigeria. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.69 to 0.79, show a moderate level of consistency in the responses, suggesting that while there is some variation in opinions, the overall consensus supports the influential role of these hangouts in the media landscape.

Research Objective Three: To assess the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public perception and trust in the media.

Table 3. Mean ratings on the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public perception and trust in the media.

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std	Decision
7	When journalists act as spin doctors, it negatively affects public trust in the media.	2.4	0.44	Disagreed
8	The public is generally aware when journalists manipulate news stories to fit specific agendas.	3.0	0.95	Agreed
9	Journalists acting as spin doctors contribute to a	2.3	0.53	Disagreed

decline in public perception of media credibility.

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The results reveal mixed perceptions regarding the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public trust and media credibility. The mean ratings for statements 7 and 9, with scores of 2.4 and 2.3 respectively, indicate a general disagreement among respondents that spin doctoring significantly affects public trust or contributes to a decline in media credibility. This suggests that there is scepticism about the direct impact of spin doctoring on trust and perception. However, the mean rating of 3.0 for the statement regarding public awareness of manipulation suggests agreement that the public is cognisant of when journalists skew news to fit specific agendas. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.44 to 0.95, reflect variability in responses, particularly on the awareness of manipulation, indicating a more nuanced view of the relationship between spin doctoring and public perception. While there is acknowledgment of public awareness of media manipulation, the direct impact on trust and credibility appears to be less certain among respondents.

IV. Results of Discussion

The results from the first table, which examines the extent to which journalist hangouts influence the framing of news stories, align with the notion that these gatherings have a considerable impact on media framing, as discussed in previous literature. The mean ratings for the statements suggest that respondents generally agree on the influence of journalist hangouts in shaping how news stories are framed. This finding corroborates the work of Adeyemi (2023) and Musa (2023), who argued that journalist hangouts are influential spaces where media professionals converge to shape narratives. However, the variability in responses, particularly the lower mean for the influence of prevailing opinions, indicates that while there is consensus on the impact, the degree to which hangouts shape news framing may vary among individuals. This variability might reflect the differing levels of influence these hangouts exert on journalists, a nuance that was also noted by Ogunleye (2022), who highlighted the context-dependent nature of this influence.

The second table's results underscore the role of journalist hangouts in promoting and reinforcing specific narratives within the Nigerian media. The mean ratings indicate a general agreement that these gatherings play a significant role in shaping media agendas and reinforcing dominant narratives. This finding is consistent with the literature reviewed, particularly the insights from Adewale (2023), who observed that journalist hangouts often act as platforms for reinforcing prevailing media narratives. The mean ratings for the statements about shaping media agendas and promoting narratives align with the assertions by Adewale (2023) and other scholars that journalist hangouts are instrumental in steering media discourse. The moderate standard deviations suggest that while there is general agreement on the role of hangouts, individual perceptions of their influence may still vary, reflecting the diverse experiences and roles of journalists in these settings.

The third table's results present a more nuanced view of the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public perception and trust. The disagreement with statements on the negative impact of spin doctoring on public trust and media credibility contrasts with the findings of earlier studies, such as those by Adewale (2023) and Omole (2022), which suggested that spin doctoring significantly undermines public trust in the media. The mean ratings indicate that respondents are less convinced that spin doctoring directly affects trust or

credibility, although there is agreement that the public is aware of media manipulation. This divergence might reflect a gap between public awareness of manipulation and its actual impact on trust, as highlighted by Musa (2023), who noted that public perceptions of media credibility are influenced by various factors beyond immediate spin doctoring practices. This discrepancy suggests that while public awareness of manipulation is acknowledged, its direct effect on trust and credibility might be less pronounced than previously reported.

Answering Research Questions

1. The extent to which journalist hangouts influence the framing of news stories by journalists in Nigeria is significant, with a general agreement that these gatherings shape how news is reported, although the degree of influence varies among individuals.
2. Journalist hangouts play a crucial role in promoting and reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the Nigerian media landscape, with respondents agreeing that these gatherings significantly impact media discourse.
3. The implications of journalists acting as spin doctors on public perception and trust in the media are mixed, with some agreement that the public is aware of manipulation, but less certainty about its direct effect on media trust and credibility.

V. Conclusion

The findings indicate that journalist hangouts in Nigeria significantly influence the framing of news stories and play a vital role in promoting and reinforcing specific narratives and agendas within the media landscape. These gatherings serve as critical platforms where media professionals converge to shape media discourse, with a notable impact on how news is reported. However, the study also reveals mixed perceptions regarding the implications of journalists acting as spin doctors, with respondents acknowledging public awareness of media manipulation but showing less consensus on its direct impact on public trust and media credibility. While journalist hangouts are recognised for their influence on media framing and agenda-setting, the precise effects on public perception of media trust are less clear.

Recommendations

From the findings above, the study recommends the following:

1. Media organisations should enhance ethical training for journalists to address the influence of journalist hangouts on news framing and to mitigate the potential biases that may arise from these gatherings. This training should emphasise the importance of maintaining objectivity and transparency in reporting, even when influenced by peer discussions.
2. Media outlets should implement stricter guidelines to ensure transparency in reporting, particularly regarding the sources and influences behind news stories. This can help to build public trust and reduce the negative impact of spin doctoring by making it clearer when and how narratives are shaped.
3. To counteract the reinforcement of dominant narratives and ensure balanced reporting, media organisations should actively seek out and include diverse perspectives in news coverage. This can help to broaden the scope of media narratives and reduce the effect of homogenous viewpoints often reinforced in journalist hangouts.

Limitations of the Study

While the mixed-methods approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, it also has some limitations:

1. Time and Resource Constraints: The study was limited by time and resource constraints, which affected the sample size and data collection methods.
2. Sampling Bias: The use of non-probability convenience sampling technique may have introduced sampling bias, which could affect the generalizability of the findings.

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