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DOES A BADGE JUSTIFY MASTERY?

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE TRUE VALUE OF ACCREDITATION IN GHANA'S PR
CIRCLES.**

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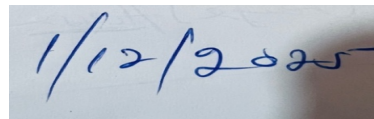
DECLARATIONS.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Paul Louis Bempong, declare that this research, except quotations and references contained in published works, which have been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in parts or whole, for another degree elsewhere. Therefore, I bear the responsibility for any shortcomings.



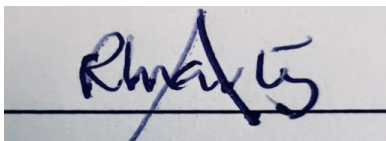
PAUL LOUIS BEMPONG
(Student)



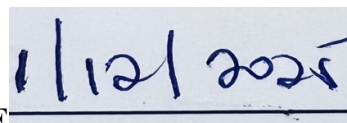
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SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

I, the undersigned supervisors, declare that we supervised the preparation and presentation of this work in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of PhD thesis as laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication. (UniMAC).



DR. RHODALENE AMARTEY



DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family without whose support, encouragement and prayers I would not have written anything. It is also devoted to every young professional in the expanding digital in Ghana due to the persistence power of inspiration and ability to overcome new challenges that they manifest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Above all I would like to thank God, due to the strength, wisdom and persistence that made me complete this work.

ABSTRACT

Accreditation is widely viewed as a means of validating competence and strengthening ethical standards in public relations (PR). In Ghana, where the profession is expanding but minimally regulated, the actual meaning and influence of accreditation remain unclear. This study explores whether PR accreditation in Ghana reflects genuine professional mastery or operates largely as a symbolic marker. Guided by Social Cognitive Career Theory, Bowen's ethics model, and Symbolic Interactionism, the study examines the cognitive, ethical, and socially constructed dimensions of accreditation. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with fifteen practitioners, educators, employers, and representatives of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana. Thematic analysis identified five core themes: perceptions of mastery, ethical expectations, career relevance, structural barriers, and recommended reforms. The Findings show that accreditation carries strong symbolic value signifying legitimacy, commitment, and professional identity, but limited practical influence. Current processes were seen as insufficient for assessing competence or shaping ethical conduct. Employers prioritised skills and performance over accreditation, while barriers such as cost, centralised training, and theoretical assessments discouraged participation. The study concludes that accreditation functions more symbolically than practically, but could gain relevance through reforms such as decentralised training, competency-based assessment, curriculum integration, and stronger employer engagement.

Keywords

Public Relations Accreditation; Professional Competence; PR Professionalisation; Ethical Practice; Ghana; Phenomenology; Practitioner Perceptions; Symbolic Interactionism; Social Cognitive Career Theory; Professional Standards; Competency-Based Assessment; Thematic Analysis; IPR Ghana; Accreditation Reform; Professional Identity

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to address the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, the scope of the study, its significance, organisation of the study and chapter summary. The process of accreditation as applicable to the practice of Public Relations (PR) has been well embraced as a sign of professionalism, ethics-managed practice, and career growth in different scenarios globally, mostly in the North American continents and some regions of Europe. The work of public relations in Ghana falls in a comparatively unregulated situation in which the accreditation of experts is not rigorously practised professionally or institutionally implemented.

This study looks to explore qualitatively the opinion of PR practitioners and educators regarding the importance, usefulness, and contribution of accreditation towards their practice, ethics, and career growth in Ghana. It is driven by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and a presupposition that the environmental context, individual assumptions, and the support structures in the institutions affect the steps and decisions made in regard to the career

1.1 Background of the study

There is a growing tendency to perceive PR as a strategic organisational role, and PR professionals are so required to uphold moral values, be competent, and have trustworthy qualifications. To facilitate such values, accreditation programs in PR, like Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) by the Universal Accreditation Board in the U.S. have been established. The programs evaluate the competence, knowledge, and ethical judgment of the

practitioners, and along the way, improve professionalism in the practice (Sha, 2011). Although PR credentialing has increased globally, most African countries, such as Ghana, are yet to fully embrace systematic accreditation regimes. The research aims to explore this vacuum to find out the knowledge and everyday life of PR scholars and practitioners with regard to accreditation as it relates to Ghana. Professionalisation of the practice of public relations (PR) is an agenda of concern to the world, especially as the profession works towards being a plausible, prestigious, and ethical management process. Accreditation and certification have been identified as some of the major tools that have been used to promote this process of professionalisation. It has also been observed that with accreditation, PR professionals tend to be more morally sensitive, feel more comfortable doing advisory work, and in many cases, they are given greater levels of respect and powers in their respective organizations (Bowen, 2016). These results correlate with wider academic attempts to establish accreditation and belong to legitimacy, credibility, and professional acknowledgment (Gregory, 2011; Romenti et al., 2023; Tkalac Vercic & Vercic, 2024).

Things are different, however, in Ghana, where the PR environment boasts of fragmentation in professional regulation, inconsistency in the calibre of education, as well as scarce awareness of the international accreditation regime. The PR sector in Ghana still struggles through the challenges such as divided regulatory regulations, the lack of balance in the level of education, and low perception and adoption of international accreditation systems. The formal oversight of the profession resides in the Institute of Public Relations Ghana (IPR-Ghana) but does not have a commonly accepted and enforced accreditation programme. More so, there is so much disparity in PR education at the tertiary level where the content of the course hardly aligns with the international best practices, thus raising issues of quality assurance, ethical readiness, and global competitiveness (Harvey, 2004).

Such a disconnect between the global standards and the local practice remains a question over whether Western-centric standards of accreditation may apply. There is a tendency to view accreditation as a universally attractive and beneficial state in most of the available literature, wherein the specifics of local practitioners proceeding with the process of professional development have been considered too little. In Ghana, institutional prestige, work experience, and professional networks can play a more critical role in career development compared to formal certification (Karlberg & Bjerke, 2023; Bowd, 2004). Such contextual realities require a more sensitive way to delve into how Ghanaian PR practitioners, educators, and human resource practitioners view and carve the concept of accreditation into their professional existence.

In recent years, accreditation and certification have become important tools in the professionalisation of public relations (PR) as a means to both assure ethical practices and quality education and as a way to provide a credible benchmark of the discipline. In many places around the world and especially in the US, formal accreditation programs such as the Accreditation in PR (APR) have become prominent as identifiers of professional credibility, readiness to be ethical, as well as career-enhancement (Sha, 2011a; Neill, 2016). The systems enhance professional demarcations, maintain ethical intentions, and indicate a sense of competency to the employer and the client (Sha, 2011b). Nevertheless, these models have been developed mainly in the Western world, and their applicability or implementation in emerging markets such as Ghana is yet to be understood.

Accreditation has also been theorized as a tool to come into action to harmonize PR education with industry needs. According to Penning, Forde, and Broussard (2024), credentials like certificates and accreditation change the way students, employers, and professionals examine career preparedness and achievement. They found that there are perceptual gaps between educators and employers concerning the role of credentials, and contextual alignment is

necessary. In Ghana, there exists a unified accreditation system of academic institutions regarding the PR programmes specifically, so the level of adaptation of subjects to the demands of the industry is not homogeneous.

Although the previous studies have linked the idea of accreditation with ethical preparedness as part of the global scholarly discourse, Neill (2016) discovered that accredited practitioners were much more prepared and confident to provide ethical counsel compared to their non-accredited counterparts. However, these are not the cases in African contexts, where the ethical issues in PR tend to be informed by unwritten norms, insufficient regulation, as well as the weaknesses of the institutions. The prospect of filling these ethical loopholes in the PR industry of Ghana through accreditation is hardly explored.

On the same note, within the framework of higher education policy, Harvey (2004) emphasized that accreditation has become one of the essential elements that are responsible for providing institutional legitimacy, enhancing the quality of the graduates, and ensuring there are parallels between the educational results and requirements of professional practice associated with academies. These functions are, however, usually different in the postcolonial contexts. (Green, 2018) have warned with regard to the transfers of the Western models of accreditation to the developing areas because they may introduce a mismatch unless the political, cultural, and economic environments are taken into account.

Further, the links between PR professionals and Ghana tend to contain hybrid professional relations that informal networks, on-the-job experience, and organisational stature act as a substitute for formal endorsement. This is in line with the findings of Sha (2011b), who opined that in a structured system such as the U.S, accreditation is not the only factor affecting career advancement, as there are other factors, which are experience and age. It is possible that these other factors are even more influential in the context of Ghana, where the regulatory regimes are less strong and thus complicate the perceived need or the benefit of formal certification.

Karlberg and Bjerke (2023) also state that local cultural and institutional logics determine the role and the meaning of accreditation. Their examination of the communicators in different settings demonstrates that the ideals of Western accreditation can be viewed as enabling or alienating depending on the local contexts. In the case of Ghana, where customary values, informal mentorship, and network patterns tend to dominate career development, foreign, exported, and strict accreditation systems are unlikely to be popular unless they are a local fantasy.

In spite of these tensions, we are starting to see the discourse on the necessity to professionalise PR in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, questions such as how Ghanaian PR professionals view accreditation remain unanswered. What does the absence of an integrated accreditation system in ethics, education, and professional identity imply? What is the opinion of the teachers concerning the implementation of the international accreditation standards into the curriculum? How is credentialing related to career trajectories in an informal and hybrid contextual environment?

The research aims to fill in the above gaps by studying the perceived relevance, influence, and adaptation of accreditation in PR practice, education, and career paths in Ghana. It puts to the front the links of PR practitioners, educators, and employers to provide the grounded concept of how accreditation can be helpful or in conflict with the professionalisation agenda in the distinctive communication environment in Ghana.

1.2 Problem Statement.

Globally, accreditation is widely regarded as a mechanism for validating professional competence, strengthening ethical commitment, and enhancing career legitimacy in public relations (Bowen, 2016; Neill, 2016; Sha, 2011a). In contexts such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, PR accreditation systems such as APR, CIPR, or PRIA certifications are designed to establish minimum competency benchmarks and signal a

practitioner's readiness to provide credible and ethical counsel. Scholarly research consistently emphasises that accreditation helps create shared standards, improves practitioner confidence, and elevates industry reputation (Sha, 2011b; Penning et al., 2024).

Despite its importance, research internationally reveals mixed evidence regarding whether accreditation genuinely reflects mastery. Studies by Sha (2011b) and Neill (2016) show that although some practitioners consider accreditation as a marker of professional identity, others view it as symbolic rather than substantive. Penning et al. (2024) add that practitioners, students, and employers often differ significantly in how they interpret the career value of accreditation.

While this global scholarship illuminates accreditation as a contested professional marker, most studies are situated in Western contexts with long-standing regulatory traditions. This leaves limited empirical understanding of accreditation in emerging PR markets, particularly in Africa, where institutional structures, organisational cultures, and labour markets differ substantially.

In Ghana, the institutional architecture for PR accreditation is visible in the programmes and membership frameworks promulgated by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana. However, systematic empirical investigation into how individual practitioners interpret these institutional signals is scarce. A recent systematic mapping of PR scholarship in Ghana highlights this omission, showing that while research has examined PR education, CSR practice and the changing roles of communicators, there is little focused empirical work on practitioner perceptions of accreditation specifically (Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman, 2023). According to the research (Accreditation, 2021), institutional documents such as the IPR report and media reports confirm that accreditation activity is ongoing in Ghana, yet academic analyses that centre the personal, lived meanings practitioners attach to accreditation are absent from the peer-reviewed literature (Institute of Public Relations Ghana, 2021; Nutsugah &

Anani-Bossman, 2023). In short, there is a disjuncture between institutional efforts to professionalise PR through accreditation and the lack of evidence about how those efforts are received, valued or resisted at the level of practitioners' everyday professional lives.

PR practice has expanded significantly across government, corporate, media, and development sectors. Yet, scholarship remains sparse on how practitioners themselves perceive accreditation within the local environment. The Institute of Public Relations Ghana (IPR-Ghana) promotes accreditation as a requirement for professional recognition, but recent developments such as increasing competition in the industry, the rise of influencer-driven communication, informal entry pathways, and inconsistent educational backgrounds suggest that Ghanaian practitioners may experience accreditation differently from their counterparts in established markets. Employers' hiring patterns also appear inconsistent, with some requiring accreditation while many do not, raising further questions about whether accreditation is perceived as essential, optional, or irrelevant.

Focusing on practitioner perception is crucial for three reasons. Professionalisation theory and symbolic interactionism both highlight that professions are socially constructed through shared meanings, not merely through formal regulations (Blumer, 1969). If practitioners do not perceive accreditation as meaningful, its symbolic and functional power weakens.

Also, the success of accreditation systems depends heavily on practitioners' willingness to adopt them. Research from other fields shows that if practitioners do not see clear benefits such as improved career mobility, ethical legitimacy, or public trust, accreditation fails to gain traction (Harvey, 2004). Understanding Ghanaian practitioners' beliefs is therefore essential for strengthening IPR-Ghana's policies.

Moreso, public relations practice in Ghana is highly diverse, with many practitioners entering the field through journalism, marketing, political communication, or administrative routes.

These varied pathways may shape distinct perceptions of whether accreditation is necessary, affordable, or relevant. Exploring these differences helps illuminate whether accreditation is becoming a genuine marker of mastery or merely functioning as a symbolic badge with limited career consequences.

The central problem addressed by this study is the absence of empirical research on Ghanaian PR practitioners' personal perceptions of accreditation, its value, relevance, fairness, and connection (or lack thereof) to mastery, career progression, and ethical practice. Given the increasing visibility of accreditation requirements in some job postings and IPR-Ghana's renewed push for professional standardisation, this gap demands urgent scholarly inquiry.

In sum, although accreditation is widely promoted as a hallmark of professionalism, it remains unclear how Ghanaian practitioners themselves interpret its meaning, whether they view it as a pathway to mastery, whether it influences how they perform and are evaluated, and whether barriers such as cost, awareness, or exam structures limit participation. Addressing this gap will provide evidence-based insights that can guide national policy, improve accreditation frameworks, and contribute to global scholarship on PR professionalisation in non-Western contexts.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 Main objective.

The main objective of this study is to explore the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of public relations practitioners, educators, and human resource professionals in Ghana regarding professional accreditation and to examine its perceived relevance, impact, and integration within PR practice, education, and career development.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

To explore Ghanaian PR practitioners' perceptions of professional accreditation.

To examine the perceived impact of accreditation on ethical practice and professional recognition.

To assess the career implications of holding or lacking PR credentials among practitioners in Ghana.

To investigate how PR educators in Ghana view the integration of accreditation standards in academic curricula.

1.4 Research Questions.

How do Ghanaian PR practitioners perceive the value and necessity of professional accreditation?

What is the perceived impact of accreditation on ethical decision-making and professional credibility in Ghana?

How does the presence or absence of accreditation affect the career development and self-efficacy of Ghanaian PR practitioners?

How do PR educators in Ghana understand the role of accreditation in shaping PR academic programmes?

1.5 Significance of the Study.

The research is of relevance and timely because in Ghana, an era where there is growing pressure on ethical responsibility and professional ethics regarding the PR practice. Its results will be useful to a group of stakeholders. This study can be used to inform professionals to develop better decisions regarding credentialing and continuing professional development through the revelation of how peers view the importance of accreditation. The research will aid the establishment and reorganisation of accreditation programs that are appropriate in the professional conditions in Ghana. For Academic institutions, this study can be used in the planning of the curriculum in line with what the industry needs in terms of PR education.

Finally, Recruitment and employee development practice may be guided by an understanding of the value of accreditation as it is perceived.

1.6 The Scope of the Study.

The study will only be limited to the PR practitioners and scholars in Ghana, especially in the urban towns including Accra where the majority of communication firms, media establishments, and universities are located. It is a study of only the academic and professional views of accreditation without any quantitative instruments adopted of accreditation systems or case analyses of other countries.

This study focuses on ethical practice, curriculum, and professional development in Ghanaian settings, utilising the qualitative method of data collection comprising interviews and thematic analysis.

1.7 Research Limitations.

This study provides valuable insight into perceptions of PR accreditation in Ghana, but several limitations affect the breadth of its conclusions. The qualitative phenomenological design relied on fifteen participants which is a sample size suitable for exploring lived experience but insufficient for broad generalisation across Ghana's diverse PR landscape. Participant availability also introduces potential bias, as those with stronger views about accreditation may have been more inclined to participate, leaving practitioners in remote or less formalised settings underrepresented.

The findings are based on self-reported experiences, which are influenced by personal interpretation and memory, potentially affecting consistency in accounts of competence and ethical practice. The Ghana-focused scope, while providing contextual depth, limits comparison with regional or international accreditation models that could offer wider benchmarking. Additionally, the study was conducted during a period of ongoing

professionalisation in the Ghanaian PR sector, meaning subsequent policy or institutional changes are not reflected in the data.

Despite these constraints, the study establishes an important foundation for understanding accreditation perceptions and identifying areas for strengthening PR professionalism in Ghana.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms and Concepts.

Accreditation: Formal recognition of capability and intention by a professional organisation (Sha, 2011a).

Professional Competency: Demonstrated PR professional expertise, in strategy, ethics, and adaptability (Bowen, 2016).

Mastery: The demonstrated ability to apply PR principles effectively and ethically in real-world contexts, integrating academic knowledge, practical skill, and contextual adaptability (Neill, 2016).

Ethics: The set of moral principles that govern PR practice, encompassing honesty, transparency, fairness, and responsibility to stakeholders and society (Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006).

Public Relations Practitioner: A communication professional engaged in strategic relationship management, reputation building, and stakeholder engagement across organisational, governmental, or consultancy sectors in Ghana. **Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana:**

The statutory professional body responsible for regulating PR practice, accrediting practitioners, and promoting ethical and professional standards within the industry. **Social**

Interaction: The dynamic exchange of communication among individuals that shapes perceptions, constructs professional identity, and produces collective meaning in a social system (Blumer, 1969). **Self-Efficacy:** Trust in capability to achieve professional work (Lent

et al., 1994). **Outcome. Expectations:** Anticipated benefits resulting from accreditation, such

as higher mobility and greater credibility (Lent et al., 1994). Gatekeeping: Management of access to opportunities and credit by virtue of credentials (Sha, 2011a).

Ethical Advice: Ability to offer recommendations based on ethical judgment (Neill, 2016).

Symbolic Capital: Prestige and legitimacy that are yielded by credentials (Harvey, 2004).

1.9 Organisation of the study.

There are five chapters in this study:

Chapter One presents the introduction to the study, including the background, problem statement, research objectives, questions, and significance.

Chapter two follows pertinent literature, particularly the global views of PR accreditation, ethics of the same, academic match and its development, and gaps. Chapter Three presents the qualitative procedure that is to be adopted, such as research design, sampling, methods of data collection, and data analysis.

In Chapter Four, themes are presented and interpreted in line with the research findings in such a way that enables the use of the voices of the participants that investigate perceptions and experiences.

Chapter Five is a conclusion but entails a summary of findings, conclusions, and policy implications as well as implications of education and professional practice in Ghana.

1.10 Chapter Summary.

The chapter commenced the study by providing an overview introduction of what accreditation is, the vital yet unexplored element in the Ghanaian public relations sector.

This chapter has defined the problem of the research, the objective, and the question of the review, and has explained its importance to the academic and industry. The scope and organisation of the study were also presented in the chapter, thus giving way to the literature reviews and methodologies to be discussed in the following chapters. With accreditation still

making waves in terms of influencing PR professionalism in the international environment, the importance of carrying out this kind of study can be aptly classified under the need to domesticate and contextualise such a debate in the active communication environment of Ghana.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION.

This chapter synthesises existing literature on accreditation in public relations, situating the discourse within both global perspectives and Ghana-specific realities. It begins with an exploration of major themes found in the literature, including practitioner polarisation, ethical preparedness, stakeholder perceptions, and the alignment between accreditation and career development. It also examines the intersections between accreditation, PR education, and professional expectations, highlighting the tensions between institutional ideals and industry practices. Relevant theoretical frameworks such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Professionalism and Ethics in Public Affairs, and Symbolic Interactionism are then presented to provide conceptual grounding for the study.

Finally, key terms are operationally defined, and the chapter concludes with a synthesis of literature gaps that the present research aims to address.

By adopting a critical and context-sensitive perspective, this chapter demonstrates that while accreditation may serve as a strong indicator of professionalisation in established PR markets, its meaning in Ghana remains ambiguous. Whether accreditation is perceived as a true marker of mastery or merely a symbolic badge hinges on cultural norms, institutional readiness, and stakeholder expectations—factors that this study aims to interrogate in detail. The real usefulness of these qualifications is, however, disputable, particularly in emerging markets such as Ghana, where formal systems of PR accreditation are only developing. This piece of research hence attempts to address that gap, as it attempts to place the accreditation discourse in the Ghanaian socio-professional realities.

Accreditation has long been regarded as a central pillar in the global discourse on professionalisation, serving as a mechanism through which occupational fields validate competence, standardise practice, and cultivate ethical responsibility. Within public relations (PR), accreditation systems have historically emerged as instruments for reinforcing credibility and ensuring that practitioners meet established benchmarks of knowledge, skill, and professional conduct. In many developed PR markets such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, accreditation is integrated into the wider ecosystem of professional identity, continuing education, and labour market differentiation (Sha, 2011a; Neill, 2016). Yet, despite its prominence in global conversations, the conceptualisation, implementation, and perceived value of accreditation remain deeply contested.

These complexities become even more pronounced in emerging markets such as Ghana, where formal accreditation systems are still in their developmental stages. The Ghanaian PR industry has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, spurred by organisational demand for strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, reputation management, and social media strategy. However, its professional structures have not evolved at the same pace. A major systematic review by Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) revealed that PR research in Ghana remains heavily concentrated in areas such as corporate social responsibility, higher education communication, and digital media usage, while topics related to credentialing, professional standards, and accreditation are significantly understudied. This gap underscores an important conceptual problem. Although accreditation is widely celebrated in global PR practice, its applicability, symbolic value, and practical benefits in the Ghanaian context are far less clear

2.1 Review of Relevant Literature.

2.1.1 Practitioner Polarization and the Accreditation Divide.

Accreditation has traditionally served as a distinguishing marker within public relations practice, dividing the field into accredited and non-accredited practitioners. In advanced PR

markets, this divide reflects different levels of training, ethical orientation, and perceived credibility. Sha (2011a) argues that accreditation functions simultaneously as a unifying standard and a polarising mechanism, shaping how practitioners are perceived by employers, clients, and professional peers. According to her analysis, accredited practitioners often enjoy reputational advantages, as accreditation signals dedication to professional development, adherence to ethical codes, and mastery of specialised competencies. Conversely, non-accredited practitioners may be viewed fairly or unfairly as lacking the same level of commitment or expertise, even when they possess extensive practical experience.

This debate is not merely theoretical. Studies in the United States and Canada show that accreditation contributes to better professional self-assessment, enhanced ethical awareness, and increased confidence in strategic decision-making (Neill, 2016; Bowen, 2016). The divide is often entrenched by institutional structures. Professional bodies require or strongly recommend accreditation, employers incorporate it into hiring or promotion criteria, and educational curricula are aligned with accreditation standards. These systemic dynamics contribute to a stratified professional landscape in which accreditation has both symbolic and practical authority.

However, this binary takes on a different form in countries where accreditation is not fully institutionalised. In Ghana, for example, Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) observe that the PR industry lacks a robust, widely recognised accreditation framework. Consequently, the typical polarisation between accredited and non-accredited practitioners is muted or replaced by alternative bases of professional differentiation. In the absence of formal accreditation, practitioners often rely on informal credentials such as experience, personal networks, exposure to journalism or marketing, and organisational reputation. This mirrors findings from global studies showing that experience and social capital can sometimes rival formal credentials as determinants of perceived competence (Sha, 2011b; Schäfer & Tsetsura, 2020).

Moreover, in the Ghanaian context, the PR field's rapid growth has not been matched by equal development of regulatory and credentialing mechanisms. The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana is mandated to regulate practice and promote professional standards, but accreditation systems remain limited, inconsistent, or underutilised. As a result, the divide between accredited and non-accredited practitioners is largely symbolic, lacking the structural enforcement found in more established markets. This raises critical questions about fairness, access, and career mobility issues that become central to the present research.

In summary, practitioner polarisation surrounding PR accreditation is widely documented in global literature. Yet, in Ghana, the divide is less pronounced but more complex, shaped not by certification itself but by the absence of widely recognised accreditation structures.

This unique context underscores the need to investigate practitioners' perceptions and experiences to understand what accreditation means and does not mean within Ghana's professional reality.

2.1.2 Accreditation in Public Relations (APR).

Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) is one of the most recognised credentialing systems globally, particularly in North America. Developed by the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) and supported by bodies such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the APR credential is designed to demonstrate mastery in strategic communication, research, ethical decision-making, and management-level competencies (PRSA, 2025). Scholars frequently cite APR as an important tool for professional standardisation, providing a benchmark for assessing practitioner capability (Neill, 2016; DiStaso, Stacks, & Botan, 2009). Sha's (2011a) seminal work reveals both the strengths and limitations of APR. On one hand, it offers practitioners a structured pathway to develop and validate their professional expertise. On the other hand, it can be exclusionary, dividing the profession between those who have the resources, time, or institutional support to pursue accreditation and those who do not. Such

exclusionary tendencies may inadvertently reinforce inequalities in professional recognition. Within African contexts, however, the APR model has limited penetration. Research by Nkana and Chari (2022) indicates that professional bodies in many African states lack the institutional infrastructure to sustain rigorous accreditation systems. This resonates strongly in Ghana, where Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) found very limited scholarly engagement with accreditation mechanisms. The absence of robust accreditation structures means that the APR model cannot simply be transplanted, rather it must be reinterpreted to fit local contexts. Furthermore, Neill's (2016) study on ethical confidence among accredited practitioners highlights a critical dimension of the APR system and this emphasis on ethical competence. Accredited practitioners often report greater ease handling ethical crises due to systematic training in codes of conduct and case-based ethical reasoning. This is especially relevant in Ghana, where PR practitioners frequently engage with politically sensitive communication issues, crisis management, and media relations. Ethical dilemmas in such environments are complex and often ambiguous, suggesting that accreditation, if meaningfully implemented could play a vital role in strengthening ethical preparedness.

Nevertheless, accreditation in Ghana currently lacks the institutional traction needed to deliver these benefits. Many practitioners view accreditation as optional or peripheral, partly due to the absence of employer incentives and partly because informal experience remains highly valued. Consequently, accreditation risks becoming a symbolic badge, a theme explored later in this chapter rather than a transformative marker of professional development.

2.1.3 Accreditation and Career Pathways.

A substantial body of literature links accreditation to career advancement, organisational credibility, and professional mobility within public relations. Scholars have approached this discourse from various angles, examining how employers interpret accreditation, how practitioners integrate it into their career decisions, and how students frame their professional

aspirations around it. Penning, Forde, and Broussard (2024) provide one of the most comprehensive examinations of these dynamics. Their study reveals a nuanced landscape in which accreditation is both valued and questioned. For some employers, accreditation indicates initiative, commitment to professional development, and a willingness to engage in lifelong learning. These employers often regard accreditation as evidence of strategic thinking, competence in research and evaluation, and adherence to ethical codes. However, other employers view accreditation as secondary to practical experience, portfolio quality, interpersonal communication skills, and industry networks. This divergence suggests that accreditation, while potentially beneficial, is not universally perceived as a decisive factor in career development. This aligns with global discussions where practitioners report mixed experiences regarding the actual impact of accreditation on promotions, job security, or salary increases (Todd, 2014; Valentini, 2021). In contexts where performance is assessed primarily through measurable outcomes such as campaign results, media visibility, stakeholder relations, or crisis responsiveness accreditation may hold limited influence unless deeply embedded in organisational culture.

This debate resonates strongly in Ghana. The Ghanaian PR industry, as noted by Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023), is characterised by significant heterogeneity: practitioners enter the field through various pathways, including journalism, marketing, political communication, or freelance consultancy. Many of the most celebrated professionals in Ghana have built their careers on years of practice, strong networks, and high public visibility rather than formal accreditation. This mirrors findings by Harvey (2004), who argued that accreditation often promises quality but does not necessarily guarantee competence, innovation, or adaptability traits that are critical in rapidly evolving communication environments.

The generational divide highlighted by Penning et al. (2024) is also salient in Ghana. Younger practitioners and recent graduates tend to view accreditation as a way to enhance employability,

especially in a labour market where competition is increasing. For them, accreditation represents a badge of credibility, a structured path to mastery, and a way to differentiate themselves in job interviews. Older practitioners, however, often perceive accreditation as unnecessary, especially when they have already attained senior positions, accumulated long-term client relationships, or built strong reputations through practice. Practical barriers such as the cost of accreditation, time commitments, and lack of institutional support further reduce uptake among mid-career and senior practitioners.

In essence, the career-related value of accreditation is context-dependent. In Ghana, where the PR industry is still consolidating its structures and professional norms, accreditation has not yet achieved the level of influence reported in more developed markets. This raises important questions about whether accreditation offers meaningful professional advantages or merely functions as a symbolic credential with limited real-world implications.

2.1.4 Ethics, Curriculum, and Professional Alignment.

Another critical dimension in the accreditation discourse concerns ethics and curriculum alignment. Scholars have long argued that accreditation bodies often influence the design of university curricula by establishing standards for professional education, especially in areas such as ethics, research proficiency, public affairs, and strategic management (Rosso & Haight, 2020). This influence is seen as essential to ensuring that graduates enter the profession prepared to meet ethical and strategic challenges. Accreditation frameworks often emphasise ethical reasoning because PR practitioners routinely face dilemmas related to transparency, misinformation, conflict management, and representation of diverse publics. Bowen (2016) asserts that professionalism in public relations cannot be reduced to technical competence; it must encompass moral reasoning, reflective judgment, and adherence to ethical principles. Accreditation, therefore, serves not only as a technical credential but as a signal of ethical discipline and professional readiness.

However, Rosso and Haught (2020) caution against overly prescriptive accreditation systems that restrict curricular innovation. In diverse cultural environments, educators need flexibility to adapt curricula to local socio-cultural contexts, emerging technologies, and evolving communication patterns. Overly standardised accreditation requirements may suppress context-specific teaching and limit the adaptability of educational programmes.

These observations are particularly relevant in Ghana, where PR degree programmes vary significantly across institutions. Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) found considerable inconsistency in the quality and content of PR education, with some programmes focusing heavily on theory while others emphasise practical training or niche communication skills.

A strong accreditation system could help harmonise these programmes, ensuring that graduates possess the core competencies needed to function effectively in the field. At the same time, the system must be flexible enough to accommodate Ghana's unique media landscape, cultural communication norms, and political communication environment.

Another challenge relates to the gap between academic training and industry expectations. Multiple studies, including those by Fitch and Third (2014) and L'Etang (2020), highlight a persistent disconnect between what universities teach and what employers demand. Accreditation has the potential to bridge this gap by aligning curricula with professional expectations and creating pathways for collaboration between educational institutions and professional bodies.

However, if not adequately supported by industry stakeholders, accreditation risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Without employer recognition, practitioner buy-in, and institutional support, accreditation may fail to influence ethical behaviour or professional standards. These tensions are central to the Ghanaian context, where accreditation is not yet embedded within a coherent system of professional regulation. As a result, accreditation may

be perceived as an optional extra rather than a necessary component of professional development.

2.2 Review of Related Literature.

2.2.1 Accreditation and Experience.

A central theme in the literature is the tension between experience-based competence and credential-based competence. Sha (2011b) offers one of the most influential examinations of this dynamic, demonstrating that experience, more than accreditation or age, correlates strongly with perceived competence in PR practice. Her findings challenge the assumption that accreditation inherently produces superior practitioners, suggesting instead that competence develops through years of practice, exposure to real-world challenges, and continuous learning. This insight is echoed by other scholars who argue that PR practice often evolves through experiential learning rather than formal instruction. For instance, Berger and Reber (2019) emphasise that PR expertise is shaped by tacit knowledge, reflective decision-making, and situational judgement qualities cultivated through practice rather than classroom-based or exam-based learning.

The Ghanaian PR industry aligns closely with these observations. Many practitioners enter the field after careers in journalism, media production, marketing, or political communication. Their competence is often built through hands-on experience rather than formal accreditation. In such a context, experience becomes a powerful marker of legitimacy, shaping stakeholder perceptions of professionalism and trustworthiness. This pattern reflects similar trends in other emerging markets, where professionalisation is driven by practice rather than regulation (Osei-Tutu & Haynes, 2021).

Sha's (2011b) study raises a critical question: does accreditation indicate competence, or merely acknowledge it? In countries where regulatory structures are fragmented, as is the case

in Ghana, accreditation may signify little more than the willingness to undergo assessment. Without strong institutional reinforcement, accreditation lacks the authority to override the experiential legitimacy that practitioners accumulate over time.

Bowen's (2016) analysis of ethics further complicates this debate. While accreditation can enhance ethical preparedness by exposing practitioners to professional codes and case studies, ethical reasoning ultimately emerges through real-world dilemmas and contextual judgment. In Ghana, where PR professionals often operate in politically charged environments, ethical challenges are complex and culturally mediated. Experience, therefore, may play a greater role in developing ethical competence than accreditation alone.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Perceptions: Accreditation as a Symbol or Substance?

Such wariness has a central interest in the content of the contemporary debates categorised along with assessment of the perceptions of the external stakeholders to accreditation. Using an empowering study, Penning, Forde, and Broussard (2024) surveyed practitioners, employers, clients, and students in their research across the wide field of the profession of public relations and found a significant gap between perceived and actual influence of credentials. Despite the fact that every employer regularly claimed that they attach importance to accreditation, their day-to-day employment practices demonstrated how much more emphasis was placed on portfolios, performance during the interview, and recommendations of known industry contacts. This finding supports the position of Rosso and Haught (2020) that formal credentials have mainly symbolic importance and cannot elevate a professional status automatically. The research also indicates the difference between the symbolic and the practical capital, which is shown to be important, especially in settings when access to a recognised institution or programme is limited. To give one example, in Ghana, local reputation and connections between individuals and previous demonstrable expertise are often more effective forms of endorsement of expertise than accreditation. Another interesting finding by Penning

et al. (2024) is that students believe in a certain degree of aspiration attached to accreditation and its connection with upward mobility, as compared to employers, who will more likely ignore the need for accreditation once candidates have had field experience. Collectively, these discoveries indicate a possible discrepancy between the current institutional ideals and the practical expectations of practitioners and hiring organizations. In case accreditation should be adopted as a standard, then it has to be in tandem with not only institutional goals but also the actual circumstances in which those working in the field in practice undergo.

2.2.3 Comparative Perspectives and Emerging Insights.

Although the global literature on accreditation offers valuable insights, its applicability to Ghana must be viewed with caution. Neill (2016) argues that attitudes toward accreditation vary based on institutional maturity, cultural context, and industry norms. Accreditation systems developed in Western contexts such as the APR framework are built on assumptions about organisational structure, professional regulation, and industry expectations that may not align with the realities of developing markets.

PRSA's (2025) historical review of accreditation underscores that credentialing systems succeed only when supported by strong institutional authority, professional consensus, and sustained participation. Without these conditions, accreditation risks becoming a token credential with limited practical impact. This finding is reinforced by studies in South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, where accreditation systems struggle to gain traction due to limited funding, low practitioner awareness, and weak regulatory enforcement (Ayeni & Omogbemi, 2020; Mersham & Skinner, 2019). For Ghana, these insights are instructive. The PR industry is diverse, with practitioners operating across government, corporate, NGO, and media sectors. Institutional asymmetry where no single body fully regulates practice creates a fragmented professional landscape. In such contexts, accreditation may be interpreted differently by various stakeholders, leading to inconsistent uptake and varied perceptions of relevance. As

Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023) note, professionalisation in Ghana is still evolving, and accreditation must therefore be considered within this evolving socio-cultural and institutional terrain.

2.3 Theoretical Framework.

This study adopts a tripartite theoretical framework consisting of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), Professionalism and Ethics in Public Affairs (Bowen, 2016), and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Carter & Fuller, 2015). Together, these theories provide a multidimensional analytical lens that enables a comprehensive understanding of how accreditation is perceived, interpreted, and utilised within Ghana's public relations landscape.

These theories were selected because accreditation in PR is not only a technical credential but also a psychological motivator, an ethical signal, and a cultural symbol. The frameworks therefore help to interrogate accreditation from three complementary angles:

SCCT explains how practitioners' beliefs, motivations, and perceived career outcomes influence their decisions to pursue (or ignore) accreditation.

Ethics and Professionalism Theory helps assess whether accreditation genuinely improves ethical behaviour and professional standards or simply symbolizes them.

Symbolic Interactionism illuminates how practitioners construct meaning around accreditation based on social interactions, cultural context, and industry expectations.

By combining behavioural, normative, and interpretive dimensions, this integrated framework strengthens the study's ability to analyse accreditation in a context where professionalisation is fluid, institutional structures are uneven, and practitioners derive legitimacy from diverse sources including experience, networks, and symbolic capital.

2.3.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) asserts that career behaviour is shaped by the interplay of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. These constructs are influenced by social environments, learning experiences, and perceived opportunities and barriers. SCCT underscores that individuals often pursue training and credentials when they believe these will improve their professional standing, enhance employment prospects, or create upward mobility. In the context of Ghanaian public relations practice, SCCT provides a useful lens to examine why some practitioners pursue accreditation while others do not. Practitioners who believe strongly in their professional capabilities may view accreditation as a means of affirming their competence. For others with lower self-efficacy, accreditation may be seen as a way to build confidence and gain external validation of their skills.

Outcome expectations also play a crucial role. If practitioners believe accreditation will lead to better job opportunities, increased visibility, or enhanced professional legitimacy, they are more likely to seek it. Yet, as Ghanaian practitioners frequently operate in environments where employers prioritise experience and networks over formal credentials, many may not expect accreditation to produce meaningful benefits, thereby reducing motivation to pursue it. Thus, even if practitioners believe accreditation could be beneficial, SCCT suggests that perceived barriers may reduce the likelihood that they engage with the process. SCCT therefore helps explain the fragmented patterns of uptake in Ghana: accreditation is pursued not merely because it exists, but because practitioners have differing beliefs about its usefulness, the feasibility of acquiring it, and the returns it will generate in their careers. This theoretical lens is vital to the study because it situates accreditation within broader dynamics of motivation, opportunity, and structural inequality in professional practice.

"Self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations form the basis of how individuals perceive the value of accreditation in their professional development, especially in contexts where access and motivation are structurally constrained" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

2.3.2 Professionalism and Ethics in Public Affairs (Bowen, 2016).

Professionalism and Ethics Theory, as conceptualised by Bowen (2016), argues that ethical reasoning, reflective judgment, and values-based decision-making lie at the heart of what it means to be a professional in public relations. For Bowen, professionalism is not defined merely by credentials or technical expertise; instead, it is grounded in a practitioner's ability to navigate ethical dilemmas, serve the public interest, and uphold moral responsibility.

This model is particularly relevant for Ghana, where practitioners operate in contexts marked by political influence, media manipulation pressures, resource constraints, and complex stakeholder relationships. These environments require PR professionals to make ethically charged decisions that may not have clear-cut solutions. Bowen's framework enables this study to analyse whether accreditation enhances ethical preparedness or whether practitioners rely more heavily on experiential learning and moral intuition shaped by context and culture.

This perspective also challenges one of the underlying assumptions of accreditation: that exposure to ethical codes, case studies, and professional standards through formal programmes naturally translates into ethical behaviour. Bowen (2016) argues that ethical competence is a practical skill shaped by experience rather than theoretical knowledge alone. For instance, a Ghanaian PR officer working in public sector communication may frequently face pressures to spin information, suppress data, or protect institutional image. Ethical decision-making in such circumstances requires judgment that cannot be developed solely through accreditation training. This raises an important question: Does accreditation cultivate ethical mastery, or does it merely symbolize it?

Bowen's work provides a framework for interrogating this gap. It allows the study to examine not only whether accredited practitioners claim higher ethical readiness, but whether accreditation aligns with actual ethical behaviour in Ghana's PR practice.

Ultimately, this framework helps the research distinguish between accreditation as a badge and accreditation as a genuine marker of ethical competence an especially crucial distinction in a country where the integrity of communication practice is often under scrutiny.

“Professionalism must go beyond badges and credentials. It should include the exercise of ethical judgment, contextual sensitivity, and moral responsibility” (Bowen, 2016, p. 320).

2.3.4 Symbolic Interactionist Theory (Carter & Fuller, 2015)

Symbolic Interactionism asserts that individuals act toward things based on the meanings those things hold, and that these meanings emerge from social interactions and are continually interpreted and reinterpreted (Blumer, 1969). The theory emphasises that professional symbols such as credentials, titles, membership badges, and institutional affiliations derive their significance not inherently but through negotiation within social groups.

In the context of Ghanaian PR practice, accreditation functions as a symbolic artefact. Its value is not fixed; instead, it is shaped by how practitioners, employers, educators, and professional bodies talk about it, interpret it, and embed it in their collective understanding of professionalism.

For some practitioners, accreditation symbolises prestige, expertise, and belonging to a recognised professional community. For others, it represents unnecessary gatekeeping or an administrative formality that has little bearing on day-to-day practice. Employers may regard accreditation as a sign of ambition, while clients may be indifferent to it, focusing instead on performance outputs such as media coverage, event success, or stakeholder satisfaction. Symbolic Interactionism thus allows this study to explore the diversity of meanings practitioners attribute to accreditation in Ghana. As IPR Ghana evolves its accreditation

system, practitioners continually renegotiate what the badge stands for. When the institution communicates the benefits effectively, the symbol gains strength; when the process is unclear or inaccessible, the symbol weakens.

This perspective also underscores the relational nature of professional legitimacy.

A practitioner's accreditation is meaningful only to the extent that others recognise and value it. In a fragmented industry like Ghana's, where institutional authority is unevenly distributed and informal networks play a significant role, the symbolic meaning of accreditation becomes contested and fluid.

2.4 Integrative Application of Theories.

Taken together, these three frameworks enable a comprehensive exploration of the research problem. SCCT and Bowen's ethics framework enable this study to investigate both the pragmatic value of accreditation, such as employability, prestige, skills recognition, and the normative dimensions, which include but are not limited to professional conduct, ethical readiness, and public service. Symbolic Interactionism explores what accreditation means within the social fabric of Ghanaian PR practice.

This integrative approach ensures that the study does not reduce accreditation to a mere badge of competence but critically examines its implications for individual careers, ethical practice, and the collective professional identity of PR in Ghana.

The Ghanaian setting in regard to professional practice in the field of public relations is indeterminate in indigenous conventions, with high heterogeneity of practitioners and institutional asymmetry. These situations provide a rich ground on which to explore the ways PR practitioners can create and shelter their identities, credibility, and ethical standings in an environment where accreditation is not always supported and not always enforced sevenfold. In this respect, the social-cultural-contextual theory of accreditation enables the examination of environmental characteristics (e.g., low awareness of accreditation or uneven institutional

recognition it has gained) that encourage or discourage adoption patterns to be investigated as closely as possible.

Empirically, by extension, the Bowen framework evokes the question of whether the accredited professionals who are examined show measurable better performance in terms of moral judgment in everyday practice. These various theoretical tools, together, provide a strong analytical framework through which we may question how accreditation is perceived and appreciated or ignored as part of the Ghanaian PR community in order to establish whether it reflects true knowledge or instead some superficial obedience.

2.5 Chapter Summary.

This chapter has presented a systematic, in-depth review of global and Ghana-specific literature on public relations accreditation, highlighting the major debates, themes, and empirical findings relevant to the study. The review demonstrates that accreditation remains a contested concept, valued by some as a marker of professionalism and ethical readiness, yet viewed by others as a symbolic credential with limited influence on real-world practice.

Key themes emerging include:

The persistent divide between accredited and non-accredited practitioners, reflecting differing perceptions of credibility and ethical preparedness.

The tension between experience and credentials, with evidence suggesting that practical experience often trumps formal accreditation in determining competence and legitimacy.

Varied stakeholder perceptions, where students and early-career practitioners view accreditation inspirationally, but employers may prioritise performance and networks.

Contextual differences across countries, underscoring that accreditation systems developed in Western contexts may not easily translate into developing markets like Ghana.

Curricular and ethical implications, highlighting how accreditation can shape educational standards yet risks becoming overly prescriptive.

The theoretical framework integrating SCCT, Bowen's ethics theory, and Symbolic Interactionism offers a comprehensive analytical lens through which to examine the professional, ethical, symbolic, and contextual dynamics surrounding accreditation in Ghana. Overall, the literature reveals a significant gap: while accreditation is widely studied in Western contexts, its meaning, impact, and value in Ghana remain underexplored. This study fills that gap by investigating whether accreditation truly represents mastery, competence, and ethical capacity in Ghanaian PR practice, or whether it primarily functions as symbolic capital within a fragmented and evolving professional landscape.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION.

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding the study, *Does a Badge Justify Mastery? An Inquiry into the True Value of Accreditation in Ghana's PR Circles*.

It presents the research design, population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data handling and analysis, and the mechanisms employed to ensure trustworthiness and rigour. The chapter concludes with summary of the key methodological choices.

3.1 Research Paradigm.

The study adopts the interpretivist paradigm, which is predicated on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretivism is particularly suitable for exploring phenomena that are context-specific and multifaceted in nature such as influencer marketing in Ghana, where different stakeholder groups experience the same process in diverse ways (Bryman, 2016). Unlike positivist paradigms, which seeks objective, generalizable truths, interpretivism prioritizes rich, nuanced accounts of lived realities. This paradigm allows the researcher to access and interpret the subjective viewpoints of influencers, PR practitioners, and brand representatives, thereby producing findings that are not only descriptive but also explanatory within the Ghanaian socio-digital landscape.

3.2 Research Approach.

The study employs a qualitative research approach, which is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm and the exploratory nature of the research objectives. Qualitative studies are useful

whenever the researcher is interested in establishing how participants create meanings about their realities, rather than the purpose of establishing hypotheses or gauging variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative approaches are particularly effective in examining under-researched areas and generating holistic insights into complex social phenomena (Patton, 2015). Inductive reasoning allows patterns, categories, and themes to emerge from the data, enabling the researcher to construct theory that is grounded in participants' lived realities rather than testing predetermined hypotheses.

3.3 Research Design.

The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings individuals assign to lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This makes it particularly suited for exploring how accreditation is perceived within Ghana's public relations (PR) practice. By focusing on personal narratives, the phenomenological design captures the underlying values, tensions, and interpretations practitioners attach to accreditation. This approach is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which asserts that reality is socially constructed, context-dependent, and best understood through subjective accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since accreditation in PR is not a purely technical requirement but a socially negotiated marker of professional legitimacy, an interpretivist lens is appropriate.

3.4 Population.

The population of this study encompasses key stakeholders in Ghana's PR ecosystem:

- I. Accredited PR practitioners who hold professional recognition from the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR-Ghana).
- II. Non-accredited practitioners who have significant professional experience but have not pursued accreditation.
- III. Academics and educators in PR and communication studies.

IV. Employers and industry leaders, including communication directors and hiring managers in corporate, government, and NGO contexts.

This diverse population ensures that the study captures both insider perspectives (from practitioners) and evaluative perspectives (from employers and academics).

3.5 Sample Size.

The study involves 20-25 participants, allowing sufficient depth and breadth for phenomenological inquiry while ensuring manageability. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) argue that qualitative saturation can often be achieved within this range, particularly when participants represent a diverse cross-section of the field.

3.6 Sampling Techniques.

The study employs purposive sampling to deliberately select participants with rich, relevant experiences related to accreditation. Within this, a maximum variation strategy is applied to capture differences in career stage (early, mid-career, senior), accreditation status (accredited vs. non-accredited), and sector (corporate, government, NGO, academic).

This ensures that findings reflect a wide spectrum of views rather than privileging one group's experiences. The justification lies in the research aim: to critically examine whether accreditation is a genuine measure of mastery or merely symbolic capital.

3.7 Data Collection Methods.

3.7.1 Secondary Data.

This study employs secondary data sources which include professional reports, organizational records, and academic literature on PR accreditation. For instance, PRSA's Evolution of Accreditation (2025) and academic works such as Sha (2011a, 2011b), Neill (2016), and

Penning et al. (2024) provide comparative insights. These sources contextualize the Ghanaian experience within broader global debates about the value and relevance of accreditation.

3.7.2 Primary Data.

Primary data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes. Interviews enable participants to express their perceptions freely while allowing the researcher to probe deeper into emerging issues (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The method is justified because it balances flexibility with structure, ensuring consistency across interviews while remaining responsive to participants' unique narratives.

Interviews will be conducted face-to-face where possible or virtually for accessibility. Audio recordings will be made with consent, and transcripts will be produced for detailed analysis.

3.8 Data Handling and Analysis.

The study applies a thematic analysis which is a widely used technique in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process involves six steps:

Familiarization with data: immersing in the transcripts through repeated reading.

Generating initial codes: systematically coding interesting features.

Searching for themes: collating codes into potential themes.

Reviewing themes: refining themes to ensure internal coherence and distinction.

Defining and naming themes: capturing the essence of each theme.

Producing the report: weaving findings into a narrative linked to the research questions and theoretical framework.

NVivo software may be used to enhance systematic coding and the retrieval of themes.

All transcripts and coding files will be stored securely to maintain data integrity.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical guidelines as stipulated by the Ghana Institute of Journalism and international research ethics protocols (Resnik, 2020). The study was conducted with high standards of ethics per the guidelines of the institutional review boards.

Participants were made aware of the nature and the purpose of the study, they were also requested to sign informed consent forms prior to being enrolled and emphasized that they were free at any point to withdraw without incurring any penalty.

The confidentiality was observed by utilizing anonymization and pseudonyms in reporting. Considering that the topic covered competence in the profession and practices in institutions, efforts were made to make sure that the identity and response to the issue could not be linked back to them by the employers or workmates.

3.10 Trustworthiness and Rigour.

To ensure methodological soundness, the study applies Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of trustworthiness.

Authenticity: Achieved through triangulation of data sources (accredited vs. non-accredited practitioners, academics, employers) and member checking, where participants will review summaries of their interviews for accuracy.

Confirmability: Established by practicing reflexivity. The researcher will keep a reflexive journal to acknowledge and manage personal biases, ensuring findings are grounded in participants' narratives rather than researcher preconceptions.

Transcript Checking: Ensure they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription. By embedding these mechanisms, the study maintains academic rigour and enhances confidence in its findings.

3.11 Chapter Summary.

This chapter outlined the methodological framework underpinning the study. A qualitative design within the interpretivist paradigm was adopted to explore perceptions of accreditation in Ghana's PR circles. The study population includes practitioners, academics, and employers, with a purposive and maximum variation sample of 20-25 participants. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, supported by secondary sources, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness and rigour are ensured through Authenticity, confirmability, and transcript checking. Together, these choices establish a coherent and robust methodology capable of addressing the research question of whether accreditation represents true mastery or symbolic recognition in Ghana's public relations practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

4.0 INTRODUCTION.

This chapter presents analyses of data collected from 15 participants, out of the 20 to 25 anticipated. Data saturation was assessed continuously throughout the thematic analysis.

After 15 interviews with practitioners, educators, employers, and regulators, no new codes or insights emerged. The final four participants (P11-P15) confirmed and enriched existing themes without introducing novel conceptual categories, indicating thematic and stakeholder-level saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The data adequately captured diverse voices across gender, professional rank, and sectoral affiliation, satisfying both code and meaning saturation criteria. The study aimed to explore the question: *“Does a badge justify mastery? An inquiry into the true value of accreditation in Ghana’s PR circles.”* The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis procedure, and this was identified as: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining and naming, and report production. Through an iterative process of coding and comparison, five overarching themes were identified:

- I. Perceptions of Accreditation and Professional Mastery
- II. Accreditation and Ethical Professionalism
- III. Accreditation, Employability, and Career Progression
- IV. Barriers and Inequities in the Accreditation Process
- V. Future Directions and Reform of PR Accreditation in Ghana

Each theme is discussed in relation to the participants’ experiences and supported by relevant theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and direct quotations.

4.1 Theme One: RQ1: Perceptions of Accreditation and Professional Mastery.

Most participants described accreditation as a mark of professional credibility and identity, though many questioned whether it truly reflected practical mastery. P4, a mid-career public relations officer, described accreditation as *“a formal endorsement of one’s expertise,”* yet noted that in Ghana, *“it’s mostly seen as a symbolic badge due to limited awareness and enforcement.”*

Similarly, P7, an academic, argued that *“the badge does not always equal mastery, because people who are great at their jobs sometimes fail the accreditation exams.”*

This ambivalence mirrors findings by Sha (2011a, 2011b), who found that accreditation can polarise practitioners, dividing them into accredited and non-accredited categories without necessarily reflecting competence. Neill (2016) also observed that while accreditation enhances perceptions of ethical readiness, it does not always predict performance outcomes. From a theoretical standpoint, Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) helps explain these perceptions. Mastery in PR is shaped by self-efficacy, learning experiences, and contextual reinforcements, not merely credentials. Participants such as P5 and P15 reflected this when emphasising that *“experience and confidence”* were more important indicators of skill than a certificate.

However, P9 (IPR Ghana official) insisted that accreditation is *“not just a badge”* but a mechanism to *“standardise professional conduct and competence.”* This divergence demonstrates a tension between symbolic legitimacy and substantive mastery, echoing the Symbolic Interactionist idea that social meaning is co-constructed, and in that case, accreditation gains value only through the shared beliefs of practitioners and institutions.

4.2 Theme Two: RQ2: Accreditation and Ethical Professionalism.

Across participants, there was widespread consensus that ethical communication defines professional practice in PR. However, opinions differed on whether accreditation actively reinforces ethical behaviour. P6, a senior practitioner, asserted that “*the Institute does not bite enough when members act unethically,*” suggesting weak enforcement. P7 reinforced this view, stating, “Ethics is inborn. Accreditation cannot inject ethics into you.”

Conversely, P9 and P10 (both affiliated with IPR Ghana) argued that accreditation remains a key ethical safeguard, particularly as accredited members are bound by the Institute’s code of conduct. Bowen (2016) supports this by emphasising that professionalisation mechanisms, such as accreditation, serve as moral compasses that embed ethical reasoning into decision-making.

Nevertheless, the Ghanaian context appears to dilute this ethical function. Participants observed that while lawyers or doctors are held accountable by strong regulatory councils, PR lacks comparable enforcement. This aligns with Harvey’s (2004) argument that accreditation’s moral authority depends on institutional strength.

In practice, participants emphasised personal ethics over institutional codes. P12 summarised this tension and points out that: “*Ethical practice in PR is a personal responsibility, you cannot outsource integrity to an institution.*” This view suggests a hybrid moral model, where ethical mastery stems from both personal conscience and professional accountability, but where institutional accreditation currently plays a minor role in ensuring ethical compliance.

4.3 Theme Three: RQ3: Accreditation, Employability, and Career Progression.

Participants agreed that accreditation may offer marginal advantages in employment and career advancement, particularly in corporate and international sectors. P11, a corporate HR executive, explained: “*When we advertise for PR roles, accreditation is a nice-to-have, not a*

must-have, so we say accreditation is an added advantage”. Few applicants have it, and most HR professionals don’t even know what it entails.”

This pragmatic view underscores the limited market recognition of IPR accreditation in Ghana. Still, accreditation may serve as a differentiator in competitive spaces. P7 observed that *“recently, job adverts have started requiring IPR membership,”* marking a subtle shift toward formal recognition.

Penning, Forde, and Broussard (2024) found similar trends internationally and argued that employers value formal PR credentials more when professional bodies effectively market their credibility. In Ghana, however, weak collaboration between IPR and employers limits such recognition.

From a theoretical lens, SCCT explains how environmental factors like employer recognition and social reinforcement influence professional motivation. When employers undervalue accreditation, practitioners perceive less incentive to pursue it. Yet, when framed as part of a growth journey, accreditation enhances self-efficacy and career intentionality (Lent et al., 1994). Thus, while accreditation theoretically contributes to professional identity and employability, its practical relevance in Ghana remains inconsistent and context-dependent.

4.4 Theme Four: Barriers and Inequities in the Accreditation Process.

A dominant theme across interviews was the existence of systemic and structural barriers to accessing accreditation. These include cost, geographic centralisation, limited awareness, and a one-size-fits-all structure. P14 noted that *“many people register for the student chapter of accreditation because the advanced ones are expensive,”* while P12 observed that *“most communication officers in NGOs outside Accra rarely receive information about IPR programmes.”* These testimonies indicate economic and geographic inequities within the system, limiting inclusivity.

Similarly, P7 critiqued the process as “*a one-size-fits-all approach*” that alienates capable practitioners who fail the written exams or are perhaps not financially sound to renew their accreditation despite practical competence. This criticism echoes Rosso and Haught (2020), who argue that accreditation frameworks often privilege academic performance over applied skills. Institutional participants (P9 and P10) acknowledged these weaknesses, with P9 confirming that “*only a fraction of active PR practitioners is accredited, mostly in Accra.*” Both suggested reforms, including tiered accreditation and decentralised capacity-building programmes.

From a theoretical standpoint, these inequities undermine professional socialisation, the process by which practitioners internalise occupational norms (Bowen, 2016). They also limit the social cognitive learning opportunities that foster career development (Lent et al., 1994).

Overall, participants called for a more context-sensitive, inclusive, and practice-oriented accreditation model that recognises diverse PR pathways, from corporate communication to advocacy and media relations.

4.5 Theme Five: Future Directions and Reform of PR Accreditation in Ghana.

All participants agreed that accreditation remains potentially transformative if restructured to reflect Ghana’s evolving communication environment. The future of accreditation, as P6 argued, “*depends on how the IPR rebrands and makes itself relevant to employers.*”

P9 confirmed ongoing reforms such as tiered accreditation, academic integration, and industry partnerships. Academics like P13 advocated embedding accreditation readiness into PR curricula to close the education-practice gap, while practitioners like P12 and P15 recommended continuous professional development (CPD) models instead of one-off exams. Symbolically, accreditation can elevate the status of PR to that of law or medicine professions, where certification signifies both competence and ethical authority.

However, for this to happen, IPR must enhance institutional visibility and regulatory clout. In theoretical terms, this shift aligns with Symbolic Interactionism, which holds that professional identity and legitimacy are socially constructed (Blumer, 1970). Accreditation gains meaning when practitioners, educators, and employers collectively affirm it as a shared professional standard. Participants envisioned a future of inclusivity, accountability, and relevance, where accreditation is both symbolic and substantive, a “*living badge*” reflecting continuous mastery rather than mere credentialism.

4.6 Theoretical Integration.

Three frameworks collectively illuminate the findings:

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994) explains how learning experiences, self-efficacy, and environmental support influence professional development. Accreditation enhances confidence but is constrained by institutional and contextual factors.

Professionalism and Ethics in Public Affairs (Bowen, 2016) provides a moral lens, showing that ethical conduct in PR depends on internalised values reinforced by credible professional systems. Ghana’s weak regulatory mechanisms diminish accreditation’s ethical influence.

Symbolic Interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015) explains how accreditation’s meaning is co-constructed through social validation. In Ghana, where societal recognition is uneven, accreditation’s symbolic power outweighs its practical significance, making it more a badge of aspiration than of mastery.

These frameworks jointly position accreditation as both a social construct and a developmental tool, valued more for its symbolism than for its demonstrated outcomes, yet holding transformative potential if reformed.

4.7 Chapter Summary.

This chapter analysed qualitative data from 12 participants on the perceived value, ethics, accessibility, and future of PR accreditation in Ghana. Findings reveal that accreditation carries symbolic prestige but limited practical influence on competence and employability. Ethical professionalism remains driven by personal integrity rather than institutional regulation. Barriers such as cost, awareness, and centralisation hinder inclusivity, while emerging reforms suggest a future of progressive professionalisation. The chapter concludes that accreditation in Ghana's PR sector currently represents an aspirational badge, a necessary but insufficient indicator of mastery. True professionalisation will depend on the integration of accreditation with academic preparation, continuous learning, ethical enforcement, and employer recognition.

CHAPTER FIVE.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.0 INTRODUCTION.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study titled “*Does a badge justify mastery? An inquiry into the true value of accreditation in Ghana’s PR circles.*”

Drawing from data presented in Chapter Four, the discussion interprets the results in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, specifically Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), Professionalism and Ethics in Public Affairs (Bowen, 2016), and Symbolic Interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015)

The chapter is organised into three sections. The first interprets key findings in relation to prior studies and theory, the second draws conclusions directly tied to the research objectives and questions, and the third presents practical recommendations for the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana, academia, practitioners, and policymakers.

5.1 Discussion of Findings.

5.1.1 Ghanaian PR Practitioners’ Perceptions of Professional Accreditation.

The first research objective explored how practitioners and stakeholders perceive accreditation and whether they consider it a reliable indicator of professional mastery.

The findings revealed a dual perception of accreditation among Ghanaian PR practitioners. This reflects the dilemma between symbolic legitimacy versus practical mastery. Participants consistently described accreditation as a badge of professional recognition but not necessarily an indicator of competence. P4 and P7 noted that accreditation provides “*credibility*” and “*validation*” but questioned its connection to actual skill.

This finding aligns with Sha's (2011a) concept of practitioner "*polarisation*," where accreditation creates a visible status divide without ensuring professional capability. Similarly, Neill (2016) observed that accreditation enhances perceived ethical readiness rather than demonstrable performance.

In Ghana, this symbolic-substantive divide reflects a professional field still struggling for institutional legitimacy.

From a Symbolic Interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969), accreditation in Ghana's PR industry is a socially constructed symbol, its meaning negotiated among practitioners, employers, and educators. The data confirm that accreditation's perceived prestige outweighs its measurable contribution to skill development.

However, Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) reframes this outcome as a function of environmental reinforcement. Because employers and institutions seldom reward accreditation materially, practitioners perceive little incentive to pursue it. This contextual lack of reinforcement diminishes the self-efficacy benefits typically associated with credential attainment. Thus, while accreditation symbolises aspiration and professionalism, its failure to translate into practical advantage limits its motivational and developmental value within Ghana's PR community.

5.1.2 The Perceived impact of accreditation on ethical practice and professional recognition.

Participants expressed mixed views on accreditation's ethical significance. Some viewed it as an essential regulatory mechanism (P12, P15), while others, such as P6 and P8, argued that ethics is inherently personal and cannot be institutionalised. These findings resonate with Bowen's (2016) assertion that professionalism and ethics are mutually reinforcing but only effective when supported by credible institutional frameworks.

In Ghana, however, institutional enforcement remains weak. Participants cited the IPR's limited disciplinary visibility and inconsistent ethical monitoring. P12 remarked that, "*ethical practice in PR is a personal responsibility, you cannot outsource integrity to an institution.*"

This indicates that ethical internalisation, rather than formal accreditation, currently governs professional conduct.

Yet, participants also acknowledged that accreditation could strengthen collective ethical accountability if implemented effectively. The finding aligns with Harvey's (2004) argument that accreditation gains moral power when linked to strong organisational authority and peer enforcement. In Ghana's case, the lack of regulatory teeth diminishes accreditation's ethical influence, reducing it to symbolic compliance.

Overall, the study suggests that Ghanaian PR practitioners operate under a hybrid moral framework where personal virtue drives behaviour in the absence of robust institutional oversight. Accreditation's potential as a moral regulator remains underdeveloped.

5.1.3. Career implications of holding or lacking PR credentials among practitioners in Ghana.

Findings showed that accreditation plays only a peripheral role in employability and career advancement in Ghana's PR sector. P11, the HR executive, stated that accreditation is "*a nice-to-have, not a must-have,*" revealing limited integration between professional certification and hiring standards. This finding corroborates Penning, Forde, and Broussard (2024), who reported that global accreditation only influences employment outcomes where professional bodies actively partner with employers.

Employers in Ghana prioritise academic credentials and demonstrable performance over accreditation. This aligns with Sha's (2011b) findings that age, experience, and education often outweigh accreditation in predicting career success.

From the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory, this dynamic illustrates the influence of environmental determinants namely employer attitudes and systemic recognition on professional motivation (Lent et al., 1994). Without external reinforcement, accreditation does not produce the desired behavioural outcomes, such as sustained learning or ethical engagement. Nonetheless, accreditation can still serve as a differentiator in corporate and multinational sectors. P7 observed that some recent job adverts now require IPR membership, suggesting gradual institutional recognition. This shift reflects an evolving awareness that could, with sustained advocacy, reposition accreditation as a credible employment signal.

5.1.4 Barriers and Inequities in the Accreditation Process.

Participants identified significant economic, geographic, and procedural barriers limiting accreditation's inclusivity. Cost and centralisation were the most frequently cited issues.

P5 and P12 mentioned that accreditation "*favours practitioners in urban centres,*" while P9 confirmed that "*only a fraction of active PR professionals is accredited, mostly in Accra.*" Such disparities reveal a structural elitism that restricts participation by early-career and regional practitioners. Rosso and Haight (2020) found similar challenges in public relations education, where standardised accreditation models privilege formal academics over practical competence.

Additionally, P7 criticised the "*one-size-fits-all*" nature of IPR's current assessment framework, which relies heavily on written exams. This format disadvantages practitioners with strong experiential but weaker academic backgrounds. The insight aligns with Harvey (2004), who cautioned that accreditation processes must adapt to diverse professional pathways or risk perpetuating inequity.

The findings therefore underscore the need for contextualised, inclusive accreditation reform that accounts for Ghana's socioeconomic diversity and varying career stages.

5.1.5 Future Directions and Reform.

Despite current challenges, all participants expressed optimism about accreditation's future. Institutional representatives (P9, P10) highlighted ongoing reforms, including tiered membership structures, stronger academia - industry collaboration, and continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives.

Participants emphasised that the future of accreditation depends on rebranding, accessibility, and continuous learning. P12 stressed that *“accreditation must evolve into a holistic system that recognises competence demonstrated through practice, not just exams.”* This sentiment aligns with Penning et al. (2024), who advocate for flexible, outcome-based accreditation models globally.

Moreover, from a Symbolic Interactionist view, these reforms could redefine the shared meaning of accreditation from symbolic prestige to collective validation of skill and ethics. Such transformation requires multi-stakeholder collaboration among IPR, academia, government, and employers.

5.2 Conclusions.

Based on the findings and theoretical interpretation, several conclusions emerge:

Accreditation in Ghana's PR industry currently functions more as a symbolic badge than a practical indicator of mastery. Its legitimacy is rooted in perception rather than performance, consistent with symbolic interactionist theory.

Ethical professionalism is driven primarily by individual conscience rather than institutional enforcement. Accreditation has limited capacity to instil ethics without robust regulatory backing and peer accountability.

Employers in Ghana value academic qualifications and practical experience over accreditation. Until the Institute strengthens its partnership with the corporate sector, accreditation will remain marginal in recruitment and promotion.

Structural and economic barriers constrain access to accreditation. Centralisation, high costs, and rigid assessment models exclude many qualified practitioners, perpetuating professional inequality.

There is a strong appetite for reform and modernisation. Practitioners and educators alike envision an accreditation framework grounded in inclusivity, continuous learning, and applied competence integrated with educational curricula and employer expectations.

Theoretically, professional mastery in PR is shaped by social cognitive and symbolic factors. Mastery is not achieved through credentials alone but through experience, self-efficacy, ethics, and societal recognition.

5.3 Recommendations.

5.3.1 For the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana.

Reform accreditation processes to include multiple assessment modes, practical portfolios, oral defences, and experiential reflections to complement written exams.

Decentralise accreditation by establishing regional IPR hubs to make training and testing more accessible.

Implement a tiered accreditation system (Associate, Professional, Chartered) to reflect varying experience levels and encourage lifelong development.

Strengthen employer engagement by collaborating with the Ghana Employers.

Association and HR professional bodies to align accreditation standards with corporate expectations.

Enhance ethical oversight through regular monitoring, public accountability reports, and transparent disciplinary frameworks.

5.3.2 For Academia.

Integrate Accreditation Readiness Modules into undergraduate PR curricula to familiarise students with IPR standards and ethics.

Foster joint mentorship programmes between educators and IPR professionals to bridge the theory-practice gap.

Conduct further applied research on accreditation's role in professional development and communication ethics in Ghana.

5.3.3 For Practitioners.

Pursue accreditation as part of continuous professional growth, not merely as an achievement.

Embrace ethical leadership and mentorship, modelling best practice for emerging professionals.

Participate in peer networks and CPD initiatives to maintain relevance in an evolving media and communication environment.

5.3.4 For Employers and Policymakers.

Recognise accreditation as a benchmark for ethical and professional competence when recruiting communication staff.

Partner with IPR to create industry-accredited professional standards akin to accounting or law.

Provide incentives such as promotion eligibility or CPD sponsorship for accredited professionals.

5.4 Implications for Theory and Future Research.

This study contributes to PR scholarship in Ghana by integrating Social Cognitive Career Theory and Symbolic Interactionism into an understanding of professional accreditation. It demonstrates that mastery is constructed at the intersection of individual learning, institutional validation, and societal perception.

Future research should:

Conduct longitudinal studies to examine how accreditation influences career trajectories over time.

Explore cross-cultural comparisons between Ghana and other African contexts to understand regional variations in professionalisation.

Investigate employer perceptions quantitatively to assess how accreditation affects hiring and compensation patterns.

5.5 Chapter Summary.

This chapter has discussed and interpreted the findings on the value of PR accreditation in Ghana. It concluded that accreditation remains largely symbolic but evolving, constrained by institutional weaknesses yet capable of transformation through inclusivity and integration. The recommendations provided offer a roadmap for strengthening accreditation's ethical, educational, and professional functions.

Ultimately, the study affirms that while a badge may not yet justify mastery, it can evolve into a credible measure of professional excellence when supported by ethics, inclusivity, and collaborative reform.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The purpose of this research is to explore the true value of accreditation in Ghana's public relations practice, and whether accreditation reflects professional mastery or functions more as a symbolic recognition. Your experiences and views are very important in helping us understand this issue.

I would like to reassure you that your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question as well as withdraw from the interview at any point without penalty. Everything you share will remain confidential, and your name or identifying information will not appear in the report. With your permission, I will record the interview to ensure accuracy, but the recording will be stored securely and only used for academic purposes.

The interview should take about 45- 60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin, and do I have your consent to proceed with recording?

Interview Guide

Section A: Introductory Questions

Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your professional background in public relations?

How long have you been practicing PR, and in what types of organizations or sectors?

Are you accredited, or not accredited, with any professional PR body (e.g., IPR Ghana)?

Section B: Perceptions of Accreditation

What does PR accreditation mean to you personally and professionally?

How do you perceive the role of accreditation in shaping the identity and credibility of PR practitioners in Ghana?

Do you think accreditation reflects true professional mastery in PR, or is it more of a symbolic badge? Please elaborate.

In your experience, how do accredited and non-accredited practitioners differ in terms of opportunities, recognition, or treatment in the industry?

Section C: Professional Mastery and Career Development

Beyond accreditation, what factors do you believe demonstrate mastery in PR practice (e.g., experience, ethics, academic training, networks)

How does accreditation (or the lack of it) affect your career growth, self-confidence, and ability to perform your role effectively?

Do employers or clients in Ghana value accreditation when making decisions about hiring or promotions?

Section D: Ethics and Professional Standards

Some argue that accreditation enhances readiness to provide ethical counsel. From your perspective, how true is this in Ghana's PR practice?

Can you share an instance where accreditation (or lack of it) influenced how ethical issues were handled in your organization or by peers?

Section E: Challenges and Barriers

What are some of the challenges or barriers you see with the accreditation process in Ghana?

Are there structural, financial, or awareness-related issues that discourage practitioners from seeking accreditation?

Do you feel accreditation is accessible to all practitioners equally, or does it privilege certain groups?

Section F: Future of Accreditation in Ghana's PR Practice

In your opinion, what is the future of PR accreditation in Ghana?

Do you think accreditation should be made compulsory, optional, or redesigned to better reflect professional realities?

What changes would make accreditation more meaningful for practitioners, employers, and the public?

Section G: Closing Questions

Looking back at your career, do you feel accreditation (or its absence) has been decisive in defining your success or credibility?

Is there anything else you would like to add about the role and value of accreditation in Ghana's PR circles?

Thank You.

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE: DOES A BADGE JUSTIFY MASTERY?

AN INQUIRY INTO THE TRUE VALUE OF ACCREDITATION IN GHANA'S PR CIRCLES.

RESEARCHER: PAUL LOUIS BEMPONG

Thank you for your decision to participate in this project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from GIJ require that the participant agrees to be interviewed before the research can continue. The form is essential to ensure that you fully understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

Kindly read the information below sign to certify your approval. Thank you.

I agree to participate in research conducted by Mr. Paul Louis Bempong, a postgraduate student of University of Media, Arts and Communication -GIJ. I understand that the research is aimed at gathering data on the lived experiences of Public Relation Practitioners regarding PR Accreditation.

The purpose of my participation is that this research has been clearly explained to me

The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

I agree to allow the researcher to take notes as well as audio tape for this interview for academic purposes only.

I understand that the researcher will not identify me or my organisation in any report and that my confidentiality is very much secure.

I understand the interview is one of 25 interviews with different PR Practitioners, Employers and Academia. (both accredited and non-accredited)

The interview will not require me to expose any confidential issue so neither I nor any close relations would be at risk.

I understand that the participants will be identified by codes instead of names in the report.

I understand that this research project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, GIJ.

I understand that the interview transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the research.

I have read and understood the points and statements on this form and all my questions have been answered. I therefore voluntarily agree to allow myself to be interviewed by the researcher.

Participants signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date