

UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UNIMAC)

**SYNERGY IN STRATEGY: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF PR IN ENHANCING IMC
FOR BRAND PERFORMANCE**

BY

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MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT**

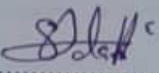
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DECLARATION

DECLARATION

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I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

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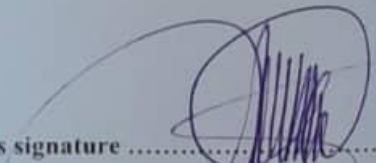
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Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the project work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of project work laid down by the University of Media Arts and Communication (UNIMAC).

Supervisor's signature 

Date 11/11/25

Supervisor's Name: Dr. George Asamoah

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my two wonderful sons, Kweku Nhyira Omane and Nyamekye Amartei Omane, whose endless love and constant encouragement have been my greatest strength and motivation. I am also deeply grateful for the unwavering love and support of my husband, Daniel Omane, who has stood by me every step of the way. Thank you for holding the family together.

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative research explores the strategic collaboration of Public Relations (PR) within Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in the urban context of Ghana in this digital age characterized by resource scarcity and fragmentation in brand communication. Based on the lived experience of twenty-five communication professionals working in SME, nonprofits, and other similar organizations in Accra, the research study examines the contribution of PR in improving the level of IMC effectiveness, message coherence, stakeholder interaction, and excellent brand success.

Using Braun and Clarke (2006) framework, which relies on the interpretivist paradigm and multi-case study design, semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed. The key findings revealed PR as a critical integrator that connects organisational silos, uses cost-effective earned media and the digital space as a real-time communicator, and shapes the culture by cultivating the community and using CSR storytelling. PR mitigate such issues as inconsistency in messages and reputational risks and contributes to building trust by establishing a two-way symmetrical communication, which is in line with the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010) and Excellence Theory (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Emergent insight outlines the adaptive nature of PR in limited resource contexts, particularly as a source of synergy and as a cultural interpreter, beyond the Western-focused context.

Theoretically, the research addresses some gaps in the qualitative, contextual, and methodological IMC literature by giving precedence to relational dynamics rather than tactical tools. Its practical implications to the Ghanaian organisations are: anchor PR early in the IMC planning process, invest in digital crisis response, and lay emphasis on the community-centered stories to help increase impact with a small budget. Despite limitations in geographic scope and sample size, the

findings underscore PR's transformative potential in elevating brand loyalty, reputation, and performance

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Meaning
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
GI-KACE	Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT
HR	Human Resource
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communication
IT	Information Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PR	Public Relations
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SM	Social Media
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a strategic approach that coordinates various marketing communication tools to deliver a consistent brand message, thereby enhancing brand performance. IMC, over the years has emerged as a pillar of strategic marketing which has helped organizations to present a uniform message across different platforms and continues to play a major role in organization in Africa who are discovering IMC. Public Relations (PR) is a central element in building mutual understanding between organizations and stakeholders, thus increasing the consistency and scope of marketing campaigns (Rehman, Gulzar, & Aslam, 2022). PR is as important as brand development as far as reputations are concerned. In today's world, where everything is connected, one mistake or bad event may quickly turn into a big problem for a brand's reputation. PR is a significant support as it provides strategic guidelines, effective communication, and means of addressing issues that may minimize their impacts. When it comes to product recalls, corporate issues, natural disasters, or other surprise emergencies, good PR could be used to establish credibility, increase confidence, and safeguard long term brand equity.

With increasing fragmentation of the marketing environment in the wake of digital channels and a greater need to ensure message consistency and enhance brands reputation, as well as to establish trust among stakeholders, the aspect of PR integration into IMC tools has become a pivoting aspect (Herur, 2022). Although its role is acknowledged, the extent of the role of PR in IMC effectiveness may not have been studied into detail, particularly in qualitative research studies where the views of the stakeholders are crucial (Herur, 2022).

The growing competition in brand communication by companies requires a synergy approach that can use the distinct advantages of PR, credibility, media relations, and stakeholder engagement, to enhance IMC results. Such synergy is especially relevant in emerging markets where limited resources require communication strategies that are as effective as possible. Since organizations are keen on improving brand performance by using consistent communication strategies, it is essential to know how PR complements, and supplements other IMC tools, including advertising, direct marketing, and digital content (Setegn & Japee, 2025).

As the Ghanaian consumer is getting more media-literate and socially responsible, consistent PR practices can become a key element in improving the overall brand performance. Consequently, the research will help evaluate the contributions of Public Relations to brand performance in IMC contexts in Ghana, to present localised knowledge, which can be used to inform strategic brand communication approaches to companies that are engaged in doing businesses in this peculiar market.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In a period where brand recognition coupled with potential visibility and collaborator confidence are progressively moulded by conversations more than speeches, institutions are moving towards Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) outline to guarantee stability and clarity over all systematic mediums. Nonetheless, during advertising, outright sales and electronic engagements mostly get the central awareness, the thorough blending of Public Relations especially its part in determining brand conception, confidence and enduring allegiance continues to be less explored or inadequately quantified within most IMC approaches.

Gap in the Issues/Evidence: The quantitative models have already addressed the promotional tools (i.e., advertising, sales promotion), but they tend to overlook or underrate the strategic use of PR, as far as the outcomes of IMC are concerned (Setegn & Japee, 2025). Such supervision creates a limited understanding of the IMC dynamics. According to the reviewed documents, the majority of the current researches focus on the promotional aspects of PR, including advertising and digital media and provide insufficient empirical data on the integrative nature of PR in IMC (Herur, 2022; Niemann et al., 2003)

Methodological Gap: Many existing studies on the tools in IMC have focused on quantitative analysis on the diffusion of quantitative designs (e.g., regression, SEM). In the IMC literature this does not allow researchers to retrieve the perception-based qualitative insights on PR and particularly an organizational context, the strategic importance for the “unity of effort” of the greater well-being of the efforts from the PR department. (Rehman et al., 2022).

Contextual Gap: The majority of the available literature is based on Western or large-scale corporate environments, and the gap exists in the comprehension of the PR-IMC synergy in emerging economies and among small and medium-sized enterprises and nonprofit organizations (Herur, 2022).

Theoretical Gap: The usefulness of PR in IMC have been widely agreed upon, it is evident that little theory has been employed to explain how and why PR can help in improving the efficiency of IMC. Most research regard PR as a tactical measure, such as a media outreach or an event promotion, but not as a strategic role, which creates stakeholder relationships and messages alignment (Herur, 2022; Niemann et al., 2003). As an example, the stakeholder theory prioritizes the aspect of managing relationships with all the groups that are affected by an organization,

whereas there are still not many IMC studies that use this theory to explain the capacity of PR to align communication with the interests and input of stakeholders (Rehman et al., 2022).

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the role of public relations in making integrated marketing communication strategies effective.
2. To learn more about the perception of PR professionals on the synergy between PR and other IMC tools.
3. To determine how PR improves brand performance in an IMC.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How can public relations help in the effective execution of IMC strategies?
2. What is the perception of the PR professionals about the role that PR plays in message coherence and stakeholder engagement?
3. What are the particular roles that PR plays in the realization of better brand performance in integrated campaigns?

1.5 Significance of the study

The research has theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature by addressing under-researched dimensions of PR's integration within IMC, offering a relational perspective to the traditionally tactical understanding of communication tools. In practice, the results will inform PR professionals, marketing professionals and brand managers on how to develop coherent and synergistic campaigns with PR at the centre stage. Furthermore, the study offers information that can be used in brands in developing countries where efficiency is

paramount and PR can add value to the marketing results at a reasonable cost (Rehman et al., 2022; Herur, 2022).

1.6 Scope/Delimitation of the Study

The study researches on the strategic importance of Public Relations (PR) in the effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) to improve the performance of brands. The study is based on specific contributions of PR to in enhancing synergy in an IMC model in terms of stakeholder relations, media relations and reputation management.

The research methodology is qualitative, which is based on interviews of the communication professionals such as PR practitioners, and marketing executives. It is focused on selected professionals in Ghana in some private sectors, especially on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and nonprofit organizations to draw some insight. The study will dwell in on urban centre, that is, Accra. This will limit the ability to generalize findings statistically across populations. However, it allows for deep, context-rich insights into the dynamics of PR-IMC integration.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter delves into introducing the research study by providing a contextual background into the role Public Relations plays in enhancing brand performance with regards to Integrated Marketing Communications and highlighting how IMC has emerged as a pillar of strategic marketing and helped organizations to present a uniform message across different platforms and continues to play a major role in organization in Africa. The research outlined limited scholarly qualitative research on the role PR plays in enhancing brand performance in terms of IMC and makes room for exploratory inquiry into best practices to bridge the gap. The chapter again delved into the pertinent issue of aim, definite objectives and the research questions aligning with the study and clearly emphasised its relevance for both academic, non-academic as well as even

professional engagements. Finally, the scope of the research seeks to explore the practice of PR professionals having deep, context-rich insights into the dynamics of PR as an IMC tool.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

The Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a strategic, joint, and customer-oriented system of the coordination of all corporate or brand informational resources, with the purpose to convey a unified, responsible, and persuasive story to the stakeholders via multiple channels, which will create synergy and positively affect brand performance (Rehman et al., 2022). Instead of positioning advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, digital marketing, and personal selling as separate silos, IMC purposely aligns and coordinates these tools to communicate with one voice, that is, to ensure that all touchpoints work together to support the same central brand promise (Cornelissen, 2020). This single strategy developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the markets were more fragmented, the number of media choices increased, and consumers became more sophisticated and critical towards the old one-way advertising (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2014).

IMC has evolved over the years and this can be traced through the four phases that were proposed by Schultz and Kitchen (2000). The first phase was tactical coordination, which was more concerned with creating a visual and stylistical consistency in adverts and promotional content. The second phase saw another redefinition of scope of marketing communication whereby integration was expanded to incorporate an inside-out (employee) and outside-in (customer database) view. The third phase focused on the use of information technology, the use of consumer information and CRM to communicate custom messages. The fourth and the most developed level is financial and strategic integration, where IMC is a business process consistent with the organisational strategy and monitored by the return-on-customer-investment performance

measurement (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023). Modern practice, most organisations can be found in between the second and third phase, and Ghana and other organisations in emerging markets are following the same route with the increased use of digital tools enhancing the process (Anabila, 2019).

IMC is foundationally built on a number of core principles. Message consistency means that the story about the brand is the same no matter whether the consumer hears it on the TV commercial, reads it in a social media post, press release, or a community event (Rehman et al., 2022). This is called synergy, when the response of integrated tools exceed the aggregate effects of the respective responses. An example is a PR-led earned media story supporting a paid advertising program (Luxton et al., 2015). Stakeholder centricity changes the perspective of targeting mere customers to managing relations with all the publics that interact or are influenced by the organisation which is in line with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010). Lastly, measurability and accountability require that IMC programmes move beyond the reach and frequency paradigm to behavioural outcomes which includes brand equity, customer lifetime value, and share of wallet (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023).

The strategic implementation of IMC normally follows in a systematic manner. The first stage of organisations is the consumer insight and research that helps them understand their audience needs, the habits and perceptions. This is then followed with the establishment of common goals that cut across departments' goals that are specific, measurable, and linked with both marketing and corporate objectives (Cornelissen, 2020). This is then followed by the creation of a centralised brand message platform, which is conveyed using key messages and tone of voice and visual identity guidelines that all the communication disciplines would adhere to. The channel planning and integration entails the mapping of customer journeys and determining the tools to be activated

at each of the touchpoints to achieve the greatest reinforcement (Kushwaha et al., 2020). Finally, an evaluation and control mechanisms for optimization is used to provide feedback, including brand-tracking research to digital analytics and econometric modelling (Luxton et al., 2015).

The IMC presupposes some special importance in resource-limited environments, like Ghanaian SMEs and non-profits. According to Anabila (2019), microfinance institutions in Ghana that embraced IMC practices achieved much better brand equity and business performance than the non-integrators in the study, where brand equity was a complete mediator. Smaller players can compete with larger brands because the cost-effectiveness of the earned (PR) and shared (social) media blended with the moderate budgets spent on paid and owned can be relatively low (Kovanoviene et al., 2021). Also, in societies with a high level of cultural diversity and strong sense of community, the importance of constant and genuine storytelling that IMC has promoted resonate deeply and brands can now be integrated into local narratives and no longer be imposed with foreign ones (Rehman et al., 2022).

The emergence of digital and social media has radically changed IMC as a one-way and controlled process into an interactive and participatory conversation (Harizi and Trebicka, 2023). Instagram, Tik Tok, and Whatsapp business have blurred the boundaries between paid, owned, and earned media in ways that create new integration issues and opportunities. The need to involve digital marketers in PR working hand-in-glove to ensure the consistency of the message in an environment where consumers can (and do) amplify or contradict brand narratives in real-time has surfaced with user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and real-time crisis responses (Rehman et al., 2022). This technological development has enhanced the strategic position of PR making it a protector of the authentic and a main channel of two-way symmetrical communication, which is a pillar of Excellence Theory (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The implementation of IMC is a challenge despite its theoretical beauty. The most typical obstacles are organisational silos, irregular budgets, different departmental KPIs and the lack of willingness to work cross-functionally (Mortimer and Laurie, 2017). Within most organisations of Ghana, IMC planning is still led by marketing departments, mostly pushing PR into the tactical implementation as opposed to strategic partnership (Herur, 2022). To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to have a powerful commitment to leadership, cross-functional, shared dashboards, and, most importantly, making PR a cross-boundary mechanism that can align cultures inside the organization with the external message (Cornelissen, 2020).

To sum up, IMC is not merely a tactical coordination exercise, but a strategic management philosophy that looks at communication as an investment in relationships with stakeholders, as well as the equity in long-term brand relationships. In Ghana, where resources are limited, competition is intense, and cultural relevance is non-negotiable, successful IMC, where PR becomes the key integrative component, can provide organisations with a potent and cost-efficient way to sustainable brand performance (Anabila, 2019).



Figure 1: Integrated Marketing Communications

2.2.1 PR and IMC

In this era businesses must navigate an increasingly complex system of communication channels to reach and engage their audiences effectively. A successful marketing strategy requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates various significant elements, such as advertising, digital marketing, content marketing, and public relations (PR). Of all of these, PR plays a crucial role in shaping how the brand is perceived, build credibility, and create meaningful connections with the target audiences. Public Relations is one of the key component of integrated marketing communications and aligning PR with the other marketing efforts, brands can create cohesive, compelling campaigns that will amplify their message and drive results.

One of the primary roles of PR in an integrated marketing communications is to establish and reinforce credibility. In contrast to paid advertising, PR is based on earned media coverage. Consumers tend to trust the third-party endorsements more than branded advertising from the company and this makes PR an essential tool for building authenticity (Anabila, 2019). Through activities such as press releases, media outreach, and influencer collaborations, the organisation's brand is able to reach a wider audience beyond traditional advertising efforts. PR creates organic visibility that complements other marketing channels by securing media coverage in high-traffic platforms.

Empirical studies have begun to explore PR's mediating role within IMC. An example of such evidence is that from (Saetegn and Japee, 2025), a high level of performance in terms of personal selling and advertising was witnessed in the tourism industry through the use of PR and this leads to the same conclusion that PR is a connecting factor to promotional instruments as far as performance is concerned. Nevertheless, in that research, they concentrated on a particular setting (tourism in Ethiopia) and their work is largely dependent on quantitative structural modelling. This

creates methodological gap, which is a qualitative investigation into how communication professionals grasp and experience this synergy in practice.

(Herur, 2022) points out that the implementation of IMC is usually hampered by silos within an organisation, unclear communication channels, and the absence of a unifying plan. Such barriers increase the importance of the potential of PR as an integrating force. However, very little has been done in the literature on how this may be the case as viewed by the PR practitioners and strategic communication managers. Furthermore, although (Rehman et al., 2022) underscore the shift in the nature of IMC through social media and customer-generated content, they do not delve into how PR as a relationship-oriented activity is changing within this landscape.

PR involves filling in the shoes for multiple roles to build, maintain and manage the reputation of your clients. The role of PR is to shape an organisation's image in front of the public. Much of the work of PR is behind the scenes: advising, researching, counseling, strategizing, and planning. IMC, on the other hand, looks at how communication tools can be utilized by organizations to coordinate their marketing efforts across multiple communication channels (Herur, 2022).

In the modern globalized world, one wrong move or a bad event can blow out of proportion and therefore be very dangerous to the brand reputation. PR offers a lifeline service to it, offers strategic advice, open communications and management strategies over issues that may counteract the effects of an issue. It might be a product recall, a corporate problem, a natural disaster or any other unexpected situation, but with the help of proper PR strategy, trust is strengthened, confidence is established and brand equity is sustained (Rehman et al., 2022).

In as much as IMC may be packaged in marketing or in media plans and strategy, not many studies conceptualize it in terms of relationship or stakeholders' perspective. This highlight the need for

theoretical approaches that considers two-way communication, trust building and the maintenance of long-term relationship.

The study will contribute to the field by exploring the role of PR in enhancing other IMC tools in terms of lived experiences and insights of PR and marketing professionals. It will also help fill a valuable contextual gap by focusing on how this convergence is being applied in the developing markets and resource constraints environment or context, where PR strategic application could produce major efficiencies of communication resources.

2.2.2 The Digital Media in IMC

IMC is continually going through some revolution. With the introduction of digital media and social media marketing, various digital platforms have now become part and parcel of reaching out to consumers and prospective clients to create brand equity. A systematic review by Harizi and Trebicka (2023) of the use of social media in IMC suggests a theoretical framework to emphasize its contribution to the provision of uniform, consistent and interactive brand messages. Kushwaha et al. (2020) also discussed the role of social media and digital media in increasing brand equity by making direct contact with consumers and increasing the reach of the message. Rehman et al. (2022) stress that social media has transformed IMC on a big scale as it allows establishing real-time two-way communication, which PR uses to create trust and control brand reputation.

Newell and Wilgenbusch (2023) highlight the role of brand storytelling in the digital media environment, stating that a well developed PR-based stories trigger emotional responses in the audiences, making IMC more effective. To illustrate, in Ghana, a country where the level of digital penetration is rising, the social media platforms provide affordable opportunities to implement PR in IMC strategies by SMEs and nonprofits (Anabila, 2019). The literature, however, contains some very small to almost none qualitative account on how the PR professionals negotiate the digital

media in order to synchronize the IMC activities with the expectations of the stakeholders especially in the emerging markets.

Digital media also presents such issues as the control of user-generated content and message alignment over the fragmented mediums (Rehman et al., 2022). PR reputation management and stakeholder engagement capabilities are essential in solving those issues, however, minimal research is done on how PR professionals adjust to the digital changes in the context of IMC (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023). The study will be useful in that it will explore how PR professionals are equally leveraging on the social media positively and how it can be used to overcome digital media issues within the Ghanaian context.

2.2.3 Experiential and Consumer Value Perspectives

Experiential approach is becoming more crucial in the contemporary marketing communications especially in the establishment of meaningful interactions that appeal both emotionally and cognitively to the consumers. This is not the typical promotional strategy, it is a new way of thinking about how to use the integrated tools, such as public relations, to develop immersive memorable experiences among the target audiences (Saetegn and Japee, 2025). PR is critical in influencing these experiences through creation of genuine narratives and messages that resonate with values and expectations of consumers. PR creates emotional connections with the brands through well crafted storytelling, which in turn supports the loyalty and long-term commitment.

A strong example of experiential PR is the campaign of a burning social problem or a community-based campaign. Such endeavours are not just a form of product promotion, but of creating mutual value and enhancing brand perception through resonating with the mood of the people and the needs of the society. In such a case, it may be beneficial to use PR campaigns that raise awareness of environmental friendliness or the empowerment of local communities, which is especially

effective in emerging markets such as Ghana, where consumers demand an increasing level of social responsibility among companies (Anabila, 2019). Strategic application of PR in these situations is not just a communication tool, but also an aspect that creates trust and strengthens cultural relevance. In such contexts, PR serves not just as a communication conduit but as a strategic enabler of trust and cultural relevance. This allows brands to embed themselves within the local narratives. This is particularly effective in resource-constrained environments, where experiential PR can amplify impact through grassroots events, influencer collaborations, or digital storytelling to foster a sense of shared purpose and elevate brand perception (Kovanoviene et al., 2021).

Kovanoviene et al. (2021) emphasized that various marketing communication tools, such as PR, can create consumer value in case they deliver relevant, interesting, and specific context information. This is especially true in environments where the consumers are very sensitive to authenticity and transparency. Within the rapidly changing Ghanaian marketplace, where the emerging 24-hour economy makes constant interaction necessary, PR can be used to make brand communication human, fill the gap between cultures, and develop stronger connections between brands and stakeholders. Fostering communication and handling issues in advance, PR practitioners can develop a valuable contact by demonstrating brand credibility and value.

According to Cornelissen (2020), PR is part of the process of building brand reputation and ensuring strategic consistency across numerous communication platforms. In practice, this means working with marketing, advertising, and corporate departments to make sure that the consistency of messages is coordinated and that they are appealing to the emotions and resonate with internal and external narratives. PR does not only influence the external communication but also internal

storytelling, shaping the alignment of employee perceptions and the brand identity, thus increasing consistency within the organization (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017).

The recent research highlights the changing nature of experiential PR in consumer value creation, especially via digital integration. As an illustration, the digitalization of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects in Ghanaian rural banking industries through PR-based programs has been observed to enhance brand equity through increased stakeholder engagement and loyalty (Francis Atta Sarpong et al., 2023). On the same note, Rehman et al. (2022) argued that the adaptive use of social media in IMC framework by PR generates immersive experiences that prioritize consumer-centered value, including personalization and emotional resonance, which result in increased retention rates. However, there is still a risk of inauthentic experiences in culturally diverse environments, where PR has to balance local peculiarities and not to become alienated (Herur, 2022). The literature on PR practice in Africa cited so far shows that the practice in Africa is strongly influenced by the cultural interpreter and personal influence models despite the presence of the Grunigen models. The personal influence model is premised on the cultivation of relationships with external stakeholders such as communities, government, media and activist groups (Anani-Bossman, 2020).

In spite of this strength, there is still lack of literature on how PR professionals themselves define their role in creating experiential value. Most of the available literature is quantitative and western oriented and qualitative studies can be carried out to investigate the influence of PR in non-western markets. This research paper is going to fill that gap by examining how PR practitioners in Ghana negotiate and work towards the generation of consumer value in an integrated marketing environment. Becoming familiar with such dynamics might shed more light on culturally based approaches to communication and diversify the IMC debate in general.

2.2.4 IMC Client/Agency Relationships

Efficient coordination of clients and communication agencies is usually the key to success in IMC campaigns. Mortimer and Laurie (2017) address the client/agency relationships in an IMC context and reveal that the partnership approach, which encompasses a mutual trust and similarity in the strategy, contributes to better campaign performance. In this regard, PR agencies, especially, are the most vital to closing organizational silos and synchronizing communication strategies with client objectives (Cornelissen, 2020). In Ghana, SMEs and nonprofits usually have to facilitate the use of external agencies because their internal expertise is minimal, and this is why client/agency relationships play an important role in ensuring effective IMC implementation (Anabila, 2019).

Nevertheless, collaboration may be obstructed by certain difficulties, including a mismatch between expectations and communication failure (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017). The boundary spanning role played by PR is paramount in achieving a coordination role and maintaining similarity in messages during agency led campaigns. There is little study that investigates these in the emerging markets, where the connections between the client and the agency are sensitive to the limited resources and culture.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

To focus this research on enhancing the role of public relations (PR) in the integrated marketing communications (IMC), two major theoretical models have been referred to, that is the Stakeholder Theory and Excellence Theory. These models provide effective lenses with which one can analyze the strategic value of PR to consumer value creation, experiential branding and organizational performance

2.3.1 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory that was initially formulated by Freeman (1984) states that an organization needs to actively work on the relationships that exist between it and different stakeholder groups that affect or are affected by the activities of an organization. Such stakeholders are the customers, the employees, the investors, the regulators and the community members. In the framework of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), the theory makes it clear that brand messaging must align with the expectations and values of these different groups in addition to being consistent across media platforms (Rehman et al., 2022; Niemann et al., 2003).

The most important role in this alignment is played by Public Relations (PR). It is the tactical channel with which organizations construct, sustain, and develop the relationships with stakeholders. PR also helps in two-way communication, which allows the brands to listen, respond to the concerns and adjust to the concerns of the stakeholders. In new markets like in Ghana, where culture awareness and community involvement is critical, PR is an instrument of trust and value co-creation (Anabila, 2019). This stakeholder-focused strategy is especially applicable in IMC strategies geared towards improving the performance of brands through the development of loyalty and advocacy.

Instead of being seen as a tactical or reactive media outreach PR must be incorporated into the strategy heart of IMC planning. Stakeholder Theory promotes PR to embrace transparency, responsible interaction, and win-win relationship, which are consistent with current demands of stakeholder orientation in marketing (Cornelissen, 2020.). This transition takes IMC into a more relational and participatory approach to IMC where PR professionals are the creators of trust and meaning makers.

Stakeholder Theory in the framework of IMC is a shift in positioning of PR as a promotional instrument to a core strategic coordinator of communication within the stakeholder network. PR is operationalized as the main point of the dialogue, feedback, and relationship development. In contrast to advertising, where the one-way persuasive message is frequently aired, or sales promotion, where the goal is to implement short-term behavior change, PR enables two-way symmetrical communication to match brand messages with the values and needs of its stakeholders. This alignment is required to make the IMC not only sounding and content-wise but also contextually, culturally and ethically accountable, thus improving brand legitimacy and performance. As an example, stakeholder mapping exercises are performed by PR professionals to determine key publics, evaluate their salience according to their power and legitimacy as well as urgency and align communication strategy to these factors (Mitchell et al., 1997). The process changes IMC into a fragmented array of promotional strategies to a unified, responsive system to the stakeholders.

The Stakeholder Theory application to IMC is especially enlightening in the markets like Ghana where communal values, social interdependent and cultural norms play a very important role in determining consumer behavior and organizational legitimacy. The stakeholder interdependence is reflected in the Ghanaian society through the idea of Ubuntu, which is a philosophy that focuses on collective humanity and interconnectedness. Organizations are not regarded as in isolation but are integrated in the community networks with reputation, reciprocity and social responsibility being the key considerations. PR utilizes this cultural background by focusing on community relations, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and building local partners in IMC strategies. To illustrate, a Ghanaian SME that is introducing a new product may consider incorporating PR-led community forums, endorsement of the product through traditional media by local chiefs as well as social media campaigns with user created content by community members.

These initiatives help to make the brand message attractive to the local values of family, education, and environmental responsibility, which enhances stakeholder trust and brand equity (Anabila, 2019).

The effectiveness of PR based on stakeholders is backed by empirical research in IMC. The IMC measurement scale created and tested by (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023). included a dimension of stakeholder relationship quality, and the researchers concluded that organizations with a high stakeholder orientation scored brand performance 32 points higher than organizations with low orientation. On the same note, Niemann-Struwig et al. (2022) have shown that PR-based stakeholder engagement mediated the connection between IMC implementation and organizational reputation in a study of South African nonprofits, with the mediation effect of 0.45. These results highlight the significance of PR in the translation of the stakeholder theory to the IMC strategies that can be implemented to achieve measurable results.

Stakeholder Theory is vital because it questions the old models of IMC where a customer-centricity approach is considered more important than a wider public. The early IMC literature was often quite limited in its consideration of the audience since it focused on the consumer as the main audience, overlooking employees, regulators or community groups. Stakeholder Theory rightly redresses this imbalance by promoting the multi-stakeholder communication framework in which PR ensures that internal branding is consistent with external messages, regulatory compliance is communicated openly, and the effects of the community are addressed proactively. This is a holistic perspective, which is particularly important during crisis cases, where stakeholder confidence may be the difference between organizational life and death. In the case of a product recall, e.g., PR will have to communicate to not only the customers but also to employees (to keep

morale high), regulators (to ensure compliance), and local communities (to reduce reputational spill over) (Coombs, 2007).

Besides, the theory also urges organizations to appreciate the dynamic character of the influence of stakeholders. With the augmented voices of stakeholders on digital platforms and social media, PR has to change to be able to handle real-time interactions and reputational risks. Such receptiveness does not only enhance stakeholder relations but leads to the long-term brand equity and performance (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023).

What Stakeholder Theory says	How PR makes it real (in everyday work)	Ghana example
Find & prioritise people	PR maps who matters most (customers, staff, chiefs, regulators)	A small Accra bakery asks local chiefs and customers what they care about before launching a new bread line
Build win-win relationships	PR talks <i>with</i> people, not <i>at</i> them (listens, replies, co-creates)	A nonprofit runs a whatsapp group where mothers suggest health tips; PR turns those into real campaigns
Be honest & culturally right	PR keeps messages clear, local, and true to Ghanaian values	A telecom explains price changes in Twi on radio plus Instagram Live, no surprises
Connect inside & outside	PR links departments so everyone sings the same song	During a power outage, PR tells staff first (“we’re fixing it”), then customers (“here’s the plan”)
React fast to voices online	PR watches social media, answers in real time	A fire service live-streams rescue updates on TikTok to stop rumours
Measure trust, not just sales	PR tracks smiles, shares, and “I trust this brand”	A bank counts how many villagers say “I feel heard” after a CSR tree-planting day

Table 1: Mapping PR to Stakeholder Theory

Source: Generated by researcher

2.3.2 Excellence Theory

Grunig and colleagues (1992) formulated Excellence Theory to show how PR works in terms of its contribution to organizational effectiveness in the scenario where PR is approached as a strategic management tool. The theory outlines four historical models of PR practice: press agency

(one-way, propaganda-style communication with the goal of publicity), the public information (one-way dissemination of factual information), the two-way asymmetrical (persuasive, organization-centered research to influence publics) and the two-way symmetrical (dialogue-based, mutual understanding between organization and stakeholders). One of the core ideas of this theory is two-way symmetrical communication. It focuses on ethical, conversational, and evidence-based practices of working with publics. Once PR works according to these values, it makes organizations more flexible, makes stakeholders and customer more satisfied, and raises brand credibility.

The implementation of Excellence Theory is especially powerful in the developing markets such as Ghana, whereby formal communication infrastructures are few, and cultural, social, and economical forces require the application of adaptive approaches. In these situations, the symmetrical PR is presented in the form of community conversation, communication in local language, and culturally-based CSR where IMC appeals to the Ghanaian values of communalism, respect to tradition, and social responsibility. An example is that a Ghanaian nonprofit can employ PR facilitated town halls, radio call-in programs and social media discussion forums as a co-creation of health campaign messages with community leaders yielding better adoption rates compared to top-down advertising. Setegn and Japee (2025) used the Excellence Theory in the tourism industry in Ethiopia and observed that the relationship between the promotional tools and visitor attraction was mediated by the symmetrical PR with an effect size of 0.41, yet it was unable to achieve full implementation due to the limitation of resources.

The theory also touches on the issue of power in the organizations. Superb PR necessitates empowerment of PR role in terms of budgetary control, proficient practitioners and CEO support. Some of the African organizations have under-resourced PR and see it as a cost center and not an

added value driver. The Excellence Theory is a guide to professionalization based on education, certification, and strategic inclusion advocacy (Rehman et al., 2022). Cornelissen (2020) suggests that a great PR will turn IMC into a process that is marketing led, rather than organization wide communication system, where internal branding, employee engagement, and corporate reputation are equally important as external campaigns.

The Excellence Theory of IMC has been empowered and tested by digital transformation. Social media allow scaling the communication process to be symmetrical in real-time feedback, live question and answer, and user-generated content, however, it also opens up risks such as misinformation and reputational volatility. The PR of the excellent kind reacts with proactive issues management, social listening, and response protocols, making the digital IMC ethical and effective (Harizi and Trebicka, 2023). In Ghana, where mobile penetration is high, PR practitioners adopt WhatsApp groups, X, and Tik Tok live streams to interact with the stakeholders on a two-way basis, which creates trust in real-time. Francis Atta Sarpong et al. (2023) reported the application of symmetrical digital PR by a Ghanaian telecom to a network outage, which minimized negative emotion by 42% in 24 hours.

Excellence Theory takes PR to a new level in the IMC, i.e., it makes the PR a strategic integrator rather than a supporting tactic. PR practitioners act as a boundary spanner or the people that bridge the gap between all the departments inside a company and the entire outside world so that the messages about brands are aligned, culturally appropriate, and open to suggestions voiced by stakeholders (Herur, 2022). Such integrative role is of essence in an environment in which brand performance is pegged upon continuous yet purposeful interaction between a brand and its various touchpoints.

This is also stated in Excellence Theory, and it is meant that PR has to be empowered as an organizational leadership. By being a party to the decision-making table, PR is able to have an input in the direction of the strategies of the organizations, forecast the issues of any stakeholder, and lead in the design of communication strategies that underpin the brand values. This makes a culture of openness and responsiveness to be present, which is critical in making stronger brands in competitive markets (Luxton et al., 2014).

In addition, research and evaluation in PR practices are advocated by the theory. Through a consistent measurement of stakeholder perception and communication effects, PR can improve IMC practices as far as developing an effective treatment of IMC strategies is concerned, to suit the needs of the target audience and maximize its brand performance. Such an evidence-based strategy goes hand-in-hand with the emerging increase in accountability and measurable impact in marketing communications (Cornnelissen, 2020).

Collectively, the two theories offer a solid base through which PR could be considered in making IMC better. They make the transition between output based strategy to relationship based strategies by focusing more on stakeholder engagement, ethical communication and strategy integration. They thereby clarify the role of PR in the higher mechanisms of trust, value, and brand-sustainability construction.

What Excellence Theory Says	How PR makes it real (in everyday work)	Ghana example
Use two-way symmetrical talk	PR chats back and forth with people – listens, shares, and builds mutual understanding, not just pushes info	A health nonprofit in Accra runs radio call-ins where folks share concerns, and PR tweaks campaigns based on what they hear
Make PR a boss-level strategy	PR joins the big decisions, advising leaders on ethics and long-term trust, not just quick fixes	A small IT firm in Ghana lets their PR head sit in CEO meetings to plan community tech workshops that boost the brand's rep

What Excellence Theory Says	How PR makes it real (in everyday work)	Ghana example
Empower PR with resources & pros	Give PR teams budget, training, and support to shine, treating it like a value-creator, not a cost	An Accra SME certifies their PR staff and funds social media tools, turning low-cost events into big loyalty wins
Handle digital stuff smartly	PR uses online tools for real-time chats, spotting issues early and keeping things ethical	A telecom firm monitors X for complaints during outages, replies fast, and shares fixes to calm folks down
Measure with evidence & feedback	Track how well PR builds satisfaction and trust, using data to improve	A nonprofit surveys community after a CSR event, like a clean-up day, and uses feedback to make the next one even better
Act as a bridge builder	PR connects teams inside the org and links to the outside world for smooth, consistent stories	During a product launch, PR aligns marketing folks with community leaders to ensure messages feel local and genuine

Table 2 : Mapping PR to Excellence Theory

Source: Generated by researcher

2.4 Summary

This part of the research discussed the relevant concepts and literature related to this study. To examine PR's contribution more rigorously, the study applies two key theoretical models that is The Stakeholder Theory and Excellence Theory. The Stakeholder Theory promotes a trust-based and culture-sensitive dialogue that allows the brand messages to correspond to the needs of the variety of stakeholders (Harizi & Trebicka, 2023). The Excellence Theory regards PR as a strategic management activity that proposes ethical and reciprocal communication and the engagement of organizational leadership in PR decision-making (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Luxton et al., 2014).

These theories combined continue to support the importance of PR in message delivery as well as relationship building, expectation management, and long-term brand performance and credibility. The chapter ends with the indication of a qualitative, context-sensitive research that aims to study the lived experiences of PR professionals in the IMC environment in Ghana.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to the Methodology

This chapter explores the methodological framework for the research, which examines the strategic role of public relations (PR) in enhancing integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies to improve brand performance in the Ghanaian context. The approach employed in the research to address the literature gaps in terms of PR being effective in its synergy with other IMC tools entails the qualitative approach in which the researcher seeks to obtain rich, context based insight on the PR and marketing professionals (Herur, 2022). The methodology is tailored to align with the research objectives, which is focused on exploring PR's contributions to message coherence, stakeholder engagement, and brand performance. This qualitative inquiry values in-depth information over breadth and seeks to understand the lived experiences of professionals in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and nonprofit organizations in Accra. The chapter further explains the research paradigm, philosophical assumptions, design, population and sampling methods of data collection and data analysis, ethical considerations, and measures to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness. This give the findings of the study a solid grounding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Research Paradigm

The research is grounded on an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and can be best understood through the subjective experiences and interpretations of the people (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This paradigm is in contrast with positivism, which focuses on objective, measurable phenomena, and is particularly suited to exploring the nuanced perceptions of PR practitioners in IMC frameworks (Kroeze, 2012). Interpretivism allows the

study to delve into how professionals in Ghana sail through cultural, social, and resource-related factors to integrate PR with other IMC tools, thereby enhancing brand performance (Rehman et al., 2022). By focusing on the subjective meanings professionals assign to their roles, the study captures the contextual dynamics of PR in emerging markets, where trust and stakeholder relationships are critical (Anabila, 2019). The interpretivist approach facilitates a flexible, participant driven exploration, ensuring that findings reflect the realities of Ghana's communication landscape.

3.3 Philosophical Assumptions

The paradigm that is adopted in the study assumes some philosophical assumptions on it which influence the behaviour of the study. These assumptions can be seen as the reflection of qualitative nature of the work and its influence on the overall direction of the investigation. The philosophical foundation of this study is based on interpretivist ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Ontological assumption

The Ontological position of the study is relativist and the assumption is that there are various realities that are determined by the interactions between PR professionals and their organisational and cultural surroundings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). An example of this is that the perception of PR practitioner regarding the role of IMC can vary depending on the size of the organisation, the industry expectation or priorities, which reveals the varied reality in the Accra communication setting. That is enough to use open-ended interviews to talk about the diversity of experiences and meanings.

Epistemological assumption

Epistemological assumption indicates that knowledge is co-created in a conversation between the researcher and participants, with a focus on relational knowledge and not objectivity (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This method will allow the study to reveal the process of negotiations of PR in strategic integration in IMC among professionals and based on their experience in this area (Herur, 2022).

Axiological assumption

In this assumption it is acknowledged that the researcher has his or her own values and potential biases which prejudice and define the research process. Incorporating reflexivity will ensure interpretations and finding will reflect the voices of the participants and not certain presumptions (Hammarberg et al., 2016). These assumptions align with stakeholder theory, which emphasizes PR's role in fostering mutual relationships, and excellence theory, which positions PR as a strategic management function (Freeman, 2010).

Methodological assumption

The study is methodologically fulfilled in a qualitative and inductive manner and is flexible. People do not aim to find out anticipated outcomes; instead, the research is conducted to enable emergence of patterns and themes through the data. This methodology will be in line with the overall objective of seeking detailed in-depth information on how PR can be used to develop IMC across all types of organizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4 Research Design

The research design that is employed is a qualitative. Specifically, a case study approach as it attempts to investigate the role of PR in improving IMC strategy in the chosen organisations in Accra. Case study methodology best suits the investigation of complex, real world phenomena in

natural environments to be able to understand in depth the benefits of PR within IMC, based on specific organizational contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In contrast to larger phenomenological designs, the case study method concentrates on specific SMEs and nonprofits, which allows for the examination of PR practices, stakeholder engagement, and brand performance in a more detailed manner (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This design is inductive and exploratory that enables the emergence of themes based on the data as well as addresses the research questions pertaining to the PR's synergy with IMC tools. The study emphasizes contextual nuances that quantitative IMC research usually fails to capture by prioritizing real world cases in Ghana, which offer practical implications to emerging markets where efficient communication tools are of utmost importance (Francis Atta Sarpong et al., 2023).

Accra has three to five organizations (SMEs and nonprofits) that were chosen as case studies and each one of them embodies different PR IMC practices, including digital campaigns, crisis communication, or community engagement campaigns. This multi-case design is more robust because it will help to compare and contrast the role of PR in various organizational settings and still provides the focus on depth, rather than on generalizability (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.5 Population and Sample

The target population consists of communication professionals in Accra, including PR practitioners, marketing executives, and strategic communication managers working in SMEs and nonprofit organizations. These groups are selected due to their direct involvement in implementing IMC strategies and their relevance in Ghana's resource-constrained environment, where PR can maximize communication impact (Anabila, 2019). Accra is chosen as the research site because it serves as Ghana's economic and communication hub, hosting a diverse range of organisations with active IMC practices.

The sample size will be set at point where there will be sufficient information to achieve thematic saturation, where no new insights emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This sample includes professionals with at least three years of experience to ensure informed perspectives, representing both genders and varying organisational roles to capture diverse viewpoints. The inclusion of SMEs and nonprofits reflects their reliance on cost-effective PR strategies, making them ideal for studying PR-IMC synergy in resource limited settings (Niemann-Struwig et al., 2022). This purposive selection ensures participants can provide rich, relevant data that aligned with the study's objectives.

3.6 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with specific expertise in PR and IMC, ensuring their experiences align with the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Criteria for inclusion include professional roles in PR or marketing, involvement in IMC campaigns, and affiliation with SMEs or nonprofits in Accra. This technique targets individuals with deep knowledge of PR's contributions to stakeholder engagement and brand performance, such as those managing media relations or digital campaigns (Herur, 2022). While purposive sampling limits statistical generalizability, it ensures indepth and relevance, critical for qualitative insights in emerging markets (Silverman, 2020).

3.7 Data Collection Method

As the primary data collection method, the semi-structured interview is chosen. This can be attributed to its flexibility, the depth it gives information to be gathered and richness of the data. The main approach is semi-structured interviews which provide the flexibility to explore the experience of the participants, including some PR tactics that enhanced the performance of IMC

or challenges in coordination of the messages across the channels (Rehman et al., 2022). The Interview questions cover the following:

- PR's role in the successful implementation of IMC strategies?
- Perception of the PR professionals about the role that PR plays in message coherence and stakeholder engagement?
- Practices of PR that improve brand performance in integrated campaigns?
- Challenges in integrating PR into IMC in Ghana

The interview will be conducted either in the face-to-face or online (in the case of the availability and readiness to cooperate) format. In certain cases, recording and transcription of audio will be acquired.

3.8 Research Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide is the main data collection tool. This is created on the basis of the literature and research objectives. It incorporated open-ended questions like: "How does PR help in message consistency across IMC channels in your organization? and "What are some top PR methods that have boosted brand performance in your IMC campaigns? (Herur, 2022). Such questions were customized to gain in-depth accounts of how PR plays a strategic role, how it engages stakeholders, and what difficulties are encountered in integrating PR.

A demographic questionnaire is use to gather information about the roles of the participants, the years of experience and the context of their organizations so as to give background to the responses.

3.9 Data Analysis Techniques

The study will utilize the thematic analysis as the primary method for data analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing and interpreting themes within qualitative data.

Thematic analysis is employed because of its flexibility to explore different angles of participants' perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It leads to the in-depth comprehension of the lived experiences of the participants which aligns with the design of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The following criteria will be adopted in order to guarantee rigor authenticity and trustworthiness of this qualitative phenomenological study.

First is the Triangulation. One of the main methods employed in this qualitative study is the Triangulation to make the findings more credible, trustworthy, and rich by integrating several sources or perspectives (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

The study is mainly qualitative based on lived experience, but nevertheless, triangulation is also suitable and useful to supplement the interpretation process and validate patterns in the narratives of the participants. The multiple data sources are studied using data triangulation, i.e., interviews with PR professionals, brand managers, and IMC strategists.

The application of divergent sources in the study will allow the researcher to cross-verify the themes and allow an in-depth or comprehensive study of the depth of stakeholder involvement and also provide credibility and authenticity to the findings (Silverman, 2020).

Member checking also referred to as participant validation is another mechanism to be employed. It is a critical strategy of trustworthiness in qualitative research that can be applied to make sure

that the findings are indicative of the experiences and meanings of the participants. It involves the process of giving feedback to the data, themes or interpretations that have been gathered back to the participants to ensure that their opinions are properly reflected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This step is especially critical in this case study because it would make it possible to validate the lived experiences of the participants under analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews conducted with communication professionals in Accra between October and November, 2025. The study employed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected, based on the interpretivist paradigm and inductive approach outlined in Chapter 3 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis aims to uncover elaborate insights from the perception of the participants into the strategic position of public relations (PR) in enhancing integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies to improve the performance of brand in resource-constrained settings.

The respondents, who were selected based on small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), non profits and governmental organizations, gave very context specific responses. The research questions covered their responses: (1) How does PR contribute to the effective execution of IMC strategies? (2) What are PR professionals' perceptions of PR's role in message coherence and stakeholder engagement? (3) What specific PR practices enhance brand performance in an integrated campaign?

The Thematic analysis was based on the 6-step process of Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phase process include the following: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting findings. Quotes from participants are assigned pseudonyms (e.g., Participant A for the Marketing Executive in architecture), will illustrate major points. The findings are organised into six themes. This will includes sub-themes that provide more insights to ensure that the dynamics of PR-IMC in the urban setting of Ghana are fully explored.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Participants

To illustrate the findings in perspective, Table 4.1 captures the participants' profiles, which include their roles, number of years of experience, organisation types, and possible sectors. The purposive sample was used and this is inline with the study's focus on SMEs, nonprofits, NGOs and similar entities in Accra, which ensure the diverse perspectives on PR-IMC integration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Codes were used to represent the participants for confidentiality.

Code	Role & Experience	Years of experience	Organisation Type
P1	Marketing Executive	8	SME
P2	Marketing/Communication	10	Private
P3	Fire Officer	15	Public
P4	HR & PR Officer	17	Private
P5	Business Journalist	5	Media
P6	Project Manager	12	Private
P7	Journalist/Editor	18	Public Broadcaster
P8	Corporate Comm. Manager	9	SME
P9	PR Consultant	14	Agency serving SMEs
P10	Brand Manager	7	Nonprofit
P11	Digital Marketing Lead	6	SME
P12	Communication Officer	11	Public
P13	Head of Marketing	20	Private
P14	CSR & PR Manager	8	Nonprofit
P15	Media Relations Officer	13	Media
P16	Marketing Director	16	SME

P17	Communication Specialist	10	International NGO
P18	PR Executive	5	Agency
P19	Corporate Affairs Manager	22	Public Utility
P20	Brand & Comms	9	SME
P21	Senior Journalist	25	Private Media House
P22	Events & PR Coordinator	7	Nonprofit
P23	Digital PR Specialist	6	Agency
P24	Communication Director	19	Public
P25	Marketing & PR Officer	11	SME

Table 3: Demographic profile of interview participants

Code	Organisation Type	Sector
P1	SME	Architectural Design
P2	Private	Healthcare
P3	Public	Security (GNFS)
P4	Private	IT/Cybersecurity
P5	Media	Media
P6	Private	Construction
P7	Public Broadcaster	Media
P8	SME	Fintech
P9	Agency serving SMEs	SMEs/CSOs
P10	Nonprofit	Education NGO

P11	SME	Fashion
P12	Public	Regulatory
P13	Private	Telecommunications
P14	Nonprofit	Environmental
P15	Media	Health
P16	SME	Hospitality
P17	International NGO	NGO
P18	Agency	SME
P19	Public Utility	Utility
P20	SME	Agri-business
P21	Private Media House	Media
P22	Nonprofit	NGO
P23	Agency	Tech startups
P24	Public	Education
P25	SME	Manufacturing

Table 4: Sectors of participants

The experience of the participants ranges from 5 to over 25 years old and offered experienced knowledge on IMC practices. There is diversity in the sector and this include the architecture, health care, security, IT, media, manufacturing and construction. This enabled for a broad investigation of the role of PR in these various organisational settings in Ghana.

4.3 Analysis of Key Findings

The thematic analysis identified six key themes: (1) Integration of PR into IMC strategies; (2) Challenges in IMC execution and PR's Mitigating Role; (3) PR's Contribution to Synergy and Message Coherence; (4) PR's Role in Stakeholder Engagement and Trust-Building; (5) PR's Impact on Brand Performance; and (6) PR's Role in Creating Experiential Value. These themes, with sub-themes, address the research questions and align with the stakeholder and excellence theories (Freeman, 2010; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

4.3.1 Integration of PR into IMC strategies

This theme examines the way PR is integrated in IMC systems, and this answers the first research question. The participants refer to PR as a central element that integrates the tools of communication, which changes with the digital development and adjusts to the limitation of resources in Ghana.

The participants always considered PR as a vehicle or a connecting force in IMC. According to participant P3 (Fire Officer), he said that, Public Relations is the means by which GNFS sells safety messages to the masses. It has developed out of the traditional media and now incorporates social media platform as well. This change is an indication of the fact that PR has now become digitalized to engage in real-time communication (Rehman et al., 2022). Participant P4 (HR and PR Officer) explained: Public Relations has been completely incorporated by making sure that whatever messages are released there are in line with our brand values of the organization. Our advertisement and digital marketing has been directly supported by PR activities like media relations, press releases, social media management, etc. This integration is in line with Herur (2022), who underscores the importance of PR in breaking organizational silos.

Cost-effectiveness was the force behind some of the PR integration in SMEs and nonprofits. Participant P1 (Marketing Executive) observed that their company has been using digital media and print because of budget limitations owing to the potential of PR. “We have never done any PR activities, but to be honest PR will assist in keeping the message inconsistency at bay”. Participant P5 (Business Journalist) highlighted that PR helps to increase authenticity with the help of CSR campaigns and influencer interaction, which is in line with Setegn and Japee (2025). Participant P2 further added, the digital world has changed. This is because the algorithms of different platforms can now relay certain information to individuals in a broader network. This highlights the versatility of PR taking advantage of digital platforms to reach more people (Harizi and Trebicka, 2023).

The integration of PR in the resource-constrained environment in Ghana was perceived as important in maximising the impact. P4 emphasised on community involvement and event publicity as PR tactics which supplement digital marketing especially among SMEs. This is consistent with Anabila (2019) who observe that IMC enhances brand equity in resource constrained environments such as the microfinance sector of Ghana. The theme points out the evolving role of PR as a traditional media to a strategic digitally integrated role that helps in IMC objectives.

The development towards digital integration was a recurring sub-theme. P3 (Fire Officer) observed the transition of traditional media to social media, and P23 (Digital PR Specialist) said, “PR without digital is not a complete thing today and real-time interaction are becoming the main activity”. However, the formal PR activities of P1 and P11 were limited, and they do not depend on it, but rather on digital marketing; however, both recognised the potential of PR in terms of improving consistency and credibility (Herur, 2022).

Participant P1 said “there are no PR activities such as media relations or crisis management that we have conducted in the 7 years that I have been working there”. This highlights a lack of full exploitation, which is aligned with the fact that PR is often underestimated in IMC models (Herur, 2022). Overall, the theme illustrates PR's strategic evolution which supports Research Question 1 on PR's aid in IMC execution

4.3.2 Challenges in IMC Execution and PR's Mitigating Role

This theme further responds to the first research question by discussing the barriers to effective IMC and ways PR can alleviate them. The participants cited organizational silos, inconsistency of messages, and digital fragmentation as the most significant issues, and PR serving as a critical solution that the organization needed.

Communication silos in the organisation and coordination problems were mentioned by some participants. Participant P4 explained that the absence of coordination is one of the major problems as it leads to inconsistency of messages. Silos and coordination failures were mentioned several times by P4, P7, P12, and P19. Participant P5 also said: "Organisational silos, lack of consistency in messaging, and digital fragmentation are all key challenges. These results are consistent with Herur (2022) who mentions that silos are barriers to IMC. PR was viewed as a bridge and Participant P6 said, “It is a way of harmonising the silos into one front” and Participant P3 added that, PR uses communication strategy to overcome these challenges.

The issue of digital fragmentation was a major concern especially in the rapidly changing Ghanaian media landscape. Participant P2 remarked, PR bridges communication gap, and Participant P4 said, PR sets the basic rules on how to communicate and collect feedback from the general public.

P15, P23 and P13 emphasized digital fragmentation and fast misinformation. P15 (Health Service) clarified, when there is a health scare rumours spread immediately; PR real-time reaction and myth-busting save the brand (P15). The SMEs/nonprofits were limited in resources (P1, P9, P10, P14, P18, P20, P22). P18 observed, that clients who do not have large budgets to invest in huge advertisements, PR uses earned media and partnerships to attain similar or even greater reach.

This is indicative of the focus by Rehman et al. (2022) on the role of PR in the management of digital content. The cost-effective PR tactics such as earned media were critical in the resource-constrained environments. In line with Herur (2022), participant P5 pointed to the fact that PR uses partnerships and community engagement to work cost-effectively.

Crisis communication is another aspect of PR that was observed to mitigate risks by the participants. According to participant P3, P19 and P15, the introduction of live coverage of incidents (fire outbreak, power outages and health misinformation) equally guaranteed a better relationship, which is a demonstration of how PR can manage reputational risks on a real-time basis. This is consistent with Niemann-Struwig et al. (2022) who underscore the strategic position of PR in IMC to manage reputation. The theme highlights the ability of PR to overcome complex situations, which adds to the efficacy of IMC in the Ghanaian setting.

4.3.3 Creating Synergy Between PR and other IMC tools.

This theme addresses the second research question, focusing on PR's role in creating synergy among IMC tools and ensuring message coherence, particularly in digital and traditional channels.

The participants viewed PR as the strategic connection that aligns advertising, promotions, and digital content. According to participant P5, PR generates synergy because it provides a consistent

story that connects advertising, sales promotion, and direct marketing to a single brand message. Participant P13 further contributed that PR develops synergy by making sure that there is a uniform message in advertising, promotions and direct marketing. In SMEs, PR is more hands-on." Setegn and Japee (2025) observe that this practical orientation in SMEs is different compared to the strategic orientation in large organizations.

Centralized guidelines and active participation were used to achieve message coherence. Participants (P4, P7, P13, P24, P25), explained that PR guarantees coherence of the message by creating unified key messages and coordinating with all the departments within my organisation. Participant P3 encouraged, "Paying attention to both traditional and digital marketing equally and encourage receiving feedback". This role was enhanced by social media where Participant P4 and P20 observed, PR has become quicker in responding, rectifying errors, and maintaining the brand message. This dynamic management is in line with Harizi and Trebicka (2023) who emphasize the importance of social media in IMC.

Social media brought about both challenges such as user-generated content and PR opportunities. Participant P17 hinted, "The issue of inconsistency of messages is a significant challenge. PR can also assist in maintaining this in check because it is essential to maintain the tone of the messages". Participant P13 went on to say that social media has made message management more dynamic and participatory. These insights reflects the perception of Rehman et al. (2022) view of PR moving through the digital complexities to ensure brand consistency.

4.3.4 PR's Role in Stakeholder Engagement and Building Trust

This theme explores the role of PR in engaging stakeholders and it will address the second research question and will align to the theory of stakeholders (Freeman, 2010). The stakeholder engagement was considered by all the participants to be the main requirement of PR in IMC which

is rather close to Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010). The sub-themes that were found several times were two-way symmetrical communication, transparency, and cultural sensitivity.

An example of this was given by P12 (Regulatory): “PR holds stakeholder forums, media briefings, and call-in programmes to ensure that concerns are heard at an early stage”. P10, P14, P17, and P22 (nonprofit sector) emphasized community outreach and co-creation. P17 (Youth NGO) observed, in Ghana, building trust is achieved through the brand listening and accommodation to local values. PR translates international messages into local idioms of a culture (P17).

The Ghanaian context was differentiated by cultural adaptation and community-centred approaches. P20 (Agri-business) mentioned, “We engage farmers in designing campaigns, PR helps us to do that and transforms participants into brand advocates”.

Misaligned expectations and cultural misperceptions (especially among the SMEs/nonprofits of Accra) were overcome with the help of PR through dialogue and relationship-building (P4, P9, P18).

Participants emphasized the importance of PR in facilitating communication. According to participant P5, PR is a key element of integrated marketing communications as it facilitates communication and awareness of the needs of stakeholders. Some examples include town-hall meetings and media briefings e.g. when utility tariffs were to be adjusted to address concerns. Participant P5 explained, PR can hold stakeholder forums or social media Q&A. This is a two-way communication that can be used to address concerns at early stages. This information is in line with the theory of excellence proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), which focuses on the symmetrical communication.

In Ghana, building trust would require some level of cultural alignment. According to participant P3, consistency and timely interactions have guaranteed the relationship with the public is better. Participant A said, "Stakeholder engagement is a significant aspect of PR, you need to act within the law, and do your best to be a socially responsible organization. The flexibility of PR to local circumstances was also instrumental, with Participant P5 stating the following: "PR develops trust by being transparent, reaching out to the community. This contribution supports the research findings of Anabila (2019) on cultural relevance in the IMC of Ghana.

There was the issue of cultural misunderstandings or barriers especially in SMEs. Participant P17 said, PR assists in bridging these by fostering dialogue, expectations management and adapting messages to cultural contexts. Such adaptability increases the trust of stakeholders, which supports the relational aspect of PR in IMC (Rehman et al., 2022).

4.3.5 PR's Impact on Brand Performance

This theme addresses the third research question which deals with the specific contribution of PR to brand performance in the form of reputation, loyalty and equity.

Participants P3, P15, P19, and P5 indicated that PR increased brand reputation and trust restoration in times of crisis. Participant P5 mentioned that brand reputation has been greatly promoted by strategic PR practices. In one of the previous crises, timely press briefings were used to reinstate credibility. Powerful drivers became community and CSR storytelling (P10, P14, P20, P22). According to P14 (Environmental nonprofit), they published a campaign that made them a responsible leader and the loyalty of the donors went up by 40 %.

The above measurement metrics covered media coverage volume and tone, share of voice, sentiment analysis, stakeholder satisfaction surveys, engagement rates, brand recall and

sales/donor uplift (P4, P5, P7, P13, P21). According to P21 (Senior Journalist), PR earned media tends to be more likely to perform better than paid advertising in terms of trust and recall.

Participant P4 said, "In one of the cybersecurity awareness campaigns, PR as a tool enhanced our brand presence and positioned the company as a reliable partner. These instances are in line with Anabila (2019) who concluded that IMC enhances brand equity in Ghana.

One of the PR practices was community engagement. Participant P18 emphasized, "Consistent storytelling and outreach to the community enhanced brand trust and loyalty. Participant P21 also noted that the storytelling based on CSR increased the trust of the community, which agrees with Kovanoviene et al. (2021). Such initiatives were important in brand performance in Ghana where social responsibility is highly regarded.

Among the measures mentioned by the participants were such metrics as media coverage, stakeholder satisfaction, brand equity (Participant P13) and sentiment analysis, engagement levels (Participant P6). Participant P2 highlighted brand awareness and patronage by the clients. These are in line with Luxton et al. (2015), who emphasize the role of IMC in brand performance.

4.3.6 PR's Role in creating experiential value.

The participants (22) defined PR as the main generator of emotional, experiential, and socially responsible relationships that go beyond the transactional marketing.

P4 wrote, "PR creates authentic, emotionally resonant experiences, events, campaigns, stories that make people feel like they are a part of something bigger". In Ghana, environmental and community campaigns were mentioned many times (P14, P20, P22). P22 (Women's Rights) also held participative events in which women co-created campaign messages; the emotional connection became a life long advocate.

The Ghanaian market was considered as non-negotiable in terms of social responsibility. P10 described it as “the consumers want the brands to pay back through PR-initiated programs on education or sustainability develop shared value and long-term loyalty”. The brand performance was affected in the long term: there was an increase in retention, positive word-of-mouth, and brand stability during controversies (Newell & Wilgenbusch, 2023).

This theme builds on Research Question 3 by showing how PR can turn IMC into an experience instead of information, creating more emotional ties and cultural resonance that will be essential in ensuring long-term brand success in Ghana (Kovanoviene et al., 2021).

4.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter examined interview information, which indicated the multifunctional nature of PR in IMC in the context of Ghana. The Thematic analysis was based on the 6-step process of Braun and Clarke (2006). The six key Themes identified demonstrated how PR integrates, mitigates challenges, its contribution to synergy and message coherence, engagement with the stakeholders building trust, and how it contributes to brand performance and experiential value through the lens and of participants. The findings are consistent with the stakeholder and excellence theories, offering practical insight to SMEs and nonprofits in emerging markets.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the insight gained from the study, and how the concept of public relations (PR) can be an important thread in the weaving of integrated marketing communication (IMC) to improve brand performance, especially in Ghana where resources are limited. This chapter is based on the findings provided in Chapter 4, and the initial part of it is the summary of the main findings, which is connected to the research objectives and questions formulated in Chapter 1. It then analyzes the correspondence of the findings with the theoretical frameworks of Stakeholder Theory and Excellence Theory, as well as points out new, context-specific insights that build on the current body of literature. The discussion candidly discusses limitations of the study, provides practical and theoretical recommendations and concludes by summarizing the contributions and outlining directions of future research. In this way, not only does this chapter emphasize the strategic importance of PR, but it also indicates its potential to build meaningful and trust-related relationships in a more interconnected world.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The qualitative exploration of the study is grounded in the lived experiences of twenty five communication professionals in Accra and shows that PR has a multidimensional contribution to strengthening IMC and enhancing brand performance. These findings directly respond to the research objectives: exploring the role of PR in the effectiveness of IMC, understanding professionals' perceptions of its role in synergy and stakeholder engagement, and identifying particular PR practices that drive superior brand outcomes.

First, PR is a fundamental part of integrating IMC strategies, whereby the traditional media is transformed into digital platforms to give more access to people and allow real-time communication. The participants also underscored the role of PR activities like media relations, press releases and social media management in helping advertising and digital content, establishing a single brand voice. Nevertheless, the gaps in the use of PR especially in SMEs indicate that most Ghanaian organizations still undervalue the full potential of PR.

Secondly, PR is effective in addressing IMC implementation issues, such as organisational silos, message inconsistency and digital fragmentation. The practitioners described PR as a medium that encourages coordination and feedback, with cost-effective tactics like earned media and community partnerships, found to be critical in the resource-constrained environment.

Thirdly, PR fosters synergy and coherence of the message by acting as the strategic link that coordinates advertising, promotion, and digital tools. This is particularly practical in SMEs where PR uses social media as a dynamic tool for interacting with the audience and responds to user-generated information to maintain brand integrity.

Lastly, PR has a direct positive effect on brand performance in terms of storytelling, community initiatives and crisis response, reputation, loyalty, and equity. PR establishes emotional bonds through experiential campaigns in Ghana, where the social responsibility of the consumer is important, and the effects of the campaigns can be measured by media coverage, stakeholder satisfaction, and sentiment analysis.

5.2.1 Theoretical Alignment and Emergent Insights: Bridging Literature and Lived Experience

The findings resonate strongly with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010) and Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), while revealing contextually grounded nuances that extend beyond Western-centric or large-corporate models.

Alignment with Stakeholder Theory.

The Stakeholder Theory is based on the idea that the success of an organization depends on how it manages to relate to all the affected parties by creating value. The results of the current research are entirely consistent. The participants explained PR as a relationship platform that helps to conduct two-way communication. As an example, Participant P4 held stakeholder forums and social media Q&As sessions to address issues early and made the stakeholders feel appreciated. Other examples such as regulatory town halls (P12), live crisis engagement (P3, P19), and co-created community campaigns (P10, P14, P20, P22) to show how PR can turn the stakeholders into active partners. The socially conscious market in Ghana has a strong focus on PR, and community outreach and CSR storytelling is a direct response to local demands of corporate social responsibility. PR facilitates prompt response and rebuilding of trust even during a crisis as observed in live coverage of fire incidents. The cultural adaptation also involves the intensity of norms of respect, transparency, and communal benefit and this can be added to the theory in non-western contexts.

Alignment with Excellence Theory.

Excellence Theory elevates PR to strategic management by means of symmetrical communication, organizational leadership inclusion, and evidence-based practice. There is a high fit of alignment. PR was defined as a strategic integrator that would align messaging and credibility across platforms. Centralized content approval and cross departmental briefing were found as leadership

empowerment and feedback loops as continuous improvement. However, the gap between theory and practice arose in the case of SMEs, with PR being considered strategic in theory and under-resourced in execution, something that was not predicted in the literature.

Novel ideas beyond the existing theory.

The literature is extended by three emergent themes that are based on the limited and digitally evolving landscape.

PR as a cost-effective synergy engine in SMEs - The participants described PR as the sole feasible approach to attaining IMC coherence without paid media budgets, through earned media and community participation to enhance reach. This financial need of resource-deficient environments is under-researched in big firm oriented research.

Digital PR as real-time reputation firefighting - Live crisis response on social media (e.g., fire incident coverage, myth-busting about cybersecurity) positioned PR in the role of a digital first-responder, which is a role that goes beyond general discourse about two-way communication.

The PR in the context of the translation of the cultural message - PR actively reinterprets global brand messages to fit local idioms, values, and humor, avoiding missteps in tone or symbolism. This cultural brokerage role within IMC is not specifically theorised in Stakeholder Theory.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

While the qualitative design has provided rich and context-specific information, a number of limitations have limited the scope and generalizability of the results.

First, the research was geographically limited to Accra, Ghana, an urban economic center, and might not cover the rural experiences where there is a difference in digital access, resources, and cultural processes.

Second, the purposive sample of twenty-five participants, although reaching thematic saturation, is narrow and does not cover large multinational corporations, which limits the information about scaled PR-IMC integration. Certain sectors like, manufacturing, and tourism were also underrepresented.

Finally, the cross-sectional design captures a 2024-2025 slice in the very swift digital development. The adaptive role of PR could be more effectively followed using longitudinal studies. These constraints point to the future research opportunities without making the study invalid in its constraints.

5.4 Conclusion

PR plays a central role in the heightening of IMC, transforming fragmented efforts into consistent and resonant strategies that reinforce brands and foster trust. This research assist to fill the gaps in the literature regarding the qualitative, methodological, and contextual aspects of PR to clarify the role of PR as a relational powerhouse in the rich, but limited, Ghanaian setting, fostering synergy, navigating challenges, and creating experiential value.

Despite the limitations, in geographic focus, sample size, possible biases, and the time of cross section, the study contributes to localised information that will enable Ghanaian organizations to design cultural sensitive communication strategies. Future studies can incorporate quantitative measures, a rural context, or longitudinal study to trace the changing effects of PR in the light of digital and societal changes. In a world where brands are defined by relationships rather than

transactions, embracing PR's strategic adaptive role offers a pathway to ensuring success and meaningful societal impact.

5.5 Recommendations

The findings provide practical solutions that are sensitive to the reality of the emerging market in Ghana.

Practitioner should incorporate PR during the initial stages of IMC planning through centralized guidelines and cross-departmental meetings in order to reduce silos. In the SMEs and nonprofits, use digital tools for cost-effective engagement and invest in crisis management training.

Organisations should treat PR as a strategic resource just as they will treat marketing, human resource and administration and allocate resources for community outreach and CSR campaigns to establish emotional connection and loyalty.

Policymakers and Industry Bodies. The Institute of Public Relations Ghana could offer more workshops on digital PR integration in order to fill in the literature gaps and the practical enhancement in the IMC strategies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UNIMAC), conducting this research as part of the requirements for the award of a master's degree. The topic for the study is: "**Exploring the Role of Public Relations in Enhancing Integrated Marketing Communication for Brand Performance.**" This study is purely for academic purposes, and I kindly seek your voluntary cooperation in participating in the interview.

Please be assured that all the information you will provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will not be disclosed to any third party. Your input is highly valuable and will contribute greatly to the success of this research and my academic progression. I sincerely appreciate your time and effort.

It focuses on PR practitioners, marketing executives and related fields in SMEs and nonprofits in Accra, Ghana.

The interview will last for about 30-40 minutes, conducted face-to-face, online or recorded

Thank you

SECTION 1: Demographic and Background Questions

1. What is your current professional role (e.g., PR practitioner, marketing executive, strategic communication manager)?
2. Years of experience.

3. What type of organization do you work for (e.g., SME, nonprofit, or other)? Please briefly describe its sector (e.g., tourism, microfinance, community development).

4. In what ways has your organization implemented integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies in the past 3-5 years (e.g., combining advertising, digital media, PR)?

SECTION 2: Main Interview Questions

Question 1: Investigating the role of public relations in making integrated marketing communication strategies effective / How can public relations help in the effective execution of IMC strategies?

5. Can you describe how public relations has been integrated into your organization's overall IMC strategies?

What specific PR activities (e.g., media relations, crisis management) have supported tools like advertising or digital content? How has this integration evolved over time?

6. In your experience, what challenges arise when trying to execute IMC strategies, and how does PR help overcome them?

For example, how does PR address issues like organizational silos, message inconsistency, or digital fragmentation?

7. How does PR contribute to creating synergy between different IMC tools (e.g., advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing) in your campaigns?

What role does PR play in aligning these tools for maximum impact?

Question 2: Learning about the perception of PR professionals on the synergy between PR and other IMC tools / What is the perception of the PR professionals about the role that PR plays in message coherence and stakeholder engagement?

8. From your perspective, how does PR ensure message coherence across various IMC channels (e.g., social media, traditional media, events)? How has social media or user-generated content influenced this role?

9. What is your view on PR's role in stakeholder engagement within IMC frameworks?

How does PR build trust and relationships with stakeholders (e.g., customers, communities, regulators) in Ghana's context? Can you provide an example where PR facilitated two-way communication or addressed stakeholder expectations?

10. How do you perceive the synergy between PR and other IMC tools in terms of client/agency relationships or internal collaboration?

What barriers (e.g., mismatched expectations, cultural factors) have you encountered, and how does PR help bridge them?

Question 3: Determining how PR improves brand performance in an IMC / What are the particular roles that PR plays in the realization of better brand performance in integrated campaigns?

11. In your experience, what specific PR practices have directly contributed to improved brand performance in integrated campaigns?

How has PR enhanced brand reputation, loyalty, or equity through storytelling, community initiatives, or crisis response? Please share a success story or challenge from your organization.

12. How does PR create experiential value for consumers or stakeholders in your IMC efforts?

What role does PR play in fostering emotional connections or social responsibility (e.g., environmental campaigns in Ghana)? How does this impact long-term brand performance?

13. Based on your professional insights, how can PR be measured or evaluated for its impact on brand performance within IMC?

What metrics (e.g., stakeholder satisfaction, media coverage, brand equity) do you use? How does this align with theories like stakeholder engagement or excellence in PR?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about the role of PR in IMC that we haven't discussed?

I am grateful for your participation. Where further information or clarity is required, I will contact you.

Appendix B: Sample Interview transcript

SECTION 1: Demographic and Background Questions

1. What is your current professional role (e.g., PR practitioner, marketing executive, strategic communication manager)?

Ans. I currently serve as the Human Resource and Public Relations Officer at MakatobIT Securities. I also co-founded the Global Girls Impact Hub, an initiative that empowers young women globally, and I serve as the Programmes Officer for Women in Internet Governance (WiIG).

2. Years of experience.

Ans. I have over 17 years of administrative experience and more than 23 years of experience in child and adolescent counselling and pastoral care

3. . What type of organization do you work for (e.g., SME, nonprofit, or other)? Please briefly describe its sector (e.g., tourism, microfinance, community development).

Ans. I work with MakatobIT Securities, a private company that operates within the information technology and cybersecurity sector. The organization focuses on IT consultancy, digital security solutions, and technology-driven business support services.

4. . In what ways has your organization implemented integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies in the past 3-5 years (e.g., combining advertising, digital media, PR)?

Ans. In the past few years, we have implemented Integrated Marketing Communication by combining public relations, digital media, advertising, and CSR initiatives to promote a consistent brand image. At MakatobIT Securities, our PR campaigns align with social media and client engagement activities to reinforce our cybersecurity brand message.

SECTION 2: Main Interview Questions

Question 1: Investigating the role of public relations in making integrated marketing communication strategies effective / How can public relations help in the effective execution of IMC strategies?

5. Can you describe how public relations has been integrated into your organization's overall IMC strategies?

Ans. Public Relations has been fully integrated into our organization's overall IMC strategy by ensuring that all communication whether digital, advertising, or internal is consistent with our brand values and messaging. The PR team works closely with marketing to craft messages that reflect our organizational goals, manage our public image, and maintain strong relationships with clients and stakeholders. PR also supports event publicity, community engagement, and brand storytelling, which helps strengthen the impact of our marketing campaigns.

What specific PR activities (e.g., media relations, crisis management) have supported tools like advertising or digital content? How has this integration evolved over time?

Specific PR activities such as media relations, press releases, social media management, and stakeholder communication have directly supported our advertising and digital marketing efforts. For instance, when we open application for cybersecurity courses, PR handles media coverage and brand positioning, through social platforms.

6. In your experience, what challenges arise when trying to execute IMC strategies, and how does PR help overcome them?

For example, how does PR address issues like organizational silos, message inconsistency, or digital fragmentation?

Ans. One of the key challenges of IMC execution is our lack of coordination. Which causes messages to become inconsistent. And in turn, communication across digital platforms becomes disorganized. Through Public Relations, we can intimate departments who send the message. Everything can work without a hitch when the messaging blends seamlessly. PR sets the basic rules on how to communicate, handles crisis communication, and collects feedback from the public; it helps the organization stay consistent in all media. This coordination has enhanced teamwork and improved brand credibility over time.

7. How does PR contribute to creating synergy between different IMC tools (e.g., advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing) in your campaigns?

What role does PR play in aligning these tools for maximum impact?

Ans. PR creates synergy by ensuring that advertising, promotions, and direct marketing all share a consistent message and brand story. It aligns these tools through clear communication and reputation management. In SMEs and nonprofits, PR is more hands-on using media relations and community engagement to maximize impact with limited resources while in larger organizations, it focuses on strategy, coordination, and brand reputation.

Question 2: Learning about the perception of PR professionals on the synergy between PR and other IMC tools / What is the perception of the PR professionals about the role that PR plays in message coherence and stakeholder engagement?

8. From your perspective, how does PR ensure message coherence across various IMC channels (e.g., social media, traditional media, events)? How has social media or user-generated content influenced this role?

Ans. PR keeps messages consistent by making sure all teams share the same key information across social media, news, and events. We plan content together and check messages before they go out. With social media and user content, PR now works faster to respond, correct mistakes, and keep the brand message clear and trustworthy.

9. What is your view on PR's role in stakeholder engagement within IMC frameworks?

How does PR build trust and relationships with stakeholders (e.g., customers, communities, regulators) in Ghana's context? Can you provide an example where PR facilitated two-way communication or addressed stakeholder expectations?

Ans. PR plays a key role in stakeholder engagement by building and maintaining positive relationships within the IMC framework. It ensures open communication, listens to stakeholder concerns, and helps align brand messages with stakeholder needs and expectations.

b. In Ghana's context, PR builds trust and relationships through community outreach, media engagement, and transparency in communication. For example, when launching a new project, PR may organize stakeholder forums or social media Q&A sessions to share updates and gather feedback. This two-way communication helps address concerns early, strengthens trust, and makes stakeholders feel valued and involved.

10. How do you perceive the synergy between PR and other IMC tools in terms of client/agency relationships or internal collaboration?

What barriers (e.g., mismatched expectations, cultural factors) have you encountered, and how does PR help bridge them?

Ans. There is strong synergy between PR and other IMC tools when teams or agencies work closely together. PR helps connect advertising, marketing, and digital efforts by ensuring that everyone shares the same goals and messaging, which improves collaboration and client satisfaction.

b. Barriers such as limited resources, cultural misunderstandings, or mismatched expectations often arise, especially in SMEs and nonprofits in Accra. PR helps bridge these gaps through clear communication, relationship-building, and adaptability. By promoting teamwork and understanding the local context, PR ensures that campaigns remain effective even with small budgets

Question 3: Determining how PR improves brand performance in an IMC / What are the particular roles that PR plays in the realization of better brand performance in integrated campaigns?

11. In your experience, what specific PR practices have directly contributed to improved brand performance in integrated campaigns?

How has PR enhanced brand reputation, loyalty, or equity through storytelling, community initiatives, or crisis response? Please share a success story or challenge from your organization.

Ans. PR improves brand performance by building a strong reputation and emotional connection with the audience. In our case, consistent storytelling, community outreach, and transparent communication have strengthened brand trust and loyalty. For example, during a cybersecurity awareness campaign, our PR team worked with media and online communities to educate the

public on safe digital practices. This not only improved our brand visibility but also positioned the company as a trusted and responsible technology partner.

12. How does PR create experiential value for consumers or stakeholders in your IMC efforts?

What role does PR play in fostering emotional connections or social responsibility (e.g., environmental campaigns in Ghana)? How does this impact long-term brand performance?

Ans. PR creates experiential value by helping people connect emotionally with the brand through meaningful stories, events, and social impact activities. In Ghana, PR often promotes community and environmental campaigns that show the brand's care for society. These efforts build trust, loyalty, and a positive image, which strengthen long-term brand performance by keeping the brand relevant and respected in the public's eyes.

13. Based on your professional insights, how can PR be measured or evaluated for its impact on brand performance within IMC?

What metrics (e.g., stakeholder satisfaction, media coverage, brand equity) do you use? How does this align with theories like stakeholder engagement or excellence in PR?

Ans. PR impact can be measured through both quantitative and qualitative metrics. Common measures include media coverage, audience engagement, stakeholder feedback, and brand sentiment. We also track brand awareness, customer trust, and reputation improvement over time. In integrated campaigns, PR's success is seen when messages gain positive attention, relationships grow stronger, and the brand's overall image and equity improve.

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about the role of PR in IMC that we haven't discussed?

I am grateful for your participation. Where further information or clarity is required, I will contact you.

