

25^{of} 100**Dr. Caroline
Azionya**

Here to be Forward -thinking

**Turning knowledge
into influence:** Proving
that scholarship can be
a powerful force for
African progress.

Some journeys to purpose begin in unexpected places. For Dr. Caroline Azionya, hers began at her mother's funeral. Reflecting on the life her mother had lived and the people she had touched, Azionya found herself asking how she could contribute meaningfully to solving some of the challenges facing the continent.

Years later, another moment would sharpen that purpose. As conversations around artificial intelligence increasingly suggested that AI had made public relations and strategic communication obsolete, she refused to accept the narrative. Instead, she saw an opportunity: to help shape what the future of the profession could become.

Today, Dr. Azionya is an award-winning Senior Lecturer in Strategic Communication at the University of Johannesburg and the 69th President of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA). Her career challenges the assumption that academics simply observe industries from a distance. She is actively helping reshape the industry she studies.

Her doctoral research explores digital multisided platforms and the ways AI-driven ecosystems create and capture value. This scholarship has informed her curriculum development and contributed to her participation in AI discussions at ministerial and industry level across Africa. Her work on generative AI and digital platforms asks an important question: how can African institutions ensure that African markets and communities are not merely consumers of technological innovation, but participants in creating its value?

That same thinking informs her leadership at PRISA. As Chair of the PRISMs Summit, Dr. Azionya helped introduce new approaches that strengthened the platform's visibility and commercial sustainability while placing AI safety, governance and professionalisation at the centre of industry conversations. Her work contributed to the Africa Declaration, which seeks to advance professional standards across the continent.

Her current focus is equally forward-looking: the professional pipeline. Through initiatives such as the Student Employability and Brag Summit, she has helped bring students, universities and industry closer together, recognising that the future of strategic communication depends on graduates who are not only academically qualified but prepared to contribute meaningfully to the profession.

Her leadership journey within PRISA has been deliberate. From Interim Vice President in 2024 to President-Elect in 2025 and now President, she has championed consolidation, collaboration and stronger professional standards across Southern Africa.

Yet behind the titles is a woman who wears many hats: academic, researcher, executive trainer, wife, mother and professional leader. In Dr. Azionya's world, these identities do not compete; they strengthen one another. Her academic foundation gives her the ability to recognise change early, while her leadership experience gives her the opportunity to turn insight into action.

Her story is a powerful reminder that knowledge is not simply something to acquire. In the right hands, it becomes a tool for building institutions, opening opportunities and shaping the future.

Your
story
matters

