

DISCOURSE GENRES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE PODCAST OF THE LUXURY HOUSES

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Abstract

Brands, the most luxurious as well as the lesser known, have now fully included the podcast in their storytelling strategy. In October 2018, a communication campaign by LVMH testifies to the emergence of a new form of audio advertising, the podcast, which can be seen as collaborative storytelling or a radio for everyone rather than a radio for all seems to respond to the habits of young people, each year more numerous to listen to these sound programs. With its less conventional, more intimate tone, the podcast has the assets to satisfy a connected and mobile lifestyle. This new media, therefore, gathers a young audience, which proves, moreover, particularly attentive, as indicated by a study published by Médiamétrie in April 2018: more than 80% of downloaded podcasts are listened to and, moreover, in full for the majority (58%). So, the podcast appears as a new intimate and engaged media of luxury houses (and not only). We will therefore identify the podcast series of the various luxury houses, and in a qualitative approach, we will try to observe the characteristics of the podcasts, as a kind of digital discourse.

Keywords: digital discourse, podcast, luxury houses

1. INTRODUCTION. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF DIGITAL DISCOURSE GENRES. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE STATE OF ACADEMIC WORK

Because of its diversity, mutability, and the large number of factors to be considered in its analysis (situations, statements, functions), the genre is a complex conceptual object to grasp and instrumentalize (Gonçalves, 2014). The concept of "digital genre" whose name is not yet stable - cyberggenres - (Caballero, 2008), web genres or computer genres (Bonhomme, 2015), is considered by some as a renewal of genres that distinguishes the digital from the traditional (Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000), and by others as completely new

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genres, with new technodiscursive structures and functions: "Technodiscourses, therefore, have certain properties that distinguish them from pre-digital or non-digital discourses, which must be described from digital discursive universes and not from devices built on non-digital discourses" (Paveau, 2017).

According to Chartrand Aubin, Blain, and Simard (1999), genres are conventional forms of messages defined according to a number of factors, including "[...] the communication situation; the world represented: fictional or real; the topic addressed; the general structure: narrative, description, explanation, argumentation, etc. Among the oral genres are conversation, conference, debate, interview, and song". The "digital" refers to a set of techniques that allow the production, storage and processing of information in binary form. This phenomenon induces a redistribution of content and skills: we are witnessing a contamination of professional spheres as well as an extension of the fields of intervention, observable in other media fields.

The podcast appears as the great return of sound. This article focuses on the genres of discourse in the digital age, while seeking to answer the question "What are the possibilities offered by the technological revolution in terms of genres of discourse?" and analysing the specificities and the role of the podcast in the context of brand communication.

Thus, the questions raised refer both to the notions of digital discourse genres and to podcasting. What are the observable variations? For example, Dior, Gucci, and Chanel. Is it a means of expression that has allowed them to maintain the link with their customers during the pandemic, but that is also more intimate, deeper, and sometimes even more committed? This is how Nathalie Lemonnier, founder of the digital strategy and customer relationship consulting firm Lemon Think¹, explains it. We will try to take the first steps in the deciphering of a phenomenon that is still in its infancy.

2. METHODOLOGY

The academic works aimed at the genres of discourse in the digital age show an interpretative approach, adopted for example by Gonçalves (2014), which favours the description of the identity of genres, despite their instability and perpetual mutations. Some studies explore the concept of digital discourse genre in a qualitative way. This is notably the case with Bonhomme's (2015) research.

¹ Lemon Think - Cabinet de Conseil en Stratégie Marketing et Digitale Luxe.

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In his study, the researcher used the case study to analyse the homepages of three political sites, paying particular attention to the constants showing a generic framing during their production and contributing to a "genre effect" during their consultation. Maingueneau's model (2013), allowed us to identify an "encompassing scene" (sphere of activity in which the homepage is inscribed) such as politics, but also a "generic scene" (framing of language activities using a medium, roles and purposes) and a "scenography" (e.g., choice of colour, access to popular social media).

Based on these types of approaches and on the theory of digital discourse genres, we will try to identify the specificities of the podcasts of the luxury houses, their framing, their functions, as well as their place in the brand's communication tools.

Podcasts have become a necessity in brands' communication strategies over the past few years. A format that has also seduced players in the luxury sector - especially fashion houses - who are competing creatively to convey their universe and, at the same time, attract their audience. Podcasting seems to be the great return of sound.

We observed that many luxury houses tried to maintain the link with the customers. It was inappropriate to talk about the products, especially at the beginning of the crisis when there was no visibility, but it was necessary to maintain a link, which the podcast allowed. So the podcast is seen as a medium of intimacy at the same time. We will try, in this direction, to detect the transformations identified at the level of the **functions** of the podcast, the **themes** of discussion, the characters of the dialogue contract, by answering the question "What type of **content** do they convey?".

In addition, to be able to answer the question "What are the changes in the corporate communication sector related to branding?", we try to discover characteristics related to the **ethos of the podcast**. What is the predominant type of discursive ethos: an individual or rather a collective ethos, an authentic or rather advertising ethos, a committed or rather disengaged ethos, an informal and friendly or rather formal ethos? We will therefore identify the podcast series of the various luxury houses, and in a qualitative approach, we will try to observe the **characteristics** of the podcasts, as a kind of digital discourse.

3. THE PODCAST

Brands, both high- and low-profile, have now fully integrated the podcast into their storytelling strategy. In October 2018, an LVMH communications

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campaign attests to the emergence of a new form of audio advertising. The podcast, which can be seen as collaborative storytelling or radio for each person rather than radio for all, seems to cater to the habits of young people, who are listening to these audio programmes in increasing numbers every year.

With a less conventional and more intimate tone, the podcast has the potential to cater to a connected and mobile lifestyle. As a result, this new medium is attracting a young audience, which is also particularly attentive, as indicated by a study published by Médiamétrie² in September 2020³: more than 80% of downloaded podcasts are listened to and, moreover, the majority (58%) are listened to in full⁴. So podcasts seem to be a new intimate and engaging means of communication for luxury homes (and beyond).

3.1. Luxury brand podcast

Until 2018, online magazines and influencers from the fashion sector are podcasting frequently. Especially digital content sites with a strong focus on a millennial target group which are mainly accessed via smartphones such as Highsnobiety and Hypebeast have engaged in podcasting (Dietrich and Bug, 2018). But reputable business magazines in the fashion industry like The Business of Fashion are also using podcasts as a form of communicating content. Luxury and premium brands seem to add a podcast into their communication mix. One assumption might be the utmost importance of storytelling and brand experience in this business sector. In the following examples, after a short description of some of the podcast series selected for our short study, we seek luxury brands podcast series **topics** and **specificities**.

(a) Hermès: a light touch

At the beginning of 2019, Hermès kicked off the "Le Monde d'Hermès" podcast collection. After an inaugural season dedicated to the teams at its flagship in Paris, followed by a season focused on five of the house's experts, last year the brand unveiled "Les Enquêtes de Pénélope", built around an imaginary heroine in search of iconic objects.

For the 2022 season, Hermès proposes "Un Air de Légèreté" and gives voice to more - sometimes unexpected - elements of its heritage. From the large hand of

² Médiamétrie's eStat Podcast measurement counts the listens and downloads of French podcasts of its subscribers on the scope taken into account by the measurement. The contents measured are the podcasts previously broadcast and/or native podcasts.

³ Médiamétrie - Le podcast, un format à fort potentiel (mediametrie.fr), accessed on January, 26, 2023.

⁴ Microsoft PowerPoint - 2018 04 26 CdP Ecoute Podcasts VF.pptx (mediametrie.fr), accessed on January, 26, 2023.

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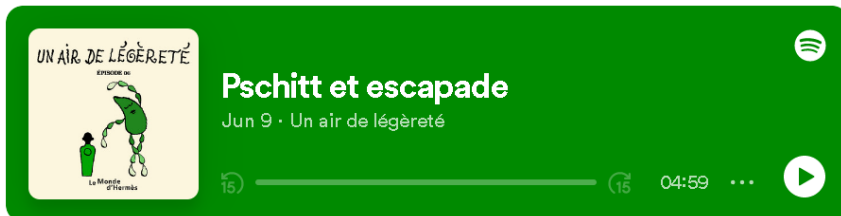
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ISSN 2602-1463

Vol. 7 (1) 2023 Society, Communication and Politics. Discursive Patterns

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the Arceau watch to the salad bowl from the Soleil collection, not forgetting a drop of perfume or a jumping bar from Saut Hermès: an ode to personification.



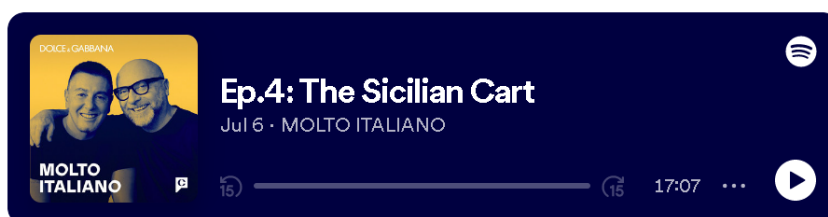
(b) Saint Laurent: Smoking

A secret smoking room hidden in the Saint Laurent Rive Droite Paris concept store. Here, away from the hustle and bustle of rue Saint Honoré, the house recorded this salvo of episodes. Catherine Deneuve, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Laetitia Casta, Gaspard Noé... Here, guests are invited to talk "in complete transparency", in an intimate atmosphere that encourages trust.



(c) Dolce & Gabbana: Molto Italiano

At Dolce & Gabbana, Italian heritage is cultivated. From corsets to tank tops and Sicilian trolleys, the brand pays homage to its heritage. Hosted by actress Isabelle Rossellini, this podcast is fuelled by exchanges with guests from various disciplines - historians, academics, artists... - who come to share their views on each of the major topics covered.



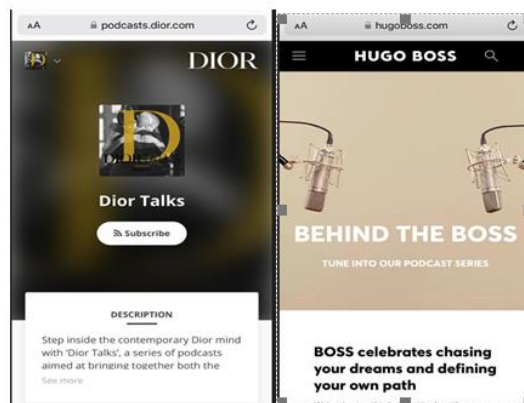
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(d) *BOSS: Behind The BOSS*

The resurgent German brand launched a new podcast "Behind The BOSS" on May 2020. This inspirational podcast aims to give a voice every two weeks to personalities from various backgrounds - fashion, sport, metaverse... - who reveal their journey, goals, doubts and successes.

(e) *Dior: A.B.C.Dior*

Dior Talks, Lady Art, Dior Tales, Dior Joaillerie... Among the many themed podcasts offered by the fashion house, "Dior Stories - A.B.C.Dior" aims to explore intrinsic elements of its brand's history through an alphabet. M for "Montaigne" street, O for "gold", T for "fabrics"... all little pills that echo the brand's many codes.



(f) *Gucci*

The podcasting trend has also affected the Italian house Gucci, which has chosen to present a series of podcasts made up of 28 episodes, offering answers to social questions, but also on topics such as fashion and art, with meetings between artists.

3.2. Functions, characteristics and topics

The podcast arose in the era of Web 2.0 and is, thus, often named in one breath with other social media networks. However, its special auditive character also evokes a strong **relationship with the audio branding activities** of a company. Despite, as the podcast was not created to deliver musical stimuli, it must be part

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of a corporate content marketing strategy, if the customers, the public of the company has access to such social media and used it frequently.

Podcasts, like other marketing strategies, were created by companies, brands, or people in order to **engage with an external community**. In order to remain meaningful and distinguishable on the market, brands aim to **transport their values to the customer** in as many ways as possible to create a consistent brand image (Steiner, 2018). Offering companies or brands the possibility to create **attention, deliver corporate values translated to sounds, and increase identification with the target group** by audio stimuli, sound branding can significantly enhance brand popularity (Steiner, 2018, p. 70-74).

Podcasting, as a digital discourse genre, has allowed luxury brands to **keep in touch with their customers** (especially during the pandemic), but this kind of communication seems to be also more intimate, deeper, and sometimes even more engaged.

Additionally, especially younger age groups access podcasts to receive news, politics, and special events (Main, 2017), so luxury brands intended to have this type of public as an audience. Considering that podcast content is perceived as more trustworthy than the content of local newspapers and the radio by the young audience (Main, 2017), the luxury brands podcast can fulfil this **function** too, that of creating a long customer-brand relationship.

When speaking about **characteristics**, for a good **podcast** it is important to include (1) being knowledgeable on the subject (in our case, fashion, sustainability, the luxury item, challenges in the fashion industry, premium goods market, but also estate of mind, motivation, art, history - related to the brand-, beauty, profession, passion, creativity, emotions), (2) clearly labeling the episodes, (3) getting to the point of the episode, (4) offering high-quality content, and (5) posting regularly.

For having a good podcast, specialists mention five elements⁵: (1) focus on a central idea, (2) play to an audience, (3) regular schedules, (4) show structure, and (5) authenticity. All the brands mentioned above respect all these indicators so that their results are at their maximum capacity. Luxury brand podcasts are part of a communication brand strategy and they are trying to manage as many directions in their communication with the public as possible.

⁵ What Makes a Good Podcast? 5 Elements You Should Know (g2.com), accessed on January 27, 2023.

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When it comes to **topics**, even if, the most popular podcast categories in Europe are “Comedy”, “Education and Science,” “Health”, “Society and Culture”, and “Music”, “Religion”, “Family and Children”, and “Arts” are on the lowest ranks (Goldhammer, 2017), lifestyle topics featuring **fashion**, food, and travel related content, are gaining more attention, especially among the female audience [Newman et al., 2018]. There is almost no niche topic left that is not represented in a podcast (Niederauer-Kopf and Domenichini, 2018). When examining the name of the podcast episodes one can see that episodes belong to one content series covering one specific theme or event happening at the French houses. For example, podcast series can cover sometimes the collaboration with the famous concept store Colette in Paris, where CHANEL organized events and talks which were captured in the form of a podcast and shared after recording.

When speaking about "What type of **content** do they convey?", we must take into consideration that in order to increase identification with the target group, the luxury houses had in their portfolio different types of podcasts with different guests and sometimes with different hosts. Fashion podcasts cover a wide range of different topics, in order to build brand relationships with a community. As we saw, some retailers engaged in innovative content formats such as podcasts as a part of the content marketing strategy and thus, also part of the social media communication of a fashion company.

3.3 The podcasts ethos in the fashion industry

A study on the impact of social media marketing in the fashion industry by Kim and Ko in 2010 has revealed that social media engagement, comprising properties such as entertainment, interaction, customization, online word of mouth, and trends, has a positive impact on brand trust, intimacy, and purchase intention [Kim and Ko, 2010]. In this direction, luxury houses have created and promoted their own podcast in the last years. The podcast in the fashion industry is a space created to put together brand and community that aims to discuss issues in the fashion industry. The latest types of podcasts had brought to light topics like fashion ethics, sustainability, innovation, technology, showing an individual and a collective ethos, an authentic rather advertising ethos, a committed (rather disengaged) ethos, an informal and friendly (rather formal) ethos?

The luxury houses such as Dior, Gucci, Boss, Saint Laurent, and Hermès have in their audio interventions special stories based on storytelling offering answers to social questions, not only economic but related to art also, to creativity, goals,

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success, having as guests different people from stars to people who are involved in the brand creations but who aren't so visible to the public. Dolce&Gabbana podcast, for example, brings academics and historians to map the luxury house within the Italian cultural dimension. So, a social ethos, being more involved in society's problems and more interested in social changes and challenges. Engagement and inspiration seem to be the most important objectives of luxury brands podcasts.

Sometimes, in order to bring experience back to the boutique, the store organizes talks and gatherings. These are recorded and distributed in podcast formats.

The way the fashion industry exists in the market is thanks to "both those involved in design and those responsible for organizational and production structures, marketing, communication and distribution" (Barrère & Santagata, 2005, p. 201). Fashion is a site of cultural production where issues of gender, identity and consumerism meet. So, the podcast should retain all of these aspects and present them in various aspects.

3. CONCLUSIONS

History indicates that the fashion industry seems to adapt to new media formats sometimes more slowly than other industry sectors [DashHudson, 2016]

A fashion podcast is an audio file distributed freely on the internet made by fashion industry insiders with a topical focus on fashion-related content. The podcast seems to make it easier to tell the stories of luxury brands (to know the history, to discover the manufacturing secrets, to get behind-the-scenes access). More and more major luxury houses are launching podcasts, a communication tool favoured in the context of the pandemic to limit the isolation linked to closures and bans imposed in several countries around the world.

One of the main goals of the luxury sector is to reach out to the younger generation. But it is very difficult to capture and hold the attention of this generation capable of quickly moving from one Instagram story to another completely abandoning one social network for another (RIP Facebook). So, additionally, it can be assumed that the content of the podcast was specially created to target a young audience. The topics are very trend and "hype" focused compared to other podcasts analysed in the embedded case exploration

Booming in France, with a 48% increase in listeners (2021), the branded podcast has been taken over by luxury brands (Harris study): "Dior Talks" and "Dior

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Stories" by Dior, "Confidences particulières" by LVMH, " 3.55 " the CHANEL podcast, " Gucci " with English pop legend Elton John, " Inspire " by Cartier.

Luxury brands such as Balenciaga, Louboutin, Chanel or Thierry Mugler had already invested in: - bookshops and museums where they tell their story through exhibitions (e.g., Christian Louboutin at the Palais de la Porte Dorée) - bistros and cafés that look like Café Saint Laurent Rive Droite or Ralph's, by Ralph Laurent, - social networks, by multiplying collaborations with influencers on Instagram and Tik Tok.

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ISSN 2602-1463

Vol. 7 (1) 2023 Society, Communication and Politics. Discursive Patterns

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