Soundwaves of Success?

Exploring the Differential Effects of Branded & Corporate Podcasts

on Corporate Reputation

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Abstract

Over the past decade podcasts have emerged into an evergreen trend, that an increasing amount of organisations are playing along. Within the organisational podcasting realm, two prominent and distinct audio formats have emerged, being corporate and branded podcasts. Corporate podcasts as a pure form of organisational communication, typically featuring employees and other affiliated individuals from the publishing organisation. These podcasts predominantly focus on corporate-related topics and serve internal or external public relations purposes. Branded podcasts on the other hand, represent a different approach to audio content. The primary objective of branded podcasts is to entertain and inform target audiences through storytelling narratives and content. They go beyond conventional brand communication and promotion, aiming to create engaging content experiences for listeners, to emotionally bond with them through a subtle link between content theme and brand identity. Given the distinct characteristics, this study explores differential effects of branded and corporate podcasts on corporate reputation, in the context of Mercedes-Benz. Further objectives included the examination of potential differences in the podcasts' authenticity, entertainment, and information value. Using a two-group experimental design, participants were randomly assigned to either listen to a branded podcast episode or corporate podcast episode. The results indicate that there were no significant differences in the overall perceived reputation between the two podcast formats. However, participants in the corporate podcast group rated Mercedes-Benz higher in the underlying dimension accounting for innovation and leadership impressions. Different than expected, no significant differences were found for other reputation dimensions, nor for perceived authenticity, entertainment, and information value. This implies that despite the divergent content styles and narratives employed in branded and corporate podcasts, the underlying organisational association may have the potential to influence listeners' perceptions. Even when presented with distinct formats, the mere recognition of a podcast as being affiliated with an organisation may shape listeners' overall impressions, transcending the distinctions in content and its delivery.

Introduction

At the Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco 2005, Steve Jobs, founder, and CEO of Apple at the time, declared podcasts "the hottest thing going in radio", as he announced *iTunes 4.9*, featuring native podcast support for the first time. The impact was immediate, with podcast subscriptions on the platform exceeding one million two days after launch (Apple, 2005b), marking a significant milestone in the history of podcasting and a notable step towards its mainstream adoption.

At its launch, the iTunes directory originally featured 3,000 free podcasts (Apple, 2005a). At present, determining the exact number of podcasts available is challenging due to a lack of universal criteria for what qualifies as a podcast and inconsistencies of accounting for inactive shows. Nonetheless, leading audio content provider Spotify (2023) claims to offer over five million podcasts in its streaming library, while Podcast Index LL (2023) estimates that the total number of podcasts is likely around four million. The *Global Podcast Listener Forecast 2021–2025* by Cramer-Flood (2022) predicts that the number of individuals listening to podcasts will reach nearly half a billion people by 2023.

Podcasts have emerged as a convenient and diverse medium of entertainment or education that resonates with the digital generation's *zeitgeist* seeking multitasking media exposure while being physically and mentally active (Perks & Turner, 2019). This is evident from the increasing number of people regularly tuning in to their favourite shows. Their rather lengthy format therefore disrupts the current media landscape which prioritises fast-paced, trend-based content across popular social platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Hammerschmidt, 2020).

The demographics of podcast listeners are of significant interest. A study conducted by Online Marketing Rockstars (2021) revealed that podcast listeners are typically between 21 and 35 years of age, possess a certain level of academic education, and averagely have a minimum gross household income of €2,500. These characteristics make podcast listeners a unique, homogeneous audience, often described as "young, affluent, and educated" (Insider Intelligence, 2022). Moreover, the *audiophiles* are generally receptive towards integrated

advertisements, making them an attractive target group for marketing efforts (Online Marketing Rockstars, 2021; see also Insider Intelligence, 2022; Domenichini, 2018).

The distinct characteristics of podcast listeners have prompted organisations to recognise the potential of audio formats as a valuable media outlet. As per Insider Intelligence (2022), podcast ad spending in the United States alone is expected to exceed $2 billion by 2023. Moreover, businesses of all sizes are utilising podcasts as a tool to reach and engage with their stakeholders. Besides sponsorships, advertisements, and guest appearances on relevant shows, organisations are actively integrating their own branded and corporate podcasts into their digital content strategies. Popular examples of branded podcasts include *Future Dimensions* by Mercedes-Benz, Sephora's *#LIPSTORIES* and *Now What?* by Wix. Further, some organisations bank on corporate podcast formats such as BMW with *Changing Lanes* or Netflix with its corporate podcast for employer branding *WeAreNetflix*.

There has been a massive adoption of podcasts by companies as a popular form of branded content and marketing. Still, regardless of the widespread use and praise of podcasts in business articles and industry circles, the scientific community has largely overlooked this phenomenon. While extensive research exists on podcast listener characteristics and behaviour in the social sciences (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020; Kazlauskas & Robinson, 2012; Perks et al., 2019; Perks & Turner, 2019), there remains a significant gap in understanding the effects of corporate podcasts and branded podcasts as distinct communication formats. Corporate podcasts provide content directly related to their sending company, whereas branded podcasts typically reduce corporate affiliations to an absolute minimum, relying on subtle means of connecting content with brand identity. Despite these remarkable differences, the effects of these two types of podcasts have received little to no research attention and no studies have empirically compared their impacts so far.

The study at hand seeks to contribute particularly to the understanding of podcasts within the realm of corporate reputation. While previous research has acknowledged the role of corporate podcasts as a strategic communication tool for shaping corporate reputation (Heck, 2020; Huber 2008), a direct comparison of the impact of corporate and branded

podcasts on corporate reputation has yet to be done. This knowledge gap presents an exciting and relevant research opportunity to explore the differential effects and implications of these podcast formats in shaping corporate reputation. Therefore, the main underlying research question guiding this study is as follows:

RQ: To what extent does listening to a corporate podcast compared to a branded podcast cause differences in corporate reputation?

By investigating the differential effects of corporate and branded podcasts, one can possibly shed light on effects and implications of these podcast formats in the realm of corporate reputation. Further, understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and influences could provide valuable insights for companies seeking to optimise their communication efforts through audio content. Moreover, delving into this unexplored territory, contributes to bridging the gap between industry practice and empirical research, addressing the conflict between the glorification of podcasts in organisational communication and the lack of scientific recognition.

Theoretical Framework

Branded and Corporate Podcasts

The podcast as a specified term for audio content has been around for almost 20 years. First mentioned by Hammersley (2004) in the article *Audible revolution* published in The Guardian it is a "portmanteau of *iPod* (Apple's mp3 player) and *broadcasting*" (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022, p. 3). The term describes "audio files that can be downloaded or streamed from a mobile device, usually at no direct cost to the user" (Perks & Turner, 2019, p. 97). Despite its affordance of being mostly free to listen to, podcasting has been compared to an audio-form of *Netflix* (Schreyer & Solmecke, 2019) given its on-demand, streaming characteristic. Podcasts, therefore, possess certain advantages over traditional media forms such as television and radio, including portability, interactivity, and non-repetitive content. These features give podcasts the potential to replace or at least challenge the dominance of these established media formats (Perks & Turner, 2019). Hence, from a combined perspective that considers content and technical characteristics, podcasts are digital audio files that cover a broad spectrum of subjects and are made available on the internet as a series of individual

episodes. They can be listened to or subscribed to, usually through a streaming application, on a mobile device at no extra cost (Schreyer & Solmecke, 2019).

When examining podcasts within the realm of organisational communication, the characterisation of the audio medium extends beyond the beforementioned essence and affordances. Still, the formats of podcasts distributed by organisations have received limited attention in academia (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022; Heck, 2020) However, within the realm of professional communication, there is a vibrant discourse surrounding these content formats. There is a prevalent distinction between two distinct variations, being branded podcasts and corporate podcasts, which both have gained increased popularity within organisational settings in recent years.

According to the definition provided by the Observatorio Branded Entertainment (2021), a branded podcast represents a distinct type of audio content that is either produced or funded by a brand. These podcasts are accessible on-demand through the brand's digital platforms or popular podcasting streaming providers. The primary objective of branded podcasts is to entertain and inform target audiences (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). Branded podcasts surpass conventional brand communication and product promotion by delivering storytelling narratives and content (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). In contrast, corporate podcasts are often characterised as a form of "pure brand communication" and typically feature employees and managers from the publishing organisation (Podmon, 2022). These podcasts predominantly focus on corporate-related topics (Höcker, 2021). Being a "particular offshoot of content marketing in a broader branded content sphere" (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021, p. 334), branded podcasts are more nuanced than corporate formats. The sender company is not front and centre (Online Marketing Rockstars, 2023) and in some cases, these podcasts may not even actively disclose their affiliation with a company, utilizing rather subtle approaches to engage listeners (Online Marketing Rockstars, 2023). Nonetheless, regardless of the extent to which the thematic direction of a branded podcast entails a noticeable brand connection, its narrative aligns with the core brand identity including its culture, purposes, and objectives (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). This way

branded podcasts aim to emotionally bond with audiences through a subtle link between content theme and organizational identity (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022).

Corporate podcasts serve either internal or external PR purposes (Höcker, 2021). Internal corporate podcasts, for instance, are employed for knowledge sharing among employees or as an internal platform to convey the organisation's identity, mission, and updates (Höcker, 2021). The primary objective of these internal formats is to cultivate a sense of unity and loyalty among the organisation's staff through "transparent and authentic communication" (Höcker, 2021, p. 35). A notable example is the *Audi Mitarbeiter Podcast*, which is a bi-weekly internal podcast that is publicly accessible, serving as a means to communicate internal corporate messages of the automobile manufacturer to its German speaking workforce (Audi AG, n.d.). External corporate podcasts, on the other hand, are specifically aimed at external stakeholders who possess a direct interest in the sending organisation. These formats serve to disseminate corporate information to the public without the intervention of "editorial filters", associated with relevant press and other multiplier channels (Höcker, 2021, p. 36). Another use case of external corporate podcasts lies in the realm of employer branding, enabling organisations to showcase their culture, expertise, and operational aspects to a diverse pool of potential employees, ranging from interns to highly experienced managers (Höcker, 2021). The podcast produced by CLAAS, a renowned German agricultural machinery manufacturer, is a typical example of an employer branding-focused podcast (CLAAS, n.d.).

Branded podcasts are acknowledged as a distinct form of content marketing that emphasises the entertainment factor, with the sender companies taking a step back from the core theme and allowing space for storytelling content. On the other hand, corporate podcasts are perceived more as a mode of translation, where existing means of corporate communication are transformed into a modern form of audio messages that serve various business-driven objectives. By employing these distinct labels, research findings and recommendations can be clearly delineated for each term, facilitating interpretations, and enabling future academic contributions to the topic.

Regardless of the distinct characteristics of branded and corporate podcasts, it is important to note that both concepts are sometimes used interchangeably due to the absence of a universal definition. The lack of clear differentiations between the two categories makes it challenging to classify some podcasts definitively as solely branded or corporate (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). For instance, the Green Talks podcast, produced in collaboration with the University of Twente by the Green Hub Twente, explores general sustainability topics but also maintains a close association with the university's organisational activities (Green Hub Twente, n.d.). This overlap blurs the line between branded and corporate podcasts and makes a clear distinction difficult. Nevertheless, to maintain consistency with most recent professional jargon (Online Marketing Rockstars, 2023) and given that distinct characteristics and use cases exist, this paper maintains a clear differentiation between branded podcasts and corporate podcasts as two separate content formats.

Corporate Reputation

Several reasons exist why organisations choose to incorporate podcasts into their strategic communication efforts. One recurring application is the use of podcasts as a management tool to shape the corporate image and reputation of the sending company (Online Marketing Rockstars, 2023; Schreyer, 2019). However, to maintain consistency with existing empirical research (Heck, 2020; Huber, 2008) the term 'corporate reputation' will be utilised in this study rather than 'corporate image'. It is worth noting, that different schools of thought exist on whether image and reputation are distinct or overlapping concepts (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

Gotsi and Wilson (2001) have made an effort to unify popular interpretations of corporate reputation, stating that a company's corporate reputation is formed by stakeholders' long-term assessment of the company, influenced by their personal interactions with the company, as well as any other information or symbolism that conveys the company's actions. This definition is conform with the assumption of Fombrun (1996) that "corporate reputation is a snapshot that reconciles the multiple images of a company held by all of its constituencies" (p. 144). Additionally, Holzhauer (1991, as cited in Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) argues that reputations are shaped by the exposure to different advertisements, contributing to the

familiarity with a company. Further, the formation of corporate reputation strongly relies on individuals' impressions of an organisation, with direct personal experiences having a prime influence (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Moreover, these individual impressions address more particular dimensions of an organisation's identity, which taken together shape the corporate reputation (Fombrun et al., 2015). These underlying dimensions reach from general performance and quality impressions to internal governance, over to an organisation's bottom-line role as a member of society (Fombrun et al. 2015).

There is a common assumption that corporate reputation has a beneficial impact on numerous economic and non-economic factors (Wiedmann & Buxel, 2005) that provide organisations with a competitive edge on the market (Ponzi et al., 2011). According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) "a positive reputation works like a magnet" and "strengthens the attractiveness of an organisation, simplifying the realisation of a broad range of activities" (p. 47). Such activities include the attraction and retention of talented employees, charging elevated prices for products and services (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), as well as facilitations in customer acquisition and retention (Wiedmann & Buxel, 2005).

Branded and corporate podcasts, although they may be perceived as a personalised brand experience by some (Heck, 2020), fall within the realm of mass communication efforts aimed at reputation management and branding. These approaches utilise mass media information, both paid and unpaid (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), which typically include pure advertising endeavours as well as content marketing strategies. While mass media is considered to have less influence on corporate reputation compared to direct personal experiences and social environment encounters, it is recognised as the most relied-upon tool by organisations (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007), as it allows companies to maintain a high level of control over the messages, being sent out.

Drawing from the existing literature and considering that both branded podcasts and corporate podcasts operate within the realm of mass media communication, it is anticipated that both formats fulfil means of reputation management and are utilised by orgnanisation for this purpose. Nonetheless, the podcast formats differ substantially, incorporating distinct

narratives that shape their content. Additionally, the construction of corporate reputation encompasses various underlying dimensions, each addressing different organisational attributes. Consequently, due to the distinctive content they offer, it is anticipated that corporate and branded podcasts will have differing impacts on shaping reputation dimensions.

H1: Corporate and branded podcasts have differing effects on the underlying dimensions of corporate reputation.

Information and Entertainment Value

While one study (Heck, 2020) revealed a positive impact of corporate podcasts on corporate reputation, there remains a noticeable research gap regarding company-produced podcasts, particularly in the realm of branded podcasts. Huber et al. (2008) identified several crucial success factors for corporate podcasts as effective tools for communication and advertising. Grounded in the notion that people are motivated to listen to podcasts for entertainment and information, the authors (Huber et al., 2008) emphasised the importance of perceived information value and perceived entertainment value as significant factors influencing attitudes towards a podcast. The empirical findings of Heck (2020) confirm these conclusions in the context of corporate podcasts, finding a positive correlation between information- and entertainment value of a corporate podcast on reputation. However, it is worth noting that Heck (2020) exclusively sampled university students and only focused on measuring the effects of a corporate podcast. Given these limitations and the fact that only one study revealed a positive impact of corporate podcasts on corporate reputation, there remains a noticeable research gap regarding company-produced podcasts, particularly in the realm of branded podcasts.

The significance of information and entertainment in organisational communication has also been acknowledged within the broader scope of digital content marketing (DCM) (Lou & Xie, 2020). DCM involves the creation and dissemination of brand-related content, such as branded podcasts, on digital platforms with the objective of fostering "brand engagement, trust, and relationships" with existing and potential customers, rather than solely focusing on stimulating purchase intentions (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019, p. 27). Lou and Xie (2020) argue

that DCM plays a pivotal role in shaping brand experiences and fostering brand loyalty among customers. They highlight that the effectiveness of DCM efforts lies in the informative or entertaining value provided. Particularly for brands with high product involvement, the factors of information and entertainment have been recognized as key indicators of the effectiveness of content marketing endeavours (Lou & Xie, 2020). It is worth noting that the role of information tends to surpass the significance of entertainment in these cases (Lou et al., 2019). This can be attributed to the fact that potential clients, when faced with high product involvement, have a stronger inclination to seek and evaluate information to make informed decisions (Lou & Xie, 2020). Therefore, providing valuable and relevant information becomes a crucial aspect of content marketing strategies aimed at engaging and influencing such customers (Lou & et al., 2019).

Within the context of this study, those findings suggests that the perceived information value, as well as the perceived entertainment value might influence the extent to which a branded or corporate podcast succeeds as a reputation management tool.

H2: The perceived entertainment value mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.

H3: The perceived information value mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.

Given the distinct nature of the two podcast formats, it is anticipated that branded podcasts, positioned within the realm of branded entertainment (Observatorio Branded Entertainment, 2021), would prioritize engaging and entertaining the audience rather than directly generating purchase intentions (García-Estévez & Cartes-Barroso, 2022). On the other hand, corporate podcasts are primarily considered PR tools for conveying brand insights (Höcker, 2021). As a result, it is expected that the perceived entertainment value of a branded podcast would outweigh that of a corporate format, while the corporate format is predicted to offer greater informational value compared to the branded podcast format.

H4: The perceived entertainment value is higher for a branded podcast than for a corporate podcast.

H5: The perceived information value is higher for a corporate podcast than for a branded podcast.

Authenticity

Content marketing stands out to traditional marketing efforts. Conventional forms of marketing, such as paid self-promotion and company endorsements, are often met with scepticism and doubt by consumers, who are suspicious of the underlying intentions, questioning the credibility and authenticity of the message being conveyed (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). This is why "consumers prefer consumption experiences that are authentic, meaning real, true or genuine" (Charlton & Cornwell, 2019, p. 280). Moreover, the *IMPACT model*, developed by Fombrun and Van Riel (2004), suggests that marketing can be most effective for reputation management when it is perceived as authentic.

Within advertising particularly, authenticity is considered a crucial factor for success by many professionals (Becker et al., 2019). Generally interpreted as a multi-layered concept (Beverland et al. 2008; Morhart et al., 2015), that encompasses different traits and aspects from different disciplines, being authentic in an advertisement context means that a message is "genuine, real, and true with regard to some executional element or dimension" (Becker et al., 2019, p. 25). Authenticity is therefore believed to shape the impact of advertisement on brand trust (Anderberg & Morris, 2006), brand-consumer connections (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), emotional appeals of sympathy towards a sending organisation (Stern, 1994), as well as to assist in addressing sceptic consumers (Cornelissen, 2020). This in turn may positively impact a company's reputation.

Achieving authenticity, however, is not a straightforward process, and requires careful attention to the values and culture of an organisation (Arthur W. Page Society, 2012). According to Cook (2007), it is the job of public relations (PR) professionals to uncover and communicate the authenticity at the heart of organisations and to find ways to share stories with the public through language that will resonate and be understood. Moreover, Molleda, (2010) points out that when organisations maintain consistency between their actions and public statements, this can contribute to a reputation that aligns closely with the intended

corporate identity, which further accentuates the role of authenticity in corporate reputation management. Therefore, within the context of this study on branded and corporate podcasts as reputation management tools, it is predicted that the perceived authenticity of a podcast will impact its effect on corporate reputation.

H6: The perceived authenticity mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.

Moreover, a corporate podcast is typically more linked to an organization, openly expressing brand affiliation and establishing a connection between the content discussed and specific corporate activities. Given this direct connection, it is anticipated that the corporate format will be perceived as more authentic compared to a branded podcast format.

H7: The perceived authenticity will be higher for a corporate podcast than for a branded podcast format.

Method

The objective of the paper at hand is to present new empirical findings on the impact of branded and corporate podcasts on corporate reputation and explore effect differences between the two formats. The study utilised an experiment that employed the branded podcast *Future Dimensions* and corporate podcast *Let's talk Mercedes,* both published by Mercedes-Benz to investigate the effect of the podcast formats on the corporate reputation of the car manufacturer.

Research Design

To test the hypotheses formulated in this study, an experiment containing two conditions was conducted. The underlying setting of the experiment was that one group was presented with a branded podcast episode, while the other group listened to an episode of the corporate format. The measurement of perceived corporate reputation was conducted in both participant groups, under the premise that participants were exposed to the intervention in the form of listening to one of the podcast episodes beforehand.

The selected branded podcast for the intervention is *Future Dimensions* by Mercedes-Benz. This podcast is considered a suitable choice due to its content, which corresponds to the applied conceptualisation of branded podcasts. It is a feature podcast that presents innovative and futuristic ideas that may shape society in the future, hosted by the external presenter Ricardia Bramley and featuring interviews with "visionaries and forward thinkers" who are working towards realising these concepts (Mercedes-Benz AG, 2022). Nonetheless, the Mercedes-Benz and the corporate activities are not a central component of the podcast. Even though the topics discussed are relevant to Mercedes-Benz, no connections to the brand are actively constructed through the content, apart from a short fictional storytelling intro. Hence, the main content component of the podcast is fully disconnected from the brand and its corporate activities. As of now, the podcast consists of four episodes (excluding the trailer and teaser episode), with the first episode released in late October 2022 and the fourth episode released in early December 2022 (Mercedes-Benz, n.d.).

The second group of participants listened to the 16th episode of *Let's talk Mercedes* by Mercedes-Benz. The podcast is a corporate audio format of the company, that centres around different mobility topics, featuring Mercedes-Benz experts and partners, aiming to create a "new access point to wide-ranging stories from the world of Mercedes-Benz" (Mercedes-Benz Group, 2020). In contrast to the *Future Dimensions* Podcast *Let's talk Mercedes* therefore incorporates typical corporate podcast features, delivering a 20-minute story about the organisational activities, told by employees and other Mercedes-Benz related personas. As per a personal communication with Annalena Schmitz (May 18, 2023), a digital consultant at the esteemed PR and communications agency Oliver Schrott Kommunikation GmbH, the podcast is the predecessor to the aforementioned branded format, *Future Dimensions*. According to Schmitz, it was established to offer valuable insights into Mercedes-Benz's organisational endeavours and ongoing projects, catering particularly to journalists and some internal audiences. Notably, Oliver Schrott Kommunikation GmbH, has been actively involved in the creation of both discussed formats.

Mercedes-Benz as the sender of the podcasts at stake is highly suitable for this research experiment, due to its widespread international presence and relevance. As one of the most popular and valuable brands globally (Interbrand, 2022), there were no anticipated complications in participants' ability to assess the organisation's reputation due to a lack of familiarity with the brand, regardless of demographics or exposure to either one of the podcast episodes.

Sampling

The desired sample size for the research experiment was set at a minimum of 80 participants. To reach this number of subjects, convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was employed. This involved approaching potential participants directly through various means such as text messages, social media channels, and online communities. Friends, fellow students, relatives, acquaintances, and individuals from relevant online groups, such as academic subreddits and Facebook groups for podcast enthusiasts, were invited to participate in the study. Despite this, snowballing was applied to further distribute the online experiment to further participants. It is important to note, that colleagues at Oliver Schrott Kommunikation GmbH were explicitly asked to not participate in the study to avoid biased responses and conflicts of interest, due to the agency's affiliation with the production of both podcasts at hand. Yet, due to the shared interest in the results and implications of the study, they were considered a useful source for distributing the study to individuals that qualify for the experiment.

Participants

Initially, a total of 184 individuals entered the online experiment. However, after removing individuals who did not complete all survey components and those who failed to answer the control questions on the respective podcast content, the branded podcast intervention group consisted of n = 40 participants, and the corporate podcast intervention group included n = 42 participants. Therefore, the final sample for data analysis consisted of a total of N = 82 valid responses.

The sample consisted of 42 female participants, 39 male participants, and one participant who did not disclose their gender identity. The average age of the participants was 25.5 years (*SD* = 7.8). There was a total of 16 different nationalities represented in the sample, the most prominent being German *n* = 53) and Dutch (*n* = 7). In terms of educational backgrounds, the largest group of participants has either completed a bachelor's degree or was currently enrolled bachelor students (*n* = 49); followed by participants who have completed or were currently pursuing a master's degree (*n* = 16). Further, the sample included eight individuals with some college or vocational education and nine participants who have completed high school or were high school students when taking the survey.

Regarding the podcast usage patterns, more than 75% of participants listens to podcasts somewhat between a daily and monthly basis (*n* = 70), as only six people indicated to never really listen to podcasts. Furthermore, 41 participants stated, that they had never listened to a podcast published by an organisation before, followed by 24 people which stated they were not sure whether they did or not. Despite this, 17 people indicated that they have prior listening experience of an organisation-published podcast.

The descriptive participant data is considered important in this experimental study, as it aimed to address individuals who fall within the distinct user demographics of podcast listeners, which are typically young and well-educated (Insider Intelligence, 2022; Online Marketing Rockstars, 2021). Based upon the participant insights, it is concluded, that the sample provides a good fit for the experimental study, as it widely matches the demographic characteristics of podcast listeners. Despite this, it is worth noting, that the majority of the lacks prior experience in organisation produced podcasts.

Table 1

Descriptive participant statistics

	Branded podcast		Corporate podcast		Full sample	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender						
Female	20	50.0	22	52.4	42	51.2
Male	20	50.0	19	45.2	39	47.6
N.d.			1	2.4	1	1.2
Nationality						
German	25	62.5	28	66.7	53	64.6
Dutch	3	7.5	4	9.5	7	8.5
Other [a]	12	30.0	10	23.8	22	22.2
Education [b]						
Master's degree	7	17.5	9	21.4	16	19.5
Bachelor's degree	27	67.5	22	52.4	49	59.8
Some college or associate degree	3	7.5	5	11.9	8	9.8
High school graduate	3	7.5	6	14.3	9	11.0
Podcast streaming [c]						
Daily	6	15.0	5	11.9	11	13.4
Multiple times a week	10	25.0	9	21.4	19	23.2
About weekly	6	15.0	14	33.3	20	24.4
About monthly	12	30.	8	19.0	20	24.4
Never really	6	15.0	6	14.3	12	14.6
Previous experience [d]						
No	20	50.0	21	50.0	41	50.0
Not sure	10	25.0	14	33.3	24	29.3
Yes	10	25.0	7	16.7	17	20.7

a) Combined values for participant nationalities with *n* < 5.

b) Refers to either obtained degree or current learning status.

c) Estimated podcast streaming frequency.

d) Whether or not participants have listened to a podcast published by an organisation before.

Procedure

In the current study context, an online survey was the single method used for data collection. However, participants were automatically allocated to either the branded or corporate podcast format. Upon giving their consent, both groups were initially presented with questions seeking their general demographic information and their podcast usage patterns. Afterwards, participants in the first group were asked to listen to the first *Future Dimensions* episode *Dimension #1 - what if luxury was naturally sustainable?* which is the shortest episode of the four, and therefore requiring the least amount of time from the participants. The second group, assigned to the corporate podcast, listened to *LTM #16 Just Think and Drive? – Sid Kouider and Maxine Benz*. This particular episode was chosen because its duration aligns with that of the *Future Dimensions* episode. Despite this, the *Let's talk Mercedes* episode also delves into a futuristic topic. This enhances the comparability of the episodes, as they both explore similar subject matters but offer different narratives based on their respective branded and corporate formats.

To facilitate simple access to the correct episode, participants were able to listen to the respective episode within the survey and provided with links to relevant podcast players. Participants had the freedom to choose when and where they listened to the podcast, aligning with its "along the way" characteristic (Heck, 2020, p. 7). Podcasting research has highlighted the medium's popularity due to enabling multitasking (Perks & Turner, 2019). Granting participants autonomy in selecting the preferred time and context of listening replicates the natural use which enhances internal validity. However, this approach may reduce external validity due to the uncontrolled setting. To ensure participants' attentiveness, a set of control questions related to the episode's content was included, allowing elimination of responses lacking comprehension.

In the subsequent phase, participants proceeded with the survey by expressing their perceived corporate reputation of Mercedes-Benz, the sender of the podcasts. Furthermore, all respondents answered questions related to the perceived authenticity, information, and entertainment value of the episode.

Measures

The current study incorporates several measures to investigate the formulated hypotheses. The main focus was on assessing the perceived corporate reputation of Mercedes-Benz, as well as the perceived authenticity, entertainment value, and information value of the podcasts. These measures aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research variables and support the analysis of the study's objectives.

Perceived Corporate Reputation (PCR)

The framework of the RepTrak™ model, developed by the Reputation Institute, was used in this study to measure the perceived reputation of Mercedes-Benz among participants. The model is based on several studies conducted since 2000 and is widely recognised and validated (Ponzi et al., 2011; Fombrun et al., 2015). However, for this experimental study, an adapted version of the model was applied.

The original framework includes seven dimensions that contribute to corporate reputation. However, the 'workplace' dimension, which assesses employee treatment and fairness (Fombrun et al., 2015), was not considered in this study due to expected lack of familiarity with Mercedes-Benz's workplace situation among participants. Regarding the 'Products and Services' dimension, the item 'Offers products and services that are a good value for the money' was excluded. Mercedes-Benz is known as a luxury brand (Mercedes-Benz Group, 2022), which operate in a higher price segment and focus on exclusivity, prestige, and exceptional quality. Evaluating the brand's reputation based on affordability was not relevant in this study. Further changes were made to the 'Leadership' dimension. The attribute 'Has excellent managers' was removed as it relates to internal governance, which is not applicable to the branded podcast group. The item 'Has a strong and appealing leader' was adapted to a broader organisational leadership perspective, becoming 'Portrays strong and appealing leadership'.

Consequently, reputation was assessed based on six remaining dimensions, measured based on a total sum of 18 equally divided attributes. Participants from both groups responded

towards these attributes on a five-point Likert-scale. Table 2 provides a full overview of the applied RepTrak™ scale adaptation.

Table 2

Reputation measures based on an adjusted RepTrak™ scale

Dimension	Attributes
Products & Services	Offers high quality products and services
Products & Services	Stands behind its products and services
Products & Services	Meets customer needs
Innovation	Is an innovative company
Innovation	Is generally the first company to go to market with new products and services
Innovation	Adapts quickly to change
Governance	Is open and transparent about the way the company operates
Governance	Behaves ethically
Governance	Is fair in the way it does business
Citizenship	Acts responsibly to protect the environment
Citizenship	Supports good causes
Citizenship	Has a positive influence on society
Leadership	Has a clear vision for its future
Leadership	Is a well-organised company
Leadership	Portrays strong and appealing leadership
Performance	Is a profitable company
Performance	Delivers financial results that are better than expected
Performance	Shows strong prospects for future growth

Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA)

To evaluate the perceived authenticity of the podcast episodes in relation to the sender Mercedes-Benz, participants respond to an eight-item scale that is based on two underlying dimensions. This scale is an adaptation of an operationalisation developed by Becker et al. (2019). Unlike the more common approach in academia of measuring brand authenticity as a whole (Morhart et al., 2015), this scale focuses on the perceived authenticity of specific advertisements. It originally consists of four different dimensions, which have proven to be underlying factors when conveying an authentic message.

However, in the context of this study, the "realistic plot" dimension is excluded. This is because both podcasts, except for short storytelling elements at the beginning of *Future Dimensions*, do not follow a conventional storyline, as they are feature or interview formats based on several conversations. Therefore, the attributes related to this dimension are not applicable to the podcast episode.

Furthermore, the dimension related to assessing the role of "brand heritage" is also excluded from the current study. While it is evident that Mercedes-Benz, as a renowned and venerable car manufacturer, possesses a rich heritage to leverage and communicate, these particular podcasts take different approaches. The formats focus on exploring future perspectives and relevant topics associated with Mercedes-Benz. Consequently, measuring a dimension of authenticity that is based on past brand heritage is not applicable to this specific audio content, as it diverges from the podcasts' forward-looking orientation.

Moreover, the wording of the remaining scale items has been adjusted to align with the medium of podcasts. As a result, participants will provide responses on a five-point Likert scale for the dimensions "Brand Essence" and "Message Credibility" and their respective underlying attributes. For a comprehensive overview of these dimensions and their associated attributes, refer to Table 3.

Table 3

Measurement model for PPA

Dimension	Attributes [a)
Brand Essence	The podcast episode was suitable.
Brand Essence	The podcast episode was consistent.
Brand Essence	The podcast episode was congruent.
Brand Essence	The podcast episode was a good fit.
Brand Essence	The podcast episode was well aligned.
Message Credibility	The content of the podcast episode was inaccurate.
Message Credibility	The content of the podcast episode was exaggerated.
Message Credibility	The content of the podcast episode was overstated.

a) Participants responded to items based on their overall brand image of Mercedes-Benz.

Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV) & Perceived Information Value (PIV)

The listeners' perceived entertainment and information value of the podcast episodes are measured using two different scales. The first is a five-item scale for measuring entertainment value, while the second is a four-item scale for measuring information value both applied by Lou and Xie (2020). Originally, these scales were developed by Ducoffe (1995) to evaluate the perceived values of video commercials in advertising research. Lou and Xie (2020) have used a slightly adapted version for measuring the perceived values of content marketing videos. Given the alignment between the underlying premises of content marketing

efforts and branded podcasts, there is a strong rationale to apply these scales for assessing the perceived entertainment and information value of branded podcasts. Moreover, no specific reasons have been identified to suggest that these scales would be unsuitable for assessing the perceived value of corporate podcasts. Therefore, it is considered reasonable to apply these scales in order to gauge the perceived entertainment and information value of both branded and corporate podcasts. Hence, only the wordings of the scale items are modified to suit the medium of podcasts. Table 3 provides an overview of the applied scales which participants responded to on a five-point Likert-scale basis.

Table 3

Measurement model for PEV and PIV

Dimension	Attributes
PEV	The podcast episode was entertaining.
PEV	The podcast episode was enjoyable.
PEV	The podcast episode was exciting.
PEV	The podcast episode was pleasing.
PEV	I felt relaxed when I listened to the podcast episode.
PIV	The podcast episode provided relevant content.
PIV	The podcast episode provided timely content.
PIV	The podcast episode provided useful content.
PIV	The podcast episode provided valuable content.

Reliability and Validity

In order to assess the reliability and validity of the applied scales a factor analysis was carried out. As a result, a considerable amount of adaptations had to be made regarding the structure of the measures. Firstly, the factor analysis suggests that the dimensions of perceived (PCR) should be considered as distinct measures rather than a single underlying measure. Additionally, the factor analysis identified overlaps within the dimensions. Specifically, there were overlaps between the dimensions of 'Products & Services' and 'Performance', 'Innovation' and 'Leadership', as well as 'Governance' and 'Citizenship'. Consequently, following the removal of the three unsatisfactory items related to perceived corporate reputation (PCR), the overlapping dimensions were combined, resulting in three distinct PCR dimensions. Additionally, four items were excluded from the scale measuring perceived product attractiveness (PPA), and one item was removed from the scale measuring perceived

information value (PIV). Based on a second factor analysis, it was decided that the adapted

measures were acceptable. A full overview of the adapted measures is given in Table 4.

Table 4

Adjusted measurement scales

Constructs	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
Products, Services & Performance (PSP) [a]	Offers high quality products and services	0.73	.77
	Stands behind its products and services	0.69	
	Meets customer needs	0.48	
	Is a profitable company	0.61	
	Shows strong prospects for future growth	0.40	
Innovation & Leadership (IL) [a]	Is generally the first company to go to market with new products and services	0.63	.67
	Adapts quickly to change	0.52	
	Is a well-organised company	0.51	
	Portrays strong and appealing leadership	0.49	
Governance & Citizenship (GC) [a]	Is open and transparent about the way the company operates	0.62	.89
	Behaves ethically	0.87	
	Is fair in the way it does business	0.58	
	Acts responsibly to protect the environment	0.69	
	Supports good causes	0.55	
	Has a positive influence on society	0.52	
Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA)	The podcast episode was suitable.	0.50	.82
	The podcast episode was congruent.	0.52	
	The podcast episode was a good fit.	0.79	
	The podcast episode was well aligned.	0.46	
Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV)	The podcast episode was entertaining	0.84	.88
	The podcast episode was enjoyable	0.80	
	The podcast episode was exciting	0.68	
	The podcast episode was pleasing	0.63	
	I felt relaxed when I listened to the podcast episode	0.49	
Perceived Information Value (PIV)	The podcast episode provided relevant content	0.58	.77
	The podcast episode provided timely content	0.49	
	The podcast episode provided valuable content	0.64	

a) Merged constructs based on factor analysis of the PCR measurement scale.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The statistics were calculated based on a sample of 82 participants, who provided ratings for the measures of interest. Descriptive statistics are provided for the PCR scale, as well as its underlying concepts, based on the full sample, regardless of group assignment. Furthermore, a comprehensive summary of descriptive insights of the mediating factors PPA, PEV and PIV is given.

Main Measurements

Descriptive statistics were calculated for Perceived Corporate Reputation, as well as its underlying constructs Products, Services & Performance, Innovation and Leadership, and Governance & Citizenship.

Firstly, overall descriptive statistics considering both the branded group and the corporate group were computed. For Perceived Corporate Reputation, the mean score was 3.60 (*SD* = 0.53), and a range from 2.13 to 4.73. Concerning Products, Services & Performance, the mean score was 4.24 (*SD* = 0.56) and the range varied from 2.40 to 5.00. For Innovation and Leadership, the mean score was 3.56 (*SD* = 0.66) and the range spanned from 2.00 to 4.75. Finally, for Governance & Citizenship, the mean score was 3.10 (*SD* = 0.75) and the range extended from 1.00 to 5.00.

Additionally, the descriptive statistics were computed individually for each group. For the Perceived Corporate Reputation, the branded podcast group had a mean score of 3.59 (*SD* = 0.53), while the corporate group had a slightly higher mean score of 3.62 (*SD* = 0.54). Regarding Products, Services & Performance, the branded group yielded an average score of 4.20 (*SD* = 0.56), and the corporate group a slightly higher average score of 4.28 (*SD* = 0.54). In terms of Innovation and Leadership, the branded group obtained a mean score of 3.39 (*SD* = 0.64), whereas the corporate group had a higher mean score of 3.71 (*SD* = 0.66). Lastly, for Governance & Citizenship the Branded Group had a mean score of 3.21 (*SD* = 0.74), while the Corporate Group obtained a slightly lower mean score of 3.00 (*SD* = 0.74). A comprehensive tabular overview is given in Table 5.

Mediating Factors

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the perceived authenticity, perceived entertainment value, and perceived information value of the podcast episodes featured in this study. The entire sample exhibited an average perception of authenticity, with a mean score of 3.80 (SD = 0.68), ranging from 2.00 to 5.00. Participants attributed an average score of 3.25 (SD = 0.89) to the episodes' entertainment value, indicating a range of perceived entertainment from 1.00 to 5.00. Moreover, the information value of the podcast episodes yielded an average score of 4.00 (SD = 0.75), with scores ranging from 1.00 to 5.00.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistics for PPA, PEV, and PIV were examined separately for each intervention group. In the branded podcast intervention group, participants perceived an average authenticity score of 3.78 (SD = 0.66), while in the corporate podcast intervention group, the average score for authenticity was slightly higher at 3.81 (SD = 0.71). In terms of perceived entertainment value, the branded podcast intervention group reported a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 0.80), while the corporate podcast intervention group had a slightly lower mean score of 3.07 (SD = 0.94). Regarding perceived information value, participants in the branded podcast intervention group had an average score of 4.12 (SD = 0.70), and those in the corporate podcast intervention group reported a slightly lower average score of 3.88 (SD = 0.78). For a comprehensive tabular overview refer to Table 5.

Table 5

Descriptive measurement statistics

	Branded Podcast Group			Corporate Podcast Group			Full Sample		
	M	*SD*	*Range*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*
PCR	3.59	0.53	2.40 - 4.73	3.62	0.54	2.13 - 4.67	3.60	0.53	2.13 - 4.73
PSP	4.20	0.56	2.40 - 5.00	4.28	0.54	2.80 - 5.00	4.24	0.56	2.40 - 5.00
IL	3.39	0.64	2.00 - 4.50	3.71	0.66	2.00 - 4.75	3.56	0.66	2.00 - 4.75
GC	3.21	0.74	1.50 - 5.00	3.00	0.74	1.00 - 4.50	3.10	0.75	1.00 - 5.00
PPA	3.78	0.66	2.25 - 5.00	3.81	0.71	2.00 - 5.00	3.80	0.68	2.00 - 5.00
PEV	3.44	0.80	1.60 - 5.00	3.07	0.94	1.00 - 5.00	3.25	0.89	1.00 - 5.00
PIV	4.12	0.70	2.00 - 5.00	3.88	0.78	1.00 - 5.00	4.00	0.75	1.00 - 5.00

Group Differences

To address the main research question of whether there is a significant difference in the perceived reputation of Mercedes-Benz between participants in the branded podcast intervention group and the corporate podcast intervention group, as well as to investigate potential differences in specific dimensions of perceived reputation based on group assignment, a series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted. These t-tests aimed to assess the statistical significance of any variations in measurement scores between the two intervention groups. For a detailed tabular overview of the various t-test results you may refer to Table 6.

Group differences in PCR

The results of the independent-samples t-test conducted on perceived corporate reputation as a whole, revealed no significant difference between the branded podcast intervention group (M = 3.59, SD = 0.53) and the corporate podcast intervention group (M = 3.62, SD = 0.54), $t(80)$ = -0.23, p = .82. Regarding the main research question of this study, these findings indicate that the podcast format listened to, did not result in significant differences of the overall perceived reputation of Mercedes-Benz.

Group differences in underlying PCR concepts

The results of the independent-samples t-tests showed that there was no significant difference in perception of Mercedes-Benz's products, services & performance between the group who listened to the branded podcast format (M = 4.21, SD = 0.58) and the one who had listened to the corporate format (M = 4.28, SD = 0.54), $t(80)$ = -0.61, p = .54. This suggests that both groups exhibited similar perceptions of the products, services, and performance of Mercedes-Benz, regardless of the intervention.

However, a significant difference was found in the underlying concept of innovation and leadership. The scores assigned by the branded podcast intervention group (M = 3.39, SD = 0.64) and the corporate podcast intervention group (M = 3.71, SD = 0.66), differed significantly, $t(80)$ = -2.24, p = 0.03. Participants who listened to the corporate podcast therefore rated the

organisation significantly higher in terms of leadership and innovation traits compared to those in the branded podcast group. However, the Cohen's d (d = 0.49) indicates a small effect size.

Despite this, the t-test for the underlying concept of governance and citizenship revealed no significant difference between the branded podcast group (M = 2.21, SD = 0.74) and the corporate podcast group (M= 3.00, SD = 0.74), t(80) = 1.27, p = 0.21. Therefore, participants had rather similar perceptions of Mercedes-Benz governance and citizenship, regardless of the podcast intervention.

In summary, the analysis revealed that the branded and corporate podcast intervention groups differed significantly in terms of perceived innovation & leadership of Mercedes-Benz, indicating that the specific podcast intervention had an impact on participants' perceptions of these attributes, with the corporate podcast group perceiving higher levels of leadership and innovation. However, further significant differences were neither found for the underlying concept products, services, and performance nor for the concept of governance and citizenship. Therefore, H1 assuming group differences within the underlying PCR dimensions is partially rejected, as significant differences based on podcast format only occurred for one underlying dimension.

Group differences in PPA

The results of the independent-samples t-test conducted on perceived podcast authenticity revealed no significant difference between the branded podcast intervention group (M = 3.78, SD = 0.66) and the corporate podcast intervention group (M = 3.81, SD = 0.71), t(80) = -0.19, p = .85. Consequently, the formulated hypothesis H7 can be rejected, as these findings indicate that the authenticity of the podcast episode people listened to was not perceived significantly different per group.

Group differences in PEV and PIV

Based on the independent-samples t-test results on perceived entertainment value, no significant difference between the branded podcast intervention group (M = 3.44, SD = 0.80) and the corporate podcast intervention group (M = 3.07, SD = 0.94), t(80) = 1.89, p = .06, was found. However, a marginal effect is visible, indicating that the branded podcast did provide a

higher level of entertainment for listeners compared to the corporate podcast. This difference might become more significant with a larger sample size. Moreover, the analysis revealed no significant differences between the branded podcast group (*M* = 4.13, *SD* = 0.70), and corporate podcast group (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = 0.78) for perceived information value either, *t*(80) = 1.49, *p* = .14. This shows that both podcast formats were perceived similarly entertaining and informative by participants, which means that within the realm of this study, the hypotheses H4 and H5 are rejected.

Table 6

Results of various t-test analyses examining group differences

	Branded Podcast		Corporate Podcast		*t*(80)	*p*	Cohen's *d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Perceived Corporate Reputation	3.59	0.53	3.62	0.54	-0.23	.82	0.05
Products, Services & Performance	4.20	0.58	4.28	0.54	-0.61	.54	0.13
Innovation & Leadership	3.39	0.64	3.71	0.66	-2.24	.03	0.49
Governance & Citizenship	3.21	0.74	3.00	0.74	1.27	.21	0.28
Perceived Podcast Authenticity	3.78	0.66	3.81	0.71	-0.19	.85	0.04
Perceived Entertainment Value	3.44	0.80	3.07	0.94	1.89	.06	0.42
Perceived Information Value	4.12	0.70	3.88	0.78	1.49	.14	0.33

Mediation Effects

To investigate the mediation effects of Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA), Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV), and Perceived Information Value (PIV) several simple mediation analyses were carried out, using the PROCESS macro approach by Hayes (2013). A full overview of the effects on Perceived Corporate Reputation (PCR), Products, Services and Performance (PSP), as well as Innovation and Leadership (IL) and Governance and Citizenship (GC) is given in Table 7.

Perceived Podcast Authenticity

The simple mediation analysis to examine the relationship between group assignment and PCR, mediated by PPA, revealed that the direct effect of group assignment on PCR was non-significant, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(81) = 0.16$, $p = .88$. Further, the indirect effect of group assignment on PCR mediated through PPA was non-significant as well, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI -0.11, 0.14]. Further mediation analyses based on PPA, and group assignment were done for the underlying PCR dimensions PSP, IL, and GC. There were neither significant direct effects for PSP, $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(81) = 0.58$, $p = .56$, nor indirect effects, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.12]. However, a significant direct effect was found between group assignment and IL when accounting for the mediation through PPA, $b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(81) = 2.31$, $p < .05$. Despite this, the indirect effect was non-significant, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.11]. Finally, neither a significant direct effect $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(81) = -1.59$, $p = .12$, nor indirect effect $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.19] was found between the relationship of group assignment and GC, when accounting for mediation through PPA.

To conclude, the simple mediation analysis indicated that Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA) had no significant mediation effects on any independent measures in this particular experimental study, which leads to the rejection of hypothesis H6.

Perceived Entertainment Value

The simple mediation analysis to examine the relationship between group assignment and PCR, mediated by PEV, revealed that the direct effect of group assignment on PCR was non-significant, $b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(81) = 1.62$, $p = .10$. Further, the indirect effect of group assignment on PCR mediated through PEV was non-significant as well, $b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [-0.29, 0.01]. Further mediation analyses based on PEV, and group assignment were done for the underlying PCR dimensions PSP, IL, and GC. There were neither significant direct effects for PSP, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(81) = 1.61$, $p = .11$, nor indirect effects, $b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.23, 0.00]. However, a significant direct effect was found between group assignment and IL when accounting for the mediation through PEV, $b = 0.46$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(81) = 3.58$, $p < .05$. Despite this, the indirect effect was non-significant, $b =$

-0.13, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [-0.32, 0.00]. Finally, neither a significant direct effect *b* = -0.06, *SE* = 0.15, *t(*81) = -0.39, *p* = .69, nor indirect effect *b* = -0.15, *SE* = 0.09, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.01] was found between the relationship of group assignment and GC, when accounting for mediation through PEV. To conclude, the simple mediation analysis indicated that Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV) had no significant mediation effects on any independent measures in this particular experimental study. Consequently, hypothesis H2 is rejected.

Perceived Information Value

The simple mediation analysis to examine the relationship between group assignment and PCR, mediated by PIV, revealed that the direct effect of group assignment on PCR was non-significant, *b* = 0.12, *SE* = 0.10, *t(*81) = 1.18, *p* = .24. Further, the indirect effect of group assignment on PCR mediated through PEV was non-significant as well, *b* = -0.09, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [-0.22, 0.03]. Further mediation analyses based on PIV, and group assignment were done for the underlying PCR dimensions PSP, IL, and GC. There were neither significant direct effects for PSP, *b* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.12, *t(*81) = 1.06, *p* = .29, nor indirect effects, *b* = -0.05, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.14, 0.02]. However, a significant direct effect was found between group assignment and IL when accounting for the mediation through PEV, *b* = 0.39, *SE* = 0.14, *t(*81) = 2.84, *p* < .05. Despite this, the indirect effect was non-significant, *b* = -0.07, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [-0.19, 0.02]. Finally, neither a significant direct effect *b* = -0.07, *SE* = 0.14, *t(*81) = -0.49, *p* = .63, nor indirect effect *b* = -0.14, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI [-0.34, 0.05] was found between the relationship of group assignment and GC, when accounting for mediation through PEV.

To conclude, the simple mediation analysis indicated that Perceived Information Value (PIV) had no significant mediation effects on any independent measures in this particular experimental study, which is why hypothesis H3 is rejected.

Table 7

Results of various simple mediation analyses

			Direct Effect				Indirect Effect		
IV [a]	M [b]	DV [c]	*b*	*SE*	*t*(81)	*p*	*b*	*SE*	95% CI
Group	PPA	PCR	0.02	0.10	0.16	.88	0.01	0.06	-0.11 - 0.14
Group	PPA	PSP	0.07	0.12	0.58	.56	0.01	0.05	-0.08 - 0.12
Group	PPA	IL	0.31	0.13	2.31	<.05	0.01	0.05	-0.11 - 0.11
Group	PPA	GC	-0.22	0.14	-1.59	.12	0.02	0.08	-0.15 - 0.19
Group	PEV	PCR	0.16	0.10	1.62	.11	-0.13	0.07	-0.29 - 0.01
Group	PEV	PSP	0.18	0.11	1.61	.11	-0.11	0.06	-0.23 - <0.01
Group	PEV	IL	0.46	0.13	3.58	<.05	-0.13	0.08	-0.32 - <0.01
Group	PEV	GC	-0.06	0.15	-0.39	.69	-0.15	0.09	-0.33 - 0.01
Group	PIV	PCR	0.12	0.10	1.18	.24	-0.09	0.06	-0.22 - 0.03
Group	PIV	PSP	0.13	0.12	1.06	.29	-0.05	0.04	-0.14 - 0.02
Group	PIV	IL	0.39	0.14	2.84	<.05	-0.07	0.05	-0.19 - 0.02
Group	PIV	GC	-0.07	0.14	-0.49	.63	-0.14	0.10	-0.34 - 0.05

a) Independent variable

b) Mediator

c) Dependent variable

Table 8

Research Question and Hypotheses Overview and Outcome

Research Question & Hypotheses	Outcome
RQ *To what extent does listening to a corporate podcast compared to a branded podcast cause differences in corporate reputation?*	No significant difference.
H1 *Corporate and branded podcasts have differing effects on the underlying dimensions of corporate reputation.*	Partially supported.
H2 *The perceived entertainment value mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.*	Not supported.
H3 *The perceived information value mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.*	Not supported.
H4 *The perceived entertainment value is higher for a branded podcast than for a corporate podcast.*	Not supported.
H5 *The perceived information value is higher for a corporate podcast than for a branded podcast.*	Not supported.
H6 *The perceived authenticity mediates the effect of a branded or corporate podcast on corporate reputation and its underlying dimensions.*	Not supported.
H7 *The perceived authenticity will be higher for a corporate podcast than for a branded podcast format.*	Not supported.

Discussion

Main Findings

The primary objective of this study was to explore potential variations in the effects of branded and corporate podcasts on the Perceived Corporate Reputation (PCR) of Mercedes-Benz. Additionally, differences in underlying PCR dimensions, including Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA), Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV), and Perceived Information Value (PIV), were examined. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate any mediation effects of PPA, PEV, and PIV. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the distinct podcast formats did not result in significant differential effects on the PCR of Mercedes-Benz. Additionally, none of the formulated hypotheses concerning group differences and mediations yielded fully significant results. Nonetheless, the absence of significant differences itself provides interesting insights.

Previous research suggested a positive impact of corporate podcasts on PCR (Heck, 2020; Huber, 2008). Hence, this study aimed to contribute empirical insights by comparing a corporate podcast with a branded podcast, in order to examine potential distinctions. Interestingly and fairly unexpectedly, no significant distinction was observed in the overall perceived reputation of Mercedes-Benz among listeners of the corporate versus branded podcast. This indicates that listeners of both the branded and corporate podcasts had similar perceptions of the company's reputation. This finding may appear unremarkable at first, indicating a similar to equal effect of both podcast formats on PCR, or the possibility that the podcasts did not have a substantial effect at all. The latter would suggest that participants already held pre-existing perceptions of Mercedes-Benz's reputation, which remained unchanged following the podcast intervention, contradictory to previous empirical findings (Heck, 2020; Huber, 2008).

However, further analyses of the underlying dimensions of perceived reputation revealed interesting insights that add depth to the findings. Among the dimensions examined, a notable difference emerged in the PCR dimension of Innovation and Leadership (IL). Notably, participants who listened to the corporate podcast rated the Leadership and Innovation of

Mercedes-Benz significantly higher, compared to those in the branded podcast group. This observation shows that the corporate podcast intervention had an impact on participants' perceptions of these attributes. It is worth noting that both episodes featured in this study focused on innovation and forward thinking-driven topics. Consequently, these findings suggest that the narrative of the corporate podcast, which directly and explicitly connected episode topics to particular activities of Mercedes-Benz, contrasted with the more subtle approach of the branded podcast, played a crucial role in causing this significant difference.

Continuing the exploration of the underlying PCR dimensions, no significant differences between the branded podcast and the corporate podcast were found in relation to the remaining dimensions. Specifically, participants from both groups displayed comparable perceptions of Mercedes-Benz's Products, Services, and Performance (PSP), as well as their views on the Governance and Citizenship of the organisation (GC). This indicates that despite the contrasting narratives, content, and presentation styles of the two podcast formats, similar perceptions of these attributes were observed.

Before, collecting and analysing the experimental data, several hypotheses were made regarding further anticipated differences between the branded and corporate podcast format. The corporate podcast was expected to be perceived more authentic, due to its more direct link to the sender company Mercedes-Benz. Further, the branded podcast was expected be perceived less informative, given the lack of a clear link between its presented content and the corporate activities. Additionally, it was hypothesised that listeners of the branded podcast episode would perceive it to be more entertaining. Notwithstanding, none of the anticipated differences appeared to be evident.

Regardless of the insignificant findings, it is valuable to delve deeper into the tendencies and overall scores to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the two podcasts under examination. While the difference in PPA between the two audio formats did not reach statistical significance, it is noteworthy that both podcasts were generally perceived as authentic by the listeners. However, the branded podcast, despite not being statistically significant either, tended to obtain higher scores for PEV compared to the corporate podcast.

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting that both formats were generally perceived as neither particularly entertaining nor unentertaining by the listeners. This observation is essential to highlight, as the initial expectation of a differential score suggested that the branded podcast would inherently be entertaining. Further, although again not statistically significant, there is a tendency indicating that the branded format was perceived as more informative than the corporate, which contrasts the initial expectation. This suggests that listeners tended to be finding content that was not solely focused on the brand itself to be more informative than pure corporate content.

Moving forward, several mediation effects had been anticipated. However, the results revealed that PPA, PEV, and PIV did not act as mediators for neither relationships between the podcast format and PCR, nor its underlying dimensions. The discovery of mediation effects for most dependent measures being unlikely, given the unsignificant group differences in the first place, the absence of mediation effects was also evident for the IL dimension.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. First of all, the sample size was relatively small (N = 82), which might have limited the statistical power to detect small effects. A larger sample size could have enhanced the generalisability of the findings and provide more robust results. Further, out of 184 people who entered the study more than 100 responses had to be removed, mostly due to false responses to the control questions. This suggests that the control questions may have been too hard to answer, which was frequently feedbacked by some subjects after participation (personal communication, n.d.). The conduction of a pre-test, containing various different control questions for selection, would have been one way to address this issue, and may have resulted in a larger sample size.

Secondly, unlike being exposed to advertisement, engaging with branded and corporate podcasts is typically a deliberate choice made by individuals, driven by a pre-existing interest in the brand or podcast topic. Unfortunately, this pre-existing interest could not be accounted for in the current study. It is plausible that a sample consisting of individuals who were specifically interested in Mercedes-Benz, the automotive industry, or the podcasts' topics

might have perceived the audio content differently, particularly in terms of entertainment and information value. Therefore, the findings of this study may not fully capture the perceptions and experiences of individuals who would actively seek out and engage with these podcasts in a real-life context, given genuine interest in the content.

Further, the study focused solely on Mercedes-Benz, and the generalisability of the findings is therefore limited to this particular brand and its respective podcast formats. Moreover, given that only one episode of each podcast format was included, generalisability is further decreased. Nonetheless, this provides case specific insights for the company as well as its production firm Oliver Schrott Kommunikation GmbH, it adds little value to the academic knowledge based on corporate and branded podcast as a whole. Moreover, differential effects between the two distinct podcast formats were explored based on a post-intervention test only. Therefore, questions about the general influence of the podcast formats on the organisation's PCR and its underlying concepts remain unanswered. Moreover, given this experimental design, it is not possible to assess whether the significant difference found for the IL dimension might have been present before the podcast intervention already.

Implications

Directions for Future Research

Based on this study several academic implications for future research in the field of podcasting in the context of professional communication are to be made. This study focused specifically on Mercedes-Benz. Future research could replicate this study with different brands and larger sample sizes, to examine the generalisability of the findings by investigating further cases from various industries. This way it could be determined whether the effects observed in this study are consistent across different contexts, in order to provide further insights into the broader implications of podcasting as a brand communication tool. Still, one should consider exploring additional mediating and moderating variables that may influence the relationship between podcast interventions and perceived reputation. Factors such as trust, brand familiarity and initial anticipations could be examined as potential mediators or moderators, providing a more comprehensive understanding of underlying mechanisms.

Moreover, longitudinal studies represent another valuable area for future exploration. Assessing the long-term effects of podcast interventions, based on a series of episodes would provide interesting insights into the sustained impact of corporate or branded podcasting over time and provide relevant theoretical proof, which professionals can use for taking informed decision about whether or not this communication channel generates sustained success.

Furthermore, future academic endeavours should consider incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups. This would facilitate a more a more in-depth understanding of participants' actual perceptions and experiences, providing richer insights into the underlying mechanisms of people's perceptions and attitudes towards these types of podcasts, providing relevant input for further quantitative investigations.

Lastly, comparative analyses of podcast formats with other, more traditional communication channels, such as written press releases or social videos is another promising area for future insights. By comparing podcast interventions with traditional communication tools or social media content, researchers could identify unique advantages and disadvantages of each communication tool in a comparative way, facilitating professionals to distribute particular messages and content in the most suitable way.

Practical Directions

The findings offer practical implications for organizations and external firms engaged in brand communication and podcasting. While the majority of measures did not show significant differential effects between the branded and corporate podcast format, it is essential to recognise the specific finding that corporate podcasts led to higher perceptions of leadership and innovation qualities of Mercedes-Benz. This suggests that a corporate podcast format can have a distinct advantage in shaping particular brand perceptions.

However, it is worth noting that despite not reaching statistical significance, there were slight tendencies visible in the collected data. These tendencies towards the branded podcast being perceived as slightly more entertaining and informative, compared to the corporate podcast, raise important questions about the potential impact of content relevance and alignment with audience interests. They highlight the need for organisations and their

communication professionals, to find a balance between achieving their communication goals and delivering valuable content that actually resonates with their target audience.

When formulating a podcast strategy, it is important that organisations carefully consider the value they intend to deliver to their listeners. Even if the findings of this study show that the corporate podcast had a slight advantage in shaping underlying reputational perceptions of Mercedes-Benz, it is important to note that participants in this research only listened to a single episode. At the time of the study, the corporate format *Let's talk Mercedes* consisted of 17 episodes, while the branded format *Future Dimensions* featured four episodes. Regardless, whether some reputational effects were observed or not, the question raises why individuals would continue listening to subsequent episodes if they were not feeling entertained by the initial one.

Therefore, despite seeking reputational or other potential effects that could potentially lead to economic outcomes, the primary objective should be to cultivate listener engagement and loyalty. It is reasonable to assume that the more individuals are exposed to this audio content, the greater the likelihood of achieving goals on a larger scale is.

Conclusion

The present study examined the branded podcast *Future Dimensions* and corporate podcast *Let's talk* Mercedes by Mercedes-Benz. Based on a two-group experimental design differential effects in Perceived Corporate Reputation (PCR), Perceived Podcast Authenticity (PPA), Perceived Entertainment Value (PEV), and Perceived Information Value (PIV) were measured. No significant differences occurred in the overall perceived reputation based on the two podcast formats. Nonetheless, the corporate podcast group rated Mercedes-Benz higher in the dimension of Innovation and Leadership (IL), whereas no significant differences were observed in the remaining dimensions of perceived reputation, being Products, Services and Performance (PSP) and Governance and Citizenship (GC). No significant differences in PPA, PEV, or PIV between the two formats were observed either, but tendencies towards higher PEV and PIV for the branded podcast were implied. A research duplication, using a larger

sample size, could therefore shed light on these insinuated differences. Further, the mediation analyses of PPA, PEV, and PIV revealed no mediation, which is unsurprisingly given the mostly insignificant differential effects in the first place.

Despite limitations such as a small sample size, focus on a single brand and two podcast episodes only, the study provided some directions for future research including the replication of the study with different brands, and exploring additional variables, as well as the employment of qualitative approaches. Finally, from a practical perspective, the findings indicate that the corporate podcast demonstrated a slight advantage in terms of its reputational effect compared to the branded podcast. However, it is noteworthy that neither format was perceived as particularly entertaining by the sample of participants. This raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of the podcasts in engaging and retaining listeners. As a result, it is advised to prioritise the goals of fostering engagement and retention with the audio content in order to support long-term organisational goals.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Systematic Search Log

Literature Search Overview

Date	Source	Search String	Total hits	Relevant Literature
30-03-23	Scopus	"branded podcast*" AND reputation	0	-
30-03-23	Scopus	"branded podcast*"	2	1
30-03-23	Google Scholar	"branded podcast*" AND reputation	10	6
30-03-23	Google Scholar	"branded podcast*"	106	2
30-03-23	Scopus	"corporate podcast*"	3	1
30-03-23	Google Scholar	"corporate podcast*"	85	4
16-04-23	Google Scholar	(image OR reputation) AND ("organizational podcast" OR "organisational podcast" OR "corporate podcast" OR "branded podcast")	85	7
18-04-23	Scopus	"content marketing" AND podcast	3	1
18-04-23	Google Scholar	"content marketing" AND podcast	5,990	2
18-04-23	Scopus	"corporate reputation management"	1761	3
18-04-23	Scopus	measuring AND "corporate reputation"	82	2
25-04-23	Scopus	("content marketing" OR advertis*) AND "authenticity"	390	7
25-04-23	Google Scholar	("content marketing" OR advertis*) AND "authenticity"	12,000	4
03-05-23	Scopus	("content marketing" OR advertis*) AND "entertainment value"	43	2
03-05-23	Google Scholar	("content marketing" OR advertis*) AND "entertainment value"	12,600	3

Note. Being a working student in digital communications at Oliver Schrott Kommunikation GmbH, granted access to a large internal collection of knowledge and literature on branded and corporate podcasts, gathered within the podcasting unit. This included particularly non-scientific sources or pure statistical insights.

Appendix B – Podcast Episodes used as Intervention

Podcast Episode Overview

Organisation	Format	Podcast Title	Episode Title	Episode Link
Mercedes-Benz	Corporate Podcast	Let's talk Mercedes	LTM #16 Just think and drive? – Sid Kouider and Maxine Benz	Spotify Apple Podcasts
Mercedes-Benz	Branded Podcast	Future Dimensions	Dimension #1 – what if luxury was naturally sustainable?	Spotify Apple Podcasts

Appendix C – Survey for Data Collection

Introduction

Dear participant,

You are being invited to participate in an online survey as part of a research study on branded podcasts. You will be asked to listen to an episode of a pre-determined podcast and respond to some questions. Including the podcast listening time, participation will take about 40 minutes.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. All data will be handled with care and for research purposes only.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your participation, please do not hesitate to [reach out](#) to me.

Thanks a lot for doing this and investing your time – I really appreciate that!

Best,

Nils Schöning

I have read and understood the provided information and wish to proceed with the survey.

○ Yes
○ No

Demographics & Podcast Usage Patterns

How do you identify?

○ Female
○ Male
○ Other
○ Prefer not to say

How old are you?

[   ]

What country are you from? (as indicated by your passport)

[⌄]

What is the highest level of education you have completed **or** that you are currently enrolled in?

○ Less than high school
○ High school graduate
○ Some college or associate degree
○ Bachelor's degree
○ Master's degree
○ Phd / doctorate

How often do you listen to podcasts?

○ Never really
○ About monthly
○ About weekly
○ Multiple times a week
○ Daily

How would you describe a branded podcast in one sentence?

○ I do not know what a branded podcast is.
○ A branded podcast is:
[   ]

Have you ever listened to a podcast of an organisation/company?

○ No
○ I am not sure
○ Yes, from these organisations:
[   ]

Intervention A – Branded Podcast

I kindly ask you to listen to this episode of *Future Dimensions*, a podcast by Mercedes-Benz. It's crucial that you listen to the entire episode because there will be questions asked about the content to validate your attention. You can listen to it in any context you like, as you would with other podcasts you regularly listen to. Just make sure to keep the survey tab open so you can return to it after you finish listening.

You can listen to the episode most easily by using the player integration below.
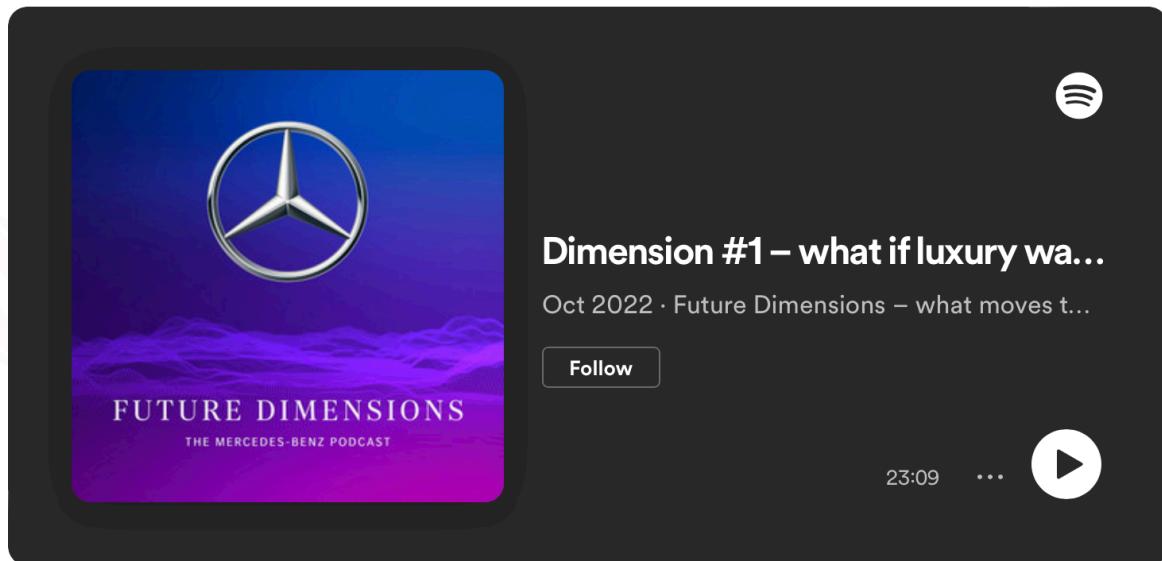
Control Questions A – Branded Podcast

Who does the host Ricardia Bramley talk to right at the beginning of the podcast?

○ Artificial Mercedes-Benz voice

○ Her mother

○ Mercedes-Benz CEO

What 'nickname' was connected to Benjamin Berghaus?

○ Grouch

○ Mr. Luxury

○ Nerd

Who among the following people was **not** featured on the episode?

○ Luisa Neubauer (Climate Activist)

○ António Paraíso (Luxury Marketing Consultant)

○ Sofia Ilmonen (Designer & Fashion Label Founder)

Intervention B – Corporate Podcast

I kindly ask you to listen to this episode of *Let's talk Mercedes*, a podcast by Mercedes-Benz. It's crucial that you listen to the entire episode because there will be questions asked about the content to validate your attention. You can listen to it in any context you like, as you would with other podcasts you regularly listen to. Just make sure to keep the survey tab open so you can return to it after you finish listening.

You can listen to the episode most easily by using the player integration below.
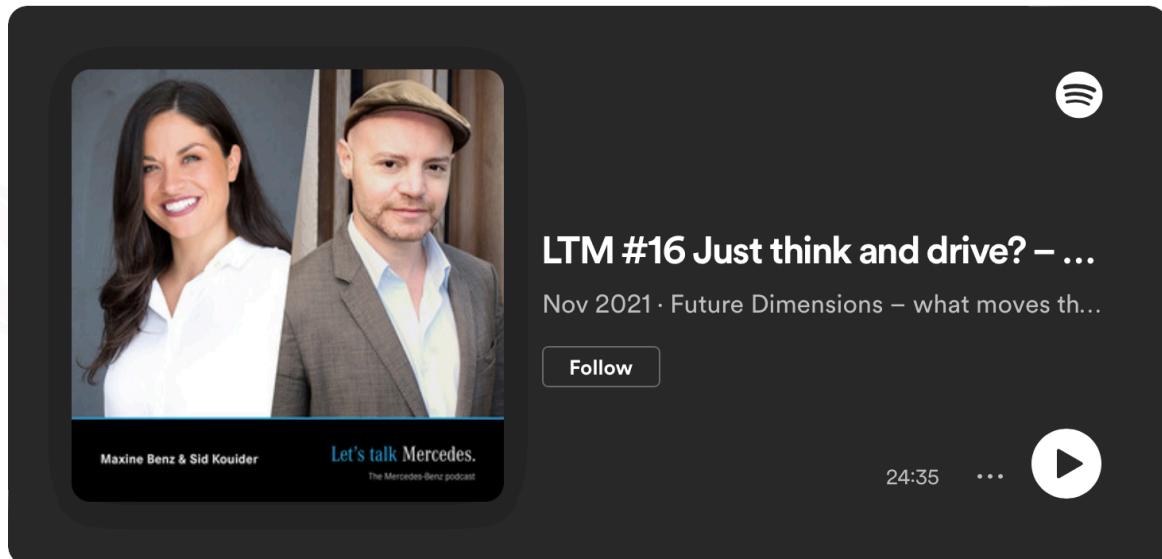
Control Questions B – Corporate Podcast

What was **not** mentioned as a potential of BCI in Mercedes-Benz cars?

○ Fuel efficiency

○ Comfort

○ Safety

What does BCI stand for?

○ Brain Computer Interfaces

○ Battery Capacity Indicator

○ Blockchain Certification Institute

Who among the following people was **not** on the episode?

○ Ola Källenius (CEO at Mercedes-Benz)

○ Maxine Benz (Future Research Expert at Mercedes-Benz)

○ Sid Kouider (Neuroscientist and Founder of NextMind)

Perceived Corporate Reputation

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

The car manufacturer Mercedes-Benz...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
...offers high quality products and services	○	○	○	○	○
...stands behind its products and services	○	○	○	○	○
...meets customer needs	○	○	○	○	○
...is an innovative company	○	○	○	○	○
...is generally the first company to go to market with new products and services	○	○	○	○	○
...adapts quickly to change	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
...is open and transparent about the way the company operates	○	○	○	○	○
...behaves ethically	○	○	○	○	○
...is fair in the way it does business	○	○	○	○	○
...acts responsibly to protect the environment	○	○	○	○	○
...supports good causes	○	○	○	○	○
...has a positive influence on society	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
...has a clear vision for its future	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...is a well-organized company	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...portrays strong and appealing leadership	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...is a profitable company	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...delivers financial results that are better than expected	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
...shows strong prospects for future growth	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Perceived Podcast Authenticity

Based on your overall brand image of Mercedes-Benz, indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The podcast episode was suitable.	O	O	O	O	O
The podcast episode was consistent.	O	O	O	O	O
The podcast episode was congruent.	O	O	O	O	O
The podcast episode was a good fit.	O	O	O	O	O
The podcast episode was well aligned.	O	O	O	O	O
The content of the podcast episode was inaccurate.	O	O	O	O	O
The content of the podcast episode was exaggerated.	O	O	O	O	O
The content of the podcast episode was overstated.	O	O	O	O	O

Perceived Entertainment Value

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The podcast episode was entertaining.	○	○	○	○	○
The podcast episode was enjoyable.	○	○	○	○	○
The podcast episode was exciting.	○	○	○	◉	○
The podcast episode was pleasing.	○	○	○	○	○
I felt relaxed when I listened to the podcast episode.	○	○	○	○	○

Perceived Information Value

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The podcast episode provided relevant content.	○	○	○	○	○
The podcast episode provided timely content.	○	○	○	○	○
The podcast episode provided useful content.	○	○	○	◉	○
The podcast episode provided valuable content.	○	○	○	○	○

Outro

Your response has been recorded.

You have reached the end of this survey, and I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your participation. Your input plays a significant role in my journey towards attaining my degree.

During the initial introduction of the study, I provided only limited information about the subject. My research focus revolves around the utilisation of branded podcasts as a tool for managing reputation. Specifically, I am investigating the impact of a branded podcast on corporate reputation, with a specific emphasis on Mercedes-Benz in this case. Furthermore, I am exploring whether the authenticity of the content, as well as its entertainment and informational value, influence the expected relationship. By collecting data through this survey, I aim to gain deeper insights into these matters.

Again, thank you so much for your time and ff you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Ride on and stay curious ;)