

TRANSFORMING TEXTS, GENRES, AND POWER

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Abstract *In the age of globalized digital communication, the nature of texts and genres is undergoing rapid transformation. These changes are not merely technical or stylistic shifts; they signal deeper reconfigurations in how power is produced, maintained, and challenged through discourse. This thesis critically investigates how genres evolve in various communicative contexts and how such transformations are intertwined with the distribution and exercise of power. Drawing on theoretical insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Genre Theory, and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this study examines the socio-political implications of genre shifts in digital and institutional environments.*

Keywords *genre theory, discourse analysis, power, social media, multimodal communication, academic discourse, institutional rhetoric, digital genres*

Genres, traditionally understood as stable and predictable patterns of communication (Swales, 1990), are now increasingly fluid and hybrid in digital spaces. From social media posts to academic discourse, the borders between genres are being redrawn in ways that reflect broader societal changes. Following Bakhtin's (1986) dialogic theory of language and Fairclough's (1992) model of discourse, this research views genres not as fixed forms but as socially situated actions that both shape and are shaped by ideological structures. This thesis argues that the transformation of genres is fundamentally linked to transformations in power relations. When a genre evolves—whether a political speech adopts a conversational tone on Twitter or academic lectures shift into interactive online forums—it reflects a change in who controls the discourse, how authority is expressed, and whose voices are legitimized or marginalized. As van Dijk (2008) emphasizes, discourse is a key site for the reproduction of dominance and inequality. Genre shifts, therefore, are not neutral but can function as mechanisms of ideological control or resistance. To explore these dynamics, this study adopts a multi-case critical discourse analysis methodology, focusing on three domains:

1. Political Communication on Social Media

This section analyzes how political actors use platforms like Twitter and TikTok to blend genres (e.g., mixing memes with policy statements). This hybridization serves to blur the lines between formal authority and personal authenticity. Such strategies can enhance engagement, but they may also trivialize policy or manipulate public sentiment.

Drawing on work by Jones and Hafner (2012), the analysis highlights how digital genres offer both opportunities and risks for democratic participation.

2. Corporate Crisis Communication

In this case, the study examines how corporations respond to public crises through genre-mixed formats such as open letters, video messages, and hashtag campaigns. The personalization of corporate voice often disguises institutional power under a veil of empathy. The application of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal theory shows how visual and textual elements co-construct narratives that protect brand image while diffusing responsibility.

3. Academic and Pedagogical Discourse in Online Platforms

The third case explores how the shift to online education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic transformed traditional academic genres. Discussion forums, recorded lectures, and digital assessments redefined teacher-student power relations and affected engagement, identity, and learning outcomes. Drawing on Lillis and Curry's (2010) sociocultural approach to academic writing, this section shows how genre adaptation in education can either democratize knowledge or entrench new forms of surveillance and exclusion.

Across these three domains, genre transformation emerges as a double-edged phenomenon. On one hand, new genres and formats offer more accessible, flexible, and diverse communicative opportunities. On the other hand, they may reinforce systemic inequalities by privileging certain modes of expression over others. For instance, marginalized communities might struggle to participate in professional or academic spaces that increasingly rely on genre conventions unfamiliar to them.

This thesis also foregrounds the importance of multimodality in understanding genre change. Modern communication often integrates text, image, sound, and interaction, making it essential to analyze how different semiotic resources are combined to produce meaning and exert influence. Multimodal discourse analysis, as outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), provides tools to dissect how power operates not just through what is said, but how it is visually and structurally presented.

Ultimately, this research underscores the need for critical genre awareness—an ability to recognize and interrogate the forms and functions of evolving genres. Educators, journalists, policymakers, and digital users alike must develop skills to analyze not only content but the genres through which content is delivered. Genre awareness equips individuals to better navigate the ideological terrain of contemporary discourse and resist manipulation.

In conclusion, genre transformation is not a peripheral phenomenon but central to understanding communication in the 21st century. By linking genre evolution to power dynamics, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in discourse studies, media analysis,

and critical pedagogy. It calls for further interdisciplinary research into how emerging genres affect agency, inclusion, and equity across social contexts.

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