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Bogaards, M.P.M.

Citation

Bogaards, M. P. M. (2021). “Completely impartial opinion, okay?”: An argumentation-theoretical approach to sponsorships on YouTube. *Journal Of Argumentation In Context*, 10(3), 368-396. doi:10.1075/jaic.19020.bog

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

“Completely impartial opinion, okay?”

An argumentation-theoretical approach to sponsorships on YouTube

Maarten Bogaards
Leiden University

Sponsorships on YouTube – i.e., video creators on YouTube promoting a third-party product or service to their audience – have attracted considerable research interest recently in various disciplines. This multidisciplinary study analyzes it from the perspective of argumentation theory, specifically pragma-dialectics, which offers valuable new insights into the discursive tensions inherent to this type of promotion. These tensions arise between the creator’s relationship with their audience on the one hand, which is built upon ‘parasocial’ evaluations of authenticity and community, and the commercial third party brand on the other. The insights provided by the pragma-dialectic analysis are demonstrated by means of a case study examining a sponsorship segment by YouTuber PewDiePie, which shows that creators can employ specific types of presentational choices and audience adaptation strategically to undercut commitment to the sponsor while furthering the relationship with their viewers.

Keywords: activity type, argumentation theory, ethos, influencers, parasocial interaction, pragma-dialectics, social media, sponsorship, strategic maneuvering, YouTube

1. Introduction

Since its inception in 2005, the online video platform YouTube has grown steadily in terms of both views and uploads – so much so, that increasing numbers of video makers, known as ‘creators’, rely on YouTube as a main source of income. Despite the “fun and free” image of this kind of creative profession (Duffy and Wissinger 2017), ‘doing YouTube full-time’ more often than not entails financial insecurity and precarity. It is therefore no wonder that creators frequently engage

in so-called 'sponsorships,' meaning they are paid to promote a third-party product or service to their viewership. A great deal of research has been conducted recently into this phenomenon from the perspective of media theory (e.g., Duffy and Pooley 2019; Raun 2018) and marketing scholarship (e.g., Chen 2016; Cocker and Cronin 2017), as well as regarding its legal and ethical implications (e.g., De Jans et al. 2018; Gerhards 2017).

However, sponsorships on YouTube have not yet been investigated from the perspective of argumentation theory. An argumentation-theoretical approach to this type of social media sponsorship can deepen our understanding of the phenomenon by shedding light on the strategic moves that creators make to achieve their commercial goals. This is particularly relevant because sponsorships are characterized by a fundamental discursive tension between the creator-viewer relationship on the one hand, and the introduction of a third party commercial brand on the other: the former is built on 'parasocial' evaluations of authenticity and community, whereas the latter seeks to marketize those evaluations (Cunningham and Craig 2017). Creators are thus faced with the challenge of satisfying both the creator-viewer modality of being authentic and the commercial demand of increasing sales, creating a likely breeding ground for strategic argumentative moves. The argumentation-theoretical approach taken in this paper lays out a way to reveal and analyze those strategic moves, which contributes to research into sponsorships on social media in general and on YouTube in particular.

The specific framework adopted in this paper is that of extended pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren 2010) because social media sponsorships present a particularly interesting case of argumentative behavior for this framework in several respects. First, the tensions characterizing sponsorships, which augment the need for strategic argumentation, closely match the framework's focus on 'strategic maneuvering' (van Eemeren 2010; van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002). Second, pragma-dialectics provides a framework for a contextualized institutional analysis of argumentative behavior in the form of 'communicative activity types' (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005; van Eemeren and Wu 2017), which offers conceptual tools for analyzing the interplay of creator interests, audience demands, sponsor requirements and legal frameworks. Developing an understanding of social media sponsorships in terms of pragma-dialectics is therefore a valuable addition to the field.

The central question that this paper aims to answer is how YouTube creators, when engaging in a sponsorship, strategically attempt to resolve tensions between viewer and sponsor demands through their argumentative moves. Section 2 draws on media theory, marketing scholarship and psychology to develop a theoretical understanding of the relations between creator, viewer and sponsor compatible

with an argumentation-theoretical approach. Section 3 analyzes this conception of sponsorships in terms of the argumentation-theoretical framework of extended pragma-dialectics, specifically the concepts of ‘strategic maneuvering’ and ‘activity type’. The insights provided by this analysis are then demonstrated and developed in Section 4 by means of a case study examining a sponsorship segment by YouTube creator PewDiePie. Section 5 addresses limitations and avenues for future research.

2. YouTube creators, viewers and sponsorships

The relation between YouTube creators and their audiences has been widely termed ‘parasocial’ (e.g., Chen 2016; Ferchaud et al. 2018; Rihl and Wegener 2017), a term coined in the field of psychiatry by Horton and Wohl (1956) to capture the way TV and cinema audiences relate to performers on the small or big screen. Ferchaud et al. (2018: 89) define ‘parasocial interaction’ as “the phenomenon by which [...] audience members develop one-way relationships with mediated personalities”, which is somewhat paradoxically characterized by both a lack of reciprocity *and* the feeling of a “deeper connection with the media personality” from the viewer’s perspective. So although the interactions are largely one-sided, they establish parasocial relationships experienced by viewers as intimate and meaningful – even akin to interpersonal, face-to-face contact (Ferchaud et al. 2018: 90). From the perspective of the creator, maintaining and enhancing parasocial relationships with viewers is instrumental to building a large audience, which crucially determines whether it is viable for them to rely on YouTube as a source of income. Forming and furthering parasocial relationships can therefore be seen as any creator’s primary objective.

So what makes for successful parasocial interaction? The consensus in current research is that the single most important ‘parasocial attribute’ (Ferchaud et al. 2018: 92) in this context is ‘authenticity’ (Banet-Weiser 2012; Cocker and Cronin 2017; Cunningham and Craig 2017; Duffy and Pooley 2019; Ferchaud et al. 2018; Hou 2018; Rihl and Wegener 2017). Authenticity can be defined as “congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (Trilling 1971: 2). In the case of YouTube, ‘being authentic’ refers not so much to *real* congruence between a creator’s avowal and feeling, as to a *performed* and *perceived* affect (Hou 2018). This is reflected by various terms coined to describe these practices, such as ‘strategic intimacy’ (Marwick 2015: 333) and ‘staged authenticity’ (Hou 2018: 15), which emphasize the goal-oriented, strategically advantageous and performative character of creator-viewer parasocial interaction.

Besides authenticity, Cocker and Cronin (2017: 455) argue that creator-viewer relationships are characterized by “collaborative, co-constructive and communal interdependence.” That is, the technological affordances of platforms such as YouTube facilitate feedback dynamics that allow audiences to participate in the creation of shared meaning. For instance, if a creator makes a joke that is particularly well-received by viewers, who in turn echo or play with it in the comment section of that video or later ones, it may be strategic for the creator to refer to it again in subsequent videos. In this way, creators can be thought of as “community leaders” (Hou 2018: 18) whose position depends on interactions that are experienced by viewers as authentic and communal. Or, as Cunningham and Craig (2017: 74) put it, creators constantly “negotiate their authenticity status with their community” – especially when faced with a sponsorship introducing commercial motives that are ostensibly neither authentic, nor part of that community.

When adding sponsorships to the mix, it is useful to understand its relation to the creator-viewer parasocial relationship not in dichotomous terms (i.e., between authentic community on the one hand and corporate commercialism on the other), but as an interaction between brands. Just like the corporate brand behind the sponsorship, the ‘digital self’ (Chen 2016) constructed and managed on YouTube can be thought of as a type of brand, constituted by the experiences and meanings shared by creator and viewer (Chen 2013; Hou 2018). Labrecque et al. (2011: 48) even argue that “branding is inevitable when participating in an online environment.” Doing a sponsorship is a way for YouTube creators to convert their parasocial brand into economic capital, which has been called ‘capitalizing affective labor’ (Hearn and Schoenhoff 2016; Raun 2018).

From this perspective, sponsorships can be understood as a confrontation between a parasocial brand and a commercial brand, both of which aim to ‘capitalize’, but which are constituted by different discursive logics: the parasocial brand operates according to an authentic-communal logic, the corporate brand according to an economic logic of marketization. Cunningham and Craig (2017) suggest that the crucial dynamic characterizing this confrontation is temporal: the commercial brand by definition only comes into play after the parasocial brand has been established. This creates an interdependence between brands: the commercial brand leverages their economic capital to marketize the parasocial relationship between creator and viewer, while the parasocial brand looks for ways to participate in that marketization while neutralizing potential tensions between the two brands in what Hou (2018: 18) calls a negotiation of “a series of contradictions.” Cunningham and Craig (2017: 80) even contend that all creator-viewer interactions are driven by “a discursive logic that attempts to render brand relationships subordinate to the dominant discourses of authenticity and community.” It is therefore to be expected that creators, when engaging in argumentative

discourse in service of commercial goals, will strive not only to protect their authenticity and community status, but also to employ this status argumentatively.

Where can we expect to find this type of argumentation? Given that sponsorships are integrated into the communicative modality between creator and viewer – i.e., a YouTube video – the argumentation occurs *within* a new parasocial interaction, which simultaneously follows previous interactions and fuels the parasocial relationship going forward. This integration thus specifies the observed discursive tension in theoretical terms: the ‘commercial act’ of doing a sponsorship is itself a ‘parasocial act’ within the parasocial interaction the sponsorship is embedded in. This implies that creators are likely to come up with argumentative strategies at the level of that interaction to maintain or advance the parasocial relationship, and to prevent any potential dissonance with YouTube’s discursive forces from damaging their parasocial brand.

3. An argumentation-theoretical perspective

Having compiled a conceptual toolkit to analyze YouTube sponsorships in precise theoretical terms, this section connects these terms to a theory of argumentation: the extended pragma-dialectical framework (van Eemeren 2010).

3.1 Pragma-dialectics, strategic maneuvering and ethos

The pragma-dialectical framework defines ‘argumentation’ or ‘argumentative discourse’ as a communicative practice aimed at resolving a difference of opinion by appealing to the reasonableness of the interlocutors (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 2004). The extended framework also seeks to account for the fact that in practice, arguers are not motivated exclusively by principles of reasonableness; they also want their argumentation to be effective (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002, 2006). It is therefore assumed that arguers perform ‘strategic maneuvering’, aimed at both “maintaining certain critical standards of reasonableness” and “resolving the difference of opinion effectively in favor of their case” (van Eemeren 2010: 39), while attempting to strike a balance between the two. Although ideally strategic maneuvering entails that discussants strive to be effective within the boundaries of reasonableness, it is possible that they prioritize effectiveness at the cost of being reasonable. This leads to a ‘derailment’ of a strategic maneuver, which could hinder the resolution of the difference of opinion (van Eemeren 2010: 41).

Approaching sponsorships in pragma-dialectic terms means (re)conceptualizing them as a difference of opinion between creator and viewer revolving

around a proposition of the type ‘you should consume this product/service’: the creator aims to persuade their viewers to do so by introducing argumentation supporting the consumption of the third party brand’s product or service. At the same time, YouTube’s authentic-communal discursive logic dictates that creators forward the relationship with their viewers in every parasocial interaction. This insight may be reformulated in argumentation-theoretical terms as a second proposition, of the type ‘our relationship is authentic and communal’.

The argumentative situation evoked by a sponsorship therefore centers around a multiple difference of opinion regarding two propositions:¹ one commercial, concerning the creator’s and viewers’ relation to the sponsor (‘consume this product/service’); the other parasocial, pertaining to the relationship between creator and viewer (‘our relationship is authentic and communal’). The multiple standpoint requires two lines of argumentation: the commercial proposition calls for pragmatic arguments pointing out the merits of consuming the product or service, while the parasocial proposition demands evidence of the creator’s authenticity and community with their viewers. These two lines of argumentation can be formulated as ‘I recommend it’ (commercial argumentation) and ‘you can trust me’ (parasocial argumentation).²

For the commercial proposition, these two lines of argumentation overlap at least partially: in order to convince viewers of consuming a sponsored product, the creator not only has arguments at their disposal pertaining directly to the properties of that product; they can also use parasocial arguments to support the commercial standpoint as a kind of argument by authority (Walton 1996a: 64) – or, in this case, an ‘argument by authenticity’. In other words, viewers may be persuaded to consume the product/service both because the creator recommends it and because they simply trust the creator.

On the other hand, the parasocial proposition may be harmed by commercial arguments, as overt moves within a logic of marketization conflict with the dis-

1. For a the concept of *multiple difference of opinion*, see van Eemeren et al. (2002: 9). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

2. An anonymous reviewer suggests that the reasoning with regard to the parasocial proposition should be the other way round: ‘our relationship is communal and authentic (argument), so you can trust me (proposition)’, because the relationship between viewer and creator is a starting point that can be employed argumentatively. While I agree that the status of the parasocial relationship can be used as an argument (see Figure 1), this does not mean in my view that the parasocial proposition should be ‘you can trust me’; after all, one of the main insights from Section 2 is that YouTube creators’ primary goal – in any interaction with their viewers – is to maintain the parasocial relationship with their viewership, since that is what their success on the platform depends on. Therefore, the proposition regarding the status of that relationship should be a component of the standpoint.

cursive logic underlying a creator’s trustworthiness. The parasocial proposition can therefore only be defended by means of parasocial argumentation. One potential argument in support of the parasocial line of argumentation (‘you can trust me’) may be derived from the parasocial proposition itself (‘our relationship is authentic and communal’): viewers may trust the creator precisely because they experience their existing parasocial relationship with them to be authentic and communal. This applies to long-time, not first-time viewers, but since talking about ‘viewership’ implies generalizing over all types of viewers, the possibility to employ the existing parasocial relationship strategically (with varying degrees of success) is part of the argumentative situation in an abstract sense. Taking the parasocial proposition to be a component of both standpoint and potential argumentation thus captures the experience of a broad set of viewers.

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the ‘sponsorship’ argumentative situation as conceptualized presently, showing that (i) the standpoint consists of a commercial and a parasocial proposition, (ii) the commercial strand of argumentation supports only the commercial proposition while the parasocial strand serves to forward both, and (iii) the parasocial proposition can itself be employed as an argument for the parasocial line of argumentation. The line between the two argumentative strands signifies that they function coordinatively, i.e., both are required to persuade the viewer to adopt the standpoint as a whole.³

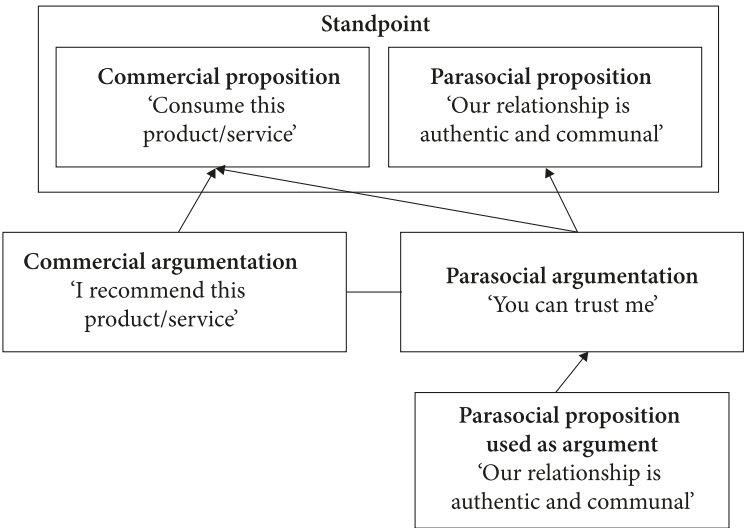


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the ‘sponsorship’ argumentative situation

3. For ease of reference, I will use the terms ‘commercial/parasocial proposition’ and ‘commercial/parasocial standpoint’ interchangeably in the remainder of this paper.

In its supportive relation to the commercial proposition, parasocial argumentation can be seen as an appeal to *ethos*, exploiting the creator's perceived character to further the standpoint. *Ethos*, according to Aristotle (Aristotle 1991, *Rhetoric*:14, 64), is divisible into three subtypes, specifying the means by which *ethos* can be employed persuasively: by stressing practical wisdom (*phronesis*), virtue (*arete*), or goodwill (*eunoia*). Authenticity and community can be connected to virtue and goodwill, respectively: 'being authentic' within YouTube's discursive logic counts as 'being of virtuous character', and the sense of community experienced by viewers fosters goodwill toward the creator.

In Aristotle's conception, appeals to *ethos* constitute the strongest persuasive means of the tripartition into *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* (Aristotle 2004, *Rhetorica*: 12–1356a). In modern argumentation studies it likewise plays an important role, for instance in research into political deliberation (e.g., Majdik and Keith 2011), doctor-patient communication (e.g., Pilgram 2012, 2015) and health information brochures (e.g., Boogaart 2013; van Poppel 2009). In this sense, YouTube sponsorships fall right in line with political and medical argumentative contexts, featuring the same fundamental dynamic, but with the crucial difference that the *ethos* resources of virtue and goodwill are tied to perceptions of authenticity and community rather than authority and expertise. Put differently, appeals to *ethos* based on expertise derive their convincingness from the hearer's assumption that the (cited) arguer "has access to the whole domain of knowledge the proposition belongs to" (Walton et al. 2008: 89), whereas YouTube creators may leave that domain wholly untapped, tapping instead into what in terms of Walton et al. may be called a 'domain of parasocial interaction'.

In pragma-dialectical terms, sponsorships thus carry with them argumentative discourse characterized by strategic maneuvering for a multiple difference of opinion consisting of two propositions, supported by two coordinative argumentative strands. The question then arises what counts as convincing argumentation or strategic derailment for the standpoint, and how these assessments relate across propositions. Based on the internal organization of the standpoint and arguments in Figure 1, it can be theorized that derailments pertaining to the parasocial line of argumentation by definition harm the commercial standpoint, while successful strategic maneuvering in the parasocial line of argumentation strengthens both. Conversely, strategic derailments in the commercial line of argumentation do not necessarily weaken the parasocial standpoint. This suggests that creators' primary interests lie in successful strategic maneuvers supporting the parasocial line of argumentation.

3.2 The sponsorship as an argumentative activity type

This general description does not yet clarify what kind of argumentative move constitutes a derailment in the context of either standpoint, since the soundness and fallaciousness of argumentation are also crucially tied to the institutional macro-context in which that argumentation takes place (van Eemeren 2010: 129). The evaluation of argumentation proceeds according to different conventionalized rules within the domain of political communication than the domain of legal communication, for instance. These domains encompass specific schemes for interaction called ‘activity types’ (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005; van Eemeren and Wu 2017). In this section I will argue that as an activity type, sponsorships can be characterized in terms of two argumentative genres: *promotion* and *communion*.

Activity types impose context-dependent constraints upon argumentative behavior. Such constraints may have been implicitly conventionalized through repeated argumentative exchanges in similar institutional settings, or explicitly codified. Contextual features also provide opportunities for strategic moves. These constraints and opportunities are especially relevant for YouTube sponsorships, since the platform’s authentic-communal discursive logic has direct consequences for the evaluation of argumentative behavior.

As mentioned previously, activity types can be categorized under overarching ‘domains of communicative activity’. The multiple difference of opinion discussed in the previous section – i.e., the commercial and parasocial propositions – can be connected to two different domains distinguished by van Eemeren (2010: 143): the former to the domain of *commercial* communication, which corresponds to the genre of promotion and covers such activity types as advertorials and sales talks; the latter to the domain of *interpersonal* communication, corresponding to the genre of communion, covering activity types like chats and love letters. I would argue that YouTube sponsorships are a result of combining elements from both these communicative domains, resulting in the introduction and management of two propositions: one commercial, the other parasocial. This implies that the rules applying to this activity type originate from two separate domains (e.g., legal rules constraining commercial activity paired with moral axioms governing interpersonal communication).

The argumentative characterization of any given activity type is structured in pragma-dialectics by the four stages of a critical discussion (van Eemeren 2010: 146–147). The explicit and implicit rules governing the confrontation, opening, argumentation, and concluding stage determine different relevant aspects of the activity type, namely its (1) initial situation; (2) starting points; (3) argumentative means; and (4) possible outcomes (van Eemeren 2010: 151). These stages

can be described for YouTube sponsorships by drawing on legal tenets and moral axioms, the demands and interests of each of the actors participating in the activity type, and the theoretical conception of the creator-viewer relationship vis-à-vis sponsorships laid out in Section 2.

The present point of departure for the argumentative characterization of YouTube sponsorships is Wierda and Visser's (2017: 84) analysis of direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertisements as an activity type, which is likewise a combination of promotion and a second genre, in their case *consultation*. The 'YouTube sponsorship' activity type resembles that of the prescription drug advertisement in the combination of genres, and in the initial situation during the confrontation stage: in both cases, a standpoint is advanced "in an implicit discussion, addressing an implicit audience" (Wierda and Visser 2017: 82). The disagreement over that standpoint is anticipated to be non-mixed, i.e., the viewer is not yet convinced of its acceptability but does not explicitly disagree with it either.

The two activity types diverge in other respects, however. For instance, the drug advertisement has a broad intended audience, which makes it difficult for the arguer – in Wierda and Visser's case a pharmaceutical company – to establish shared points of departure. It conforms in this sense to the "prototypical ad", which "can be seen as a non-personal, paid communication type" (Koll-Stobbe 1994: 387). The YouTube creator, on the other hand, not only has an intricate understanding of their viewership and the parasocial pillars of their relationship, but also has a *personal* association to the intended audience. This calls for the adoption of a second proposition in the confrontation stage, i.e., the parasocial proposition. Like the commercial proposition, the creator anticipates non-mixed disagreement over the parasocial proposition regarding the status of the parasocial relationship.⁴

4. I have three reasons for claiming that there is disagreement over the parasocial standpoint, and that this disagreement is non-mixed. First, saying that the creator argues for the parasocial standpoint to 'their audience' entails an abstraction over different types of viewers: first-time and long-time viewers, or casual and core viewership. While core viewers may already be convinced of the parasocial standpoint (which – in terms of Figure 1 – enables the creator to use the parasocial proposition itself to support the parasocial argument), new and more casual viewers have likely yet to be convinced. Abstracting over these points of departure produces a generalization characterized by at least some degree of disagreement.

Second, the status of the parasocial relationship was characterized in Section 2 as a continuous negotiation fueled, maintained or harmed by each subsequent parasocial interaction; this implies that the need for argumentation is never satiated, as parasocial relationships may deteriorate at the level of both the individual viewer and the viewership as a whole.

Third and last, the pragma-dialectical taxonomy of disagreement into mixed disagreements structured by diametrically opposing standpoints, and non-mixed disagreements constituted by casting doubt upon one standpoint (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992; Houtlosser 2001),

Moving from the confrontation to the opening stage, sponsorships are constrained in the opening stage by explicitly codified regulatory frameworks that vary by region. In the European Union, *Directive 2010/13/EU* dictates viewers be informed about the commercial relationship between creator and sponsor (Gerhards 2017). Across the Atlantic, the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) demands this relationship be disclosed in a clear and conspicuous way (De Jans et al. 2018). These guidelines boil down to the same doctrine, which De Jans et al. (2018: 321) term the ‘principle of identification’. A second constraining force in the opening stage is the third party brand, which in exchange for their sponsorship usually demands a say in the editorial process (Gerhards 2017). For example, sponsors may require a creator to state the brand name a minimum number of times or in a certain way. These requirements are communicated explicitly to the creator during the collaboration process; they are thus likewise codified, albeit locally and privately.

The remaining starting points are more implicit; they originate from the expectations that viewers derive from the parasocial nature of the creator-viewer relationship (i.e., the creator’s *ethos*). First, there are moral axioms ensuing from the assumption of authenticity: the viewer, based on previous parasocial interactions, puts trust in the creator’s integrity and honesty. Second, following from the communal character of their relationship, creator and viewer share a history of co-created meanings, which may offer the creator strategic argumentative opportunities. These two implicit starting points help explain why parasocial arguments can support the commercial standpoint as an ‘argument by authenticity’ in this specific activity type, whereas such an argument would surely derail in prescription drug advertisements, which lack the strategic affordances of the communion genre.

The third stage of an activity type is characterized by the argumentative means that count as sound argumentation. First, the commercial standpoint can be supported by pragmatic argumentation pointing out the merits of consuming the product/service in question. Second, the creator may anticipate ways in which

is compatible with, or perhaps even implies, a gradient conception of argumentative disputes in terms of *degrees* of disagreement. Although van Eemeren (2010) to my knowledge does not address this issue explicitly, the varied examples that he provides for his typology of communicative domains and argumentative activity types (van Eemeren 2010: 143) seem to suggest something along these lines: mediated talks between divorcees about custody over their child, for example, presumably feature a greater ‘intensity’ of disagreement than two friends trying to decide where to go out to dinner tonight – even though either dispute may be mixed or non-mixed. In this way, the apparent dissimilarity between the commercial and parasocial standpoint can be theoretically accounted for by assuming that the commercial standpoint is anticipated to encounter a greater degree of doubt than the parasocial one.

viewers could criticize that argumentation, and present reactions to implicit criticism. The third kind of argument follows from the principle of identification: the paid promotion must be disclosed. Disclosure of commercial interests can function as a parasocial argument, as it shows that the creator is honest with their viewers. At the same time, excessive alignment with the sponsor may threaten their authenticity, leading to a derailment in the parasocial line of argumentation. Fourth and last, this activity type allows arguments that appeal to the authentic and communal qualities of the parasocial relationship between creator and viewer. Such arguments affirm the parasocial standpoint, but also exploit the parasocial relationship to back up the commercial standpoint.

Finally, the concluding stage lays down the possible outcomes. For the commercial standpoint, the intended outcome is an implicit resolution of the non-mixed disagreement, persuading the viewer to consume the product/service. As for the parasocial standpoint, the creator's aim with any parasocial interaction is to maintain or, ideally, advance the parasocial relationship with their viewership. This means that the intended outcome for the parasocial standpoint is to either maintain the status quo or provide further support for it. The best-case-scenario for creator and sponsor is thus that the disagreement on the commercial standpoint is resolved while the (lesser) degree of disagreement on the parasocial standpoint is sustained or eroded. The organization of strategic argumentative moves by creators can be understood to be aimed at realizing this combination of scenarios.

Table 1 summarizes the argumentative characterization of the YouTube sponsorship proposed in this section, grouping the relevant properties under the discussion stages.

The argumentative characterization in stages presented in Table 1 is based on theoretical assumptions about the mutual relations of sponsorship participants (i.e., creator, viewer and sponsor) and the structure of the promotion and communion activity types. It is therefore not *based* on the case study in Section 4, but instead *precedes* its analysis: it predicts, or postulates, what kinds of argumentative patterns can be expected on the basis of the institutional means, constraints and goals.⁵ In pragma-dialectical terms, they constitute *prototypical patterns* (van Eemeren 2016), defined as “argumentative patterns characteristically used in real-

5. This does not mean that the theoretical characterization of sponsorships developed in this section is unempirical. After all, the earlier research (be it psychological or media-, marketing- or argumentation-theoretical) that this characterization draws from is itself based on empirical observations. The characterization can still be refined, though, and perhaps rendered ‘more empirical’, by examining more sponsorship material on YouTube with the aim of an argumentative analysis. The case study in Section 4 is a first attempt at this.

izing the institutional point of a certain communicative activity type” (van Eemeren 2016: 16). Crucially, prototypical patterns may or may not be realized in individual instances of argumentative behavior; argumentative patterns “which are not only prototypical but also occur frequently in the communicative activity type concerned” are termed *stereotypical patterns* (van Eemeren 2016: 16). The proto-/stereotypical distinction is in itself a valuable concept for the present analysis because it assigns distinct theoretical status to the more abstract and theoretical characterization in this section and the more concrete and empirical one in the next.

Table 1. Characterization of ‘YouTube sponsorships’ as an argumentative activity type

Genre	Initial situation	Starting points	Argumentative means	Possible outcomes
promotion and communion	– anticipated non-mixed disagreement between creator and viewer on whether to consume product/service (commercial standpoint)	– regulatory frameworks for sponsorships on social media (<i>principle of identification</i>)	– argumentation pertaining to merits of product/service	– intended implicit resolution of commercial standpoint
	– anticipated non-mixed disagreement between creator and viewer on status of parasocial relationship (parasocial standpoint)	– third party sponsor requirements – moral axioms regarding integrity, honesty and trust in an authentic relationship – history of shared meanings, like tone of address and sense of community, as well as inside jokes and other local tropes	– anticipation of potential critical responses by audience – argumentation pertaining to and derived from authenticity and community – argumentation based on disclosure of paid promotion	– viewer consuming product/service – possible return to initial situation of commercial standpoint – intended return to initial situation or enhancement of parasocial standpoint – possible damage to parasocial standpoint

In sum, the characterization of the YouTube sponsorship as an activity type presented in this section specifies the contextual constraints and opportunities that determine in large part the convincingness of a creator's strategic maneuvers. This analysis provides insights into the general properties and internal organization of the argumentative situation evoked by any given sponsorship on YouTube. The added value of these insights will now be demonstrated, and made more tangible, by means of a case study.

4. Case study: "Completely impartial opinion, okay?"

On March 1, 2019, YouTube creator PewDiePie⁶ – whose real name is Felix Kjellberg – uploaded a video that featured a sponsorship promoting the free-to-play mobile app game 'Bricks n Balls' (Kjellberg 2019). The video's first two minutes are dedicated entirely to the sponsor segment, which features Kjellberg addressing the audience directly, occasionally intercut with screenshots from the game and its download page. Visual and audio effects accompany Kjellberg's speech, and background music plays all the way through. Around the end of the segment – at the 2:09 minute mark – the video dissolves to black and the music fades out. Then the video proper starts, which is differentiated from the sponsor segment in various ways, both visual and aural: Kjellberg is wearing different clothes and a headset, the color scheme has switched from full-color to greyscale, and there is no longer any background music. The sponsor segment is thus clearly demarcated from the regular content, making this video a suitable candidate for a case study of strategic argumentative moves.

4.1 Method

In order to analyze Kjellberg's sponsorship with Bricks n Balls,⁷ the segment was first transcribed in its entirety. As noted above, the object of study features

6. For a more extensive discussion of the PewDiePie persona, I refer the reader to Beers Fägersten (2017: 2–3).

7. Note that Kjellberg (2019) consistently pronounces and spells the game's title differently than it appears on its official download page: there, the game is called 'Bricks n Balls', with two plurals and a lowercase *n*, whereas Kjellberg pronounces it 'Brick and Balls' and stylizes it 'Brick N Balls', with singular *brick* and uppercase *N*. The description below the video on YouTube does employ the original spelling. Here, the transcription and the argumentation structure derived from it follow Kjellberg's versions, but in referring to the game outside of its appearance in the sponsor segment, I use the original title. Incidentally, Kjellberg's mispronunciation and deviant orthography could also be analyzed as argumentative strategies in support of the parasocial

not only verbal but also visual and audio cues. The analysis is thus necessarily ‘multimodal’ (Kress 2010). Multimodality is compatible with a pragma-dialectical approach in the sense that uses of other semiotic modes than the verbal can also be analyzed as (auxiliary) argumentative moves (see Kjeldsen 2015; Tseronis 2018 for examples). What this means concretely is that I made a transcription in which multimodal (i.e., visual and aural) cues deemed relevant to the segment’s argumentation were included by means of a verbal description between angle brackets (i.e., <...>). Multimodal moves that could not clearly be linked to the argumentative goals at hand were not included in the transcription so as not to clutter up the structural analysis. The complete transcription is included in the Appendix.

The next step was to draw up the segment’s argumentation structure (van Eemeren and Snoeck Henkemans 2011: 63–79; Walton 1996b) on the basis of this transcription. It follows from the argumentative characterization of sponsorships in the previous section that these structures are prototypically organized around a standpoint consisting of two propositions: one commercial, the other parasocial, with supporting argumentation for both. This served as an *a priori* template that the observed argumentation could be projected onto.

The argumentation structure makes it possible to analyze Kjellberg’s sponsor segment in terms of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering: topical selection, audience demand and presentational devices (van Eemeren 2010: 93–95). These aspects, and the ways they operate within the logic of the activity type, will demonstrate how a pragma-dialectical approach contributes to a better understanding of YouTube sponsorships.

4.2 Analysis

Figure 2 presents a reconstruction of Kjellberg’s arguments – both explicit and implicit – and their internal organization in an argumentation structure.

Figure 2 shows that the arguments Kjellberg puts forward fit with the prototypical organization of the sponsorship activity type into two coordinative lines of argumentation: commercial (‘I recommend this product/service’) and parasocial (‘you can trust me’).

At first sight, Kjellberg appears to supply substantive commercial argumentation pertaining to the merits of downloading the mobile app game, similarly to a prototypical ad: he claims “it is the greatest game of all time” (1.1a.1a), which

standpoint, as they affirm his authentic persona by signaling that he does not take the sponsor(ship) very seriously.

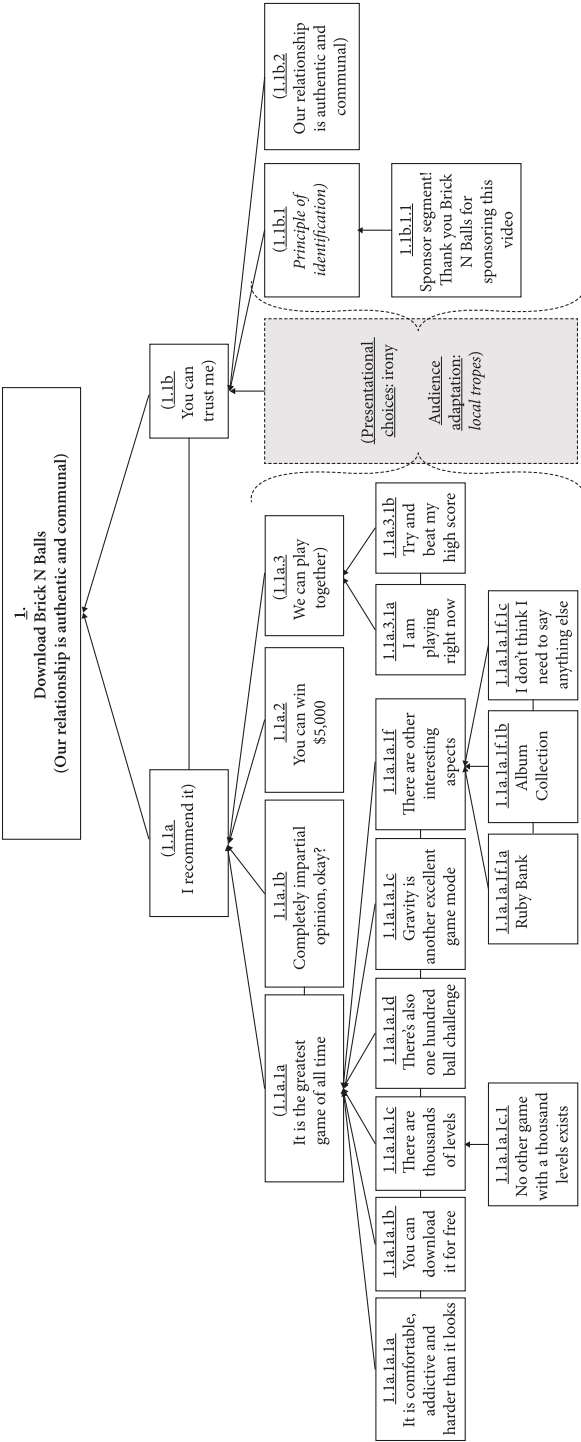


Figure 2. Argumentation structure based on sponsor segment in Kjellberg (2019)

he supports coordinatively by pointing at six of its features (1.1a.1a.1a-f).⁸ In addition, Kjellberg offers an additional, circumstantial advantages to be gained from downloading the mobile game: “you can win \$ 5,000” (1.1a.2), and he implies that viewers will be able to play together *with* him (1.1a.3). The parasocial line of argumentation is supported by the principle of identification, which Kjellberg fulfills on two occasions: by exclaiming “sponsor segment!” at the start and by explicitly thanking the sponsor (1.1b.1.1).

On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the presentational choices Kjellberg makes for the commercial arguments (viz., irony) serve to undermine his commitment to this line of argumentation, and by extension, to the commercial standpoint – underlining his authenticity and minimizing the potential damage of these arguments to the parasocial standpoint. Moreover, Kjellberg integrates audience adaptations into the sponsor segment that play into the audience’s demand for community (viz., local tropes). For these reasons, Figure 2 prominently features the strategic aspects of ‘presentational choices’ and ‘audience adaptation’, which are integrated into the commercial and parasocial strands of argumentation (as signified by the curly brackets) and as such serve to support the parasocial argument and standpoint. In other words, viewers can derive a sense of authenticity and communality from the presentational choices and audience adaptations incorporated into the arguments put forward by Kjellberg, bolstering the parasocial line of argumentation.

In what follows, I will analyze these presentational choices and audience adaptations in more detail, arguing that Kjellberg employs them strategically to reduce commitment to the commercial standpoint and further substantiate the parasocial standpoint.

4.2.1 *Presentational choices*

The sponsor segment starts with the immediate disclosure of Kjellberg’s commercial interests, which supports the parasocial standpoint by underlining his honesty and integrity, contributing to his *ethos* (1.1b.1.1).

Kjellberg presents this disclosure in a striking way: he shouts “sponsor segment!” and goes on to state: “oh heck yeah, my favorite part of this channel”. These statements are accompanied by visual and sound effects that could be described as ‘tacky’ or ‘amateurish’. To give an idea why I think these visuals could be described as such, they are shown in Figure 3; the rainbow gradient has an outdated vibe that professional editing software can easily avoid, and this vibe is reinforced by the plainly depicted hashtag #AD.

8. An anonymous reviewer points out that the six arguments could also be analyzed as multiple argumentation, since each defence could be self-standing. However, I prefer a coordinative analysis because of the magnitude of the claim “the greatest game of all time.”



Figure 3. Still from Kjellberg (2019: 00.01)

Both the ‘amateurish’ look of the visual accompaniment and counterfactual nature of the ‘favorite’ statement (it being obvious that ads are no one’s favorite part of a social media channel) steer the viewer into the direction of an ironic interpretation: Kjellberg is not being serious about these presentational choices, casting doubt on his commitment to the sponsorship, and emphasizing his authenticity even within the context of the sponsor segment. In terms of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering, meeting the identification requirement is clearly a selection from topical potential, but the (multimodal) ways in which Kjellberg discloses the sponsored content can be considered presentational devices aimed at furthering the parasocial standpoint.

The circumstantial commercial argument (1.1a.2) is presented in a similar way. While the argument itself is relevant to his recommendation of the product, its announcement is accompanied by visual and audio effects that are similarly ‘tacky’ or ‘amateurish’ to the effects played during argument 1.1b.1 (as well as some of the sub-arguments under 1.1a.1a, which will be discussed later): hard cuts (in both video and audio), awkward costume and perspective changes, and markedly low-res clip-art and letters underline Kjellberg’s authenticity in the face of the third party sponsorship. Figures 4 and 5 show two stills from this part of the video; note the unexplained costume change to a hoodie sporting Cyrillic script in Figure 4, as well as the jagged edges of the writing and image in Figure 5. In sum, while argument 1.1a.2 serves primarily as a monetary incentive to viewers not already convinced of the commercial standpoint, the presentational devices with which it is paired can simultaneously be understood to fulfill the parasocial demands of the audience.



Figure 4. Still from Kjellberg (2019:01.54)



Figure 5. Still from Kjellberg (2019:02.01)

The main argument supporting the commercial standpoint is Kjellberg's claim that Bricks n Balls is "the greatest game of all time" (1.1a.1a). Although Kjellberg supplies extensive coordinative argumentation for this statement (1.1a.1a.1a-f), these arguments are overtly unable to function as substantive commercial argumentation.

This already becomes clear with the main claim itself: calling Bricks n Balls the "greatest game of all time" is a daring statement by itself, as mobile app games – with their limited processing power, control schemes, and production funds compared to PC and console titles – are notoriously lacking in gameplay quality. So although this argument is presented in direct support of the commercial standpoint, it is clearly unable to support it. This argument is therefore itself *ironic* in the sense that it must be taken to "express something other than, and

even the opposite of, [its] literal meaning” (Tindale and Gough 1987: 2) in order to make sense of the argumentative relations presented by the creator.

This conception of irony corresponds to *verbal* (i.e., not *dramatic*) irony, which in the context of communication can be defined as “a message that is intentionally and transparently inconsistent with attitudes or beliefs held between two or more people” (Averbeck 2013: 48). In this way, ironic argumentation enables a creator to present arguments that *structurally* pose as commercial argumentation but *functionally* serve to entertain the viewer, and to make it plausible that the sponsorship need not conflict with the creator’s authenticity. Here, the presentational device of irony is not just exploited by way of multi-modal accompaniment (like in 1.1b.1.1 and 1.1a.2); it is incorporated entirely into the line of argumentation.

The irony of Kjellberg’s “greatest of all time” statement is definitively brought home by his follow-up claim that this is a “completely impartial opinion, okay?” (1.1a.1b),⁹ which conflicts openly with two of the activity type’s starting points: the principle of identification and the moral axioms of integrity and honesty. This ironic friction (i.e., Kjellberg making clear that his opinion is actually *not* impartial) keeps on resounding within the remainder of the segment, underscoring or evoking the irony of the sub-argumentation pertaining to the mobile game’s supposed merits (1.1a.1a.1a-f).

In fact, nearly all of the arguments addressing the game’s positive features steer toward an ironic interpretation. In 1.1a.1a.1c and 1.1a.1a.1e, Kjellberg plays with gross exaggerations – common, perhaps, in more conventional types of promotion like TV commercials – that are clearly not supposed to be taken seriously. The claim that “no other game with a thousand levels” exists (1.1a.1a.1c.1) is evidently facetious, and when Kjellberg calls the “gravity” game mode “excellent” (1.1a.1a.1e), he backs up this evaluation only circularly by emphasizing its “gravitational gameplay.” The ironic overstatement is then underscored by Kjellberg exclaiming “goddamn!” twice and repeating the “completely impartial opinion, okay?” sentiment, reaffirming his authenticity by humorously reminding the viewer of his overt partiality.

9. As one anonymous reviewer points out, this claim could be considered a presentational choice in its entirety rather than a selection from topical potential under the commercial line of defense. In this case, though, I would argue that it corresponds to both aspects, because the assertion of (im)partiality itself becomes part of the content of the argumentative discourse: interpreted unironically, it supports the commercial standpoint; interpreted ironically, the parasocial standpoint. The fact that the ironic interpretation of this claim is more salient than simultaneously contributes to the irony as a presentational choice, which permeates the entire segment.

Argument 1.1a.1a.1f is supported by threefold coordinative argumentation illustrating the supposedly “other interesting aspects” that the game has to offer. The argumentation – manifested primarily in 1.1a.1a.1f.1a-b: “Ruby Bank” and “Album Collection” – is maximally concise yet rather unclear, which contrasts heavily and explicitly with the supposition that “I don’t think I need to say anything else” (1.1a.1a.1f.1c). Kjellberg presents unknown – almost technical – in-game terms as though they were major selling points, again creating ironic friction that supports not so much the commercial standpoint as the creator’s authenticity and community.

4.2.2 Audience adaptation

Besides presenting his arguments ironically, Kjellberg also strategically adapts to audience demand on several occasions. In argument 1.1a.1a.1a, three properties that are attributed to Bricks n Balls are quoted directly from the game’s download page: it being “comfortable”, “addictive”, and “harder than it looks.” Kjellberg exclaims these buzzwords twice. The juxtaposition of these attributes is exploited here for implicit comedic effect, especially the combination of “addictive” and “hard”, which may conjure up phallic and onanistic associations – especially with the younger, perhaps somewhat puerile part of Kjellberg’s viewership, for whom such notions hold a transgressive appeal (García Jiménez et al. 2016: 78–79).¹⁰

The claim that viewers make these associations is corroborated by the video’s comment section, where two out of the ten top comments about the sponsor segment reflect on this juxtaposition, as shown in Figure 6.¹¹ The second one of these makes the sexual associations explicit by using the expression “that’s what she said”, which is “used in response to statements that may sound sexual in nature when taken out of context”,¹² in combination with the so-called “smirking face” emoji, which is “often used to convey [...] sexual innuendo.”¹³

The comments in Figure 6 can be seen as contributions to the co-construction of shared meaning, and Kjellberg’s emphatic and repeated use of the three adjectives as the first move in this process. The creator’s transformation of the game

10. Another move that could be analyzed as puerilely transgressive (and thus parasocially beneficial) is Kjellberg’s elongated realization of the second part of the game title, i.e., as “baaaalls!” (see Appendix).

11. YouTube allows for sorting comments either chronologically or by ‘top comments’, which shows the most popular comments first (see <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6000976>). I sorted by ‘top comments’ and selected the first ten pertaining to the sponsorship (as of 14 September 2019) in order to gauge the audience’s evaluation of and reflection on the sponsor segment.

12. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/thats-what-she-said>, last accessed 14 September 2019.

13. <https://emojipedia.org/smirking-face>, last accessed 14 September 2019.

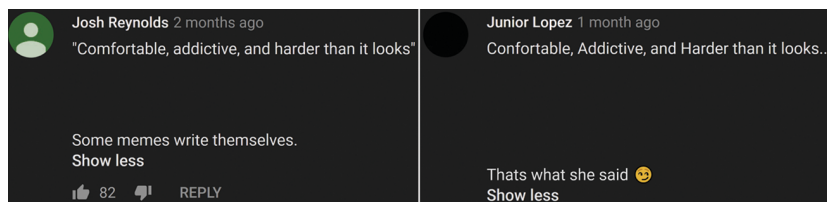


Figure 6. ‘Top comments’ reflecting on Kjellberg’s (2019) argument 1.1a.1a.1a

developer’s buzzwords into innuendo, and the viewers’ express recognition of that transformation, exemplify ‘in real time’ the negotiation of a local trope (“comfortable, addictive and harder than it looks”) against the cultural backdrop of more widely shared ones (“that’s what she said”). In this way, Kjellberg adapts strategically to audience demand – i.e., the demand for community in the form of shared local tropes – to further the parasocial standpoint with arguments that are presented structurally as substantive commercial argumentation.

Kjellberg implies that his viewers can play the game together with him by “try[ing] to beat” his high score (1.1a.3.1a-b), evoking a sense of community ensuing from a shared activity. He concludes the sponsor segment by offering his viewers a so-called ‘brofist’ (see Appendix), which according to an online knowledge base on Kjellberg’s channel is “the main symbol of PewDiePie and his fanbase.”¹⁴ Here, Kjellberg is invoking a local trope that symbolizes the relationship between him and his viewership, forwarding the idea that the parasocial attributes constituting that relationship are still valid or becoming more so. This corresponds to the strategic aspect of audience adaptation: viewers on YouTube look for channels that they experience as authentic and communal, and emphasizing shared goals (such as a high score) and tropes (such as the ‘brofist’) taps into that demand.

4.3 Overview and evaluation

The lion’s share of Kjellberg’s seemingly substantive commercial argumentation can be analyzed in terms of presentational devices (irony) and audience adaptation (setting shared goals, invoking local tropes and constructing new tropes in ‘real time’) to undermine his commitment to the commercial standpoint and further substantiate the parasocial standpoint.¹⁵ This could lead to a new reconstruction of the argumentation structure, in which the defense of the commercial standpoint is considerably weaker than the creator makes it seem: in such a recon-

14. <https://pewdiepie.fandom.com/wiki/Brofist>, last accessed 14 September 2019.

15. In terms of linguistic pragmatics, this could be analyzed as a denial of commitment to the literal meaning of the commercial arguments in favor of commitment to their (ironic) parasocial implicatures (see Boogaart et al. 2021).

struction, the defense for the commercial standpoint would be limited to “you can win \$ 5,000” (1.1a.2) and “we can play together” (1.1a.3), whereas the “greatest game of all time” line of argumentation (1.1a.1a) – into which the ironic presentational devices are fully incorporated – primarily serves the parasocial goals and not the commercial ones.¹⁶

A final question that could arise here is whether Kjellberg’s strategic maneuvers were indeed *effective*, or whether derailments led the segment to fall short of its argumentative goals. The technological affordances of the YouTube platform – specifically, the ability to upvote comments that users agree with – allow for examining this question empirically. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct a full-scale quantitative study of sentiments in the comment section of Kjellberg (2019), but a quick look at the top comments can provide an empirically founded first impression.

Among the top comments are two which explicitly assess the sponsor segment, both evaluating it positively. They are presented in Figure 7, which also shows that 256 and 10 other viewers upvoted the comments, respectively, suggesting their agreement with the positive sentiments.¹⁷

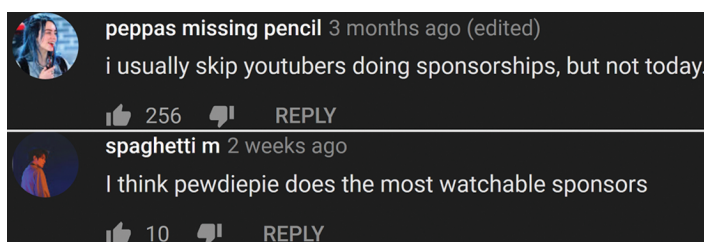


Figure 7. ‘Top comments’ evaluating the sponsor segment

These comments give an indication of the direct effectiveness of the parasocial argumentation for the parasocial proposition, but not of the direct and extended effectiveness of the commercial and parasocial argumentation for the commercial proposition, i.e., for the number of downloads generated by the sponsor segment. Theoretically, an effectively supported parasocial line of argumentation should contribute to the resolution of disagreement over the commercial proposition, but empirical examination of this requires quantitative research beyond the present scope. What the comments in Figure 7 do suggest, is that the

16. Due to the ‘double role’ of parasocial argumentation in supporting both the parasocial and the commercial proposition (see Figure 1), argument 1.1a.1a may still serve the commercial goals in this reconstruction – albeit indirectly.

17. These numbers are accurate as of 14 September 2019.

strategic maneuvering for the parasocial standpoint did not derail. Otherwise, it would not have been “watchable”, which would presumably have driven the first commenter to “skip” the segment.

The case study analyzed in this section has specified the relevant aspects of strategic maneuvering, and has shown how seemingly substantive lines of commercial argumentation may be interspersed with ironic presentational choices and authentic-communal audience adaptation, undermining the creator’s commitment to the commercial standpoint while furthering the parasocial standpoint. The pragma-dialectical conception of sponsorships developed in Section 3 was not only instrumental in doing this case study; the case study also served to test and refine it.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper I have developed an argumentation-theoretical conception of sponsorships on YouTube in terms of strategic maneuvering and activity types, and I have demonstrated the insights yielded by this analysis with a case study.

The main insights are: (i) the argumentative situation evoked by the YouTube sponsorship centers around a multiple difference of opinion consisting of a commercial and a parasocial proposition, and (ii) as an activity type, sponsorships’ argumentative opportunities and constraints can be understood in terms of two overarching communicative domains: promotion and communion. Within this activity type, presentational choices and audience adaptation can be employed strategically to neutralize tensions between commercial motives and an authentic-communal discursive logic, specifically by ironicizing ostensibly commercial arguments so that they undercut commitment to the commercial proposition while underling the creator’s authenticity, as well as by invoking and constructing local tropes and shared goals that affirm a sense of community.

The exploratory character of this study leaves several questions unanswered. First, the characterization of YouTube sponsorships as an activity type (based on earlier work and one case study) is, strictly speaking, only prototypical and not stereotypical. This is because stereotypicality – in van Eemeren’s (2016: 16) conception as “not only prototypical” but also “frequent [...] in the [...] activity type concerned” – is a quantitative notion, i.e., it can only be established on the basis of a representative sample, or at least its quantitative adequacy requires motivation. Further research is needed to establish whether the patterns found here are attested in a broader set of sponsor segments. Second, the polar notions structuring strategic maneuvering (i.e., reasonableness and effectiveness) require further elaboration in relation to the sponsorship as an activity type. Although the case

study allowed for getting a first impression of viewer evaluations, these pertained exclusively to resolving mixed disagreement over the parasocial proposition, not the commercial one. The conception of sponsorships presented here would profit from a more fine-grained understanding of what counts as successful argumentation for the commercial proposition and what constitutes a derailment. Taken together, the issues of stereotypicality and the elaboration of strategic maneuvering both underline the need for a more quantitatively oriented follow-up study.

With this paper, I hope to have demonstrated the relevance and value of investigating relatively novel argumentative practices like YouTube sponsorships through an argumentation-theoretical lens in a general sense, and from the perspective of pragma-dialectics in particular. Not only does argumentation theory contribute relevant insights to the study of social media sponsorships; the discursive tension inherent to these new argumentative practices should enrich any linguistic theory of argumentation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Roosmaryn Pilgram for insightful comments on several earlier versions of this paper, and for valuable discussions during the research this paper was based on. I am grateful to Hugo Kolstee for thorough proofreading. Finally, I thank two anonymous reviewers for their elaborate and constructive comments, which led to considerable improvements.

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Appendix. Multimodal transcription of Kjellberg (2019: 00.00–02.11)

Sponsor segment! <tacky rainbow visual effect; '#AD' flying onto, then off the screen in large white letters; short, upward glissando-like sound effect> Oh heck yeah, my favorite part of this channel. Thank you everyone. Now. What do you say with me? That's right: Brick and Balls. Not Brick and Balls, Brick N Balls. Greatest game of all time. <dramatic zoom onto screenshot of download page, showing game's title as 'Bricks n Balls', paired with anime-style speed lines; echoing, high-pitched 'wow!' sound effect> Completely impartial opinion, okay?

Brick N Balls is a[sic] comfortable, addictive and harder than it looks. Say it with me: comfortable, <mechanical sound effect> addictive <low bell sound> and harder than it looks. <high bell sound> If you have a one thousand IQ, then this game is for you. <silhouette of human profile with brain visible; buzzing sound> Because it takes a smart player, goddammit. You think you're up for the challenge? Brick N Balls.

How much does this game cost, Felix? You can download it for free. Do I have to sell this any more? I don't think so. Do I assume this game has already gotten 85 million downloads? Oh absolutely. <zoom in on Kjellberg's channel's subscriber count of approximately 87 million>

In the main gameplay, there are thousands of levels to beat. Thousands. Name one other game with thousand levels. It doesn't exist. There's also hundred ball challenge – I am playing right now as we speak – hundred ball challenge where you try and get as high a score as possible, with hundred balls, one launch. My high score is 558. Try and beat it.

Gravity. Another excellent game mode. Which is an endless challenge mode with gravitational gameplay. Goddamn! I know I'm not supposed to give my opinion, cuz this is a sponsored video, but goddamn, check out Brick N Balls. Download Brick N Balls!

There are other interesting aspect[sic] of this game to explore. For example: Ruby Bank. Album Collection. I don't think I need to say anything else. Download Brick N Baaaalls! Link in description. Thank you Brick N Balls for sponsoring this video.

If you download it, and comment in this video, in this video, your high score, I will pick one person in the comments – <hard cut to Kjellberg in different clothes with anime-style speed lines in background; zoom in; mechanical sound effect> **randomly of course** <cut back> – that will win – <suddenly yelling; image overlay of gift card paired with '\$ 5000 GIFTCARD' in large yellow letters> **five thousand!** And the lucky winner will be – <hard cut to extreme zoom on differently clothed Kjellberg's mouth> **selected** – <cut to black background with overlay of simple clip-art calendar and 'Friday 8th Mar 2019' in low-resolution letters> **March 8** <cut back> --. Brofist? I'll give you a brofist if you download Brick N Balls. Good job.

Address for correspondence

Maarten Bogaards
Leiden University Centre for Linguistics
P.O. box 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
m.p.m.bogaards@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Publication history

Date received: 8 October 2019

Date accepted: 10 June 2020