





# Sponsorships on YouTube An argumentation-theoretical perspective

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3 Framework

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## 1 Introduction

- ➤ YouTube (YT): largest online video platform
- ▶ People who make YouTube videos as a fulltime job ("creators") face financial precarity
- ► "Sponsorship"—i.e. promoting 3rd party product/service to audience within a video—as way to secure extra income

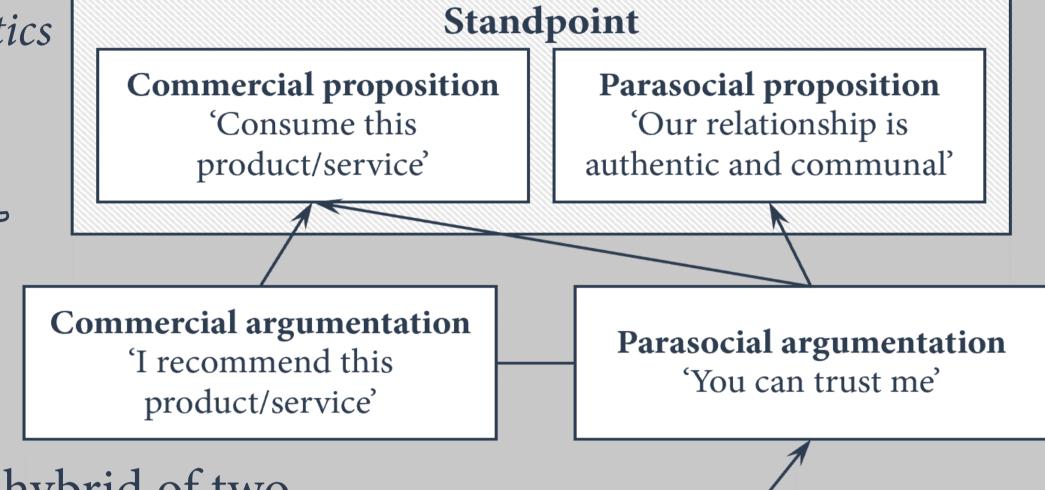


- - (built on perceived authenticity & community);
  - 2. introduction of commercial motives (commodifying those very attributes)
- ? Linguistic strategies to negotiate tension?

- ▶ Discursive tension between
  - 1. creator's relationship with their viewers

### ➤ Argumentation theory: *Extended Pragma-Dialectics* (van Eemeren 2010): valuable analytical tools

- (non-mixed) multiple difference of opinion
- ▶ Parasocial proposition can be employed as "argument by authenticity" (cf. authority)



- ▶ Macro-contextual opportunities/contraints: hybrid of two communicative domains → activity types (van Eemeren 2010):

  - **1.** Commercial domain → promotion—e.g. advertorial, sales talk...
  - **2.** Interpersonal domain → *communion*—e.g. chat, love letter...

## 5 Conclusions

- ▷ Observed strategies are aimed at undercutting commitment to the commercial proposition, while substantiating the parasocial one
- > Analysis as argumentative practice provides tools for understanding strategic moves...
- > ...and vice versa, YT sponsorships provide interesting case of argumentation in context
- > Follow-up questions: quantification (which strategies are most frequent?) & generalization (strategies on platforms other than YT?)
- Interested in reading more? Full paper accepted for publication in *Journal of Argumentation in Context*; pre-print accessible <u>here</u>.

## 2 Creators & Viewers

- ▶ Interaction between creator and viewers on YouTube = "parasocial" (coined by Horton & Wohl 1956—cf. Chen 2016; Ferchaud et al. 2018; Rihl & Wegener 2017)
- ➤ That is: one-way relation viewer → creator, which viewers nonetheless experience as intimate and meaningful



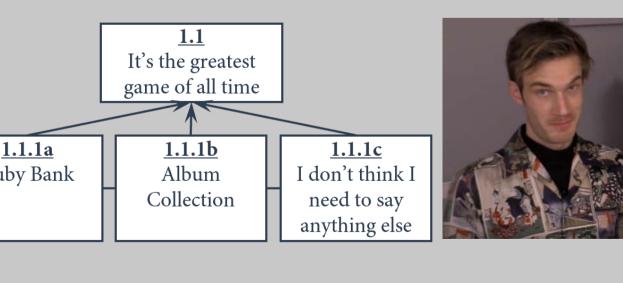
- ➤ Two "parasocial attributes" (e.g. Banet-Weiser 2012; Cocker & Cronin 2017; Cunningham & Craig 2017; Hou 2018):
  - 1. Authenticity: "congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (Trilling 1971:2)—on YT as a performed and perceived affect (Hou 2018);
  - 2. Community: "collaborative, co-constructive and communal interdependence" (Cocker & Cronin 2017:455; Cunningham & Craig 2017)
- ▶ Expectation: creators will **protect** parasocial attributes and employ them persuasively

## 4 Strategies

- ▶ Three "aspects of strategic maneuvering" (van Eemeren 2010): Topical selection, Presentational choices and Audience adaptation
- Case studies: sponsorships by YT creators PewDiePie (Kjellberg 2019), brutalmoose (MacLeod 2017), Lindsay Ellis (Ellis 2018) & Drew Gooden (Gooden 2020)

## 4a Topical selection

Flouting reasonability standards: offering evidently insufficient/untrue arguments



Engaging in (ironic) meta-discourse on doing the sponsorship

'Newer corporations have molded their marketing strategy round the faith viewers have in the authenticity of their favorite YouTuber. Companies like Casper, Squarespace." [...] sighes deeply> "This video was brought to you by Squarespace."





Greatest game of all time. Completely

thousands of

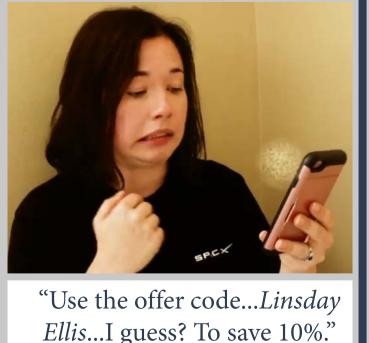


I know I'm not

### 4b Presentational choices

▶ Indices for 'low effort': amateurish, low-res effects; underprepared/reluctant delivery



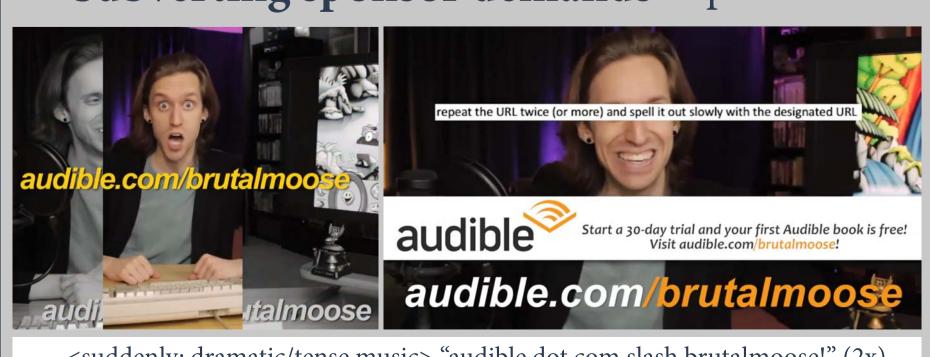


Parasocial proposition

used as argument

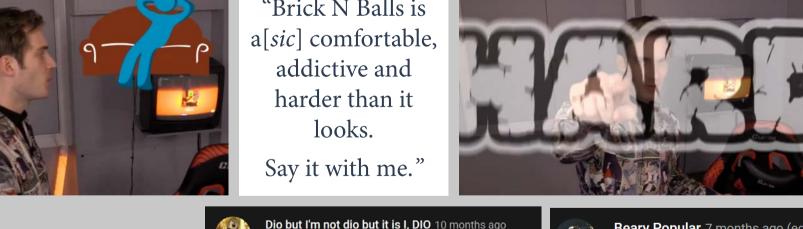
'Our relationship is

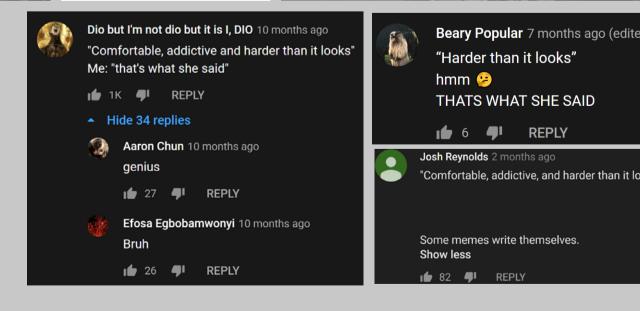
authentic and communal'



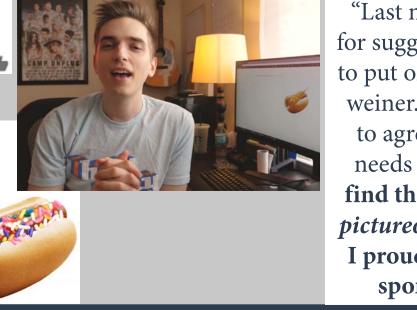
: dramatic/tense music> "audible dot com slash brutalmoose!" (2x) "B-R-U-T-A-L-M-O-O-S-E..." <ka-ching sound> <music stops>

## 4c Audience adaptation





▶ Drawing on existing shared tropes



"Last month I asked you guys for suggestions of what toppings to put on the now world famous weiner. [...] I found it hard not to agree with Sheila: hot dog needs sprinkles. [...] You can find this delicious treat [...] at pictureofhotdog.com, a website I proudly made using today's sponsor: Squarespace."